The Pilgrim Soul

by jachap

Summary

Darcy Lewis has always been—different. Too curious, too smart, too everything. In 1940, she runs into Steve Rogers walking home from the subway. He introduces her to his best friend Bucky Barnes. Thus begins a relationship that spans the better part of a century.

Notes

I have 15 chapters of this written, and it looks like it’s going to be a really long fic. I’m gonna post the first two chapters this week, then a chapter a week thereafter. Hopefully, I’ll be able to maintain this schedule by having a cushion of completed chapters.

Chapters average 4,000 words in length. Tags may change as time goes on.
June, 1925

Darcy Elizabeth Lewis is seven years old, small for her age, and curious. The kind of curious that leads her to climb trees, jump into ponds before she knows how to swim, and swing from a rope out of the hayloft. Today, she's climbing over the fence rail to get a closer look at the new horse. He is beautiful; a tall chestnut stallion her grandfather bought at auction a month before.

She vaguely recalls her mother whispering “dangerous” and “high strung” when describing the animal, but all Darcy sees is his beauty. She admires the white star on his forehead, his graceful form prancing in the warm Iowa sun.

She managed to slip away from her grandpa’s side while he cleaned out the stalls in the barn. She can see Mama up the hill, arms raised high as she hangs the laundry on the line. Darcy creeps up to the horse, her blue eyes wide, straw poking out of her dark curls and dirt smudged on her face and hands. She sidles up to his muscled flank, arms outstretched to trail her hands along his side when he suddenly rears, whinnying with his sharp hooves flashing out, his shadow cast long upon the ground.

The next thing she hears is her grandfather shouting and her mother screaming. It's suddenly so hard to breathe and there is mud—why is she lying in the mud? Her head snaps to the side and she tastes copper in her mouth, and there is a ringing in her ears like she’s standing inside a giant bell, then there is nothing.

She wakes to darkness, a wrenching pain in her chest and her head feeling as if it has it’s own heartbeat, a pulsating, unceasing agony she struggles to escape but cannot. She can hear her mother crying.

A soft male voice says, “I’m sorry Dorothy, her head injury is severe and she has internal injuries from the horse trampling her. Short of a miracle, there’s nothing more to be done.”

Who are they talking about?

She hears her mother’s voice hitch as she says, “Thank you, Tom.”

The door creaks, opening and closing, there are footsteps down the hallway, then silence. Darcy cracks open one blue eye, her vision blurry. She’s in her bed, the yellow glow of a kerosene lantern on the bedside table. She moves her arms and legs experimentally, and there is a sudden incandescent pain, chasing her into unconsciousness again.

The next time she wakes, she hears the soft sighing of someone breathing and she’s able to open her eyes and stretch her arms and legs, finding they are sore but not terribly so. She turns towards the sound of breathing and sees her mother sleeping soundly, her face haggard and her blond hair disheveled. Faint morning light shines through the curtains, and Darcy raises her hands to feel her heavily bandaged head. She claws at the bandages until they unravel, then yelps, startled, at the sight of heavy bloodstains.
Her mother bolts upright, eyes wide and reaching towards the bed.

“Darcy! My God—Stop moving, you’ll hurt yourself!” she cries sitting on the bedside and leaning over her.

Darcy looks up at her mother, her fair hair a halo around her head, her brow crumpled in confusion as she looks at the bloody bandages next to Darcy and then more closely at her head. She smooths Darcy’s dark hair away from her forehead, running her hands through the tangled curls. There is a swiftly fading red crescent of skin on the side of Darcy’s head, and her hair is still clotted with blood, but there is no open wound to be found.

Mama pushes back the blankets to find the pale skin on her arms and legs no longer mottled with ugly bruises. She pulls up Darcy’s nightgown to reveal her abdomen and chest, again pale and absent the horrific bruises.

Just two days before, the side of Darcy’s head was dented and bloody, half of her face bruised and swollen beyond recognition. Her right arm and left leg were broken and her entire torso mottled and swollen with ugly black and purple bruising.

“Mama?” Darcy whispers.

“You stay right here, I’m getting Grandpa.” She rises and walks quickly out the door.

A quarter hour later finds her sitting on the edge of her bed as Grandpa and Mama marvel at the lack of any outward sign of injury.

“Is it a miracle?” Mama says.

Grandpa snorts, “It’s something. I think we should keep Darcy in the house and tell people she’s taken a turn for the better,” he runs one calloused finger gently down her face, tipping her chin up, “I don’t think people around here will react well to her Lazarus impression.”

“Who’s Lazarus?” Darcy asks.

“Fella in the Bible who rose from the dead,” Grandpa explains.

Darcy’s gasps, “Was I dead?”

“Near enough,” he grunts.

“Pa! Stop scaring her!” Mama scolds. She crosses her arms over her chest and huffs, “I choose to believe it’s a miracle.”

“Choose what you want, but next time I go into town I’ll mention Darcy has turned a corner and is improving, although very slowly. No calling Doctor Brooks out to look at her for a while. Good thing we live far enough from town we’re unlikely to receive visitors.”

Grandpa and Mama look at Darcy, their expressions guarded. They are grateful Darcy is alive, but her mysterious recovery is something outside of their experience.

It will have to be kept secret.
October, 1929

Darcy clambers onto the horse behind Mama. The horse is still lively, but in time Grandpa tamed him. He made Darcy help, saying no grandchild of his would grow up afraid of riding. Consequently, she’s an excellent rider and knows the ins and outs of animal husbandry.

Each weekday, she rides the five miles into town with Mama and is dropped off at the school before Mama goes to work at Dr. Brooks’ office.

Mama took a job assisting the doctor a few years back. It helps make ends meet, and Dr. Brooks desperately needs the help. His wife had to stop assisting him upon the birth of their second child.

The population in town is growing by leaps and bounds, (they even have Main Street paved now!) several men in town have automobiles, for all the good it does them. Horses don’t get stuck on the muddy backroads and don’t break down as often. After school, Darcy walks to the doctor’s office and waits for the last appointments of the day to finish up.

It’s a beautiful fall day, the sun is shining and the trees along the road are a blazing kaleidoscope of color. Darcy takes a deep breath of the crisp fall air and wishes something would happen to prevent her from attending school. She can’t even pretend to be sick, because she’s never ill.

As the years have passed, her quick healing has become just one of Darcy’s hidden abilities. Time has brought greater strength and agility. She has excellent reflexes and physical coordination, swiftly learning things like dancing or horseback riding, and rarely needing to be shown more than once.

On the other hand, making friends is difficult for her. An avid reader, with almost perfect recall, she soaks up information like a sponge. She has no siblings and spends most of her time with her mother and grandfather. In truth, she relates to adults better than other children. They think she’s strange, with her odd interests and her nose always stuck in a book.

Her best memories involve Grandpa carrying her on his back around the farm, her hands in his thick white hair as he showed her new things and patiently answered her many questions. Her grandfather is a practical man, proud of her intelligence, and interested in her as a person. She would watch his weathered hands as he milked the cow, or checked the horses hooves for stones, or worked on the indoor plumbing he was installing in the kitchen, and she would ask questions. He would explain what he was doing and why, his brown eyes, so like Mama’s, intent on her face.

Other children have a father. Hers died before she ever knew him, somewhere in the trenches near Germany during The Great War. Mama only has one picture of him. Sometimes Darcy looks at the picture and tries to see something of herself in his features. She has the same dark curly hair, blue eyes, and full lips as her father, but the rest of her is all Mama. Dorothy Lewis is petite and curvy with silky blond hair, porcelain skin, and snapping brown eyes. Like her father, she doesn’t put up with any nonsense.

She hasn’t been interested in remarrying, much to the consternation of the local men. The married ladies in town gossip about her, but Mama says she already has enough on her plate without worrying about a man. She spends a lot of time with her best girlfriend Martha, who happens to be Dr. Brooks’ wife. She likes to dance and dates occasionally, but things never get too serious. She teaches Darcy to cook, knit, sew, and dance. She teaches her to be herself, to try her best, and to work hard.
They arrive at the school and Darcy reluctantly slides off the horse, turning to grab her lunch bucket from Mama’s outstretched hand. She peers towards the schoolyard where a couple of boys loiter by the door. Her mouth pinches in annoyance and Mama reaches down to tug one of her braids.

“They boys been bothering you again?”

Darcy sighs, “Just Mikey. The other kids mostly ignore me or ask me for help with their schoolwork. I wish he would just leave me alone.” Her full pink lips turn down in an exaggerated pout. “He makes fun of me because Miss Davies has been giving me extra lessons. She says I can move ahead to 8th grade math pretty soon.”

Mikey is in 8th grade and he couldn’t even do 6th grade math.

Dorothy nods, stroking her hair, “Some people feel threatened when someone else is better at things than they are. Especially if you’re a girl. Do the best you can and don’t worry about anyone else, sweetheart.”

Darcy bows her head, scraping the toe of her shoe in the dirt. She’s tired of feeling different from the other girls, from the other children, really.

She waves to Mama and trudges into the school, ignoring the snickering boys by the door.

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In the early spring of that year, Darcy turns twelve and Will Garland moves to town with his widower father, who takes over the funeral home from old Mr. Katz. He’s small for his age, redheaded, with bottle green eyes and a sassy attitude.

At eleven years old, he has a chip on his shoulder the size of Iowa. At first, all of the girls in school whisper about how adorable he is, but soon it becomes apparent he isn’t interested in holding hands with the girls or playing ball with the boys. He spends most of his time at recess sitting under the shade of the large apple tree in the schoolyard reading a book. For whatever reason, he doesn’t fit in.

Darcy can sympathize.

He frowns when she wanders into to the shade under the tree with her own book.

“Hi, my name is Darcy Lewis,” she holds out her hand to shake his, which he reluctantly shakes, muttering “Will Garland,” and looking down again at his book. She settles against the trunk of the tree opposite from him.

She decides to treat him like a shy horse and quietly begins reading without bothering him any more.

Each day she moves a little closer to him. Sometimes she shares treats from her lunch, her Mama makes really good cookies. A week later when Darcy sits under the apple tree, Will doesn’t frown. He looks up and sends her a small smile before continuing to read his book.

She’s excited about her new book, Dr. Brooks let her borrow an anatomy text that shows all of the organs and describes their purpose. She thinks she’d like to be a scientist or a doctor someday.

Will leans over and glances at Darcy’s book, “What the heck are you reading?” he asks.
“Anatomy book Dr. Brooks loaned me,” she flushes slightly and bows her head to the book, anticipating a negative comment.

Will nods sagely, “Hmmm.”

Darcy’s shoulders relax and she sends him a small smile. “What about you?” She tips her head towards his book.

“It’s about airplanes and aeronautics. I’m going to fly planes some day.” Will casually shrugs.

Darcy nods, “Swell.”

They grin shyly at each other and turn back to their books.

Hope blooms in Darcy’s heart.

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Two months later, Darcy and Will have settled into a routine. They sit under the apple tree at recess, sharing Darcy’s lunch (Mr. Garland is busy in the mornings and Will almost always overslept, rushing out of the house without lunch. Darcy starts packing extra.). They read their books, sometimes trading and discussing them. Will is amazed by how quickly Darcy picks up information and soon she knows all the models and specs of airplanes like he does. After school, Will walks with Darcy to Dr. Brooks office.

Turns out the doctor had been stationed at a hospital on an Air Force base during the Great War, so he was friends with some of the pilots. He brought photos of planes with his friends posed in front of them for Will to look at.

Sometimes, Darcy would walk over to the funeral home with Will, after they’d finished their schoolwork. Will and Mr. Garland lived in a spacious apartment on the top floor of the funeral home. Mr. Garland knew of Darcy’s interest in anatomy and with her mother’s permission, had shown her a few of the texts he had collected for his profession.

Darcy was curious about the bodies in the embalming room downstairs, but Mr. Garland said they’d have to wait a few years for that.

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That summer they are thick as thieves. Darcy continues to go to work with Mama so she can walk over to the funeral home and hang out with Will. They run around town together, spend hours at the library, the corner drugstore, or they sneak into the viewing rooms at the funeral home to get a closer look at the dead people.

Sometimes, she recognizes people from around town in the caskets, but they look weirdly different. They certainly don’t look like they are sleeping, like some people claim. More like some essential part of them is missing. Is it their soul’s departure that makes the difference?
Darcy and Will ponder the possibility of an afterlife.

Occasionally, Will rides home with her and Mama and stays the night, especially if it looks like his father is going to be particularly busy. They ride horses and splash around the swimming hole when it’s hot. Will, like Darcy, is very fair skinned. He burns easily in the sun, so they stay in the shade as much as possible. Darcy never burns.

Grandpa likes to take the two of them out to the back field to practice shooting. Hunting is something pretty much everyone does; so it’s good to be able to use a rifle.

Grandpa also wanted Darcy to learn to use a pistol for self-defense. They live far enough out of town that he feels they could be vulnerable if one of the occasional drifters that passed through town had ill intent. It’s fun shooting at the tin cans Grandpa lines up along the fence, and Darcy is a crack shot much to Will’s aggravation.

Will turns twelve on July 20th. It is a particularly hot day, and since he got 4 quarters for his birthday, they decide to go to a matinee at the town's new movie house. They laugh through a Felix the Cat cartoon then settle down to watch “Cocoanuts” with the Marx Brothers. It isn’t a new release, they tend to get movies a couple years after they come out. It’s okay though, it’s a funny movie with catchy musical numbers. They’d already seen it once, so Darcy entertains herself by mouthing all the lines in her favorite scenes, sharing a box of Cracker Jacks with Will.

Throughout the movie, Mikey and a couple of boys sitting behind them repeatedly kick their seats, heckle the movie, and tease Will about being on a “date”. Darcy places her hand on his arm, feeling his muscles grow tight with tension. By the time the movie is over, Will is furious.

The older boys follow them at a distance as they walk through town. Darcy and Will walk as quickly as they can towards the funeral home, but Mikey and his two friends persist in following them. When they get to the vacant lot a few buildings away from the funeral home, Mikey and his friends crowd up behind them, chucking pebbles at their backs and taunting them. Darcy and Will turn to face them.

“What are you two freaks doing? Having a little date together?” Mikey leers suggestively at Darcy. She shrinks a little under his gaze. Mikey always makes her feel uncomfortable.

Will sneers, “Why don't drag your knuckles home, you moronic Neanderthal?”

Mikey is not sure what a Neanderthal is, but his face flushes with rage and he lunges forward grabbing Will by his shirt front. Will cocks his arm back and slugs Mikey in the nose as hard as he can.

Suddenly, one of Mikey’s friends grabs ahold of Will from behind, and pins his arms. He howls in outrage as Mikey and the other boys lunge forward and start pummeling him.

Darcy is shoved to the ground by the grappling boys, but soon regains her feet, shrieking in anger and jumping on the back of the kid holding onto Will. She grabs a hold of his hair and tugs hard, feeling some of his hair pull loose in her hands. He drops Will, hands clutching his head.

Will ducks and comes up swinging, even though he already has a bloody nose and his eye is swelling. He lands a knee to Mikey’s stomach and when he collapses, heaving, the other two seem to lose momentum, perhaps thinking this fight isn’t worth the trouble.

They grab Mikey and drag him away, but not before the boy Darcy pulled off Will punches Darcy hard in the face.
Will and Darcy sit down side by side, panting and sniffling a little. Darcy’s breath hitches in a sob, holding her nose and licking her top lip which is split and bleeding. Will looks over at her, nose bleeding and eye swollen shut.

“Some birthday, huh?” he sighs, “Boy, we look terrible.”

He tilts Darcy’s head back and looks at her split lip, “Looks like you didn't lose any teeth though, so that’s good.”

He digs a crumpled handkerchief from his pocket and gives it to Darcy, she wipes the blood from her face. She hands it back to him and he folds it over and holds it to his bleeding nose. Darcy has stopped bleeding.

When he glances back at her his eyes widen in shock as her split lip finishes healing right in front of him. Darcy panics. She knows what he sees.

Will he think she’s a freak? Will he tell everyone?

Will looks her in the eye and says, “Well, that’s not fair at all.” Then, “we are talking about this later.”

They hobble over to Dr. Brooks’ office to get Will patched up.

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Will sleeps over that night. He sneaks into her room from the guest room and they huddle under her blanket together. She tells him everything she knows about her abilities, which isn’t a whole lot really.

He’s silent for a long time. Finally, “We should test this out.”

Darcy wants to be a scientist, but she doesn’t really want to be a lab rat. Testing her healing means getting hurt. She vetoes purposely injuring herself.

Instead, the rest of the summer they test her strength and agility. She lifts heavy objects, climbs trees, jumps from branch to branch, swings from the rope out over the pond.

Sometimes she falls and skins her knee or elbow and Will times her healing with the pocket watch he starts carrying. One painful couple of hours she waits for the bone in her arm to knit together after falling fifteen feet from a tree. By the end of summer, they are both stronger and Darcy has a better understanding of how her body works.

They also decide to learn how to fight better. While Darcy is stronger than average and heals quickly, she has very little idea of how to defend herself. Will is a little better, being the frequent target of bullies himself. It would be difficult to explain Darcy’s desire to learn how to fight, so Will decides he’ll ask his father for some pointers then pass the information to Darcy. They practice together.

It doesn’t do a lot of good, but they both get better at ducking a punch.
September, 1935

When she is seventeen, Darcy’s grandfather collapses while working in the barn and never regains consciousness again.

Tears run down her face as she leans on Will by Grandpa's grave, watching the dirt being shoveled into the hole. Mama clutches her hand and sobs.

Mr. Garland stands tall by Mama’s other side, his coppery head bent, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. They have been dating for two years.

It turned out having their children constantly shuttle between their houses had given them an plenty of opportunity to get to know each other. They slid into their relationship without a lot of fanfare, their decision to marry a foregone conclusion. With Grandpa’s passing, it looks like they are going to be living at the farm in a few months instead of moving into town.

Darcy is happy Will is going to be her brother, since they’ve practically been siblings since they were twelve. She is even going to change her last name to Garland when Mama marries his Pop, so they'll match.

Even when puberty betrayed Darcy at thirteen, and she abruptly gained a woman’s body over the course of one summer, Will had treated her the same as always. That same summer, she’d spent a lot of time mooning over Jimmy, a handsome young man home from college and working the counter at the corner drugstore. Will commiserated enthusiastically. That’s when she realized Will liked boys the same way she did.

As the years had gone by, Will had gotten taller and his shoulders widened. He continued to be the kind of handsome that’s almost pretty, with striking green eyes and a blinding white smile. He tried very hard to like girls, playing the heartbreaker, taking one out on a few dates before moving on to the next. It was all an act, his heart was never in it. He told Darcy if he could fall in love with a girl, it would have been her. But they both know it will never be that way between them, there is no spark. They still love each other, though.

Darcy’s pronounced hourglass shape got a lot of unwelcome attention from men old enough to know better, (it actually made her really uncomfortable and after a while she wore more layers than necessary to camouflage her body) and the ones her age had already pigeonholed her as strange, thanks to gossiping girls and bullies like Mikey.

Will and Darcy have decided to go to New York City as soon as they save up some money. Dr. Brooks has connections to a hospital in Brooklyn and says he can write her references for the nursing program. Hopefully, they can get an apartment together, go to school, and maybe Will will finally be able to date someone for real. They both need a fresh start somewhere no one knows them.

August 13, 1939
Darcy is packing the last of her new wardrobe into her suitcase, ready to catch a train to Chicago in the morning and from there to New York City.

Mama had insisted she needed new clothes for her new life, and for the first time since she was thirteen, she had clothes that actually fit her figure. Dresses, skirts, shirtwaists, new underthings, two pairs of stockings, and even a red lipstick that Mama said made her look professional and put together.

She looks so different and grown up in her new clothes she scarcely recognizes herself. She’d modeled one of her new outfits the night before and Will had teasingly wolf whistled at her.

She crosses the hall to Will’s room, knocking on the door frame before entering. He’s on his bed looking over a map of Brooklyn. He’ll be attending the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn to study engineering, focusing on aeronautics.

Three years ago, he’d found a way to get into a plane. He’d convinced a former military pilot who ran a local crop dusting business to teach him to fly in return for free labor. Eventually, Will was good enough to fly on his own as a paid employee, and spent Spring and Summer dusting the crops in three counties.

During that time, she’d assisted both Mr. Garland (he insisted she call him Pop) in the funeral home, and Dr. Brooks in the clinic. She saved every penny she earned.

As time went on, her body grew stronger and her senses more acute. She could smell infection and hear a heart problem or lung inflammation long before it became obvious to others. She didn’t need much more than 5 hours of sleep every night. Her nearly photographic memory had helped her graduate top of her class and her letters of recommendation had easily earned her a place in the nursing program at Brooklyn Hospital.

However, her hopes of being a doctor had been dashed. There were few medical schools that enrolled women for physician training, she would need a bachelor’s degree before even applying, and the cost of the extensive education was more than she could afford.

Darcy lay down next to Will. “Are you nervous?” She says softly.

Will turns to look at her, “No. I can’t wait to get out of this town. Once we get to New York, Dr. Brooks’ friend from the hospital will meet us and take us to our apartment. Then, we’ll start our new life!” He beams with enthusiasm.

She grins. She can’t wait.

August 16, 1939

The stairs creak underfoot as they follow the portly form of Dr. Robert “call me Bobby” Lowenstein to their new apartment. The stairwell is somewhat dim, the wood floors scuffed, and the walls are papered in a faded floral pattern.

The building is a bit shabby, three stories tall, and it’s not in the best part of town. But the rent is affordable, especially with the savings both she and Will have accumulated over the past three years.
If they budget carefully, they should be able to live on their savings if they supplement with odd jobs here and there.

The hospital is only three subway stops away and Will’s school is even closer. Darcy is dragging her smaller suitcase while Bobby takes the larger one. In reality, she could have carried both of them without a problem, but she has to keep up appearances.

Will huffs out a breath on the third floor landing, and drops the end of his trunk. “Woo! I’m going to get some great legs going up and down these stairs,” he grins.

“Like you need to be any more gorgeous,” Darcy mutters, pushing stray curls away from her sweaty forehead. Will flips his coppery hair back with a smirk.

Bobby unlocks the first door at the top of the stairs and ushers them inside with a flourish.

Darcy’s first impression is of light. There are two tall windows to the right that face the street, allowing the late afternoon sunshine to pour over the shabby blue sofa in front of them. To the left is a doorway that leads to a short hallway, where she guesses the bedrooms and bath are. Straight ahead at the end of the long open room is the kitchen area, where there is another tall window over the kitchen sink and a butcher block counter that runs the entire wall, with whitewashed cabinets under it and alongside the window. The stove and icebox are on the left, perpendicular to the counter. On the right there is a small dining table with four sturdy but mismatched chairs.

She crosses the room to the window over kitchen sink and flicks the curtains aside to check out the view. It faces the alley, but the building next door is only two stories high so the sunlight is not obstructed and she can see the rooftop of the adjacent building. Their apartment is at the front of the building, so if she looks down and to the right she can see pedestrians and cars passing by at street level. There’s a lot more cars and a lot more people than she’s used to seeing outside of her window.

Bobby motions them to take a look down the hallway and shows them the bathroom on the right, which is small, painted an unimaginative white, but it has a deep claw foot tub, white and gray octagon shaped tile covering the floor, and white subway tile halfway up the wall. The fixtures are old, but it’s clean and well lit.

The bedroom next to the bathroom has two tall windows that lead to the fire escape and Darcy immediately claims it as hers for the windows alone. The bedroom on the opposite side has no windows as it faces the interior of the building, but it is quite a bit bigger than the other bedroom and has an actual fireplace in it. Bobby tells them the fireplace works, that when the building was constructed the entire top floor had been one residence and when later it was divided into smaller apartments, the fireplaces wound up in weird places. Will doesn’t mind the lack of windows, he’s the kind of person who needs absolute darkness to sleep. Plus, he likes the idea of a fireplace in his bedroom.

Each bedroom is furnished with a dresser, bedside table, and a full size bed.

*A full size bed?*

Bobby explains the last tenants had been a married couple and their two children. Cheaper to furnish with one full size rather than two twin size beds for the kids. She’s not complaining.

After a brief tour, Bobby grins at them, his brown eyes twinkling. “Okay kids, I’ll leave you to get settled in. If you take a right out the front door, there’s a second hand shop two blocks over if you want to get some household items, and a market across the street from there. Rent is due first of the month, you can leave it with Mrs. Levinson in apartment 1A. I’ll give you my phone number in case
you need to reach me, and there’s a phone on each floor for residents to use,” he pauses, pointing at Darcy, “look me up at the hospital, I can introduce you to some people.”

She smiles, “Thanks, Bobby! I’ll see you on Monday.”

Will walks with him out of the apartment, chatting about local points of interest.

Darcy looks in each of the kitchen cabinets and in the icebox before flopping on the sofa, listening as their deep voices fade down the stairs. She glances around the room and pulls a pencil and paper from her bag, already making a list of what they need.

Will returns, huffing in the doorway. “Well, I suppose we should go get some groceries and a few things to start us off here.”

She raises an eyebrow at Will, “Trying to get a head start on making your legs more gorgeous?”

“Damn right!” he says, laughing as he pulls her off the sofa and steers her out the door.

Chapter End Notes

There actually is a Brooklyn Hospital which was in existence in 1940. Also, Brooklyn Polytechnic. Any details about programs or procedures at these institutions is purely fictional, however.

It’s also true that it was exceptionally rare for a woman in the United States to become a physician in the first half of the 20th century. In fact, in 1979 they only constituted 20% of medical school enrollment.
Chapter 2

November 8, 1940

Darcy hurries home from the subway, distractedly digging in her tote bag for her umbrella as it starts to rain. She wonders if Will is going to meet up with her on her walk home. He worries about her being out after dark even though he knows she can take care of herself. The traffic sounds are muffled under the sudden downpour and she hurries beneath a nearby awning. Rapidly approaching footsteps splash behind her and she spins around, dropping her bag and spilling it onto the sidewalk.

“Shoot!” She crouches, inhaling the scent of wet pavement as she grabs the contents of her bag, haphazardly stuffing papers, her spare uniform apron and hat, and her knitting needles into her tote.

Someone clears their throat from her left and she raises her eyes to see a thin, handsome, blond man with gorgeous blue eyes crouching beside her. He holds out her umbrella and a ball of yarn.

“Sorry, miss! I didn’t mean to startle ya,” his brow is furrowed with concern, face adorably earnest.

Darcy smiles at him, taking the yarn and umbrella from him. “It’s okay. I’m not usually so clumsy.” She focuses on his breathing, which is a bit labored. She lays her hand on his arm, “Are you ok?”

He nods rapidly, twisting his hands together then tipping his chin up defiantly. “I’m fine! Just ran up the block is all.” He looks down then back up at her through the longest eyelashes she’s ever seen. “Haven’t seen you around,” he holds out his hand, “My name is Steve Rogers”.

She takes his hand gently, “Darcy Garland. My brother and I moved to the neighborhood about a year ago. I’m not surprised you haven’t seen me. I’ve been so busy with school it seems like I only come home to sleep!”

Steve rises to his feet, reaching for her hand to help her stand. His hands are warm, and surprisingly large for such a delicately built man, the fingers long and tapered.

She realizes he’s only a couple inches taller than her. It’s a novel experience, being able to easily look a man in the eye.

Thunder rumbles overhead and Darcy glances at the lightning flickering in the sky, “Gee, it’s really coming down now! Don’t you have an umbrella?”

He shrugs, “No worries. I won’t melt.”
Darcy raises an eyebrow, she can hear the congestion in his lungs. “Hey, I live three blocks from here. If it’s on your way, we can share the umbrella for a while.”

“You wouldn’t mind? That’s awfully nice of you.” He holds out his arm to take her tote and she opens the umbrella. They huddle together under it and begin walking.

Along the way, Steve tells her about the art school he attended last year and asks about her school. She tells him about nursing and the work she does up at the hospital as a part of her program.

A shadow crosses his face, “My ma worked as a nurse up at Brooklyn hospital. She died from tuberculosis three years ago.” His mouth turns down, and Darcy squeezes his hand.

“I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“Well, you should be extra careful around sick people, wouldn’t want to catch something.” His blue eyes focus on her, his expression chagrined. “Shoot. I’m doing what Bucky always says I do, putting my foot in it around a pretty dame. Didn’t mean to scare ya or nothin’.”

“Don’t worry, you didn’t scare me. I’m healthy as a horse.” She pauses, a little embarrassed bringing up her good health when he is obviously rather sickly.

Change of subject, then.

“Who’s Bucky?”

“My best friend. I moved in with his family after my ma passed. We got our own place a little while ago.”

“Oh. It’s good you have a friend like that.” Darcy blushes a little, “Say, do you have any artwork from school? I’d be interested in seeing it sometime,” she laughs, “even my stick figures look sad so I envy any artistic talent.”

Steve grins, his teeth white and straight, and Darcy notices how handsome he is when he smiles. “Sure, maybe next time I see ya around I can show ya.”

They had slowed to nearly a standstill while talking. Steve takes a deep breath, a look of determination on his face. His eyes meet hers and hold. “Hey, maybe—”

“Darcy!” They both startle and turn towards the voice.

Will jogs up to them holding his umbrella overhead. “Sorry I didn’t meet you at the subway stop, I got caught up after class.”

Darcy rolls her eyes. She bet he had. Will’s social life has taken off, she can’t even keep track of who he’s been spending time with lately. “Just in time, Steve here was about to abduct me,” she teases.

Steve chokes and she shoots him a mischievous smirk. She turns back to Will, “This my friend Steve Rogers, and Steve, this is my brother Will.”

Steve flushes with bewildered pleasure at being introduced as her friend and puts out his hand to shake.

Will takes his hand firmly and smiles. “Nice to meet you Steve. You don’t wanna be stealing Darcy,
she’s too much trouble,” She elbows him in the side and he groans dramatically, clutching his side. “You live around here?”

“Yeah, four blocks that way,” he says, pointing down the sidewalk behind Will.

“We’re practically neighbors! Our building is that one over there.” Will tips his head at a three story brownstone a couple buildings down from them. He turns and they resume walking. Steve and Darcy still sharing her umbrella.

When they reach Will and Darcy’s building, Will bids Steve goodnight and hurries up the stairs out of the rain. Steve makes to step out from under Darcy’s umbrella and she stops him with a hand on his arm.

“Here, take my umbrella for the rest of your walk. You can always return it.” She quickly presses the handle into his hand and steps back, raindrops collecting in her dark hair.

“Apartment 3A! I usually get home by 6 o’clock.” she says, winking and pointing her finger like a pistol, then turns and skips after Will.

Steve stands still in the rain for a moment, dazed eyes watching her legs disappear up the first flight of stairs through the glass fronted door. He shakes his head, huffs out a baffled laugh, and hurries the rest of the way home.

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Steve shakes the rainwater from the umbrella as he walks into the apartment, thinking about the quick smile and blue eyes of the girl who loaned it to him. Bucky lays on their threadbare sofa, tossing a baseball up and catching it. He turns abruptly when Steve comes through the door.

“Where ya been, punk? It’s raining cats and dogs out there and ya ain’t over that cold ya caught last week.” He quirks an eyebrow at the umbrella.

Steve ducks his head shyly, a small satisfied smile on his face. “I’m fine, Buck. I ran into a gal on my way back from the subway. She lent me her umbrella.” He leans the wet umbrella against the wall.

Bucky sits up with interest. “Lent ya her umbrella, huh?” he says slyly.

Steve slips off his coat and throws it at Bucky’s head, snickering at his indignant squawk. “Aw, Buck. She’s a nice girl, going to nursing school up at the hospital. Met her brother too.” He walks over to the stove, lifts the lid off a simmering pot, and wrinkles his nose. “Chicken soup again? Pretty soon I’m gonna start clucking.”

“You’ll eat that soup and like it, Steven Grant. S’not like we can afford chicken every day and it helps get you healthy.”

Steve frowns, eyes downcast. He hates being sick. Bucky is everything he wishes he could be. Tall, strong, and confident with a ready smile and a bit of swagger.

Sometimes he wonders why Buck sticks with him. Every time he apologizes for being such a burden Bucky looks at him like he’s an idiot and says, “I’m with you ‘til the end of the line. We’re family, Stevie.”

Bucky walks over and slings his arm around his shoulder. “I don’t know about you but I’m starved. Let’s get some grub and you can tell me more about this girl.” He waggles his eyebrows at him.
Steve smacks him on the shoulder, “Jerk.”

Bucky laughs and gives him a little shove, “Punk.”

Bucky lays in his bed that night listening to Steve’s slightly labored breathing from across the room. He’s tired, but sometimes it takes him a while to fall asleep, despite the hard physical labor of his job on the docks. Years of listening to Steve struggling to breathe and wondering if he would make it through the night has conditioned him to being a light sleeper.

He thinks about the gal Stevie had gone on about at dinner, how his face lit up like a sunrise over the thought of a pretty dame giving him the time of day. He feels a rush of anger at all the people who dismiss Steve, treat him as less than a man because he’s small and sickly.

Steve is the best person he knows. Always throwing himself into defending others from bullies and stubbornly pushing himself so he can contribute to their household. His naivety is tempered by an intuitive ability to read people. He knows when people are playing him and years of being on the outside have given him keen observational skills. He can be a little shit, playing on his angelic face and smaller stature to convince others of his innocence, regardless of whatever trouble he’s gotten himself into. Since his ma died, all the older ladies in the neighborhood mother hen Steve and want to fatten him up. Steve isn’t above milking that for all it’s worth. They both benefit, especially since money is often tight.

Bucky has always had an easy time making friends, people flock to him and he doesn’t bother to weed through their motivations. Steve, on the other hand, never had many friends growing up, struggling to prove himself and resenting people pitying him for his weakness. It’s rare for him to find someone who sees beyond his frailty. When he does, his loyalty is ironclad, no questions asked. Bucky has no doubt Steve would walk through fire for him and Bucky feels the same way about Steve.

He wonders about Darcy Garland. If Stevie likes her, she’s probably something. He sighs, rolling over and punching his pillow into shape.

He’ll have to keep an eye on things, make sure she doesn’t hurt him.

On Saturday morning, Bucky and Steve are getting ready to walk down to the market when Steve decides they should drop off Darcy’s umbrella. It’s a sunny day, mild for November, and Steve has pretty much recovered from his cold. Bucky still makes him wear a scarf, grumbling about his lungs, and to stop being so hard headed.

When they arrive at Darcy’s building, Bucky waves Steve off, tells him he’ll wait down in the entryway.

“He’s not polite to spring strangers on a gal.”

Steve smiles, “Alright, I’ll be back in a couple minutes.”

He trudges up the three floors to her apartment and stops to catch his breath in front of Darcy’s apartment before he knocks. After a minute, he raps on the door. He hears a shuffling on the other side and a shouted “Just a minute!” before the door opens a few inches, security chain in place, one blue eye peering through the crack and a dark eyebrow rising as she drawls, “Hey, Steve.”
She disengages the chain and swings the door open, “You got something for me?”

Steve’s mouth goes dry at the vision Darcy makes. Her dark hair lays in waves to her shoulders and she’s wearing a blue dress that brings out her eyes and makes her pale skin glow.

When Steve met her, he’d known she had a pretty face, but her figure had been obscured by her coat. Her hourglass shape is on full display today, and she reminds him of a pin-up.

He wordlessly hands the umbrella to her as he struggles to untie his tongue. Darcy smiles, “Thanks for returning it, what are you up to today?”

Steve clears his throat and shuffles his feet a little, “Bucky and I are off to the market, our cupboards are bare.”

She peers over his shoulder, glancing up and down the hall, “Where is he?”

“Oh, um. He’s waiting downstairs.”

“Well, if you don’t mind, I’d like to accompany you to the market. Will drank the last of the coffee and left early this morning, the dirty rat. I can’t go all day without it.”

Steve nods enthusiastically, “Of course you can come! We can even help you bring back your groceries if you need to get a few more things.”

“Swell! Why don’t you go tell your friend and I’ll meet you downstairs in a jiffy.”

A rushed clattering on the stairs causes Bucky turn expectantly.

Steve jumps over the last couple steps and says breathlessly, “Darcy wants to come with us to the market. She’ll be down in a minute.” He looks a bit flustered.

Bucky’s raises an eyebrow and smirks at his friend.

Steve elbows him in the side, “It ain’t a date, jerk. We’re just friends.”

“Sure, sure,” he grins.

The sharp sound of heels coming down the stairs causes them both to look towards them. Bucky looks over Steve’s head to see a short, curvy girl in a blue dress rushing down with her coat thrown over her arm. He feels a little stunned when she arrives at the bottom and sends a warm, open smile at a clearly dazzled Steve.

She’s beautiful. He honestly hadn’t expected that.

“Help me with my coat?” She hands her coat to Steve and Bucky’s eyes run over the curves of her figure. She winks and hands her purse to Bucky before sliding her arm in one sleeve then the other as Steve holds it for her, a goofy smile on his face.

She turns to Bucky for her purse and he hands it back to her, a little bemused by her easy familiarity. She looks up at him with laughing blue eyes and holds out her hand, “You must be Bucky. My name is Darcy Garland,” she shakes his hand firmly then says, “Say, what kinda name is Bucky anyway?”

He keeps hold of her hand and grins, “James Buchanan Barnes. Bucky is short for Buchanan.” he grips her hand gently before letting go, “My friends call me Bucky.”
She looks up at him and purses her full lips in contemplation, “Hmmm. Maybe we can be friends.”
She says, “How do you feel about coffee? Because I haven’t had any today and I need fortification. The diner next to the market has great coffee, my treat.”

Bucky glances at Steve who shrugs, watching them banter with interest, “Sure, but I can’t let my new friend pay for our coffee. My ma raised me to be a gentleman.”

Steve snorts and rolls his eyes. Bucky elbows him in the gut and is satisfied to hear a little “oof” of surprise.

Darcy glances between the two of them, eyebrows raised. “How do you feel about coming over for dinner later instead? Helping with the groceries means you can eat some of them.”

Bucky and Steve share a silent conversation of eyebrow twitches and significant glances. Steve turns to her, “That’d be swell.”

“Wonderful! Now, let’s get some coffee!”

Bucky holds open the door for Steve and Darcy to walk through, Darcy leading the way. She turns and grabs Steve’s arm, babbling away and gesticulating with her other hand. Bucky watches, charmed by her easy acceptance of Steve.

Also, she’d flirted with both of them, unfazed by spending time with a couple of fellas. He’s not sure what to make of that. The girls in the neighborhood fall all over themselves to get his attention, but she seemed comfortable and flirty without trying too hard.

She’s definitely something.

Bucky quirked a dark eyebrow and sits across from them, glancing around for a waitress. He gets a tight look around his eyes that passes so quickly she wouldn’t have noticed if she wasn’t studying him.

“Something wrong?”

Bucky sighs and turned his silvery blue eyes her way. He smiles, “Nah, it’s fine doll,” just as the waitress arrives at the table.

She’s a pretty brunette whose name tag reads, “Clara”. She leans in and places a proprietary hand on Bucky’s shoulder and says, “Hey, Bucky~ What can I getcha?” It’s obvious she was offering more than what’s on the menu. Bucky shrugs and rubs a hand over his face.

This is interesting. She glances at Steve and he wiggles his eyebrows a little at her, smirking.

When Bucky catches their interaction there’s a shuffle under the table and Steve jumps a little, whispering, “Ow”.
Clara continues to ignore their side of the table completely, a petulant pout on her pretty face. How rude.

“We’re just having coffee,” he winks at Darcy, bites his bottom lip, “unless you want something more, sweetheart?”

Clara turns towards her, lips pursed in irritation. If looks could kill she’d be dead for sure.

“No darling, that’s perfect.” she sends him a flirty glance and glances up at Clara. “Just some cream and sugar for the coffee please,” she smiles sweetly, watching Bucky get a little flustered. Ha.

She hears Steve snicker a little next to her and nudes his knee under the table. Clara huffs and flounces away.

“She’s not gonna spit in my coffee is she?”

Steve laughs, “Better keep an eye on her, Buck. Told ya you shouldn’t have taken her out.”

Bucky lets out a beleaguered sigh, “It was just one date. She knew it wasn’t anything serious, just a bit of fun.”

He slouches down a bit in the booth, keeping an eye on Clara pouring their coffee.

Darcy snorts, “Looks like she wants to keep having fun.”

She’s seen this before. Will left a trail of broken hearts behind him and Darcy had been on the receiving end of quite a bit of jealousy, even though she repeatedly told everyone he was like a brother to her.

Dealing with spiteful girls is nothing new.

Bucky is matinee idol handsome, tall, with wavy, chestnut brown hair and light eyes that shift between gray and blue. Add in his flirty attitude and pouty lips and she’s sure he gets more than his share of attention.

Steve nudges her shoulder and says, “Buck has a bit of a reputation with the ladies.”

“You don’t say,” Darcy drawls, completely deadpan.

“Shut up, punk.” Bucky says irritably to Steve.

He tips his head down, sending a smoldering look towards Darcy, “You don’t mind my reputation do you?”

Oh my god. He’s a shameless flirt. Darcy giggles, waving her hand at him, “Does that actually work for you?”

Bucky looks a bit disappointed and shrugs, “Usually.” He straightens up, laughing, “Looks like I’ll have to try harder.”

“Please don’t. I really don’t need a pack of women trying to snatch me bald.”

Clara brings their coffee over, slaps the check on the table, and flounces away again.

Darcy steadies the slightly wobbling table and slides her coffee over, immediately doctoring it up with cream and sugar, holding the cup under her nose and inhaling. She moans, “Ahh, sweet
Steve grabs his and puts in cream and Bucky adds so much sugar she’s surprised his spoon doesn’t stand up in it.

They settle in, drinking their coffee and exchanging stories. Bucky and Steve are fascinated with Darcy’s tales of Iowa. They are city boys, closest they’ve gotten to nature is Prospect Park and Coney Island. Her lively stories about riding horses, climbing trees, rope swings, and swimming holes, is like stuff from the movies to them.

In return, they tell her about dance halls, gangsters, playing stickball in the street, and all the scuffles the two of them have gotten into (mostly Bucky bailing Steve out of one scrape or another).

She tells them about Will, how he was her best friend since childhood, and how Mama and his Pop got married and he became her brother and she became a Garland.

She talks about her work in Dr. Brooks’ office and at the funeral home. They are fascinated rather than repulsed by the idea of her working in the funeral home. Both Bucky and Steve are practical people, growing up poor in the city exposed them to the unsavory parts of life. Steve’s mother had been a nurse, kind and steadfast, but she’d never sugarcoated things. There isn’t room for squeamishness for either of them.

Steve describes some of the illustrations he’d been doing for local advertisements, and about the figure drawing class he’d taken last Spring. He pulls a scrap of paper and a pencil from his pocket and sketches out some of the ideas he’s working on.

Bucky works on the docks loading and unloading cargo. It sounds like rough, dangerous work, but he’s hopeful he can maybe make foreman if he works hard.

He mentions his sister, Rebecca and his ma. He confides that his father died when he was 16 and how he had to take over as man of the family. He works as much as possible to help support them.

She tells them that her father, like Steve’s, died in the Great War before she was born, and discovers that Steve didn’t have biological siblings either.

“What was your father’s name?” Steve asks.

“David Lewis. I wish I’d known him.”

Steve bows his head, his face somber. She thinks he missed not having a father more than she did.

They linger in the diner drinking coffee for more than an hour. Clara glares at the three of them until they finally relent, rising from the table and putting their coats on.

Darcy walks between the two of them to the market. It’s the start of a beautiful friendship, she can tell.

Chapter End Notes

Remember that brunette that went to the Stark expo with Bucky in CA The First Avenger? That’s Clara.
So, next chapter will post next Saturday, god willing. Feel free to comment or give kudos as this is my first fic and every bit of encouragement helps!
Steve and Bucky have dinner at Darcy’s and get to know her and Will a bit better. Will shows Darcy a few boxing moves.

Darcy makes beef stew for dinner with fresh baked bread, followed by spice cake for dessert. If he wasn’t already infatuated with her, the spice cake would’ve sealed the deal for Steve.

He’s pretty sure Bucky is thinking the same thing when she offers him a second slice of cake. Bucky has a huge sweet tooth. He actually moans a little when he takes his first bite.

Aside from the leftovers occasionally offered by the older ladies in the neighborhood, they haven’t eaten so well since they lived at home. Honestly, neither he nor Bucky can cook worth a damn. It usually involves boiling whatever meat and vegetables they have until they are mushy and hoping for the best.

Will had teased Darcy for making the cake asking, “Say, what’s the occasion?” when she brought it out after they ate the stew.

Darcy’s cheeks reddened and she said, “New friends.”

After dessert, Will gets out a deck of cards which he shuffles expertly after he pulls a bottle of whiskey from the cupboard. He tilts it towards he and Bucky after pouring a couple inches in a glass. Steve rarely drinks because with his size and constitution, it never takes much to get him tipsy. He declines. Bucky has some and surprisingly Darcy knocks back a shot. They decide to play a game of hearts. Darcy and Will have a radio in the corner which she turns on while Will deals the cards.

The apartment is a bit larger than the one he and Bucky share, and a lot more homey. It smells like lemon polish and home cooking. There are cheerful plaid curtains on the kitchen window, rag rugs on the floor, and a patchwork quilt thrown over the back of the sofa, along with an assortment of throw pillows. A squashy looking chair sits near one end of the sofa, with books stacked on the floor next it, and an end table with the radio on it between them.

Darcy says she and Will have been working for the last year to make their place more comfortable. She’d brought the quilt from home and made the curtains and pillows, herself. Will had dragged the chair, radio, and rugs back from the second hand shop. Her ma had shipped spare linens and fabric to make curtains.

It’s also warm, a decided difference from their place. Half the time the heat in their apartment doesn’t work and the windows are a bit drafty.

The combination of a full belly and warmth is making him drowsy.

The fast tempo of Benny Goodman’s “Sing, Sing, Sing” comes on the radio and Darcy starts tapping her feet. She nudges Will, “Remember this song?!”
Will smiles, puts his cards down, and stands, taking Darcy’s hand, “May I have this dance?”

She takes his hand, rising to follow him to the center of the room. They sway together and swiftly find the rhythm, making it obvious that they can really move. They bounce into some quick swing steps, keeping their maneuvers tight due to the small dance floor. Bucky leans back in his chair, eyes intent and tapping out the rhythm on his knee. She and Will dance smoothly together, obviously practiced and comfortable with each other.

Darcy throws back her head and laughs and Steve wishes he knew how to dance.

When the next song comes on, Bucky stands and cuts in. Will (who he isn’t ashamed to admit is the most handsome man he’s seen outside of the movies) claps him on the back and goes to sit with Steve. Darcy takes his hand and he places his other hand at her waist. She puts her arm around his neck, her fingers idly stroking the hair at the nape of his neck.

He smoothly leads her around the makeshift dance floor, dipping and twirling her, feeling how well she moves with him. She tips her chin up and murmurs, “You’re good at this.”

He loves to dance. He usually goes to a dance hall on a Saturday night, dances with as many girls as he can before singling one out for extra attention. “This ain’t nothin’, doll. We oughta go dancing sometime, then I can really impress ya.”

She beams, “I’d love that! We should all go.”

He’s pleased she includes Steve, even though part of him is disappointed she didn’t take the opportunity to make it a date for just the two of them. He’s never been around a dame that wasn’t angling for him to be her fella. She pays just as much attention to Steve as she does to him.

Maybe even more attention, actually.

It’s confusing.

He’s known her for less than a day and he’s already tied up in knots. He’s used to flirting with women. Playing games. She’s friendly, flirts back a bit, but is refreshingly forthright.

She turns to Steve, “What do you say, wanna go out dancing some time?”

Stevie has never danced because he has no one to partner with him and also because too much exercise usually sets off his asthma. Usually, if they go to a dance hall, Steve stays at the table and watches the drinks and purses.

Bucky can see he’s a bit panicked by the question. So can Darcy. Sharp gal.

“Don’t worry Steve, we can practice together and we’ll go when you feel like it,” she says.

Stevie’s shoulders relax and a smile lights up his face, “Sure, Darcy.”

She turns back to Bucky and he reels her in for a deep dip as the song ends. She kicks one leg up and points her toe, giggling. He looks into her laughing blue eyes and grins, pulling her her back to her feet.

Later, Steve lays on his bed thinking about their evening. He can hear Bucky rummaging around in
the kitchen, no doubt getting into the leftovers Darcy sent home with them. Sure enough, in a moment Bucky is leaning on the doorframe, plate in hand with another piece of cake on it.

Steve rolls his eyes, “Your teeth are gonna rot right outta your head. Save some for later why don’t ya?”

Bucky mumbles, “It is later, punk,” around a mouth full of cake.

Steve snorts and reaches behind his head to fluff his pillow.

Bucky finishes off the cake and takes his plate and fork back to the kitchen. Steve hears the water running and knows he’s washing them before putting them away. He’s particular like that. Neat.

He wanders back into the bedroom and grabs the pack of smokes and box of matches he keeps on the window ledge. He turns to Steve, “Hey, get under your blanket. I’m gonna open the window and have a smoke. Don’t want you to catch a chill.”

Bucky always smokes outside since it bothers Steve’s lungs.

He opens the window and steps out onto the fire escape, shutting the window most of the way behind him, leaving it open enough for them to talk. Steve turns off the bedside lamp and huddles under his blanket. The alley is dark but there’s enough illumination from the streetlights that he can see Bucky’s silhouette outside. The cherry red ember of his cigarette periodically flares with his inhalations.

“Had a good time tonight.”

Steve nods, even though Bucky can’t see him. “Yeah. I told ya Darcy was a peach. Will seems nice too,” he smiles, thinking of Darcy laughing, “sure was fun.”

Bucky stubs out his cigarette and flicks it into the alley. He climbs through the window, shutting it behind him and sits on the edge of his bed. He takes off his shoes and stands, placing them side by side at the end of the bed before shedding his shirt and pants which he folds and puts on the dresser between their beds. Clad in his undershirt and shorts, he slides under the covers, punching his pillow a few times to work it into shape. He turns on his side towards Steve.

“They’re different. She’s different. Most of the gals around here just wanna get married, have some kids. She seems to have other plans. She’s smart. I think she was keeping track of all the cards because she sure kicked our butts at hearts.”

Steve thinks about that. He didn’t really notice, just thought she was lucky. But Bucky is really smart himself, always was good at math and numbers. Figures he’d pick up on that.

“Heard ya talkin’ to Will about going down to Goldie’s Gym to teach him how to box. Maybe I’ll come and watch?”

“You’ll do more than watch if you’re coming along. You’re scrappy but it never hurts to work on your uppercut. Plus, maybe we can get a little more muscle on ya.”

Steve sighs. He’s never gonna be as strong as Bucky, but maybe he could work on his speed.

“Alright.”

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November 22, 1940

Darcy and Will are in their apartment and he’s showing her some of the boxing moves he’s picked up at the gym. They’d continued with their pursuit of self-defense skills throughout the years. Unfortunately, boxing gyms aren’t places that women are allowed.

It’s irritating. Women have more to worry about in terms of physical attacks yet there are few opportunities for learning to protect themselves.

Darcy wants to be able to defend herself, not to just hide behind a man. Thank god she can shoot a gun. But she can’t carry one everywhere she goes. At least she has her grandpa’s old pistol in her bedside table.

Unfortunately, ammunition doesn’t grow on trees.

She squares off with Will, wearing one of his undershirts and a pair of his old pants, rolled up and belted tightly so they won’t slide off. Will is showing her all the different ways to punch, also how to block a hit by holding her arms up. He has the advantage of height and reach, she however, is fast and agile. If she can get in under his guard, she can land some powerful hits to his abdomen.

In a real fight, she’d aim for the throat or groin. Despite having above average strength, her small stature makes her vulnerable and she figures going for the sensitive bits is the best strategy.

Will huffs out a breath as she ducks under his arm and hits him. “Not pulling your punches Darce?”

“That was me pulling my punches, darling,” she smirks. “Don’t hold back Will. You know I’ll heal and I need to know what it feels like so I won’t be surprised if it happens.”

Will sighs. She knows he hates hitting her, it feels wrong. She’s a woman and much smaller than him.

“Come on!” She manages to get a solid hit into his side and even holding back she knows there will be bruises. She dances back and forth, arms up protecting her face.

Will uses his superior reach to swing around her defenses and hits her hard in the side. Darcy stumbles with the force of the blow and bends at her waist, sucking in a breath and holding her side.

“Oh God—are you alright? I told you I didn’t want to really hit you,” Will stammers.

Darcy lifts her shirt and pokes at her side. It’s red but rapidly fading. It probably wouldn’t even bruise because her body works on healing the broken blood vessels before enough blood clots beneath her skin.

She drops her shirt, grits her teeth, and nods.

She raises her hands, “Again.”

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter, expect another one sooner than next Saturday!

Sing, Sing, Sing by Benny Goodman
https://youtu.be/6_YG9XBX04Y
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Steve and Bucky’s heat is on the fritz. Darcy offers leftovers and a place to warm up. Bucky has a talk with Steve about Darcy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 13, 1940

On a bitterly cold Friday, Darcy runs into Steve walking home from the subway. He has a portfolio under his arm and his nose is red from the cold. The light is fading fast, the long orange rays of sunset lining the edges of the buildings.

They haven’t seen each other much the last week or so.

Just before Thanksgiving, the flu cases had increased exponentially at the hospital. With many of the staff out sick, her supervisors have been running her ragged. She’d quickly gained a reputation for being steady, not squeamish, and unafraid of hard work. Thus, she was the dogsbody of her class.

She doesn’t mind, she’s learned through experience that buckling down and getting her hands dirty is a necessary part of mastering a skill. Book learning can only take her so far.

She and Steve have only managed to get in two dance lessons so far, and they’ve been brief. He and Bucky came up to their place with Will post-boxing a couple times. Will and Bucky played gin and had a drink while she and Steve worked on some basic steps.

After a while, Bucky stood behind Steve with his hands on his shoulders, moving Steve to the music while he learned to lead. Steve managed to look embarrassed and pleased at the same time, his cheeks flushed, with a little quirk to his lips. Bucky’s eyes laughed at her over his shoulder, white teeth flashing as he grinned.

Darcy doesn’t think she’s ever had more fun.

They need a little more practice; Bucky and Will want to go dancing on New Year's Eve.

“Steve! I haven’t seen you in forever!” She wants to hug him, he looks so cold. That probably wouldn’t be an appropriate thing to do on the street. Darn.

He smiles, shivering a little. “Hello, doll,” he says, “almost two weeks, not quite forever.”

She shakes her head with and rolls her eyes, “For. Ever.”

Steve snorts in amusement, taking her arm as they resume walking.

Snow is beginning to come down in big fluffy flakes, sticking to his hair. She smiles and tucks her hand around his arm, pulling him even tighter to her when he shivers again, listening hard and hearing the congestion in his lungs.
“You been feeling alright?”

He’d told her about his asthma when they started their dance lessons. He was embarrassed by how quickly he got winded. Darcy knows there is more wrong with him than just asthma, his heartbeat is a bit abnormal, and he’d mentioned he was color blind.

He doesn’t like to talk about it so she tries to be nonchalant and accommodates him by teaching him slower dances.

“The cold irritates my lungs, is all.”

“Ah. We should get you home then, so you can get warmed up!” She turns to him and tucks his scarf a bit more firmly around his neck. “So, what have you been up to?”

“Oh, been taking an art class.” he says, “Work. I got a few illustration jobs for the holidays and I’ve been spending a lot of my free time working on that. The extra money will help buy a few Christmas presents, maybe save some ‘just in case’ money.”

Darcy knows money is always tight for Steve and Bucky. Steve’s work is often interrupted by illness and Bucky gives a lot of his earnings to his mother and sister so there isn’t a whole lot left over.

“Where’s Bucky been? Will says he hasn’t seen him at the gym in a week!” She misses him too, she hasn’t seen him since the last time she and Steve practiced dancing.

“He picked up a couple extra shifts at the docks this week. He’s been leaving early and coming home after dark. I’m hoping he’s home now.”

“I’ll walk with you. I’d like to say hello to him if he’s there! I’m all by my lonesome tonight anyhow. Will’s staying at his friend Tony’s place.”

She didn't tell him Tony is Will’s fella. They’d met at school, been seeing each other pretty steadily since the end of summer. She only met him a few weeks ago when the two of them decided they were serious about each other. She’s happy for Will, even if it means he isn’t always around in the evening.

“Wouldn’t want you to be all alone, Darce,” his brow wrinkles with worry, blue eyes earnest.

She brushes off his concern, “It’s alright Steve. I’m used to it.”

As they walk the four blocks past her building to where Bucky and Steve live, the neighborhood becomes noticeably more seedy. Darcy lives on the edge of a shabby, rough part Brooklyn. However, her neighborhood has older people who’d raised their families and stayed, some young families, and people her age seeking cheaper accommodations.

What a difference a few blocks can make. Buildings in disrepair, alleys full of garbage, men loitering on stoops smoking and looking shifty. Darcy walks a little closer to Steve as a couple of catcalls are shouted her way. Steve looks simultaneously angry and embarrassed.

When they arrive at Steve and Bucky’s building, she follows him up three flights of dimly lit stairs. Poor Steve wheezes with each exhalation, though he struggles to hide it. He pauses for a moment outside the apartment and she puts her hand on his back, gently rubbing circles while he catches his breath. It seems to help, but the tips of his ears are red with embarrassment.

He sighs and pulls his key out of his pocket. They enter the apartment only to find Bucky, his back to the door, swearing and bent over the radiator across the room.
“Dammit! The heat’s on the fritz again and it’s colder than hell outside. Stevie, I’m gonna kill the super. Doesn’t do a damn thing.”

Steve snickers, “Language.”

Bucky turns and sees Darcy standing beside Steve, smirking at him. He ducks his head, running a hand over the back of his neck. “Sorry, Darcy,” he says, “didn’t know you were here.”

“Obviously,” she says, “but you forgot I live with Will, and he’s got a mouth on him.”

She looks around. Their place is clean if a bit utilitarian. They have an old, threadbare brown sofa, a small kitchen table with a couple chairs, and the faded curtains on the window are obvious cast offs. At least their window faces a vacant lot at the back of the building and has southern exposure. They’d get sunlight during the day. There’s a small table and chair next to the window, with a gooseneck lamp along and a cup full of pencils on it. A few sketchbooks are stacked on the corner of the table and on the walls near the work table, Steve has pinned a few of his drawings.

Her eyes follow lines of the figures and faces he’s drawn. His drawings show the movement and mood of the moment he’d captured, better than a photograph because of the expressiveness of his work. She nudges Steve’s arm, “These are wonderful. I can see why you’re getting illustration jobs.”

“They’re okay. I mostly do it for fun.” Steve runs a hand over the back of his neck, a pleased smile on his face.

“This is more than “fun’,” she waves her hands at the drawings, “you are truly talented. I’m jealous, my sad stick figures are even more pathetic in retrospect.”

She grins at him and turns to Bucky, “you guys want to come to my place to warm up? I’ve got leftover chicken and dumplings we can share and I can maybe throw together something for dessert.”

Steve says, “Will ain’t coming home tonight. Darcy said he’s staying at a friends place.”

Darcy watches as Bucky and Steve have another of their silent conversations.

“Doll, I don’t know if that would be good for your reputation, having a couple of fellas over when you’re home alone.”

“Don’t worry Bucky, my building is mostly old people and they hardly ever come out of their apartments in the evening. If they see you they’ll just assume Will is home too. He tends to come and go quite a bit anyway.”

Bucky wavers for a moment then finally shrugs, going back to the bedroom and grabbing his coat and cigarettes. “Ain’t gotta twist my arm. Food and heat sound pretty good right now.”

He walks over to Steve’s art table and picks up a stray piece of paper and a pencil. “Just let me write a note for the super to fix the heat.” He scribbles out a few lines, folds the paper and puts it in his pocket. “I’ll shove this under his door on the way out.”

Steve and Darcy wait in the hall while Bucky turns out the lights and locks the door. They chat as they walk down the stairs, stop on the first floor while Bucky angrily shoves the note under the super’s door, then leave the building.

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The wind has picked up while they’ve been inside and by the time they reach Darcy’s apartment it’s
snowing heavily. Bucky opens the door to Darcy’s building and follows Steve and Darcy up the stairs.

He hears the faint whistling in Steve’s panting exhalations and wishes there were fewer stairs. Darcy glances back at him, her brow furrowed with worry. He lifts an eyebrow at her and she widens her eyes at him, silently conveying her concern.

By the time they enter the apartment, Steve is pale and sweaty. Darcy pushes him onto the sofa and tucks the blanket on it around him.

Bucky sits next to him, pulling Steve against his chest and breathing slowly, encouraging him to breathe with him.

Darcy walks to the icebox and pulls out a pot of chicken and dumplings, placing it on the stove to warm. Then she starts up the percolator. Soon the scent of coffee wafts into the room and Darcy brings two steaming mugs to them and sets milk and sugar on the end table next to Bucky. “Sorry there’s no cream. Fix it the way you like it. It will help you get warm and the caffeine can’t hurt.”

She strips off her coat, hat, and gloves, revealing the nurse’s uniform she wore that day. She turns to Bucky, “I’ll be right back, I need to change out of this,” she waves her hand at her uniform, “there’s more coffee on the stove if you want it. Make yourself comfortable.” She darts back to her bedroom.

Bucky stirs milk and sugar into Steve’s cup and hands it to him, and stirs four spoonfuls of sugar into his own before relaxing and taking a sip. He looks over at Steve who grimaces, “Ugh, too sweet.”

“Shut up and drink it. It’ll give ya some energy.”

“Or give me a toothache,” Steve mutters but he drinks it anyway.

Darcy returns with her hair falling in soft waves over her shoulders, wearing a red floral house dress with what looks like one of Will’s cardigans over it. Bucky quirks an eyebrow when he spots the long knitted socks she’s wearing which appear to be made from the odds and ends of different knitting projects. Darcy looks down, “What? I know they’re ugly. My legs were cold.”

Steve grins.

She raises an eyebrow and huffs, “I can see you’re feeling better.”

Bucky removes his coat and lays it over the end of the sofa. Steve pulls the blanket off and hands him his outerwear too. Bucky tosses the blanket back over Steve and stands up, walking over next to Darcy who is stirring the chicken and dumplings on the stove.

“Can I help you with anything, doll?” He rests a hand on the small of her back.

She leans into his hand and smiles, the scent of flowers wafts from her hair, “If you wouldn’t mind setting the table,” she points to a cabinet, then a drawer, “bowls and cups up there, utensils are in the drawer below it.”

He steps away, letting his hand slide over her hip. After setting the table, he turns back to Steve who is regaining his color and no longer wheezing so much.

“Soup’s on!” Darcy calls as she sets the pot on the table. “Anybody want milk or water with dinner?”

“More coffee would be good,” Bucky raises his eyebrows at Steve and he nods assent.
“I’ll fix my own cup this time, jerk.”

They settle in to eat.

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After dinner, Darcy turns on the radio, curls up on the sofa, and snuggles under the blanket while Bucky and Steve clear the table and bring the dishes to the sink. She listens to the news report with half an ear as they bicker over who will wash and who will dry the dishes. Turns out they both hate drying, but Bucky finally agrees to do it.

She watches as the two of them work in perfect synchronicity, their movements like those of long time dance partners. The rise and fall of their deep voices, Bucky’s husky tone and Steve’s smooth, surprisingly deep one, lull her into drowsiness.

After the dishes are done, they sit on either side of her on the sofa. Darcy leans her head on Steve’s shoulder, drawing a corner of the blanket over his knees, and tucks her feet under Bucky’s thigh.

“Tired, Darce?” Steve murmurs in her ear. Bucky’s fingers stroke her ankle.

“A little.” She sighs, “It’s been a crazy few weeks at the hospital.”

The introduction for “The Burns and Allen Show” starts on the radio and Darcy perks up. The three of them relax and listen to the program until it’s done. Bucky stirs beside Darcy and asks about dessert, to Steve’s surprise.

Steve snorts, “how can you have any room?”

Bucky reaches around Darcy and whacks Steve on the head with a pillow, “I’m a growing boy!”

Darcy flicks back the blanket and turns to tuck it around Steve before getting up and rummaging in the kitchen cupboards. “Well, since we couldn’t go home for Thanksgiving or Christmas this year, Mama sent us a care package.” She holds up a tin of cocoa powder. “How do you feel about hot cocoa?”

Bucky’s grin is infectious, “That’d be swell.”

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Steve rests on the sofa, warm under the blanket Darcy tucked around him. He watches her standing by the stove, stirring the pot of cocoa. Her dark hair shines under the kitchen light and the scent of chocolate perfumes the air. He hasn’t felt so content since his ma was alive.

He glances over at Bucky, who’s watching her intently, his teeth worrying his bottom lip. He’s known Bucky half of his life and he’s never seen him look at a girl the way he looks at Darcy.

Bucky likes to have fun, flitting from one pretty girl to another, never settling down. He looks at Darcy like she is a puzzle to solve or something delicious he wants to eat.

Steve worries a little, he can tell she isn’t like the girls Bucky normally dates for “fun”.

Darcy goes up on her toes to grab a mug from the cupboard and Bucky jumps up to help her, laying a hand at the small of her back while reaching over her to grab two more.

She glances over her shoulder at him and flashes a warm smile. “My, aren’t you helpful.”
She takes the mugs from him and pours the chocolate, handing one to Bucky.

Bucky takes a sip of his cocoa and looks over the rim of the mug at her, winking, “Mmmm, delicious~”

She rolls her eyes, handing him another mug for Steve. She busies herself rinsing the pot at the sink while Bucky sits down and hands him the other mug. He inhales the sweet smelling steam before taking a sip. Bucky’s right, delicious.

Darcy leans over the counter and pulls the curtain back from the window, looking outside. “The snow is really coming down. Maybe you two should stay here tonight, one of you could take the sofa and the other could take Will’s bed.” She gazes steadily at them, leaning against the counter sipping her cocoa.

Steve knows that it isn’t proper, but he wants to stay. Going out out in the cold again and sleeping in their unheated apartment sounds awful. He glances at Bucky, who is studying him.

Steve says, “If you don’t mind, I’ll take the sofa.” He raises an eyebrow at Bucky.

“Don’t wanna put you out,” he grumbles.

She grins, “Don’t worry. You aren’t. Back home, we’d never force a neighbor to walk home in this after dark.”

Bucky snorts, “It’s four blocks, doll.” He sends an appraising glance at Steve.

Darcy counters, “Yes, but I doubt your heat is back on.”

Bucky sighs, glancing again at Steve. “Alright. I don’t have work tomorrow. I can sneak out early and get the shovel from the super. Make it look like I came over to clear your walk for ya.”

Darcy smirks, “Whatever you think is best. Honestly though, I rarely see any of the other tenants. They mind their own business pretty well.”

Steve knows Mrs. Barnes always seems to hear the gossip about Bucky running around. Mostly because the girls he dates get sour grapes when he doesn’t settle down with them and they bad mouth him to all their friends and family.

Darcy isn’t like those girls. She’s special.

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Darcy knows Steve and Bucky worry people will gossip. What they don’t understand is people have talked about her for most of her life. Most of what they had to say was untrue and after a while, she stopped caring about it.

She and Will had moved away from home so they could be free.

Small town life had suffocated them both, and getting back into that box isn’t something either of them are planning to do.

The city offers them some anonymity as well as a greater variety of people to meet. Will finally met other men like himself, and had fallen in love. She isn’t naïve enough to think that he and Tony stayed up playing cards when he stayed overnight. Will is open with her about his life and has shared some (somewhat embarrassing) details of his sexual adventures with her. He’s even taken her to a
few parties where she’d met his friends and had to fend off the flirtatious advances of one of the women there.

While Will isn’t trumpeting his preferences to the world, he’s not planning on pretending either. He no longer dates women as a cover. He has ambitions that would be hurt by him dating men, so he’s discreet.

Behind closed doors, he’s himself. She’s sad he has to hide who he’s dating, but at least here, he found someone to date.

Darcy doesn’t plan on letting anyone tell her who she can spend time with, either. She likes Steve and Bucky, she feels safe and comfortable with them. Besides, it’s innocent flirtation anyway. She’s never even been kissed by anyone besides Will.

They’d both wanted to know what it felt like when they were 15. Afterwards, they agreed it must be better when you’re actually attracted to the other person.

Will verified that it made a big difference after he’d gone on a few dates after moving to Brooklyn.

She’s curious, but not in a hurry. The thought of kissing Steve or Bucky has crossed her mind, but she’s afraid to upset their relationship. Besides, they haven’t known each other long. She decides to just take it moment by moment and not overthink everything.

Right now, she wants her friends to be warm and safe and to stay with her.

After they agree to stay, she’d gets Steve a spare blanket and pillow and does a quick clean up of Will’s room before showing it to Bucky. She gives them each a spare towel and shows them the bathroom.

“Sorry there’s no extra toothbrushes,” she shrugs, “maybe you could just use your finger?” She mimes brushing her teeth with her finger. “Also, our bathtub has a shower head, which is pretty great. Back home we all had to take baths. We didn’t even have indoor plumbing til I was twelve.”

Steve quirks an eyebrow in question.

“We lived in the country, five miles out from town. Took a while for electricity to make it out to our house, we had a hand pump for water in the kitchen and had to heat up our bath water on the wood stove! Thank goodness Grandpa was handy, he eventually added a bathroom and indoor plumbing to the house.”

She pulls back the curtain on the claw foot bathtub. She says, “Mama sent us some of her homemade soap. Mine smells floral, Will’s smells like cloves if you prefer.” She reaches into the medicine cabinet and pulls out a jar of bath salts, “Steve, you go first, take a bath and put some of this in it.”

Steve frowns a little. “Why?”

“Because the steam will help your lungs and the heat and salts will relax your muscles. Don’t worry, they smell like lavender, not roses,” she holds her thumb and forefinger about an inch apart, “use this much of them.”

She grabs Bucky by the arm and yanks him out of the bathroom. “Take your time, Steve!” She shuts the door on Steve's bemused expression.
Bucky turns to Darcy outside the bathroom door. He looks down into her laughing blue eyes and smirks, “Bossy,” he bops the end of her nose gently with his finger.

She grins, “I know. Steve needs that, I think.”

“His ma was pretty bossy. Only person who could get him to do a damn thing without too much fuss.”

The sound of the taps turning in the bathroom spurs them to walk into the living room. He sits on the sofa as Darcy rummages through a stack of books on the floor.

“He never listens to me, I have to fight to get him to slow down and take care of himself. Hates to admit when he’s sick,” he complains.

She looks sympathetic, “It’s hard when people treat you as less able.” She thinks of all the things people say she can’t do because of her gender. How frustrating it is. She looks down at her books, sorting through until she finds the one she wants.

She sighs, “I wanted to be a doctor. I worked with Dr. Brooks for more than two years and learned everything he could teach me. He even gave me his books from school,” she gestures to the books by her side, “but it doesn’t matter because I’m a woman and there are hardly any programs that allow women in for physician training and they are expensive. Even if I somehow became a doctor, people will always think I’m less capable, unless it involves women’s health care and childbirth, of course.”

Bucky didn’t realize she’d been settling for less when she decided to train to be a nurse. It’s more than most of the girls he grew up with seem to want. Most of them have jobs cleaning or cooking for wealthier families, or work in shops, restaurants, or factories. They’d get married and have children and stay home to care for them. Maybe take in sewing or laundry to help make ends meet.

He’d once thought about being something more, his marks in school were good. He was particularly keen with mathematics, but then his father died, and he had to work to help his family.

College isn’t for poor fellas from Brooklyn. He’s beginning to think he’ll be lucky to have a job that keeps a roof over his family’s head and food on the table. Damned hard thing to do as it is.

Darcy sits beside him on the sofa, book in her lap. She starts flipping through the pages and he says, “Whatcha lookin’ at there?”

She smiles absentmindedly, absorbed in the book. “Female anatomy, pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care. I’m scheduled to work with the nurses in the maternity ward after Christmas. I should have been there already, but with all of the flu cases and being short staffed I’ve been all over the place the last few weeks.”

He leans in close, curious about her studies. The page she’s looking at has detailed anatomical drawings of the female reproductive system. He’s fascinated.

The rumors about his sex life are somewhat exaggerated, but he’s made time with more than his fair share. But most of the encounters he’s had were situations where neither party was entirely nude, or even in a bed. Clothing was pushed aside, there was plenty of kissing and touching, but he hardly ever had opportunity to just look at everything.

God, to have hours to explore a woman would be a dream. He understands what feels good to him and has learned what made a woman feel good. But who knew all of that was going on inside of them?
Darcy glances at him, “Bodies are fascinating. When I worked in the funeral home with Pop, he had me help wash and prepare the women. He felt uncomfortable with letting me work with the men unless they were clothed.” She shrugs, “It’s made me less prone to embarrassment when faced with nudity, I guess.”

He imagines handling dead bodies and shudders a little. He remembers seeing Steve’s ma in the cheap wooden box she was buried in. Steve had to hock his ma’s locket just to afford that much. Luckily Bucky had been able to buy it back for him.

“What about when you worked with Dr. Brooks?”

“I saw pretty much everything. People get a lot less worried about you seeing them naked when it’s an emergency. I kind of stayed in the background, handing things to the doctor as he needed them,” her lips tipped up slightly, “a lot of the girls in the nurses training program are shocked and embarrassed by some of the things we have to do. My experiences with Pop and Dr. Brooks make me more practical.”

This dame.

Bucky thinks he’s never met anyone like her. He leans his head on her shoulder as she flips through the pages of her book, and explains in her soft, husky voice the things she expects to see and do in the maternity ward.

Sounds like she will be allowed to do far less than she’s able.

He breathes deep. He wonders how she always smells like flowers. He’d be lying if he didn’t admit to wanting to put his hands all over her, mapping her curves and tasting her skin.

Right now though, he’s enchanted by her mind. He never thought that would be arousing, but it definitely was. She’s opened him up to new ideas, has him thinking about more.

The click of the bathroom door, then a waft of lavender precedes Steve into the living room. He’s flushed, running his hand through his damp blond hair. Damned if he doesn’t look like an angel, his rosy face making his blue eyes even more vivid.

Darcy shoves him over, “Your turn, handsome. Try not to use all of the hot water.”

He pats Steve on the shoulder as he passes and goes to clean up.

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Darcy sets her book aside when Steve sits down. He smells of lavender and his blue eyes shine. His breathing sounds much better now.

She leans into his side, “So how was the bath?”

“Wonderful. I forgot how good that could feel, the hot water at our place is rarely hot so we usually go for a quick wash,” he glances at his fingertips, they are pruned from the bath. He stayed in until the water cooled, “I hope I wasn’t in there too long.”

“Don’t be silly, that’s exactly what I wanted you to do. Gave me a chance to get some studying in and show Bucky a few of the things I’m learning.”

The radio is still playing softly from earlier, she reaches over and turns it up when she hears the song playing. “How would you feel about continuing our dance lesson while Bucky cleans up?”
Steve replies by standing up and pulling her from the couch into his arms. They sway together, finding the beat. Darcy’s fingers thread through the hair at the nape of his neck. Steve shivers in response.

“Cold?” she asks, concerned.

“Nah. Just feels good, you touching my hair,” she runs her fingers through his hair again and he shivers again. She sends him a devilish grin.

“Hey, now. Don’t use my weakness against me,” he chides her, swinging her in a quick spin that causes her to grip his neck tighter.

“Don’t worry. I’ll use my powers for good,” she teases, resting her cheek against his.

She scratches her nails against his scalp and he damn near melts. She smirks unrepentantly.

He swings her around some more, practicing the moves from their last lesson. A simple waltz was easier than he thought. They’d also been working on the two step and foxtrot. A slower song comes on the radio and he pulls her closer, sinking into the warmth of her and moving into a slow box step.

Darcy tips her head back to look into his eyes, “You’re doing so much better! Have you been practicing?”

“A bit.”

A lot.

He’s determined to not embarrass himself on New Year’s Eve. Bucky’s been practicing with him, although it was hard for him to turn off his urge to lead. Also, strangely enough, boxing practice had been helping too. He feels a little more agile, with better control of his breathing despite his episode today. He’d never be able to knock anyone out, but he could sure as hell get in a few good licks and better dodge punches sent his way.

He focuses on Darcy’s lush curves brushing against him and rests his cheek against hers. He really likes dancing.

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Later, while Darcy is in the bath, Bucky comes into the living room from Will’s room to find Steve laying on the sofa with a blanket over him. The room is dim except for the pale light of the snowy evening coming through the windows.

He slumps into the comfortable chair next to the couch and runs a hand through his damp hair. The hot shower had been glorious. He’s so used to the way his muscles ache from work that he’d nearly melted as they relaxed.

He blows out a breath and turns to Steve, “What’d ya do while I was cleaning up?”

“Dance practice,” he murmurs sleepily.

Bucky sighs, trying to figure out how to tell Steve what’s going through his head. He leans forward, his head in his hands. “I don’t know what to do, punk.”

“About what?” he mumbles, half asleep already.

“I know you’re sweet on Darcy and that she flirts with you. You might have a shot with her. I need
to know if you want me to step back, because I want her too,” he says in a rush. Darcy treats Stevie so well, it made his opinion of her rise head and shoulders above any other girl he’s known.

He doesn’t want to want her, he wants to be able to step back and give Steve a chance, but she keeps pulling him in.

He’s hardly looked at another girl since he met her. He’s never felt this way about anyone before.

“She flirts with you too, ya know,” Steve turns on his side, gazing at Bucky. “With my health…” he sighs, “I don’t have a lot to offer her.”

Bucky frowns, a mulish expression on his face. Damn. He hates it that people have made Steve think he ain’t worth nothin’. “You’re the best guy I know. She’d be lucky to have ya.”

Steve sighs again, silent. This is an old argument, Bucky doesn’t like to hear Steve talk about his shortcomings. Steve always says he’s just being practical. That he likes to dream about the future, but he’s not stupid. That he’s small and his health isn’t good.

Bucky won’t hear it. He won’t.

Steve deserves a future as much as anyone, more than, in his opinion. He should get some of what other fellas take for granted.

Steve’s voice is very small when he whispers, “Would it be okay if we both loved her? Could we share?”

Love. Is that what was happening?

His head spins a little. All he knows is he wants her. Leave it to Steve to go all in with his heart.

And sharing? Is that something they could even do? For most of his life, he’s shared everything with Steve. He’s never considered this though.

“Ya know I’d do anything for ya,” Bucky murmurs, head still in his hands as he turns to look at Steve, “Darcy is different from other dames. Still, I don’t know if she’ll go for that.”

Would a good girl like Darcy go for that? He doesn’t know.

Steve is remarkably untroubled for someone suggesting such an unconventional arrangement. “I guess it’s up to her then,” he flips over on his back, pulls the blanket up around his neck, and closes his eyes, “it’ll be alright. Til the end of the line, right?”

“Til the end of the line, punk,” he listens as Steve’s breathing evens out, deepening into a familiar pattern as he slides towards sleep.

“G’night, Buck.” Steve mumbles.

Bucky cards his fingers through Steve’s hair, then stands, “G’night, Stevie,” he whispers.

Chapter End Notes
Next chapter probably Saturday after Thanksgiving. I work retail and the bastard corporation I work for has basically eliminated the holiday, so I’ll be working Thursday and extra hours on Friday. Thanks, greedy capitalists. :( 
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Waking up at Darcy’s. Bucky makes his move. Darcy and Steve take on a bully. Steve and Bucky find out Darcy’s secret.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Darcy wakes in the dim blue light just before dawn, warm under the patchwork quilt on her bed. She listens, deeply contented to hear the soft sound of Bucky snoring in the next room and the faint sigh of Steve asleep on the sofa.

For so long, the only people she’d had were Grandpa and Mama. The pressure of her secrets and the oddity of her intelligence left her lonely. Then she met Will, and their connection had been nearly instantaneous.

She felt that same recognition when she met Steve, like the click of a puzzle piece settling into place. Then, she met Bucky and he was another puzzle piece she hadn’t known she’d been missing. She felt drawn to them in ways that went beyond friendship.

In Steve, she recognizes the frustration of being underestimated along with the desire to combat injustice. She sees his beautiful heart, idealistic bravery, and sensitive nature.

In Bucky, she sees a fierce protector, a caretaker, a restless curiosity, and passionate physicality she feels drawn to.

They make her feel connected. Known.

She thinks about Steve and Bucky a lot.

She looks forward to seeing them, is disappointed when she doesn’t. She goes through her daily activities and thoughts of them always hover at the back of her mind.

She sees a beautiful photograph in a book and thinks, *I wonder what Steve would think about this?* She observes an interesting case at the hospital and thinks, *I can’t wait to tell Bucky about this.* She walks through street markets and shops, fingering fabrics, flipping through old books, and haggling for things she needs for the apartment and thinks, *Bucky would look good in this shirt,* or, *Steve could use these gloves.*

It’s crazy. It’s distracting.

Then, there is desire. She’s been okay alone for a long time. No opportunity for boyfriends, no real interest in anyone either. She has her books, her studies, her friendship with Will, and acquaintances at the hospital. Suddenly, these things are not enough.
She thinks about sex. She understands how bodies work, how people in relationships behave. It’s not as if she’d never had sexual cravings.

Initially, she’d been embarrassed by the unwelcome attention she received when her body grew curves. It had swiftly given way to fascination and curiosity about her changing body and how it responded to touch. She learned what felt good to her, how to please herself.

Lately, that isn’t enough either.

The freedom she felt in her intellectual pursuits has never carried over into the real world. She’s had to deny her capabilities, to camouflage her form from unwanted attention.

There had been no Saturday night dates for Darcy, her reputation as being “strange” cemented firmly in the psyche of her small town.

But now, she’s thinking of dating, of kisses, maybe more—ugh, she is so pathetic.

She doesn’t know the steps to this dance.

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Bucky rolls over to look at the alarm clock on Will’s bedside table. In the faint light from the hallway it reads 6am.

Still early.

He flops on his back, rubbing his hand over the scratchy stubble on his face, then down to his morning erection, cupping and pressing down with a groan. He sighs, better get up if he’s gonna shovel the walk.

He stands and stretches, grabbing his pants and pulling them on before heading to the bathroom. A glance towards Darcy’s bedroom finds the door half-open, and the low light from the windows shows her empty bed, the rumpled blankets the only sign that she’d been there.

He scratches his jaw absently as he enters the bathroom. He’ll skip shaving ‘til he gets home, but he washes his face and cleans his teeth as best he can without a toothbrush. He grins thinking of Darcy’s pantomime of how to do that the night before. Slipping his shirt on over his undershirt he leaves it unbuttoned and walks into the kitchen.

The kitchen is shadowed, the grey blue light of early morning it’s only illumination. Steve is a softly snoring lump buried under his blanket on the sofa.

Darcy stands facing the window over the sink, cup of coffee in her hand, hair in sleep-mussed curls on her shoulders. She wears a blue robe, the white flounce from her nightgown peeking under the hem. The crazy socks she’d worn last night are on her feet. She turns towards him, leaning back against the counter with a soft smile, “Morning,” she whispers, tipping her head towards the percolator, “there’s coffee, if you want it.”

He comes closer, reaching over her head to the cupboard and leaning in a bit to get himself a coffee mug. He hears her breath stutter as his chest brushes against her and turns away quickly to hide his smirk and pours himself some coffee.

He turns back to her and raises an eyebrow, “Sugar?”
She pushes the bowl across the countertop and hands him a spoon. After he fixes it the way he likes, he leans against the counter next to her and sips at his coffee, inhaling the steam from his cup as they both contemplate sleeping Steve.

“Punk sleeps like the dead.”

Darcy nods, “Likely he needed it after that asthma attack yesterday,” she looks up at him, lips curving, “why d’ya call him punk anyway?”

“Ah, some guys used to push him around, called him queer and punk because he’s small and pretty,” he smirks, “Steve would always come back swinging, no matter how outnumbered. Lost count of how many times I’ve pulled his bacon out of the fire when he mouthed off at bullies giving him or other people trouble. Started calling him punk to tease him a little, take the sting out.”

She bumps shoulders with him, “That why he calls you jerk?”

“Among other reasons,” he grins.

“What shall I call you?” She turns towards him, hands cradling her mug, looking up at him with laughing blue eyes.

“How ‘bout sweetheart?”

She purses her full lips, shaking her head.

“Darling?” He steps closer, lowering his voice an octave.

He pushes his coffee mug onto the counter, wrapping a hand around the swell of her hip, pulling her close, gently running his knuckles over the warm slope of her cheek to her chin, and tilting her head back.

She bites her lip and looks up at him, her blue eyes electric through dark lashes. She hums, “Hmmm, I dunno …”

He takes her mug and sets it on the counter, wrapping her arms around his neck. Her hands play in his hair, scratching lightly at the nape of his neck. He leans into her, runs a hand from the nape of her neck to the small of her back, breathing, “Baby?”

A shiver runs down her spine as his warm breath washes against the sensitive skin of her neck. He inhales the scent of flowers.

A tremor runs through her again as she shakes her head no, breath hitching.

“How ‘bout— mine?” he whispers, lips on her ear, a soft curl of her dark hair brushing his cheek.

She leans back, the pupils of her storm blue eyes blown, with a flush high on her cheeks, “Mine?”

He gazes at her, his silvery blue eyes intent, “Yours.”

Steve snorts and turns over, breaking the moment. She steps back, hands dragging down his neck and resting on his chest. She leans in a bit, pressing him into the counter.

Those full red lips tilt into a slow smile. “Maybe,” she leans in closer, her lips so close to his that her breath washes over his lips, “we’ll see.”

She dances back and walks over to the icebox, turning to look at Steve as he sits up groggily on the
sofa, blanket slipping down, and his thick, blond, hair messy.

“How do ya’ feel about left over cornbread with buttermilk for breakfast, Stevie?” she says.

He rubs his eyes and yawns, “Sounds great, Darce.”

Bucky nearly groans in frustration. He leans in and whispers in her ear, “This ain’t over doll.”

She winks and whispers back, “I hope not.”

He grins and turns towards Steve who has cocooned himself in his blanket again. He walks over and grabs his coat from the arm of the couch and pokes him in the side.

“Gonna go shovel, get your ass up and help Darcy.”

“Geez, Buck,” he shrugs off the blanket and shuffles to the bathroom, “be back in a minute, Darce.”

Bucky toes on his shoes and winks at her before he walks out the door.

Darcy leans against the counter and presses her hands against her heated cheeks. Bucky. It was like being thrown in the deep end when she should be in the kiddie pool. She’d nearly combusted when he leaned in and whispered in her ear.

Part of her wonders if he’s only interested in adding another notch to his bedpost. She knows he’s a flirt, Steve’s stories and being on the receiving end of more than a few jealous glares when they were out together made her aware of that.

Then, there is Steve. She’d taken to him almost the instant she’d met him. He is angel sweet and earnest, with a devil of a temper when he detects any injustice. She can’t imagine either of them without the other and she doesn’t want to.

She sighs, the three of them need to have a conversation before her head explodes.

After breakfast, Steve clears the table and Bucky starts washing the dishes. Darcy plants a smacking kiss on each of their cheeks, proclaiming them “the best clean-up crew ever!” and leaves to get washed up and dressed for the day.

Steve stands beside Bucky, drying the dishes while his mind is still focused on the feeling of her lips on his skin. Bucky elbows him playfully, waggling his eyebrows and Steve snaps the dish towel in retaliation and grumbles, “Saw you putting the moves on her earlier.”

He laid in his cocoon of Darcy scented blankets and watched through slitted eyes as Bucky wove his spell around her. He’d been surprised by his reaction, less jealous of Bucky touching Darcy, more worried he’d scare her away.

“Thought you were sleeping.”

“I bet,” he mutters.

Steve pauses, rubbing his hand across the back of his neck, “You’re not worried about moving too
“Fast?” he asks softly.

“Punk, I’m lettin’ her know how I feel—never gonna get anywhere without tryin’,” he gently shoves his friend, “Stop worrying so much—’sides, she didn’t seem all that offended.”

Steve can’t help feeling frustrated. He isn’t like Bucky, all smooth moves and experience. Darcy is swiftly becoming very important to him. He doesn’t want to do anything that makes her uncomfortable, but he wants her to know how he feels about her too.

Footsteps in the hall alert them to her return.

She breezes in, red lipstick in place, wearing a dark blue dress, and heavy woolen tights. She carries her purse and coat, boots, and a long, knitted, cobalt blue scarf. She throws her coat and purse on the sofa and sits down to put on her boots. “What are you boys planning for the rest of the day?” she says.

Bucky leans against the kitchen counter, drying his hands with the dish towel. “Was gonna go back over to our place and check on the heat. If it’s not working I’m gonna harass the super,” he says with a shark-like grin.

She snorts and turns to Steve, “Are you going with him or do you wanna go with me to the market? I need to pick up a few things.”

He glances at Bucky and says, “I’d be happy to help you with your groceries. Bucky, do we need anything?” He frowns, knowing they can’t afford much. He has a little money in his wallet, it should be enough.

“See if you can get some eggs and potatoes. Maybe some cheese? Bread?”

Darcy says, “Don’t worry about bread. I’m gonna bake some later and I’ll make extra.”

Steve smiles, “Thanks, Darce.”

Bucky walks over to the sofa and picks up his coat, putting it on, and holds Darcy’s coat up and helps her into it. She smiles up at him as he buttons it up to her throat, his fingers gentle. He starts to wrap the blue scarf around her neck but she stops him, taking it from his hands and looping it around his neck instead. “It’s for you. I noticed you didn’t have one.”

He fingers the ends of it, stroking it lightly before a smile lights his face, “Thanks doll.” He leans in and hugs her for a moment, winking over her shoulder at Steve.

“Stay warm, punk. See ya back home.”

Darcy walks back from the market with Steve. It’s chilly but the sun is out, and everything sparkles under a layer of snow. He carries two brown paper shopping bags and she carries one, he’d insisted. She has her arm looped through his, laughing as he tells her about Bucky’s Ma saying grace before dinner.

“She says, ‘Lord thank you for our daily bread and all of your blessings upon us and please help my boy resist his carnal urges lest he get some poor girl in the family way. Amen.’”

Darcy chortles, “Bet he wasn’t even ashamed.”
“Nah. He grabbed his ma’s hand and kissed it, looked at her with those eyes of his, and smiled,”
Steve flutters his ridiculously long lashes and smirks in imitation, “and she was done for,” he laughs,
“Course, she smacked him on the back the head and grumbled but she doesn’t have it in her to be
mad at him for more than a minute.”
“I can see how it’d be hard to resist him when he turns on the charm.”
“The Barnes’ all have charm. Bucky’s little sister Becca has boys wrapped around her finger and
she’s only 14!”
“Ha! How’s Bucky deal with that?”
“Threatens to send her off to the convent pretty much every time he sees her.”
She laughs. Steve smiles back at her, his sky blue eyes sparkling.

Speaking of charm, how could all the stupid girls around here be blind to his?

She hugs his arm, pulling him closer to her as they walk together. They talk about their plans for the
week, Steve mentions they usually have dinner with Bucky’s family on Sundays.
“Good thing too, before we met you it was the only decent meal we’d have all week.”
“I should teach you and Bucky how to cook.”
“Yeah? We’re pretty hopeless. The stuff we make is edible, I guess,” his face screws up in disgust,
“it would be good to know how to do more than boil stuff.”
“Maybe sometime this week?”
“Count on it.” He squeezes her arm gently and squints at something down the block. “Murphy,” he
mutters.

She looks ahead, noticing a stocky, mean-faced young man coming down the sidewalk towards
them. His eyes run over her in the way that nasty men have been doing since she was thirteen. He
glances dismissively at Steve, his mouth a contemptuous sneer. Darcy tightens her hand on Steve’s
arm as she feels him stiffen beside her.

“Well, well. What’s a dame like this doing with you, Rogers?” He glances around, “Your bodyguard
busy elsewhere this morning?”

He turns to Darcy, leering, “Maybe you need a real man to help you with your bags, sweetheart?”
He grabs her grocery bag, pulling it towards him.

She jerks the bag back, “I have the best man right here. If you’ll excuse us, we have better things to
do,” she tugs at Steve’s arm, trying to walk around him.

“Come on sweetheart, I could keep you warm,” he runs a sly finger down her arm and Steve erupts.

“Somethin’ wrong with your ears? The lady ain’t interested!”

Suddenly, Murphy shoves Steve into the nearby alley, backing him away from the sidewalk. Steve
drops his bags and lunges at him, swinging his arms wildly and hitting him in the mouth.

Murphy laughs, spitting blood into the snow. “Looks like Barnes finally taught ya how to throw a
punch. Are ya still good at being knocked on your ass, fairy boy?”
Steve tries to dodge, but trips over one of the grocery bags. Murphy takes advantage of him being off balance and punches him hard in the face. There is an audible crack and blood gushes from his nose as he falls back against the alley wall. Murphy steps forward and punches him again in the side.

Darcy has been looking for help on the street but it’s early and with the snow not many people are out. When the punches start flying she rushes down the alley, dropping her bag in favor of getting her hands free.

Murphy punches Steve again and she jumps on his back, wrapping her arms around his neck and squeezing. He chokes and swings around, knocking her off and throwing her into the brick of the alley wall.

Pain explodes in her cheekbone and she bends over, feeling the hot wash of blood on her face. She swipes a hand over her cheek, glancing at the blood and wiping it on her skirt. Over time, she’s learned that pain passes, more quickly for her than for anybody, as far as she knows.

Now, when someone hurts her she doesn’t get afraid or caught up in the pain—she gets angry. How dare this presumptuous bully assault her and Steve?

Steve is yelling, charging at Murphy with a garbage can lid, yelling obscenities and blocking his punches.

She looks around and grabs another lid and swings it hard into the back of Murphy’s knees. He grunts as his knees buckle, but straightens again so and she hits him hard in the back of the head. He shouts in incoherent rage and sways, blood seeping from a gash on his head. He turns towards her, fist cocked back and she’s ready, her teeth bared in a grim smile, but Steve hammers him with a solid kick to his crotch before he can swing at her.

Murphy groans, folding in on himself and rolling on the slushy ground.

Darcy stumbles over to where Steve hunches next to the wall, adrenaline still singing in her veins. Steve’s breathing is harsh in the sudden silence.

The sound of rushed footsteps has them turning towards the head of the alleyway, still holding the garbage can lids and leaning against the wall. Bucky rushes into the alley and skids in the dirty slush, taking in the two of them and Murphy groaning on the ground.

His eyes widen, “What the hell?!?”

Steve wipes his nose and grunts, “Hey, Buck.”

Darcy sends Bucky a weak wave, “Hey.”

“Hey?” He gestures wildly at Murphy and then at them, “What—the—hell, Steve.”

She glances down at Murphy, who is attempting to get to his feet and kicks him hard in the side, knocking him over, “He started it.”

Murphy groans, “Bitch.”

Bucky snarls, “You better stay down you sonofabitch, or I’ll be telling the whole neighborhood you got beat up by a fella half your size and dame smaller than that!” He punctuates his statement with another kick to Murphy’s side.

He groans again.
Nobody cares.

Bucky wraps one arm around Steve and the other around her and pulls them away from the wall. She sighs and leans into him, and he looks her over and groans, “God, now there’s two of you. Doll, your face—we gotta get you home.”

She shrugs, looking at Steve, “Your poor nose.”

She gently runs her fingers across his cheek, his nose is already swelling and his eyes have the beginning of what promises to be spectacular bruises. She turns to Bucky, “Let’s go. We can clean up at my place.”

Bucky bends and picks up the spilled groceries and puts them back in the bags. Half of the eggs had cracked when Steve dropped them.

Darcy props Steve up and they stagger to the mouth of the alley and she stoops to grab her purse and grocery bag. Bucky walks up behind them and Steve takes one of the grocery bags from Bucky so he’ll have a hand free.

Bucky wraps an arm around her waist as they start walking back. She thinks Steve could use the support more, but can see he’s trying to act like he’s fine. Luckily, they are close to home.

She and Steve give Bucky the play by play on their fight with Murphy as they walk home.

“A garbage can lid, punk?” Bucky shakes his head.

Steve shrugs, “What? It worked.”

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Once they get back to Darcy’s place, Bucky puts the grocery bags in the icebox so nothing will spoil. He leaves Steve and Darcy sitting side by side on the sofa to get the first aid kit Darcy told him was under her bed.

When he returns, she’s dipping a washrag into a bowl of warm water, gently wiping the blood from Steve’s battered face. He sits on Darcy’s other side with the large first aid kit in his lap.

She finishes washing Steve’s face, sets the bowl on the floor, and leans forward to gently cup his face in her hands. “I’m so sorry, I’m going to have to reset your nose.” she huffs, “that sonofabitch broke it.”

Steve’s lip quirks at her language, then he nods, gazing into her eyes.

Stevie looks so intoxicated by her touch that Bucky wonders if he might start picking more fights just to have her patch him up.

He lays his hand over the small of Darcy’s back as she leans forward, moves her fingers to rest along either side of Steve’s nose, and swiftly pushes it into place. He winces as a fresh stream of blood runs from one of his nostrils.

She asks Bucky to hand her some gauze and he watches curiously as she rolls it up to make two cylinders, which she says have to be left in Steve’s nostrils to hold it in place til morning. She gives Bucky some gauze packets so Steve can change them later.

“Take them out if your asthma acts up, I’m actually surprised you aren’t having more trouble right
She’s turning to pick up the bowl of water when Steve stops her and grabs it himself. He wrings out the washcloth and says, “Your turn.”

Bucky feels her back muscles twitch as Steve raises the cloth to her cheek to wipe the blood away. “Huh,” Steve looks confused and Bucky feels her back tighten further, like she’s preparing to jump up. He turns her toward him and she’s biting her lip, eyes downcast. He tips up her face further and sees a pink line on her cheekbone, completely sealed.

He looks over at Steve, eyebrow raised. “Saw Murphy slam her into the wall and she got cut deep on her cheek. Bled quite a bit,” he holds up the reddened washrag.

Bucky raises questioning brows at Darcy. She stammers, “Um—I heal really fast?”

“How fast is fast?” Steve says.

“Faster than normal? If it’s not too deep, less than half an hour,” she says in a small voice, twisting her hands together. She looks up at Bucky, her storm blue eyes worried.

“Doll, my ma would call that a miracle,” he says.

Steve huffs out a laugh behind her and she turns to smile tentatively at him. “You don’t think I’m strange?”

“Sure you are. In the best way possible,” Steve says, smiling softly at her and glancing significantly at Bucky over her shoulder.

Bucky nods and wraps an arm around her, pulling her to lean on him while Steve grabs hold of her hand, leaning into her.

She sighs, “Well that’s okay, then.”

Steve drifts, head on Darcy’s shoulder until the sound of a key turning the lock startles him upright. Will comes through the door whistling, pauses and raises an eyebrow at the three of them huddled on the couch and drawls, “Something you wanna tell me, Darcy?”

She sighs, “Steve and I got beat up.”

Steve chimes in, “…and I’m the only one who still looks like it. “

Will smirks and flicks back his coppery hair, “Oh.That.”

He saunters over to the icebox and grabs some ice and wraps it in a rag, returns, and hands it to Steve, who holds it to the bridge of his nose.

“Yeah, I found out the same way. It’s really not fair how she manages that,” he leans forward and turns her cheek for a better view, “Also, why do you always pick friends that get beat up?”

Satisfied that her cheek is on the mend, he slouches into the chair.
Darcy turns her face into Bucky’s neck, ”Only two so far,” she mutters.

Bucky snorts, “The way Stevie attracts trouble I ain’t making any promises. Any other secrets we should know about?”

He squeezes Darcy a little closer. Steve tilts into Darcy’s other side and presses the ice pack to one of his eyes.

Will laughs, “If we’re putting all our cards on the table, Tony is more than my friend, he’s my fella,” he laughs nervously, “not sure if that’s the kind of secret you meant...”

Steve shares a look with Bucky. This isn’t shocking news to them, given where they live. Their neighborhood is pretty rough, full of people who’re kinda living on the fringes of society. Probably why it has a lot of gay men living in it.

Hell, the St. George Hotel is just a few blocks away and everyone knows what goes on there. Doesn’t really matter to either of them.

Tony came to Goldie’s to watch them box a couple times and it was pretty obvious to both of them what kind of relationship Will and Tony have.

Steve shrugs, “Yeah, we kinda figured. Not really the kind of secret we need to know about, but ya don’t have to hide it.”

“Thanks,” Will grins, “So—let’s talk about how strange my dear sister is.”

Darcy covers her face with both hands, “Ugh. Will, no.”

Bucky brings Steve a couple of aspirin with a glass of water that evening before turning out the light and flopping on his bed. “How ya feeling, Stevie?”

Steve snuffles a little before replying, “S’ok. Pain’s a dull roar now. Sure would be swell if I had some of Darcy’s healing power right about now.”

“Yeah, that’s somethin’, alright. Good news that she’ll never get sick, workin’ in the hospital and all.”

They both think about Steve’s ma and sigh.

Will told them about the experiments he and Darcy did to figure out the extent of her abilities. Sounded like she hit the jackpot, especially with her immunity to disease and super healing.

Got him to wondering how that worked and wishing she could give some to Stevie.

And that’s when he realized why she kept it secret. What would happen to her if some scientist or government type wondered the same things? He and Stevie promised not to tell anyone.

Steve punches his pillow and props himself up a little in his bed. “Not like she’s invincible, she can still get hurt. Jus’ gets over it quicker,” he fingers his swollen nose, “I’m glad she has that, otherwise Murphy woulda’ left a scar on her pretty face.”

His turns on his side, his breathing slowing and evening out as he drifts towards sleep.

Bucky continues to stare at the ceiling, absently counting the cracks in the plaster as his gut churns
with anger at the thought of that asshole putting his hands on Steve and Darcy. Between bullies wanting to knock him down and rushing headlong into situations he should walk away from if he had any sense, Steve is beat up half the time.

Maybe having Darcy with him when Bucky couldn’t be would temper some of that.

Maybe.

Oh, who was he kidding?

More likely they’d rush into trouble together.

Chapter End Notes

I made it through a 13 hour Black Friday retail shift, y’all. I’m currently soaking in the bath and rethinking my life choices.

I wasn’t completely satisfied with the flow of this chapter, especially at the start. But it got more fun towards the end! Hope you enjoy, feel free to review!

The Hotel St. George in Brooklyn, popular gay hookup site and residence for gay men in the 1940’s.
https://www.out.com/2013/10/07/queer-waterfront-brooklyn-history#slide-8
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Darcy gives Steve and Bucky cooking lessons. Darcy has some questions about dating. Steve has some concerns about kissing. Bucky helps him out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

December 20, 1940

Darcy giggles and flicks flour at Steve and he retaliates by running one sticky finger covered with bread dough down her cheek. He squawks indignantly when she reaches over and grabs a little ball of dough and squashes it in his hair. She laughs uproariously while he tries to pick it out.

She’s at Steve and Bucky’s place teaching him how to make bread. It’s the first step in their cooking lesson, which will be followed by making beef stew. Bucky is coming home soon so they can cook together.

She arrived an hour ago, carrying a bag with a few extra supplies and wearing a big smile for Steve. Thankfully, the furnace was working today so they are comfortable working in the small kitchen. She lays a towel over the bowl of dough and explains to Steve how it has to rise for about an hour.

After they clean up the kitchen, Steve goes to the bathroom and returns with a warm, damp, washcloth and cups her face in his hand while he gently wipes the dough from her cheek. She leans into his hand as he finishes and turns her head to kiss the palm of his hand. She turns back to look into his eyes and he runs his fingers down her neck and settles at her shoulder, giving it a slight squeeze, his sky blue eyes intense.

“Steve?”

“Yeah, doll?” He reaches up and runs his knuckles from her cheekbone to her chin. His touch leaves a line of heat in its wake and the hair at the nape of her neck stands up. She shivers and feels her cheeks heat a little.

“Are we friends?”

He drops his hand and rests it on her shoulder, his blue eyes sincere, “The best of friends.”

She looks down at her feet, biting her lower lip. “Are we more than friends?”

Her eyes flick back up to his.

He gazes at her steadily, a little color high on his cheekbones and the tips of his ears, “I was hoping so.”

She tremulous smile lights her face, “So was I.” Her smile widens into a happy grin.

His hand tightens a bit on her shoulder and he pulls her closer. She wraps her arms around him and leans into him. She likes the way their bodies fit together. After a moment she sighs and leans back
and looks at him again, “What about Bucky, though?”

Steve clears his throat, “Um, I think he’s hoping you’re more than friends too.”

Darcy frowns, “Me too. Is that strange? Or wrong?”

“I don’t know what other people will think, but Bucky is the best guy I know and you are the best girl. If you two wanna be something more than friends and you feel that way about me too, I feel lucky.”

“I feel lucky too, and a little greedy. I’ve never even dated one guy, much less two,” she confides, “also, I’ve only ever kissed Will, but that was just one time to see what it felt like,” she scrunches her face in disgust, “and it was awkward.”

Steve’s eyebrows raise in surprise, “What d’ya mean you’ve never dated anyone?”

“Well, people back home thought I was a little strange? And the ones who did seem interested made me feel uncomfortable, like they were more interested in what was under my clothes than anything else. Also, there were always rumors about me and Will being together. They got particularly nasty once we lived together as family.” She frowns thinking about some of the gossip that had gotten back to her.

Steve looks a little angry and he huffs, “Those people back home must be stupid. I know why I haven’t had a date, but you’re beautiful and smart!” He shakes his head in disbelief, “what is wrong with people?”

“I dunno. I guess people don’t like different,” she leans her head on his shoulder, her face pressed into his neck. “For the record, I think you’re pretty swell too.”

He hugs her again in response.

“So, how are we gonna work this dating thing?”

“I think we should talk with Bucky when he gets home.”

She leans back to look him in the eye, “Alright.” She gives him a little squeeze and steps back, “Say, you never did show me your sketch books. We’ve got a bit of time to kill while the bread is rising.”

Bucky trudges up the stairs just after dark. He pauses to stretch his back. God, he aches. It’s hard work moving crates on and off the boats all day in the cold.

He sighs.

Sometimes, he wishes he could run away from Brooklyn and never come back. But he can’t leave his ma and Becca. Otherwise, he imagines he would’ve saved some money and he and Stevie would’ve blown this town.

But then they’d never have met Darcy——

He unlocks the door to the apartment to find Steve and Darcy huddled together on the sofa, looking through a stack of sketchbooks. He instantly feels lighter. Steve looks up, a luminous smile of welcome on his face. He smiles in return, so happy to be home.

Darcy sets the sketchbook she’s holding to the side and jumps up to walk over to him. “Just in time!
Steve and I are gonna put the bread in the oven and start making the stew.” Her brow furrows in concern and she touches his hand, “You look tired. Why don’t you wash up and come back and sit while we get started?”

He twines her fingers with his and pulls her closer, wrapping her in his arms. Her head fits perfectly beneath his chin. He breathes the clean floral scent of her hair and feels the weight of the day disappear.

He tightens his arms around her then releases her. “I’ve been lookin’ forward to this all day.”

Bucky goes to his room and dumps his coat, boots, and the soft, blue, scarf Darcy had given him. He grabs a clean shirt, and washes his face and hands in the bathroom. He glances at himself in the mirror and runs his damp fingers through the brown waves of his hair, realizing he’ll need a haircut soon. Maybe Darcy can do it.

When he enters the kitchen she’s putting the bread in the oven and Steve is rummaging around for the stew pot. Darcy turns to the icebox and pulls out a couple carrots and the end of a left over roast she cooked a couple days ago. At her direction, Bucky grabs a few potatoes and an onion and sits at the kitchen table, peeling and chopping the potatoes, then the onion. He wipes his eyes (damn onions) and listens as she explains to Steve each step of the stew-making process. Steve washes and chops the carrots at the counter while Darcy cuts the leftover roast into bite size pieces. She melts some butter in the bottom of the stew pot and adds the onion Bucky chopped, sautéing it until it’s golden. She then stirs in a little flour, salt, and pepper and makes a gravy. Soon enough she adds the other ingredients, covers them with a little bit more water to simmer for an hour or so.

While they are waiting on dinner, they move to the sofa. Darcy’s in the middle with a text book she’s looking over for school, Steve has his pencils and is drawing in his sketchbook, and Bucky is reading over Darcy’s shoulder. She’s still boning up on childbirth and infant care, though after a while she pulls out a pamphlet from a free clinic that’s affiliated with the hospital.

“You doing somethin’ at that clinic?”

“Hopefully, after I work in the maternity ward. The nurse in charge of the clinic is pretty picky about who she allows in.” She flicks through the pamphlet. “It’s a birth control clinic.”

Steve perks up, “What?”

“They offer low cost women’s health services and contraceptive devices. It’s an optional part of the nursing curriculum but I want to learn,” she sends a sly glance towards Bucky, “given your history, you might benefit from any information I can give you.”

Steve snorts.

Bucky is a little perturbed. He doesn't want Darcy thinking he’s still running around with a new girl every week. Even when he was, he was always careful. He grumbles,“I wouldn’t ruin a girl’s life like that,” he pauses, then grins, “’Sides, my Ma would kill me.”

“Yeah, she would.” Steve mutters. Bucky reaches behind Darcy and smacks him in the back of the head. He rubs his head and laughs.

Darcy shrugs,“Well, I’m a realist. I think people have sex, both in and out of marriage, and that unwanted children shouldn’t be the consequence. More effective contraception prevents a lot of heartache. Also, as a person who doesn’t plan to get married for a while, but would like to have sex, avoiding unplanned pregnancy sounds swell.”
Steve and Bucky sit in stunned silence.

Steve because he’s probably turning himself inside out with all this sex talk and Bucky because he’s never heard a girl be so frank about the subject.

He’s had sex with girls, but in his experience they didn't really discuss it. Bucky has spent many an evening seeing how far he could slide his hand up a dame’s skirt before she’d push his hand away. Or not.

Darcy’s admission is interesting, to say the least.

Steve clears his throat awkwardly, “Um, Darce? Is now a good time to bring up that thing we said we needed to discuss with Buck?”

She pokes him in the side, “Sure, now that I’ve made things awkward with my birth control lecture.”

Bucky looks from Steve to Darcy, eyebrows raised in question.

Steve says, “Darcy asked me if we were friends, and I told her yes. Then she wanted to know if we were more than friends, and I told her I hoped so.”

“And I told him that I feel that way about him and also for you.” Darcy fidgets, tracing a loose thread on her dress but then looks him in the eye, determined. “So we decided to ask you what you think.”

“Lemme get this straight. You wanna date both of us?” Bucky takes Darcy’s hand, twining his fingers with hers.

“Yes? Because, I like both of you quite a lot,” she squeezes his fingers, “but if that would make things awkward between you and Steve, I'd rather just be friends with both of you. Also, I won’t mess things up between the two of you by choosing one over the other.”

“Honestly, I’ve never had a problem sharing anything with Steve. But I’ve never wanted more than a few dates with the girls I’ve been seeing and none of them woulda’ given him the time of day,” he pauses and grimaces, “No offense, punk.”

Steve shrugs. Facts are facts.

“So, this is somethin’ that’s never happened before. But I think we could make it work.”

“How, exactly, do you picture it working?” Darcy asks.

He sits back, still holding her hand and ponders the question. “Well, I suppose sometimes I'll take you out to the movies, or for coffee, or dancing.” He strokes the palm of her hand with his thumb, “Sometimes you’ll do things with Steve.” He glances over at Steve, who nods, ”And sometimes we’ll do things all three of us, kind of like tonight.”

Bucky doesn’t bring up sex because he’s pretty sure Steve will combust and he’s not sure if Darcy is ready for that yet. But he’s definitely thinking about it.

Jesus.

“That sounds perfect.” A glowing smile crosses her face. She leans into Bucky’s side and picks up her book again, tucking her feet under Steve’s leg, Steve picks up his pencil and starts drawing, and Bucky reads over Darcy’s shoulder.

Perfect.
Steve is sitting on the threadbare couch in their apartment looking over the drawings of Darcy he’d made earlier in the evening. He runs his finger over the shape of her mouth, the line of her neck and thinks of being more than her friend and what that means.

Lately, whenever he thinks of her he feels an electricity in his stomach, a restless energy that causes him to fidget. He thinks of her lips, full and pillowy and usually smiling at him and wonders how it would feel to kiss her. If he thinks too long about it, he becomes so restless he feels itchy in his skin.

His shower time has become a little lengthy lately.

He’s anxious, feeling a lack of confidence because of his limited experience with women. But he’s a little relieved to find Darcy is just as inexperienced as he is, (if he didn’t count her kiss with Will).

Still, he wishes he was more like Bucky who’s always had effortless charm, with no visible nervousness to betray him.

He wants to touch her constantly. Fortunately, she’s a tactile sort of person, gifting him with little touches, looping her arm through his when they walk, snuggling into him when they sit on the sofa. He finally understands the appeal of dancing, as it allows him press against her lush curves. But he doesn’t know how to initiate more than those kinds of touches.

What if he kisses her and it’s terrible?

Oh, god.

Bucky wanders in from the bedroom, opens the door to the icebox and stands looking in it for a while before shrugging, closing it, and turning to get a glass of water. He sips it, leaning against the counter with his back to Steve. He is obviously ready for bed, stripped down to his undershirt and boxers.

“Bucky?”

“Hmmm?” he sets his glass in the sink and turns around.

He takes a deep breath, “Darcy told me she’d never even been kissed by anyone other than her brother which doesn’t count. Or even been on a date. Got me to thinking about kissing—I’m worried I’ll be bad at it.”

Bucky chokes a little, “Wait, what?” he shakes his head, “She’s never been on a date?”

Steve nods and shrugs. It baffles him too. “Says people in her town thought she was odd or assumed she and Will were fooling around. Sounds like they were either blind or stupid.”

Bucky ponders for a moment, frowning. “And what’s this about kissing Will?”

“They were fifteen. Wanted to see what the fuss was about so they tried it and decided it must be better if you’re attracted to the person kissing you.” He fidgets, rolling his pencil between his fingers and bouncing his knee, “but about the other thing…”

Bucky snorts and rolls his eyes. He walks over and sits next to Steve. He sighs, “I can’t tell you how to kiss. I mean, you’ve seen it when we go to picture shows and I know you’ve seen me canoodling with a dame more than a few times,” he waggles his eyebrows suggestively.
“Gah!” Steve leans his head back against the sofa and puts his hand over his face. He damn well had seen Bucky canoodling. Usually while Steve and whatever blind date Bucky had arranged sat awkwardly, not knowing where to look. Bucky has no shame at all, and the girls he took out tended to go along with whatever he talked them into. “Don’t remind me.”

“So, what do ya wanna do? I could maybe kiss ya so you can see how it feels.” Steve peeks at him through his fingers and Bucky shrugs. “I don’t mind, it’s sorta like Darcy kissing Will. Don’t expect it to do much for ya but you can get the mechanics of it.”

Steve sits up. Yeah, he can do this. Bucky is his best pal and they’re about as close as two people can be. “Alright. What do I do?”

“Well, I’m gonna pretend you’re a dame I’m putting the moves on so you can see how it works.” He turns towards him, “I usually gauge my welcome by moving a little closer.” Bucky moves so his thigh pressed against Steve’s and leans in a bit. Steve watches with interest.

“Then I’ll kinda ease in a few touches while we talk,” He idly plays with the hair at the nape of Steve’s neck, strokes down his neck to his collar bone, brushing his thumb back and forth as he talks, “you might have to do this for a while, get her warmed up. It’s important to make sure she’s interested. Never, ever push when a girl is unwilling.”

“If she is receptive and doesn’t move away, get a little closer.” He leans in, mouth by his ear and murmurs, “sometimes, especially the first time, it’s good to kiss other places first.” Steve feels Bucky’s lips by his ear, the warm exhale of his breath against his skin, then feathering to his jawbone, trailing tiny kisses. He shivers a little as goosebumps raise on his neck.

“If you’re this far, usually she’ll turn towards you,” Steve turns his face towards Bucky, their noses nearly touching. “But if she doesn’t, you can do this,” he raises his hands to cup Steve’s face, gently tilting his face upward, “Be gentle, don’t hurry.”

He gazes at Steve, his silvery blue eyes steady, “That’s when you go in for the kiss,” he brushes his lips close to Steve’s, whispering, “Personally, I love the feel of a woman’s skin, so soft, so I do this,” he trails his lips over Steve’s cheek, nuzzling against him then softly brushing his lips against his, before pressing into them with a little more pressure.

Bucky tips his head to the side and moves his mouth over his, varying pressure and gently pulling at his lower lip.

Steve’s hands clench in his lap. He leans into Bucky, runs one hand up his arm, and pulls him closer.

Bucky’s lips part, his tongue licking along Steve’s lower lip and he startles a little but quickly moves back in, imitating what Bucky did, sucking a little on his lower lip then shifting to lick the seam of his lips.

Bucky’s hands tighten and his mouth opens, head shifting to the side as their tongues tangle, licking and nipping at each other. Steve feels heat pooling in his abdomen and shooting through him, making him feel flushed all over.

After a few moments Bucky eases back, placing quick gentle kisses on Steve’s lips before resting his forehead against Steve’s. They’re both a little out of breath. He leans back and releases Steve’s head.

He clears his throat, “And that’s how it’s done. Pretty good for your first try.” He pats his shoulder and gets up, walking quickly to the bedroom.

Steve stares into space, remembering the way Darcy described kissing Will.
He touches his lips.

*Kissing Bucky didn’t feel that way at all.*

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Bucky rolls over in his bed, pressing his cock into the mattress. He groans into the pillow, breathing deeply to calm himself.

He hadn’t expected to feel anything more than strange when kissing Steve. He wanted to help him, had tried to put him at ease. At first, he focused on what he liked to do with girls, he thought of Darcy’s plush lips and silky skin, imagining what it would feel like to kiss her to alleviate the strangeness.

He explained and demonstrated to Steve what he imagined, what worked with girls before. But somewhere along the way, he stopped imagining and instructing and just sank into how it felt to run his lips along Steve’s jaw, the scent of him, and then the feel of those pouty lips.

And that’s when things got confusing.

Bucky loves women. Hell, everyone knows that. The shape of a woman, that point where her waist flares into the curve of rounded hips, the silky skin, long hair, soft lips of a woman; it’s all the beauty in his life.

Sometimes, he felt the only bright spot in his mundane day was the anticipation of holding a woman close, breathing in her scent, feeling soft curves press into the hard angles of his body.

The only time he’d willingly drop to his knees is before God and a woman. His faith in this fact is unshakable.

*But that kiss with Steve*...

It’s probably nothing. He’s been so hung up on Darcy for the last month or so that he hasn’t been doing his usual thing to relieve tension. That’s all it is.

*That’s all.*

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Chapter End Notes

A little early this week with the chapter. So now Bucky, Steve and Darcy are officially more than friends. Whee!

Pulled out the “friend shows friend how to kiss and it leads to confusing feelings” cliche. But it’s a cliche because it could happen. Sure.
Fun fact: the first family planning and birth control clinic in the U.S. was opened by Margaret Sanger in Brooklyn, in 1916. Of course she was arrested for doing so soon after. Nevertheless she persisted, and it was the origins of what would later become Planned Parenthood. There were several legal clinics by the 1940’s. Let’s say Darcy’s clinic is one of these.

https://www.nyu.edu/projects/sanger/aboutms/organization_msrb.php
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

It’s New Years Eve and time to party! Everyone gets dressed up, goes to a fancy ballroom, has some champagne, and dances the night away. Also, they meet a few new people and a particularly interesting inventor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tuesday, December 31, 1940

Darcy rests her head against the rim of the bathtub, relaxing into the fragrant warmth of the water. A wide grin blooms on her face as she lathers soap over her body, careful to avoid getting her piled up curls wet.

The last week has been hectic, she worked a lot of hours at the hospital. The flu is still taking its toll and doctors and nurses have been jockeying for time off for the holidays, so the hospital is woefully short staffed. Darcy volunteered for a shift on Christmas, hoping the work would distract her from missing home.

She made sugar cookies and a spice cake for Steve and Bucky and brought it to their apartment early on Christmas Eve. Steve gave her a beautiful sketch he’d drawn of her, reclining on their couch. Bucky made a decoratively carved wooden frame for it.

She hung it over her bed and every evening she looked up at it and thought of them.

There was only enough time to exchange gifts before Bucky and Steve were off to meet Bucky’s ma and Becca for dinner and midnight mass. Bucky felt bad about not inviting her, but he’d never brought a girl home before. He said he wasn’t ready to face the relationship questions from his Ma yet.

She wasn’t ready for that either, considering they had barely started dating. Also, Darcy didn’t have the heart to tell him that she and Will weren’t much for church anyway, especially since the preacher in their town spent a lot of time telling them they were all going to hell.

Kind of made church a dreaded event rather than a celebration.

A couple of days after Christmas the three of them had gone to the movies.

The newsreels before the show were all about the war in Europe. A little over a year ago, Germany had invaded Poland, and the British and the French had declared war against Hitler's Nazi State. Now it seems like all of Europe is at war, along with the Japanese. The newsreels showed the British soldiers marching and practicing maneuvers and reported ships being sunk off the coast of Britain by German U-boat subs. German planes dropping bombs filled the air over London.

Steve and Bucky thought the United States should lend a hand, since it was allied with both England and France from the Great War. Darcy wasn’t so sure. She got a tight feeling in her stomach when she thought of her father and the lone picture she had of him. He’d only been 23 when he died. So
many young men never came home.

She thought of Steve, Bucky, and Will going to war and selfishly hoped they would stay out of this war and the British and the French would be able to stop Hitler.

Thankfully, the movie broke through her solemn thoughts.

“The Wizard of Oz” had been out for more than a year, but Darcy hadn’t seen it. Bucky and Steve had. Steve liked the use of Technicolor in the film, he couldn't see all the colors, but it was definitely more vivid than black and white. Bucky liked the musical numbers and the flying monkeys.

Darcy liked it all, even if the wicked witch and flying monkeys scared her a little.

She sat between the two of them, holding their hands. Steve squeezed her hand during the scary parts and whispered, “It's ok, doll.” Eventually, he had pulled her closer and she leaned her head on his shoulder.

Throughout the movie, Bucky rubbed his thumb in a constant circle in the palm of her hand. After a while, he lay his hand on her knee, rubbing slow circles on the inside of her leg. She’d squirmed a little in her seat and Bucky sent a knowing smirk her way.

Ugh. He’d known exactly what he was doing.

She wonders what dancing with him will be like tonight.

She and Steve have danced quite a bit in an effort to help him learn how. They’ve snuck in a lot of affectionate touches during those lessons.

However, she hasn’t danced with Bucky since they decided they were more than friends and started dating. Something tells her Bucky won’t be shy about touching her either. She’s excited to see what Bucky can do on the dance floor.

She pulls the plug from the drain with her toes and rises from the water, grabbing her towel to dry off. The bath oil Will gave her for Christmas leaves her silky smooth and smelling like gardenias.

She slips on her robe and leaves the steamy bathroom and pauses at the open door to Will’s room to see him standing in front of the dresser mirror in his black dress pants and a crisp white shirt, working on knotting his tie.

He turns to her, one eyebrow raised. The green tie brings out his eyes, the intensity of their color reminds her of spring grass.

She crosses the room and takes the ends of his tie in her hands. He watches as she knots it, smoothing it down the front of his white dress shirt afterwards.

“You always do that better than I can,” he grumbles, “I don’t see how that’s possible since you don't even wear ties.”

“Superior muscle memory.” She smirks, sitting on the edge of his bed as he slips into his suspenders, then jacket. So handsome. She’s accustomed to Will’s good looks but occasionally they take her by surprise.

“No need to be smug.” He sits next to her, pulling on his highly polished black shoes, then lacing them. “Why aren’t you dressed yet?”
“Oh, all I have to do is slip on my dress and I’ll be ready.”

“You’re going to knock their socks off, Darce.”

She certainly hopes so.

“That’s the plan.”

Her dress is spread on the bed, shoes, stockings, and undergarments piled next to it.

Before leaving home, she altered one of Mama’s old party dresses to bring with her to New York. She had to let out the chest and hips just a little and taken in the waist, and although the dress isn’t particularly revealing, it fits like a glove. The color is her favorite part, a shade of blue somewhere between blue and violet, like the color of twilight. The heavy satin is cut on the bias, showing her curves to advantage. She’s never worn anything so pretty.

She shimmies into the ivory satin bra and garter belt, slipping the matching high waisted panties over the top. After smoothing on her sheer black stockings, she clips them to the garter belt and turns in front of the the vanity mirror in the corner to check the seams up the back of her legs. Satisfied they are straight, she sits on the stool in front of the vanity and takes down her hair, brushing it till it shines, falling in soft waves to her shoulders. She arranges it in a deep side part, anchoring one side with the decorative comb Will gave her for Christmas.

She powders her nose and décolletage, and licks her finger to run it over her brows. Fortunately, they aren’t bushy and have a nice arching shape. She’s also blessed with long, thick, lashes so she can skip the mascara tonight. She’s seen the ruins of eye makeup after an evening of dancing, and it isn’t pretty.

After slipping on her dress and black patent pumps, she leans into the mirror to apply her red lipstick. Smoothing her lips together, she twirls a little and checks herself over in the mirror once more.

*Ready.*

Bucky leans against the bedroom window on the fire escape smoking a cigarette while he waits for Steve to finish getting dressed to go out. He glances through the window to see him running a hand through his blonde hair after buttoning his shirt.

Earlier in the day, Bucky sat and polished both his and Steve’s shoes to a mirror shine. They don’t have a lot of fancy clothes, but they each have a suit for special occasions. Steve’s is navy blue and Bucky’s is charcoal gray. Change out the shirt, the tie, it’s something different for whatever the occasion.
They’d had a lady in the building starch and press their nicest white button down shirts and bought new ties and suspenders for tonight. Darcy went shopping with them, she picked out ties in shades of blue that she said reminded her of their eyes. His is silvery blue, Steve's is the color of the summer sky.

They are going to the Grand Prospect Hall for the evening, and he sorta can’t believe it. The place is pretty exclusive, and normally they would never get in, especially on New Year’s.

Turns out, Will’s fella, Tony Carbonell, is getting them in, because his Ma’s family owns the place. Steve and Bucky are paying for a cab to take them all over from Darcy and Will’s place.

He stubs out his cigarette and opens the bedroom window, climbing over the sill into the room. Steve is still messing with his tie, so he walks over and slaps his hands away, tying it for him.

“Ya never do get these things right,” he smooths down the tie and sits on the edge of the bed. Steve sighs and sits next to him. “What’s the matter, punk?”

“A little nervous. Never been dancing before and I don’t wanna mess up and disappoint Darcy.”

“No way you’ll mess up. Spent all that time teaching you, didn’t she?” He nudges Steve's shoulder. “It’ll be fine. ‘Sides, you look swell.”

Steve shrugs bashfully and a small smile forms on his downturned face. Bucky reaches over and ruffles his hair.

Despite the faint bruises from his broken nose, he really does look good. Darcy was right about the tie, it makes his eyes look damn near incandescent. The steady meals he’s getting lately have helped him put on a little weight too.

Doesn’t matter if he’s small and frail, he still has that angel face.

Bucky hopes they can make it through the winter without Steve getting really sick. Last year, he had pneumonia for what seemed like forever. Bucky spent days on end terrified his next breath would be his last. The heat in the apartment didn’t work and he slept with him at night to try to keep him warm. He wrapped himself around him, his hand resting on Steve’s chest to reassure himself he was still breathing.

Steve’s been making noise about selling papers again. Work slows down on the docks post-holidays, and money gets tighter than ever. Bucky wishes there was some other work Steve could do. Standing in the cold selling papers won’t help his health. But with his frequent absences due to illness, it’s hard for him to stay employed.

He blows out a breath, pushing those thoughts away.

He hooks his arm around Steve’s neck pulling him into a hug. “Enough worry, punk. Tonight it’s you and me and our best girl, celebrating a new year with dancing,” he waggles his brows, “and hopefully some drinking!”

Steve laughs and shoves him. “Alright. Let’s walk over to Darcy’s.”
When Darcy answers the door to her apartment, Steve just about swallows his tongue.

To be fair, he isn’t the only one stunned by her appearance, he hears Bucky choke a little behind him. The way the deep blue satin of her dress clings to her curves ought to be illegal. Her pouty red lips curve into a welcoming smile and her eyes sparkle with happiness.

“Vous look so handsome!” She pulls him into a warm hug and kisses his cheek, then cups his face, absently rubbing the lipstick away with her thumb.

She turns towards Bucky and he wraps his arms around her and pulls her against him, muttering in her ear, “So gorgeous, doll.” He gives her an extra squeeze and steps back, slinging his arm around Steve’s shoulders. “So, are we ready to go? I can run down the hall and call a cab.”

“We’re ready. Go ahead and call, we can have a drink while we wait.” Darcy tugs Steve’s arm and pulls him into the apartment after Bucky heads down the hall. Will is sitting on the sofa nursing a glass of whiskey, looking movie star handsome in his suit.

He jumps up and claps Steve on the shoulder, “Heya Steve, lookin’ good. You gonna show my sis a good time tonight?”

Steve shrugs, “Gonna do my best.”

Darcy says, “And his best is better than most.” She touches Steve’s shoulder, “I’m just gonna grab my coat and purse from my room.”

Steve watches as she walks away, mesmerized by the seams up the back of her stockings. Damn. He doesn’t know how he got so lucky.

Will nudges his shoulder, “All she’s been talking about for days is dancing with you and Bucky.” He sighs, tipping his glass to his lips for a last swallow before sending a serious look at Steve, “I know she can take care of herself and that her choices are her own, but please, be careful with her. I know when she gives herself to someone she’ll give her whole heart, no holding back. It means she has everything to lose.”

Steve bows his head, hand rubbing the back of his neck. He looks up at Will. “I’ll never intentionally hurt her. She’s the best girl I’ve ever met.” He shakes his head, “I don’t know what she sees in me.”

Will pats his shoulder, “She sees a good man, Steve. That’s all that matters.”

The cab ride over is tight with the four of them in the back seat, but Bucky doesn’t care because Darcy is sitting on his lap. As far as he’s concerned, they can take the long way, cab fare be damned.

His arm is wrapped around her waist, the curve of her bottom pressed into his lap. He hopes the layers of their winter coats combined help hide the potentially embarrassing situation in his pants.

Not that he’s ashamed. He’s a red-blooded man and Darcy is gorgeous.

She turns her head to talk to Steve and he takes the opportunity to run his lips up the side of her neck, his face hidden by her hair. He pauses just behind her ear when she shivers and unconsciously
presses back into him. *Damn.*

He squeezes her a little tighter, the curve at the underside of her breasts just barely touching his arm. He breathes in the floral scent of her skin and closes his eyes for a moment against the silk of her dark hair. He has to get ahold of himself, they’re in a *damn* cab. *With her brother.*

He sits back again, turning towards Steve, resting his cheek against the top of her hair. There’s a mischievous light in Steve’s eyes, he knows what’s going through Bucky’s head as surely as if he’s spoken aloud.

Bucky bites his lip and raises his eyebrows at Steve, who quirks an eyebrow and grins at his predicament. Stupid punk.

The cab pulls up to the hall and there’s a line of people dressed to the nines waiting outside the front door. Will jumps out of the other side of the cab and walks around to give Darcy a hand as she scoots off of Bucky’s lap and out of the cab. Bucky gives the cab driver his fare and gets out, Steve is already standing next to Darcy, her arm looped through his. He walks over to them and Darcy smiles and wraps her other arm around his, pulling him close to her side.

Will rises on his toes, looking over the crowd. He smiles and waves, shouting, “*Tony, over here!*” He grins as Tony pushes through the crowd, a pretty blonde dame on one arm, a sultry looking brunette on the other.

“You made it!” He wraps an arm around Will’s shoulder, clapping him on the back, “You remember Doris and Bess?” He gestures to the ladies on either side of him. He smirks, “I know you Darcy, but I barely recognize these handsome fellas.”

Darcy grins, “Hello, Bess, Doris,” she gestures towards Steve, “This is my date, Steve Rogers.”

Steve nods to the ladies, who smile back at him.

She pulls Bucky closer, “And this is my date, Bucky Barnes.”

Bucky grins roguishly at them, “Ladies. Nice to meet you.”

Tony grins widely, “*Oh ho! Lucky girl, Darcy. Your dance card will be full tonight.*” He waggles his eyebrows at Darcy suggestively. She laughs, delighted.

Darcy turns to the blonde with Tony, “Doris, it’s nice to see you again. Couldn’t find a better date than this clown?” She gestures to Tony and he clutches his chest in mock hurt.

Doris laughs, “Bess and I like to dance and Antonio tells me Will’s a great dancer.”

Tony grumbles, “*Tony, Doris. Only my mother calls me Antonio.*”

Doris shrugs, “I’ll call you what I want, we’ve known each other since we were three, after all.”

She turns to Bess, twining her fingers with the brunette, and purrs, “Don’t worry darling, I’ll share Will with you.”

Tony pouts, “Hey! I can dance, too.” His dark eyes sparkle with humor and he flashes a white grin at Will.

Doris rolls her eyes, “*Sure, sure,*” she eyes Darcy and says flirtatiously, “Maybe I’ll dance with you later if your dance card isn’t too full and if Bess doesn’t mind.” She strokes the brunette’s wrist.
Darcy laughs, “I wouldn’t want to step on Bess’s toes. I think I’ll be busy.”

Doris pouts in mock indignation then grins at Bucky and Steve. “Guess I won’t be stealing your girl tonight.”

Bucky sends a pointed look at Steve and he shrugs minutely as they follow Tony through a side door into the building. He takes them to check their coats before entering the ballroom.

Bucky sucks in a stunned breath. He’s never been anywhere so fancy. He glances at Steve and sees his eyes tracing over the elaborate chandeliers and vaulted three story ceiling. His fingers twitch, and Bucky knows he’s itching for a pencil and paper.

Darcy whirls in a circle to take it all in, eyebrows raised and lips parted in awe. Bucky weaves his fingers with hers and scans the room.

There are two levels of balconies that run all the way around the ballroom, and tables set up along the sides of the main floor. The dance floor extends the length of the room and at the end of it is a stage with a band tuning up. The tables are covered in white linen with colorful floral centerpieces and candles at each one. There is a long bar along one wall with bartenders standing at the ready.

Tony leads them to a table close to the stage, it already has two buckets with champagne on ice. He opens one of the champagne bottles and pours everyone a glass. “A toast! To good friends and good times!”

They all take a sip, it’s not bad. Bucky would rather have a beer but he never turns down free booze.

Tony tosses back the rest of his champagne and tells them to get comfortable, the band will start playing in a few minutes when the doors open for everyone else.

The room is buzzing with noise from the crowd of people sitting at tables and standing around the dance floor. Darcy sits between Bucky and Steve sipping champagne.

She’s only had champagne a couple times in her life, but she doesn’t remember it tasting as good as whatever Tony gave them. She drains her glass and Bucky nudges her, “Might wanna slow down with that doll, don’t wanna be off balance for dancing.”

She glances over at Doris and Bess chattering with Will on the other side of the round table. She lowers her voice so only Steve and Bucky can hear, “Don’t worry, I could drink that whole bottle right now and I’d be drunk for maybe 5 minutes.”

“Really? How’s that?” Bucky leans in, hand on Darcy’s knee.

“I think my body just processes it quickly? It’s like a wave that passes through, I feel warm and fuzzy and then it goes away.” She shrugs, “Will and I figured it would take a large amount consumed quickly and steadily for me to get drunk and stay there for a while.”

Steve touches her hand, his blue eyes curious. “That’s handy. Suppose there’s not much point for you to drink beyond liking the taste then.”
“Not really, I guess. I do enjoy the warmth of whiskey going down and the taste of beer and champagne.”

Bucky grins, “I’ll drink to that,” he holds his champagne aloft before tossing it back.

Steve rolls his eyes at Darcy and playfully nudges her shoulder. He continues to sip his champagne.

The lights lower slightly in the room and a spotlight focuses on the stage. The band leader leans into his microphone, “Welcome to the Grand Prospect New Year’s Eve bash! We’ll be ringing in 1941 with you and playing some swell tunes. Let’s ease into the party with something sloooow,” he turns and signals the band to begin playing.

Couples head towards the dance floor and Bucky holds out a hand to Darcy tipping his head towards the floor.

She grins and takes his hand, leaning towards Steve and kissing his cheek, “I’ll be right back, next slow dance is yours, handsome.”

He tips his glass towards them in a mock toast and takes another sip of his champagne. He leans towards Will who pulls him into the conversation he and Tony are having with Doris and Bess.

Bucky leads her to the dance floor, his large hand warm around hers. He takes her into his arms and they begin a slow foxtrot.

He’s an amazing dancer.

She’s always danced with Will, their bodies synced with time and practice. Will is an elegant, graceful dancer, his body flows through dance steps like a swimmer through water.

Bucky is a more athletic, physical dancer. Long hours working the docks and boxing in the gym have left him with muscular shoulders and arms. His natural athleticism makes him a strong lead, with excellent rhythm and a sure control over himself and his partner's movements. She imagines he’d make anyone dancing with him, regardless of skill level, look good.

There is an instant frisson of attraction when she dances with Bucky, it’s clear he not only enjoys dancing but also holding her in his arms. He focuses intently on her, his eyes glinting through his lowered lashes. His hand grips her waist, fingers spread wide and occasionally stroking the upper curve of her bottom. A tremulous heat unfurls in her lower abdomen as he presses closer to her.

She tips her head back to gaze into his silvery blue eyes. He breathes deeply through his nose as she cards her fingers through the silky hair at the nape of his neck.

“Darcy?”

“Hmmm?”

“I’m gonna kiss you tonight.”

Her heart hammers and she has no doubt if her hands were free they’d be shaking. Is it possible to die from excitement? She feels so much at his statement she doesn’t know what to do with herself.

She decides honesty is the best policy. She takes a breath, looking into his intent gaze, and slowly smiles. “God, I hope so. I’ve waited a long time.”

He smiles in return, lowering his head so their cheeks are nearly brushing, his lips by her ear. “I’ll
make it worth the wait, doll.”

She presses her lips to his his cheek and whispers against his skin, “I know you will.”

Steve is feeling a little warm from the champagne as he watches Darcy and Bucky on the dance floor. A small part of him is envious of Bucky’s skill, but mostly, he enjoys watching them together. He wishes he had his sketch pad and a pencil right now, he hopes he can remember enough of this moment to recreate it later on paper.

Bucky is nearly a head taller than Darcy’s petite form, their bodies pressed together and his head tipped down, whispering in her ear. Her fingers tangle in Bucky’s thick, brown, hair, and by the flush on Darcy’s porcelain skin, he guesses Bucky is flirting.

After a moment he twirls her around, flashing a grin as she tips her head back, and her beautiful red lips curve up as she laughs.

From his vantage point, he sees men looking her over and women giving Bucky the eye. Obviously, they dance well enough to draw some attention, but mostly it’s the sheer attractiveness of the two of them that draws the eye. They are oblivious to everything except for each other.

As the song draws to a close, the two of them sway to a stop, Bucky taking her hand as they return to the table. Darcy sits down next to Steve and Bucky pours champagne into their glasses again.

Will and Tony leave the table with Doris and Bess, headed for the crowded dance floor as the band strikes up a fast tempo tune. Darcy leans back in her chair, sipping her champagne and watching the dancers.

“If you haven’t figured it out yet, Doris and Bess are together.” She taps her nails against the side of her glass as she watches Will and Doris execute a complicated series of dance moves.

Steve had gotten that idea already, but he was curious about the arrangement. He merely nods in the affirmative and Bucky murmurs, “Kinda got a clue outside when Doris offered to fill your dance card if it was okay with Bess.”

“Doris likes to flirt. I met her when I went to a cabaret show with Will and Tony a while back. It was interesting, I think I was the only woman in the room who wasn’t interested in dating women,” she grins, “one woman was bit pushy about getting to know me better. Doris came to sit with me and acted as a kind of buffer. She and Tony have known each other since they were children. In fact, there’s been some pressure from both of their families for the two of them to get married, which wouldn’t work out so well with their predilections.”

Steve snorts, “I bet.”

“Doris and Bess share an apartment. Most people, including their families, believe they are merely friends and roommates.” She says, “Imagine having to hide your love from most of the people you know. It’s monstrously unfair.”

Bucky sighs, “Doll, you can’t change the world, it ain’t a fair place. There’s always gonna be people who think they can tell everyone else how to live. Personally, I figure it’s none of my business what
people get up to as long as nobody’s getting hurt.”

She absently strokes Bucky’s fingers and bites her lip. “I worry about Will. He has so many ambitions that could be smashed because he’s with Tony. It’s absurd, his love life has absolutely no bearing on his intelligence or capability. I know it hurts him to hide,” She sighs, “At least he found someone here. He was so lonely back home.”

Steve hasn’t ever thought much about the gay fellas in his neighborhood, but what Darcy is describing sounds a lot like bullying to him. Will and Tony are swell guys, he doesn’t care at all what they get up to in the bedroom. What did it hurt anybody, anyhow?

He knows the Church doesn’t approve and he wonders what his ma would’ve thought. Back in Ireland she’d been raised Catholic, and her family was fairly devout.

Steve attended church every Sunday when he wasn’t sick as a child. But he remembers how some of the other women had whispered about his ma, scandalized that she was a single parent who worked to support her child. He remembers their lack of charity.

There are things about the Church he loves, but there are things that trouble him.

He knows Bucky only ever went to church to please his ma. He spent most of the time in the pew next to Steve, muttering comments about the girls in attendance or attempting to get Steve into trouble by making him laugh.

“Maybe things will change,” he says, “We’ll just have to lead by example. Maybe if enough people refuse to go along, things will change.”

Darcy leans into his side, her head on his shoulder. “Always taking on the bullies, Stevie.”

She reaches forward, picks up her champagne glass and tilts the rest of the golden liquid into her mouth, “Mmmm. Thoughts like those make me wish I could get drunk. Maybe get a little drunk for me, boys.”

Bucky chuckles, “Already working on it, doll.”

Steve snorts and picks up his glass.

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Later, Bucky sips whiskey and leans against the bar watching Darcy and Steve spin around the dance floor, goofy smiles on both of their faces.

It’s a slower song, and Steve is doing a fairly good job of moving Darcy around the floor. He can’t remember the last time he’s seen him so happy. It looks good on him, his luminous smile and shining blue eyes a testament to joy. He’s a bit flushed with exertion, maybe a little from champagne, but Stevie is always careful not to drink too much. Bucky knows Darcy will walk him off the floor if his asthma starts acting up.

It’s nearly 10:30pm, they’re closing in on midnight. He’s danced with Darcy, Doris, and Bess. There are a couple girls here he recognizes from other dance halls, they watch him expectantly, waiting for him to ask them for a dance as he has in the past, and pouting when he doesn’t. He doesn’t wanna
He sees the catty glances they send towards Darcy and he almost wishes he hadn’t been so free with his attentions in the past. Almost. It was educational after all.

He doesn’t want Darcy to be the target of nasty gossip, but he has no control over what other people think or say. He can only work on convincing Darcy she’s the only one for him now.

Some of the revelers are a bit drunk at this point, and he’s eyeing a couple of fellas who’re watching Darcy with interest, gesturing and egging each other on as the song winds down.

One of them ventures over to cut in but Darcy shakes her head no, remaining in Steve’s arms. Bucky puts down his whiskey and starts edging around the room when it looks like the drunken lout isn’t taking rejection too kindly.

Steve steps up, his temper flaring, and says something that causes the man to shove him.

Bucky can guess, punk has a mouth on him when he’s riled.

Before Steve can throw himself at the guy, Darcy turns on him, one hand on her hip, the other poking him in the chest.

She’s glorious in her fury.

“I don’t know who you think you are mister, but you’re nothing special. You like the shape of me, so you decide I owe you something. I don’t owe you ANYTHING. Not a dance, a smile, or a even a hello. I said, ‘NO’ and I meant it!”

She turns her back on the man and walks back over to Steve, taking his arm before smiling sweetly at Bucky and taking his arm too. “Let’s go boys.”

The drunk guy just can’t leave it alone. He yells, “Yeah? We’ll you’re just a bitch. Never wanted you anyway.”

Bucky turns back, takes two steps away from Darcy and punches the guy in the face, knocking him down and out. He winces and shakes out his hand, turns to Darcy and takes her arm again.

He mutters, “Now, let’s go.”

The small crowd of people that had formed around the altercation is dispersing, the drunk guy’s friends hastily drag him off the dance floor, and Bucky ushers Steve and Darcy back towards their table. Fortunately, all the fuss happened on the far side of the dance floor, away from the band and their table. The music still plays and people are still dancing.

Will and Tony are seated at the table with a dark haired mustachioed man, who’s gesticulating wildly with the cigar holds in his hand. He’s drawn some diagrams on the white linen of the tablecloth in front of them. Will is looking them over intently, pointing out sections of the diagram and asking questions.

As they reach the table, Will takes the pencil out of the man’s hand and says, “What if you did something like this?” He draws a few lines on the diagram, eyebrow cocked in question.

The man with the cigar leans to look and murmurs, “That just might work.”

Will looks up as they sit down. “Hey, you guys were gone a while.”
Darcy huffs, “Some idiot on the dance floor thought he could hijack my dance with Steve. Wouldn’t take no for an answer.”

Tony laughs, “Everything sorted?”

Bucky nods in affirmation, flexes his knuckles, and smiles.

Tony claps his hands, “Good, good,” he turns to the man with the cigar. “I’d like you to meet my old friend Howard Stark.”

The man looks up distractedly from the diagram on the tablecloth and focuses on them.

Tony says, “This is Will’s sister, Darcy Garland,” Howard leans forward to take her hand, pulling it forward to kiss it. She withdraws quickly, eyebrow raised.

Tony rolls his eyes, “Howard.” He sighs, “And these are her dates Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes.”

Bucky gives Howard a hard look to which he responds with an unrepentant grin.

“Don’t mind him,” Tony nudges Howard's shoulder as he winks at Darcy, “He’s a notorious flirt. Can’t seem to help himself at all.”

Darcy drawls, “Well, he might wanna try or Bucky and Steve might decide to help him.”

Howard barks a laugh. “Sorry fellas. Sometimes I get ahead of myself.” He holds out a hand and firmly shakes Bucky and Steve’s hands.

Darcy glances at the diagram on the table, “Working on making that plane faster, I take it?”

Howard startles, looking at her more intently, “You engineer too?”

Darcy laughs, “Nah. But my brother and I share interests. I’ve seen specs like these before.”

“You fly?” Howard asks.

“I can. I’ve been up with Will a few times and he’s gone over the basics.” She shrugs, “It’s really Will’s cup of tea more than mine. I’m more interested in medicine.”

Will explains, “Darcy is in the nursing program over at Brooklyn Hospital. She really should be a doctor.” Will frowns, it still bothers him that she’s held back by her gender.

Howard nods, “Well, don’t let anything stop you from studying whatever it is you want, even if it’s off the books. I started my company a little more than a year ago and I didn’t have a fancy education or loads of money. It’s all up here,” He taps on his temple, “I’m just starting out, but I’ve got some big contracts already. I’m gonna make things people have only ever read about in science fiction.”

Bucky is fascinated. “Like what?”

“Oh, let me tell ya about my idea for a flying car,” Howard smirks.

The Grand Prospect is a real place! Look!
Darcy’s dress design, hers is blue though.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Phoenix_173 for sending me the info for how to embed links! Thanks to leftennant for explaining it!

Also, Howard Stark! I’m introducing him to Steve and Bucky long before he appeared in the MCU. And you might have noticed Will’s boyfriend Tony is Antonio Carbonell. He’s a real character in the Marvel Universe, if only mentioned as being Maria Carbonell’s (Tony Stark’s mom’s) older brother. Small world.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The clock strikes midnight, Bucky comes through on his promise, and Steve puts that practice to work. The party ends, everybody goes home and Steve and Bucky stay over at Darcy’s again. Bucky and Darcy canoodle, big time.

Warning: mild but descriptive smut happens. Sorry if it’s not great, I’ve never written smut before, guys.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

10...9...8...7...

Darcy stands between Bucky and Steve on the dance floor, facing the stage as the band leader counts down to the new year. She tips her head back, glancing at the upper balcony where tuxedo wearing attendants are on standby with baskets of confetti.

She glances at Bucky and he’s not looking at the stage either, he’s looking at her. With intent.

Steve is leaning into her other side, he’s a little tired from all the dancing and the champagne, and she can hear the faintest beginning of a wheeze when he breathes. Too much smoke in the ballroom. They should leave soon.

6...5...4...

Steve’s arm is around her waist, his blond head tilted back, watching the upper balconies with interest. His arm tightens around her and she feels the wiry strength of him, surprising in someone as slightly built as he is. He turns to her and smiles shyly at her, a faint flush on his cheeks. She smiles softly in return. So handsome.

She glances over at Bucky, he’s doing that thing he does with his lip. Biting it and looking down at her. Oh god. His arm is around her shoulders, she’s pulled up against his side, the ends of his fingers stroking her shoulder. His silvery blue eyes are focused on her mouth, she licks her lips in anticipation, his pupils dilate and he shifts minutely closer.

3...2...

Bucky is looking over her head at Steve, having another one of their silent conversations. She wonders if she’ll ever be able to translate the expressions they use to communicate.

Bucky pushes her slightly towards Steve, glancing down at her then back over to Steve.

Oh.

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Confetti rains down upon the crowd, noisemakers and cheers ring out. Steve turns Darcy in his arms and cups his hands around her face, “Happy New Year, Darce.’

She feels the heat of Bucky’s hand on her lower back as Steve smiles softly, tracing his thumb over her lips. And then he kisses her.

His kiss is like a promise.

Soft, tentative at first, and then he presses a little more firmly into her, one hand in her hair and the other at her hip, his hand tightening when she tangles her fingers into his soft hair and tugs it.

Goosebumps run up her arms and she shivers, he licks the seam of her lips, and pulls back to look into her eyes, pressing one more tiny kiss to her lips. She feels flushed and out of breath. His eyes are electric as he presses his forehead to hers.

She smiles, “Happy New Year, Stevie.”

He looks over her shoulder and gently turns her towards Bucky.

She gazes into his silvery blue eyes, as he slips his right hand around the back of her neck, under her hair. His other arm wraps around her waist and pulls her flush against him. He ducks his head, kissing her just under her ear on the side of her throat. She tips her head back in response, a full body shiver running down her spine. She feels his lips curve into a smile against her skin and he lightly nips her, pressing kisses along her jaw before landing on her mouth, sucking gently on her lower lip then tilting his head and flicking his tongue over the seam of her lips. She gasps slightly and he licks into her mouth, deepening the kiss, his hand sliding into her hair and tugging on it. He groans, his tongue tangling with hers and his hand tightening in her hair.

His kiss is like a brand.

She forgets herself for a minute, floundering under new sensations. She hears Steve clear his throat at her shoulder and Bucky pulls back, his hand loosening from her hair and stroking down to the small of her back.

She looks up at Bucky and he tips his head back, closing his eyes as he takes a deep breath before stepping back and looking down at her. His lips curve in a wry smile, “Sorry doll, got a little carried away. Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year, Bucky.”

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Steve holds Darcy’s hand as they walk behind Bucky through the crowd on the dance floor back to the table.

They pass Will, who is propping up a grinning, slightly wobbly, Tony.

Will claps a hand on Bucky’s shoulder, “We’re off. Doris and Bess already left and this one’s had a bit too much to drink so I’m seeing him back to his place. I won’t be home til late tomorrow. See Darcy home safe?”

“Sure thing,” Bucky pats him on the shoulder and Darcy leans in to kiss his cheek, whispering something in his ear. Will grins and nods before turning to Steve and clasping his shoulder before they part.
Tony sketches a drunken salute in their direction, abruptly slumping against Will again.

Darcy plucks an unopened bottle of champagne from the ice bucket on their table as they pass, grinning mischievously at he and Bucky, “Waste not, want not.”

Bucky clasps his hand to his chest, “Ah, a girl after my own heart.” He takes the bottle from her and they head out of the ballroom.

Cabs line up at the curb outside the building, and Bucky quickly flags one down. They scramble into the back seat, Darcy between them. She gives the cabbie her address and they’re off.

The silence of the cab is feels strange after the constant noise of the past few hours. Steve is suddenly tired, he sags in the seat, his breathing shallow.

Darcy looks over in concern, laying her hand over his chest. “You alright Steve?”

“Jus’ tired. Maybe the exercise and the smoke got to me a little.” He grins, “I had a swell time.”

“Me too,” she says, “I’ve never been to a party like that.”

“Sure was fancy.” He leans his head back against the seat, lulled by the motion of the cab. “I liked dancing.”

Bucky says, “Ya did good, punk.” He rests his hand on Darcy’s knee, his chin on top of her head. A slow grin of contentment crosses his face as she leans into him.

Steve thinks about kissing Darcy, how silky her skin felt under his hands and the plush softness of her lips. The little shivers that shook her. He wants more of that.

When they arrive at Darcy’s she asks them to come up with her, offers to feed them some leftovers and make them a cup of tea to warm up.

Bucky pays the cabbie and they follow Darcy up the stairs.

As if there’s anywhere else they’d rather be.

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Bucky follows Darcy and Steve up the stairs to her apartment, eyes on the swing of her hips as they climb the stairs.

Damn if he isn’t still buzzing from that kiss. His skin feels strangely electric, like it’s too tight for his body.

He hadn’t expected it to take him that way. He’d already been hot from watching her and Steve kiss, but when he had her in his arms it felt like everything dropped away, there was only the feel of those pillowy lips against his and her hands in his hair.

If Stevie hadn’t cleared his throat, he woulda taken it too far for public consumption.

It’s not like him at all. Usually he’s always thinking, in control of the situation. He likes the challenge, figuring out what makes a woman melt. Figuring out how far she’ll let him go.

Stevie always chided him for his constant pursuit of women. Despite the fact that any woman he’d ever dated was completely dismissive of Steve, he still had a soft spot for them. He worried about Bucky leading them on or hurting their feelings.
But they all knew he wasn’t the kinda guy who dated one person exclusively. He never promised anything. He never took anything that wasn’t offered.

*He hasn’t looked at another woman since setting eyes on Darcy.*

It scares him a little. He knows she’s inexperienced and he can feel how open she is to him. He doesn’t want to hurt her. He thinks of the light in her eyes when she looks at him. For that to be extinguished is the worst thing he can imagine.

They enter the apartment and Darcy walks back to her room to change after putting the kettle on for some tea. He and Steve shed their outerwear and their suit jackets. Bucky loosens his tie and rolls up his sleeves, sliding his suspenders off his shoulders to dangle at his hips. Steve takes off his tie altogether and sits on the sofa, leaning his head against the backrest. He looks tired.

He puts the champagne in the icebox and stands with the door open, looking for the leftovers Darcy promised.

“Hey, Darce?”

“Yeah?” She calls back, her voice slightly muffled.

“What are we eatin’? I’ll get it out of the icebox.”

“Check the blue pot, should be some soup.”

He pulls it out and takes off the lid, looks like ham and bean soup. Sounds good to him. He puts it on the stove to reheat just as Darcy returns to the kitchen.

She’s changed into a nightgown with a robe over it, her feet in a pair of wooly socks. Her hair is soft and rumpled and her face freshly washed. The scent of her floral soap wafts over him.

The kettle begins whistling and she stands alongside him at the stove, pouring hot water into a mug and adding chamomile tea. She adds a little honey to it and stirs, bringing it over to Steve.

Steve’s eyes are closed, head tipped against the back of the sofa. Darcy softly runs her fingers through his hair and he hums, opening his eyes to look up at her. She hands him the tea and says, “Drink it, it’ll help your muscles relax more. I can hear your lungs, you sound constricted.”

Steve nods and sips at the tea. His gaze soft as he looks at Darcy.

She sits next to him, gently rubbing the back of his neck. “If you’re really good, I’ll draw you a bath with the lavender bath salts. I want you to stay here tonight.” She looks over her shoulder at Bucky, “You too, Buck. I told Will I was gonna ask you to stay and he was okay with someone using his bed.”

“Whatever you want, doll.” Every time they are together, he wishes the night wouldn’t end. It looks like his wish will come true tonight. He watches as Steve leans like a damn cat into the hand Darcy runs through his hair. He doesn’t need to ask if Steve is onboard with the plan.

Bucky turns back to the soup that’s heating on the stove and gives it a stir, it smells delicious and it’s been a long night of dancing and drinking without much food except for some tiny sandwiches, tiny hotdogs, and some kind of weird fish paste on crackers. Fancy party food wasn’t very appetizing.

Darcy opens the icebox rummages around til she comes up with some butter, then some cornbread wrapped in wax paper. She sets it on the counter and opens the cabinet, stretching on tiptoe for the
bowls. Bucky comes up behind her and reaches over her head for them, setting them on the counter. She leans back into him and rests the back of her head against his chest.

"Thanks," she says softly and tilts her head back and smiles. He grins back and bends down to kiss her nose.

She turns in his arms, wrapping her arms around his neck and going up on tiptoe, gently kissing his lips. He pulls her closer, her unbound breasts soft against him, his hands nearly meeting around her small waist. She smiles against his lips and pulls away to nip his chin, tongue flicking out to lick the cleft in it.

He pushes her against the counter and dips his head to reclaim her lips, sucking gently on first her lower lip, then the upper one. He licks the seam between them, gently kissing her once more before trailing kisses to her ear. "Darcy doll, you drive me crazy," he whispers.

She lifts her hands to his hair, massaging her fingers into the nape of his neck and scratching up to the crown of his head. He leans his head back into her hands, eyes closed. Damn. Everything she did felt so good.

“I wanna make you feel good,” she said.

Bucky opens his eyes. Guess I said that out loud.

“You do. More than you know.” He briefly squeezes her then releases her, “How ‘bout we eat? I’m starved.”

He grabs the bowls off the counter while she gets cutlery out of the drawer. He glances at Steve to find him watching them with interest, a small smile hidden behind the rim of his mug.

Darcy yawns widely, arching her back and stretching her arms and legs as far as they will go before settling back into her bed.

It’s daylight, later in the morning than she normally sleeps based on the sunlight shining across the foot of her bed. She rolls over to look at her alarm clock.

9am. Huh.

She listens intently and hears the faint sound of her boys sleeping. Her boys. She kicks her legs around under the covers in a little dance of happiness, a little giddy at the thought of them.

They’d all been exhausted after eating last night, deciding to leave the dishes til morning and call it a night. After she and Bucky got cleaned up, she’d run the promised bath for Steve and he pressed her against the doorframe of the bathroom and kissed her silly before smirking and shutting the door.

She touches her lips and grins. Steve is getting more confident, it’s good to see.

She’d retreated to her bed afterwards, Bucky was already asleep in Will’s room.

She groans and stretches again, then rolls out of bed to go to the bathroom, washing her face and rinsing her mouth. She looks in the mirror, her hair tousled and eyes sleepy and smiles to herself.

She returns to her room, leaving the door halfway open behind her and walks to the window. She
twitches the curtain back to look outside, morning sun floods the room as she looks down, breath fogging the glass. She reaches out a finger and draws a small heart in the condensation before returning to lay in the sunlight spilling over her bed. She grabs a book from her bedside table and turns to lay on her stomach, feet waving in the air as she looks over her medical textbook.

She vaguely notices the sound of a door clicking across the hall and the toilet flushing. After a bit, there’s a knock on the door and she looks over to see Bucky holding two cups of coffee, leaning against the doorframe in his undershirt and not quite buttoned dress pants. Damn. He grins, morning stubble dark on his cheeks as he raises a mug to her and quirks an eyebrow in inquiry.

She pushes up and sits back on her knees, motioning him in. He walks slowly to her, handing her the mug and leaning back against the window sill sipping his coffee, his silvery blue eyes focused.

She takes a sip and hums, “Mmmm, it’s good. Thank you.”

She pats the bed beside her and he hesitates before sitting next to her, sighing as she leans into his side.

They drink their coffee in companionable silence, basking in the winter sunshine. She finishes hers and sets the mug on the bedside table, taking Bucky’s empty mug and setting it beside hers.

Bucky leans forward, running a finger from her shoulder to her wrist, her arms bare in her nightgown. She shivers, turning to look at him.

“Darcy”

“Hmmm?”

“You’re doing it again.” He licks his bottom lip, then bites it, inhaling deeply.

“What?” She leans a little closer, sunlight shifting over her skin.

He slips his hand around her neck, under her hair, and strokes down the smooth skin of her neck and upper back, then over her nightgown until it rests at the small of her back. Goosebumps follow in the wake of his hand.

He weaves his other hand in her hair and pulls her closer, his lips nearly touching hers, “Driving me crazy.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Her lips curve, brushing featherlight against his.

“This.”

He tilts her head and kisses her, licking and nipping her lips until she opens them, panting. He deepens the kiss, his tongue stroking hers. She wraps her arms around his neck, hands in his hair, and presses closer.

The scent of soap and coffee along with some ephemeral scent that is purely Bucky fills her lungs. Her heart hammers and her skin feels hot.

He tilts his head, licking into her mouth and she moans, his hands squeeze convulsively and he pulls her into his lap, her legs straddling his hips.

She gasps as he pulls her against him, the firm bulge in his lap pressing into her. He groans and she tips her head back, trembling as his mouth trails across her jaw to her neck, licking and sucking just
under her ear. Her hips instinctively circle, pressing more firmly into him.

He hums, sucking on her pulse point as her blood sings in her veins.

His hand slides up her side to just under her breast and she squirms a little, grinding down on his lap.

“God, Darcy. We gotta slow down, baby,” He says as he slips the strap of her nightgown down, mouthing her shoulder, before licking across the top of her breast, sucking at the soft skin there.

She shudders, arching into his mouth gasping, “Not sure if that’s slowing down.”

“I know. It’s kinda hard, doll,” he rasps.

She rocks into him, head thrown back, “I noticed.” She licks her lips and her mouth curves in a slow smile. “Mmmm.”

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Bucky is in hell.

He pretty much lost control of the situation as soon as he saw Darcy laying on her bed, the sunlight making the thin cotton of her blue nightgown practically translucent.

His beautiful girl is in his lap, flushed and trembling. The winter sun beams through the window and glints off of her full, kiss reddened lips and the upper curve of her breasts, damp from his mouth.

There is a love bite just behind her ear and on the top of her left breast. He runs a finger over his fading handiwork as she arches against him, grinding her pelvis into his aching cock. Oh god.

He needs to slow down. He lifts her from his lap, ignoring her whine of protest, and lays her on the bed, her hair spread across the pillows. He crawls over to lie beside her, turning on his side to look at her. So beautiful. Her cheeks are flushed, eyes dark, she bites her lip as she squirms onto her side to face him.

“I’m trying to do what’s right, doll,” he wills his cock to settle down, with little success. “We can’t just rush ahead without talking. You matter to me, I don’t wanna take advantage.”

“You matter to me too, Bucky. So much.” She focuses on his mouth, tongue darting out to wet her lips.

Dammit. Her mouth.

He kinda hates the part of him that’s telling him to slow down. Sounds an awful lot like Stevie. Punk.

He reaches for her, hands cupping her face. “Stevie told me you never dated anyone, never even kissed anyone besides Will before.”

She nods, her gaze never leaving his.

Jesus.

The trust in her eyes. He needs to make this right.
“I need to know how far you wanna take this.” He strokes her cheeks with his thumbs, waiting.

She grasps his hands lowering them so she can wiggle closer to him, her forehead leaning against his and her breath on his mouth. “I want to kiss you and be kissed,” she pauses to gently kiss him, leaning back again and licking her lips, “I want to touch you,” she places one of his hands on her hip and he pulls her closer. “Everywhere,” she whispers. “With my hands, with my mouth.” She sighs and leans into him so they lay on their sides facing each other, legs intertwined, connected from chest to hips. “And I want you to touch me too.”

He deserves a goddamn sainthood.

She rests her cheek on his, her chin hooked over his shoulder. “Someday, I want to feel what it’s like to have you inside me.” She breathes.

Goddamn.

He flexes a his hips against her in reaction to her words. He closes his eyes before pulling back. He looks into Darcy’s eyes, her face is flushed.

“Yes,” he groans, “someday. This isn’t something that should be rushed. But maybe, we can do something to take the edge off?”

She nods.

“Hold on.” He rolls out of bed, palming his aching cock before he walks to the door. He listens to Steve snoring in the next room and closes it.

Darcy lays on her side, watching him curiously from the bed, her dark hair tumbled around her and the curves of her body outlined in sunlight.

He lays down beside her, pushing her hair back from her face.

“I’m gonna kiss you. And touch you. And make you feel good,” he raises a brow at her, “but you gotta tell me if anything makes you uncomfortable or you wanna stop.”

She licks her lips and breathes, “Can I touch you too?”

“Mmmmm,” He hums, “Yes, please.”

He leans in to kiss her, her mouth soft against his. She licks at his lower lip, sucking it into her mouth and gently biting it before tilting her head to slot her mouth against his, their tongues stroking against each other.

The desire he’d managed to tamp down flares back up, making him burn. He rolls her onto her back, his elbows on either side of her head, kissing her until she pulls back to gasp for breath.

Her eyes are closed, her head tipped back as she arches and rolls her hips against him. He slides his hand under the edge of her nightgown and grasps behind her knee, pulling her leg up and over his hip. She digs a heel into the back of his thigh, pressing him against her, rocking against his cock as he nuzzles into the side of her neck, sucking on that spot beneath her ear that seems to make her crazy. She shudders and he sucks a little harder.

“Ohhh, you feel so good,” she whimpers.

Her hands creep up the back of his undershirt, stroking up to his shoulders. He reaches behind him
and grabs the back of his shirt, pulling it up and over his head and throwing it on the floor.

Her heated gaze roams over his chest, her hand stroking his shoulders, chest and then low on his abdomen.

He unbuttons the first three buttons of her nightgown and pushes the straps down, licking and sucking each inch of her generous breasts as he slowly uncovers them. He leans back and rolls to her side again to work the top down to her waist, his eyes mapping her chest, his hand clenching in the fabric of her nightgown.

“Goddamn baby—so beautiful.” She flushes and glances down, then back up at him through her lashes.

Her breasts are porcelain pale, full and silky soft. She presses her teeth into her plush lower lip and squirms as he traces a finger over the upper curves of them, slowly stroking the flawless skin in circles til he reaches her tightly furled, deep pink nipples.

He leans into her, flicking his tongue over them, his bare chest rubbing against the soft skin of her stomach. Darcy wraps a hand in his hair, pushing him against her as she writhes. He sucks a nipple into his mouth and she trembles, whining and rocking her hips, trying to find some friction.

The hem of her nightgown is bunched up around her knees, and he slides his hand up the warm, smooth, skin of her thigh. He mouths her other nipple, licking and sucking as he reaches her upper thigh, running his finger along the elastic of her panties.

He raises his head, her nipple slipping from his mouth with a pop. She arches and shivers, her eyes closed.

“Doll,” he murmurs.

She opens her storm blue eyes, cheeks flushed and panting.

“This ok?” He runs his finger along the waistband of her panties, gently pushing his fingers under the edge of them.

She nods, breath shaky. She takes his hand and pushes it all the way under, pressing his fingers between her legs.

He raises an eyebrow in surprise and she grins, faltering with a moan as he strokes a finger over the bundle of nerves at the top of her slit, sliding back further to gather some of the slick between her thighs and bringing his fingers back up to rub her again.

He strokes her, rubbing the sensitive nub between her legs in slow circles as he kisses her again, swallowing her moans as she gets closer to her end. He dips down again, sucking her nipple into his mouth and he feels a flood of moisture over his fingers, her back bowing and trembling as she throws an arm across her face, muffling her moans as she comes.

He strokes her through it, stopping when she pushes his hand away, sensitive in the aftermath. He pulls his hand from her panties, rubbing his slick fingers together.

He looks up at her, her face and chest flushed, with lids at half mast and a lazy smile on her face, and sucks his wet fingers into his mouth, tasting the musky sweet flavor of her. Her teeth sink into her bottom lip as she focuses on him, eyeing his fingers in fascination.

He lays next to her and she turns onto her side, kissing him softly, brushing her hand down his chest.
to the hard bulge between his legs. She cups her hand around him and strokes him through his trousers and he hisses, thrusting into her hand, so hard it nearly hurts.

She kisses his neck, whispering, “Show me what to do.”

She slowly unbuttons his fly, then pushes his trousers and boxers down as he raises his hips to help her.

She sits up, her nightgown tangled around her waist until she pulls the straps over her shoulders, leaving the buttons undone. She kneels next to him, unselfconscious as her fingers stroke his cock. He bites his lip, overwhelmed by the sight of her and the feeling of her soft hands on him.

She looks at his cock from every angle, curious. “I’ve only ever seen one before on patients or in my anatomy books,” she quirks her lips, “never seen one looking—hard. Hmmmm.”

She strokes her fingers down the length of him, circling under to cup his balls. Stroking around and under, gently lifting them in her hand and rolling them slightly. He groans. Shit. No one has ever touched him like this.

Goddamn, she drives him crazy.

She grips him at the base, stroking upward, then back, slipping his foreskin back and forth. He reaches for her and pulls her down to his side, kissing her as she slowly strokes him and he wraps his hand around hers and guides her, stroking his cock a little more firmly, twisting a bit on the upstroke.

He moans into her mouth as she catches the rhythm, releasing her hand to wrap in her hair, pulling her against him as she continues stroking him, one thigh thrown over his, her breasts pressed to his side.

He pulls his mouth from hers, gasping, “Mmmm baby, so close.”

She nods, licking his neck then sucking hard.

He shudders, his balls tightening, back arching as his vision whites out with pleasure. Hot spurts of come paint his belly and she strokes him through it, hand slowing as he relaxes and she releases him.

He collapses, boneless and suddenly exhausted. Her curious fingers circle in the liquid on his belly. He cracks his eyes open to see her raise them to her face, sniffing then flicking her tongue across them to taste.

She wrinkles her nose a little, looking contemplative.

“What’s the verdict?” He croaks.

She glances at him, “Hmmm. Salty. A little bitter?” She shrugs.

He chuckles. “You’re somethin’ else, doll.”

She snorts, buttoning her nightgown. She rests her index finger on the cleft of his chin, “Stay. I’ll be right back.”

He watches as she leaves the bedroom, shutting the door behind her. She returns momentarily with a damp washcloth and wipes his belly clean, tossing the cloth on the floor and curling into his side as he buttons his pants.

“Steve’s still sleeping.” She whispers, pulling the blankets over them.
He drifts for a while between consciousness and sleep, her head on his shoulder.

Steve wakes to the smell of coffee and eggs cooking. He hears the soft mutter of voices and cracks open his eyes to see Darcy working at the stove while Buck stands beside her, one arm looped around her waist as he drinks his coffee.

Darcy glances at him as he sits up in his cocoon of blankets on the sofa. She grins, “Hello, sleepyhead. Want some coffee?”

She nudges Bucky with her hip, handing him the spatula she’s using to stir the eggs. He sighs and haphazardly pokes at them.

Steve watches as she pours his coffee, adding a splash of cream, just the way he likes it.

She brings it to him, snuggling into his side as he sips it. She nuzzles her nose into his neck, “Mmmm. You smell good.”

He tightens his arm around her and kisses the top of her head. Inhaling the scent of her. She smells like flowers—and Bucky. He looks his friend over and notices a darkening circular bruise on his neck.

Hmmm.

The two of them have been getting close, admittedly more slowly than Bucky usually moves with a girl, but still fast in Steve’s book.

Darcy doesn’t seem to mind at all.

It amazes him, the easy affection she gives them. It settles his nerves, allows the part of him that so longs for touch to come out. He realizes he’s getting over the idea that she’ll turn away from him, or decide he isn’t worth her time.

He glances at Bucky, who is absentmindedly stirring the eggs while looking over at them with an affectionate smile on his face.

Steve raises an eyebrow and nonchalantly points a finger at his own neck, eyeballing what he suspects is a love bite on Bucky’s. He squints his eyes at Bucky, who then proceeds to rub his hand over it and grin lazily, arching his back and stretching a little.

Steve huffs.

There will be words later.

Darcy lifts her head from Steve’s shoulder, “You better not let those eggs burn, James Buchanan Barnes.”

Bucky startles, quickly turning back to the stove and shutting the burner off under the frying pan. He grins, “They’re fine, doll.”

“Hmmph.” She gives Steve one last nuzzle before she jumps up to grabs some butter and a jar of strawberry jam out of the icebox as Bucky carries a plate of toast from the counter to the table.

Steve finishes his coffee with a gulp and excuses himself to the bathroom. He attempts to smooth down his hair, but it was damp when he’d fallen asleep the night before. He gives it up as a lost
cause. His eyes are slightly bloodshot, his clothes are rumpled, but he feels good.

Why does he sleep better on Darcy’s couch than in his own bed?

He returns to the domestic scene in the kitchen and helps set the table, easily moving around Bucky and Darcy as they finish refilling their coffee before sitting down.

They talk about the night before, Darcy ribbing Bucky over some of the gals giving her the evil eye whenever she danced with him.

Bucky groans, “Doll, it’s not my fault. I recognized a couple of ‘em from other dance halls and they musta expected to dance with me.” He strokes a finger down her arm, dropping his voice low, “I do love to dance.”

Darcy rolls her eyes and drawls, “You don’t say?”

Steve sighs, “Seems like there’s always someone ready to fight over one or the other of ya. Lots of fellas lookin’ to cut in last night, Darce.”

“I’ve never invited that kind of attention, except maybe with you two,” She smiles and reaches for his hand, “There were men back in my hometown who made me feel like I needed to hide myself because of the way they looked at me and the things they said. You should have seen me at fourteen. I dressed in baggy clothes and layers year round to avoid notice. I was still a kid, but I had all this.” She waves her hands over her chest and muses, “I was confused and embarrassed by the attention.”

Steve understands what it’s like to be pigeonholed because of his outer appearance. Women look at him and think he’s less of a man. Men look at her and forget she’s a person underneath it all.

Steve squeezes Darcy’s hand, looking into her eyes. “You’re more than what’s on the outside, doll.”

Bucky leers playfully, “Not that we don’t notice the outside. Because, baby, you are a pleasure to look at.” He grins and goes back to eating his eggs.

She rolls her eyes and nudges Steve’s knee under the table. Steve playfully smacks Bucky’s shoulder and he drops his forkful of eggs, “Heyyy,” he whines.

Darcy grins. “I know what we have is about more than outside appearances. You’ve never made me uncomfortable,” she fiddles with her napkin and shyly looks them over, “but I notice how handsome both of you are. I might ogle a bit.”

Steve snorts in disbelief.

Bucky drops his fork with a clang. “Listen punk, when a beautiful dame gives you a compliment, you say, ‘thank you’,” he picks his fork up again, stabbing at his eggs, “She wouldn’t say it if she didn’t mean it.”

Steve shrugs. He trusts Darcy, she’s never been anything but honest and kind to him. He looks at her, trying hard to believe. “Thanks, Darce.”

“You’re very welcome. You know, it may be selfish Steve, but I’m glad none of those girls Bucky tried to set you up with were interested,” She licks her lips and teasingly ogles him, “more for me.”

Steve’s face feels hot but he can’t help his pleased grin.

Bucky laughs at him.
Jerk.

By the way, this is how I picture Will

Chapter End Notes

So, yeah. That happened. *runs away*

*runs back* Tell me, did Bucky and Darcy move too fast or does this pace make sense? I have anxiety, y’all. *runs away again*
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

The heat at Steve and Bucky’s is on the fritz again, the boys go to Goldie’s to warm up, followed by a visit and dinner with Darcy. Steve tells Darcy something important.

Darcy at work, Steve being stubborn.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wednesday, January 8, 1941

Steve’s sitting in a patch of sunlight at his work table by the window when Bucky gets home. He’d only worked a half day, not enough to do at the docks for a full shift.

The light glints off of Steve’s fair hair as he bends over his sketchbook, completely focused. He’s wearing his coat, a blanket over his lap with a cup of something hot steaming by his elbow. The late afternoon sun coming through the window creates the warmest spot in the apartment.

Dammit. The super still hasn’t fixed the furnace.

This morning they’d both woken shivering and Bucky had run down to yell at the lazy bastard before he went to work.

Steve flips his hair out of his eyes and glances at him as he shuts the door, “Hey Buck.”

Bucky doesn’t bother to take his coat off. “Hey punk. Still no heat, I take it?”

“Nope. But there were a few rattles from the radiator an hour ago.”

Bucky crosses the room to the radiator and hovers a hand over it before touching it to find it stone cold. He sighs. Why the hell are they even paying for coal if the heat only works half the time in winter? He suspects the super is pocketing the coal money and claiming the furnace is broken.

Goddammit.

He wishes they had enough money to leave this shithole apartment.

He rubs his hand over his face before crossing to the icebox and pulling out some eggs and milk.

“How ‘bout I make us some eggs and we can eat something before heading over to Goldie’s to warm up?”

Steve murmurs distractedly, “Sounds good. There’s some bread Darcy gave us. It’s getting a little stale so maybe toast it.”

Bucky watches Steve move the pencil across the paper, the tip of his tongue poking out a little at the corner of his mouth as he concentrates. Cute.
He grabs the matches next to the stove and lights the burner. At least it will warm up the room a bit if he’s cooking. He finds the bread and cuts the last of it into six slices. He’ll toast it on the stove and they could make egg sandwiches. Not a feast by a long shot, but will at least fill them up.

The kettle on the stove is half full of hot water, and Bucky pours it into a mug for himself. “What’d ya make with the hot water Stevie?”

“Some of that tea Darcy gave us. We’re outta coffee.”

He rummages through the cabinet ‘til he finds the tea and makes himself a cup. He smiles when he thinks of their girl. She and Will get care packages from home, and she likes to share with them.

He wishes there was more he could give her. He’s never been with someone who gave him so much without expecting anything in return.

Sometimes, he wonders if she’d be better off with someone like that Howard Stark fella. He seemed like he was going places.

Bucky can give her a good time. In the past, that had seemed like enough. But lately, he finds himself thinking of the future.

“Say, Stevie. Ya talked to Will lately?”

“Yeah. Saw him yesterday when I was walking home from the subway.” He pauses to shade an area of his sketch. “He said Darcy misses us. She’s been working a lot of extra hours in the maternity ward. Also, she’s making some extra money filing for their landlord. Guess he’s a doctor up at the hospital?” He shrugs.

Bucky nods and stirs the eggs, he misses her too. She’d warned them things would get busy for her after the holidays. But he’d gotten used to spending regular time with her and now he feels itchy because he hasn’t seen her for a few days. Maybe it’s because work is slow on the docks and he has too much idle time.

He can’t stop thinking about how she’d looked on New Year’s Day stretched out beneath him. The memory of that morning has played in his head on continuous loop for days. He needs to see her soon, it’s starting to make him a little crazy.

After they’d gone home on New Year’s, Steve had asked some awkward questions. Bucky told him some of what Darcy had said to him, just so Steve would know he wasn’t taking advantage of her.

Funny thing, he used to have no problem giving Steve a play by play about girls he’d slept with, but now it feels disrespectful. He just let him know she was entirely willing and that seemed to satisfy Steve.

Bucky still worries that Steve will think he’s stealing Darcy for himself, but so far, he doesn’t seem jealous. They each have their own relationship with her and are moving at a pace that works for them.

“Did he mention that he’s gonna be doing some work with Howard Stark?”

Steve shook his head, raising a curious eyebrow.

“When we met up at Goldie’s earlier this week, he told me. Guess he’s helping with some of the design aspects of the airplanes Stark is making. Maybe test piloting.”
He put the eggs and toast on the table and motioned Steve over. They sit in companionable silence, eating their sandwiches.

Steve chews his sandwich for a few minutes before saying, “I wonder if that’s dangerous.”

Bucky shrugs, “Probably. Didn’t sound like Will was worried though.”

Of course not.

Seems like all of his friends have no problem rushing into danger. Spent half his life pulling Stevie outta trouble and now there’s Darcy and Will.

“From what Darcy says, Will’s been flying a few years. He’s good.”

Bucky wonders what it would be like to fly. Would it be like the roller coaster at Coney Island? He loved the euphoria of that moment of weightlessness as they plummeted over the big incline, his stomach dropping and a tight feeling rising into his throat, like his body can’t decide whether to sob or to laugh.

He’d like to try it someday.

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They stay at Goldie’s until after dark, basking in the warmth of the gym for as long as possible.

Steve has spent the last hour sitting on a bench against the wall, sketching various boxers practicing before settling on drawing Bucky as he works the heavy bag in the corner until he’s drenched in sweat.

Finally, Bucky pauses, wiping his arm across his brow and stepping away from the bag. He walks over to Steve, holding out his gloves to be unlaced, muscles loose and panting slightly from exertion.

Steve puts down his pencil and unlaces the gloves, holding onto them while Bucky slides his hands out. He flexes his hands, his knuckles red and swollen.

“Geez, Buck. Thought you were never gonna stop punching that thing.” He tosses the gloves on the bench and Bucky sits at his side, reaching for a towel to wipe his face and neck.

“Yeah. Had some energy to work out.” He rolls his shoulders and rests his back against the wall. After a minute he puts his shirt back on over his undershirt and pulls up his suspenders. He walks over to the fountain in the corner and drinks, wiping his mouth and returning to Steve, who’s shrugging into his coat.

“What d’ya say we stop by Darcy’s on the way home, punk.”

Steve walks quickly towards the door, not looking to see if Bucky follows. Bucky chuckles under his breath, grabs his coat, and jogs to catch up to him as he reaches the door.

“Where’s the fire?” Bucky teases, exiting the gym after Steve and shivering as the cold air hits him and the sweat on his body immediately cools.

“You asked if I wanted to see her— I really do.”

Steve sets off at a trot, eager to see Darcy. He hasn’t had much time with her since New Year’s, just quick visits and the couple times he’s run into her walking back from the subway. He hopes she’s
home.

He wants to ask her to go to the show on Saturday night.

They arrive at her building and Steve is a little out of breath. Hurrying in the cold really isn’t something he should do, but lingering in the cold isn’t good either, so if he’s gonna be messed up he might as well do it at a speed he chooses.

He takes the stairs a little more slowly, Bucky trudging up behind him at the same speed, even though he could have already run up them if he wasn’t with him.

When they arrive at her door he pauses, getting his breathing under control enough that he’s not wheezing. Well, not much anyway. He leans against the wall as Bucky knocks.

Steve is beginning to fear nobody is home when he hears Darcy’s muffled voice and the door opens, security chain in place. One blue eye peers through the cracked door, the edge of her full lips curling up before it’s swiftly unlatched, to reveal Darcy’s grinning face. She leans against the doorframe, hip cocked, wearing her nurse’s uniform.

“Well, hello boys.” She purrs, eyes laughing as she strikes a provocative pose.

She squeals when Bucky grabs her around the waist, hoists her over his shoulder and walks into the apartment. Steve rolls his eyes, walking in behind them and shutting the door.

“Bucky! Put me down!” She laughs delightedly, smacking at his lower back.

Bucky twirls her around before setting her on her feet, wobbling a little but still grinning like mad. She hugs him, “Missed you,” she mutters into his chest.

Bucky smiles, nuzzling the top of her head with his lips.

She squeezes and releases him to turn to Steve.

“You too! This week as been so long and it isn’t even close to over yet.” She sighs, wrapping her arms around Steve and he hugs her to him, burying his face in her hair.

She steps back. “You two have great timing. I just got home a few minutes ago, haven’t even had time to change.”

Steve reaches for her hand, twining his fingers with hers and she smiles softly at him. She always seems so glad for any gestures of affection he gives her. She has a way of making him feel absolutely welcome that he’s only ever experienced with his Ma and Bucky.

Darcy squeezes his hand before telling them to get comfortable while she goes to change clothes. He and Bucky lay their coats over the arm of the sofa before Steve sits down and Bucky calls to Darcy, “Doll, okay if I use your shower?”

Darcy’s muffled voice calls back, “Sure, gimme a second.”

She returns after a moment, dressed in her red flowered house dress, pulling a brush through her hair. She has a towel in her other hand, which she gives to Bucky.

“Thanks, Darce. Got awfully sweaty at the gym and the heat is out again at our place. Not sure if we’ll have hot water when we get back.” He leans in and kisses her cheek before heading to the bathroom.
Darcy comes over to sit next to Steve on the sofa and he watches her brush her hair. He reaches for her wrist, stopping the brush.

She looks at him questioningly and he says, “Can I? I used to brush my ma’s hair,” he looks down at the brush in her hand, “I miss it.”

Darcy silently hands him the brush and moves from the sofa to the floor, sitting in front of him between his outspread knees. He gently runs the brush through her hair, running his other hand behind it, smoothing down it’s length. She hums, leaning back against the sofa and tilting her head back, eyes closed.

Her hair falls in soft spirals, a deep, rich brown that’s nearly black. It reaches to just below her shoulders when he smoothes it down with the brush, but just above her shoulders when the curls spring back up. He runs his hands through it, feeling the silky softness of it, remembering the feeling of his ma’s hair.

He talks to Darcy as he strokes through her hair, working through a tangle at the nape of her neck. He explains how his ma used to come home dead tired and how this was something he would do for her as they described the events of their day. He allows that he was probably closer to her than most boys were to their mothers, mostly because they were all each other had.

He realizes she must have been lonely, too caught in a cycle of hard work and caring for him to have much of a social life, though she never expressed it. His throat aches with suppressed tears.

He sighs at the selfishness of children. She died before he’d gotten old enough to see her as a person herself, separate from him with her own needs and dreams.

He takes a deep breath and blows it out, turning from his sad thoughts and refocusing on Darcy’s hair. He looks down at her upturned face, her lashes dark fans against her cheeks. Around her forehead her hair is finer, forming soft corkscrew curls. He wraps one around his finger, pulling it and releasing it to spring back.

She smiles, relaxing her head against his hands.

“What’d your Ma look like Stevie?” she says.

“I’ve been told I resemble her. She was small, fine boned, but strong. She had blond hair and blue eyes like me.”

“Must’ve been beautiful if she looked like you.”

Steve smiles, “She was.”

She opens her eyes, looking up at him, her face calm and open. He sets the brush on the arm of the sofa, slowly stroking his hands through her hair before cupping her face in his hands. She closes her eyes and sighs, her tongue flicking over her bottom lip, and he leans forward, kissing her upturned face. Forehead, nose, then lips.

He closes his eyes, catalogues the sensation of her upside down mouth against his. She gently nibbles his top lip, before swiping her tongue against it, arching her back and raising her arms to loop around his neck.

He groans low, the sudden punch of heat low in his abdomen surprising him. She smiles against his mouth and turns in his arms, climbing up into his lap and kissing him again.
He wraps his arms around her waist, pulling her closer as she tilts her head, lips opening under his. She feels so good against him, all soft curves and heat, he forgets himself for a while, kissing her until he runs out of breath and tilts his head back to gasp for air.

Her lips worry his jawline and then a spot just under his ear where his pulse is fluttering madly, pausing to nip and suck at his flesh til he’s panting for breath and unconsciously flexing his hips up into her. He twines his hands into her hair, bringing her mouth back to his and kisses her, long, slow, languid kisses that somehow slow things down and cause the heat in his groin to diffuse through his entire body.

Their lips part and she leans back, hands cupping his face. He looks into her blue eyes and is suddenly certain that he loves her with every fiber of his being.

Something must show on his face because she leans in close, lips brushing over his and says, “What is it, Stevie?”

He pauses, stroking his fingers over her cheekbones, “I love you, Darcy,” he whispers.

She smiles, her face glowing with happiness as she pulls him into a warm embrace. She nuzzles her face into his neck and breathes into his ear, “And I love you. So, so, much.”

She leans back to look at him and they grin at each other, giddy in their own personal bubble of happiness. He can hardly believe how lucky he is.

Bucky emerges from the bathroom to find Steve and Darcy standing by the stove, wrapped up in each other. She is stirring a steaming pot and Steve is molded to her side, whispering something in her ear that has her grinning.

He whispers something else and she says, “Of course I will. What are we seeing?”

She glances back at Bucky and winks, eyes sparkling. “That sounds swell.”

Steve follows her gaze and smiles at him, “Hey, Buck. Feeling better?”

Bucky throws the towel over his shoulder, running a hand through his hair. He feels warm and loose, the kind of relaxed that only comes after hard exercise or good sex. “Much. What’re you two up to?”

“Plannin’ on going to the show Saturday night—interested?”

Bucky sighs, “Wish I could. Promised Ma I’d come by for dinner. She has a neighbor who’ll pay me to do a couple odd jobs around her place,” he pauses, smiling ruefully, “We could use the money.”

Steve frowns. Bucky knows he’s thinking about how he doesn’t do enough to contribute. He can’t tell the punk enough times that he isn’t a burden, that he’s family.

“Are ya going to church with her on Sunday?” Steve asks.
“Not this week. Just dinner on Saturday night—Ma will probably still try to talk me into going though,” he grins, “She’s awfully concerned about my soul, ya know.”

Steve snorts. “Maybe she’ll lay off since you haven’t been running around with every girl in the neighborhood lately.”

Bucky bows his head, rubbing the back of his neck. Ma isn’t stupid. She always seems to know what’s going on with him, and the lack of rumors about his love life lately will have her suspicious.

*Oh, God.*

She’ll probably try to set him up with “a nice Catholic girl” if she thinks he’s quit catting around.

He loves his ma, but she’s made noises about him settling down for the last year. He doesn’t think what he’s doing with Darcy and Steve quite fits her idea of settling down.

Darcy, in her usual forthright manner asks, “What are we telling people?”

She bends forward to stir the pot, not looking at either of them.

Startled, both he and Steve’s heads whip around to look at her. “What d’ya mean, doll?” he asks.

She turns in Steve’s arms to look at Bucky. “I mean, I understand you’re worried about telling your ma about me because you aren’t sure how to define our relationship. The way I see it, eventually someone is going to ask what’s going on with us. There are different ways to handle it.”

She raises a finger, “One, we can pretend I’m only Steve’s girl,” she raises another finger, “Two, we can pretend I’m only your girl,” a third finger ticks up, ”Three, we can pretend I’m just a friend to both of you,” the fourth and final finger pops up, “or four, we can just not pretend at all.”

Steve’s mouth turns down. He’s hates lying. His honesty has gotten him in trouble in the past, whenever he sees something wrong he refuses to ignore it. Bucky knows lying doesn’t sit well with him.

He wishes that they didn’t need to define anything about their relationship for anyone. He doesn’t have much, is it too much to ask for this one thing?

“Doll. I’d like to continue doing what we’ve been doing—no one needs explanations. This is ours.”

Steve's brow furrows in thought. “Will doesn’t care, your ma is back in Iowa, so Bucky’s ma is the only one who might wanna know what’s going on.”

Darcy sighs, “It doesn’t help that girls watch us whenever we go out, Bucky. I can see them trying to figure who I’m with and trying to get your attention. As adorable as Steve is, I don't have to worry about a pack of jealous girls gossiping about he and I.” She strokes a finger over the bridge of Steve’s nose and presses it to the center of his lips. He kisses it, smiling softly at her.

Bucky runs his hands through his hair, grabbing it and pulling a little in frustration. He knows some of the girls he’s dated are probably gossiping. “Let’s be clear, I’m not seeing anyone else. I’ve taken girls out before, but they all knew I was just looking for fun. This is more than just fun to me, Darcy.”

“I know Bucky,” she grasps his hand in hers, “I know that. You’re both very important to me and as long as you know it, we’re fine.”
Bucky pulls her into his embrace, hugging her and looking over her shoulder at Steve, who’s taken over stirring the pot on the stove. He sighs, feeling her curves against him.

“What’s in the pot, punk? Smells delicious.”

“Potato soup. With ham in it.”

Bucky nods, murmuring in Darcy’s ear, “You spoil us, doll.”

She kisses his cheek and says, “Let me. It makes me happy.”

He strokes a hand through her hair, resting his hand at the nape of her neck, pressing her tighter against him. She hums and wraps her arms around him and it feels like home.

After a while, Bucky gets to work slicing up a loaf of bread as Darcy and Steve set the table. Just as they finish, Will comes through the door, towing a laughing Tony behind him.

Darcy cheers, “You’re home!” before hugging both men in greeting.

Bucky shrugs and grabs two more bowls for the table. Darcy sends Steve back to her room for her vanity chair and they all sit down for dinner.

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Later that night, Steve wakes up shivering. The temperature has dropped overnight and their apartment is so cold he cannot get warm, despite the extra blanket Darcy sent home with him.

He lays in the dark, facing the window over Bucky's bed. There’s a hazy light outside, and snow whispers against the glass. He kicks his legs restlessly under the covers, futilely attempting to generate warmth in his extremities. He burrows his head under his pillow, his teeth chattering.

Bucky’s even breathing stutters and he mutters, “What the hell? Goddamn it.”

He hears him rustling around and huffing. Finally he mutters, “You awake, Stevie.”

“Yeah.” He replies, voice muffled by the pillow over his head. He curls his legs up tight against his abdomen, hunching down further in his blankets.

Bucky abruptly sits up in bed.

“Fuck this.”

He stands, grabs all of the blankets from his bed, and tosses them over Steve before lifting the edge of the blankets and saying, “Budge over.”

Steve scoots over and Bucky slides in next to him, pulling the blankets over both of them. A few minutes of the two of them wiggling around to find a comfortable position ends in Steve laying on his side with Bucky behind him, one arm thrown over Steve’s waist.

Countless times they’ve slept this way, when Steve was sick, when he couldn’t get warm. There’s an animal comfort in this closeness, the sharing of warmth such a relief that Steve finds himself relaxing into Bucky, the cold quickly receding. His eyes drift closed. He never feels safer than when they do this. Bucky’s breath warms the back of his neck as he whispers, “Go to sleep, Stevie.”

He does.
Friday, January 10, 1941

It’s near dark when Darcy hurries home on Friday night. She’s exhausted, she’d done some filing very early in the morning for Dr. Bobby then had gone on to work a 9 hour shift assisting the nurses in the maternity ward.

She hates the maternity ward.

Today she assisted in eight births, not everyone had delivered during her shift, but running between patients had kept her on her feet all day. She didn’t like the way the doctors used what she felt were unnecessarily invasive procedures in what should be a natural process. Unlike the births when she’d assisted Dr. Brooks, the women in the hospital maternity ward were given an injection that relieved pain but could also act as an amnesiac. They were strapped down to the table where they gave birth, not remembering the experience or sometimes losing consciousness.

This is horrifying to Darcy, she feels the mother’s active participation is important, that it increases the bond between mother and child. When she questioned the doctor in charge, she was informed it was hospital policy and it was a safer way to give birth.

It was clear her opinions didn’t matter.

All of the newborns emerged listless, with little urge to nurse. This is very unlike the behavior Darcy has witnessed in the babies born at home when she assisted Dr. Brooks.

She’s grateful she had been born at home.

She only has one more week in the maternity ward. Nurse Levy has selected her to work in the birth control clinic which at least promised to be interesting, if only because of its controversial nature.

She’s distracted from her thoughts when she spots Steve standing on a corner up ahead, holding a stack of newspapers while Bucky is next to him gesticulating and looking frustrated. As she crosses the street, Bucky says, “Dammit punk, it’s too cold for you to be standing out here after dark.”

Steve has a mulish expression on his face, and she knows he isn’t going to cave to Bucky’s demands. Sure enough, Steve starts arguing.

“I can’t leave ‘til I sell all the papers or I won’t get my full pay for the day.” He sets his shoulders, tipping his chin back. It’s clear he’s not budging.

Bucky throws his hands up, “Ugh! Stupid.” He turns away from Steve, frowning, jamming his hands in his pockets. After a moment, he notices Darcy and his handsome face lights up with a smile.

“Hey, doll.”

She finds herself grinning in return, ridiculous butterflies in her stomach. How have these two men come to mean so much, so quickly? It feels like there is never enough time with them. Bucky offers his arm and she takes it, snuggling into his side. He smells so good, clean and slightly musky, a combination of his soap and natural scent. She turns to look at Steve, whose stubborn expression has softened into a smile, even, white teeth and slight dimples on display.
“How’s it going Steve?”

He sighs and pushes his hair out of his eyes. It’s clear he’s not thrilled about standing in the cold either. But Steve’s the kind of guy that finishes the job, come hell or high water. He shifts from one foot to the other, obviously cold and miserable but trying to hide it.

She can hear his lungs whistling and frowns.

Stubbornness, thy name is Steve Rogers.

“Fine. Just a few more papers to sell and I’ll be done.”

Darcy looks at the stack of papers in Steve’s arms. There are maybe 10 left. They sell for 5 cents apiece.

“Gimme some,” she holds out her arms and Steve reluctantly hands her a couple, eyebrows raised in question. She wiggles her fingers in a “gimme” motion and he gives her a few more. She glances at Bucky and winks, handing some to him and he smirks as he realizes her solution to the problem.

She glances at the headline, grins and wades into the evening crowds headed home from work.

“Extra, extra, read all about it! Congress proposes sending supplies to aid England and France in war against Hitler.”

They sell the rest of the papers in no time.

Hospital birth practices from 1940-1970ish

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: Darcy’s description of hospital childbirth practices in the 1940’s is accurate. Sounds pretty unnatural to me.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Bucky has a dream, goes for a walk, and ends up at Darcy’s. They find out a couple things they didn’t know about each other. Bucky teaches Darcy something new and she returns the favor. NSFW!

Chapter Notes

You might have noticed updates ended up being on Thursdays rather than Saturdays like I originally thought. Work scheduling and whatnot made that happen. I plan to stick with this schedule, if at all possible.

Also, this fic is unbetad, please forgive abuse of commas and awkward syntax!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Saturday, January 18, 1941

Bucky is on his back, naked, with Darcy straddling him. She’s wearing nothing but her panties, the wet heat between her thighs soaking them as she rubs against his cock. He kisses her, hands in her hair, hips straining to get closer. She moans into his mouth and he bucks against her, the need to be inside her a torment.

He gasps, arching his back as pulses of heat strangle his cock, growing more and more intense. He turns his head and Steve is there too, running a hand down Darcy's back, leaning forward to kiss him.

He groans at the feeling of Steve’s lips on his, licking into his mouth as Darcy continues to rock her hips against him, her mouth sucking at the skin of his neck. He feels a spiraling sensation in his groin, his entire body bowing in anticipation of coming—

He wakes with a gasp, flexing his hips twice into the mattress before coming explosively. He shudders and breathes deeply for a moment before grunting softly and rolling over onto his back. The room is dim, street lights illuminate one wall and Steve snores softly across the room as Bucky cranes his neck to gaze at the alarm clock on the dresser.

3am.

He sighs, throwing his arm over his face, grimacing at the sticky feeling in his shorts.

Damn.

He hasn’t done that since he was a green kid.
He glances at Steve again, assuring himself he still slept before quietly grabbing some clean clothes from the dresser and retreating to the bathroom to clean up.

He’s quick, wiping himself down with a washcloth and splashing some water on his face. He looks in the mirror over the sink as he pats his face dry, noting the stubble on his cheeks and the length of his hair.

Ma had forcefully sat him down last Saturday and cut his hair, grumbling all the while that no son of hers would walk around looking like a hobo. He grins slightly at the memory. He’d successfully avoided all questions about his personal life by spending most of the evening working on the plumbing under the kitchen sink. He’d also mounted a few shelves for Mrs. McKinnon next door, so it had been after 10 o’clock when he got home that evening.

He’d been laying in bed, reading, when Steve had rolled in around 11, looking pleasantly dazed with kiss swollen lips and slightly mussed hair. He’d smiled lazily at Bucky, before telling him about the movies he’d watched with Darcy and blushing a bit when Bucky teasingly wondered how much of the movies he actually watched.

“Nah, Buck. We watched the movies! The theater was pretty crowded.” He smirked, “but we went to her place after and Will wasn’t home...Darcy sure does like kissing.” He sighed dreamily and Bucky threw a pillow at his head, laughing.

He wads up his soiled underclothes and creeps back into the bedroom, throwing them into the laundry basket in the corner. He stands by the window, breath fogging the glass as he looks out at the alley, before opening it and stepping out onto the fire escape for a smoke.

The streets are quiet, and it’s cold but clear. He can see the moon through the slight haze that lingers over the city. He inhales deeply, before letting the smoke stream out of his mouth like a white banner.

He misses Darcy. They haven’t had any time alone for a while.

They plan on going dancing tonight, just the two of them. He hasn’t been dancing since New Year’s Eve, and that’s unusual for him. But now there’s Darcy, and they do other things together, not just dancing.

It’s not like before when he’d pick up a new girl every Saturday at the dancehall. He eats meals with her and Steve (and sometimes Will) three or four times a week.

She can’t seem to stop feeding them, not that he’s complaining.

They run into each other almost daily coming back from the subway. He still boxes with Will, Steve often tags along and then they stop by to see her afterwards, playing cards, listening to the radio, even just sitting around reading books while Stevie draws.

But still, he’s frustrated, restless. It never seems like enough. His dream underlines how very much he wants her. And then there’s Steve….he’s not sure what to think about that.

He stubs out his cigarette and peers over the fire escape before chucking it into the alley. It’s hours until daylight and he knows he won’t sleep.

He raises the window and steps back into the bedroom. Maybe he’ll go for a walk, clear his head.

As he’s putting on his coat, Steve stirs, mumbling, “Buck? What're ya doin?’”
“S’ok, Stevie. Can’t sleep, going for a walk to settle down.”

Steve mumbles an affirmative and turns over, pulling his pillow over his head.

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Darcy wakes from a sound sleep when she hears noises on the fire escape outside her window. She lays still, ears straining, detecting footsteps coming up from at least a floor down.

She sits on the edge of her bed, facing the window and reaching into her bedside table for her grandpa’s pistol. She waits, breathing shallow, as she cocks the gun and rests it on her knee, the cold metal chilling her skin through her thin nightgown.

She debates getting Will from his room but decides against it. She’d rather not wake him, it could be a false alarm. Truly, there’s not much he can do that she can’t handle herself.

The steps continue up the fire escape and pause outside her window, there’s a tapping on the glass and she jumps, rising to her feet with the pistol ready.

“Darcy, wake up,” someone says lowly, followed by more tapping on the glass.

Oh my god.

She recognizes that voice.

She tips her head back, takes a deep breath to calm herself and blows it out before lowering the gun. She uncocks it and approaches the window, abruptly yanking the curtain aside. Bucky jerks back, startled. She glares at him through the glass for a moment before raising the sash and grabbing his arm.

He yelps as she yanks him into the room, slamming the window behind him.

She turns to him, smacking him on the shoulder “What the hell were you thinking?!?” She smacks him again and whisper yells at him, “I could have shot you!”

He flinches, looking down at the gun in her hand. He runs a hand over the back of his neck, and sends her an embarrassed grin. “I obviously didn’t think this through. I’m sorry, doll—I didn’t mean to scare ya,” he looks pointedly at the gun, “didn’t know ya were packing heat either.”

She raises a brow at him, her eyes flashing in the light from the window. She turns and opens a drawer in the bedside table, puts the gun in, and slams it shut.

She glares at him, hands on her hips. “What couldn’t wait til morning?”

He lowers his head. “It seems stupid now,” he whispers, “I had a dream about you, made me miss you so much I couldn’t sleep.” His eyes glint silver through his thick lashes in the faint light from the moon and his lips curve flirtatiously, “I went for a walk and my feet led me here. Please forgive me, doll.” He reaches for her and she lets him pull her into a hug.

“Don’t ever do that again,” She mutters into his chest.

“Never?” He leans back, grinning unrepentantly.
She snorts. His charm is ridiculous. It’s not right how quickly her anger fades. “Maybe we need to have a signal so you don’t scare the life out of me. You know, I heard you coming when you were still on the first floor.”

“Really? Hmmm.”

“Yes, really. My hearing is very sharp. If you tapped on the railing on the first flight I’d know it was you.”

“Something like ‘shave and a haircut’?”

“That would do.” She shivers, it’s cold in just her nightgown.

He hugs her tighter, “Cold?”

She nods against his chest.

His hands run down her back from nape to the small of her back. She shivers for a different reason. He steps back, looking into her eyes.

“Why don’t you get back into bed? I can leave if you want me to.”

She sits on the bed before sliding beneath the covers. He watches as she lays back, pulling the covers up to her shoulders. He stands, uncertain, before turning back to the window.

“No,” She flips back the edge of the blanket and beckons him over, “stay.”

He approaches the bed, sitting on the edge and pulling off his shoes, coat, and scarf. He drops them on the floor next to the bed and slides under the covers. He sighs as she pulls the blankets up to their shoulders.

She lays on her side, looking at him. He’s on his back, the light from the window outlining his profile. Her eyes trace the thick curve of his eyelashes, the bridge of his nose, and his full lips. He turns toward her, throwing his face in shadow.

“Where did you get the gun?” He says, stroking the side of her face from temple to chin.

“It was my grandpa’s. He taught Will and I to shoot when we were 12. I learned on a rifle, then the pistol.” She wiggles a little closer to him, resting her forehead against his chest. “Ma sent it with me when I moved here, for protection.”

“It’s a good thing,” he murmurs. He’s quiet for a few moments, running his hand down her back from her neck to the curve of her waist then back up again. “I learned how to shoot a rifle from my Da. He was a sharpshooter in the Army during the Great War. Used to take me up to Camp Lehigh to shoot with him and some Army buddies. Got pretty good, but I haven’t gotten to practice much since he died.”

She shivers again, the heat of his hand branding the small of her back. “We should practice shooting sometime. Will mentioned Howard’s making some things he may want me to test for him. Will’s an excellent pilot, but I’m the better shot.”

She strokes her fingers through his hair and he hums, leaning his head back into her hand. His hair is soft and thick, she scratches her fingers against his scalp and he arches, a husky, “mmmm,” escaping him. She laughs softly, “What is it with you and Steve liking your heads scratched? Like puppies, I swear.”
“Feels good, you make me feel so good,” he sighs.

She continues to scratch his scalp from the crown of his head to the nape of his neck then up again before stroking down to the base of his neck again.

“What was your dream about?”

She hears his breath hitch, feels his neck heat under her hand.

He leans forward, running his lips up her neck and stopping at her ear. He whispers, “I dreamed we were in bed together, naked, and you were sitting on top of me.”

And just like that she is so hot for him.

Her nails dig into his neck and she arches into him reflexively, feeling shivery all over. He licks her neck before gently sucking the skin under her ear. She shudders and choke out, “I want that.”

He sucks in a breath, groaning low, pressing his hips into her, “Mmmm, doll. I’m so dizzy for you.”

He trails his lips along her jawbone, making her shiver and squirm. She draws her leg up, curling it over his hip, and digs her heel into his backside, pulling him closer. She feels like her heart is going to burst.

*God, so hot.*

He rolls her onto her back, his elbows resting on either side of her. They lay, chest to chest, his lips a hair's breadth from hers, the warmth of his breath washing over her lips.

She wonders if he can feel her heart pounding.

She surges up, her lips pressing into his before parting to lick his bottom lip.

They kiss almost violently, tongues tangling and lips wet and sucking, until they have to pull back, gasping for breath. They kiss again, slow, drugging kisses, until their lips are swollen and her cheeks are reddened from the stubble of his beard. He trails kisses down her neck, his mouth hot, sucking a bruise into the skin where her pulse hammers. The mark will fade to nothing within minutes, she wishes it would stay longer.

She weaves her fingers in his hair, pulling slightly as his hand grabs her hip rocking her as he grinds his cock into her as if there were no clothes between them. She moans, and he slides his hand behind her knee to hitch her other leg around his waist and she feels like she cannot get close enough. Bucky continues nipping and sucking her neck like it’s his mission to mark her.

She reaches for the buttons of his shirt, hands shaking as she slowly unbuttons it, finally pulling at it in frustration until Bucky laughs and reaches behind him with one arm to pull his shirt and undershirt over his head in one quick yank. He drops it on the floor and she runs her hands over his chest, reveling in the smooth warmth of his skin and the hard muscles underneath it.

She remembers the things he’d done to her when they’d been together on New Year’s Day, and circles her fingers on his chest til she gets to his nipples and flicks them lightly with her fingers, watching his response.

He gasps and she grins before licking him there instead, one, then the other, sucking and listening to his pulse race as she traces her fingers down his stomach to the edge of his pants.
The tight press of their bodies stops her fingers from going further. She sucks harder at his nipple before nibbling with the edge of her teeth. He groans, pulling her head back by her hair, kissing her again, their tongues tangling as he presses into the wet heat between her legs.

He pulls up her nightgown, sliding a hand under it to grasp her bottom, kneading one cheek and pulling her up into each slow grind of his hips. Her head tips back again, back arching as he nuzzles her breasts through the cloth covering them, his mouth wetting the fabric over her nipples. She tugs at her nightgown, lifting her shoulders to pull it up and over her head, dropping it to the floor.

“God, baby,” Bucky moans before stroking a hand over her breasts, “so beautiful,” he sucks the skin of the upper curve of one breast, trailing kisses to it’s tip and pulling her nipple into his mouth, sucking harder when she moans and arches into him.

She cradles his head in her hands, pulling at his soft hair as he releases her nipple with a pop and blows on it, making her shiver against him. He repeats the action on her other breast and she circles her hips against him, desperately seeking relief from the winding pressure and heat building between her legs. She whines as he descends her body, pulling his hips away from her in favor of kissing and licking down her stomach, the scruff of his unshaven cheeks abrading the tender skin there. He reaches the edge of her panties and hooks a finger under the waistband.

“Can I take these off, doll?” He whispers, his voice husky with need.

She slides her hands to her hips, fingers hooking under the waistband and raising her hips to pull her panties down her thighs, Bucky pulls them the rest of the way off.

He runs his hands over her feet and up her legs, massaging her calves and thighs before brushing over the curls between her legs, sliding one calloused finger along her damp slit, rubbing back and forth over the sensitive bundle of nerves at the apex. She arches into him, moaning, “Mmmmmm, oh god, Bucky.”

“So wet, doll,” he strokes her again, parting her nether lips with his finger and probing gently at her opening. She jumps a little, the sensation different somehow than when she’s touched herself.

He presses into her slowly and she arches into his fingers, trying to force him to move faster, press a little harder.

“More,” she gasps.

He pulls away, sliding down so his face is between her legs, his breath hot on her. She props herself on her elbows to look down at him, the dim light from the window barely illuminating the bed.

“What are you doing?” she whispers.

“Do you trust me?” She catches the glint of his silvery eyes as he looks up at her.

“Yes. Absolutely.”

He nudges her thigh, “Spread your legs some, I want to kiss you here.” He strokes between her legs and she raises an eyebrow, wondering why he’d want to do that.

“I promise you’ll like it,” he urges.

She takes a deep breath, letting it out. “Ok.” She rests against the pillows, spreading her legs slightly. He moves forward on his belly, using his shoulders to push her thighs further apart before hooking a knee over each shoulder. She whimpers and throws an arm over her face, feeling awkward and
inexperienced.

He pauses, “Darcy, don’t hide, baby,” his hand strokes her breasts and belly and she moves her arm to peek down at him. “I want to see you. I want you to watch.”

*Oh god. His voice.*

She feels indescribably hotter, even if she’s a little anxious. “I just don’t know what to expect and it scares me a little.”

“Watch me. That way you won’t be surprised.” He runs a finger down between her legs again, stroking back and forth, and she hisses, arching involuntarily into his hand.

“Mmmm—that’s it, babydoll,” he groans, spreading the lips of her sex and leaning in to press his mouth to her, flicking his tongue back and forth over the tight bud of nerves at the top of her slit.

*Oh my—*

She does like this.

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Bucky has done this a few times, there was a young widow he’d spent some time with a couple years ago who taught him quite a bit.

This though, is something else. He feels near to bursting, and he knows he has to focus on Darcy’s pleasure before he embarrasses himself with a quick end.

But, still.

He presses his cock into the mattress as she moans with his first taste of her. Sweet and somehow floral with a slightly tart undertone.

*Goddamn.*

He gazes up at her as she tosses her head on the pillow, her features blurred in the shadowy room. Her hair is spread like a dark halo around her face, her kiss swollen lips parted. Her breasts rise and fall with her breathing, nipples jutting out diamond hard. She tangles her hands in her own hair as she arches into his mouth.

He licks around her nub, gently inserting the tip of one finger into her opening, and she feels velvety soft, hot, and tight. He watches her face, eyes now focused on him as his tongue works her, and moans as she presses into him, his finger slipping further into her as a gush of wetness coats it.

He lets her lead, her hips churning against him and her thighs trembling around his head.

The little noises she’s making are driving him mad. She’s biting that full bottom lip of hers and she untangles her hands from her hair to slide them over her breasts, unselfconsciously stroking and pinching her nipples as she presses her hips up into his mouth.

She rocks faster and he crooks his finger inside of her, rubbing a little harder as he sucks on the swollen nub of flesh beneath his lips.
Her back arches tight as a bow as she peaks, her legs stiffening alongside his head as she shudders, moaning and panting into the pillow next to her head. He licks her through it, watching her face, eyes shut and lush mouth open, until her body starts to relax and she pulls away. Her hips roll as he slides his finger out of her, and he sucks it into his mouth without thinking, eager for one last taste of her.

He wipes his face on the sheet and grins. She looks wrecked, laying boneless against the pillows with a lazy smile of satisfaction on her face. He crawls over her to kiss her soft lips, gazing into her dazed eyes as she sinks her hands into his hair, humming with pleasure.

She pulls back, sighing, “You were right. I did like that.” She kisses him again, languid and soft. “Thank you.”

“No, thank you. It was a pleasure.”

She looks into his eyes, shadowed in the dim room, and smiles.

They lay in silence, running their hands over each other for a few minutes before she reaches for the buttons of his fly. He’s still hard as a rock and there’s a damp spot on the front of his pants that is not just from her excitement.

“It’s your turn,” she whispers, unbuttoning his pants and pulling at them. He grins, raising his hips to assist her in removing them.

Darcy shoves his pants down and off his legs, flinging them over the side of the bed before pulling his socks off too. She wants him entirely naked, like her. She kneels at his feet, looking up his body to meet his eyes. He’s spread out on her pillows, one arm folded behind his head and he sucks his bottom lip into his mouth, biting it with a flash of white teeth as he watches her intently.

He’s beautiful all over, not just his face. His wide shoulders are heavily muscled from the hard work he does at the docks, and he has a light dusting of chest hair that tapers down to nothing over the ridges of muscle on his flat stomach before thickening again below his belly button. His skin is pale, but not as pale as hers. Unlike her, he probably browns in the sun.

She traces her hands up his muscled calves, the dusting of hair on his legs crinkling against the palms of her hands. She crawls over him, her knees on either side of his thighs and braces her hands on his narrow hips, thumbs running up the inner crease of his thighs next to his balls.

Bucky moans, “Baby, you’re killing me,” and flexes his hips up. She feels the skin of his sack tighten next to her thumbs and watches his cock jerk, seemingly of its own accord. She leans forward, running her nose along the crease of his thigh, before licking there too.

He tastes salty, like clean sweat and there’s a slightly musky scent that is uniquely his. She gently grasps his cock, and Bucky grunts, convulsively jerking his hips upward. She lays a hand on his hip to hold him still and Bucky whines a little as she tightens her grip.

The last time she’d seen him naked, it had been so new and startling that she hadn’t really registered the dimensions of him. He is thick in her hand, her fingers about an inch away from meeting where she clasps him at the base. She slowly strokes upward, marveling at the silken feeling of his skin, the
slickness near the thick head. From what she can tell, he is long, though she has no basis for comparison.

She strokes him again. She whispers, “Are most men about this size when they are hard?” He seems big to her, the only penises she’s ever seen were flaccid so she doesn’t know for certain.

He chuckles softly, his breath hitching as she strokes him again, “I’m a little bigger than average, doll.” She detects the pride in his voice and smirks.

“Hmmm. I’m not sure how this will fit inside of me.”

His breath stutters at this statement, his voice low and husky in reply, “Trust me, it will.”

She shrugs and leans forward, licking a stripe up the underside of him, swirling her tongue around the head. Bucky jerks again, gasping, her mouth on him unexpected.

“You don’t have to do that, doll,” he grunts, writhing a little under her mouth.

She stops, glancing up at him through her lashes. “You don’t like it?”

“Mmmm, it’s just, good girls never wanna do that.”

She tips her head, puzzled. “Am I not a good girl?”

“The best,” he whispers.

“Well, I think it’s only fair since you made me feel so good.”

“Don’t gotta twist my arm, doll. Right now I feel like the luckiest fella alive.”

She leans forward again, licking up the length of him and swirling around the tip. He tastes salty and she slightly bitter. Not bad. “Just tell me if you don’t like something.”

“Mmmhmm,” he mutters hoarsely as she takes the tip of him into her mouth, swirling her tongue around him as she lowers her mouth further. His hips jerk again and he gasps, and she tightens her grip on his hip to hold him still.

She keeps her hand grasped at the base of him, stroking upward as she pulls her mouth up to the tip, cheeks hollowing as she sucks him before plunging back down, swirling her tongue around him. She keeps her teeth away, curling her lips around them on the downstroke.

Bucky starts to babble, growling things like, “just like that, baby,” and “mmmm, God,” and “my girl, oh, so good, doll,” and Darcy wants to see him come undone.

She quickens her pace, careful not to take him too far into her mouth and gag herself. She loosens her hand from his hip, bringing it down to cup his balls, stroking them and feeling how tight and high they are.

She bobs her mouth up and down a handful of times, stroking him with her tongue and sucking at the tip, Bucky moans a litany of praise and curses as his heart pounds faster and faster.

He grunts and gasps, “I’m gonna come baby,” and wraps a hand in her hair, pulling her off him and moving her hand up and down his cock two more strokes before his back arches, buttocks clenching, and he comes in thick spurts on his belly, with a deep groan of completion.

She licks her lips, feeling accomplished, and crawls up the bed to lay on her side next to him.
Bucky pulls her to him, cupping her face and kissing her slowly.

She’d taken him in her mouth. Not a single one of the girls he’s been with had done that for him. It somehow felt more intimate than anything he’d ever done with a woman.

*My girl. So perfect.*

Eventually, she pulls away, stroking her fingers down his face before sitting up, “I’ll go get you something to clean that up,” she whispers, gesturing to the mess he’d left on his belly.

He watches the sway of her hips as she walks to the door, slipping on the blue robe that hangs on the back of it. She glances back at him, pausing, her expression relaxed in the faint light from the window, before quickly exiting.

He gazes up at the ceiling, wrung out by the events of the past hour. Turning his head on the pillow he inhales the clean floral scent he always associates with Darcy.

Every other time he’s gotten this far with a girl, he was looking for a way to gracefully exit afterwards. Now he’s thinking of ways to stay, ways to never leave this bed.

It amazes him how quickly he’s fallen under her spell. Even Stevie, always quick to jump into conflict but shy with women, had felt comfortable enough to pursue her. She’s a strange combination of innocent and worldly. She’s read so much, experienced unusual things through her work and school and because of her abilities, yet she skipped over a lot of the rites of passage that most girls go through. She’s unfazed by things that leave other girls embarrassed or ashamed, using logic and her gut to work through new experiences. In matters of her heart and of her body, she makes up her own mind, unfettered by outside opinions.

He loves that about her.

*I love her.*

He turns his head towards the door as it clicks open. Light strobes across the ceiling from a passing car as Darcy enters the room, illuminating her pale skin and red lips, blue eyes squinting against the glare.

She approaches him, sitting on the edge of the bed and slowly dragging a warm, damp washcloth over his belly. She stands, throwing it into a basket next to the bed and slipping her robe off again. He reaches for her hand, tugging her back into bed with him and she lays on her side facing him, soft curves and smooth skin pressed into his side. He tugs the blankets over them and she kisses him, lips soft, her cold feet tangling with his.

“Your feet are freezing.”

“Good thing you’re here to warm them up.”

He snorts, wrapping his feet around hers. After a moment he turns onto his back and she snuggles into his shoulder, her hand stroking over his chest until it rests over his heart.
He feels warm and relaxed, almost euphoric. It’s almost perfect. He thinks he’d feel even better if Steve were here.

Strange, but true.

“Do you feel guilty when we do things like this without Steve?” he blurts out, he winces, wondering if he’s just ruined the moment.

She’s quiet for minute, her breath gently washing over his skin. “Hmmm. A little? It feels like he should be here, I don’t want him to feel left out.” She whispers, pressing a kiss to his chest.

He relaxes, relieved she feels it too.

“Have you and Steve done anything like this?” He waves his hand over the two of them.

“You mean getting naked and nearly having sex?” She asks, glancing up at him with mischievous eyes.

“Yeah, doll. And that was sex in my book. Just not the kind where we need to worry about making babies.”

She slaps his chest, burrowing further into his side, throwing a leg over him.

“And when are we gonna do the kind where I need to worry about that?”

He smooths a hand over her hip, marveling at the silky texture of her skin. “Whenever you’re ready, doll.” He tilts her chin up and kisses her then rests his forehead against hers.”I don’t want to rush, there’s only one first time after all.” She nods, and kisses him softly before laying her head back on his shoulder.

Her fingers trace circles on his chest as she says, “Steve and I have kissed a lot, and there’s some over the clothes touching. He gets me really wound up. But he’s less experienced, so I think he hesitates to do more.”

It’s probably a combination of not knowing how to move further and not really believing she’d want him. Steve’s self-conscious about his body, he’s been picked on his whole life. It’s inevitably affected his confidence.

“You might need to show him you want more than that.”

Part of him feels like this is the strangest conversation to be having with the girl he loves. The larger part of him is concerned about his best friend’s heart. As fearless as Steve is, he still lacks confidence in this area and worries he’ll scare Darcy away.

“I can try. We may both have to work on him though. You could maybe talk to him?”

He knows Steve. If he thinks he and Darcy are intimate in more ways than she is with Steve then he’ll wonder if he should just bow out. “I used to tell Steve everything I did with the girls I went out with. Everything. It was partly because it’d get his goat. He’d get all fired up and offended on their behalf.” He sighs, the punk is such a gentleman. The irony of him defending girls who wouldn’t give him the time of day isn’t lost on Bucky. “But I haven’t told him much about us,” he grazes her forehead with a kiss, “felt disrespectful, didn’t wanna step on his toes or make what we have look cheap.”

He feels her lips curve up in a smile against his skin. “Good to know you don’t think I’m cheap,” she
teases before adding, “I guess there’s no blueprint for this sort of relationship. I mean, people date casually, sometimes seeing a few people at a time, but they don’t usually date best friends, in a serious way, where everyone involved is committed to each other.”

“I know. I’ve never dated sisters, or even best friends. Hell, that’s a recipe for disaster.”

“People usually don’t like to share.”

“I share everything with Stevie. Before you came along, there was no one, outside of family, who was closer to me. I really don’t get upset about the three of us together. Seems right.”

She sighs, “All I know is, I wanna kiss you and kiss him and maybe do more and not feel like I can only do that if I’m alone with one or the other of you.”

He remembers the dream he’d had, Steve kissing him while Darcy was grinding on top of him had been the hottest thing he could imagine. He isn’t sure how he’d feel about that in real life. He’s always loved Stevie but he shies away from the idea of their relationship being more than that of the closest friends.

“Well, maybe you should just do what you want—see what happens.”

“Maybe,” she squirms around, turning away from him onto her side and he curls around her, one arm around her waist, the other under her neck where her cheek rests against it. He breathes in the scent of her hair. She yawns, “We still going dancing later?”

“Of course.” He’s been looking forward to it all week.

“Wanna ask Steve to go, too?”

If she’d asked him a couple of hours ago, he would have hesitated. He wanted some alone time with her. But now? He has her in his arms. He’s feeling satisfied, the restlessness that has plagued him for days has evaporated.

“Sure, doll.” He squeezes her tighter against him, luxuriating in the warmth of her skin.

He feels her eyelashes flutter against his arm, her eyes closing. “You staying til it gets light?” she whispers.

“If it’s okay with you. Don’t want Stevie to worry though,” he yawns. “I’ll leave by 7.”

She nods against him, muscles growing lax as she drifts towards sleep. “Love you, Bucky.”

He grins.

So damn happy.

He kisses her temple, curls around the warmth of her body, and murmurs, “Love you too, sweet girl.”
So that happened. Second foray into smutty times and it seems to be getting less awkward to write. What did you think?
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Darcy reads Steve some poetry, they have some intimate moments that lead to an asthma attack. Darcy helps him relax, despite his self-consciousness. Then things get very heated.

Bucky comes home to find his favorite people in bed together.

Chapter Notes

Unbetad. I apologize for any grammatical errors or clunky syntax. Feverishly rereading this chapter 3 times and fine tuning it each time is the best I can do!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Friday, February 7, 1941

Steve rests his head in Darcy's lap as she leans against the arm of the sofa, reading a book. She threads her fingers through his hair, stopping every so often to trace his face with her fingers, smiling softly at him before returning to her reading. He brings her hand to his mouth, kissing each fingertip before holding it against his chest. He closes his eyes in contentment.

The last few weeks they've grown closer.

From the beginning, Darcy has been tactile, touching his arm, hugging him, running her hands through his hair. But lately, every time they kiss she deepens it, pressing against him, stroking his back and working her hands under his shirt to touch his skin.

The other day, Bucky pulled her into his lap as the three of them sat on the sofa, kissing her with his hands wound in her hair until they broke apart, panting. Darcy tilted her head back as Bucky sucked a bruise into her neck, his eyes glinting at Steve over her shoulder with one eyebrow raised, the unspoken, "What are ya gonna do, punk?" evident in his expression.

What he'd done was squirm with a combination of desire and embarrassment until Darcy slid off Bucky’s lap and turned to him, kissing him senseless. She nuzzled his neck, placing open mouthed kisses along its length as Bucky stared unwaveringly at them, biting his lip and shamelessly smirking at Steve.

Whenever they aren’t working, they're together in some configuration. They go to shows, cook together, read together. He loves quiet times like this, his head in her lap as she reads, sometimes she reads aloud to him, sometimes she tells him stories about back home and the people there.

He likes to picture the farm in Iowa, Darcy and Will riding horses or playing in the swimming hole.
What would it be like to be somewhere that the horizon is uncluttered by tall buildings? What do the stars look like at night when there is perfect darkness, unbroken by streetlights?

Funny, when he and Bucky talked about their future it was always the two of them getting better jobs, a nicer apartment, and dating pretty girls. He’d always assumed they’d live together, and now he pictures Darcy there too.

He opens his eyes to gaze up at her. Her hand still rests on his chest, fingers idly stroking, her blue eyes intent on her book. Her eyes track quickly back and forth, a smile curving her lips before stopping to look down at him. He gently pulls one of the curls at her hairline, smoothing it straight before letting it spring back again.

“What’re ya reading, Darce?”

“Poetry.”

He raises a brow, “Huh. Usually you're reading stuff for school.”

“This is for relaxation. I like the images and ideas in poetry, the way writers try to get under the surface of things. It’s like painting with words.”

He’s never been much for poetry. He likes to read stories with action or history. When he was a kid the only stuff he read was for school and the comics he’d hoard his pennies to buy. He still loves comics for the artwork. He studies the line work and the way the simple, graphic drawings convey movement and emotion with few strokes of a pen.

It’s amazing really.

“Read me something, doll.”

She smiles and returns her gaze to the page, her fingers tracing over the words before looking down at him again.

“This one is sort of sad and beautiful. It’s by William Butler Yeats.”

He listens, closing his eyes as her soft voice washes over him.

“When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true,
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.”

She gently traces a finger over his closed eyelids, down his nose and across his bottom lip. He kisses her fingertip and she says, “I like the part about the pilgrim soul. I always hoped to find someone who could really see me and accept me, not just focus on my outside appearance. I like the idea of
our souls traveling through life, our bodies vehicles for the most important part of who we are.”

He thinks of the reasons he loves her. Her kindness and curiosity, the way she’s always sharing all she has with he and Bucky. He loves her laugh, and the way she makes everyday things seem special. He loves the way she stands up for the things she believes and likes to form her own opinion.

The way every time he’s with her it feels like home.

He grasps her hand again, squeezing it gently. “Love ya, Darcy. Your pilgrim soul, your generous heart, and everythin’ else.”

He feels the brush of her hair against his face and opens his eyes to find her leaning over him, her eyes inches away from his. She cups his face in her hands, and tears well in her eyes as she whispers, “And I love you, Steven Grant Rogers. Don’t ever doubt it.”

_Ah, god. She should never cry._

He sits up, turning to pull her into his arms. “Don’t cry.”

“Happy tears, Stevie. I just love you so much that it overwhelms me a little.” She presses her face into his neck, and he slides his hand up under her hair, wrapping it around her nape and anchoring her to him.

She sighs, resting against him, her breath soft against his skin.

Eventually, they lay down on the narrow sofa. They’re both small, so they manage, fitting together like puzzle pieces. They lay on their sides facing each other, her chin hooked over his shoulder and his arms wrapped around her.

He inhales the scent of her hair, his nose ghosting over her cheek before his lips meet hers in a long, slow kiss. He likes this, the slow drag of their tongues, sucking her bottom lip in his mouth. He closes his eyes, his fingers reading her face like Braille. Her teeth nibble at his lips, and the slow building flame of arousal flashes into incendiary heat.

Suddenly, his pulse is like a drumbeat in his head, in his cock.

She hooks her leg over his hip, bringing their centers closer together and he moans. She runs her fingers through his hair, grasping it and tilting his head back so she can trace open mouthed kisses up the side of his neck to just under his jaw, where she gently bites him, panting into his ear as she tightens her leg over his hip, her heel digging into the back of his thigh and pulling him harder against her.

Steve’s hand spasms on the swell of her hip, pulling her closer, before he slides his hand up the back of her shirt. She gasps as his hand trails up the hot, silky skin of her back, and he catches her mouth again in a deep kiss. She whimpers into his mouth and he flexes his hips against her.

He wants to kiss her like this forever, but he feels his breath getting short, and pulls back to look into her face. Her cheeks are flushed, the light dew of sweat at her hairline causing the little hairs there to curl into spirals. She places her hand over his heart, brow furrowed in concern, and leans in to kiss under his jaw again.

“You okay?” She whispers.

“Yeah, just a little out of breath.”
He huffs, angry with his body.

Angry with how it slows him down.

His heart shudders in his chest and he feels his lungs constricting. She leans into him, head cocked, and he knows she’s listening to his breathing, following the erratic beat of his heart.

She sits up, getting to her feet and turning to pull him to his feet as well.

“Let’s get you somewhere we can lay down more comfortably and not be so squashed.”

He ducks his head, feeling bashful.

Oh, the nights he’d thought of having her in his bed, doing the things Bucky has described in lusty detail after many of his dates. He wants to sweep her off her feet, carry her to his bed, and make passionate love to her.

He wants it so badly.

But he is weak, not a tall, strong, man like Bucky.

She rests her hand on the side of his face and he leans into it, her storm blue eyes concerned.

She whispers, “Come on, Stevie. Let me make you feel better.”

He nods and tips his head towards the hall and she smiles, grasping his hand and pulling him towards the bedroom door. He looks around the room, thankful that he’d actually made his bed this morning.

His side of the room is always a bit messy. There are sketchbooks and pencils strewn on the dresser next to his bed, a plate with a crust of bread on it from the night before, and a shirt on the floor. His messiness drives Bucky a little crazy, but Steve thinks Bucky is a little too neat.

Sometimes, he leaves stuff laying around to see how long it takes before Bucky cracks and cleans it up.

Darcy pauses in the doorway, noting the pristinely clean side of the room that is Bucky’s and his own messy side before unerringly heading to his side of the room. She sits on the edge of his bed, patting the space beside her.

Steve sits, struggling to diminish the wheezing of his inhalations. Darcy strokes his shoulder before taking his hand in hers. She turns toward him, her face earnest.

“Steve, you trust me, right?”

He nods and she continues, “I want you to take your shirt off and lay down on your stomach.”

His looks down at his lap as his cheeks flush with embarrassment. Darcy has never seen him without his clothes. They’ve touched each other plenty, but over their clothes. As much as he longs to see her body, it never felt right to press for more when he himself feels so reluctant to take his clothes off. He’s afraid she’ll see him, skinny and frail as he is, and find him unattractive. He’s pretty sure it would crush him beyond repair if he saw any hint of pity or disgust on her face.

Plus, she has Bucky for that.

She doesn’t need him.
Darcy looks at Steve’s downturned face and sees the thoughts chasing across it. He sucks his bottom lip into his mouth and looks up at her beneath his ridiculously long lashes.

Really.

His eyes are prettier than those of most women she’s met. She pushes his thick, blond hair back from his forehead and tilts his head back, kissing him gently along his jaw until she reaches his ear.

“I love you, Stevie, and I wanna make you feel good. Please let me?” She whispers.

“Um, what do you wanna do?” he says.

“I’m gonna rub your back. If I can get your muscles to relax it will help your breathing.”

“Oh. Can’t you do it with my shirt on?” He says in a small voice.

Her heart breaks for him. She wants to hurt everyone who’s ever hurt him. She vows to herself to show him how much she loves him as often as possible.

She clears her throat, her voice hoarse with suppressed tears, “No. It will feel better with my hands on your skin.”

He sighs, “Oh, Ok.”

He turns away from her, sliding his suspenders from his shoulders, then unbuttoning his shirt and dropping it to the floor before pulling his undershirt over his head and tossing it aside. He quickly lays on his belly in the center of the bed, head turned to the side to watch her.

She stands next to the bed and he shivers as she runs a hand down the pale expanse of skin over his spine from his neck to the small of his back. She leans over and removes his shoes before sitting on the edge of the bed next to his hip. His breathing is labored and his heart is racing.

She hopes this idea doesn’t backfire and make his asthma worse.

She gently places both hands at his shoulders and presses inward toward his spine, running her hands along his back in methodical even strokes. She continues in this manner for several minutes, getting him accustomed to the feel of her hands on his skin.

Though much thinner than Bucky, Steve’s body is beautiful in its own way. His skin is smooth and unblemished, the kind of golden paleness that some blonds possess. His shoulders are wider than hers and his waist and hips are very narrow. She can see the bumps of his vertebrae and feel the jut of his rib bones as she presses down on the muscles in the middle of his back. Despite his thinness, he has wiry muscles, all the more obvious because of how lean he is. He’s like one of those racing dogs, greyhounds, she thinks. All twitchy muscles and thin skin, ready to bolt at a moment’s notice.

His heartbeat starts to settle as she continues to work and his muscles begin to relax. He closes his eyes, melting into the bed as she works on releasing the knots in the muscles just under his shoulder blades. He sighs deeply, moaning slightly as she firmly works her thumbs into his muscles.

After a moment, she kicks off her shoes and rolls down her stockings, throwing them on the floor
and clambering onto the bed. She crawls over him until she straddles his thighs, settling on her knees with her hands pressing into the small of his back. He glances over his shoulder, his cheeks flushed and eyes tranquil.

“Let me know if it hurts too much,” she says, leaning forward to kiss the center of his back.

“M’ok, Darce—feels good,” he murmurs, laying his head back on his pillow and closing his eyes.

She works on his back and then the muscles of his shoulders and arms for nearly half an hour before the wheezing in his lungs subsides and she lightens her touch to soft circling strokes of his back, lightly scratching with her nails across his shoulder blades and down as he sighs with contentment. She wishes he was completely naked. She wants to touch all of him, and once he relaxes, Steve is like a purring cat pressing up into her hands and humming whenever she scratches a particularly pleasurable spot.

She leans forward, kissing the back of his neck before trailing her lips down his spine, leaving open mouthed, sucking, kisses as she goes. He shivers and goosebumps rise on his skin. His hands grip the edges of his pillow and his hips press into the bed.

He groans as she kisses back up to his neck, nosing along his jaw and kissing his cheek. She runs a hand down each of his arms and laces her fingers with his, pressing her breasts into his back. Steve grips her fingers, pushing up against her as she sucks his earlobe into her mouth.

“Darce?”

“Hmmm?” She hums into his ear, before kissing him just behind it.

“Hold on.”

He lets go of her hands and turns onto his side, toppling her onto the bed. In a moment he has her pinned beneath him, his hands spearing through her hair as he kisses her.

She tilts her head and licks into his mouth and soon their tongues are stroking against each other as they exchange slow, deep kisses, pausing for breath only to start over again. She arches her back, pressing her breasts into his chest as he kisses along her jaw, gently nibbling her neck where her pulse pounds against his lips.

He pulls back to look at her, running his thumb over the fading mark he’s just made, his blue eyes intent on hers. She curves her hand around his face, tracing his bottom lip with her thumb until he catches it with his teeth, nipping it gently before turning his face to kiss her palm.

She pulls him closer until their eyes are inches apart, their lips nearly touching.

“You can take off my shirt if you want,” she whispers, stroking a hand down his naked back, “it’s only fair.”

His eyes widen and she hears his pulse pick up, “You sure?”

“Yes. I want to feel your skin against mine.”

He tips his head back, inhaling deeply before he kisses her again, hard, her lips parting under his for long moments before he kisses her jaw, then noses under the collar of her shirt to kiss her at the junction of neck and shoulder. He pulls back, resting on his elbows as she unbuttons her shirt. He turns onto his side so she can loosen the last few buttons then gently pushes her hands away, grasping the edges of her shirt to spread it open. He sucks in a breath, eyes tracing the line of her
collarbones down to the upper curve of her breasts, just peeking over the edge of her bra. He pushes
the edges of her shirt back further before tracing his fingers gently down the straps of her bra and
then over the edge of it, following the line of it over the curves of her breasts. Her nipples harden in
response and she squirms a little as his fingers trace over them, his face flushed and eyes shining.

He bites his lip and looks up at her, fingering the strap of her bra again. “Can I take this off too?”

She smiles, glad he’s not afraid to ask for what he wants.

“Yes.”

She raises up onto her elbows and finishes pulling her shirt off, dropping it over the side of the bed
before reaching back to unhook her bra. She hunches her shoulders slightly, shimmying the straps
halfway down her arms, glancing up at Steve through her lashes before hooking a finger under the
front edge between her breasts and pulling it the rest of the way off.

She grins as Steve’s eyes widen and he sucks in a stunned breath.

Steve has never seen a naked woman before.

Not in person, anyway.

He’s seen pictures.

He and Bucky had spent some significant time when they were little more than kids furtively
studying some dirty postcards from France. When he was in art school, the models had been
tastefully draped with a sheet, enough that they were covered without obscuring the lines of their
bodies. That had been titillating at first, but something he soon became accustomed to once he
focused on his work.

But this.

Darcy is lovely.

He’s always known that. But seeing her under him, with her hair mussed and lips swollen from his
kisses, makes her the most beautiful thing he’s ever seen. Half naked as she is, he’s nearly
overwhelmed.

Her breasts.

Damn.

For such a petite girl, she has curves for days.

His gaze travels back to hers and she smiles. “I know, they’re distracting.” She wiggles a little,
grinning, “you can touch, you know.”

He is the luckiest man alive.

He leans over her, kissing her lips softly, cataloging the feeling of her soft curves pressed against his
chest. The sensation of her skin against his is sublime.

She wraps her hand around his neck, her fingers twisting in his hair and pulling him closer as the kiss
deepens. Their heads tilt to slot their mouths together more firmly and her nails dig into his neck, the
slight sting more stimulating than painful. Their mouths open, hers questing to lick his lips then
stroking along his tongue.

He pulls back to breathe, peppering her cheek and then her neck with soft kisses as she combs her
fingers through his hair. He moves lower, running his lips along her collar bones and then down her
sternum, inhaling her floral scent which seems most concentrated in the valley between her breasts.
He turns his head, mouthing the inner curve of one breast, the skin incredibly soft and smooth. He
brings his hand up to touch, tracing underneath and around her full curves before settling on one
puckered nipple. She arches a little into his hand, her legs rubbing restlessly together as he traces one
nipple then the other, before gently pinching one between thumb and forefinger. She gasps and lets
out a little squeak and he focuses on her face, finding her head tilted back, storm blue eyes gleaming
at half mast.

He smirks and pinches again, a little harder and she bites her lip and trembles, pushing her breast
more firmly into his hand. He releases her, leaning forward to kiss and lick around each nipple before
sucking one into his mouth. Her hands spasm in his hair and she wraps one leg around his waist,
pressing her heel into the back of his thigh to bring him closer.

He sucks at her nipple, pulling as much as he can into his mouth and rubbing his tongue against the
underside. She whimpered, her fingers kneading the sides of his head, pulling him closer as her hips
churn against him.

God.

He could do this all day, just to hear her make those sounds. He feels inexplicably powerful that he
has this effect on her.

He sucks and licks each of her nipples until they are hard reddened points, using his teeth to gently
nibble before starting over again, listening as her whimpers and gasps become more frantic.

He licks and kisses up her chest, pulling himself to her mouth again and kisses her til his breath runs
out, moaning as she wraps her legs around his hips, her skirt bunching around her thighs as she
grinds into his painfully hard cock.

If she doesn’t stop he’s going to make a mess in his pants. “Ugh. Darcy. We gotta slow down,” he
pants against her lips.

She whines, “Don’t wanna, it feels so good.”

He grunts, feeling the heat of her even through the layers of clothes between them. “Baby, it does.”
she digs her heel into his ass, and he moans, “Mmmmgod,” as she softly keens into his neck.

Oh, God—

He’s barely hanging on. He pushes up to his elbows, resting his forehead on hers. He slides one
hand down her belly to the waistband of her skirt. “Can I take this off?”

Darcy looks frantic, her face flushed and pupils blown, “Please.”

She unzips the zipper at her hip and he leans to the side and helps her wiggle out of her skirt. He
touches her lacy panties, running his fingers over them, mesmerized by the sight of her splayed
before him. The fabric at her crotch is translucent with wetness, and when he runs a finger between
her legs she moans, “Please, Stevie. Please.”

Shockingly, she grasps the waistband of her panties and pulls them down, shimmying them to the top
of her thighs before Steve jumps into action and pulls them the rest of the way off. He looks up the length of her body from the foot of his bed and swallows with a suddenly dry throat.

She’s naked.

*Jesus.*

Heat surges into his cock, and his pants feel unbearably tight. He sucks in his breath, frantically reciting baseball statistics in his head to calm down. He breathes slowly, willing himself to focus on pleasing her. In through his nose, out through his mouth as he traces his fingers over the tops of her feet, gently circling his hands around her ankles to pull her legs slightly apart so he can crawl up between them. He leans down to kiss each of her knees before stroking up her thighs, mapping the silky, pale skin stretched over her taut muscles.

Much as his own arousal is nearly overwhelming him, his curiosity wins out as he gradually calms. He methodically traces his fingers and lips over every inch of her thighs, cataloguing the tiny birthmark just above her knee, another high on her inner thigh, until he reaches the dark triangle of curls between them. Darcy shakes, her hands clutching the sheets as he gently spreads her legs wider to get a closer look.

He glances again at her flushed face and she smiles tremulously at him, silently encouraging him to explore.

He strokes his fingers along the top of her thighs, gently tracing along the crease where her legs meet her pelvis and down until he cards his fingers through the curls between her legs. She twitches, bucking up when he slides one finger along her damp slit, spreading her legs further as he slowly strokes up and down.

He tilts his head, gazing raptly at the glistening pink lips exposed by his questing fingers. He remembers every dirty detail of Bucky’s play by play narrations about women he’s had over the years, but he never mentioned how velvety soft a woman is between her legs.

Darcy is wet and pink and perfect. He leans in, stroking her up and down as she whines, flexing her hips in counterpoint to his stroking.

He glances up, meeting her eyes, “Show me what to do?”

She stares at him, eyes wide and cheeks flushed a deep pink. After a moment she takes a deep breath and inches her hand down between her thighs, using her index finger to stroke up and down her slit until she focuses near the top of it, rubbing herself in quick circles.

He watches as she slides her other hand lower, arching her back and slowly penetrates herself with another finger. He leans forward onto his belly, resting his head on her thigh, breathing in the sweet, musky scent of her as he watches her work herself. Her head is thrown back, eyes closed as she rocks her hips back and forth against her hands.

After a moment, he crawls up alongside her and pushes her hands away, whispering, “let me,” when she whines in protest. He circles the hardened nub at the top of her slit with his thumb before slowly sliding his middle finger into her wet heat.

*Jesus.*

She feels soft and hot inside, his finger slips slowly in and out of her as she rocks into it and he kisses her again, rubbing his cock against her hip until she turns on her side towards him, throwing her leg over his hip and creeping her hand down his belly under the waistband of his pants.
He pulls back from her lips with a gasp and she looks up at him, hips stilling and eyes hazy with want. “Can I?”

He nods and she unbuttons his pants, pulling them and his undershorts down around his thighs. He resumes stroking his thumb over her and slides his finger back inside her. He realizes her breath catches every time he crooks his finger so he continues to rub back and forth over that same spot as she wraps her hand around his cock.

They kiss wildly, hands stroking each other and hips rocking. By some miracle, he feels her trembling increase and her leg locking around his hip as she moans and shakes around him, gasping don’t stop, don’t stop, don’t stop. He reaches his end seconds later, coming over her hand and onto her belly, his breath seizing up and vision going white.

He slumps into her, his forehead resting against her chest and both of them pant as their hearts slow. He realizes his hand is still cupped between her thighs and slides it to her hip, pulling her closer to kiss her lips.

He sighs, looking down at the mess between them.

“Sorry about that, I’ll get something to clean us up.”

He hitches his pants up, leaving them partially unbuttoned as he heads to the bathroom to wash up.

He returns with a wet wash rag to find Darcy still sprawled naked on his bed, eyes closed, with her sticky hand resting on her belly.

She opens her eyes, smiling at him as he gingerly cleans her fingers and belly, and he feathers little kisses over her face and neck before he lays down beside her.

She curls onto her side, and he wraps himself around her. Their heads share the pillow on the narrow bed and they talk softly as he gently strokes her shoulder and side, then over the soft skin of her hip, until they drift into sleep.

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Bucky arrives home at nearly 10 pm, trudging up the stairs with his toolbox. He’d had dinner with Ma and Becca, then fixed the leaky sink in the bathroom and repaired one of her kitchen chairs. He’d had a hard time getting away. Ma had given him a sharp look when she asked him to stay the night and he declined, saying he slept better in his own bed and didn’t like leaving Stevie alone.

He enters the apartment, raising an eyebrow at Darcy’s coat on the arm of the sofa, along with her bag and some of her books. It’s quiet, the only light coming from the fixture over the kitchen sink. He shrugs out of his coat and hangs it on the hook next to the door, before crossing to the sink to get a glass of water. He carries it with him down the darkened hall, nudging the bedroom door open with his hip.

He stands still, leaning against the doorframe until his eyes adjust to the dark. It’s a clear night, the moon is full and bright, it’s light shining through the window. After a moment, the details of the room become visible.

Darcy and Steve are tangled up together in Steve’s bed, their bare shoulders and one of Darcy’s
shapely legs visible outside of the blankets.

Steve’s snoring, dead to the world.

Bucky smirks, moving closer, setting his water glass on the dresser between his bed and Steve’s.

“Bucky,” Darcy whispers, wiggling an arm from beneath the covers and reaching for him.

He crouches next to the bed and she strokes his cheek.

He turns his head to kiss her palm before reaching to smooth her hair back from her forehead. “Hey, doll. Did I wake you?” he says softly.

“Heard you come in. What time is it?”

“Almost 10pm.”

She sighs. He leans his forehead against hers, breathing in her scent. He runs a finger over her shoulder and down her arm and grins, “Are you naked under there?”

Darcy lightly smacks his fingers, “Maybe I am.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow, “Scandalous,” he slides the sheet down, revealing the tops of her breasts, “What shall I do?”

Steve raises his head over Darcy’s shoulder and grumbles, “How ‘bout you shut the hell up so I can sleep?” and flops back onto the mattress.

Darcy snorts and turns her face against Bucky’s arm, giggling.

Steve huffs and turns onto his side, burrowing his face into Darcy’s hair and tightening his arm around her.

Bucky grins and asks Darcy, “You staying the night?”

“Might as well. Will’s with Tony anyway,” she gently nudges Steve with her elbow, “Hey, Mr. Octopus. Let me up. I need to go to the bathroom.”

Steve whines and releases her, flopping onto his belly and pulling the pillow over his head as she sits up, blankets falling to her waist. Bucky can’t help but reach for her, pulling her to the edge of the mattress and kneeling between her legs to kiss her. She’s warm and soft, smelling like a mixture of Steve and herself. She tightens her legs alongside his hips as he deepens the kiss, licking into her mouth until she pulls back, groaning, “I really do have to pee. Can I borrow a shirt to sleep in?”

Oh. He doesn’t want to cover her up, not at all.

He wants to carry her over to his bed and touch her all over and kiss her some more, but he unbuttons the shirt he’s wearing and slips it around her, interspersing kisses between slowly buttoning it up. When it’s secure, he rolls up each sleeve before standing and helping her to her feet.

He grabs his water glass and follows behind her, admiring the sway of her hips and the way his shirt just barely covers the curves of her magnificent ass. Some primal part of him is undeniably pleased that it’s his shirt wrapped around her.

He heads to the kitchen while she’s in the bathroom and refills his glass of water. He opens the icebox to pull out some leftover ham, a block of cheese, and some brown mustard to make a
sandwich. He’s busy putting his sandwich together when Darcy’s soft figure presses against his back and her arms wrap around his waist.

He feels the warmth of her breath between his shoulder blades and shivers, “You want some too?” he murmurs.

She slides to his side, leaning into him and watching him slice some ham. “Yeah. Maybe just a half sandwich though.”

He cuts a piece of bread and points to the jar of mustard and she nods so he spreads some over it and folds it in half around a thick piece of ham and a slice of cheese. He hands it to her and they lean their backs against the counter, eating their sandwiches in silence.

After they finish eating she asks if she can use their shower and he follows her down the darkened hallway to show her where the extra towels are and to check if they have actual hot water today.

The water runs warm over his fingers and when he turns to tell her it’s okay he finds her leaning naked against the sink, his shirt at her feet, with a smirk on her face.

He stands, shaking the water from his fingers, and pulls her into his arms, running his hands down her back until they rest under the plush curve of her bottom.

“Doll, why’d ya go and do that? Now the hot water’s gonna run out by the time I let you go,” he murmurs against her throat as he sucks kisses into her skin.

“Not if you get in with me.” She pushes him back, arching one brow at him before stepping into the tub and shutting the curtain.

He hears the shower head engage and he’s out of his clothing and into the shower so fast he’s surprised he doesn’t leave skid marks behind him.

He pulls the curtain closed and Darcy glances over her shoulder and smiles. She turns to face the spray from the showerhead and tilts her head back, her hair sleek and nearly black under the water. His eyes trace the shining rivulets pouring over her pale skin as he steps under the water with her, hands around her waist, his hardened cock pressing into the small of her back. Her skin feels like hot, slippery, silk under his hands, and he can’t help touching her, his hands slipping around to cup her breasts, the soft weight of them mesmerizing.

He pushes her hair over her shoulder and lowers his mouth to the juncture between her neck and shoulder, nipping her lightly before kissing up to just under her ear. She arches into his hands, wrapping one hand around his neck, the other covering his hand on her breast.

He turns her, presses her back to the wall and slants his mouth over hers, groaning into her mouth when she slides a hand between them, grasping the base of his cock and sliding it up and down.

The sensation spears through him like lightening and he shudders, reflexively rocking into her hand and grunting.

“Keep that up and it will be over too soon.”
She tilts her head back and grins unrepentantly, tightening her fist around him momentarily before lowering her leg from his hip and releasing him.

She presses against his shoulder, turning him so he’s leaning against the wall, out from under the spray of the water. She runs her hands down his chest, circling his nipples before leaning in to lick and nibble at them, smirking up at him as she licks a trail down his stomach. She leans forward, her hands resting on his hips and nuzzles his cock, her breath hot on him before she grasps one hand around him, licking a stripe from base to tip. He jerks, hands clutching her hair as she does it again, swirling her tongue around the tip before sucking it into her mouth.

“Oh baby, oh….feels so good,” he moans, voice breaking as she sucks him in further, her mouth around him a heaven he never wants to leave.

He glances down, brushing her wet hair to the side so he can see her lush, pink, lips wrapped around him. The visual causes a sharp clench of arousal to tighten in his balls.

My god.

He tips his head back, closing his eyes to get ahold of himself. She presses his hips against the wall and takes him deeper, her tongue stroking the underside of him and swirling around as she pulls up, sucking on the tip again before slowly sliding down.

Slowly.

It’s torture.

His hips buck and she firmly pushes them against the wall and glances up at him, humming around him as she shakes her head “no”.

She slides up, releasing the head of his cock with a pop. She teases, “I thought you wanted to make it last?”

Her eyes gleam with amusement as she looks up at him, tongue circling the tip of his cock as she reaches down to stroke his balls.

Holy shit. I’ve created a monster.

He huffs and bangs his head against the wall, biting his lip as she slowly slides him into her mouth again, sucking him in as far as she can go without gagging then sliding back up again. She continues at her slow pace, dragging Bucky to the edge by inches. His hands clench in her hair, aching to thrust into her mouth.

Ugh.

His thighs tremble with the strain of holding back. Her hand ghosted down his leg before coming up under his balls, cradling them and pulling gently.

He starts babbling, cursing and groaning, before eventually begging and she hums in approval, eyes shining as she finally, finally speeds up. Her hand and mouth work him, sliding and sucking til he arches into her, tight as a bow.

“Doll, I’m coming, oh my god, baby…” he warns her but she hums again, sucking him deeper and he shakes, coming with a shout that echoes off the walls of the bathroom.

He gasps at the intensity of it, shaking and seeing spots behind his eyelids. He slumps against the
wall, hips jerking as she pulls off of him.

He watches as she purses her lips and stands, a slight frown on her face. She shrugs, tips her face into the shower spray, mouth open to catch some water before she swishes and spits.

Reaching for the soap she lathers her hands, running them over his shoulders and down his chest, gently turning him this way and that as she washes him from head to toe.

He snaps out of his stupor to take the soap from her, returning the favor by gently washing her down, intent on the slippery feeling of her skin.

The water is rapidly cooling so they rinse quickly, grabbing towels and drying each other off. She leans her forehead between his shoulder blades as he brushes his teeth, finally poking one arm around him to wet her finger under the faucet and asking him to put a little tooth powder on it. He watches, amused, as she brushes her teeth with her finger.

Finally, he hangs their wet towels up as she shrugs into his shirt as he pulls on his undershirt and shorts. He turns to her, slowly kissing her minty mouth as he strokes down the silky skin visible between the sides of her unbuttoned shirt.

“Baby, I feel bad you did all the work and I didn’t take care of you. Ladies should always be first.”

She snorts, “I wanted to do that. Watching you come apart made me feel…” she pauses, gazing at him intently, “powerful.”

“Powerful?” He murmurs, kissing her throat.

“Yes.” She leans back to smirk at him, “Besides, Stevie took care of me earlier.”

*Interesting.*

“I still owe you one.”

She laughs, buttoning her borrowed shirt and walking out into the hall. He follows her to the bedroom and pauses behind her.

“Where do ya wanna sleep, doll?”

She sighs. “Bed’s too narrow for me to fit with you,” she nudges his side, “you take up a lot more space than Steve.”

He frowns. He wants to hold her while he falls asleep. He looks at his bed, getting an idea.

“Help me with something?”

He walks over to the dresser between the beds and pulls it away from the wall. It’s not too heavy, and with her help (he always forgets she’s stronger than she looks) they move the dresser out of the way and slide his bed flush alongside Steve’s.

Amazingly, Steve doesn’t stir during the commotion.

They crawl into bed, Darcy rearranging the blankets and laying down at the edge of his mattress, turning on her side towards Steve and stretching an arm and leg towards him, stroking the back of his neck briefly before pulling the blanket higher on his shoulders.

Bucky shares his pillow with her, curling around her back and sighing contentedly into her hair. She
wiggles her bottom against him, getting comfortable.

“Don’t push me forward, Bucky. I don’t wanna sleep on the crack.” She grumbles, “S’uncomfortable.”

He nods against her hair, breath slowing as he slips into sleep. “Love you, Darce.”

“Love you too,” she whispers, holding his hand.

Chapter End Notes

The origin of the story title revealed!

Also, more sex, but I’m honestly trying to make it about intimacy, connection, and exploring the boundaries of a new relationship rather than gratuitous fucking.

Not that I have a problem with gratuitous fucking, but that is a different story.

Let me know what you think about Steve finally getting some!

Also, this is a story about three people who fall in love and then the tide of history engulfs them. I’m taking my time building their relationship before their world goes crazy.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Darcy works at the birth control clinic. Steve gets sick, then Bucky. Darcy takes care of them.

Chapter Notes

I am not a doctor—but I did some research about 40’s medical dispensaries, diaphragms, and condoms.

Fun fact: condoms prior to the late 1930’s had something like a 50% failure rate, there was little quality control in their production. Also, latex wasn’t commonly used until the early 30’s. In the U.S. condom advertising was restricted to their use as a disease preventative, not as birth control.

By 1931 the condom was standard issue to all members of the U.S. military for disease prevention and coincided with a steep decline in sexually transmitted diseases amongst the troops.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wednesday, February 19, 1941

Darcy hums as she stocks the dispensary at the clinic.

She fills individual bins with multiple sizes of gauze, cotton wool, bandages, rubber gloves, syringes, bottles of iodine, bottles of rubbing alcohol, and other medical supplies necessary for examinations and care.

Next she stocks the contraceptives: condoms, spermicidal jelly, different sizes of cervical caps, and diaphragms. There’s also several boxes of informational pamphlets that she stacks next to them.

The diaphragms are the newest thing. They’ve only been available for distribution for a couple years and unfortunately, a lot of doctors still only give them to married women. That is not the case in this clinic, but societal pressure to remain a virgin until marriage causes many single women to shy away from being responsible for their own contraception. Condoms are far more commonly used, and usually something men purchase.

Darcy knows women are having sex outside of marriage. Obviously. But still, there is a double standard, women are shamed and men are lauded for their sexual experience.

Helene Levy, head nurse at the clinic, is a follower of Margaret Sanger and a proponent for women having control and choice over sexual and reproductive matters. It’s been refreshing and informative
for Darcy to work with her, and they’ve become friends.

Helene is in her early 40’s, a slim, elegantly built woman with sharp features and a no nonsense attitude. Originally from France, she has lived in the United States since immigrating as a newlywed, and has been married for 20 years to a physician who supports her politics and viewpoint. She’s dedicated to her work, and earthy and practical in her approach.

Darcy went to Helene for advice when it became obvious her relationship with Bucky and Steve was becoming more sexual. She’s eager to experience everything with them, but not without being fully informed about her options. Darcy told her she was a virgin but didn't plan on being one for much longer.

She’d promptly handed Darcy a box of condoms and after ascertaining Darcy knew how to properly use them, suggested she come back to be fitted for a diaphragm after she’d, in Helene’s words, “used a half dozen of these,” shaking the box of condoms.

Helene, much to Darcy’s surprise, informed her that her first time would go much better if she’d orgasmed before penetration, the natural lubrication would ease entry and greatly reduce the likelihood of any pain. She also recommended a warm bath afterward to ease any soreness she might experience. Darcy thinks her enhanced healing will make the bath unnecessary, but she appreciates Helene’s thoughtful advice.

She forces away any embarrassment she feels discussing the subject.

There is nothing to be ashamed of.

Her work is going to involve many frank conversations about potentially embarrassing subjects, and she knows her patients comfort will be greatly affected by her own attitude. It’s only that she had never spoken of this with anyone before that made her feel awkward.

Mama was matter of fact about reproduction, but less informative about the pleasures of sex. It’s probably not something she’d want to discuss with her mother anyway.

Ever.

She gained most of her information through reading, rumor, and Bucky.

*Thank God for Bucky.*

She and Steve would have fumbled around for a lot longer without him. She doesn’t even slightly resent how he gained his experience. It only bothers her when girls he’s been with in the past make catty comments or flirt with Bucky while they are out together.

That’s just rude behavior.

Helene bustles into the dispensary, her dark eyes searching the shelves as she collects supplies for her next patient.

“Darcy, you should observe this consultation. The woman is 32 years old and has 8 children! Sounds like a prolapsed uterus so we will probably be fitting her with a pessary today.”

She pulls one of the bins from the shelf, grabbing several packages of the ring shaped device. She hands them to Darcy as she collects the other necessary supplies. “I hope I can convince her to try some type of contraception, as I wouldn’t recommend she have any more children with her condition,” she mutters.
Darcy shakes her head. A good portion of the women who come to the clinic are there for prenatal care or gynecological issues. They aren’t always receptive to receiving contraception, due to their own or their husbands personal beliefs.

Sometimes it is hard to be respectful of those beliefs when pregnancy could be life threatening for some of their patients.

She checks her watch as they head to the examination room and sighs. She’s been here since 7:30 in the morning and it’s nearly 5pm. Hopefully this is the last patient for the day.

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Steve is standing on the subway platform with Bucky, waiting for the 8pm train to arrive. When Darcy didn’t show by the 6 o’clock, they decided to walk down to meet each train on the hour after that. Neither of them liked her walking home alone after dark, but she’s rarely this late.

Bucky pulls his cigarettes out of his jacket pocket and shakes one out of the pack, lighting it with a match he strikes on the bottom of his shoe. He inhales deeply, relaxing against a pillar, and blows the smoke away from Steve out of habit.

There’s a few people waiting for the train, but the platform is largely empty, the lack of a crowd intensifies the echoes coming down the track from the oncoming train.

It pulls into the station with a hiss, doors sliding open as groups of people exit: some men wearing suits, a few laborers carrying their lunch buckets, and some family groups.

Finally, there’s Darcy.

She steps off the train still wearing her white nurse's uniform under her gray winter coat, a red knitted scarf wrapped around her neck. A large tote bag is slung over her shoulder and it looks heavy, probably loaded with books. She seems tired but alert, and when she spots them her face brightens, a smile curving her red lips. Bucky straightens up from the pillar, smiling and dropping his cigarette before crushing it underfoot.

Steve exhales.

She’s okay.

He realizes how clenched with worry he’d been and feels almost euphoric as that tension evaporates.

“Hey! I didn’t expect to see you here.” Darcy says as she strides over, grinning, “I got held up at work.”

Bucky takes her bag and she wraps her arm around his before extending a hand to Steve. He takes her hand in his and they walk slowly off the platform and up the stairs to street level, Darcy chattering about her day. The chill breeze makes him shiver and Darcy pulls him closer.

It’s raw out, the kind of damp cold that happens in late winter. The air smells like smoke and car exhaust, with the occasional waft of food from restaurants as they pass. Steve shivers again, cold to his bones. He spent the afternoon selling papers and wants nothing so much as to be somewhere warm.
When they get to Darcy’s place they follow her up to her apartment. She offers to share some leftovers she’s having for dinner but they’ve already eaten, so instead she offers them coffee and pie which neither of them would ever turn down.

When they enter the apartment, Will is lounging on the sofa, textbooks and papers spread around him. He glances up, pencil behind his ear, when they follow Darcy inside.

“Hey, fellas.” He checks his watch and frowns, “Are you just getting home from the hospital, Darcy?”

“Yeah,” Darcy says, unwrapping her scarf and unbuttoning her coat, laying them on the end of the sofa, “We had an interesting case come in at the end of the day and Helene wanted me to observe. By the time we finished up and I walked to the subway station, I just missed the 6:30 train— had to wait an hour for the next one.”

Bucky sets her bag down and he and Steve take their coats off, piling them next to Darcy’s on the sofa.

Steve flops on the opposite end of sofa from Will as Darcy heads to the icebox, getting out leftovers for her dinner and the pie she’d promised them.

Bucky leans against the counter, keeping an eagle eye on the pie.

“Did ya eat dinner, Will?” Darcy says, balancing a pie tin in one hand and a covered pan in another.

“Hmmm, yeah. Ate with Tony.” Will mutters absentmindedly, leaning forward to write some figures on a piece of paper.

Bucky swiftly grabs the pie tin from Darcy and sets it on the counter while she places the pan on the stove to reheat her dinner.

Nice to see Bucky has his priorities straight, Steve thinks with amusement.

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Bucky follows Steve up the three flights of stairs to their apartment, listening with half an ear to his breathing. Half way up, Steve pauses and sneezes twice before continuing up the stairs.

“You feelin’ okay, punk?” he asks, concerned.

“S’nothin, just a little tickle in my throat,” Steve shrugs.

Bucky narrows his eyes at Steve’s back as they reach the apartment. They’ve been lucky this winter. Steve’s asthma has been problematic as usual, but he hasn’t been sick with anything more serious than a cold.

He sighs. Steve is incredibly stubborn about admitting when he’s sick. He hopes this isn’t one of those times when he’s covering up how bad he really feels.

The apartment is warm when they get inside, Bucky walks over to the radiator and hovers a hand above it, feeling the heat rising from it.
Thank god.

Steve flops on the sofa without removing his coat and closes his eyes, head resting against the cushions. Bucky hangs up his coat and heads over to the stove, glancing again at Steve before brewing some of the chamomile tea Darcy gave them.

He nudges Steve and hands the steaming mug to him without comment.

Steve sips his drink, the tips of his ears reddened and his eyes glassy with fatigue. Bucky resists the urge to feel his forehead, knowing how aggravated he gets with his mother henning.

Steve mutters something about getting ready for bed and shuffles down the hall, leaving his empty mug balanced on the arm of the sofa. Bucky drags a hand over his face and sighs, picks up the mug, washes it, and puts it away.

By the time he walks into the bedroom, Steve is curled up in bed, burrowed under the covers and breathing heavily.

Bucky picks up Steve’s coat from the floor and throws it over the end of the bed, then tosses the shirt and pants he left on the floor into the laundry basket. He undresses down to his undershirt and boxers, sniffing his shirt before tossing it in the laundry basket along with his socks, and folding his pants and laying them on top of the dresser. He slides under the covers, laying on his back, crossing his arms under his head. His stares at the flickering shadows and the periodic wash of headlights on the ceiling, eyes unfocused.

They never bothered to move their beds apart after he and Darcy pushed them together. The morning after she stayed the night, he awakened curled around Darcy, his face buried in her hair, his hardened cock nestled against the curve of her bottom. He’d rubbed against her subconsciously before he was completely awake, opening his eyes to see Stevie laying on the other side of her, holding her hand. He gazed steadily at him, smirking.

They’d had one of their silent conversations as she slept.

Steve raised an eyebrow, *what’s with the beds?*

Bucky shrugged, *seemed like a good idea,* then waggled an eyebrow, *what d’ya think?*

Steve smiled, *I like it.*

So that was that.

It actually worked out pretty well because they’d had two nights since with no heat and they stayed warm together without cramming into one narrow bed. Darcy hasn’t stayed over again but he knows it’s only a matter of time.

Now that Steve’s asleep, he reaches over and lightly rests his hand on his forehead.

Too warm. He’s definitely sick.

Bucky scoots across the bed, tucking the blankets closer around them after spooning around Steve’s small form. Steve sighs and stirs briefly against him before relaxing again.

Bucky breathes deeply, forcing himself to relax. It will be alright. Steve’s been so much healthier this winter than last, he just needs to rest and tomorrow he’ll make soup.
He’s awake for a long time, hand over Steve’s heart, measuring the rise and fall of his chest.

Steve wakes the next morning feeling achy and hot, his head pounding, and his throat feeling like he’s swallowed glass. He rolls over onto his stomach and can’t help whimpering a little in misery.

The weak morning sunlight burns his eyes so he pulls the blanket over his head, breathing slowly in and out through his mouth, since his nose is stuffed up.

He hears shuffling in the doorway and the bed dips as Bucky sits on the edge. “How’re ya doin’ Stevie?”

Steve starts to speak but his throat is raw and he coughs before rasping, “Ok. Guess I have a little cold.”

Bucky nudges his shoulder, “Wanna come out from under the blankets and sit up? I brought ya some tea.”

Steve sighs and rolls over, pulling the covers from his face. Based on Bucky’s expression he looks as bad as he feels. He slowly pushes himself up to lean against the headboard and Bucky hands him the tea.

“Thanks,” he croaks.

He sips it gingerly, the heat relieving his scratchy throat but swallowing reminding him of the ache. He tips his head back against the headboard and closes his eyes.

He feels like he could sleep a million years.

“I made some oatmeal too. Feel up to eating?”

“Maybe later. Tea’s good for now.”

Bucky watches him sip his tea, his hands moving restlessly over the blanket, and jaw muscles ticking in frustration. Steve knows Bucky would feel better if he could spoon feed him like a baby bird but there is no way he’s letting that happen. He’ll hover around fluffing pillows and asking him how he feels until Steve wants to scream. So he tells Bucky to go on to work and he’ll be fine.

Bucky looks torn, making him swallow a couple aspirin before he finally leaves. He tells Steve he’ll get a message to Darcy at the hospital to check in on him since he’ll be working past dinner tonight.

After Bucky is gone, Steve shuffles to the bathroom like an old, arthritic, man and takes a shower, running the water as hot as he can stand and slumping under it til it starts to cool.

He brushes his teeth, looking in the mirror at the dark circles like bruises under his glassy eyes and his pale face. He looks like death. At least the steam from the shower helps him breathe a little easier, but he’s beginning to shiver.

He returns to the bedroom in his towel, shaking as he quickly dresses in a clean undershirt and shorts and slips into the bed. He pulls the covers over his head, shivering, turning, and shifting until he warms up enough to feel comfortable and finally succumbs to exhaustion.
Darcy gets the message from Helene that Steve is sick and Bucky wants her to check in on him after work. He'll leave a key for her above the door frame so she can let herself in. Bucky must be really concerned because he usually doesn’t like her walking alone to their apartment in the evening and Darcy’s brow furrows with worry. Steve had looked pale and tired last night, and she’d wondered if he was coming down with something.

She sighs, wishing she could go to him this instant.

She’s discussed Steve’s health problems with Helene before, not mentioning their relationship, but she’s pretty sure she reads between the lines. She doesn’t mention Bucky and while Darcy isn’t ashamed of her unusual arrangement with them, she keeps it private. None of them have figured out how or if they need to define their relationship to others and until they agree on an approach she keeps it to herself.

Anyway, she’s only talked about Steve in a professional capacity, attempting to find ways to alleviate some of his issues. Helene suggested getting him an electric nebuliser and some epinephrine to help with asthma attacks. Darcy doesn’t know why Steve doesn't have that already, but she suspects the issue is poverty. He’s rarely been able to afford a doctor and in the past has waited until emergency forced him to the hospital.

She knows Steve’s asthma will get so much worse if he’s sick, so she calls Dr. Bobby and he agrees to give her a nebuliser and walks her through the preparation and use of the epinephrine.

She’ll stop by his office before leaving work.

Fortunately she is busy, the waiting room at the clinic is jammed with patients, and the troubles of others take her mind off of her worry for Steve. Nonetheless, she leaves a little early, so she has time to get the medicine from Dr. Bobby and catch her usual train home.

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She unlocks the door to Steve and Bucky’s apartment and enters to find it dark, with only the street lights shining fitfully through the windows. She flicks on the light switch and sets her bag on the kitchen table. Walking around the apartment to draw the curtains, she stops to check the radiator to find it emanating heat.

Thank God.

She follows the sound of Steve’s labored breathing to the bedroom. The light from the kitchen faintly illuminates him, huddled on his side, with only his hair and closed eyes visible above the blankets.

She crosses the room to him and sits on the edge of the bed to touch his forehead.

He is burning up.

He stirs restlessly under her hand and cracks open his eyes, “Darce?” he croaks.

“Hey,” she strokes his hair back from his sweaty forehead. “Where’s it hurt, baby?”
He sighs gustily, “Everywhere.”

His legs move in agitation under the blankets and he grimaces in discomfort, wheezing with each breath and shivering despite his fever. He struggles to sit up and she helps him, tucking his pillow behind him and handing him the glass of water sitting on the dresser. He drains the glass, clearing his throat.

“What time is it?”

She glances at her watch. “6 o’clock. Bucky should be here soon.”

He blinks. “Huh. I guess I slept the day away.”

“How ‘bout I run you a bath and you can soak for a bit while I make you some tea and maybe something to eat?”

He tries to tell her he can take care of himself but in the end she runs him a hot bath with some mentholated bath salts in it to help clear his sinuses and takes his arm and walks him to the bathroom. He shoos her away and she goes to the kitchen, putting the kettle on and picking up her bag, carrying it back to the bedroom. She pulls out the nebulizer and epinephrine and leaves it on the dresser.

She straightens the bedsheets and blankets and fluffs the pillows, and searches for clean clothing for Steve. Even if their sizes weren’t different, it would be easy to tell which drawers Bucky uses, everything is meticulously folded, unlike Steve’s jumbled belongings.

She knocks on the bathroom door as she’s returning to the kitchen, “Is it alright if I come in?”

There’s some faint splashing before Steve says, “Yeah.”

She cracks the door glancing over to where Steve’s head is visible over the edge of the tub. She goes in, shutting the door behind her to hold in the steamy warmth of the bathroom.

“I brought you a change of clothes.” She sets the folded clothes on the floor a few feet from the tub and sits down on the closed lid of the toilet. Steve watches her with dazed, half-lidded eyes, obviously miserable.

“Do you want me to bring you a cup of tea to sip while you’re in here?” She asks.

“That might be good,” he says, raising one dripping hand out of the water to rest on the side of the tub.

She takes his hand in hers and squeezes it gently, “If you lean forward I’ll wash your back.”

He nods, pulling his knees up to lay forehead against them. She releases his hand to grab the soap and a washcloth, dipping it in the tub and lathering it before rubbing his back in gentle circles across his shoulders and down his back. He sighs, turning his head to the side, his blue eyes watching her face as she works. She rinses the cloth and rubs it down his back, rinsing it again before urging him to lay back as she gently wipes his face and chest.

She drapes the washcloth over his lap and leans forward to kiss his forehead. “I’ll go get your tea.”

When she returns with the tea he’s lying with his head tipped back against the end of the tub, eyes closed. He cracks his eyes open as she enters the room, extending a hand for the cup which she hands to him.
“Have you eaten at all, today?”

He takes a slow sip of tea, swallowing before saying, “Nah. Nothing sounded good and my throats hurts.”

“Would you eat something soft? Like scrambled eggs?”

“Maybe,” he nods listlessly, leaning back again, resting his cup on his chest.

“I’ll go make some. Finish up the tea and I’ll meet you in the bedroom.”

She’s scooping the eggs onto a plate when she hears the bathroom door open and she grabs a fork and napkin, and a fresh glass of water, before heading down the hall to the bedroom.

Steve’s sitting on the edge of the bed, turning the nebulizer in his hands, a puzzled look on his face. She sets the plate on top of the dresser next to the bed and sits down next to him. He casts a questioning glance in her direction and she says, “It’s for your asthma. I got it from Dr. Bobby, you can keep it. I’ll show you how to mix the epinephrine and water to put in it and how to use it. But eat first.”

Steve puts the machine on the bed next to him and reaches for the plate, slowly eating about half of the eggs before setting the plate aside.

“I guess I don’t have much appetite,” he shrugs. He drinks half a glass of water before laying back against the pillows, looking at her expectantly as she plugs in the nebulizer and mixes the epinephrine with water in the measured amounts Dr. Bobby had instructed.

“Ok,” she says, attaching the rubber tubing to the machine and holding up the attached mask, “put this over your mouth and nose and breathe in the mist that will come through here. Just breathe slowly, in and out, until it stops misting and we’ll see how it works on your lungs.”

She turns on the machine and when a fine mist starts coming out through the mask, Steve puts it over his mouth and nose, breathing as deeply as he can. While he’s doing that, she leans her head closer to him, listening to his heart. She’s concerned the medicine might make his heart race so she monitors as he finishes the treatment.

When he’s done, she hands him the glass of water and a couple of aspirin for his fever and busies herself with turning off and unplugging the machine, coiling up the tubing, and wiping down the mask with some rubbing alcohol from her bag.

She turns to see Steve watching her, a soft smile on his face. She quirks her eyebrow at him, “What?”

“You remind me of my ma. She would have been so happy to have something like this machine to help me. When I was a kid they only had treatments like this at the hospital which we couldn’t usually afford,” he pauses, brow furrowed in thought, “The asthma is never gonna go away, but this helps. Thank you.”

She reaches for his hand. “I’d do anything to help you, Steve. I hope someday they figure out a way to fix your lungs.”

“Me too.” He smirks, “but I’m not holding my breath.”

She gently smacks his arm, “Terrible. How’s your breathing?”
“Better.” He takes a breath, blows it out, “not so tight.”

She tips her head, listening carefully to his heart, a little elevated but not concerning. “You might notice you’re heart rate getting a little elevated and maybe feeling a little jittery, that’s normal with this medication.” She points to her ear, “I’m listening and I’ll know if it’s something to worry about.”

“I forget sometimes that you can do that.” Steve murmurs.

“Yeah. Super hearing. Not always to best thing.” She thinks of some of the noises she’s heard from Will’s room when Tony stays over and shudders. She loves Will, but doesn’t want to hear his intimate moments.

At all.

A little cotton wool in each ear has been a lifesaver.

She grabs a book from her bag and sits on the bed next to Steve. He’s leaning against the headboard with a pillow stuffed behind his lower back, the blankets pulled to his waist. She lifts a corner of the blanket and sits next to him, pulling the blankets a bit higher and asking, “Hey, you want me to read to you? I got ‘Tarzan of the Apes’ from the second hand store.”

“Sure.” he leans against her shoulder and she begins to read, “I had this story from one who had no business to tell it to me, or to any other…”

She reads to him until he falls asleep again.

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Friday, February 28, 1941

Bucky feels like shit.

Three days ago he woke up sweaty and achy, his head throbbing.

Darcy had called off working at the hospital all week because she was taking care of Steve, and she slept between them each night.

When he had groaned softly, she turned over to look at him, eyes widening with concern. She laid a hand on his forehead, and he closed his eyes against the relative coolness of her skin.

“Oh, Bucky. You shoulda slept on the couch while Steve was sick. Now you’ve got the flu too,” she’d whispered.

She had wiggled out from under the covers and crawled down to the end of the bed between he and Steve. He watched as she walked out of the bedroom, hair tangled and her nightgown trailing behind her.

She’d come back with a damp washcloth, a glass of water, and a couple aspirin. She wiped his face and neck down before folding the the cool washcloth and laying it across his forehead.
Turning away to dig through her bag and coming back with a thermometer, she ran her thumb gently over his lips and told him to open before putting it in his mouth.

After a minute or two, she pulled the thermometer out of his mouth, peering at the mercury within. “101 degrees. Aw, Buck,” she whispered.

She handed him the aspirin and the glass of water which he promptly swallowed, she sighed, “Looks like I have two patients now.”

Steve had finally turned a corner the day before when his fever broke. He still had a rattling cough and he was exhausted but Darcy’s face had lost the worried crinkle between her brows.

But then, Bucky got sick too.

Today is day three of feeling miserable and Bucky is ready for it to be over.

The only positive thing from the last week or so is Darcy staying at their place all the time. He was able to go to work until three days ago, reassured that Steve would be taken care of since Darcy insisted on staying with him.

He hated to admit it, but she did a better job of getting Stevie to cooperate anyway. Maybe it was her professional training that made Steve more willing, maybe it was just Darcy, he didn't know. But she’d managed to get him to rest, drink lots of tea, eat the soup Bucky made, and take his medicine. Steve did it all, his eyes following her as she bustled around his room, a soft expression on his face despite his misery.

Sometimes, she’d sit against the headboard while Steve lay beside her and she’d read to him. She and Steve had worked their way through “Tarzan of the Apes” when it was just the two of them during the day. When Bucky was with them in the evening she read “The Big Sleep” in deference to Bucky’s love of detective stories.

She would read until Steve fell asleep and then mark the page for the next night. She and Bucky would whisper together about the events of their day and gain some comfort from each other. Sometimes they’d end up kissing and touching each other til they trembled, frantic in their need to escape for a little bit.

It was hard for both of them to see Stevie so sick, and though she didn’t say it, he knew she was deeply worried. She’d worked on the hospital ward all through the holidays when the flu cases were at their height.

People died.

Otherwise healthy people, died.

Bucky reassured her that Stevie was tough, he’d been through worse than this.

It felt like he was trying to convince himself, too.

Now Steve seemed to be slowly mending. His lungs were responding well to the nebulizer treatments (Darcy had instructed him how to administer them and he’d prepared the epinephrine and filled the reservoir in the machine himself) and he was more alert each day that passed.

Bucky knows he isn’t as sick as Steve had been but he still feels awful and cranky as hell.

After three days he is tired of lying in bed, although he doesn’t have the energy to do much else. He
has a hacking cough and is still feverish. Darcy gives him aspirin every four hours or so and periodically wipes his face and neck with a cool, damp, washcloth, but still.

He looks over at Steve who’s still sleeping and huffs.

He can hear Darcy humming in the kitchen, and smell eggs cooking and hopes for coffee too. He levers himself into a sitting position and lowers his feet to the floor. He shuffles down the hall to the bathroom, leaning a hand against the wall and sighing heavily as he relieves himself. He flushes the toilet, washing his hands before he’s overcome by a paroxysm of coughing. He hunches over, spitting in the sink, and runs the water again.

There’s a tap at the door and Darcy says, “Bucky? Can I come in?” He pulls the door open in response and leans against the sink. She reaches out to place her hand on his forehead before gently running her hands through his hair. He grimaces, it has to be disgusting, he hasn’t washed his hair in days.

She quirks her lips, “Shower?”

He nods, sighing. He actually feels too tired to do it.

She must read the exhaustion in his face. “Maybe a bath would be better, you can sit and I’ll even wash your hair for you.”

He can’t even remember the last time someone else washed his hair. Probably when he was a little kid.

She closes the lid on the toilet and pushes him to sit on it while she fills the tub, dumping some of the minty smelling bath salts she’d brought over for Steve in it. The room fills with steam and he feels some small relief of his congestion as he slowly breathes in. She leaves for a moment as the bath fills, returning with a cup of coffee the way he likes it—Thank you, God— a clean undershirt, and shorts.

“Go on and get in the tub. I’m gonna cover the eggs so they stay warm and check on Steve.” She smiles before leaving the bathroom and he sets his coffee cup on the edge of the tub while he undresses and then slips into the water.

The water is just this side of too hot and it feels amazing. He sinks down til just his head and the tops of his knees breach the water and slowly breathes in the fragrant steam swirling into the air around him. He tips his head back, relaxing into the heat.

Darcy returns with a pitcher and an extra towel which she folds on the floor next to the tub.

He opens his eyes, smirking slightly, “Hey, doll. Gonna give me a bath?”

She kneels on the towel next to the tub and dangles her fingers into the water. She flicks some water at his face and says, “If you want.”

He hands her the bar of soap and she lathers up the washcloth, instructing him to lean forward as she rubs circles on his neck, shoulders, then down his back. She dips the pitcher in the water, instructs him to close his eyes and tilt his head back and carefully pours water over his hair and rinses his back. He closes his eyes, focusing on the sensation of her hands running through his hair as she pours another pitcher of water over it.

She pushes him back again, rubbing the soapy washcloth over his arms, his hands—taking care to massage between his fingers, and over his chest. He watches as she works, her storm blue eyes focused on each part of him in turn.
She washes til just below his bellybutton and pauses, glancing up at his face. He gazes steadily at her and winks before lifting one leg and bracing his foot on the end of the tub by the faucet. She rolls her eyes at him before lathering the washcloth again and washing his feet, between his toes and up his leg. He lowers his leg into the water to rinse and raises his other leg for her to wash.

*A fella could get used to this.*

He smirks at her as she presses the washcloth into his lap and deftly washes his cock and then his balls. He gets half hard despite of how crappy he feels.

“You know,” she says, slowly stroking over him with the washcloth, “I regularly give sponge baths to both male and female patients at the hospital, so this is nothing new. When I helped Steve with his bath though, I got the feeling he wanted to handle this part himself. You, on the other hand, are shameless, James Buchanan Barnes.”

He grins in response. “Well, maybe I wanted to see how a professional handled things.”

She slaps him in the chest with the washcloth. “Sassy,” she wrings out the washcloth, “We still have to wash your hair.”

Bucky looks at her from under his eyelashes. “Why don’t you get in here with me. You can wash my hair and I’ll wash yours.”

“Seriously? You even flirt when you’re sick. I guess if you stop I’ll know you’re dying.”

She fills the pitcher again with fresh water and rinses his head before leaning forward to scrub his hair with the soap. “Keep your eyes closed and your head tipped back,” she warns, her strong fingers rubbing circles across his scalp from his forehead to the nape of his neck and back again. It feels wonderful. Who knew having his hair washed would help his headache? He melts against the end of the tub.

She rinses his hair twice with warm water, stroking her hand over his head with each rinse to push the suds out. Afterwards, he lays against the back of the tub with his eyes closed and she leans forward, pressing her lips to his damp forehead and each of his eyelids, “Love you, Bucky.”

He smiles, opening his eyes. “Love you too, babydoll.”

**History of asthma treatments—yes there were electric nebulizers in 1941, no inhalers though.**

Chapter End Notes

Darcy reads Steve and Bucky “Tarzan of the Apes” by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and “The Big Sleep” by Raymond Chandler.

Fun fact: plenty of people used soap to wash their hair in 1941. Shampoo was often considered an unnecessary luxury, also, shampoo advertising was targeted towards women.
Thursday, March 20, 1941

Darcy glances up from her book to look at Will, who is occupying the other end of the sofa. He has papers spread around him as usual, one pencil behind his ear, and another he’s tapping rhythmically on his knee as he turns a blueprint this way and that.

Will’s been bringing home more and more papers that Howard has him looking over, writing in his suggestions on blueprints and questions in the margins. He’d pretty much tweaked all of the aircraft Howard was working on and shown her a few of the proposals Howard had for new guns as well. She gave her opinions about that, but told Will flatly she was no engineer. She has to actually handle the prototypes and test them before she can form any concrete ideas.

In light of this, on Saturday she is accompanying Will to an airfield just outside of the city that Howard purchased to test his planes and weapons. Apparently, he has a second workshop there and moves between his place in Manhattan and the airfield quite a bit.

Darcy asked if Steve and Bucky could come too, Bucky to shoot and Steve because he just wanted to look at things. Howard said that was fine.

In fact, he was happy to have multiple people to test the weaponry because differing levels of marksmanship were necessary for a thorough test.

She nudges Will’s leg with her toes. He continues looking over the blueprint, completely absorbed. She pokes him again, “Will.”

“What?” he asks absentmindedly, writing something on the edge of the blueprint.

“Wanna go dancing with Bucky, Steve, and I tomorrow night?”
She’s excited. It’s the first time they’re going since Steve got sick. He’s finally recovered enough he can dance with her again.

“Sure. But we shouldn’t be out too late. Howard’s sending a car pretty early on Saturday,” he continues scribbling something on the blueprint.

“I know. Just for a couple of hours after dinner,” she nudges his leg again with her toe, “you have any idea what Howard has for me to test?”

He pauses in his writing, wrapping a hand around her ankle to halt her poking him with her toe. He glances at her, his green eyes distracted. “Hmmm. Couple of rifles? Maybe a pistol? I think he has some kind of ammo and a scope he wants to test too.”

“Have you tried any of them?”

“Nah. I’m not that great of a shot. Although maybe I will help on Saturday since Howard wants to see if his guns are accurate for the average shooter.”

“Bucky says he used to practice with his father, got pretty good at it, too. It’ll be fun to have a little friendly competition.” She smirks at Will’s irritated expression.

“Seriously? I cry foul,” he complains, grabbing her foot again when she jabs him in the ribs with it. He mutters, “not all of us have super powers.”

She snickers. “Aw, don’t be that way—you fly better than I do.”

“Yeah, well. I guess I should be grateful you haven't taken an interest in it or I’d be out of a job.”

She nudges him with her toe, “You’re still the prettiest,” she purses her lips, making kissy noises.

He grins, tossing a pillow at her head. “Damn right, I am.”

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Saturday, March 22, 1941

Bucky is feeling more than a bit bit rough, which isn't surprising considering the amount he drank the night before. He squints his eyes against the morning sun and gingerly rubs his forehead as they walk over to Darcy’s place.

Steve ambles along beside him, his bag slung over his shoulder and a spark of mischief in his blue eyes. He smirks, “Head hurtin’ today?”

He rolls his eyes and grunts, “What d’ya think punk?”

Steve laughs at him.

Some friend he is.

He probably should’ve held back a little with the booze.
It’s just that he hadn’t cut loose in so long. What with working out the particulars of the relationship between Darcy, Steve, and himself, doing odd jobs in the evening, and getting knocked out with the flu, he’s been a homebody since New Year's.

He’d resolved to make up for it by having as much fun as possible with his best girl and his best friend. They’d gotten to the dancehall a bit after 6 o’clock and danced and drank for nearly 5 hours. They’d planned to stay til maybe nine, but ended up having too much fun to quit.

Darcy wore a red dress that clung in all the right places and he and Stevie had cleaned up pretty nice too. Will came along, and later Tony showed up with Doris and Bess in tow.

Darcy danced almost every song with either him or Stevie, and in between dances with her, he threw back a drink with whoever was sitting a dance out.

_Goddamn_, for a slightly built man, Tony sure could put it away.

And Darcy just wasn’t fair, she could drink as much as a man twice her size, get a little giggly and flushed for a short while then be back to sober in no time. Steve made sure he drank slowly and interspersed his drinks with water. It was probably the only concession he made to his condition and he had learned to do it the hard way.

All evening, Darcy watched over Steve like a hawk and made sure he didn’t overdo it. She’d claim she needed a rest or a drink and make him sit down with her whenever she noticed him tiring. Steve went along with it, his stubborn tendencies overwhelmed by his affection for Darcy.

Punk was so gone on her he’d probably do anything she asked anyway.

Not that he was any different.

The last couple months have been some of the best of his life. He feels more grounded, more sure of what he wants. Instead of living day to day, he finds himself looking forward to things, thinking of the future.

He has an emotional intimacy with Darcy that he’s never had with a gal before. She knows him, and he knows her. It makes the physical intimacy they share that much more intense.

And she loves Steve.

When he first started dating, Bucky had a couple of more serious relationships. But when it came down to it, the girls he’d dated had been dismissive of Steve, sure that Bucky would choose them over his friend.

That would never happen, as they soon found out.

He could never truly love a girl who didn’t understand how important Steve was to him. And now, he didn’t have to choose between his best friend and his girl, because they choose each other too.

Thank god.

It’s better than anything he’d ever imagined.

He throws his arm around Steve’s neck as they walk up to Darcy’s building.

“Hope Darcy has coffee. M’gonna need it, I think.”

Steve elbows him, “Told ya not to drink that lighter fluid Tony was carryin’ in his flask,” he says.
“Yeah?” he winces, rubbing his forehead again, “Well, it was fun at the time.”

He trudges up the stairs and raps on the door while Steve leans against the wall and catches his breath.

Will opens the door and grins, “Hey, fellas! Ready for some daring exploits today?”

Steve raises an eyebrow, “Dunno about that. I’m gonna be sketching.”

Bucky shrugs and walks over to where Darcy is keeping watch over some bacon and eggs on the stove. He wraps his arms around her waist and she leans back against him, sipping from the coffee mug in her hand. He reaches around her, snagging the mug and dancing back when she squawks indignantly.

He sips it and grimaces. Needs more sugar.

He hands it back to her and says, “got any more coffee, doll?”

“Sure. Almost a full pot in the percolator.” She flips the bacon and gives the eggs a stir, “hey, gimme a warm up.” Her blue eyes glint at him over her shoulder as she hands him her mug.

“How’re you feeling this morning?” She teases. Will had helped Steve get him up the stairs to their apartment last night before he and Darcy continued back to their place.

“Fine. Little bit of a head on me but coffee will help.” He tops off Darcy’s coffee and hands it back to her before he stirs three spoonfuls of sugar into his and glances at Steve, who’s wandered over and is leaning against Darcy’s side. “Want some coffee?”

Steve nods, and Bucky fixes him a cup and hands it to him.

Darcy says, “Ya know, Will swears by greasy food after a night of drinking.”

“Yep.” Will pipes up from the sofa, where he’s sorting through some papers and stuffing a few in his bag.

His stomach turns at the thought and he says, “Maybe I’ll skip the bacon, doll. How ‘bout I make us some toast?”

She hands him the bread and he gets to work.

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It takes more than an hour to arrive at the airfield. Steve spends the time watching the world slip by the car window. He’s never been this far outside of the city.

He tries to imprint the sights in his memory for later, doing quick drawings in his sketchbook of the neighborhoods, houses, people, and landscapes, as they pass.

Bucky leans against the window on the other side, asleep, and Darcy’s head rests on his shoulder, her finger marking the page of a book on her lap, eyes drowsy as she gazes out the window. Will sits up front amiably chatting with the driver, Mr. Jarvis, a tall, thin British man who speaks with a very proper accent.
The sight lines get longer the further they drive, the tall buildings giving way to more open space as they get closer to the airfield.

It’s an unseasonably warm day, the sun is out, melting the last of the snow deposited by a late winter blizzard almost two weeks ago. The storm had raged the two days just before Bucky’s 24th birthday on the 10th, causing the city to be paralyzed while everyone dug out.

Darcy had been irritated, she’d found out it was Bucky’s birthday too late to plan anything and the storm had made it difficult for her to get to the market. They ended up cracking open the champagne she’d swiped on New Year’s and eating a flourless chocolate cake she threw together with the last of the cocoa her Ma had sent her. They’d been stuck at her place overnight on the 8th, and had ended up staying rest of the weekend. They’d had the place to themselves, with Will similarly stranded uptown at Tony’s place.

All in all, he’s pretty sure Bucky was satisfied with spending the weekend before his birthday curled up in Darcy’s bed. They’d all piled in together, with Darcy between them.

He’d been awakened the next morning by the bed jostling and a low moan. He opened his eyes to the sight of Darcy’s head thrown back and her eyes closed, her face flushed and back arched as she trembled. After a moment, Bucky emerged from under the covers, looking pleased with himself. He pulled himself up just far enough to rest his head on Darcy’s nightgown covered breasts, his face turned in Steve’s direction.

Bucky wiped his glistening lips on the back of his hand, his eyes sparkling with devilry, “Don’t look at me punk, she started it.” He raised a finger to his lips and slipped it into his mouth, sucking it slowly and winking at Steve.

Darcy’s breath hitched and her eyes popped open. She flushed a deeper pink, reaching for Steve’s hand. A small, slightly embarrassed grin crossed her face. “Well, it’s his birthday, after all.”

Steve pouted, “Well, it ain’t my birthday til July—I’m feelin’ a little left out.”

Bucky laughed, levering himself off of Darcy and hitching up his pants before throwing his legs over the side of the bed. “I’m gonna go shower, you two work it out.”

And they had.

They’d kissed until his breath ran out and then she shimmied under the covers, moving his clothing aside to kiss and lick down his chest until she’d finally pushed his shorts down, taking his cock in hand and doing things with her mouth he’d never thought would happen to him.

She’d had to slow down twice because his heart was beating so hard, but pulling back from the edge only made it more intense when he finally came, her mouth hot around him.

He squirms in his seat just thinking about it. He lowers his sketchbook to his lap and gazes out the window again.

She’d come up from under the covers with her face flushed and slightly sweaty, and he’d pulled her in, kissing and licking her lips, not put off by the slightly bitter taste of his own release in her mouth.

She’d settled his clothes back around him and laid her head on his shoulder, throwing one leg over him, and they’d dozed. At some point Bucky came back and slid under the covers behind Darcy, curving himself around her and looping his arm over her, his hand resting on Steve’s chest.

They’d slept late, made a huge breakfast together and spent the day listening to the radio, dancing,
and lazing around playing cards.

Eventually, they ventured out to see the neighborhood covered in snow.

It was as perfect a day as he could remember.

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Darcy nudges Bucky awake as they roll to a stop in front of a large hangar at the airfield. He’s instantly alert, his eyes tracking from her to the view outside. He straightens, runs a hand through his hair, and opens the car door and steps out, extending a hand to help her from the car onto the tarmac.

She takes his arm, glancing around the slightly overgrown airfield. The place has an air of abandonment, the exterior of the large hangar weathered, the paint peeling, and the metal roof rusty.

Steve steps up to her other side, lifting a hand to shade his eyes as he squints across the fields that surround the tarmac and two airstrips.

Will follows Mr. Jarvis over to the hangar. There are four doors, a regular one to the left side and three tall garage type doors to the right of it. He approaches the smaller door and punches a few buttons on a keypad next to the door. Darcy eyes the keypad, it is out of place on the run-down exterior of the building. There is a click as the door unlocks, and he opens the door, standing back and waving them into the building.

Her eyes widen as she takes in the interior of the building. Unlike the exterior, the inside of the hangar is immaculately clean and shiny. The floors are polished cement, the white washed walls stretch two stories high, crisscrossed by metal beams. It is brightly lit, showcasing three planes, a small fleet of cars, and several motorcycles.

Mr. Jarvis asks them to wait a moment while he informs Howard of their arrival, and he walks to a door at the other end of the hangar, punching buttons on another keypad before opening the door and disappearing within.

Steve and Bucky’s eyes light up as they look over the contents of the hangar. Will sidles up to a small fighter plane, painted pewter grey with mottled shades of lighter gray and blue throughout, sort of like a sky colored camouflage. It looks a lot like a Supermarine Spitfire, a single seat fighter plane used by the British. She releases Bucky’s arm to take a closer look at the plane with Will.

Will walks along the length of the sleek plane, checking under the wings and running his hand along the side as he walks back towards her.

“Am I right in thinking this is something like a Spitfire, Will?” she asks.

Will grins, patting the side of the plane as if it were a horse. “Yeah. Stark has been modifying and improving on the design for the RAF. He’s gotten a hold of some new metal outta Africa, called vibranium. Super expensive, lightweight, and bulletproof. Don’t mention it to anybody, including Howard, unless he brings it up. Super secret stuff. He’s been using thin sheets of it to armor key parts of the plane. It’s too expensive to use on more than a few planes for priority missions though. Also, see how he curved the wings back slightly there?” He points to the way they curve back slightly midway down the wing to the tip, reminiscent of a swallow's wings, “makes the plane more aerodynamic, faster.”
Darcy steps under the wing, pointing to the two machine guns and single cannons mounted under each wing. “And these?”

“He’s working on the ammunition. The Germans have begun armoring their planes too, so he’s come up with some armor piercing rounds. He’ll probably be having you test some of that on the ground today.”

Will pulls a crate over next to the and wing boosts himself up, reaching a hand down to her. She clambers up beside him, glancing over at Steve and Bucky circling the cars at the end of the hangar. She watches Steve enthusiastically gesturing at a motorcycle as Bucky nods beside him.

Boys and motorcycles.

She grins at their antics before turning back to Will.

He lifts the canopy and climbs into the cockpit as Darcy kneels on the wing to get a closer look at the controls. He excitedly points out the key features as well as the triggering for the guns and cannons.

Eventually, he climbs out and they sit on the edge of the wing together as Will points out details on the other two planes, one a larger bomber, and the other some kind of transport.

Finally, the door at the other end of the hangar swings open and Howard walks in with Mr. Jarvis.

Howard walks over to the plane she and Will are sitting on and grins. He looks slightly manic, his coveralls stained with grease and hair messy, as if he’s run his hands through it a lot. “Hey kids,” he says, “glad you could make it.”

He saunters over to where Darcy’s legs dangle off the edge of the wing and runs a finger from her knee to her ankle and waggles his eyebrows suggestively at her. “Especially glad you could make it, doll.”

As Bucky and Steve drift their way, Darcy catches Bucky’s eye, kicking Howard’s finger off her ankle. He steps back and she wags a finger at him, “Rude boy. I heard you want me to shoot things today? Maybe you shouldn’t irritate me.”

She swings her legs, narrowly missing Howard’s head, and grins at Steve and Bucky. “Help me down, Buck?”

He nods, “Sure, doll,” he smirks at Howard and steps up on the crate and holds his arms out to her. She slides off the wing into his arms and he steps off the crate, holding her close for a moment before setting her down.

Howard, huffs in mock outrage as she takes Steve’s hand and leans against Bucky, “You should be happy to partake of my genius.”

Steve snorts and Darcy says, “Sure, sure. You’re a gift Howard. When do we get to shoot stuff?” Bucky wraps his arm around her waist and chuckles beside her.

Howard rolls his eyes, “Barbarian. Your marksmanship better live up to the hype.”

“It does. I might need some warm up though. Been a couple years since I’ve practiced regularly,” she says.

Darcy is confident her skill will come back pretty quickly. It’s always been easy for her, probably something to do with her enhanced senses and reflexes.
“A couple years! You’re starting out with the cheap ammo then.” He looks a little aggravated.

He crooks a finger and they follow him over to a couple of Willys MB jeeps. “We’ll be taking these out to the field, Jarvis will follow us in the one loaded with the guns and ammo.”

They clamber into the vehicle, Howard driving, Will in front and Steve, Darcy, and Bucky in back. Jarvis raises one of the garage doors and they drive down an overgrown runway to a field that backs up to a heavily wooded area.

The field has been mown short and there are targets set up for distance from 50 yards out to 1000 yards, just before the tree line. There are also several walls—panels? She’s not sure what they are, over to the left about 500 yards out. She’s not exactly sure what they could be for.

There are taller tripods and low to the ground shooting rests lined up as well as a platform set up. They walk around the shooting rests and platform to see a clay pigeon thrower set up off to the side, with a pile of clay pigeons ready to go. Darcy turns to Howard, “We’re testing shotguns today?”

Howard grins, “Yeah. I wanted to see how you do with a moving target too. You ever used a shotgun?”

“Yes. Not my preference— I usually used a rifle or pistol at home. But I’ll try.” Darcy says.

Bucky shrugs, “I mostly worked with a sniper rifle with my da. Whole other thing I imagine.”

Howard nods and is about to say something when Mr. Jarvis pulls up in the other jeep. He claps his hands, “Ahh. Here we go kids. Let’s take a look at the toys.”

Darcy rolls her eyes at Steve and Bucky, mouthing “kids?”. Steve shrugs. They all know Howard is their age.

Will helps Mr. Jarvis unload several crates from the back of the jeep and Howard excitedly opens them, laying several rifles, shotguns, and pistols on the ground, along with metal boxes of ammunition. Darcy’s eyes widen as he also pulls out two Browning light machine guns and tripods. She asks, “What’s with the machine guns, Howard?”

“Oh, yeah. Gotta test some armor piercing rounds,” he says distractedly.

“On what?” she asks, looking around. He points upfield to the left and now she knows what the walls are for.

Huh.

After everything is unloaded Howard shows them the modifications he’s made to the rifle scopes and makes sure they are properly mounted and leveled with the action.

He hands a shotgun to Bucky, then herself, and she looks it over. Howard holds one too and says, “This is a Winchester Model 1912, very commonly used in the United States military. These in particular are 12 gauge, and have a 6 shot capacity.” He grabs a box of ammo and shows them how to load it, which is simple enough. “I haven’t made any modifications to these except to the heat shield. The ammo you’ll be using is standard, as this is just a little test of your skills.”

“Howard, shooting clay pigeons with a shotgun is a totally different animal than shooting long range
with a rifle,” Darcy says.

Howard grins, “I know. But it’s fun right? Think of it as a warm up.”

Darcy sighs as he hands her a box of ammo and she and Bucky load their guns. Howard loads one for himself and asks Mr. Jarvis to man the machine that throws the clay pigeons.

Steve and Will sit on the platform behind them, their legs dangling over the side, a conveniently located ice chest between them. The two of them grab a beer and clink them together in a toast.

Darcy rolls her eyes at them before focusing on Howard.

He explains they’ll be able to fire as quickly as they can pump the action. He demonstrates by setting up a target about 20 yards away and shooting it six times, quickly pumping it in between shots. Darcy and Bucky observe closely, then each of them fire 2 rounds at the target. They both hit it and grin at each other.

Howard reloads his gun and signals Jarvis to begin flinging the clay targets in the air.

Howard misses the first shot, manages to hit the next two and misses two more before hitting the last one. He looks at his gun and mutters about a flaw in its design.

Darcy walks over to him and hands him her gun, “Hey, I’ll shoot yours. Need more testers using that gun to see if there’s something wrong with it.” she says.

Howard grumbles but hands her his gun.

She winks at Bucky and he smirks as he watches her reload Howard’s gun.

Bucky steps up to the line and gets into position, his stance relaxed. He misses the first pigeon, but he hits the next three handily before he’s out of ammo. Steve and Will clink their beer bottles together and cheer. He lowers his gun, grinning at Darcy and turning to dramatically take a bow towards the platform.

Howard grumbles about beginners luck.

Darcy lifts her gun, resting it against her shoulder with her cheek tight to the stock. She waits, standing sideways to the target area, feet parallel and shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, with most of her weight on the leg that faces forward.

She misses the first shot. She’d expected it, needing to adjust to the gun and get a feel for things. After that, she’s in the weird headspace she enters when she’s completely focused. Intellectually, she realizes there are things to be calculated; speed, distance, and trajectory of the target. She doesn’t consciously gather this information, she anticipates where the target will be and adjusts accordingly.

She hits the next five targets and lowers the gun.

There’s a moment of silence before Will and Steve whoop and Bucky mutters, “Damn, girl,” and laughs.

She grins and hands Howard the gun, “Seems like there’s nothing wrong with it. Maybe I should test out another one?”

Howard smiles despite himself and hands her another gun.
Later in the day, Bucky, Steve, and Darcy sit on camp chairs by the hangar eating roast beef sandwiches and drinking beer provided by Howard. They’re watching the plane Will’s flying spiral through the air, doing tricks to test maneuverability.

Howard peers through binoculars at Will’s antics, gesticulating wildly, and jabbering at Jarvis who’s calmly taking notes on the clipboard he’s holding.

Bucky reaches into the ice chest for another beer. It’s been a good day. He, Darcy, and Will shot pistols and rifles for several hours, testing them at greater and greater distances to determine accuracy and with some of the armor piercing ammo Howard had designed to figure out it’s efficacy with different types of weapons.

They’d even gotten Steve to do a little target practice with them too.

Darcy had patiently showed him how to load a pistol and take aim, standing behind him and guiding his stance before letting him shoot on his own. The punk had looked so proud when he hit the target. He’d gone on to shoot with the rifle and didn’t do bad at all for his first try.

Their girl is a deadeye shot. He’d watched her hit targets 1000 yards away, multiple times. She did it like breathing and it was a marvel to see in action. Once he got back in the swing of things he hadn’t embarrassed himself, but it’s obvious Darcy is in a whole other class in terms of accuracy, and it had been a challenge to keep up with her. Darcy had whispered to him that her ability was just part of her being strange, unlike his skill that’s been earned with hard work.

Bucky thinks she’s amazing and told her so. He told her just because she’s a genius with a gun didn’t mean she didn’t work for it. She flushed the prettiest pink and looked up at him, her blue eyes shining, before she wrapped her arms around him.

He figures there’s always gonna be someone better and someone worse. He knows fellas who work twice as hard at boxing than he does, yet he still beats them in a fight. Some talents are innate. Like Steve’s drawing, he’s always been able to do it, to look at something and translate it into images on paper. Bucky doesn’t have that talent and he doesn’t resent it.

Howard said they can come out with Will anytime they’re testing things, and Will promised to take Bucky up in a plane sometime. He’s really looking forward to that. He offered to Steve too, but he got a little pale at the invitation, and Bucky knew he was remembering how sick he got on the Cyclone at Coney Island.

Will promised to give him a smooth flight, with no crazy maneuvers, and Steve allowed he might try it then.

It’ll be nice to come out here in the summer, when it gets so stifling hot in the city.

He glances over at Steve, who’s squinting his sky blue eyes at Howard and Jarvis, his hand moving rapidly over his sketch pad. Darcy sits between them, her head laid back, eyes closed and face tilted up to the sun. He takes her hand and she cracks an eye open, smiling softly at him before closing it again. He rubs his thumb over the soft skin of her hand and takes another sip of his beer, the malty fizz of it refreshing in his mouth.

Days like this one make him feel like the world is opening up to him. He doesn’t want that feeling to
Chapter End Notes

There really was a big blizzard in NYC in March of 1941. It blew through on the 7th and 8th, depositing 18.1 inches of snow. The city was paralyzed for days afterward while everyone dug out.

Also, Edwin Jarvis is working for Howard Stark sooner than is canon in the MCU. Their puppets, my show.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Darcy and Steve prepare for her birthday dinner, leading to some canoodling—Steve figures out why Bucky likes going down on ladies so much.

Bucky comes home to an interesting scene and Darcy has a birthday request.

Some awkwardness ensues.

Chapter Notes

Not betaed, sorry for any errors. Again with some sexual exploration—let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Saturday, April 26, 1941

Steve pulls the slightly rusty, grocery laden Radio Flyer wagon as he walks home with Darcy from the market. She’d bought it second hand a few weeks back and Bucky fixed it up so it rolls smoothly—it sure made bringing the groceries home a lot easier.

Good thing too—they had a veritable feast planned for today, and he’d promised to help her prepare everything. Bucky is at his ma’s, but is meeting up with them at her place later this afternoon.

Darcy said she always had a special dinner for her birthday, and her ma sent her some money as a gift. So, she decided to use it to make a special dinner for all of them.

Typical of Darcy to give them a gift on her birthday.

When Steve had arrived earlier to meet her for their shopping trip, he’d been surprised to see Mr. Jarvis waiting in one of Howard’s fancy cars at the curb. The slim Brit had rolled down the window and said, “Good morning, Mr. Rogers—off to wish Miss Garland a happy birthday?”

“Yes, sir, it’s a special day after all,” Steve said, smiling.

He had leaned against the car for ten minutes or so, chatting and enjoying the man’s dry humor until Will hurtled out of the building carrying an overnight bag, in a hurry to get going to the airfield for more testing with Howard.

“Hey Steve! Try to keep outta trouble today—and save me a piece of cake!” Will said, flipping his coppery hair out of his eyes and grinning widely.

“Dunno if I can promise anything with Bucky around—ya know he has a sweet tooth,” he said
teasingly.

Will groaned, “Try your damnedest, man.”

He clapped Steve on the shoulder, opened the passenger door, and said, “Good morning, Jarvis! Sorry to make you wait.”

Steve stepped back and waved goodbye as they pulled away then went up to see his girl.

When he’d entered the apartment, Darcy was nibbling on the last of the birthday breakfast Will had prepared and sorting through some books that he’d given her.

She shared the rest of her coffee and bacon with him, all the while flipping distractedly through the pages of her books, and then they’d gone over the grocery list before heading off to the market.

They’re almost home now, which is a good thing as the sky is steadily darkening and the wind is picking up like it’s gonna storm. Fat raindrops begin bouncing off the pavement as they arrive at Darcy’s building.

She lifts the back end of the wagon while he takes the front and they carry it up the steps together. He opens the door and they roll it onto the black and white tile of the vestibule.

Darcy eyes the bags in the wagon and says, “Should we carry the entire thing up the stairs or bring the bags up in a couple trips?”

Usually, they just leave the wagon in a maintenance closet on the first floor and carry their groceries up, but today they have a few more bags than usual. They’d done the weekly shopping for both households plus the extras for Darcy’s birthday dinner. Steve thought he’d be able to handle his end as long as they maybe took a rest on the landing after the second flight of stairs.

Next apartment they get, he hopes for fewer stairs.

Next apartment they get.

He catches himself more and more often thinking they’ll live together some day, even if he can’t imagine how that will work out. She’s made it clear marriage isn’t something she wants any time soon, and even if it were, who exactly would she marry? He thinks it should be Bucky, even though he’s not sure if Bucky gives much thought to marriage either.

He’s only quit dating a new girl every week a few months ago, after all.

Steve would marry her in a minute if she wanted it. But there are a lot of things she wants to accomplish before marrying, and he can’t provide for a wife anyway (he knows she doesn’t buy into that stuff, but he doesn’t know any other way for a man to live and still hold his head up).

These thoughts tangle in his head often lately. The stolen nights and weekends they share make him miss her all the more when they can’t be together.

“Let’s carry it all up in the wagon,” he says.

She nods and grips her end of the wagon and they lift it together, slowly shuffling up the stairs with him lifting the front end. It’s kinda heavy actually, and it’s awkward maneuvering up the stairs backwards.

When they get to the first landing Darcy suggests they switch places, that way she can be the one
walking backwards up the stairs and he just has to hold up his end and keep an eye out for anyone coming down the stairs. He agrees, since she’s actually the stronger of the two of them and definitely more agile.

It hurts his pride a little sometimes, but it is what it is.

They pause for a few minutes on the second landing so he can catch his breath then climb the rest of the way to the apartment.

After they get the groceries put away, Darcy grabs her recipe box and flips through it, pulling out a couple cards full of her loopy handwriting. He looks them over and nods in approval. Looks like she’s going for comfort food. Chicken fried steak, macaroni and cheese, chocolate cake with fudge frosting. She’d also found some canned peas on sale so they would at least have some kind of vegetable.

“It’s still too early to start working on dinner, but we could make the cake.” Darcy says, laying out the ingredients on the counter and pulling out some cake pans and a couple of mixing bowls.

The next half hour is spent mixing the cake batter (Steve stirs, Darcy reads off the recipe card and pours ingredients into the bowl) and after the cake is baking in the oven, they stand side by side at the counter, scraping the sides of the bowl clean of any remaining batter.

Licking their spoons somehow morphs into kissing against the kitchen counter when he decides to taste some stray chocolate on Darcy’s lips.

He pushes her spoon aside and presses her against the counter, tracing her lips with his tongue, the sweet taste of chocolate blending with the flavor of her. She grins before tilting her head to the side, wrapping her arms around his neck and opening her mouth against his, licking into his mouth.

There’s a clatter on the counter beside them as she drops her spoon to spear her hands through his hair, sucking briefly on his bottom lip before stroking his tongue with hers. The kiss becomes a wild thing, all lips and teeth, stealing each other’s breath until he pulls back to track across her jaw to the place on her neck where he can feel her pulse fluttering beneath his lips.

He drops his forgotten spoon on the counter too, wraps one hand around her hip and threads the fingers of the other through the silky hair at the nape of her neck. He tugs on her hair, tilting her head back as he nips her throat with his teeth, laving the bite with his tongue, and sealing his lips over her flesh and sucking.

The floral scent of her wafts over him as she gasps, one hand trailing down his back to his bottom, pressing him against her as she curls a leg around his hip. Her hips circle against his, her skirt riding up around her raised leg until her thigh is exposed. He trails his hand from her neck to the lower curve of her bottom, gripping the soft skin at the top of her thigh and pulling her closer.

Darcy turns her head, her warm breath washing over his ear before she sucks his earlobe into her mouth.

Jesus.

Who knew that would send a bolt of heat straight to his cock? He moans as she tightens her leg around him, grinding against him and driving him crazy.

They’ve been kissing each other for months and he still feels ready to go off like a firecracker every time she presses her body against his.
They haven’t had a lot of time alone in awhile, it’s been kisses and over the clothes touching and there are so many things he wants to do with her but there hasn’t been opportunity.

There is now.

Steve has never been one to back down from something, and what he wants right now is Darcy. He glances at the timer next to the stove, they have a little more than half an hour. Not as much time as he’d like, but enough.

As he loosens her leg from around his hip and steps back, Darcy whines low in complaint and tightens her hands around his neck.

“Come on, doll,” he lowers his eyelashes and gives her the begging look that always helps him get away with murder, “Let’s go lay down, I wanna kiss you some more.”

Darcy snorts, grinning at his flirtation, “Hmmm. I’m onto you, mister.”

She takes his hand and pulls him down the hall.

In the time since they’d unloaded the groceries and gotten the birthday cake started, the brief spring storm has passed. The midday sun is shining through her bedroom doorway into the hall.

She tugs him over to the bed and shoves him, laughing as he lets himself fall across it. Sunlight warms his face and dust motes float through the air, whirling in eddies through the light. Darcy kicks off her shoes and crawls over him, her knees on either side of his hips and hands next to his shoulders, leaning forward to press her soft lips to his.

He pulls her down on top of him, her body against his from chest to hips and her hair falling around his face in a fragrant curtain as they kiss, slow and deep, lips slipping and occasionally nipping at each other.

He rolls to his side, taking her with him, his hands smoothing her hair back from her cheeks as they continue kissing. She works her fingers under the edge of his shirt until she touches the skin of his back. She strokes up and down, lightly scoring his back with her nails when he moves to kiss her throat, before tracing her clavicle with his tongue.

He noses aside the collar of her shirt, inhaling her scent and popping the top two buttons before running his lips along the swell of one breast. Darcy tugs at his hair and arches into him, and he grins against her skin, “Eager, Darce?”

“She’s not just me,” she grumbles, “Somebody’s getting—cocky.”

He hums in response, reflexively thrusting against her hand. “Hmmm, maybe.”

Her fingers slide up to work at the buttons of his shirt and he returns the favor. In a flurry of movement their clothes hit the floor, leaving Steve in his undershorts and Darcy in her bra, panties, stockings, and garter belt.

He buries his face in her cleavage, dragging his nose along the satiny smooth curve of her breast where it swells above her bra. He loves this place most of all, so soft and warm, where the floral scent of her perfume and her own chemistry meld into something intoxicating.

He slips his hand behind her back, furiously working at the clasp of her bra. But she takes pity on him and loosens it herself, flinging it on the floor before lying back on the pillows, pulling him down on top of her again.
He busies himself with exploring her breasts, running his lips over the upper curves of them, focusing briefly on a tiny birthmark on the inner curve of her left breast while his fingers stroke over her hardened nipples.

She arches helplessly against him every time he gently pinches her nipples between his thumb and index finger so he does it again and again, increasing the pressure slightly and observing her reaction. In between pinches he soothes them with his tongue, licking in circles before sucking gently as Darcy’s hands clench and pull at his hair.

“God—Stevie,” she slurs, throwing her head back and arching into his mouth, “feels so good”.

He continues until she is trembling, running his teeth against the underside of each breast, mesmerized by the silky glide of her fair skin against his lips.

He slips down her belly, circling her belly button with his tongue as his hands grip her hips, holding her in place. She bucks against him, breath stuttering as he moves lower, bringing his fingers down to stroke between her legs, the wet fabric of her panties clinging to her folds.

“Darce?”

“Hmmm?”

“Can I take these off?”

Her gaze is heated as she bites her lip, grabbing the sides of her panties and shimmying out of them. She starts to unhook her stockings from her garter belt and he stops her hands. “Keep them on. I like the way they look and the way they feel against me.”

She raises one eyebrow but leaves them on.

Her stockings are sheer with a seam up the back, and smooth against his shoulders as he dips his head to look at the triangle of curls between her legs. He strokes one finger up and down the slippery juncture between her thighs, focusing on circling the tight bundle of nerves at the top as she gasps and rolls her hips against him.

He leans closer, using his shoulders to spread her legs further apart. Darcy squirms a little and he glances up at her face, she’s flushed and looking slightly embarrassed as he continues to circle over her sensitive nub while he reaches with the other hand to spread her lips further apart.

Darcy breathes, “Wha—what are you doing?”

Her breath hitches and she wriggles, gripping the sheets and bucking again as he increases the pressure of his circling finger slightly.

He hums, “Looking,” he glances up at her, “you’re so beautiful Darce. I want to see all of you.”

Her thighs relax around his shoulders and he circles her slick bud again. “I didn’t get a good look at this last time,” he murmurs. Fascinated by the pink folds between her legs he strokes his fingertips over her outer and then her inner lips.

“I suppose not,” she whispers as he teases her entrance, curiously dipping his fingertip into the velvety softness within, “Ugh—Stevie,” she whines, her hips tensing against his fingers.

He sinks his finger in past his second knuckle as he leans forward, bringing his lips to the slick skin at her center and lapping it with his tongue, focusing on circling the sensitive spot near the top again.
Darcy gasps and arches into him, keening low as she rocks against his mouth.

He’d wondered what this was all about.

Bucky had salaciously described a dame wrapping her legs around his head more than once, and at the time, Steve had wondered why anyone would want to do that.

But then, he witnessed the aftermath of Bucky doing it to Darcy, the satisfaction on his face and the wrecked pleasure on hers.

And he got curious.

And he wanted.

She tastes sweet and slightly tangy, like citrus. And she smells amazing. Musky and floral and almost fruity, all at once. The scent of her jolts through him like a rush of adrenaline, his cock instantly leaking as he presses it against the mattress.

*And the sounds she’s making—*

*God.*

She’s crying his name interspersed with please, *oh don’t stop* and *oh, god,* gasping and whimpering, making him feel powerful and weak at the same time.

Her thighs tremble against his shoulders and he convulsively thrusts his cock against the mattress as he flicks his tongue over her, pressing closer to suck on her swollen bud, remembering to curl his finger back and forth inside her as he’d done before.

Darcy’s back bows and her legs tighten around his shoulders as she convulses beneath him, choking out his name.

He continues to rock his pelvis against the mattress and comes just as her legs relax around his shoulders. He rests his head against her thigh and moans low as he trembles, his muscles clenched in a paroxysm of pleasure.

It feels so incredible he’s barely embarrassed.

He collapses against her, his head pillowed on her thigh as they both lay lax and panting in the aftermath.

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After a couple minutes, Darcy snaps out of her post orgasmic haze and tugs on Steve’s hair to get his attention.

“Um, not to be rude, but did you—uh—*finish?* Or do you need a—hand?”

Steve snorts against her thigh and she squirms a bit at the gust of his warm breath so close to her lady parts.

He levers himself onto one elbow and gazes up at her, “Yeah. I kinda made a mess,” he glances ruefully at his lap, and mutters, “I’m trying not to be embarrassed about it.”
She tugs on his hair again, urging him to wiggle up the bed to lay next to her. When he’s laying on his side next to her, their heads sharing the same pillow, she looks into his blue eyes and says, “Steven Grant, you have nothing to be embarrassed about. In fact, I’m beginning to wonder if you’re some kind of sexual prodigy because what you did down there?” she waves her hand in the direction of her crotch, “was mind blowing.”

He grins, the corners of his eyes crinkling with the force of it, “Blew something for me too, doll.”

She snickers, shoving his shoulder and he rolls onto his back laughing.

They snuggle into each other for a few minutes until he starts to twitch, pulling at the front of his undershorts in irritation.

She says, “I can tell you’re bothered—why don’t you get cleaned up and I’ll go check on the cake? It’s time to take it out, anyway.”

She sits up, throwing her legs over the side of the bed and standing, arching her back and raising her arms overhead in a slow stretch. A soft noise from Steve causes her to look over her shoulder.

He’s still laying on his back, his arm stretched across the slight indent where she’d been laying, his shining blue eyes intent.

“What?” she asks.

“I wanna draw you just like this—I wanna remember what you look like right now, forever,” he whispers, a soft smile on his face.

She turns and leans over him, cupping his face in her hands to kiss him soft and slow.

*He is the best man.*

She pulls back, rests her forehead on his and whispers, “Love you, Stevie.”

“Love you too, Darce,” he says, stroking her cheekbone with his thumb.

She smiles and stands again, grabbing her blue robe and slipping into it. “Maybe after you clean up and I get the cake out of the oven, you can draw me. I’ll try to sit still.”

“That sounds like a plan.”

Bucky whistles under his breath as he walks up the last flight of stairs to Darcy’s place.

He carries a wrapped package under one arm and a bottle of red wine in his other hand. The scent of chocolate perfumes the air outside of the apartment and he smiles. He knows it’s not his birthday, but *hot damn,* any day there’s cake is a good one, in his opinion.

He raps on the door out of politeness, but after a moment he shifts the wine bottle and runs his fingers along the top of the doorframe for the spare key, and lets himself in.

There’s no one in the living room or kitchen when he enters, but he hears the faint sound of music from down the hall.
He sets the package and wine on the kitchen table, spying the source of the tantalizing chocolate aroma on the counter. He takes a moment to check out the cake, as yet unfrosted, before going in search of Steve and Darcy.

The sound of music gets louder as he walks down the hall and what he sees through the open door of the bedroom causes his thoughts to stutter as he leans against the doorframe, utterly transfixed by the vision before him.

....Holy hell.

Darcy is stretched across her bed, naked except for her garter belt and stockings, with her arms curled around her head, one shapely leg outstretched and the other bent at the knee. Her dark hair is tumbled around her head and her eyes are closed, face relaxed, as if in sleep.

Steve has his back to the door, sitting in a chair about five feet from the bed, his blond hair disheveled, wearing his undershirt and trousers with his suspenders dangling around his hips. He balances a sketchbook in his lap, his head tilting up to look at her, then down again, as his hand moves rapidly over the paper.

Bucky’s eyes flash over the room, noting the radio from the living room placed on the dresser, Darcy’s clothing littering the floor, and Steve’s shirt and her blue robe flung over the end of the bed.

He silently runs his eyes over the pale expanse of Darcy’s skin. Starting at her red-polished toes and working his way up, biting his lip as he pauses on the barely visible juncture between her thighs, moving up to linger on her breasts, before continuing further to find her storm blue eyes trained on him, her expression amused.

“Hey, Bucky,” she says.

The scratchy sound of Steve’s pencil moving over the page stops and Steve glances over his shoulder at him with a distracted air and a charcoal smudge on his cheek.

“Hey, Buck,” he says.

As if this is an everyday situation.

He walks over to Steve, resting his hand on his friend’s shoulder and glancing down at his work.

“Say, Darce—are you sure it’s your birthday? Because it feels like it must be mine right now,” he purrs.

She rolls her eyes at him and shrugs.

Steve resumes shading his drawing and mutters, “We’re making art here, jerk—don’t go distracting my model,” he pauses, gripping his pencil between his teeth as he smudges some of the pencil lines with a finger.

Bucky chuckles, leaning over Steve’s shoulder to take a closer look at the drawing.

It’s breathtaking, really. Every line of her face and figure is lovingly rendered, conveying Darcy's unguarded sensuality as well as the deep feeling Steve has for his subject.

“This is amazing, Stevie,” his gaze flicks to Darcy and back again, “how long you been at this?”

“Dunno,” he cranes his neck to look at the clock on the bedside table, “couple hours?” he says, “drew her in a few different poses.”
Darcy pipes up, “Can I move now?”

“Sure, Darce—just fine tuning a few things. You should probably stretch,” Steve says.

She takes him at his word and sits up onto her knees, groaning as she arches her back and raises her arms overhead in a long stretch.

He and Steve both freeze, transfixed by the curves of her body in profile.

_Ha. Steve isn’t as unaffected as he’d like me to think._

“Damn—I wish I had a camera,” Bucky mutters. Steve clears his throat and nods in agreement before refocusing on his work.

She lowers her arms and crawls forward, laying on her belly with her head turned towards them. “Even if you had a camera, where the heck would you get the film developed? Dunno if I’d like naked pictures of me making the rounds,” she muses.

Bucky looks intently at her, “I’d figure something out.”

She laughs and sits up, grabbing her robe from the end of the bed and slipping into it before walking over to them. She leans against Bucky’s side, her clean floral scent wafting over him as she and looks over Steve’s shoulder at the drawing he’s still working on.

“Oh—this is beautiful. You made me look—is this how I look to you?” she says, resting her hands on the back of the chair and leaning forward to hook her chin over Steve’s shoulder.

He tilts his head slightly so his cheek rests against hers as he works to finish the portrait to his satisfaction.

“Yeah—gorgeous everywhere,” he whispers, kissing her cheek.

She sighs and wraps her arms around his neck in a brief hug.

“Thank you, I love it,” she says and feathers soft kisses across his cheek before standing again, “I wanna see the rest later.”

Steve mumbles affirmation, distracted again by his work.

She wraps her arm around Bucky’s waist and asks, “You wanna help me frost the cake while Steve finishes up here?”

He grins, “Only If I get to lick the bowl after.”

“Deal,” she says.

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Darcy leans on the counter frosting the cake as Bucky sits on the countertop next to her, scraping the last of the chocolate frosting from the bowl. He swings his legs, gently bumping the heels of his sock clad feet against the lower cabinets.

“So—wanna tell me what you and Stevie got up to this afternoon?” he teases.
She tilts her head towards the package on the kitchen table, “wanna tell me what’s in the package?”

Bucky smiles, “It’s a gift from me and Stevie—you hafta wait til after dinner, doll.”

She pouts, not really put out. She’s just stalling. She focuses on smoothing out the frosting around the edge of the cake.

“Steve and I, does it bother you?” she says.

Bucky frowns, “What?”

She glances at him then back at the cake, carefully smoothing the frosting on another section of cake, “that Steve and I engaged in some,” she clears her throat, “um—heavy petting this afternoon.”

Bucky’s legs still, and he slowly licks the last of the chocolate from the spoon, his brow creased in thought. He slides off the counter to stand next to her.

When she sets the knife aside and turns to look at him, his silvery blue eyes scan her face.

“I’m just curious about what ya got up to,” he says, pulling her into his arms and whispering in her ear, ‘thinkin’ about the two of ya together kinda gets me going.”

“Really?” she says, intrigued.

“Really,” he teases, “heavy petting, huh?”

“Oh—” she lays a hand on his chest, “you have no idea—he’s very—thorough.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow in interest, “Yeah? Do tell.”

“That attention to detail that makes him such a remarkable artist? Extends to sex. He’s—very committed—to figuring out my body and what works for me.”

Bucky smirks, an expression close to pride on his face, “That’s Stevie for ya, punk doesn’t do anything in half measures.”

“Boy, I’ll say.” she says wryly.

His arms tighten around her and she rests her forehead against the firm muscles of his chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart. She inhales the clean scent of his shaving soap, overlaid with hint of something sharp and green like fresh cut wood, and the light spice of healthy male.

She loves him.

He’s so important to her, and she never wants him to feel left out.

Really. Having two boyfriends can be a little nerve wracking—particularly when it comes to sex.

She’s been ready to rip open the box of condoms still lying unused in her bedside table for a while, but she’s been stalling because she isn’t sure how to approach it with the three of them involved. She knows Bucky has been waiting for a sign from her and Steve has only recently gotten to that point himself.

She blurts, “I have condoms.”
She knocks her forehead against his chest a couple of times.

Oh boy, she can’t believe she said that out loud.

She’d planned to bring it up later on, maybe when they were all curled up in her bed.

They sleep together regularly, but things don’t usually get too far. Oh, there had been some kisses and that one incident on Bucky’s birthday that she had initiated, but usually, she slept between them and woke in the morning with one or the other of them pressed up against her, their morning erections painfully obvious to her but not acknowledged by them.

If she were sleeping alone with either of them, she knows that would not be the case and she’s struggling to navigate the sexual part of their relationship when the three of them are together.

Bucky reels back, surprised, and coughs, “Wha—doll, what?”

She straightens her spine, looking him in the eye, “I have condoms. It’s my birthday and I want to use them.”

A choked sound from the hallway announces Steve’s arrival and she turns to see him stopped dead at the entryway to the kitchen.

His eyes are wide and the tips of his ears are red. Sure sign that he’s embarrassed.

Or excited.

She hopes for excited.

His gaze travels over her head to Bucky and she knows they are having one of their silent conversations.

Dammit. They better not try to make a decision about this without her.

Steve crosses over to them and says quietly, “Darce, what exactly do you want to happen?”

“That’s the thing! I know what I want, I’m just not sure how to get there without upsetting one of you,” she sighs, “there can only be one first time for me and there are two of you.”

Bucky exhales, “Doll, let’s sit down and hash this out.”

He takes her hand and leads her to the sofa where she sits down, Bucky on one side, Steve on the other.

She pulls her legs up, resting her forehead on her knees. “I’m sorry I’m making such a mess of this—I’d hoped the moment would just present itself? That we’d fall into it naturally? But with three people it’s a little more complicated,” she says, ruefully.

Steve takes her hand in his and says, “Honestly, Darce, I’ve thought about it—a lot,” he says, “but I’m still figurin’ stuff out and everythin’ we do is new for me too. I figured I’d do whatever ya wanted and go from there.”

She turns her head to look at him and his earnest blue eyes trace her features as he squeezes her hand reassuringly.

“You know you can ask for things you want too,” she says.
He shrugs, “You’ve given me more than I ever thought I’d have, and this thing the three of us have works, no matter how different it is.”

Bucky nods, “It does work. I’ve dated a lotta girls—“ Steve snorts and Bucky reaches around her to smack him on the back of his head, “but none of ’em made me as happy as you. None of ’em treated Stevie well and it wasn’t til I saw the two of ya together that I realized that’s what was always missing.”

She sighs, lifting her head from her knees and leaning into Bucky. She rests her head on his shoulder and he wraps his arm around her, his chin on top of her head. Steve leans into her other side, still holding her hand.

“I want this—the three of us together,” she says softly, “the first time—um—the first time I have sex, I want both of you to be there, because I love you both and don’t wanna leave either of you out.”

Steve clears his throat, “I’ve seen Bucky canoodling plenty, but not, ya know— doing everything,” he ducks his head, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck, “and we’ve known each other since we were kids and shared a room for years so I’ve seen him naked, obviously, but not, ya know doing that—,” his cheeks are red with embarrassment.

“So, I have to choose one of you to be with me the first time?” she says.

“Should be Buck,” he says.

Bucky says, “Why, punk? She’s your girl too.”

“Cause I’ve never done it before and I want Darcy’s first time to be good.” Steve insists.

“Who says it ain’t gonna be good with you? Always selling yourself short,” Bucky grumbles.

“Darcy needs someone more experienced,” Steve says, a mutinous look on his face.

Darcy watches their back and forth, feeling irritated. This is exactly what she’d hoped to avoid! Talking about it was supposed to make things better.

She throws up her hands, “Oh my god! Just know that I have the condoms and I’m ready. It’ll happen when it happens—with whoever—and the one that doesn’t do it can’t get mad!” she jumps up and storms down the hallway to her room, “I’m gonna get dressed.”

Steve looks at Bucky with wide eyes after she stomps away.

Bucky flops back on the couch and rubs his eyes with his fingers before dragging them down his face.

“Well, shit,” he mutters.

“What’re we gonna do,” Steve says.

“I’d say whatever she wants but it seems you’re a little shy about doing “that” with me in the same room.” he says.

“Aw, Buck. Come on, not sure how three of us would fit together anyhow, wouldn’t one of us end
up—I dunno, watchin’ more than doin’?”

Bucky inwardly rolls his eyes. For a guy who’s always been into comic books, it’s amazing Stevie never took a look at some Tijuana Bibles. Those would’ve given him some ideas of what three people could get up to, other than watching.

*Unless he was into that.*

“No, punk. That wouldn’t happen unless you or I decided to just watch. Which some people like to do,” he pauses, gauging Steve’s response.

Steve’s eyes become unfocused as he thinks things over, a light flush creeping up his neck into his cheeks.

*Huh.*

His friend might be into watching more than he admits or even realizes.

Personally, he’d long ago lost any self-consciousness about his body or sex. When he’s making time with a gal he’s so focused on giving her a good time, and having a good time himself, that he doesn’t worry about what other people think.

This may have led to few exhibitionistic situations which Steve witnessed.

He’s been accused of having no shame, and maybe it’s true.

But Stevie is uncomfortable with his body, and also sexually inexperienced, so it’s natural he’d be anxious about what Darcy had suggested.

“You could just be there—ya wouldn’t have to do nothin’ in front of me, I wouldn’t mind and obviously you’ve seen all of Darcy, so—“ he says, raising his eyebrows in question. He didn’t think it was possible for Steve to get any redder, but somehow he manages.

He choking out, “Maybe—if Darcy is okay with it?”

Bucky doesn’t think she’d care. He also doesn’t think Steve will be sitting this one out, much as he may like to convince himself he will.

“Don’t worry, punk,” he says, “I’m gonna go talk to her now.”

[Info on Tijuana Bibles](#)

Chapter End Notes

Click the link above for more info on Tijuana Bibles, also known as blue bibles or two
pagers amongst other things before the late 40’s, but I chose to use the name they are referred to now. Interesting precursor to comic books and porn mags, lol.

Also, thanks you to each of you who are kind enough to comment—it’s very encouraging and helps me continue writing!
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Darcy’s birthday wish comes true.

Chapter Notes

Happy Tuesday! Here’s a chapter—two days early.

NSFW, guys. I blushed writing it, even.

No beta, sorry for any errors in grammar or syntax. Also, Archive formatting has been a bit wonky since last week—weird spacing and stuff. Hopefully I caught all of it.

Much love to all of you who take time to comment on this story, it makes me write faster. I do try to comment in return to everyone who reviews, if I miss you, it’s not intentional! Some of my comments disappeared into the ether, actually. *shrug*

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bucky pauses in the doorway to Darcy’s bedroom, knocking gently on the doorframe before entering.

She’s seated at the vanity, dressed in the shirt and skirt that he’d previously seen on the floor, mechanically brushing her dark hair, a far-away look in her eyes.

He walks up behind her, placing his hands on her shoulders.

“Ya mad, doll?” he asks softly.

She sighs, dropping her brush on the vanity and leaning back to rest her head against his stomach.

“Not really,” she says, closing her eyes as he combs his fingers through her hair, “just frustrated. I don’t have any relationship experience to compare—I worry about messing things up. Maybe I sorta did already.”

He kneels next to her chair, turning her to look at him. Her blue eyes are glassy with tears. He cups her face in his hands and she bites her lip, chin trembling slightly as she tries not to cry.

“Aw, Darce—don’t cry, baby,” he hugs her to him, “ya didn’t mess up. It'll be alright.”

He holds her against his chest, her head tucked under his chin, and rocks her back and forth. Her breath hitches and he squeezes her tighter, rubbing soothing circles on her back.

“I just thought—I thought I should let you know I was ready,” she says, her voice clogged with tears, “it didn’t seem right to just go ahead with one of you and not discuss it with both of you. Is it wrong to talk about these things?”
He thinks she’s probably the bravest girl he’s ever met. She plunges ahead, loving him and Stevie and wearing her heart on her sleeve.

He’s used to flirting and cajoling girls and them being coy and never actually talking about sex. Her forthright approach sometimes throws him for a loop.

She’s a lot like Steve, actually.

His honesty has gotten him into plenty of trouble, but it’s sure made him the best and truest friend Bucky’s ever had. He always knows his friend has his back, it’s a certainty that’s made the hardships of life bearable.

How he’s managed to be loved by two people who have the courage to love with their whole hearts he’ll never know, but he’s so grateful.

“No, it’s not wrong. Just not used to talkin’ about it, but I’m glad ya trust us enough to tell us what ya want.” he dips his head to kiss her forehead and whispers against her skin, “we just need to convince Stevie, he’s a little shy.”

She looks up, hope shining in her eyes, “How?”

“Well—I’m thinking we’ll have a nice dinner together,” he pauses to kiss her softly, “and go see a show like we planned,” he trails light kisses across her cheek and murmurs, “then we’ll see what happens,” he leans in to kiss her again, gently nipping her bottom lip before releasing it to say, “did ya want us to stay here tonight?”

“Yes. Will’s working with Howard for the weekend,” she says, “you know, it wouldn’t matter to Will if you stayed over when he’s home. Tony sleeps here often enough.”

Bucky shakes his head, “Seems disrespectful throw it in his face that I’m fooling around with his sister—wouldn’t wanna make him uncomfortable,” he pauses, grinning slyly, “plus, ya get kinda loud, Darce.”

She smacks his shoulder, her cheeks growing red, “Ugh! I can’t help it!” he chortles as she buries her face in his chest and mutters, “thank goodness Will sleeps like a rock.”

“Let’s just have a nice evening together. Later, when we go to bed, just follow my lead,” he says.

Darcy looks up at him suspiciously, “What’re you gonna do?”

He brushes her hair behind her ear and leans in to kiss her neck, working his way to her ear as she tilts her head, surrendering to his ministrations. “Whatever ya want,” he breathes in her ear, and he hears her breath catch.

“Happy birthday to me,” she sighs.

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Later that evening, Steve walks home from the picture show with Darcy and Bucky, enjoying the mild weather of the early spring evening.

Darcy is sandwiched between he and Bucky, laughing at something Bucky said, carrying the last of the bag of popcorn they’d gotten at the theater. Every so often she chuck a kernel at Bucky who catches it in his mouth.
She’s wearing her birthday present, a dress he and Bucky had spotted in a shop window, deep plum in color, with a pattern of white and gray flowers on it.

Darcy isn’t the kind of gal who can wear things off the rack, her curves require alteration.

Fortunately, Bucky had the idea to take one of her dresses and use it for measurements. Will had snuck one to them last week, and they’d taken it to the lady in their building who did sewing and laundry for extra money. They’d managed to get it back into Darcy’s wardrobe before she noticed it was missing.

Her face had lit up like a sunrise when she unwrapped the package, she said no one had ever bought her clothing except for her ma, holding it up to her front and spinning around, a big grin on her face.

Unbeknownst to Steve, Bucky had also bought her some new stockings, sheer black ones with lace bands at the top. He’d felt a little heated when she pulled them from the package, running her fingers down their silky length and exclaiming over the cost.

Bucky had smirked at him, eyes flashing knowingly, like he knew exactly what he was thinking.

Sure, he liked stockings on a dame, who didn’t?

He glances down at her legs as she turns to walk backwards in front of he and Bucky, chucking another kernel of popcorn at Bucky, who leans to the side and catches it in his mouth.

She’s wearing the new stockings, too.

“I really liked the trousers Katherine Hepburn wore in the movie! I might get myself a pair,” she says, handing Bucky the bag of popcorn before turning and linking her arm with his.

She extends her hand to Steve, pulling him to her side and gently nudging him with her hip.

“What do ya think, Stevie?” she says.

“Ya look swell in whatever ya wear Darce,” he says, privately thinking he’d miss the stockings though.

She shrugs, “Would take a lot of alterations to make that work, I think. I’m not a tall drink of water like Miss Hepburn,” she hums, her head tilted to the side as she contemplates a shop window full of men’s clothing.

“S’all right, doll. I like a curvy little dame like yourself,” Bucky says, feeding her some popcorn and hugging her to his side.

Steve wonders if her curves would be more or less distracting in trousers.

He looks up the block and spots Clara leaving the diner with her blond friend, Bonnie, and heading towards them.

Clara and Bonnie had gone on one disastrous double date with he and Bucky last summer.

He and Bonnie had sat stiffly side by side at the movie theater as Bucky and Clara did their best to eat each other’s faces next to them.

Bonnie had made it clear she didn’t even wanna hold his hand, leaning as far away from him as possible as he glumly tried to concentrate on the movie. Meanwhile, Bucky was beside him whispering things to Clara that made her protest and giggle, before engaging in some very
exhibitionistic behavior.

Ugh.

After that, Steve refused to be set up by Bucky ever again. A man has his pride, after all.

Clara has a snotty look on her face as she looks Darcy up and down. Bonnie leans in and whispers something to Clara and they giggle together, shooting catty looks their way.

Darcy, who’d been busy arguing the merits of Jimmy Stewart over Cary Grant with Bucky, cocks her head, squeezing Steve’s hand as he tenses.

“Hello, Bucky,” Clara says sweetly, reaching up to fluff her brown hair.

Bucky glances over at Clara and Bonnie, who pause as they come abreast of them on the sidewalk.

“Hello, Clara, Bonnie,” he tips his head politely, eyeing them warily and tightening his arm around Darcy.

“Hello, Pete,” Clara says to Steve.

He sighs, rolling his eyes. “It’s Steve,” he says.

“Oh yeah, right,” she waves her hand vaguely in his direction.

Darcy begins tapping her toe on the pavement. Steve glances at her and she purses her lips slightly, her eyes flashing with irritation.

Clara says, “Haven’t seen ya in awhile at any of the dance halls—ya forget how ta dance?”

“Nah, been dancin’ plenty. Found some new places to frequent,” Bucky says, coiling one of Darcy’s dark curls around his finger and letting it spring free. She tilts her head and looks up at him, smiling at him slow and sweet, the kind of smile that she usually bestows before kissing either of them senseless.

Bucky’s eyes turn molten as he gazes at Darcy’s red lips, and he presses his teeth into his lower lip, inhaling deeply before glancing briefly at Clara, his gaze quickly wandering back to Darcy.

“Oh?” Clara says, giving Darcy a dismissive once over, “huh.”

Bucky is oblivious, his mind obviously on other things.

“Yeah, well, have a good night ladies. We have places to be,” he says, barely glancing at them as he tugs on Darcy’s arm and the three of them start to walk away.

Steve hears angry whispering behind them and Darcy chuckles under her breath at whatever she’s hearing.

“She can’t seem to get over you, Bucky,” she says lowly, “you must have really rocked her world.”

“Not even a fraction of what I’m gonna do to you doll,” he murmurs, as they approach Darcy’s building.

“Promises, promises,” she sasses, “what d’ya say we get some of that birthday cake, fellas?”
Darcy smooths her nightgown over her hips and checks her reflection in the bathroom mirror. She’d debated getting something special to wear for her birthday, but in the end had felt more comfortable with one of the familiar light cotton nightgowns she favors sleeping in. The one she’s wearing is her favorite; light blue, sleeveless, and cut like a slip. The cotton is thin and soft from many washings, tiny buttons form a row from the v-neckline to her waist, where the gown flows loose over her hips to the floor. She grabs her blue robe from the hook on the back of the door and slips it on, it’s still chilly at night and she’ll wear it until she gets into bed.

She walks down the hall and enters the bedroom, seeing Steve ready for bed, propped up against the headboard with a pillow jammed behind his back, scribbling in the sketchbook he’d left in her room earlier.

“Where’s Bucky?” She asks, crossing to the vanity and sitting down, opening a jar of cold cream and spreading it lightly over her face, neck, and hands while she watches him in the mirror.

“He forgot his smokes when we went home to change before the movie, should be back in a minute,” he says, blue eyes intent on his drawing pad as he flicks the pages, his pencil scratching against its surface as his teeth worry his lip in concentration.

She runs her hairbrush through her hair before she stands, draping her robe over the chair and crawling into bed with him. He tears his gaze from his work and fastens it on her as she curls up next to him, resting her head on his shoulder and looking down at the paper.

The drawings are outstanding.

He’s put everything in there, the things she doesn’t like about herself; how her breasts are too abundant to be perky, the way her thighs are kind of chubby, the birthmark on her breast, the one at the inside of her thigh, her wild halo of curls, and made her look more beautiful than she’s ever felt in her life.

She flicks the page and sees the previous drawing, posed on her knees facing away from him, her arms stretched over her head and her hair tumbling around her shoulders, naked except for the stockings and garters.

She notes he’d captured the dimples at the base of her spine, the birthmark on her right shoulder blade, the fullness of her bottom and the tight nip of her waist.

She’s never been a fan of her figure, curvy in a way that makes men take notice but never take her seriously, difficult to dress, not as tall as she’d like. But Steve thinks she’s beautiful and his drawings help her to see it for herself.

“These are incredible, Stevie,” she breathes.

He kisses her cheek and flicks the page to the first drawing, where she’d been facing him, legs curled to the side and leaning on one arm, her robe loosely belted and parted to show the inner curves of her breasts, her belly button, and the curve of one hip, just enough to provoke without actually being nude.

Weirdly, this is the sexiest drawing of all—makes her look like the pin-up Bucky claims she looks like.

Her face looks mischievous, she had been smirking at Steve because his ears had been so red as he pulled her robe apart and posed her. She’d messed with him a little as he drew, letting her robe fall
open a little bit more and briefly exposing a nipple before pulling it back into position, staring heatedly at him and biting her lower lip before soothing it with a flick of her tongue.

He’d squirm occasionally, telling her she was killing him as he tried to focus on the work.

“I wish I had a better sense of color, this one in particular would look swell with the contrast of your robe against your skin,” he says.

“Mmmm—Maybe. They’re amazing anyhow,” she says.

Steve sets the sketchbook aside and scrunches down, pulling her with him to lay back on the pillows, tugging the covers up over their heads.

“Are we hiding?” she whispers.

“Yeah. Under here it’s just me and you,” he says, stroking his fingers over her cheekbones before pulling her into a soft, slow, kiss.

She wraps one arm around his neck, pulling him closer so their chests are touching, licking his bottom lip before he tilts his head, slotting their mouths together.

Steve loves to do everything slowly, he likes to tease, kiss, and stroke her everywhere and keep her on edge. It started as a way for him to control his breathing, but it’s become a way to make her crazy. He likes it when she gets frustrated and starts to plead.

But also, going slow has allowed them figure each other out.

For instance, he shudders every time she bites and sucks at the juncture of his neck and shoulder, something she plans to take advantage of in a minute.

She strokes the hair at the nape of his neck and gently pulls, and he grunts, pulling back from the kiss and giving her space to work her mouth along his jaw to his ear. She flicks her tongue over his earlobe before moving down his neck, gently nipping and sucking as he groans, sliding his hand down her back to grab a handful of her bottom, pressing them tighter together.

She wants to lead this time.

He’d been so good to her earlier and she’d barely done anything for him. Besides, she loves it when Steve lets go.

Mindful that Bucky will be returning soon, she concentrates on driving him crazy, slowly kissing him, licking into his mouth, and clutching at his hair. She undulates her hips as he thrusts the hardened length of his cock against her.

She trails her hands beneath his undershirt, tracing up the silky skin of his back. Steve has the most beautiful skin, soft and fair, and she loves the way he shivers and presses into her hands when she touches him.

She pushes his undershirt up and he raises his arms so she can pull it off. She flips the blankets off of them to drop it on the floor.

She raises herself on her elbows and lifts one leg to throw over his lap, straddling him as she leans forward to kiss him again, her hands woven in his hair.

Steve’s slides his hands along the outside of her thighs, pushing her nightgown up further. She gently
bites his lip as his hands stutter to a stop upon discovering she’s naked beneath it.

She breathes, “Just think, if you hadn’t gotten yourself some new undershorts when you went home, there would be nothing between us right now.”

She rocks against him suggestively and he moans low, “Doll, ya know I’d of kept my pants on before I got in your bed, otherwise.”

“Shame,” whispers, licking and kissing her way down his neck to the juncture of his neck and shoulder, pausing to suck a bruise there as he shudders.

She hears the sound of footsteps outside the apartment and the key turning in the lock.

Bucky is here.

Steve pulls her back up to his mouth, kissing her slow, licking and nibbling her lips in between deep kisses that leave both of them breathless. His hands wander down her neck to her shoulders, pushing the straps of her nightgown down and exposing the tops of her breasts.

She can hear Bucky in the doorway, his clothes rustle as he shifts and moves closer.

Steve is still oblivious.

The bedside lamp flicks off and Steve startles beneath her as Bucky runs a hand down the length of her back, palm coming to rest just above Steve’s on the upper curve of her bottom.

“You two couldn’t wait til I got back?” Bucky mutters.

She leans forward, softly kissing Steve before answering, “Of course not.”

Steve arches his back uncontrollably as she rocks her hips against him, groaning, “Mmmm, kinda got carried away.”

“Know how ya feel, punk,” Bucky murmurs, and lifts his hand from her, the edge of the bed dipping as he sits down.

Steve tugs her into a kiss and rolls her onto her side, her back to Bucky. She hears the thud of Bucky’s shoes dropping on the floor then the rustle of him removing his shirt and pants.

After a moment, the blankets lift and Bucky is pressed behind her, his breath warm on her neck before he presses open mouthed kisses there. She arches her back to rub her bottom against his obvious erection.

He thrusts against her, his hand trailing over her hip to the bunched up hem of her nightgown, high around her thighs. He slides his hand up, discovering the naked skin beneath.

“Someone’s been naughty,’ he drawls, tracing a circle over her bare hip before gripping her there and rocking his hips against her again.

“Ugh—not naughty,” she stutters, throwing her leg over Steve’s hip, “proactive.”

Meanwhile, Steve has kissed his way down her throat, and is currently loosening the buttons at the front of her nightgown.

Somehow she is no longer leading.
Steve is evidently on his own mission.

Bucky inhales the scent of Darcy’s hair as he nudges it aside with his nose, kissing her neck just under her ear. He can feel her pulse hammering under her skin, or maybe that’s his, because right now his whole body feels electric. All that’s between them is the fabric of her nightgown and his undershirt and shorts, and he aims to tear those barriers down posthaste.

He leans back, reaching behind him for the back of his shirt, pulling it over his head and dropping it on the floor. He presses his chest against her back again and Darcy throws an arm behind her, her fingers combing through his hair and settling on the back of his neck, holding him to her.

She tilts her hips back against him and he groans low, rubbing his cock against the thin fabric barely covering her.

He traces his hand further up the smooth skin of her hip, bunching her nightgown around her waist, rolling his hips against the soft roundness of her bottom.

She moans slightly, pressing against him before she wiggles a bit, her nightgown slipping down further as Steve works the buttons at the front of it open. His friend’s knuckles brush against his chest as he tugs on the straps of her gown, pushing them down her arms, the hot silk of her naked back smooth against his chest.

She leans against him and he slides both hands to her waist, his thumbs nearly meeting at the small of her back, then slowly up, the backs of his hands brushing against Steve’s belly and chest as he goes. He cups the generous weight of her breasts in his hands, marveling again at their softness.

Darcy whimpers at whatever Steve is doing and she tips her chin up, the back of her head resting on Bucky’s shoulder.

The light is dim in the room, but for the faint glow of streetlights coming through the window, and the light from the kitchen illuminating the hallway, but it’s enough for him to see.

He peers over Darcy’s shoulder and sees the top of Steve’s head and his tongue circling her nipple before sucking it into his mouth. She gasps and Bucky thrusts his hips forward convulsively, heat shooting straight to his cock.

God.

Apparently, Darcy hadn’t been kidding about Steve working her over and driving her crazy.

Darcy tips her head back a little more, turning her head to press an open mouthed kiss against his neck, shuddering and biting him gently as Steve releases her nipple with a pop.

“Mmmm, Stevie—come up here,” she says and pulls at him, until he reluctantly leaves her breasts and she pulls him into a deep kiss.

The wet sounds of their kisses are punctuated by gasping breaths from both of them and Bucky sucks on the juncture of her neck and shoulder, palming her breasts and lightly rolling her nipples between his thumb and forefinger.

Darcy shudders against him and he pushes her nightgown down further with one hand, pulling back
enough to push it to her knees. She whines against Steve’s mouth and her legs thrash—Bucky chuckles under his breath, using his foot to push it all the way off, kicking it to the end of the bed.

Steve sighs as Darcy works her mouth down his neck to his chest, licking her way across his collarbone before pushing her bottom back against Bucky, moving him back a little so she can squirm her body lower, littering Steve’s chest with kisses, pausing to lick his nipples as she slides one hand beneath Steve’s shorts.

Steve’s eyes close and his head tips back, his kiss swollen lips parted as he breathes, “Darce—"

Bucky unconsciously palms his cock through his shorts, squeezing slightly as he strokes himself, watching Steve’s face as Darcy wiggles down further, mouthing Steve’s cock through his shorts.

“Can I take these off?” she murmurs, tugging on the waistband of his friend’s shorts.

Steve’s eyes snap open, his expression almost pained as he gazes at Bucky.

Bucky stares steadily at Steve, biting his lip and nodding encouragement as he slides his hand up to the waistband of his own shorts, pushing them down to free his cock. He strokes himself slowly, and Steve’s eyes widen as he focuses on the action of Bucky’s hand.

“Y—yes,” he chokes, lifting his hips, helping Darcy to slide his shorts down and off.

Goddamn.

Never in his life did he think he’d see Stevie this way.

Never.

But now that he is, he can’t look away.

For a little guy, Stevie has nothing to be ashamed of in the cock department. Bucky’s seen him in various stages of undress for years and was aware of that, but he’s never seen his friend fully aroused.

It’s a sight for sure.

Steve is trembling, his eyes clamped shut and hands gripping Darcy’s hair as her head slowly descends into his lap. Her hair blocks his view and Bucky utters a small sound of frustration, pulling it back over her shoulder so he can see better.

Darcy turns her head slightly, one eye on him as she licks the underside of Steve’s cock from root to tip. She winks at Bucky, pushing Steve over onto his back so he can have a better view.

Steve is squirming against Darcy, oblivious to anything except the sensations Darcy induces as she slowly circles the tip of his cock with her tongue before taking him into her mouth. Her hand is wrapped around the base of him, holding him erect as she works her mouth over him.

Bucky is transfixed. Steve is panting lightly, every so often humming and thrusting his hips helplessly as Darcy’s head bobs, sliding slowly down his length before pulling upward, hollowing her cheeks and withdrawing before plunging down on him again.

After a couple of passes, Darcy throws her leg over Steve, her breasts pressed against his thighs and her weight on one elbow as she straddles him, continuing to lick and suck him.
Bucky wiggles a little closer, stroking his hand down Darcy’s back. She shivers, a trail of goosebumps rising in the wake of his hand. He circles his hand over her bottom, dipping towards the heat of her inner thighs but he can’t quite reach his goal.

He sits up, shucking his shorts and crawling behind Darcy, his knees bracketing hers. From this angle he sees her dark hair spread over Steve’s lap, the nip of her waist and the upside down heart shape of her bottom. Steve’s head is tipped back against the pillows, his teeth embedded in his lower lip and his blond hair tousled.

**Gorgeous.**

Someday, he’s gonna have her just like this.

He trails his fingers over the curves of her bottom, tracing gently between her legs to touch her wet entrance. Darcy moans low and Steve gasps, twisting his neck to the side and throwing his arm over his face, his breath coming fast through parted lips.

Bucky gently slides his hand between her thighs, circling her entrance with his index finger before dipping it in, coating it with the slick moisture pooling there and gently pulling out, pressing in again before pulling out and curving his arm around the front of her to stroke over the sensitive nub at the top of her slit.

Darcy utters a garbled, “Oh—“ and rocks her hips back as he steadily strokes her, leaning forward on one hand to trail kisses up her back, his aching cock sliding against the curve of her ass, her skin growing slick with his arousal.

Steve starts to babble as Darcy hums and moans with him in her mouth.

Tremors shake Darcy’s thighs as her hips rock against his hand. Steve is muttering, “Darce—oh god—mmmgonna—Ugh!”

Darcy pitches forward, taking as much of Steve into her mouth as she can as he arches and trembles beneath her.

After a moment, Steve collapses against the pillows, breathing like a bellows and jerking slightly when Darcy pulls off of him, wiping one hand across her mouth. Bucky has both hands on her hips, the one between her legs pulled away when she leaned forward to finish Steve.

She sits up on her knees, looking over her shoulder at him.

“Ya didn’t get yours, doll,” he rasps, pulling her back into him and pressing kisses against her neck.

“Neither did you,” she says, reaching a hand between them to encircle his painfully hard cock. He grunts, thrusting slowly into her grasp.

“Mmmmm,” he says, “let’s work on that.”

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“Gimme a second,“ she says, releasing Bucky’s cock and crawling over Steve to grab the glass of water on the nightstand. She gulps a few mouthfuls to clear the slightly bitter taste of Steve’s release from her mouth, swipes her arm over her lips, and lays down next to her blond fella.
She hands Steve the glass and he props himself on an elbow to finish off the rest before collapsing next to her and pulling the sheet up to his waist, passing the empty glass to Bucky.

Steve’s fingers play idly in her hair as she watches Bucky return the glass to the nightstand, her eyes tracing over the taut muscles of his back and shoulders before he turns and leans in to kiss her.

She tilts her head slightly, deepening the kiss and pulling him down to her, the feeling of his chest pressed against her breasts causing the embers of her desire to flare hot.

_Ah, God._

She wants him.

She’s been on the edge of coming for what seems like forever even if it’s been only a little while. She rubs her thighs together, feeling the slick of arousal between them.

She brings her hand down between them, grasping Bucky’s cock and slowly stroking him, causing him to inhale deeply through his nose, and pull back, biting her bottom lip before licking over it.

“Doll,” he breathes, “better quit that or you won’t get your birthday present.”

She quirks an eyebrow and grins, rubbing her thumb in circles around the tip of his cock, spreading the wetness leaking from it. He groans and pulls her hand away from him, pinning her wrist against the bed between her and Steve.

“Ah-ah—ladies first,” he murmurs, working his lips down her neck and sucking hard where her pulse is wildly fluttering under her skin. She arches uncontrollably against him as he brings a hand to her breasts, cupping one, then the other in his hand before trailing his fingers across her pale skin to pluck at her nipples. She moans and shudders under the slightly rough stimulation, and he slips a thigh between hers, his cock lying hard against her hip.

She rocks against his thigh, shamelessly seeking some kind of relief from the throbbing between her legs. He chuckles low, releasing her wrist and sliding lower, and Steve rolls onto his side next to her, his fingers twining with hers.

She turns to look at him as Bucky slowly circles one of her nipples with his tongue before sucking it into his mouth, an almost painful jolt of arousal surging through her. Steve gazes at her, his eyes at half mast, shining in the dim light of the room, his thumb skimming over her palm as she spears her other hand through Bucky’s thick hair, holding him to her breast as she twists against him.

She’s starting to feel desperate.

“Please—Bucky,” she whines, biting her lip hard as he slowly works over her other breast.

“Hmmm?” he hums in inquiry, his lips turned up in a wicked smile as they seal around her nipple to suck, her entire body straining to get closer to him.

She huffs, pulling her hand from his hair and sliding it between her legs, spreading the slick arousal up and over the center of her pleasure.

Steve’s eyes follow her hand with interest and he grips her hand firmly as she begins to stroke herself in earnest, tilting her head back and closing her eyes as she works herself towards the brink of orgasm.
“Taking over my job, doll?” Bucky says, trailing his lips down to her belly and pushing her hand aside, ignoring her whine of protest.

He hooks her knees over his shoulders and leans in, licking up and down her slit before settling on circling where her fingers had just been. Flicking his tongue quickly over her as he slowly rubs a finger around her entrance, he presses inside her up to his first knuckle, then out again, pressing in further with each pass and driving her absolutely mad.

“So wet—ya gonna come for me baby?” He says, pressing her thighs further apart with his shoulders and gently working a second finger inside of her.

She tosses her head on the pillow, her muscles trembling as he flicks his tongue over her again, fast. Her hips churn uncontrollably as she pants, *Yes, yes, yes, oh god, oh, oh.*

Stevie leans in and latches his mouth to that spot behind her ear that drives her crazy as Bucky curls his fingers inside her and lashes her with his tongue until she convulses, one hand squeezing Steve’s and the other gripping Bucky’s hair as her vision whites out with pleasure.

Bucky pulls away from her slowly, sucking his fingers into his mouth before crawling over her, resting his weight on his elbows on either side of her head.

He glances at Steve, who’s moved back about a foot, his eyes on Darcy’s face as she comes down from her orgasm. Her head is turned towards his friend, her lips curved in a languorous smile that Stevie returns with one of his own.

Bucky leans down, running his lips behind her ear and breathes, “you still want this, doll?” He rocks his hips against her, his cock resting in the damp furrow between her legs.

She turns her shining gaze to him and cups her hand to his cheek. She strokes her thumb over his cheekbone and says, “Yes—Yes. I’m ready.”

Bucky has been with precisely two virgins in the past.

The first time had been a disaster, he’d been nearly as inexperienced as she was and hadn’t properly prepared her. She said it hurt and he hadn’t lasted long. She was disappointed, something he’d been too ignorant to remedy at the time.

The next time had been better, he’d had his experience with the very educational widow by then, and he’d attempted to use his new knowledge to make it good for the girl.

She’d been too embarrassed to let him go down on her but okay with him using his fingers, and he’d managed to get her off before any attempt to penetrate her, and while he’d gone slow and lasted longer, she’d declared afterwards she preferred heavy petting to actual sex.

After that, he stuck to more experienced gals who were up for a good time and seemed to know how to have one.

This is different.

Darcy isn’t nervous, she’s not embarrassed about the things they do, and he’s in love with her.
So in love with her.

He leans in and gently kisses her forehead, the bridge of her nose then her full, smiling lips, he rests his forehead against hers and whispers, “rubbers?”

She nods, “I emptied the box into the drawer of the bedside table.”

He balances his weight on one elbow and opens the drawer, fishing around inside for the familiar square packets. His fingers rustle through a pile of them and he raises an eyebrow at her, pulling one out, “how many ya got in there anyhow?”

She smirks, “Oh, a dozen or so.”

He chuckles under his breath, closing the drawer.

She plucks the packet from his fingers saying, “I wanna put it on, need the practice after all.”

Bucky grins, glancing over at Steve who’s remained silent and watchful throughout this exchange.

“Ya okay there, punk?”

Stevie nods, “Hmmm, yeah,” he says, glancing at Darcy, “ya sure ya want me here Darce?”

Darcy snorts, “Don’t be ridiculous. You’ve seen all of me and I don’t care if you see this. Think of it as an educational opportunity,” she wiggles her eyebrows at him suggestively and he chokes out a surprised laugh.

She looks up at Bucky, “You’re okay with this?” she asks.

Bucky nods in the affirmative, “More than,” he says, turning to look at his friend, “don’t get mad if I pretend you aren’t there though, gotta focus.”

Steve nods, wiggling backwards to give them a little more space and pulling the blanket up over his shoulders, relaxing on his side.

Ha. Knew Steve would like watching.

He sits back on his heels between Darcy’s legs, and after a moment she rises to her knees in front of him, leaning forward to kiss his jaw, down his throat, and across his chest. She pauses at one of his nipples, flicking it with her tongue as he buries his hands in her hair, closing his eyes and tilting his head back to release a shuddering sigh.

The muscles of his stomach clench as she nibbles and licks her way to his bellybutton, circling it with her tongue before moving a little lower to gently bite the flesh over his hip. She pauses there, sucking a mark into his skin before sliding her tongue along the groove that leads straight to his cock.

Her hot breath washes over him and his head snaps forward, compelled to look as her tongue darts out to lick him from root to tip, teasing the blunt head of his cock before taking him in her mouth. Her hand encircles the base as she slowly sinks down his length as far as she can before sliding back up, her cheeks hollowing to suck hard as she reaches the tip again.

He hisses as she pulls off, hips flexing to maintain contact with her mouth for as long as possible. She sighs ruefully, gently patting his hip and looking into his eyes as she opens the packet he’d nearly forgotten about, removes the condom, and smoothes it over the tip of his cock, grasping it at the base as she rolls it the rest of the way down.
He checks her work, reaching down to make sure it’s snug at the base before gently pinching the tip. “Good?” She whispers.

“Mmmmmmm,” he growls, pushing her back into the mattress and following her down, his mouth on hers, ravenous and wild, the need to be inside her flaring hot and uncontrolled.

He lays against her, supporting his weight on his elbows, pulling his lips from hers to breathe, “I wanna get you ready, do ya think you could come again?”

“I can—I have before—by myself,” she stammers.

Heat jolts through him at the thought of her bringing herself off, he loves that she’s so honest and unashamed.

“Good,” he says, hitching one of her legs over his hip and lining up his cock so the tip is bumping against her clit. He slides forward slowly watching her face as he glides over the sensitive bundle of nerves, rubbing back and forth, her hips catching the rhythm and surging against him with each return.

He keeps going, she’s getting more and more slick and he cups one of her breasts in his hand, toying with her nipple before rolling it between his thumb and forefinger, leaning down to suck it into his mouth and swirl around it with his tongue.

She gasps, arching her back and moaning, “Oh, Bucky—mmm” She throws her hand to the side and he sees Stevie grasping it from the corner of his eye. He releases her nipple and looks down, the condom glistens with her arousal and he turns his hips to the side to slip a hand between her legs, gliding down her slit to her entrance and dipping his middle finger slowly inside. He rubs his thumb over her clit as he captures her mouth in another kiss, tilting his head to the side and slipping his tongue alongside hers.

She’s so wet, he slips another finger in with barely a jolt in response from her, stretching her internally as he brings her closer to the edge.

She’s ready. “Baby, are you close?” he breathes.

She nods, panting. He pulls his fingers out, continuing to circle her clit as he positions himself on his knees again and hitches one of her legs around his waist. She catches on, wrapping her other leg around him as he leans forward, his hand around his cock and lining up with her entrance.

“Ready?” he says, pressing the blunt head of his cock against her.

“God, yes—please,” she bucks against him, and he slips inside an inch, her heels pressing into his ass.

He wants nothing more than to bury himself to hilt inside of her. “Slow, doll—don’t wanna hurt ya” he pants.

“Bucky—you forget who I am,” she says raising an eyebrow at him before she arches her back and digs her heels into his bottom, pulling him deep into her with a moan. His hand slips from between
her legs and he grabs hold of the soft swell of her hip and growls, breathing deep through his nose as he tries to regain some control.

She wraps her legs tight around him, holding him to her as she loops an arm around his neck. “Just stay still,” she whispers, “give me a minute.”

Jesus.

Even with the condom dulling some sensation, she feels so hot and tight he can barely hang on, the urge to pound into her is strong. He focuses on slipping his hand between them to press against her clit with his thumb.

“Does it hurt?” he chokes out.

“No—I just feel—stretched,” she murmurs, and after a moment she circles her hips experimentally, causing a deep groan to escape him, “mmm, and very full.”

She rolls her hips again and they groan together, her breath hitching as she drops her arm from his neck and reaches behind her head for the headboard, using it as leverage to press hard into him, bumping her clit against the edge of his pubic bone, “Oh, god—oh—” she does it again, and again, small tremors shaking her thighs.

He pulls out about halfway, rocking forward and she arches, rocking into him and whimpering, her head thrown back and panting his name.

She cant her hips experimentally as he slowly pulls nearly all the way out and slides in again.

She purrs, “Mmmm, right there—do it again, but harder.”

His restraint unravels as he plunges in and out of the tight squeeze of her, her moans and whimpers spurring him on. She seems to have found an angle that works for her and he endeavors to keep hitting it.

He falls forward, burying his face in her neck as she twitches her hips against him, meeting each of his thrusts eagerly, her legs twisted around him and her pulse pounding against his lips.

“Ohh—so close Bucky,” she keens in frustration, “I can’t—“

He levers himself up to look into her eyes, their mouths so close they are breathing each other’s air. Her eyes are half shut, her hair wild around her face.

“You can,” he says, sitting back on his heels and pulling her with him, adjusting her legs around his waist. She releases the headboard and he grabs her hand, sliding it between them, and leans back to give her room to stroke herself.

He grabs her bottom in both hands and thrusts hard, the sound of his hips meeting her soft flesh a staccato beat to the sounds she’s making and the persistent squeak of the bedsprings.

He’s hanging on by a thread, his head back and eyes closed, afraid to even look at her lest the visual send him over the edge. She tightens around him like a vise, the hot squeeze around his cock an agony and an ecstasy.

“Come on baby—come on,” he grunts, trying to hold steady.
She tightens infinitesimally, chanting *oh god, oh, oh, oh* and shudders, and he opens his eyes to see the perfect arch of her body, her hand still gripping Steve’s, with only the crown of her head and the tops of her shoulders anchoring her to the bed as she convulses around him with a cry.

He lets go, wrapping his hands around her hips and surging into her, burying himself deep and coming so hard he nearly blacks out.

He collapses onto her, chest heaving, his face tucked into the curve of her neck as she strokes her fingers through his hair, scratching at the nape of his neck.

He wishes he could stay inside her forever.

Unfortunately, he feels his cock beginning to soften so practical matters resurface. He grasps the condom tightly against him before pulling out of her and flopping onto his back next to her, one arm thrown over his face.

He’s suddenly exhausted.

Darcy wiggles onto her side next to him and he lifts his arm to look over at her. She’s smiling drowsily at him, with Steve curled around her back, the blanket pulled over them and his face buried in her hair.

“Gotta go take care of this,” he nods towards his lap, leaning forward to kiss her before scrambling off the bed.

“Keep my spot warm, doll,” he says, walking a little bow legged as he shuffles to the bathroom.

She laughs low, “Always.”

### Darcy’s dress

Chapter End Notes

Ahem. So that happened.

How was this for a first time? Way better than mine was, I tell ya.

The movie they go see is “Philadelphia Story” released in 1940, starring Katherine Hepburn, Jimmy Stewart, and Cary Grant.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

The morning after. Steve gets his time with Darcy. Bucky shares some important info with his family.

NSFW.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Sunday, April 27, 1941

Steve woke slowly, drifting in that space between sleep and consciousness for awhile, with little awareness beyond the sensation of warmth and safety.

As he becomes more wakeful, he catalogues the scent of coffee, the early morning sunshine on his face, and the feeling of a familiar broad chest pressed to his back. He looks down at Bucky’s arm slung over him, his hand resting on his chest.

Many nights and mornings he’s awakened in this position, Bucky seeking assurance that he still breathed, even in his sleep.

*But they’d never been naked.*

He wonders why it doesn’t bother him.

Watching Bucky and Darcy the night before hadn’t bothered him either, and he wonders at the turn his life has taken.

A small voice in the back of his head whispers that their behavior is scandalous, that it goes against the teachings of the Church.

He tries to ignore that voice.

Life has never been easy or particularly fair. He never had a father, money, or health, but he does have his convictions, and the choices he makes. He tries to do what is right.

Recent events have informed his opinion on what “right” actually is.

He’s forged a friendship with Darcy’s brother Will, a good, hard-working man who happens to be in love with a fella and has to hide his love from the world, because the world says it’s wrong.

He’s fallen in love with Darcy, who struggles against the boundaries of her gender, brilliant and beautiful and so woefully underestimated.

He’s entered this strange and wonderful relationship with two people, and has never been more happy.
And when he looks at Darcy and Bucky together, he realizes more and more that his feelings for them are equally strong, that he feels more for Bucky than friendship, considers him something other than a brother.

When it comes down to it, he chooses love.

He’s not sure what to do about it, or even how Bucky feels. But he’s done with trying to separate their relationship into Darcy and Bucky or Darcy and himself.

So he stays in Bucky’s arms, comfortable and warm, and lets himself enjoy the sensation of the larger body wrapped around him.

Darcy leans against the kitchen counter, sipping her second cup of coffee in the early morning quiet. She loves this time, the quiet, the way even the city seems slow to wake.

She’d awakened early, surrounded by the warmth of her fellas in the grey light of dawn.

Somehow during the night she’d ended up with her head on Bucky’s chest, one leg thrown over his hips and Steve tucked up behind her, his arm clutching her under her breasts.

The silence was punctuated by Steve’s soft snores and Bucky’s deep sighing breaths, and she wished she could stay curled up with them forever. She’d drowsily watched Bucky’s face in sleep, the fluttering of his eyelids as he dreamed, the shadow of whiskers along his jaw.

He looked younger in sleep, like most people did, his face unguarded and the slight frown line between his eyebrows smoothed away. She’d lightly traced her finger over the bow of his lips and he’d squirmed, smiling in his sleep.

She sighed. So handsome.

Inevitably, the needs of her bladder outweighed the desire to stay in bed and she’d wiggled out from between them, climbing off the end of the bed and turning back to look at them as she shrugged into her robe.

She’d been amused to see a slight frown cross Bucky’s face as he rolled to his side, pulling Steve to his chest with a sigh before resettling. For his part, Steve shifted until his back was against his friend’s chest, throwing one leg out from beneath the covers before sinking back into deeper sleep.

She takes another sip of her coffee and tips her head back, recalling the events from the night before, deeply satisfied with the outcome.

Steve had overcome his shyness rather quickly with a little stimulation.

In fact, she’s fairly certain his artistic habit of observing and recording images has led to some voyeuristic tendencies.

He’d held her hand as Bucky entered her, his fingers gripping hers and his gaze riveted. The look in his gleaming eyes as Bucky had moved within her had conjured such heat in her that she was surprised she hadn't burned to ash.
It had felt amazing to be so deeply connected to Bucky. There was no pain, just a delicious stretch and a slight ache that eased quickly, replaced by a steadily building pleasure.

She squirms a little at the recollection.

At one point, she’d looked away from Bucky, his head thrown back and eyes closed, and focused on Steve as he stared at the junction of her thighs, his hand unconsciously gripping hers tighter with each plunge of his friend’s hips.

She wants to do it again.

Strange how a few months back she was agonizing over getting her first “real” kiss and now she’s pondering having sex with her fellas as often as possible.

*Oh, boy.* What would people say if they knew?

Darcy Garland, sex fiend.

She snorts, laughing softly as she fills her coffee cup again, walking over to the sofa to pick up her latest knitting project.

Ridiculous.

Bucky wakes in his usual fashion, going from unconscious to alert in a space of seconds. He tightens his arm around the smaller body against his chest, feeling the familiar bumps and ridges of Steve’s bony rib cage.

*Huh.*

He’s used to waking up to find Darcy gone, early morning riser that she is. But he’s not usually snuggling a naked Steve in the morning.

He wonders why it doesn’t feel more awkward that his morning erection is clearly pressing against his friend’s ass.

He shrugs mentally, releasing Steve and turning onto his back to arch into a stretch, throwing his arms over his head and groaning slightly.

His lower back is tight. He’d worked muscles last night he hasn’t used in a while.

He grins.

Hopefully they will become accustomed to frequent use again.

He pokes Stevie in the shoulder, “You awake?” he says.

“Well, if I weren’t I would be now,” Steve grumbles.

He turns over so he’s facing Bucky.
Steve’s blue eyes are alert, sure sign he’s been awake for a while. Punk is the slowest riser, grumbling with his head under a pillow most mornings until Bucky brings him tea or coffee, pulling the pillow off of his head to make him face the day.

“Sorry for using ya as my personal teddy bear, musta grabbed ya when Darcy left,” he says.

A wash of pink stains the tops of Steve’s cheeks, “I didn’t mind,” he mutters, his fingers picking at the edge of the blanket.

Okay.

He files that away for later and says, “did ya see Darcy leave?”

“Nah, woke up and she was gone,” Steve says, sitting up and turning his back to Bucky as he wiggles into his undershirt and shorts, before standing to pull on his pants.

Bucky turns on his side to reach for his scattered clothes next to the bed. He snags his undershorts, sitting up and throwing his legs over the side of the bed to slip into them.

He stretches again, idly scratching at his chest as he looks Steve over. He catches sight of of several love bites at the base of his friend’s neck and laughs.

Steve raises an eyebrow in inquiry as he slides his arm into his shirt sleeve.

“Our girl sure worked ya over, punk,” he taps his own neck, “any higher and you’d be gettin’ some interested looks from some of the locals.”

Steve frowns, crossing to Darcy’s vanity to peer in the mirror. He runs his fingers over the marks, looking smug.

“I’m sure they’d wonder who my boyfriend is,” Steve quips, acknowledging the taunts about him being queer that the neighborhood bullies have tossed his way for forever.

“Mmhmm,” Bucky hums, the word boyfriend echoing in his mind, “probably.”

The slight creak of floorboards and a shuffle of footsteps announce Darcy’s arrival. She stands in the doorway holding two mugs, crossing to hand one to Steve who smiles in thanks and kisses her cheek before she turns and sits beside Bucky, handing him his mug.

He sips his coffee, humming in contentment as he slips an arm around her, pulling her closer to his side.

“Morning, doll,” he says, leaning down to kiss her temple, “how long you been up?”

“Couple hours,” she says, “was about to start making breakfast when I heard you two talking in here.”

Bucky’s stomach rumbles and she pokes him in the side, “someone’s hungry,” she says.

Steve mutters, “Always,” before sitting down next to Darcy.

“Shut it, punk,” Bucky says, wagging his brows over the rim of his coffee cup at Darcy, “growing boy.”

Steve snorts and Darcy grins, “Good thing Steve and I picked up groceries yesterday then,” she says, “you gonna be here for supper later?”
Bucky rubs a hand over his face, sighing, “Nah. I gotta go back to my ma’s,” he glances at the clock on her bedside table, “I promised her I’d go to late Mass and have supper with her and Becca. She’s kinda mad I’ve been missing church a lot lately. Woulda mentioned it last night but I got kinda sidetracked.”

He smirks. Ma would haul him to church three times a week if she had an inkling about what he’d been up to the night before.

Darcy nods, glancing at Steve, “how ‘bout you? Are you going too?”

“This is the first I heard about it. They expecting me Buck?”

“Nah. I told them you had things to do today. Figured you’d keep our birthday girl company til Will gets back tonight,” he says.

He sends a loaded look at Steve over Darcy’s head, glancing significantly towards the drawer of the bedside table then at Darcy. Punk’s brow wrinkles then clears, his ears turning red as he makes the connection.

That drawer is full of condoms waiting to be used. He figures Steve and Darcy might benefit from some alone time.

Yeah, he’s an excellent friend.

“Sounds good to me,” Steve says, his voice a little hoarse.

Darcy looks between the two of them and shrugs, “Well, I’m gonna start making breakfast. Get cleaned up and come help me when you’re ready,” she kisses each of them on the cheek, gets up, and leaves the room.

Bucky sets his mug on the bedside table, grabbing his pants and slipping into them as he grins smugly at Steve.

“There—now you can make time with Darcy without worrying about the peanut gallery,” he says, pulling on his undershirt, “the peanut gallery being me. You’re welcome.”

There’s a clang from the kitchen as Darcy drops something.

Steve sighs and rolls his eyes, “ya realize she can hear everything we say, right?”

Bucky had kinda forgotten that.

Darcy shouts from the kitchen, “Yes, I can!”

“Oh, well,” he winks, pulling on his shirt, “Love ya, Darce,” he murmurs.

“Love ya, Bucky!” She shouts from the kitchen.

He cracks up laughing, and Steve flops back on the bed with his coffee cup bouncing on his stomach he’s laughing so hard.

“God, Stevie. We’re doomed—never be able to pull one over on her,” he says, wiping his eyes and pulling his suspenders over his shoulders.

Steve nods as Darcy’s laughter rings from the kitchen.
Steve taps his foot to the music playing on the radio as he finishes drying the breakfast dishes. Darcy works on putting them away, occasionally bumping his hip playfully with hers when she returns to his side to retrieve a plate or bowl.

Bucky comes down the hall to the kitchen, his hair slightly damp and freshly combed, slipping his coat on and readying himself to leave.

He swoops down on Darcy, twirling her around before pressing her against the counter, kissing her soft and slow, a smile curling his lips.

“Gonna miss ya, doll,” he brethes, “but I gotta go home and change into my church clothes and hurry to meet Ma and Becca.”

She runs her fingers through his hair before resting them on the back of his neck. “Thank you for giving me such a wonderful birthday,” she says, “Do you think your mother and sister would like a piece of cake? I can wrap it up real quick.”

Steve finishes drying the last plate and opens the cupboard, putting it away with the rest. He slings the dish towel over his shoulder, leaning his hip against the counter and raising an eyebrow at Bucky, wondering if he’ll take the cake and finally let his ma know he’s in a serious relationship.

Bucky pauses and nods infinitesimally at Steve, straightening and saying, “That’d be real nice. Thank you.” He hugs her to him, kissing her cheek.

Steve looks at Bucky hard after she turns and busies herself with cutting the cake and finding a container to put it in.

Bucky raises his eyebrow, in a silent what?

Steve frowns. You know what.

He sends a loaded glance at Darcy then back at Bucky, his eyebrows raised.

Bucky shrugs.

“Here ya go,” she says, snapping the lid on a tin box and handing it Bucky.

He kisses her again, cupping her face in one hand and says, “You’re a peach. Maybe I’ll see ya later?”

She shrugs, “Maybe.”

He nods, turning to Steve, “See ya later at home, punk,” he says, winking at him before he saunters out the door.

Darcy flops on the sofa, leaning her head back and closing her eyes. He sits beside her, automatically reaching for her hand, circling her palm with his thumb.

Darcy sighs, leaning into him. “You think he’ll tell them?” she whispers.
Steve says, “What?” Even though he knows damn well what she’s talking about, he’s not going to be the one to say it.

She cracks her eyes open, rolling her eyes, “You know *what*. About us—about me.” she says.

“Maybe,” he’s pretty sure Bucky will, “Dunno if he’ll mention me in that equation though.”

She’s quiet for a minute, her brow wrinkled in thought.

“I wrote Mama about you two,” she says, idly playing with his fingers.

“Really? What’d ya say?” he asks.

“That I’d been seeing two great fellas, best friends who didn’t mind me dating both of them.”

Steve raises an eyebrow, “What’d she say?”

“She quoted Pascal, ‘The heart has its reasons which reason knows not.’ and said to be careful.”

“Huh,” he brow furrows. He’s not sure if that’s a seal of approval, but Darcy doesn’t seem worried.

“I’m not sure if she meant “be careful dating two men,” or “be careful, don’t get pregnant’” she snorts, “I’m not going to ask.”

“Probably best,” he says, wrapping his arm around her and pulling her to his side, “Do ya think I’ll ever meet your folks?”

She tilts her head back, her blue eyes serious, “I hope so. They might visit this summer, Mama mentioned a convention or two Pop wants to attend.”

*Meeting her ma and stepfather.*

He’s sure Bucky would have no problem charming them, he’s always been able to wrap people around his finger. But him? Not so much.

He wonders if they would think she shouldn’t waste her time with him. Most folks would, most folks would also frown on the relationship she, Bucky, and Steve have together.

Maybe they’d put some pressure on her to pick one guy.

His breathing begins to constrict with panic.

Darcy must notice because she lifts her head from his shoulder and turns to look at him.

“Stevie,” she says stroking her fingers over his face before settling her hand on his chest, rubbing in soothing circles, “calm down, baby—nothing to worry about.”

She kisses him on the cheek, scattering soft kisses across his face, “I love you. Even if they have a problem—*which they won’t*—I choose you and Bucky. It’s my life to live, no one else’s.”

She pushes off of him, rising to look down at him. She cocks her head, a small smile forming on her lips, “Say, I’m thinking I’ll take a bath and clean up,” she leans forward to kiss his cheek, breathing into his ear, “you’re welcome to join me.”

She winks, turning to walk down the hall to the bathroom. He watches the sway of her hips for a moment as his brain struggles to catch up.
He jumps to his feet to follow when it does.

Darcy gasps as Steve pushes her back against the pillows, her wildly curling hair tumbled around her head. He crawls over her, nuzzling under her jaw and working his way down her neck, the warm, slightly damp skin of his chest pressed to hers.

They’d bathed each other thoroughly.

Steve had run his soapy hands over every inch of her, bringing her to the brink of orgasm several times before before backing off, shooting her teasing smirks when she whined in frustration.

She’d returned the favor.

Except she’d eventually pushed him back and straddled him, sliding along the underside of his erection and grinding against him until they both came, bathwater sloshing onto the floor.

She’d lain on his chest in the rapidly cooling water, waiting for Steve to get his breath back.

After awhile, he said, “I’d planned on finishing this in the bedroom.”

She’d purred, “Who says we’re finished?” before grinning and standing up, water streaming off of her.

They’d dried the floor and each other off and she’d darted naked down the hall to her bedroom, Steve hot on her heels.

Now here they are.

Steve seems determined to go slow, his hands holding hers against the bed as he circles his tongue around her nipple before sucking it into his mouth. She could break his hold easily, but she knows he loves this, driving her to the edge and holding her there until she either turns the tables or he decides to have mercy and touch her where she really needs it.

She is definitely less patient than Steve in regards to sex, but he’s teaching her things about her body with his determined slow pace.

She’d never realized how sensitive her breasts were until Steve started his focused exploration of them.

At the moment, she almost feels like she could come just from what he’s doing, she’s so wound up. Waves of slowly rising sensation spiral from where his mouth sucks at her, causing her back to arch uncontrollably in an effort to get closer.

She feels his cock against her thigh and rubs against him, provoking him until he moans, the vibration around her nipple making her squirm.

He releases her nipple, his blue eyes heated and focused, “Ah-ah, Darce—we’re going slow this time,” he says, his lips quirking into a mock pout, “A guy only has one first time after all.”

She lets her head fall back against the pillow with a huff and he choked out a laugh, returning to his
slow torture of her breasts.

“Steeeeyvie— I wanna touch too,” she whines, gasping when he lightly sinks his teeth into her flesh before soothing it with his tongue.

After a torturous couple of minutes he whispers, “Okay,” and feathers kisses across her breasts, levering himself up on his knees to lean forward, resting his arms on either side of her head, their fingers still laced together.

He leans forward, kissing her lips softly, nibbling gently at her lower lip until she flicks her tongue out to trace the cupid’s bow of his pouty lips. He hums mmmmm, presses his mouth against hers and kisses her hungrily.

His weight presses her into the bed and she wraps one leg around his narrow waist, pulling him close against her. His fingers tighten around hers as she grinds against him, circling her hips slowly against his hardened length.

Steve breaks their kiss with a gasp, breathing heavily as she licks under his jaw, his heartbeat fluttering under her lips.

“Mmmm—baby,” he rasps, his hips twitching against hers as he sucks in a breath, “I don’t want this to be over too soon—I wanna be good to ya.”

She pulls back from nibbling his throat to gaze into his eyes, “What do you wanna do?,” she whispers.

His face reddens a little as he breathes, “I wanna get you really close before I—come inside.”

She reflexively presses her heel into the back of his thigh, flexing her hips against him. At his sharp intake of breath she stills.

“I have an idea,” she says, “roll over onto your back.”

He quirks an eyebrow in question but releases her hands and rolls off of her to lay back on the pillows.

She pulls out the drawer to the bedside table, fingers scrabbling blindly until they snag on a familiar square packet. She rolls back towards Steve, waving the packet between them.

“Do you know how to put one of these on?” she asks.

“Mmmm—Bucky went over it with me, um—before,” he stammers, “when he was setting me up on dates. And, uh—I watched last night,” he blushes slightly but his blue eyes remain steady on her, almost feverishly bright.

She nods.

“Watch me, Stevie,” she says, propping herself on one elbow to lean over and kiss his chest, scooting down along his side to nip and kiss her way over the ridges of his ribs and the flat plane of his abdomen.

He sucks in his breath, his stomach muscles trembling as she circles her tongue around his belly button before gently encircling his cock with her fingers. She glances up at his face, his bottom lip caught between his teeth as he eyes her curiously.
She strokes him up and down several times, leaning forward to lick around the head of his cock before sliding him into her mouth, the slightly salty flavor of his arousal bursting on her tongue.

He moans and arches against her as she swirls her tongue around him, plunging downward as far as she can before hollowing her cheeks as she pulls upward, sucking on him before pulling off of him with a pop.

“There,” she whispers, ripping open the square packet and pulling out the condom.

She glances up at Steve, “Okay, I’ll start but you smooth it down—we need to practice,” she grins as she gently rolls the condom over the blunt head of his cock.

She reaches for his hand, pulling it to his lap and he tentatively smooths the condom the rest of the way down.

She runs her fingers over it then glances up at him, “remember to do this,” she pinches the end of the condom, pulling it away from the tip of his cock, “it’s good to have a little extra room there, for uh —ejaculate.”

He smirks at her, “Ejaculate, Darce?”

She raises an eyebrow, “Are you sassing me Steven Grant?”

His answering snicker fades into a groan as she slowly strokes her fingers down his cock, squeezing at the base before doing it again.

She purrs, “Maybe you don’t find my medical jargon sexy,” strokes him again from tip to base, leaning forward to nip the jut of his hip bone, before licking along the crease of his thigh.

“Nuh—no, not sassing,” he whines, thrusting against her hand, “and—mmm— everything about ya is sexy.”

She grins against his skin, nipping the flesh of his inner thigh before deciding against teasing him too much.

She really doesn’t want this over too soon.

She wiggles up his side, her hand still cupping his latex clad erection as she licks around his belly button and then up his chest to circle each of his nipples.

He grunts, gripping her shoulders and pulling her so they are face to face, their eyes inches apart and noses brushing against each other. She’s caught up for a moment in intensity of his gaze, the usual vibrant blue of his eyes darkened by his enlarged pupils.

He rubs his nose along her cheek, gripping the back of her hair and nuzzling into her neck, his lips sucking hard on that spot just under her ear that always sends a shiver of lust through her body.

Suddenly, her nipples feel diamond hard and ultra sensitive, and she bucks helplessly against him as he sets his teeth into her flesh, riding the line between pleasure and pain. She groans low as he nudges her over onto her back, following her down and switching his mouth to the other side of her neck, sucking and biting again as he cups her breast in his hand, drawing his fingers together over her hardened nipple and lightly pinching as she shivers again.

He props himself onto an elbow and gazes down at her, releasing her nipple to run a finger over the sensitive spot beneath each ear that she’s certain bears fading marks from his ministrations.
She shivers again as he swirls his finger over the moisture his mouth left on her skin, her eyes focused on his kiss swollen lips.

“Kiss me, Stevie?” she breathes.

“Always—every day,” he whispers, pressing his lips gently to hers and swallowing her sigh as their lips mesh together.

Their kisses go from soft and searching to hot and demanding pretty quickly, her fingers woven through the hair at the nape of his neck, kneading and pulling at it as he moans into her mouth.

He pulls back with a gasp and wiggles down her body, stopping to nuzzle his nose into the skin over her sternum and breathe deeply, pressing into the inner curve of one breast to lick and suckle there before scattering kisses across her abdomen, the flutter of his long lashes tickling her skin.

She squirms as he circles his tongue around her belly button, gasping when he pokes it into the slight indent and swirls it around. The sensation is strange yet somehow erotic and her skin erupts in goosebumps. She hums—hmmmm—stroking her fingers through his soft hair.

He kisses lower, using his shoulders to widen the space between her thighs and laying down between them, one hand on her hip holding her in place as he runs two fingers from the top to of her slick sex to her entrance, circling his finger there before sliding back up to the top, using two fingers to rub along either side of the swollen nub of sensitized nerves there.

He gazes up at her as he rubs, his eyes dark and intent and she cannot look away, heat flooding her cheeks and spreading down her chest as her hips twitch convulsively against his fingers.

“I want you to tell me when you’re close,” he says, his voice deepening with command, “don’t rush ahead.”

“I will,” she sighs, wondering what he’s planning.

He hums in approval, moving his hand from her hip to spread her legs further apart, and lowers his mouth between her thighs, replacing his rubbing fingers with his tongue.

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God.

From the moment he tastes Darcy he feels like he can’t get enough.

He’d like to wind her up and up until she trembles and cries out and then start all over again, but he doesn’t want end up coming as he rubs himself into the mattress, so he remains focused on bringing her right to the edge.

He circles the tip of his index finger around her slick entrance and gently presses it into the velvet warmth inside. She rocks her hips against his mouth, making little gasping, keening sounds that cause him to reflexively thrust his hips against the bed.

He adds a second finger to the one he has inside her, marveling at the tight heat of her as she clenches around him, tightening bit by bit as her hips move faster. She grabs the hair on either side of
his head, pulling his mouth closer to her and moaning as he crooks his fingers inside of her.

Her breathing is starting to stutter, but he waits for her to tell him she’s close, curving his fingers in a come here motion over a curious spongy area inside of her that makes her gasp and rock harder against him with each pass.

“Ahh, god Steve—I’m so close,” she gasps, her thighs trembling around his shoulders.

He lifts his mouth from her and she whines in frustration.

He grunts, “Hold on, doll,” pulling his fingers from her and levering himself to his knees to lean over her.

He takes himself in hand, making sure the condom is still correctly placed before rubbing the head of his cock up her slit and bumping over the sensitive nub at the top. He rubs back and forth several times and takes a nervous breath before positioning himself at her entrance and slowly pressing inside, forgetting to breathe for a moment as the tight heat of her surrounds him.

He rests his arms on either side of her head, the softness of her breasts against his chest and her blue eyes focused on his as he is fully sheathed inside of her. He stills, every particle of his being focused on the sensation of being buried in Darcy.

*My God.*

Now he finally understands why Bucky persisted in his pursuit of sex, often to the exclusion of good sense or shame.

He closes his eyes for a moment, tipping his head back and biting his lip as he experimentally pulls back a little and thrusts forward. Darcy keens lowly, and clenches around him, the vise-like clutch of her muscles around his cock tightening and making him groan.

“Darce—baby, are you still close?” he chokes.

He honestly does not believe he’ll last more than 2 or 3 thrusts without coming, even after she’d gotten him off in the tub, and despite the slight dulling of sensation from the condom.

He stays still inside her, the clench of her muscles around him is sending sparks of sensation up his spine, heat and pressure building low in his abdomen. He’s sweating with the need to just let go and pour himself into her.

“Mmmhmm, I need—“ she wriggles in frustration against him, whining slightly as he presses hard against her, his pubic bone bumping her clit as he attempts to keep her still.

He remembers what Bucky did last night and levers himself up on his elbows, shuddering as he pulls out of her and settles himself on his knees between her legs.

“Stevie—wha?—uungh—“ Darcy stutters as he cups his hands under her bottom and pulls her up into his lap, her hair trailing behind her as he pulls her down the bed, wraps her legs around him, and plunges into her again.

He trembles, staying stock still as he presses his thumb to her clit, sliding it back and forth quickly.

Darcy moans, panting as she arches her back, her nipples jutting proudly as her hips swivel against his hand.
He’s hanging on by a thread, the rhythmic squeeze of her around his cock and the reflexive rocking of her hips against him pulling him towards the edge, despite his efforts to remain still.

A moment of inspiration has him pressing harder against her, his thumb circling her clit as he pinches one of her hard nipples with his other hand. He dimly realizes Darcy is babbling, oh god, oh god, Steve, Steve, Steve as she absolutely detonates, her back arching and her legs stiffening while she convulses around him.

He pulls back and thrusts hard, bottoming out inside of her, overcome and slipping over the edge, black spots dancing at the edges of his vision as he groans his release.

He collapses on top of her, his back hunched over and head pillowed by her soft breasts.

He floats, all thoughts silenced in his head, his mind blank except to register the sensation of his pulse pounding in his ears, his lungs pumping like a bellows, and the sudden complete lassitude of his body.

After a moment Darcy strokes her fingers through his hair and over his shoulders and he remembers what Bucky told him to do with the condom afterwards.

It’s an effort to prop himself on one elbow and grasp the condom at the base of his softening cock, but he does, rolling off of Darcy to lay on his back beside her.

“Ugh. I just wanna lay here and never move again,” he groans.

“Me too,” Darcy says, throwing her arms over her head and arching her back in a stretch before turning on her side and nuzzling into Steve’s side.

He sighs, grabbing ahold of the condom so it doesn’t slide off and kisses Darcy on the cheek before throwing his legs over the side of the bed and standing, awkwardly walking towards the door.

“Ya know, this condom thing is annoying,” Darcy says, “just flush it down the toilet and come back quick.”

He looks back at her, lying naked and heavy eyed against the pillows, her hair a messy halo around her head, and smiles.

“That’s my plan.”

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After supper Bucky brings the box Darcy sent with him to the table and says, “I gotta surprise for ya, anyone want chocolate cake for dessert?”

Becca squeals eagerly, jumping up to grab plates and forks as Ma looks on, her eyebrows raised in question.

He ignores the look and puts a generous slice on each plate, grinning when he notices Darcy included an extra one for him.

His girl knows he has a sweet tooth.
Becca grins at Bucky, eagerly accepting a plate with a generous slice of cake on it and digging her fork into it for a big bite. She closes her eyes as she chews, humming, her brown eyes popping open in delight, “Oh my gosh Bucky, where did you get this? I want this every day.” She digs her fork in for another bite.

Ma says, “Cake isn’t for everyday Becca. Sugar and chocolate are too dear.”

Nonetheless, she takes a dainty bite of the cake and Bucky ducks his head to hide his smile when she quickly takes a larger one.

After a moment, Ma says, “Where’d you get the cake, James?”

He swallows the bite of cake in his mouth quickly, reaching for his glass of milk and taking a swallow before casually saying, “My girl, Darcy.”

The movement of her fork to her mouth is arrested as her dark brown eyes focus intently on him, “Your girl?” she says.

Bucky rubs the back of his neck, “Yeah,” he says, not trusting himself to say more.

Becca chortles at his discomfort across the table from him and he lightly kicks her in the ankle, which makes her laugh harder.

Ma’s gaze remains pinned to his face, “Oh? And how long has this been going on?” she takes another bite of cake, chewing slowly as she waits for his answer.

“Mmmm, awhile,” he mutters, cramming a big bite of cake in his mouth in an effort to stave off saying more.

Crap. If Ma figures out he’s kept this from her for months he’ll be in trouble.

“So, is this why you’ve been missing Mass and supper on Sunday for months?” she says.

Bucky winces, “Maybe?”

“So when are we meeting this girl?”

Chapter End Notes

So—what did you think? Did Steve and Darcy do okay together? What about Bucky finally letting his family know about Darcy?
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Darcy gets that diaphragm. A look at Darcy, Bucky, and Steve on a regular work day, and some bad news.

Chapter Notes

Some plot, for those of you sick of the sexy times. Unbetad, apologies for any and all grammatical and syntax errors, as well as clunky dialogue or whatever.

Disclaimer: I am not a doctor or nurse—all medical jargon or situations are the product of some minor research and my imagination. Hopefully it works for you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wednesday, May, 28,1941

Darcy sits on the examination table at the clinic, swinging her legs and occasionally tugging at the flimsy gray gown Helene gave her to wear.

It’s strange how awkward it feels to be the patient rather than the nurse for a change. Perhaps more so for her, given the fact she hasn’t been a patient for a very long time.

In the last month she, Steve, and Bucky have worked through at least dozen condoms from the box Helene had given her, and though she’s enjoyed that immensely, she is tired of the interruption from putting them on as well as disposing of them afterwards.

Although, she supposes it’s a lot less messy for her.

So, she made an appointment with Helene to get fitted for the diaphragm they’d discussed previously. It’s the right thing to do in her circumstances, she’d rather have more control over contraception, and condoms are not as reliable of a method. The diaphragm has a much lower incidence of failure, and even then it’s more because of improper placement than anything else.

With all the time she’s spent in the clinic, she understands proper placement better than the average patient.

She’d come over on her lunch break from the Emergency Room—she’s been working there for the past three weeks. Dr. Bobby works in Emergency Medicine so she sees him a lot.

Despite some of the scary cases that come in, she feels challenged by the fast pace, and she admires the tough nurses who work there. She’s learning a lot about triage, keeping a cool head, and being quick on her feet.
She glances towards the door as she hears the familiar sound of Helene’s rapid footsteps approaching. She opens the door, supplies under her arm and a reassuring smile on her face for Darcy.

“Go on and lay down Darcy,” she says, absently setting the supplies on a rolling cart next to the table and sliding the stirrups out at the end.

She bustles around the room, moving a stool to the end of the table and moving the gooseneck lamp they use for examinations a little closer too. Finally, she stands next to the table, looking down at Darcy.

“Alright. You know how this works, scoot down to the end of the table and put your feet in the stirrups, you can leave your gown over your knees and I’ll move it when I need to,” she says, patting Darcy’s hand before she turns to the sink and washes her hands and lower arms, and pats them dry.

Darcy stares up at the ceiling light as she listens to Helene snapping on latex gloves and pulling out the stool at the end of the table.

She takes a deep breath, willing herself to relax, even though she feels weird and embarrassed and angry with herself for her embarrassment at being examined by her friend.

“Ok,” Helene says, pulling the cart closer and gently touching Darcy’s calves to encourage her to open her legs a little further. There is a metallic squeal as Helene scoots the stool closer and she says, “it’ll feel a little cold because of the lubricant, I’m checking to see what size we should try first, two fingers only.”

Darcy says, “Alright,” and tenses slightly at the cool intrusion of Helene’s fingers. After a moment, she feels mild pressure low in her abdomen as Helene reaches the opening of her cervix.

“There,” Helene says, “Ok, I’m gonna try the smaller size diaphragm first, since you are petite.”

She withdraws her fingers, and there’s a rustling as she unwraps the smaller size diaphragm.

There’s a scraping sound as Helene moves the stool again, and stands.

Darcy looks at her as she holds the diaphragm up with a tube of spermicidal jelly in her hand. “I know you’ve seen this but I’m going to go over it like you’re a regular patient. So, normally, when you insert this you’ll put some spermicide in the cap of the diaphragm, fold it like this,” she folds the diaphragm, “and insert.”

Darcy nods and Helene sits down, inserting the diaphragm slowly and pushing it until it bumps her cervix, and then letting it unfold, “when you’re inserting this on your own you can do it while standing, maybe rest one foot on a stool or the toilet— okay, it’s in place,” she says, withdrawing her fingers and wiping them on a cloth, “try standing and walking around, also try pushing internally a bit, like you’re urinating. I’ll check again after a few minutes and we’ll see if it’s staying in place.”

Darcy pulls her feet out of the stirrups and turns onto her side, levering herself up on one elbow and swinging her legs over the side of the table. She stands and walks around the room, pushing internally a couple times like Helene said.

Darcy can’t feel anything different than usual.

After a couple minutes she gets back on the table and Helene rechecks the diaphragm, which has stayed firmly in place.
Thank god.

She really didn’t want to go through multiple fittings. Next time she does this with a patient she vows to be more understanding about their discomfort. Laying on the table with her legs in stirrups feels entirely too vulnerable for comfort.

Helene removes the diaphragm used for fitting and gets a box from the cart, handing it to Darcy along with a tube of spermicidal lubricant, “Here you go, on the house,” she grins, “consider it a part of your education—remember when you use it to not to leave it in more than 24 hours. You shouldn’t need to get fitted for new one for a couple years, unless you decide to have a baby—childbirth changes a body.”

“The whole point is not having a baby anytime soon, Helene,” Darcy says, removing her feet from the stirrups and scooting to sit and dangle her legs over the side of the table, watching Helene throw out her gloves, wash her hands and gather her supplies.

Helene checks her watch, “Well, that didn’t take long, want to eat lunch together before you go back to work?” she says as she makes her way to the door.

Darcy tugs her underwear on under the gown, “Sure, meet you in your office in a few minutes.”

Bucky pulls his cap off and wipes an arm across his sweaty brow, gazing up at the cloudless blue sky before rolling his shoulders and lifting the end of the crate he and Smith are moving from the dock to the truck nearby, ready to take them to the warehouse for sorting.

Once they finish moving all of the crates off the pallet, he and Smith, along with the other men working this spot dockside, step back and Bucky whistles sharply to signal the crane operator to lift and deposit the tackle on the deck of the ship, where workers scramble to reload it before lowering it dockside again.

The shouts of the workers and clang of metal echoes down the dock as Bucky stretches his arms overhead, bowing his back to work out the kinks. It’s been a busy day but there’s a couple hours more work unloading the ship before he can head home.

He leans against a large crate, glancing up at the deck of the ship to ascertain the progress of reloading.

He relaxes, time enough for a smoke.

He pulls the crumpled pack from his shirt pocket and shakes one loose, drawing a match along the sole of his shoe, lighting it, and inhaling deeply. The smell of tobacco smoke masks the ever present aroma of oiled ropes, seawater, and dead fish by the docks.

Smith walks over to lean next to him, his burly form relaxed, a cigarette dangling from his mouth. After a moment he pulls a small piece of wood and a folding knife from his pocket, setting to work whittling as they wait for the next load.

“So, Barnes. I have na seen ya out and about o’late. The bonnie lasses be missin ya,” he waggles his eyebrows and grins, “never ya mind though, more for me.”
He rolls his eyes at the friendly Irishman, “If ya mean your sister, I only danced with her a coupla times,” he grins and Smith elbows him in the side.

“Hey, now, don’t be talkin’ about my sweet sister, she’s as pure as the driven snow, ya know,” he chortles, they both know his sister gets around, though Bucky respectfully doesn’t mention it.

“Anyway, been spendin’ time with my best girl lately,” Bucky says.

Smith whistles low, his hazel eyes widening in surprise, “What’s this? Bucky Barnes settlin’ down with one lass? She must be a real looker.”

Bucky’s smile is soft, Darcy is more than beautiful, but he isn’t gonna waste his breath explaining that to Smith, “Yeah—Gonna take her to meet my ma on Sunday,” he sighs, dropping his cigarette but to the ground and rubbing the toe of his shoe over it, “oughta be interesting, for sure.”

“If ya stopped runnin’ around with a new gal every week—just wait, she’ll be askin’ when’s the weddin’,” Smith says absently, his knife carving out what looks to be a dog from the block of wood in his hands.

“Nah, it’s too soon for that,” Bucky says, glancing up at the crane, getting ready to lower a load to the dock again, “looks like we’ll be back to work in a minute, I’m gonna get some water.”

“Good idea,” Smith says, dropping his cigarette butt on the ground and grinding it out. He folds his knife and puts it and the partially carved wooden dog into his pocket.

Bucky thinks about his ma and how happy she was that he’d stopped playing around with all the pretty girls in the neighborhood and was serious about Darcy.

On the other hand, he still hasn’t told her about Steve.

He’s not sure how to explain that.

And it’s not just that Steve is seeing Darcy too. Lately, it feels like he and Steve are circling around each other, some unsaid thing between them.

Sometimes he catches Steve looking at him in a considering way, his eyes tracing over him when he puts on his clothes after a shower as often as when he’s making time with Darcy. Something is happening between them, maybe something that had always been there but shoved to the back of his mind.

He thinks of that dream he had, Darcy grinding atop him as Steve kissed him.

It’s still the hottest thing he can imagine.

He doesn’t think Ma would understand.

He walks up to the warehouse, steel water jugs are lined up against the wall and pours himself a cup, gulping it quickly, the slightly tinny taste of it lingering in his mouth.

He doesn’t wanna take away from Steve’s relationship with Darcy by acting like she’s only his, but he really doesn’t know how else to handle things around his ma.

The crane lowers the next skid to the dock, derailing his train of thought.

Time to work.
Darcy glances at the clock.

4pm.

One hour til end of shift, and barring disaster, she might actually get to eat dinner with Steve and Bucky tonight. Most of the E.R. patients are not critical, several are waiting for care but everything seems to be under control at the moment.

She carries a tray to the supply closet, loading it up with suturing and splinting supplies for the little boy Dr. Bobby is currently working on. Poor kid, he was fooling around with his friend on a fire escape and fell off.

Luckily, Danny was only half a story up and didn’t land on his head.

Still, he has bruises, a nasty cut across the palm of his hand, and a broken arm. He sits on the side of an examination table with his mother, waiting for the topical anesthetic that had been injected into his palm to take effect as his mother scolds him relentlessly out of sheer relief that he’s alive.

Darcy approaches with the tray of supplies, setting it on the exam table for Dr. Bobby and reaching into her pocket for one of the hard candies she keeps handy for pediatric patients.

“Hey, Danny,” she says, glancing at Dr. Bobby preparing the needles for stitching up his hand, “how would you like one of these?” she holds up a couple candies, “I’ve got peppermint and butterscotch.”

Danny perks up, and though his cheeks are still wet with tears, he smiles slightly as he chooses the butterscotch candy. She rolls another tray table next to where Danny sits and adjusts the height of it so his arm rests on top of it, palm up.

She unwraps the candy for him since he only has one useful hand at the moment, and gives it to him. He pops it in his mouth, distracted as Dr. Bobby uncaps a bottle of Dakin’s solution and prepares to pour some over the wound on Danny’s palm.

Darcy holds Danny’s hand still against the tray for Dr. Bobby, and says to him, “Ok, Dr. Lowenstein is going to clean out your cut and stitch it closed, you’ll be fine—I can tell you’re a brave boy,” she smiles at Danny as his little chest puffs up a little with pride, “Maybe you can hold your mother’s hand and squeeze if you need to.”

Danny’s mother reaches for his good hand as Dr. Bobby cleans the wound in preparation of stitching it closed. Danny remains stoic, vigorously sucking his hard candy.

Darcy grips his shoulder in one hand and holds his hand down a little flatter with the other, careful not to twist or jostle the rest of his arm since the minor fracture must remain still as possible.

Dr. Bobby says, “Danny, this will probably bother you less if you look away, I’ll work fast, but it’s gonna feel strange. Luckily, it won’t take much to close you up and I’ll be done in a jiffy.”

Danny chokes, “Okay,” and his knuckles whiten as he squeezes his mother’s hand in preparation.
His brown eyes dart around frantically and he tenses further, so she begins telling him about living on a farm in Iowa, a topic that never fails to entertain people born and raised in the city.

“You really rode a horse to school everyday?” the boy says, flinching slightly and rolling the butterscotch candy in his mouth as another stitch is placed.

“Yep, five miles, rain or shine,” she says.

“That’s nuts,” he declares.

His mother admonishes, “Danny, don’t be rude,” and rubs a hand over his sandy hair as she smiles at Darcy, “sorry about that, miss.”

“No problem, I suppose it does seem pretty strange. When I moved here, it seemed crazy to me that everyone lived so close together—and that it’s never really dark at night, or quiet.”

“What d’ya mean? It’s never dark? It gets plenty dark,” Danny says, his brow wrinkles in confusion before he flinches again at the pulling sensation of another stitch being set.

“Well, there aren’t any street lights where I grew up, we’re five miles from town. The only light outside at night is the moon and stars.”

“Huh,” Danny says, “I guess that would be a lot darker.”

She glances at Dr. Bobby, who grins at her before tying off the last stitch.

“All stitched up, my boy. All that’s left is bandaging it and splinting your arm,” he says, putting the needle and unused suture thread on the tray. “Darcy, why don’t you bandage this, I’ll be back in a moment,” he stands and walks over to check the x-ray of Danny’s arm pinned to the light box on the wall before briefly conferring with the nurse caring for a patient on the next examination table.

Fifteen minutes later, as Darcy is handing gauze to Dr. Bobby to wrap Danny’s arm, they are interrupted by one of the office secretaries.

“Dr. Lowenstein, there’s an urgent phone call for you in the office,” she says.

Bobby raises an eyebrow at Darcy and says, “Can you finish wrapping this? Just wrap it around his torso a couple of times to immobilize the arm to his body and it’ll be done.”

“Sure,” she says, moving closer to Danny and pulling the tray with gauze over next to her.

Bobby pulls off his gloves and throws them in the wastebasket before hurrying away with the secretary towards the main office.

“Ok, Danny. Let’s finish this up, when we’re done you can have another butterscotch to keep you busy while we wait for Dr. Bobby to come back.”

As she is cleaning up her supplies before looking over the charting, she hears her name and turns to see Bobby walking quickly to her side, his face pale and solemn. She stiffens in alarm, her hands unconsciously clenching around the gauze in her hands.

He reaches her side, gently takes the roll of gauze from her hands and sets it on the tray, “Darcy, I need you to come to my office right now, okay?” He says softly.

“Oh—um—but Danny,” she waves towards the exam table a few feet away.
“It’s alright, I asked Nurse Jones to check the splint and bandaging and take care of the charting for him,” he nods to Danny and his mother, “you folks should be done here shortly—please make an appointment to come in and get that arm in a cast in a couple days after the swelling goes down.”

Darcy smiles tremulously at the boy, “I hope you feel better soon Danny. No more fooling around on the fire escape!”

“No, miss,” he says, leaning tiredly against his mother.

Darcy hurries after Bobby, following him to his office, where he urges her to sit down. He pulls a chair up beside her, his expression grave.

“Darcy,” he says softly, “there’s no easy way to say this. I just received a phone call from Dr. Brooks.”

Her mind races. Dr. Brooks?

What’s happened?

Her heart thunders in her ears.

“He told me this morning your mother and stepfather were on their way to Cedar Rapids and there was an accident,” he gently rests his hand on her shoulder, “I’m so sorry, but they were both killed.”

“What—no, that can’t be,” Darcy says shakily, a cold sweat breaking out over her entire body.

That can’t be.

They are supposed to come to New York this summer. She was going to show them the apartment and introduce Bucky and Steve. Mama was going to go to the street markets with her to haggle over second hand books, and to Coney Island to ride a roller coaster. She was going to bring them to the hospital and show them where she worked and especially to introduce Mama to Helene and Bobby. They were hoping to get here at the beginning of July, so maybe they could watch the fireworks together on the 4th.

She hadn’t seen them for more than a year, only letters and the rare phone call between them.

And now she would never see them alive again.

“I’m so sorry, my dear,” Bobby says, the sheen of tears in his eyes signaling his distress for her.

No no no no

She gasps in a breath, the crushing pain in her chest making it hard for her to speak, “There could be some mistake—maybe it wasn’t them?”

“No—that’s why there was some delay in informing you, the authorities notified Dr. Brooks of the accident and he went to where they had transported the—um—bodies, for verification. He was able to identify both of them.”

She hunches forward, struggling to take in breath. She feels like her thoughts are wrapped in ice, slow moving and full of jagged edges. Her vision blurs with tears and breathing hurts.

Bobby hands her his handkerchief and she numbly takes it, clutching it in her hand. Tears flow unchecked down her cheeks.
“Darcy—dear. Do you know where I can reach your brother? Dr. Brooks tried calling the phone on your floor at the apartment building, your neighbor answered and said he wasn’t home.”

She answers automatically, “He’s probably not there yet, he said he’d be home for supper.”

Bobby says, “Listen, I’m gonna call a cab and I’ll take you home, okay? I’ll wait with you for Will to come home.”

He squeezes her shoulder and stands, stepping around his desk to pick up the phone as Darcy watches blankly.

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Steve is walking back from the subway, enjoying the fine spring air and the warmth from the slowly sinking sun. He boosts the portfolio under his arm a little higher and ponders his new commission, doing the artwork for a lingerie ad of all things. He thinks Darcy would be the perfect model, as long as he alters her features enough that no one will recognize her.

He also has a side line started, one that is a bit shady but has potential to be lucrative.

A couple weeks ago while he sat sketching Bucky at Goldie’s, a fella named Billy had approached him, looking over his artwork with interest. Turns out he was looking for artists to make comic books he would print. Steve didn’t have to think up the story lines, he only had to draw the panels as requested.

Thing was, he’d be drawing Tijuana bibles.

And yeah, it was pornography, sorta. Except with cartoons. He couldn’t really get in trouble for just drawing them, but Billy sure could for printing and selling them.

He’d initially been a bit scandalized, but he had to admit he’d seen a few of them himself. While they were raunchy, he didn’t figure they really hurt anyone. And he’d be able to contribute more money to the household, too.

Bucky laughed for five minutes when he told him about it.

He’d chortled, “Stevie, ya must have the fastest learning curve of anyone I know. From virgin to pornographer in just a couple weeks!”

It wasn’t that funny.

Ok, maybe it was.

He hadn’t told Darcy yet, because he’s a little embarrassed. He swore Bucky to secrecy too, even though Bucky said Darcy wouldn’t care.

He just wishes he could make money in a more respectable way, that’s all.

He’s almost to Darcy’s building and decides to go up and see if she’s home before continuing on to his place. He trudges up the stairs, thinking about the advance he’d gotten on the lingerie ad today. Maybe they can go over to the drugstore and get a malt or something.

He smiles, thinking of sharing a malt with Darcy, with two straws and one malt, just like in the
movies.

He makes it to the third floor and rests a minute, getting his breath back before knocking.

After a moment, Darcy opens the door, looking through the crack and choking, “Oh, Stevie,” before taking the chain off and swinging the door wide, throwing herself into his arms.

Steve drops his portfolio in surprise, bringing his arms around Darcy who is clutching him like a life raft. He looks over her shoulder, confused to see a slightly portly older man sitting on the sofa.

The man gets to his feet and says, “You must be Steve, I’m Dr. Lowenstein, Darcy’s landlord and sometimes employer? You can call me Bobby—sorry, this is awkward. Darcy’s gotten some bad news and I was sitting with her until Will got home.”

Darcy pulls away from him, wiping her face with a handkerchief. Now that he can see her face, it’s obvious she’s been crying for a while.

She steps back and he picks up his portfolio, stepping into the apartment and shutting the door behind him.

“Darce— what happened?” he says.

She pulls him over to the sofa and they sit down on the opposite end from Bobby.

Her chin wobbles and her eyes fill with tears, “There was a car accident, and Mama and Pop are dead,” she sobs.

Steve glances at Bobby and he nods in grim affirmation.

He pulls Darcy into his arms, “Oh—sweetheart, I’m so sorry.”

He rubs circles on her back as she rests her head wearily on his chest, her breath occasionally hitching in a sob.

Steve looks over at Bobby again, “Thanks for bringing Darcy home and sitting with her.”

Bobby sighs, “Son, I wish I could have done more. My good friend, Dr. Brooks, called the hospital to get a hold of Darcy to break the news. She was in no shape to take the subway home.”

Darcy lifts her head from Steve’s shoulder, “Bobby, I know you have things to do at the hospital, you can head back if you need to. Steve will sit with me til Will gets home.”

“If you’re sure, I’ll be on my way,” he confirms, picking his hat up from the arm of the sofa and placing it on his head. “You and Will do whatever you need to do during this difficult time—feel free to call me and let me know your plans, I’ll handle things at the hospital for you.”

Darcy stands and hugs Bobby, linking her arm with his to walk him to the door.

“I’ll call you as soon as I know what Will and I are going to do,” she says, “I imagine we’ll be heading to Iowa as soon as possible.”

Bobby nods, patting her hand and saying, “Alright dear, keep me posted.”

After Bobby leaves, Darcy returns to Steve’s side.

He wraps his arms around her and holds her close, burying his nose in her hair, comforted by the
scent of her.

*She’s leaving for Iowa.*

He squeezes her tighter, for once, he can take care of her. He knows what it feels like to lose a parent too soon.

“What can I do for you, Darce? Would you like some tea?” he says softly.

She lifts her head from his shoulder and tilts her head back to look at him. Her blue eyes are bloodshot and puffy, but the sad smile she gives him is still beautiful. “That sounds good,” she says, her voice raspy from crying.

He busies himself with preparing tea while Darcy turns the radio on low and settles on the sofa, leaning her head against the back of it and closing her eyes.

He brings her a cup of the chamomile tea she always gives him to relax and sits beside her. She opens her eyes and takes it from him, blowing gently on the surface of the steaming liquid before she takes a sip and leans back, resting her head on his shoulder.

“I don’t know why I’m so exhausted, I feel like I could sleep for days,” she says.

“It’s the shock. I remember feeling that way when my ma passed, just numb and wrung out,” he says.

“I guess we’re both orphans now, Stevie,” she says, tears spilling down her cheeks again.

He cups her face in his hands, gently wiping the tears away with his thumbs, “I’m sorry, baby.”

She sighs, pulling the handkerchief from her pocket and wiping her face. “I can’t believe I have any tears left, as much as I’ve been crying.”

She hands him her teacup and blows her nose, grimacing and saying, “Ugh—sorry.”

He hands her tea back, “S’ok, doll.”

She sips her tea, cuddled up against his side. They sit silently together, the radio playing softly as she leans against him. He absently strokes his hand over her hair as she stares blankly at the wall, her expression desolate.

Steve glances at the clock hanging on the opposite wall.

6pm.

Will should be here soon. Bucky too.

“Darce, you want me to start something for supper?”

She’s slow to respond, her thoughts obviously a million miles away. Eventually she replies, “Let’s do that together, I need to do something normal to take my mind off of things.”

“Anything you want,” he says.
Bucky bounds up the steps to Darcy’s apartment, his hair still damp from the shower he’d taken after work. Steve hadn’t been home so he figured he must be over here.

He knocks and waits, rocking on his heels as he listens to the mutter of voices within. Steve answers the door and his smile falters as he spots the look on his face and a matching expression on Tony’s as he sits at the kitchen table with a glass of whiskey in front of him and an open bottle beside it.

He walks in and closes the door behind him, growling, “What happened?” he looks around, “where’s Darcy?”

Steve sighs, “Come sit down, I’ll get ya some tea.”

He pulls out a chair at the table and sits across from Tony, who raises raises his glass and an eyebrow in silent inquiry. Bucky nods and says, “Skip the tea, Stevie—I’ll have what he’s having,” and jumps up to grab himself a glass before settling at the kitchen table again.

Tony nudges the bottle towards him and he pours himself a couple inches in his glass, knocking back a slug and wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. He drums his fingers on the tabletop impatiently while Steve fills his mug with tea and comes to sit with them.

Bucky refills his glass and takes a smaller sip, inhales deeply, and asks again, “What happened?”

“Darcy got some bad news at work today—her ma and Will’s pop were killed in an accident this morning,” he says, leaning his elbow on the table and resting his head on his hand, wearily rubbing his eyes, “Will came home maybe 10 minutes ago and Darcy took him back to his room to tell him.”

Bucky shares a look with Tony, who nods and tosses back a good half of the liquid in his glass. He says, “This is terrible. Will’s gonna be devastated—they might not live nearby but the two of them are very close to their folks.”

Bucky nods.

Darcy only ever talked about her ma and pop in the best of terms. They were very supportive of Darcy and Will getting an education, sending care packages and letters regularly.

The two of them had a different upbringing than he’d experienced, aside from the rural location of their home, both of them had been primarily raised by a single parent and had been only children until they met each other. Both of them had no one else they called family, aside from some distant cousins they’d never met. Like Stevie, they have lost their support, the people they could fall back on if things went south.

He knew Darcy confided often in her mother, considering her a friend and sounding board for much of her life. She’d been hopeful for a visit from them this summer, almost positive they were coming.

He’s sad he’ll never meet the people who made his beautiful girl who she is.

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Will and Darcy curl together in his bed, her head resting on his chest and their arms around each
other in silent comfort.

It had been a while, they’d stopped crying for the moment.

She listens to the conversation in the kitchen. “Bucky’s here,” she says, “Steve’s told Tony what happened and now Bucky knows—at least we won’t have to repeat the story two more times.”

Will sighs, “That’s a relief,” he wraps a finger in her hair, absently pulling the curl straight and letting it spring loose, only to repeat the motion again.

“What’re we gonna do, Darce?” he whispers.

“I guess we’re gonna go home,” she says, even though the people that make Iowa home are gone now. “We gotta make arrangements for Mama and Pop, there’s no one else to do it.”

He says, “I wish we didn’t have to go back—we could just pretend they were still there, write letters, wait for the Sunday phone call, live with the notion they’re still there living their lives while we live ours here.”

“Me too,” she sniffs, her eyes burning with tears.

“There’s no one in that town I really want to see, aside from Dr. Brooks and his family—we’re gonna have to see everybody and deal with all their bullshit again.”

“I know,” she says, “it’ll only be that way for the—um—funeral,” she falters for a moment and he squeezes his arm around her in sympathy, “but after, it can be mostly just you and me, we’ll need to pack up the house and deal with the funeral home.”

“Ah, god,” he groans, “we’re gonna be gone for a while, huh?”

“Probably. Doctor and Martha Brooks will help. Martha was Mama’s best friend, she’ll know what they would have wanted.”

They’re silent for a while after that, each lost in their own thoughts.

Will turns on his side, the two of them sharing the pillow, their faces close.

“Sometimes, I feel bad I barely remember my ma, she died when I was so small. I struggle to remember her face, I don’t remember what her voice sounded like,” he whispers, “Do ya think that’ll happen with Mama and Pop?”

She knew she wouldn’t forget. She never forgot anything, even the things she wanted to.

But Will wasn’t like that.

“I think the memory of them will fade a little with time. But you’re older than you were when your ma died, so you’ll have more memories to work with,” she says.

“I don’t want to forget them,” he says, his forehead furrowed in distress.

“You won’t. I’ll help remind you of things—we’ll pull out the photo albums and tell stories,” she says.

He sighs, “Good.”

He resumes playing with her hair absentmindedly, his thoughts clouding his face.
“I never did tell Pop about Tony, never really said anything about being queer to him,” he says in a small voice.

“I know,” she says, reaching for his hand and squeezing it.

“Do ya think he would have still loved me anyway? Would he have still been proud of me?” he asks, his green eyes wet with tears.

Darcy likes to think so.

Pop was kind and encouraging, always believing Will could achieve whatever he set his mind to do. Before he got together with Mama, things had been a little haphazard in their house, laundry would pile up, dishes wouldn’t get washed, and half the time Will would be on his own for meals, but Pop loved Will.

He was his only child and his family. She had to hope he would have loved Will no matter what.

“Of course he would have,” she hugs Will tight as his breath hitches and he sobs into her neck, “of course.”

**Brief history of local anesthesia**

**This is what Tony Carbonell looks like**

Chapter End Notes

Happy Discount Chocolate Day, for all of you who recognize that Valentine’s Day is not the real cause for celebration.

Fun fact: Cocaine was the most common local anesthetic prior to 1905, then came Novocain, which was a cocaine derivative without the toxic and addictive effects. The topical and local anesthesia lidocaine was not developed until 1943 and not commonly used until 1947.

I couldn’t find much about hospital procedure for setting minor fractures and stitching wounds in 1941, so I cobbled together something that hopefully makes sense. All medical professionals—look away.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

While Darcy and Will are in Iowa, Bucky and Steve take care of business. Steve reads some letters from Darcy and contemplates his relationship with Bucky. Darcy makes a request. The boys figure out why that time they kissed got them so stirred up.

Last half of chapter NSFW.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Friday, June 20, 1941

Bucky knocks on the door to apartment 1A in Darcy’s building, rocking on his heels as he waits for Mrs. Levinson to answer.

Shuffling footsteps announce her approach and the door opens a crack, one shrewd black eye looks him over before removing the security chain to swing the door open.

“Hello, Mrs. Levinson,” he says, smiling at the short, white haired lady, “don’t you look lovely today?”

She cackles, the skin around her eyes and mouth creasing with her grin, “you and your flirting, James—what can I do for you?”

“Ya can call me Bucky, ma’am, everyone does except for my ma,” he says.

“I’ll call you the name your mother gave you, dear,” she says, “I expect you’re wondering if there was a package delivered?”

“Yes, ma’am. Darcy said in her last letter she’d be sending stuff from home.”

“Well, as a matter of fact, she sent two crates—heavy ones too,” she says, walking into her apartment and pointing to them, stacked next to the door.

“Oh yeah, she’s planning on sending a lot of things from her her ma’s pantry, jars of jam and things she’s canned and whatnot,” he says, bending to test the weight of one of the crates. Heavy, but he can carry them up one at a time and rest on the landing if he needs to. “Say—she said I could give ya a couple jars of jam if you’re interested. There’s apple butter too.”

“That would be lovely, Darcy has shared her mother’s jam with me before and it is delicious,” she clicks her tongue, “Poor girl, how are she and Will doing? Such a shock about her parents.”
“She’s doin’ okay. She’s been writing letters and calls the phone on her floor every Sunday morning and I make sure to be here to answer. They’re working on packing up their house and Will is trying to find someone to buy his pop’s business.”

“She’s lucky to have a fella like you,” she says.

“I’m lucky to have her, Mrs. Levinson, she’s an angel.”

I miss her so much.

Mrs. Levinson doesn’t know about Steve. They’d talked about it and decided Bucky would deal with things on this end as much as possible. Steve said nobody would believe he was Darcy’s fella, (a statement that made Bucky furious) and besides, Bucky always charmed the ladies, regardless of age.

He bends and picks up the top crate, jostling it bit to to settle its weight in his arms.

“Alright, ma’am, I’m gonna take this one up, my friend Steve is helping me keep an eye on Darcy and Will’s place, I’ll send him down with a couple jars of jam after we unload the crates,” he says.

“Thanks dear, you tell Darcy that she and Will are in my prayers.”

“Will do,” he says, and starts up the stairs.

When he gets to the 3rd floor and kicks the apartment door lightly, Steve opens it, standing aside to let him carry the crate in.

“Boy, Darce wasn’t kidding when she said she’d be sending stuff from home—that looks heavy,” he says.

He grunts, lowering it to the kitchen table and shaking his hands out. “yeah, and there’s another one downstairs, why don’t ya pry this one open and start unpacking and I’ll go get the next one.”

Steve looks dubiously at the wooden crate and Bucky says, “Nevermind, I’ll get a crowbar from the super and bring it up after the next crate.”

“Don’t be stupid. I’ll go get the crowbar, you get the crate. I’ll meet ya back here,” Steve smirks.

“Punk.”

“Jerk.”

He laughs and holds the door open for Steve and they head downstairs.

June 23, 1941

Steve is on Darcy’s bed, rereading the letters she’s sent to he and Bucky. It makes him feel closer to her, to read her words and smell the scent of her, lingering faintly on her pillow.

The day she left, they’d stood in the curb together waiting for her cab and she’d told them to stay at
the apartment if they wanted, eat the food in the icebox before it spoiled, keep an eye on the place, and handed him the envelope with the rent money in it to give to Mrs. Levinson on the first of the month.

Will had agreed, saying one of them could use his bed if they wanted to stay there.

Darcy’s blue eyes had been filled with tears but her lips had quirked at her brother’s offer, knowing he and Bucky have slept every night next to each other ever since they had pushed their beds together months ago.

In the end, they slept in Darcy’s bed every night.

After a week, Bucky declared it was time to change the sheets, even if they both didn’t want to lose Darcy’s scent. They compromised by using her floral bath soap to wash the pillowcases. Now they smelled like flowers, not quite like Darcy, but enough that it made both of them happy.

Almost weekly, they received letters addressed to both of them, with additional messages for each of them inserted in the same envelope. He unfolds the first letter, which had arrived a week after she and Will left.

June 3, 1941

Dear Bucky and Steve,

We buried Mama and Pop yesterday, and it was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. It still doesn’t seem real to me actually, we never got to say goodbye, and we never saw their bodies. The police officer from the scene of the accident thinks they’d swerved to avoid something, possibly a deer? And had gone off the road into the trees.

The caskets were closed because they were too damaged by the accident for viewing. I think, even if they looked horrific, it would have helped for me to see them and know they were gone.

As it is, I feel like they’re merely away, that they are somewhere else in the world and I will see them again soon. Which my mind knows is untrue but my heart cannot seem to accept.

I miss you both terribly. Sometimes I dream about you and wake in the morning reaching for you before I realize where I am and that you aren’t here.

Other times, I dream I’m talking to Mama and I wake up crying. Times like those, I crawl into bed with Will. He doesn’t mind, he says he feels better with me there.

Remember the pilgrim soul, Stevie? Mine is trying to travel to you every night, I think.

Read the poem to Bucky when you get a chance, the book is in the stack by my bed.

I love you both,

Darcy

P.S. I will call the phone on our floor Sunday morning at 10am. I need to hear your voices.
He’d read the poem to Bucky like she’d asked and told him what Darcy had said about it. Bucky had looked thoughtful, rereading it himself a couple times and since then had been reading the book, focusing on the dog eared pages, learning the poems Darcy loved best.

He sets the letter aside and picks up the next one.

**June 11, 1941**

Dear Steve and Bucky,

Getting Mama and Pop’s affairs in order is going to take longer than we expected. Will is trying to find someone to buy Pop’s business, but it’s hard. Worse comes to worse, he’ll sell the building and the equipment separately.

The house and land are my responsibility, as it has been in my family since my great-grandfather purchased the land and built the house in 1865.

Will and I decided to sell the horses, sell off or pack away anything of value, and pay someone to check on the house. They’ll keep the drive clear and keep the lawn cut back around the house so it doesn’t get too overgrown. Fortunately, Mama and Pop left us a bit of money and selling the horses and other valuables will also help.

Dr. Brooks’ oldest son is close to my age, and he could use the extra money and is willing to act as caretaker.

Maybe someday I will sell the house, but I cannot imagine doing so right now.

In other news, we’ve been going through the pantry and Mama had quite the surplus of canned goods. She has jars of homemade jam, apple butter, canned peaches, beets, and pickles. Also, soap! I plan to donate some to the church in town and to ship some to you, care of Mrs. Levinson. Please let her know I will be sending things as early as next week.

I love you both, and miss you terribly.

Your pilgrim soul,

Darcy

He smiles at Darcy calling herself a pilgrim soul. He remembers that day with her, how she’d read it to him and explained what it meant to her. He’d told her he loved her and she’d talked him into taking his shirt off for a massage. It had been a day of firsts—an amazing day.

The last letter had arrived today, and he’s waiting to read it when Bucky comes to bed. Instead, he unfolds the notes that were just for him that she’d tucked into the envelopes. She’d done the same for Bucky and he’d watched him read and reread those notes from her, his face a mixture of longing and pleasure each time.

He sighs and unfolds the first one.
Stevie,

I miss you.

Things here have been so hard. Every morning I struggle to get out of bed, knowing the day will involve packing away Mama and Pop’s belongings and feeling like I’m losing another piece of my childhood as I do.

What I really wish for every day is just to hide under my blanket, to dream a little longer, to fool myself into thinking those dreams are reality.

If you could hide under the blanket with me, it would be perfect.

I know you understand, you lost your mother, too.

It’s startling to realize I can never be someone’s child again, never have that feeling of being mothered. That is what I will miss most I think, just feeling like I have someplace where I don’t have to be grown-up all the time.

I love you and you are never far from my thoughts.

I wish you were here.

Darcy

He carefully folds the sheet of paper and unfolds the last letter.

Stevie,

It’s been more than two weeks since I’ve seen your face.

I miss leaning my head on your shoulder and watching you draw. I miss hearing about your day, and telling you about mine. I miss your smile. I miss watching you and Bucky, your silent communications, the way you tease each other.

I miss the way you smell, and I wish I’d stolen one of your shirts so I could sleep with it every night. I miss that spot where your neck meets your shoulder, that makes you shiver every time I put my lips on it.

How did this happen?

How does a person become essential to another? I don’t know.

I love you Stevie. When I see you again I want to kiss every inch of you—to take my time, be more patient, and not rush to the end.

You’re really good at that, you know.
Steve sighs and throws his arm across his face, the letter dangling from his fingers. Every time he reads the last part of her letter he’s overcome with longing for Darcy to return. His mind can’t help replaying images of her in his bed that are both arousing and frustrating.

The frustration has been rampant lately.

Despite the fact that he starts out on opposite sides of the bed from Bucky each night, they end up entangled by morning.

He wants to know if Bucky feels like he does, and if he ever thinks about the kiss they shared. If Darcy were here, he thinks he would ask her what she thinks. He knows she’d understand, after all, she’s obviously crazy about Bucky too.

Steve has questions. For instance, if he’s attracted to Bucky but not to men in general, what is he? Is he queer?

Is it just proximity? Associating Bucky with his first sexual experiences? He doesn’t know. It’s all so confusing.

*Maybe I should just make a move?*

His stomach squirms with panic at the thought of Bucky rejecting him. He doesn’t actually know what he wants with his friend, he just knows he feels like something more than a best friend, or a brother.

He knows that when he, Darcy, and Bucky are together, things feel more perfect than they have ever felt in his entire life.

Falling in love with Darcy has allowed him to recognize that he’s been in love with Bucky for a long time.

Now, if only he could figure out a way to tell him.

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Bucky wipes the steam from the mirror in Darcy and Will’s bathroom before running a comb through his wet hair. He loves having regular access to hot water, and the bath soap smells like Darcy too.

She’s been gone almost a month, and he and Steve have stayed in her apartment nearly every night, returning to their place only to check on things, for changes of clothes, their mail, and the food in their icebox.

It kinda feels like they’re living together even though she’s not here. It makes him dream about the future, one where he would have a place with her and Stevie and come home from work and eat dinner with them and they could sleep together every night.
He slips on his boxers and undershirt, brushes his teeth, and wanders down the hall to the kitchen to grab Darcy’s letter from the kitchen table before shutting off the kitchen lights.

In a moment, he’s standing in the doorway to the bedroom; silent as he gazes at Steve, stretched out on Darcy’s bed in his undershirt and boxers, her letters spread on the bed beside him and his arm thrown over his face.

He clears his throat as he walks into the room, “Readin’ her letters again, punk?”

Steve lifts his arm from his face and curls it behind his head, smiling softly at him, “Yeah, I miss talkin’ to her, ya know?”

“I know,” he says, dropping the most recent letter from Darcy on the bed beside Steve.

Steve grabs the old letters and stacks them together, handing them to Bucky who places them on the bedside table before pulling the blankets down on his side of the bed. Steve wiggles the covers out from under himself and pulls them up over his lap and lays down again, watching Bucky as he punches his pillow a couple times before laying down beside him.

He cocks an eyebrow at Steve, “Ya wanna read the letter out loud?”

“Sure,” Steve says, ripping the envelope open and pulling out several sheets of paper.

He hands one to him, folded with “Bucky” written on the outside, sets the one labeled “Steve” aside, before unfolding the third sheet of paper.

He clears his throat, resting the edge of the letter on his chest as he begins to read.

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June 18, 1941

Dear Steve and Bucky,

Things have been getting a little better. I’m starting to accept what has happened and I try to stay busy to keep my mind from wandering towards useless regrets.

It does no good to wish I’d somehow come home for Christmas, or that I’d called more, or told Mama and Pop I loved them more often.

Instead, I’m focusing on getting the house organized and helping Will with Pop’s business. It looks like he has a buyer, but it will be at least until the 3rd week of July before everything is settled.

Which brings me to the purpose of this letter, (beyond telling you I miss you and love you, which is always the case).

Tony is taking a train on the 30th to come out here and help Will get the a funeral home ready for sale, and I want you to come too, and stay for a week. I will wire you the money to buy the train tickets, and before you start arguing about the cost, Mama and Pop set aside money for the trip they’d planned to take to New York. They never got to use it, but they would have invited you to their home eventually, I am certain. They would approve of this.

Please come.
Don’t worry about the money.

I can help with that. I want to help with that.

I already have my ticket to return on July 7th because I need to get back to school and work and Will said there was nothing else here for me to do. He’s right.

At least if you come, I won’t have to travel back to New York alone.

We can sleep together every night.

We can celebrate Steve’s birthday together.

Please come.

I’ll call you at 7pm on Wednesday, the 25th. If you agree, I’ll wire the money the next day.

I love you,

Darcy

Steve turns wide eyes to Bucky and wordlessly hands it to him to read a second time.

Bucky rereads it, his gut churning with indecision. He’ll lose a week of income if they go. The responsible part of him says it’s a bad idea.

He looks at her words again,—Please come. He sighs.

I really want to go.

Steve clears his throat, turning on his side to look at him, Bucky sets the letter aside and faces him.

“What d’ya think?” Steve says softly, hope and worry warring on his face.

“Dunno, I’d lose a weeks pay,” he says, his eyes tracing again over Darcy’s looping script, before he looks at Steve.

Steve bites his lip, his ridiculously long eyelashes flicking down as he ducks his his head, “I—uh—have some money coming soon from the work I did on those Tijuana bibles,” he mutters.

Bucky grins, “are ya sayin’ your pornography is gonna help us make rent?”

Steve punches him in the shoulder, “It ain’t pornography—“ Bucky laughs, ducking a flurry of slaps from Steve.

Steve grins wryly, “Well—maybe it is. Sure pays good though."

“Yeah—don’t see the harm myself, but you could get into some trouble if Billy ever gets caught and they trace it back to you,” Bucky warns.

“Not like I sign ‘em, jerk,” Steve says.

“Anywayyyy—“ Bucky wiggles his eyebrows, “ya think it’ll be enough?”
“Should be—hate to mention it, but ya know Darce will cover the rent for us if we really need it,” Steve says.

Bucky frowns, “I know, rubs me the wrong way though—fella’s supposed to take care of his girl, ya know.”

“I know, but Darce is different,” Steve says, pulling absently at a loose thread on the blanket, “and she gets mad when we don’t accept her gifts.”

“Yeah, yeah. I just like for things to be fair,” Bucky grumbles, rolling onto his back to gaze blankly at the ceiling, excitement warring with indecision in his head.

Steve unfolds and refolds the note Darcy had written him before succumbing to curiosity and opening it again and beginning to read it. Bucky glances over at him and huffs, “I guess we’re going.”

“Yeah,” Steve says absently, his eyes flicking across the page in front of him as a pink flush begins to suffuse his cheeks.

Bucky smirks, he can bet Darcy wrote something about making time with Stevie and it’s winding him up. Their girl has a way with words, and a way of saying exactly what’s on her mind.

He turns on his side towards Steve and unfolds his letter.

Bucky,

I miss waking up with your arms around me, the way you surround and shelter me, the way it feels so warm between you and Stevie.

I haven’t felt that kind of safety and comfort since I left to come back here.

I love my brother very much, but we’re both grieving, and sometimes our sadness acts like a boomerang, bouncing back and forth between us in an endless cycle. It’s hard to comfort someone when you need comforting yourself, I guess.

Also, I just want to forget all the sadness for a while, to grab onto life with both hands.

I think Mama would understand.

I find myself daydreaming about that thing you do with your tongue. Oh god, your amazingly talented mouth. If you were here, I’d kiss you til we had to stop to breathe, and I’d lick your pretty mouth.

Is it terrible of me to write that?

Maybe you should burn this after reading it.

No, don’t.

I’m not ashamed to want you, and to tell you so. You taught me that. You’ve taught me so many new things, Bucky. I don’t know what I’d do without you—
Hopefully, we’ll see each other soon.

Give Stevie a kiss for me.

xoxo,

Darcy

Bucky licks his lips and looks up from the page to see Steve’s slightly flushed face and shining blue eyes.

He raises a brow and says, “our girl got ya worked up, punk?”

“Maybe—does she say stuff in your letters about wanting to kiss ya all over?” Steve breathes.

“Not exactly, more like how talented I am with my mouth,” he teases, “and that I should kiss ya for her.”

Steve gazes steadily at him, “Maybe ya should,” he says softly.

Bucky feels that current that’s been running between them for months, like electricity under his skin, flaring to life. This thing he’s been feeling for Stevie ain’t going away, if anything, it’s been getting stronger.

He doesn’t understand how, but sharing Darcy with him has pushed his love for his friend into attraction, especially after seeing their girl work him over a few times.

He decides to test the waters.

“Darce says there’s this thing I do with my tongue that drives her crazy,” he says, resting his hand on Steve’s shoulder, pulling him closer.

“Really? Maybe ya oughta help a fella out, share your expertise,” Steve says, so close now he feels his breath on his lips, noting the way his pupils have expanded, his eyes glinting a deep cobalt blue.

“Always willing to share, Stevie,” he whispers and leans in, their lips brushing together and heat exploding under his skin.

He cups his hands around Steve’s face, burrowing his fingers into his soft hair and tilting his head, licking over his bottom lip then sucking on it briefly before doing the same to his upper lip.

Steve growls low, wraps one arm around his neck and pulls him tight against him, fitting their lips together and licking into Bucky’s mouth. Steve’s lips press against his, soft and insistent, as their tongues stroke together, little gasps escaping both of them each time they shift their mouths apart to nibble and lick and suck at each other.

Bucky pulls back to let Steve breathe, feathering kisses across his jaw to whisper into his ear, “ya get what Darcy was talkin’ about, now?”

Steve moans, flexing his hips against him, the thin fabric of their boxer shorts the only thing separating them, “Mmmm—maybe I need another demonstration,” he chokes, his fingers digging into the nape of his neck.
Bucky chuckles, pressing his mouth beneath Steve’s ear and tracing circles with his tongue as Steve’s breath hitches and he grips his hair, pulling him closer.

“Bucky—“ Steve gasps as he nips him gently, not wanting to mark him where people will see, and soothes the bite with his tongue before nibbling again, working his way towards the spot where his neck meets his shoulder.

Steve’s skin erupts in goosebumps and a tremor shakes him as Bucky latches onto the flesh there, sucking hard and running his hand down his friend’s back til he reaches his bottom. He grips one small but muscular cheek and pulls Steve harder against him, moaning against his skin as their hardened cocks bump against each other.

Steve gasps, pulling at Bucky’s hair again and flexing his hips against him.

Bucky slides his hand up the back of Steve’s undershirt, ghosting his fingers up the warm silky skin of his back. He notes the different sensations of touching a man rather than a woman, narrow hips, soft skin overlying hard muscles, and the bumps of Steve’s vertebra.

Their chests press together as they kiss again, flat muscular planes meeting no answering softness like he’s experienced with women.

Steve throws a leg over Bucky’s hip, pulling them closer together and rubbing his cock against Bucky’s belly.

After a moment, Bucky pulls back, looking at Steve’s kiss swollen lips and fever bright eyes.

“How far ya wanna go with this, punk? If ya were a girl I’d be tryin’ to get ya outta your clothes,” he says.

Steve sucks his lower lip into his mouth and presses his hips against Bucky again, “I think that sounds like a good idea.”

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Bucky grins and reaches his hand behind him, grabbing the back of his undershirt and pulling it over his head, tossing it on the floor behind him.

Steve quickly follows suit.

He leans in to kiss Bucky again, shivering as the warm skin of their chests press together. The hair on Bucky’s chest abrades his nipples, and a bolt of heat shoots straight to his cock. He hums into his friend’s mouth as they both run their hands over each other, exploring all the bumps and grooves that are so familiar yet not.

He’s seen Bucky naked hundreds of times, he’s watched him grow up, watched his body change with time. He had always been bigger than Steve; beautiful, tall, strong, and healthy.

But he’d never touched him like this.

Never really thought of it until recently.

Now he revels in the shift of muscles under Bucky’s skin as they kiss. He wants to touch him
everywhere, his strong neck and shoulders, the small of his back, the deep dimples on either side at
the base of his spine, and the tight swell of his ass.

He runs his hands through Bucky’s thick, wavy hair as their tongues tangle, pulling his head back
and kissing and nibbling just under his jaw, licking over his Adam’s apple to the notch at the base of
his throat.

Bucky lets him, his hands wandering through his hair and down his back, groaning as Steve dips
lower to lick around one of his nipples, then the other.

“What’re ya doin’, punk?” Bucky rasps as Steve’s tongue circles his nipple, slowly.

“Showin’ ya what Darcy says I do best,” he says.

“What’s that?” Bucky asks, his eyes closed and head tipped back into the pillow, an occasional
shiver wracking his larger frame.

“Takin’ my time, workin’ her up,” he says, blowing air across Bucky’s damp nipple before nipping
him gently with the edge of his teeth.

Bucky huffs a breathless laugh, “she told me ya frustrated the hell out of her, but I didn’t know ya
kept it up after she managed to get ya naked.”

He kisses down Bucky’s sternum, his fingers circling around and occasionally pinching his hardened
nipples lightly.

Interesting how the pleasure points he’d learned with Darcy work for Bucky, too.

“It started with me goin’ slow to control my breathin’, but now I do it because I like to get Darcy
beggin’,” Steve says, licking lower down Bucky’s belly and circling his bellybutton with his tongue
while Bucky’s lets him hold his hips down.

Bucky squirms under his ministrations, his cock pressed hard against Steve’s chest. He hums,
“Hmmm—surprising.”

Steve runs a finger along the waistband of Bucky’s shorts, “I know ya think I’m impulsive, but I can
be patient, ya know,” he says.

Bucky grips Steve’s shoulders and pulls on him, “come on back up here, punk. I wanna touch you
too.”

Steve wiggles back up Bucky’s body and they kiss again, slow and deep, until they pull apart to
breathe, turning on their sides to face each other with their faces inches apart.

Bucky licks his lips and says, “I’m not sure how sex works with a couple of fellas, to be honest—
well, I heard some things but that ain’t the same as knowing anythin’.”

Steve frowns, and absentely strokes Bucky’s arm from shoulder to wrist, clasping his friend’s hand
with his.

“I figure we just do what feels good—like kissin’ and touchin’ and stuff,” he says.

Bucky releases his hand and trails it down his side, looking into his eyes as he edges his fingers
slowly towards Steve’s cock, encircling is erection through his undershorts, stroking him from root to
tip, “Like this?” he says, stroking him again.
“Um—uh, yes?” Steve stutters, arching into Bucky’s hand.

He glances down at the bulge tenting Bucky’s boxers and moves his hand towards it, tentatively wrapping his hand around it before squeezing more firmly.

He gasps as Bucky tightens his grip and strokes him again, and Steve mimics his pace with his own hand.

Bucky grunts, “this’d be better if we lost the shorts,” he strokes Steve again, “Dunno about you, but I like jerkin’ off without anything in the way.”

“Mmmm—okay,” Steve agrees and they both shuffle out of their shorts, kicking them to the end of the bed before turning back to each other.

As they kiss each other slowly, pressed together from chest to groin. Steve rubs himself against Bucky’s belly, the difference in their heights not allowing their hips to align with each other.

Bucky pushes him back a little and they adjust so they can stroke each other, their hands growing slick with each other’s arousal. Steve bites Bucky’s shoulder and pants against it, a coil of desire wrapping tighter and tighter in his lower abdomen as Bucky’s hand strokes him, twisting slightly on the upstroke just the way he likes before sliding back down.

“Mmmm—Stevie, let go of me, I wanna try somethin’,” Bucky rasps, “wiggle down a little so our cocks are touchin’.”

Steve whines a little in frustration but wiggles down a little, the top of his head just under Bucky’s chin, he thrusts his hips against Bucky’s and after a moment Bucky reaches between them, pushing their cocks together and wrapping his hand around the base of both of them and stroking upward experimentally.

Steve groans, “Oh—mmm—that works,” and throws his arm around Bucky’s hip, his fingers digging into one muscular buttock while he flexes his hips and rubs the underside of his cock against Bucky’s as his hand squeezes them together.

Bucky wraps his other hand in the hair at the back of Steve’s head, pulling his head back and hunching forward to feverishly kiss him as Steve arches helplessly against him.

A couple more thrusts against each other and they give up any pretense of kissing, gasping into each other’s mouths as Bucky groans God, Stevie, and yes, yes, yes and Steve loses the ability to speak altogether, shaking and panting against Bucky’s lips as he comes, spurting over his friend’s hand just as Bucky’s rhythmic thrusting falters and he stiffens, moaning his own release.

They slump against each other, spent.

After his brain starts working again, Steve rolls onto his back, staring at the ceiling as his heartbeat slows. The bed dips and he glances over at Bucky, who’s rolled to reach over the side of the bed, grabbing his undershirt and wiping off his hand and between his legs, before turning it inside out and handing it to Steve who wordlessly cleans up and passes it back to him.

Bucky drops it on the floor and rolls back towards Steve, pulling the blankets up over both of them and scooting closer to him and throwing an arm around his waist.

“Are we gonna talk about this, Stevie?” he says quietly, and Steve rolls onto his side so he can look at him.
“I suppose we should,” he says, “I honestly don’t know how we got here—I mean, I never thought I was queer.”

Bucky nods, “Me neither—okay, it’s true I find a lot of people attractive, men and women, and I like to flirt—“ Steve snorts and Bucky smacks his shoulder, “but ya know, I never really thought to pursue anything other than with women, though.”

“So you’d do this with another fella, if the opportunity and attraction were there?” Steve asks.

“Maybe? Dunno? I think if this thing with Darcy hadn’t started up for the both of us I woulda eventually found a gal and settled down and never thought of it,” he says.

Steve’s purses his lips, brow creased in contemplation, weighing his feelings.

“Before this, I noticed girls, but I just figured I’d never have anybody, anyhow—“ Bucky frowns, Steve knows that line of thought makes him upset, “but then Darcy came along and I got all these feelings for her and I realized I had them for you too,” he looks at Bucky intently, “and then it’s all I could think about sometimes.”

Bucky nods. “I get that.”

“Remember when you showed me how to kiss?” he says.

Bucky snorts, “Boy, do I,” he chuckles, “—had a hard on I tried to wish away, very confusing.”

Steve grins, “I couldn’t figure out why it felt so good to me, especially after Darcy told me about how it made her feel to kiss Will.”

Bucky pokes him in the side, “ya know I’m really good at the kissing—maybe I could turn anybody queer.”

“Shut up, jerk,” he says, leaning forward to kiss Bucky softly before pulling back with a smirk, “wait’ll we tell Darce, she’s gonna have a million questions.”

Bucky flops onto his back, throwing his arm over his face, “I bet,” he mutters.

“A million,” he repeats softly.

Chapter End Notes

So, Steve and Bucky are going to Iowa. Also, They’ve finally figured out they have sexual feelings for each other. Eeeek—What did you think of the canoodling?
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Bucky, Steve, and Tony travel from New York to Cedar Rapids, Iowa on a train. The boys finally see where Will and Darcy are from, a long awaited reunion ensues.

Darcy finds out about the change in Steve and Bucky’s relationship.

NSFW last bit of chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tuesday, July 2, 1941

The train pulls into the station in Cedar Rapids, Iowa at 6pm on Tuesday evening. Bucky nudges Steve with his shoulder and he opens his eyes, blearily taking in the sight of the station and people rushing around outside the window.

He smirks, watching his friend rub his eyes before sitting up straight and running a hand through his hair.

“We’re here—thank God. Traveling by train stopped being exciting 10 hours ago,” Tony grumbles across from him, deft hands gathering the playing cards spread on the leather briefcase resting atop his knees.

It’s been a long journey. They’d left New York via Grand Central Station yesterday morning, travelled 18 hours to Chicago, bummed around Union Station for a couple hours before catching the train to Iowa.

All he really wants at this point is to shower and eat, not to mention the fact that only rest they’ve had was slumped on the bench seats of the train.

At least they were fortunate in the last leg of the journey to have the two bench seats facing each other to themselves.

On the way out of New York, Tony had shared a seat with an obnoxious Fuller Brush salesman on his way to a convention in Chicago. The man couldn’t seem to quit jawing. When it became abundantly clear none of them were interested in buying his product, he proceeded to regale them with tales of places to find loose women in Chicago, trying his best to convince them to go with him.

Tony’s eyes had rolled so hard Bucky was surprised he hadn’t hurt himself.

He doesn’t know about Steve or Tony, but he personally feigned sleep a good deal of the time as afternoon faded into evening, just to avoid having to respond to the man’s chatter.

They’d cheerfully waved him goodbye upon arriving at Union Station at 7am, intent on washing up in the public restroom and getting some grub before heading out on the next train.
Steve had walked around with his head tipped back, eyes on the high ceiling illuminated by the long barrel vaulted skylight. Though not as ornate as Grand Central Station, Bucky liked the more austere lines and well lit spaces of the Chicago station. It was cleaner than the one in New York, too.

Stevie couldn’t stop gawking, but he’d been the same at Grand Central, too.

One thing Bucky was happy to leave behind in Chicago was the pungent and somewhat overpowering scent of the stockyards. When they’d exited the train station to check out the surrounding area and look for a diner, they’d been hit by a stench he hadn’t been able to identify until Tony had told them about Chicago’s meatpacking industry.

He supposed the already 80 degree day hadn’t helped much.

He reaches beneath his seat and pulls out his bag as Tony and Steve follow suit, slinging it over his shoulder and standing to stretch while observing the other passengers preparing to disembark.

He glances at Steve to find him rubbing his eyes again, his face pale with fatigue. Punk needed to rest the most, despite his ability to sleep anywhere.

Tony is restlessly bouncing up on his toes, looking ahead of the line as they steadily move to exit the train. Finally, they step onto the platform and there’s a shout to their right and a flash of red hair and Tony laughs as Will swoops in and grabs him in a fierce embrace.

After a moment, Will steps back, patting Tony on the back and turning to address he and Steve.

“Aren’t you fellas a sight for sore eyes! I borrowed Dr. Brooks’ car and we have a little drive back to the house. Darcy is cooking up a storm and is very anxious to see you,” Will casually tosses his arm around Tony’s shoulder and motions for them to follow him.

They walk a block in the early evening heat, finally arriving at a black Studebaker parked at the curb. Will opens the trunk and they pile their bags in before clambering into the car.

Cedar Rapids is a small town to Bucky, none of the buildings as tall or the crowds of people as numerous as what he’s accustomed to. It soon becomes apparent that in Iowa it was as close to a city as they would get. As they drive further from the train station and cross a river, the buildings become less tall and eventually disappear in favor of rolling hills covered in trees, punctuated by fields of corn and the occasional farm house.

They still had several hours until dark and the sun hangs low in the sky, mellow golden light flashing between the trees as they pass. They’d rolled down the windows and a fresh breeze blew through the car, ruffling his hair and causing the paper from the sketchbook in Steve’s lap to flap every time he’d lift his hand from the page.

The air smells different here than anywhere he’s been, a green, humid scent that revives him after spending more than a day in the stale interior of the train. Steve is busily sketching impressions, squinting occasionally over the front seat at the longer sightline through the windshield.

Tony and Will are chattering animatedly with each other, so visibly happy to see each other they’re practically vibrating with it.

Will glances in the rear view mirror at them, “Not much longer, fellas—we’ll be to town in about 30 minutes or so and we live five miles past that.”

“I didn’t know you could drive, Will,” he says.
“Oh yeah, most kids out here start driving a tractor pretty young then learn to drive a car. Darcy and I used to drive her Grandpa’s tractor around and I’d help out my Pop by driving the hearse on occasion,” he says, his green eyes growing distant with memories before he says, “Darcy drives a car too, ya know.”

Steve says, “I didn’t know that—say, ya think we can learn while we’re here?”

“Sure, I’ll have to teach ya with the hearse though—um—Pop’s car was wrecked in the accident,” he says, gripping the steering wheel until his knuckles stand out white, Tony soundlessly wraps his hand around the back of his neck and squeezes it in comfort.

After an awkward moment, Bucky changes the subject, “Say, what’s Darce makin’ for dinner, I’m starved.”

Tony adds his complaint and Will’s hands relax on the steering wheel as he fills them in on the amazing meal their girl has planned for them.

Darcy is placing the blueberry cobbler on the windowsill to cool when she hears the sound of tires crunching on the long gravel driveway. She sucks in a breath, fanning her face with her hands before removing her apron and slinging it over a kitchen chair, walking quickly towards the front door.

She bursts onto the porch, the screen door slamming behind her as the car comes to a stop next to the house.

She clutches her hands together, bouncing on her toes as the front doors open, Will waving to her as he heads around the back of the car to open the trunk, Tony following closely behind him with a wink.

She descends the porch steps as one of the rear doors open and Bucky steps out, his silvery blue eyes riveted on her and a crooked grin on his face, “Hello, doll,” he says and she’s running, nearly tackling him in her haste to wrap her arms around him.

He rocks back on his heels, laughing as she says, “Bucky, Bucky, Bucky! You’re finally here,” and presses her nose to his neck, inhaling his scent and relaxing against him with a sigh, “missed you so much.”

“Baby, you have no idea,” he says, nuzzling the top of her head.

The sound of the door opening on the opposite side causes her to lift her head, tracking the top of Steve’s blond head as he walks around the car to them.

She turns in Bucky’s arms to meet Steve’s beautiful smile, grinning uncontrollably in return as she stretches her hand to him, pulling him close and meeting his shining blue eyes, “Stevie,” she sighs. He leans into her and the three of them wrap their arms around each other in a fierce embrace, not letting go until Will clears his throat beside them and says, “How bout you lovebirds grab your bags and come inside and make yourself at home?”

He smirks, slinging Tony’s bag over his shoulder and tossing an arm around his fella’s shoulders as they walk into the house.
Darcy pulls back, looking into their faces, “guess we oughta go inside.”

She waits while they grab their bags and shut the car trunk, walking ahead of them up the whitewashed stairs leading to the wide front porch of her childhood home.

She’s a little nervous, she wants them to like being here, to be happy they came so far for her.

She opens the screen door and they follow, the scent of the roasted chicken and potatoes she’d cooked perfuming the entryway, causing both of them to inhale deeply and Bucky to groan, “Darce, somethin’ smells amazin’.”

Darcy smiles, “Only the best for my fellas. Go ahead and drop your bags here,” she motions to the shiny wood floor next to the stairs, “I’ll show you where to put them after dinner.”

They enter the large kitchen, illuminated by the last rays of the slowly setting sun. She’d set the table with Mama’s good dishes, and placed a the vase full of wildflowers on the center of the long table her grandfather had built.

Will and Tony are nowhere to be seen, she imagines Will has dragged him off to his room until she calls them for dinner and she can’t blame him for that.

She points out the short hallway off the kitchen that leads to the bathroom and says, “if either of you need to freshen up, there’s towels in the bathroom for you to use.”

Steve nods and heads to the bathroom and she turns to Bucky, “you know how to carve a chicken?”

“I sure do,” he smiles, his silvery blue eyes bright in the last light of day streaming through the windows.

By the time Steve returns to the kitchen, Bucky has carved the chicken and Darcy has set a bowl of mashed potatoes, a basket of warm rolls, steamed carrots, and some of her mother’s pickled beets on the table. Bucky places the platter of chicken on the table and kisses her cheek before heading off to the bathroom.

She hands Steve an empty pitcher and he fills it with water and sets it on the table, returning to wrap his arms around her as she places the roasting pan in the sink full of hot water and soap. She wipes her hands on the dish towel and leans back against him.

She tips her head to the side as he nuzzles the side of her neck, his breath warm against her skin as he whispers, “God, Darce, seems like forever since I held you.”

She turns in his arms, looping her arms around his neck and pulling him closer, their bodies aligned from chest to knees. She squeezes him tight, her cheek sliding against his jaw and turns her face into his neck, sighing, “Nothing has felt right since I left Brooklyn, Stevie—felt like part of me was missing.”

“Me too,” he says, pulling back to look into her eyes and trace a finger down the slope of her cheek to her chin. She leans in, kissing his slightly parted lips softly and then with more pressure as he hums against her.

She’s missed this.

So much.

For a minute, everything else falls away as Steve presses her back against the counter, his fingers
tangled in her hair.

She hears the thud of footsteps coming down the stairs and pulls back a bit, kissing along Steve’s jaw to breathe, “Will and Tony are coming down the stairs.”

Steve mutters, “Don’t care,” tipping his head back as she sucks the spot just below his ear, careful not to mark him.

“I know, but Tony is terrible. He’ll tease us forever,” she sighs, kissing his neck softly before pulling back and resting her head on Steve’s shoulder.

They pull apart, leaning side by side with his arm around her waist as Will and Tony enter the kitchen laughing, their lips suspiciously swollen and a relaxed air about them.

She glances briefly at Steve and he nudges her shoulder and smirks, waggling his eyebrows.

She grins and says, “Say, you boys okay? I thought I heard something thumping upstairs.”

Will sends her a narrow eyed look as Tony grins unrepentantly, “nothing to worry your pretty head about Darcy,” he says, licking his bottom lip and sending a heated glance at Will.

Will’s ears redden and he mutters, “absolutely shameless, I swear,” as he stalks to the table and takes a seat.

Bucky enters the kitchen finger combing his damp hair, then rubbing the scruff on his face as he walks over to Steve and Darcy, “wanted to shave, but my stuff is still packed up,” he says, as he leans over to kiss her cheek.

Darcy says, “don’t worry about it, you can do that later. Besides, you look sorta dangerous and devil may care with a little bit of beard.”

Bucky laughs and Steve nods in agreement.

Tony walks over to the table to sit next to Will, removing a flask from his pocket and pouring some amber liquid into his glass, knocking it back and sighing in relief before pouring a little more in his glass.

Will raises an eyebrow, “I don’t know why I’m still shocked when you manage to pull booze from somewhere on your person like a magician pulling a bunny out of a hat,” he grumbles, tilting his glass towards Tony who obligingly pours a couple fingers into his glass.

“It’s a gift.” Tony acknowledges grinning, as Darcy, Steve, and Bucky take their seats at the table. She grabs the pitcher and fills her glass with water, passing it to Bucky who fills his and Steve’s glasses.

Bucky says, “Sure coulda used some a that when that salesman was talkin’ our ears off from New York to Chicago.”

“Are you kidding? That man woulda drank all my booze—no way was I sharing,” Tony grumbles as they pass the food around the table.
Steve stands next to the window in Darcy’s bedroom, pulling aside the curtain to look at the disconcerting darkness outside. Points of light dance over the fields surrounding the house; fireflies, Darcy had said nonchalantly as Steve and Bucky watched them raptly, having never seen them in such numbers in their lives.

He drops the curtain to sit on the edge of the bed. Bucky is already resting on the other side in his undershirt and shorts, his back against the headboard and reading a book from the stack next to the bed.

“It’s so quiet,” Steve says, the only sounds being the occasional creak from the house settling, groans from the pipes in the old house, and the chirping of crickets outside.

No sounds of traffic, or people shouting, or sirens. No wonder Darcy said it was hard at first for her to sleep when she came to the city.

“Mmhmm,” Bucky says, “strange, alright.”

He lifts the sheet and slides in beside Bucky, turning on his side to gaze at his profile. He’d shaved before coming to bed, and Steve’s eyes trace over the familiar contours of his friend’s face, the thick eyelashes, full lips, and dimpled chin he loves so much.

Darcy explained that this room was originally her grandfathers and that her parents had built a new bathroom upstairs about a year ago, using part of the space occupied by her old bedroom and turning the rest of it into a sewing room for her ma.

She’d shrugged, it had been strange for her, at first, that her childhood bedroom was gone, but she’d known she’d probably never live here again anyway.

Her grandfather’s old room is on the ground floor, just off the staircase as you enter the house. There is a large bed that had been her grandparents’ and some of her bedroom furnishings are intermingled with her grandfather’s wardrobe and bureau. The wood floor is waxed to a high shine and the walls are painted a soothing sage green. Large windows overlook the side yard and are currently partially open, a light breeze causing the white cotton curtains to billow every so often.

“There’s so much space, too,” Steve muses.

Their apartment would fit inside this house several times over. The nearest neighbor is probably a mile away. He wonders how Darcy is able to handle so many people living in close proximity in the city, especially with her heightened senses.

The door creaks open and Darcy enters, smiling and closing the door behind her, leaning against it for a moment as her eyes trace over the two of them.

Bucky drops the book he’s reading and says, “C’mere, Darce. I haven’t gotten to properly kiss ya yet.”

He opens his arms in playful expectation and smirks, and Darcy hangs up her robe by the door and slowly walks towards the bed.

Somehow she’s even more beautiful than Steve remembered, wearing a body skimming, sleeveless white nightgown, it’s v-neck revealing the swell of her breasts.

She crawls onto the bed, throwing a leg over Bucky so she rests on her knees facing him, leaning forward to place her hands on his shoulders as she sits in his lap. He wraps his arms around her and pulls her closer, her breasts flattening against his chest as he slides his hands down to the sweet curve
of her bottom.

She tips her head to the side, her dark hair falling over her shoulder as Bucky places open mouthed kisses on her neck, muttering against her skin how much he’s missed her.

Steve trails a finger up the smooth skin of her leg from her ankle to where her nightgown is bunched up around her thighs, tracing circles there as he watches Bucky bury one hand in Darcy’s hair, and tug, his mouth slanting over hers in a soft kiss that soon becomes desperate.

She pulls back after a few moments, gasping, “I thought you might be tired from your travels—”

Bucky slides one of the straps from her nightgown over her shoulder, mouthing the juncture of her neck and shoulder, “I got a second wind,” he mutters and she rolls her hips against him.

“In that case, I’m glad I prepared for the possibility,” Darcy breathes.

Steve pushes her nightgown further up her thigh, noticing her lack of undergarments as he traces his fingers over the roundness of her hip, marveling at the satiny softness of her skin. “No panties, Darce? I guess you are prepared,” he says, sitting up to straddle Bucky’s legs behind her and pushing her hair to the side to gently kiss the nape of her neck.

Darcy sighs, “Mmm—there’s that, but also, we don’t need condoms anymore.”

Steve stills and Bucky pulls back to look at her, “What d’ya mean, doll?”

“That day—when I found out about my parents, I had an appointment with Helene and got a diaphragm,” she explains.

“A what?” Steve asks, his eyes meeting Bucky’s over her shoulder.

“It’s a form of birth control. I put it inside of me and it blocks the way so I can’t get pregnant. It was in my bag and I forgot all about it until I eventually went through my things here.”

Bucky raises his eyebrows, his face morphing from surprised to intrigued, “So what you’re sayin’ is that diaphragm thing is up there right now?”

Darcy nods, “Yes.”

“Will I be able to feel it?” He asks.

“Nope,” she says.

A smile slowly spreads across his face and he breathes, “Amazing.”

Steve shrugs, he’ll ask questions later. Darcy knows her stuff and he trusts her to take care of things.

Right now, he really wants to get her out of her nightgown.

Bucky is peppering her with questions and he listens with half an ear as he leans forward to suckle at that sweet spot just behind Darcy’s ear, circling his tongue there and hearing her stammer her response to Bucky’s question, breaking off with a gasp as he sucks a little harder.

Bucky chuckles, “seems like Stevie is impatient, doll.”

“Yeah—we may have gotten off topic,” her breath hitches as Steve pushes her nightgown up further, snaking hand around her hip and delving between her legs, his index finger slipping through the
damp curls there, “Oh—“ she tips her head back and he presses his hips against her soft bottom as she rocks against his hand.

He lifts his mouth from her neck to glance at Bucky, whose eyes are focused on Darcy's face as she moans in response to Steve’s finger circling her clt. He exchanges a look with Steve and grasps the hem of Darcy’s nightgown and yanks it upward as she raises her hands overhead, wiggling slightly to aid him in pulling it off. He flings it over the side of the bed and focuses on Steve’s hand working between her thighs, inhaling and biting his lip before raising his hands to cup her breasts, leaning down to take one of her taut, pink nipples into his mouth.

Darcy’s back arches, her hands in Bucky’s wavy hair holding his head to her breast as she grinds down onto his lap, Steve’s hand trapped between them.

A tremor shakes her thighs and she raises herself slightly on Bucky’s lap, trying to give Steve room to move his hand between them.

After a moment she whines in frustration, “Why am I the only one that’s naked? “

Steve pulls his shirt off and drops it over the side of the bed, scrambling off of Bucky’s legs to lay down on the bed again, looking over Darcy as she’s still straddling Bucky’s lap. His eyes trace over her full lips and the curves of her breasts, unconsciously rubbing his hand over the front of his shorts.

Darcy works her hands under the edge of Bucky’s shirt, and he leans back from her breasts to pull it all the way off, dropping it over the side of the bed and pulling Darcy against him again, his mouth working over hers in a feverish kiss.

Steve is transfixed as the most beautiful people he knows lose themselves in each other. Darcy rocking her hips in Bucky’s lap as she tugs at his hair, Bucky’s hands sliding down her back to grab hold of her bottom, pulling her tighter against him as she whimpers into his mouth.

After a few heated moments, Bucky pulls back from her mouth, both of them gasping as he runs his lips across her jaw. He mutters, “help me, doll, you’re driving me crazy—“ she rocks against him again and he groans, “gotta get in you—“

Steve reaches for her hand and she squeezes it, lifting off of Bucky to lay down beside him. She says, “take off your shorts Bucky, I’m gonna help Steve with his.”

Steve lifts his hips as Darcy pulls his shorts down, kicking his feet free and looking past her to watch Bucky wiggle out of the last of his clothes, his hard cock springing back to curve against this belly. He licks his lips, his gaze meeting Bucky’s as he sits on the other side of Darcy, his back against the headboard.

Darcy nibbles at Steve’s collar bone, working her mouth down his chest, before licking around his nipples and biting him gently until he squirms.

“I wanted to be patient, take my time—remember Stevie?” She says kissing down down his belly and pausing to dart her tongue into his belly button causing him to shiver, “but it’s been too long—“

She slips lower, nipping at his hip before sucking a bruise into the flesh there. Heat pools low in his belly and goosebumps raise on his skin as her breath washes over his aching cock.

Bucky growls, “I’ve got an idea.”
“Stevie, sit up against the headboard, spread your legs a little so Darce can kneel between them,” Bucky says.

Steve groans, but scrabbles into a sitting position and Darcy glances at Bucky, raising an eyebrow before she crawls between Steve’s outspread legs.

Bucky watches as she leans forward on hands and knees to kiss his friend soft and slow, her tongue licking into his mouth and the tips of her breasts dragging against his chest.

Bucky scoots closer as she works her way down his chest again and Steve glances at him before leaning against his shoulder and taking his hand.

Darcy slides down Steve’s chest, punctuating soft open mouthed kisses with licks and nibbles with her teeth.

He wonders if she’s noticed how Steve isn’t at all shy doing this in front of Bucky anymore.

He wonders when she’ll notice Stevie leaning on him and holding his hand.

They hadn’t really agreed on how to tell Darcy about the change in their relationship but he figures showing is always better than telling.

Before now, the three of them have slept together and Steve had watched Bucky do everything with her a few times, but his friend had still preferred to do the deed without an audience.

Bucky figures he and Steve have crossed that bridge, given they’ve been kissing and touching each other every night for more than a week.

He strokes a hand over Darcy’s back, holding her hair back so he can watch her run her tongue over Steve’s cock. She glances up at them, her eyes flicking over he and Steve’s interlaced fingers as she slowly takes him into her mouth, her hand holding Steve’s hips down as she works her way down then hollows her cheeks and sucks on the way up.

Steve moans and Bucky catches Darcy’s eye and waggles his eyebrows at her before he releases her hair and cups his hand around Steve’s face, pulling him closer as he leans in to kiss his friend.

A surprised “Mmm?” comes from the vicinity of Steve’s lap and Darcy’s husky voice queries, “something you wanna tell me, boys?”

Bucky grins against Steve’s mouth, flicking his tongue out to tease his full bottom lip before pulling back and glancing down at Darcy.

His girl is a multitasker, she keeps her eyes steady on them as she strokes her hand up Steve’s slick length.

Steve stammers, “Mmm—we mighta realized we liked each other as more than—ugh, god Darce—friends,” he shudders as Darcy circles her tongue around the tip of him.

She lifts her mouth from Steve and asks, “That right, Bucky?” she reaches down to roll his friend’s balls in her hand, her eyes on him as she licks Stevie from root to tip.

Goddamn.
He couldn’t be any harder right now.

“Yeah, doll. We figured out a few things,” he breathes.

“I’m intrigued,” she says, lowering her mouth to Steve’s cock again and licking it like a goddamn lollipop.

Steve groans, squeezing his hand hard and Bucky squeezes back, before releasing it and crawling to rest on his knees behind Darcy.

He scoots forward, sliding his cock along the crevice of her ass, just slipping along the outside of her entrance and stills, grasping Darcy’s hips and rocking gently. She glances over her shoulder at him, eyebrow lifted in inquiry.

“I’ve been thinkin’—“ he pauses to pull his hips back, sliding his cock along the slickness between her thighs, “of ways we can all be together at the same time—“ he slides forward, the head of his cock bumping gently at her entrance then sliding past and pulling back again.

“You ever done it in this position?” she asks.

And he nods, rocking gently against her, “yeah—feels different, deeper, and the girl seemed to like it —“

She nods, “okay—um—what do I do?”

He pulls back again, his cock slick with her arousal, “focus on Stevie—“ he looks at his friend, who nods and bites his lip, his eyes glued to where Bucky’s hips are rocking against her ass, “—and let me know if anything isn’t right for you.”

“Mmmhmm,” she says lowering her head to Steve’s lap and by the look on Steve’s face she’s got her mouth around him again.

He pulls back, sliding his hand between Darcy’s legs and circling a finger in the moisture at her entrance, she moans and tips her hips back in reaction and Steve gasps, the vibration of her utterance obviously doing something for him.

Bucky pushes one finger slowly into her, finding her wet and ready, slipping in and out as she rocks her hips back to enthusiastically meet him. He grins, adding second finger, and she lowers her chest in reaction, arching her back and widening her stance to open herself further to him.

He watches his fingers disappear into the hot clench of her pussy and groans, pumping them in and out a couple times before lining himself up, grasping her hip and bumping gently at her opening, “Ready, baby?” he says.

She releases Stevie from her mouth with a pop and looks over her shoulder at him again, “Yes,” she pants, pushing back and forcing the head of his cock into her, and he hisses out a breath and tips his head forward, watching himself disappear slowly within her until his hips are tight against her ass.

_Ah, God._

There is no way he’s gonna last long.

The tight squeeze of her feels amazing, the absence of a condom making the sensation of heat and slickness that much more intense. He pumps his hips experimentally and groans.
Yeah, not gonna last long at all.

He turns his eyes to Steve, who’s looking pretty wrecked himself, biting his lip hard and groaning as Darcy’s mouth engulfs his cock. His eyes flick to where Bucky’s hips are slowly rocking into Darcy, back down to Darcy’s dark head bobbing in his lap, and back up to Bucky as he pulls back and thrusts forward hard, seemingly trying to watch everything at once.

Darcy moans and reaches one hand between her legs, rubbing herself almost frantically as he pulls back and thrusts again.

Her hips are dancing against him, and he stays still, letting her work herself on him as he struggles for control.

Darcy rocks back and forth and shudders, Bucky’s cock bumping against some perfect place inside her that causes her whole body to coil tighter and tighter with each thrust.

She’s trying to focus on pleasing Steve, she really is, but keeps getting distracted by the full, tight sensation between her legs. She rubs two fingers over her clit and shudders, sucking harder on Steve in reaction, causing him to start babbling Darce, baby and so good, so good, his hands buried in her hair.

There’s so much sensation.

The tight slide of Bucky inside of her, the taste and feel of Stevie in her mouth and the sounds, the wet squelch of Bucky’s movements inside of her, the uncontrolled babbling of Steve nearing his end, the throbbing of their heartbeats, their gasping inhalations and panting exhalations.

If she concentrates hard, she hears the blood rushing through their veins.

She wonders if anyone in the world experiences this the way she does, her enhanced hearing flooding her with a symphony of sounds.

She tightens further around Bucky and he utters a low moan, pulling back and thrusting forward hard, the smack of his hips hitting her bottom loud in the room.

Ah god, just like that.

He stills, trembling, “Sorry, doll—didn’t mean to be rough—,” he chokes.

She clenches around him, so, so close, and pulls her mouth off of Steve, stroking over him with her hand, as his hips jerk uncontrollably.

“Do it again, Bucky,” she breathes, rolling her hips against him, “I’m so close.”

Bucky inhales, and she hears his heartbeat careen wildly out of control and smiles, satisfied, leaning forward to suck Steve into her mouth again, taking him almost too deep when Bucky surges forward, his hips smacking into her hard as his large hands grip her hips.

She glances up at Steve through her hair, his face is flushed and his eyes dark and riveted on whatever he sees behind her, his teeth digging into his lip when Bucky’s hips slam into her again.
“Darce—“ Steve groans, tipping his head back and closing his eyes tight, “I’m comin’.”

She debates pulling off of him and finishing with her hand but decides to stay where she is, gripping the base of his cock and sliding her mouth down as far as she can without gagging as he thrusts once, twice, and shudders, the slightly bitter, salty taste of him flooding her mouth as he comes. She waits until he stops moving and pulls off, swallowing and laying her head on his belly for a moment before getting her elbow under her and pushing back against Bucky.

As the first pulses of her impending orgasm quiver through her, she finds herself pressed into Bucky’s lap as he sinks onto his heels, pulling her to straddle him, his chest molded to her back. She can feel his heart thundering in his chest as he grabs her hips and thrusts upward, gasping babydoll, so perfect as she arches and throws one arm behind her, grabbing ahold of the hair at nape of his neck and pulling him closer.

She shudders uncontrollably, dangling at the precipice of orgasm for one infinite moment before she implodes with pleasure, her eyes slamming shut as her head fills with the white noise of her own crazed heartbeat.

She vaguely notes Bucky thrusting wildly within her, pulling her down hard and seemingly bent on getting himself as deep inside of her as he can as he comes with an incoherent shout.

She rests against him, her back slick with sweat, though she’s unsure if it’s from him or herself. After a moment, Bucky huffs out a breath and wraps his arm tight around her waist and shuffles forward, tipping them onto the pillows next to a limp, drowsy Steve.

She moves her hips forward, thinking to pull away from Bucky and clean up and he whines, “Nah, Darce. I wanna stay as long as I can—never been able to before.”

She snorts in amusement but slides her hips back again, his cock still semi-erect and snug within her.

He nuzzles her hair aside and kisses behind her ear and sighs, sliding his arm up from her waist to hold her just under her breasts.

She looks at Steve, sprawled half asleep on the pillow next to her. She traces a fingertip across his brow and down his nose and he turns onto his side, leaning forward to press his lips to hers, “Love you, Darce,” he whispers before reaching down to grasp the edge of the sheet, pulling it over the three of them.

He lays down again, his back to her, seemingly done with being awake. She tangles her feet with his and gently strokes his back.

“Love you, Stevie,” she says and drifts, listening to his breathing slow as he descends into sleep.

Bucky whines when he inevitably slips out of her, muttering, “Aww,” and she giggles softly as he shuffles around behind her before handing her his undershirt. “Use it to clean up, doll.”

She gingerly wipes between her thighs and hands it back to him, hearing the light thud of him throwing the shirt on the floor.

He settles down against her back, wrapping his arm around her again.

“That was the most amazin’ thing I ever felt,” he says.

She smiles, “you say that every time.”
“I mean it every time,” he says, hooking his chin over her shoulder and burying his face in her hair, “missed you so much, Darce.”

“Missed you too, Bucky. Feels like this is the first time I’ve been happy in a month,” she says, wrapping her hand around his where it rests between her breasts.

“Mmmm, I’m so sorry we weren’t with you,” he breathes into her ear, hugging her tighter to him.

She’s silent for a moment, basking in the comfort of being between her two loves.

“Hey, Buck,” she says.

“Hmm?” he hums drowsily.

“You gotta give me details tomorrow about the new Steve and Bucky are more than friends relationship,” she says.

He huffs out a laugh, “I’ll tell ya everythin’ I know.”

“Mmmmmmm,” she says, and closes her eyes.

A little history of railroad travel in the U.S.

Small town life—1930’s, 40’s

Grand Central Station 1941

Cedar Rapids, Iowa 1941

Union Station, Chicago 1941

Chapter End Notes

Check out the links at the end of the story for a little history and some pictures of various locations! Hope you all enjoyed this—please comment and let me know what you thought!
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Snippets of a few days at the farm. The trio celebrate Steve’s birthday in their own private way. Darcy overhears something and Bucky wants all the details. Will and Darcy finish packing away their parents stuff. Steve, Bucky, and Darcy go home.

Chapter Notes

New chapter, a little early! Mostly fluff and snippets of Steve and Bucky’s Iowa visit. A little smut, of course.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

July 3, 1941

The late morning sun beats down on Steve’s head as he looks doubtfully at the horses Darcy is leading from the barn.

He thinks he could walk to the swimming hole just fine. It’s not far.

Maybe he should start walking now—it’s a good plan.

Bucky is circling around the horses with Darcy, lifting a saddle onto the back of each horse and watching with interest as she tightens the cinch on each one and adjusts the length of the stirrups before turning to look at Steve.

“Come closer Stevie! They won’t bite,” she pats the neck of the big brown horse, “This is Rogue, he used to be feisty but he’s an old gentleman now,” she turns to the white horse and strokes her nose, “and this is Fairy. Pop bought her for Mama because Rogue was getting too old to ride all the way to town. She’s very steady, very gentle.”

Steve tilts his head, looking at the brown horse, “Uh, Darce—isn’t that the same horse that nearly stomped you to death when you were a kid? Dunno if I wanna get on that.”

The brown horse turns his head slightly to look at him as he speaks, his dark eyes unnervingly intelligent. Steve eyes him warily as he edges over to stand next to Bucky who is holding the reins of the white horse.

“Aw, Steve, he just needed training—he lost all his sass a long time ago,” she gently pats the horse’s neck and Rogue turns his head to lip Darcy’s hair. She laughs softly, pushing his head away, “silly horse.”

Bucky slings his arm around Steve’s shoulders and says, “Come on punk, when’re we ever gonna get a chance to do this again? It’ll be fun!”
Steve frowns at Bucky before looking back over at Darcy.

She’s busy putting some containers in the saddlebags slung over Rogue’s back. She plans to show them the sights around the farm and for them to have a picnic by the swimming hole.

But mostly, she wants to ride Rogue one last time.

The two horses are going to their new owners tomorrow. She tried to put a happy spin on finding good people for the horses to go to, but she couldn’t hide the sadness shadowing her eyes. He knows she loves Rogue, despite their inauspicious beginning.

*Crap.*

He’s gonna have to ride the horse.

“Alright, but I have no idea what I’m doing and your horse is very large and somewhat terrifying.”

Bucky snorts and breaks out laughing beside him and Darcy grins.

“Bucky doesn’t know either, but he’s plenty willing so Fairy will be easy for him to handle. You can ride with me,” she says.

“Ok, fellas. Watch me get up and copy it when it’s your turn.”

Darcy drapes the reins around the saddle horn, places one booted foot in the stirrup and grips the edge of the saddle and pulls herself up, throwing her leg over the other side of the saddle. She leans forward and grips the reins, turning Rogue so she’s facing where he and Bucky are standing next to Fairy.

Steve looks up at Darcy on the horse and wonders how the heck he is gonna get up there without knocking her off. Plus, the horse looks even taller to him now.

Really tall.

She says, “Hey Bucky, drop Fairy’s reins for a second, maybe spot Steve while he gets up behind me.”

Bucky drops the reins and Fairy stands still as they head over to Rogue’s side.

“Ya want me to throw him up there, doll?” teases Bucky.

“Nah, I’d rather not catch him,” she says, grinning as she drops her feet from the stirrups and reaches for Steve’s hand, “Alright, put your foot in the stirrup and push up with your leg as I pull your arm and swing your leg over to sit behind me.”

Amazingly, he’s on the horse after his first try, Darcy’s steady grip on his arm and Bucky’s slight push on his bottom getting him over saddle more easily than he imagined was possible.

The ground looks far away, but he feels okay about it with his arms around Darcy’s waist. They watch as Bucky gets on Fairy, his natural strength and athleticism making it look easy. He raises an eyebrow and smirks at them and Steve rolls his eyes in return.

*Such a jerk.*

“Ok, Bucky—here’s what you need to know—pull the reins right or left and that’s the direction the horse will go, pull back and the horse will stop. Don’t jerk on the reins, it’ll hurt her mouth. You can
use your knees too, putting pressure on the side you want them to turn towards. Kinda lean forward in the saddle and put a little pressure on with your knees and shake the reins and the horse will start walking. Don’t kick her sides or she’ll think you wanna go faster,” she raises an eyebrow at Bucky, “you don’t.”

Bucky nods, grinning.

Steve hopes he doesn’t decide to go faster.

She pats Steve’s arm where it’s wrapped around her waist. “Stevie, your job is to hang on and try to keep your hips loose and roll with the horse’s gait.”

He has no idea how to do that but he’ll try.

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Bucky sighs in satisfaction after he eats the last bite of blueberry cobbler, sets his plate aside, and lays back on the blanket, his head in Darcy’s lap. She strokes her fingers absentmindedly through his hair as she continues talking to Steve.

“You’ve really never swam before in your life? Ever?” she says in disbelief.

“Nope. Not exactly a lot of opportunities to swim in Brooklyn, Darce,” his friend answers, winking at him and taking another bite of his cobbler.

_Punk._

There should be more cobbler.

Darcy hums in contemplation, gazing over the sun dappled water of the swimming hole. After a moment she says, “I could teach you.”

Bucky perks up. It’s a sweltering hot day and although it’s cooler in the shade of the trees, he wouldn’t mind cooling off.

The swimming hole is actually a wide section of a spring fed creek which bottlenecks about 50 feet downstream, creating a natural pool which Darcy assured them was plenty deep in the center. The stream flows into it over a low rocky outcrop, creating a small waterfall.

Darcy’s family had cleared away most of the trees along the bank where they had spread their picnic blanket, with the exception of several large trees. There are a couple of old tractor tire inner tubes leaning against one of the larger trees a few yards away, and a rope strung from one of the high branches that juts out over the water.

The horses graze placidly under the trees closer to the waterfall, content to be shaded from the blazing sun.

Darcy looks down at Bucky, tugging his hair, “Do you know how to swim?”

Bucky shrugs. “Not really—only time I’ve been in the water was the beach at Coney Island and it was just to wade around a bit.”
“We should swim—I’ll teach both of you,” she lays back, closing her eyes against the filtered sunlight streaming through the trees, “after our food settles.”

Darcy looks up at the dark shapes of Steve and Bucky’s inner tubes floating above her head, their feet dangling in the water along one side and their bottoms poking through the centers of the tubes.

She grins to herself as she swims under them, nipping Steve’s boxer clad bottom, chortling, air bubbles bursting out of her mouth at his muffled yelp. She swims past to surface on Bucky’s other side, pushing her wet hair back and splashing his sun warmed skin.

Bucky flinches, cracks open an eye, and grins lazily at her, “you’re a menace—better be careful or I’ll come in after you.”

Steve’s blue eyes gleam before he flips himself over the side of his inner tube into the shoulder deep water, looping one arm around it and grabbing Darcy’s arm to tug her over to him.

“Gotcha,” he breathes, pulling her in and kissing her softly.

She wraps her legs around his waist to anchor herself before kissing him soundly, the slip of their skin against each other in the water a cool counterpoint to the heat of the sun on their heads.

After they’d digested their food a bit, Darcy had stood, stripped down to her underwear and headed for the water, coyly glancing back at Steve and Bucky with a raised eyebrow before wading in.

It wasn’t long before both of them joined her and while Bucky caught on to swimming fairly quickly, Steve had surprised even himself by how well he took to water.

Seems like the lack of gravity made it the perfect exercise for him, plus he could float easily, stretching out on his back and tilting his head into the water like Darcy instructed.

Bucky sank like a stone.

Maybe it was because of his muscular frame, but he had to work to keep his head above water, floating didn’t come easily for him.

They didn’t venture into the deep water without the inner tubes, but within an hour they’d been splashing about without fear.

Darcy kisses Steve for a few moments before pulling away to swim towards the shore.

“Where ya goin’, Darce?” he calls.

“Wanna show you something!” she shouts as she climbs out of the water, flipping her wet hair out of her face. She turns to see Steve climbing back into his inner tube, both he and Bucky eyeing her curiously.

There’s a tree that stands on the rocky bluff at the head of the waterfall, its branches jutting over the deepest part of the pool with a long rope tied to one of them. She and Will had set it up one summer and she’d climb the tree every year to check the strength of the rope.

She did that now, climbing the tree quick as a monkey and checking the knots on the rope and
inspecting it for rot. It still looked sound, so she climbed down the tree again, walking to the edge of
the bluff and looking down at Steve and Bucky.

Steve is frowning a little, his face worried and Bucky looks from her to the rope to the water,
catching on to what she’s doing and looking intrigued.

The rope dangles about 4 feet away from the edge of the bluff and requires a leap to grab it, so she
backs up about 6 feet and takes a running jump, grabs the rope and swings out, high over the pool.
At the apex of the swing, she lets go, somersaulting in the air and diving into the water. She blows
the air out of her nose as she descends into the depths, paddling upward as her momentum slows.
She surfaces and swims over to the shallower water where Bucky and Steve float, their mouths agog.

“Doll, where’d ya learn to do that?” Bucky says.

“Will and I went to the circus whenever it came to town when we were kids—I liked the trapeze
artists best,” she says swimming around to grasp the side of Bucky’s inner tube.

“So ya watched and figured ya could do that too?” Steve says in quiet amazement.

“Well, yeah—but it involved a few belly flops and that one time I broke my arm when I fell out of
the tree—“ Steve looks alarmed and she rushes to reassure him, “but eventually I got it.”

Bucky snorts, “Great—you’re a daredevil and Stevie is a hothead who gets into too many fights,” he
lays his arm over is eyes and tips his head back moaning, “Why me?”

“What?” she says, “I heal really fast—no worries.”

“What If ya landed on your head, Darce?” Steve says accusingly.

“But I didn’t,” she huffs, “I’m actually very coordinated Steve.”

“I’ll show you coordinated!” he rolls off of his inner tube, flinging water in her face.

She splutters in outrage and splashes him back, sparking an epic water fight. Inevitably, Bucky is
cought in the crossfire as they get on opposite sides of his inner tube, using him as shelter as they
ruthlessly pelt each other with water.

He rolls off of the inner tube, flipping his wet hair off his forehead and lunges at Steve as Darcy
laughs, fleeing for the shore.

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July 4, 1941

Bucky wakes from a sound sleep at the clap of the front door slamming and voices raised in anger.

He glances at the alarm clock, it’s not too late, only 10 o’clock, but they’d ended up in bed soon after
dinner and worn each other out.

Darcy’s soft hand strokes his arm, her breasts pressed against his back as she hooks her chin over his
shoulder and breathes into his ear, “It’s Will and Tony—they just got back from town and Tony’s
had a bit too much to drink. He’s jealous of all the girls flirting with Will at the 4th of July carnival.”

He, Darcy, and Steve had elected to stay home and spent the afternoon and evening together, celebrating Steve’s birthday with more swimming, an excellent dinner, followed by chocolate cake and good sex.

He listens to the raised voices, only hearing a phrase or two.

Will shouting, “it’s not my fault—“

Inarticulate sounds from Tony, then, “you’re mine. Mine.”

The sound of something crashing to the floor and a scuffle, and after a few moments, a low moan.

“What the hell is happening?” he whispers.

Darcy chuckles darkly, “I’m pretty sure they’re fucking on the stairs.”

Bucky startles, Darcy hardly ever swears, and she said fuck.

Fuck.

He turns to face her, gripping the back of her thigh and sliding his other hand under her hair to pull her closer, he growls in her ear, “Doll—such language,” before kissing along her jaw and taking her bottom lip between his teeth and sucking it gently into his mouth.

He releases it and kisses back along her jaw as she reaches between them, palming his hardening cock and says, “seems like my dirty mouth gets you going.”

He thrusts against her hand, “Oh, yeah—“ and leans forward, fitting his lips to hers again, kissing her slow and deep, the way she likes it.

She digs her heel to the back of his thigh, pulling him closer, the soft mounds of her breasts pressed against his chest and his cock sliding along the damp crevice between her legs, still slippery from their activities earlier in the evening.

They’d made their way down the hall after dinner, stopping to kiss each other in different combinations, Steve kissing Bucky, Bucky kissing Darcy, Darcy kissing Steve until they tumbled into her bedroom, stripped out of their clothes and rolled onto the bed.

She’d insisted she wanted to see he and Steve kiss and touch each other, hovering around them and stroking her hands over them as they did.

Eventually, she and Bucky ended up working Steve over together, Darcy slowly riding him and Bucky pinning his hands to the pillow as he kissed him, swallowing Steve’s moans as he came.

Afterwards, she’d rolled away from Steve and reached for him, pulling him down into a ravenous kiss and wrapping her legs around him, clearly on edge and needy as he’d sunk into her, and she’d moaned in his ear, hard Bucky, do it hard and he’d gone wild as Stevie watched them with drowsy eyes.

But right now he wants slow, and he wants her to talk.

He pulls back from her lips, whispering, “Baby, turn towards Stevie, I wanna try somethin’.”

She wiggles onto her side, pressing her soft bottom against him.
He wraps one arm around her, stroking over first one breast, then the other, before gently plucking at her nipples. She hums, squirming against him as he looks over her shoulder at Steve, deeply asleep, his face open and angelic in the moonlight.

“Look at that punk,” he breathes in her ear, “don’t know how he sleeps so hard.”

He pinches her nipple lightly before rolling it between his thumb and forefinger, repeating the action on the other one as she whimpers, tilting her head back against his shoulder and turning her face into his neck, her breath washing over his skin in heated pants.

“Can ya still hear Will and Tony, doll?” he asks.

“Mmmm—yeah,” she she breathes, mouthing the flesh just under his jaw.

He slides his hand down between her legs, stroking over her clit in tight circles. She moans, rocking her hips against his hand.

“What d’ya hear?” he says, pausing to pull her leg up and back so it rests on the outside of his thigh before slipping his fingers between her legs again.

“Tony is telling Will he loves him, that he’s his, only his—” he rubs his cock along the crease of her ass, bumping against her wet entrance and sliding past it to pull back and rock forward again. She wiggles in an effort to get him in her and he says, “Ah, ah, Darce—we’re goin’ slow this time—what else is Tony sayin’?”

He thrusts shallowly against her and she grumbles, “Ugh—Bucky—dammit—he’s saying he wants Will to feel him for days—” he groans and sucks at the skin just under her ear and she shudders against him, her hips pulsing against him and muttering Bucky—god as he continues to work her with his fingers.

He has an idea what exactly Will and Tony get up to that would leave one of them feeling it for days—he and Stevie haven’t tried it but maybe—

Darcy moans low, her thigh clenching around his hip and he slows his fingers, grinning against her neck when she whines in frustration.

He gets why Steve likes to hold her on edge, she gets vocal when she’s needy. He’s trembling in an effort to move slowly, to not pound into her like he wants.

When her body starts to tense until she can barely choke out her words, he pulls back from stroking her, abandoning her clit in favor of plucking at her nipples with his damp fingers as she begs, please, Bucky—please.

“Patience, babydoll—it’s gonna feel amazing,” he groans, and slips just the head of his cock into her, rocking his hips shallowly against her as he slides his fingers between her legs again.

He continues in this manner, barely inside her until she finally pleads, “Ugh—god—just fuck me.”

And he groans, burying himself in her to the hilt, holding himself still so he won’t come, as she squirms and moans softly oh yes, please, please.

He pulls back an inch or so and thrusts hard and Darcy keens, her thigh trembling atop his and her hips rocking in abbreviated thrusts as she attempts to increase the friction within her as he holds her tight to him.
“What else do ya hear?” he rasps into her ear, rocking shallowly back and forth and tormenting her clit with feather light circles.

“Slapping noises, and uh—grunting—and Will saying “Fuck Tony, just like that, just like that—“ and she reaches her hand between her legs, mashing his fingers against her. She rocks once, twice and she’s gone, her body wracked with spasms in his arms and clamping around him almost painfully.

“Dammit Darce—“ he moans low, pulling almost all the way out and plunging back into her hard, his hand still cupped between her thighs and pushing her back into each lunge of his hips.

He pounds into her, losing himself in the feel of her for just a few more thrusts before he succumbs, convulsing against her and muttering Christ baby, ah god.

For several moments, it seems like his world is encompassed by the beat of his heart and the heaving of his lungs, but eventually he calms enough to wrap his arm around Darcy’s waist and mold his chest to her back. He noses her hair aside, inhaling the scent of her skin mixed with clean sweat, and kisses her neck softly.

“Y’ok, doll?” he breathes against her neck.

“Mmmm, very,” she says, wiggling her bottom against him.

They’re quiet together for a few moments, the only sounds are Steve’s soft snores and the rustling of the sheets as he idly strokes his hand down her side to her hip, his thumb tracing circles there.

Eventually, his cock softens and slips out of her and he huffs in aggravation, reaching for his discarded undershirt on the floor to gently mop up the mess between Dacy’s thighs and on himself, muttering, “stupid cock, stupid mess,” as she giggles next to him.

He throws his shirt on the floor, flops onto his back and asks, “D’ya think it’s strange how hot it makes me when ya say fuck?”

She snorts in amusement, “Not any stranger than me getting off on the combination of what you were doing and hearing what Will and Tony were doing.”

She burrows her head into his chest and mutters, “I don’t know if I’ll be able to look either of them in the eye tomorrow.”

“Maybe we should work on those driving lessons—stay outta their hair,” he suggests.

“Good idea,” she yawns, “I can’t believe Stevie slept through that.”

He closes his eyes, chuckling, “it’s some kinda talent, alright.”
dirt road that leads to the farm. It’s early enough in the day that it hasn’t gotten too hot yet, but they still have the windows rolled down to keep them cool.

The breeze blows her hair around her head and she pushes it out of her eyes to watch Steve step on the clutch and shift gears. He grins at her when he manages not to grind the gears this time and hits the accelerator with a whoop.

Bucky’s arm tightens around her and his knuckles whiten as his other hand grips the edge of the door.

“Maybe ya wanna slow down, punk?” he shouts over the sound of the engine and the wind whipping through the window.

Steve’s grin widens, taking on a manic edge, “Nah—I’m good!”

“Jesus Christ,” Bucky grumbles and Darcy pats his hand comfortingly.

Steve laughs.

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July 6, 1941

Darcy sits on the bed in her parents room, shuffling through a stack of photos as Will finishes packing Pop’s clothes away in boxes. She’d already gone through Mama’s clothing, keeping some favorites for herself and packing away the rest to donate to the church.

She sniffs, wiping tears from her eyes as she gazes at Mama and Pop’s wedding photo. In it, Mama is gazing up at Pop and seemingly lit from within, a luminous smile on her face as she looks into his eyes.

They look so happy.

She curls onto her side, the picture dangling from her fingertips as she buries her face into Mama’s pillow, inhaling the familiar vanilla scent of her soap. She sighs, rolling onto her back and pressing the heels of her hands against her eyes for a few moments before wiping her tears away.

Will steps away from from the closet, an armful of trousers in his arms, “Hey Darce, do ya think Bucky could wear some of these? I already took the ones I wanted and he’s tall enough they’d work—maybe take in the waist a bit,” he grins ruefully.

She nods absentmindedly and he drops the pile of clothes next to the bed, before crawling to lie down beside her and wrap his arm around her. He leans his head against hers and pulls the photo from her fingers.

After a moment he says, “When you smile, you look like her.”

Darcy looks closer at her mother’s blond hair and finer features, “Nah, you know I look more like my father.”

“Maybe your hair and eyes, and the shape of your lips, but it’s the expressions, the way you move your hands when you talk, that remind me of her,” he says.
She shrugs, “You’re a carbon copy of Pop—no wonder Mama fell for him,” she traces her finger over his face in the photo, “so handsome.”

They sit together, flipping through the photos, exclaiming over older ones of her grandfather and grandmother, Mama as a child, Darcy on her 10th birthday, blowing out the candles on her cake, she and Will standing in a field next to Grandpa, rifles at their sides, she and Will at 17, dressed up for a dance.

Will sighs, “I found a box with some old photos in the back of the closet, some of my ma, some of me when I was small, stuff like that—I suppose I should organize them somehow. “

“We can bring them back to Brooklyn. I found some more loose photos in Mama’s vanity too. I’ll pick up a couple photo albums and we can work on it together,” she says.

Will nods and hops up again, pulling something down from a high shelf in the closet, “We should take this back, too,” he says, handing her a small box.

She looks inside to find a camera and rolls of film, some never used, some never developed. “Say, there’s a lot more camera shops in Brooklyn than there are here. We should get these developed and start taking more pictures ourselves,” she says.

She grins, thinking—*but not naked ones, Bucky.*

Will says, “Yeah, looking through these photos made me think we should do that, too—so someday we can remember how it was.”

Darcy remembers everything, even the things she’d like to forget, but photos are different. They convey a moment in time in a more concrete way than memory. She knows Will worries Pop will fade from his memory as his ma has.

“That’s a good idea! Can we share the camera? I’d like to take pictures of Bucky and Steve.”

“Sure. We’ll split the unused film between us and buy our own when we get back to the city,” he replies, rustling through the box and setting unused film aside on the bedspread.

Darcy spies an instruction booklet tucked to the side in the box and pulls it out, flipping through it with interest.

Will nudges her shoulder, “I’m counting on you to figure out how to use this and show me after. Maybe show the fellas too,” he says.

She hums an affirmation and scans each page carefully as Will finishes organizing the film into piles, placing the booklet back in the box after a few minutes.

Will whistles low, “Done already? You’re getting better at that, Darce.”

She thinks about it for a moment, before answering, “I guess so—maybe it’s all the material I have to go over for school and the stuff I look at on my own? Like a muscle, the more I exercise it, the stronger it gets.”

Will nods, “Makes sense, you’re stronger now than when you were at twelve. Hell, stronger than you were at seventeen. Maybe your abilities continue growing along with you,” he pauses, a speculative gleam in his eye, “when’s the last time you tested your healing factor?”

She thinks back.
Years.

She and Will stopped running their experiments when they were in high school.

“A long time. The last time I was injured was that scuffle Steve and I got into back in December— I couldn’t actually take a good look at the injury or clock the healing time, Will,” she grumbles.

“We should test it—” she groans and he nudges her side with his elbow, “it’s important, Darce.”

“Oh, okay,” she mutters, “maybe we can do something later—hey, Tony doesn’t know about me, right?”

Will ducks his head, rubbing the back of his neck, “Nah—didn’t figure he really needed to know. It’s your business, it’s not like Steve and Bucky—being your fellas and all.”

She nods, “Fewer people who know, the better, I think. Besides, it’s not relevant to Tony, right?”

“Right,” Will says, before muttering, “still feel guilty keepin’ anything from him though.”

She wraps her arm around his waist, and leans her head on his shoulder, “I know,” she says softly.

July 7, 1941

Steve looks out the window of the train as they leave the station in Cedar Rapids, waving at Will and Tony standing together on the platform as Darcy shouts from the window next to Bucky, “See you in a couple weeks! Don’t forget to call on Sunday mornings!”

Will grins, saluting her ironically before throwing his arm over Tony’s shoulder and strolling away.

Darcy flops back on the cracked leather seat next to Steve, sighing as she leans her head on his shoulder, “He better remember to do all the stuff to close up the house. We aren’t gonna be able to come back for a long time.”

She picks at a loose thread on her dress as her chin trembles, sniffing once before taking a deep breath and straightening up.

Bucky sits across from them, the picnic basket Darcy had packed resting on his knees as he gazes steadily at her, “It’ll be okay, doll. Will knows what to do and Tony will help.”

“Your right—I know it,” she mutters, rummaging around in her bag and pulling out the camera, “Hey! I forgot to mention I brought this so we could take pictures from the train—for posterity.”

She and Will had found the camera yesterday and they’d all practiced taking pictures after Darcy went over all the ins and outs of loading film, using flash bulbs, and focusing the camera lens.

Bucky in particular seemed to like it, taking pictures of Steve and Darcy, walking around the farm and taking pictures of the house and the barn.

They’d gone for one last swim late yesterday afternoon and this time Will and Tony accompanied them. Bucky took a lot of pictures of Darcy and Will swinging off the rope into the water, Steve
floating in an inner tube, Will and Tony splashing each other in the swimming hole.

Will had taken some pictures of Darcy, Bucky, and Steve, too, so they could remember their time in Iowa together.

She made him take a lot in case some of them didn’t turn out. Steve can’t wait to see them after they get them developed.

He watches her wind a new roll of film into the camera, handing it to him after she’s done.

“Here ya go. Maybe you can take pictures of stuff you’d like to draw later?” she says.

He nods, turning the camera over in his hands, thinking it's a good idea.

Bucky lifts the lid on the picnic basket, “Darce, what’d ya pack in here anyhow?”

“Oh my god! Didn’t you eat just before we left?” Darcy says in an exasperated tone, leaning forward to smack Bucky’s wrist.

Steve chortles and lifts the camera to his eye, focusing on Bucky.

His friend lifts his eyebrow, grins rakishly, and says, “So?”

He snaps the picture.

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The swimming hole
Chapter End Notes

What did you think of the visit to Iowa? This chapter marks the end of time moving sorta slow, things will be moving faster but with time focused on important relationship events. Please comment and let me know what you think!!

Also—is anyone getting sick of the sex? Because I remember being that age and in the early stages of a relationship—sex was totally a “can’t get enough” and a “let’s try this” thing.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve move to a new place. Darcy runs into someone at the hospital and starts a new job. Bucky has a boxing match.

Chapter Notes

Plotty, plot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Friday, July 25, 1941

Steve is splayed on the sofa in front of the fan as it stirs the hot air of the apartment, his hand loosely gripping the sweating glass of water resting on his chest.

It’s too hot to move.

It’s been in the upper 90’s all week, and tempers all around the city are growing frayed. The wealthy have fled the city to their beach houses on the coast, leaving the less fortunate to stew in their own sweat.

His lungs have been bad. He’s needed the nebulizer every day, several times a day, as the excessively high temperatures and humidity prevented any of the car exhaust and industrial fumes from escaping the city, making the air quality quite poor.

He hasn’t been selling papers, too torpid to do much but attempt working on some of his advertising commissions in the cool of the morning or later in the evening.

Bucky’s been coming home exhausted, even with frequent water breaks and pulling his shirt off to pour water over his head and back to cool off, it’s hard to work the docks in the sweltering conditions.

Darcy says the hospital has been full of people suffering from heat related conditions, in addition to a higher than usual number of work accidents, and injuries because of fights.

They all need a break, that’s for sure.

There’s a clatter outside the door and the turning of a key in the lock, and the door opens to reveal a red cheeked Darcy, a riot of curls springing out along her sweating hairline, the rest of her hair pulled up into a bun.
She wipes her arm across her forehead and drops her bag by the door, “Phew, you look like I feel, Stevie. It’s ridiculous outside.”

She drops a kiss on his cheek and heads to the bathroom, running the faucet for a few minutes and then turning it off. She returns with a damp washcloth, laying it across his sweaty forehead before sprawling on the other end of the sofa.

Steve wipes the sweat from his face and watches as she slips her shoes off and rolls her stockings down before throwing them on the floor, laying back and tangling her legs with his on the couch as he refolds the cool cloth, laying it across his forehead again.

“When’s Bucky supposed to get home?” Darcy says, reaching for a newspaper on the table and fanning her face with it.

“Dunno, any time now, I suppose.”

“How ‘bout we write a note for Bucky, go to my place, take a cool shower, and go out for ice cream after we have a sandwich or something—it’s too hot to cook,” she says.

“Sounds like a plan,” he says, smiling for the first time all day.

Later, as the three of them are enjoying their ice cream at the crowded soda fountain, Darcy springs some news on Steve and Bucky.

“Okay, I’ve been talking to Dr. Bobby about your apartment situation—which I think we can all agree is terrible,” she raises her eyebrows at them and both and they nod in agreement.

“There’s a studio apartment opening up on the second floor in my building, the tenant is moving out this weekend, if you want it, Dr. Bobby will rent it to you for a little more than you pay at your current place, but you’ll have working heat in the winter and hot water all the time—plus we’ll be in the same building!” she crows, waiting for their reaction.

She patiently watches Bucky and Steve have one of their silent conversations, an occasional eyebrow quirk and twitch of a lip the only indication of their communication.

Steve nods, leaning in to take a sip of the strawberry malt he and Darcy are sharing.

Bucky sits back, slowly licking around the edge of his ice cream cone before he says, “how much more is the rent?”

“What do you pay now? $20 a month?” she asks.

“Yeah, and it don’t include much,” Bucky says.

“Bobby said he’d rent it to you for $25 a month. It’s costs a little more, and you give up having a separate bedroom, but he showed it to me—it may be slightly larger than what you have now.”

Bucky says, “Furnished or not?”

“He said there’s a sofa and kitchen table and chairs. The rest is up to you,” she says, leaning forward
to take a sip of the malt, her knee brushing against Steve’s under the table. He nudges her and smiles, and her heart flip-flops in her chest.

_So handsome._

“We’ll take it. All the furniture in our place except for the sofa is ours anyhow, we’ll figure out what to keep and sell the rest to the second hand shop.” Bucky reaches for her hand and squeezes it, grinning, his white teeth flashing in his sun browned face, “Thanks for puttin’ in a word for us with Bobby, doll.”

“You’re welcome,” she says softly, “I can’t wait to be neighbors.”

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Sunday, August 15, 1941

Bucky is leaning over the bathroom sink in he and Stevie’s new apartment, guiding the straight razor from cheekbone to jaw when he hears a knock at the door.

Steve says, “Darce, ya don’t have to knock—ya practically live here after all.”

“I know, I know, it’s just that—what if you were naked? Or in the middle of something? Or in the middle of something naked? It just feels rude,” she says as Stevie laughs.

Bucky grins, leaning closer to the mirror, scraping the razor through the shaving soap on his face. He wipes it on the washcloth on the edge of the sink and pokes his head out the door, “Hello, doll—wouldn’t care if ya found us doing naked things anyhow,” he says smirking, before turning back to finish shaving.

The sharp sound of heels on the wood floor precedes Darcy entering the bathroom, slipping past him to lower the toilet seat and sit down, asking, “Oh, yeah? What kind of naked stuff have you been getting up to when I’m not around?”

Her blue eyes watch intently as he scrapes away the shaving soap on his upper lip, then starts on his other cheek.

Not much, to be truthful. They sleep in Darcy’s bed upstairs or she sleeps in their bed here. He and Steve aren’t shy about kissing and touching each other but they haven’t done too much canoodling on their own, just when the three of them are together.

“Nothin’ ya haven’t seen already.” he glances at her briefly before turning his eyes back to the mirror, “ya look nice, Darce—is that a new dress?”

Darcy smooths the skirt of the dark green dress over her knees, “Sort of, it was one of Mama’s,” she says quietly, “you think it’ll be alright for church?”

“Ya look swell, doll,” he says sending a grin her way.

She looks beautiful, in fact. Her dark curls gleam under the bathroom lights, her pale skin is luminous against the dark green of the dress, and she’s wearing red lipstick on her full lips.
It makes him wish he could stay home and mess it up, and find out what she’s wearing under that dress.

She flushes a little, her eyes following the straight razor as he tips his head back, shaving under his jaw.

He’s finally taking her to meet Ma and Becca. They’re going to Mass and having supper together.

She taps the toe of her black patent leather shoe on the white tiled floor, “I’m nervous,” she says in a small voice.

He finishes the last stroke, rinsing the soap off the razor and wiping it dry on the edge of a towel as he turns to look at her, “What for?” he says.

“What if your ma doesn’t like me?”

“No way she won’t,” he says.

“But what if she doesn’t?” she says, clearly concerned.

He wipes his face and squats in front of her, taking her clenched hands in his, “Doll, she’ll love you because I love you, and you make me happy, and you take such good care of me,” he says.

Mindful of her lipstick, he leans in to kiss her cheek.

She sighs deeply, resting her head against his shoulder, “Are we telling her about Stevie?” she says softly.

“We agreed not to— he doesn’t care.”

“He does care— I care,” she says, tightening her fingers around his before her shoulders slump a little in defeat, “But it’s what we have to do, I guess.”

“Yeah,” he sighs, standing up and helping her to her feet then wrapping his arms around her, his face in her hair, “it’ll be okay.”

He wonders if he’s trying to convince her or himself.

Stevie calls from the other room, “Ya ready, jerk? We’re gonna be late!”

“Alright, keep your shirt on—we’re coming,” he kisses Darcy’s cheek again, whispering in her ear, “tonight, we show Stevie how much we love him, okay?”

She nods, pulling back and looking into his eyes, “Okay.”

Monday, August 16, 1941

Darcy huffs out a breath, juggling a thick stack of files and her overstuffed tote bag, her shoes
squeaking on the linoleum as she rushes down one of the labyrinthine corridors in the hospital basement.

She’s late this morning, but she can’t suppress the grin that curves her lips as she recalls the reason why.

After going to Mass and having supper with Bucky’s family, they’d stayed far later than they’d intended, playing cards and listening to the radio as Mrs. Barnes had looked on indulgently.

She thought she’d seen the Barnes charm in action, but Bucky’s sister took the cake. She clearly adored her big brother and Steve (there’s a girl who sees how adorable he is—thank goodness she’s only 15 or Darcy would have some competition).

They’d finally left, despite Becca’s efforts to get them to stay a little longer, and Bucky’s ma had embraced each of them warmly before they departed, telling them to come back soon. The feeling of Mrs. Barnes arms around her had brought tears to her eyes—she misses Mama so much.

When the three of them got home, she and Bucky worked hard and repeatedly to remind Steve how loved and wanted he is.

As a consequence, she’d overslept.

Bucky too—he’d opened his eyes and blearily checked the clock in a mild panic as she hopped around on one foot by the side of the bed, trying to get her shoes on so she could run upstairs and change for work. Stevie had merely raised an eyelid and huffed, pulling the pillow over his head and returning to slumber.

She’d promised Dr. Bobby she’d search the records room for some files he needed and it’s proven a time consuming and frustrating task. The file rooms contain all of the charting that’s at least five years old, back to the origins of the hospital. It’s abundantly clear it hasn’t been organized in a while—that’s reserved for the more current records upstairs.

She’s been down here before, the basement is full of abandoned labs, storage rooms, and old file rooms.

It’s a little creepy.

The electric lights flicker occasionally, it smells vaguely damp, and sound echoes strangely. She rarely sees another soul, but least it’s quiet. She supposes it does give her some respite from the sometimes overwhelming clamor of the E.R. From what she’s noticed today, there’s only a couple people working down here.

She’s managed to pull all of the files Bobby requested in record time and is rushing towards the stairs when hears someone stirring in one of the labs. Suddenly, the door abruptly swings open in front of her, startling her enough that she drops the files.

She sighs, “Ah, crap,” gazing down at the scattered papers on the floor before looking over at the cause of her mishap.

A short, grey haired man wearing a white lab coat stands just outside of the doorway, looking disheveled and apologetic. He takes off his eyeglasses and rubs his eyes tiredly before putting them back on, his lips pursed as he gazes at the mess on the floor before turning his attention to her.

He has dark, sharply intelligent eyes in a kind face and his voice is heavily accented when he says, “My apologies, miss—I sometimes neglect to pay attention to the world around me when I am deep
Darcy looks him over again, noting his wild gray hair and wrinkled lab coat, “Working all night or just getting to work?” she inquires.

He glances at his wristwatch, raising his bushy eyebrows in surprise and chuckling, “Working all night, it appears—” he puts out his hand to shake, “I apologize for my rudeness, my name is Dr. Abraham Erskine,” he says.

She takes his hand, his grip is gentle on hers, “Darcy Garland. I’m a nurse in training at the hospital. Dr. Lowenstein had me doing a little research in the file room this morning—” she gestured at the floor, “I guess I’m gonna be a little late getting these to him,” she grins ruefully.

She crouches on the floor, methodically sorting through the files. Fortunately, she remembers which papers go in each file folder. Dr. Erskine crouches beside her, saying, “I’m afraid some of my papers are in this mess.”

“No problem,” she says, glancing at each paper as she quickly shuffles through them, setting aside anything that looks unfamiliar, “I think I can sort out your stuff, just look those over,” she motions to the pile she’s separated out, “and let me know if you’re missing anything.”

As she sorts through the mess, she processes the information in the papers he’d dropped, turning the notes and formulas over in her mind.

He’s working on something—a serum? Trying to create a way to correct genetic defects and enhance what is already there so the recipient becomes the best, strongest human specimen that is possible with their genetic makeup.

_Fascinating._

She frowns, holding up a page and scanning it briefly before handing it to him.

“So, Dr. Erskine, I haven’t seen you around before—been here long?” she asks, leaning forward to grab another page of unfamiliar notes.

“Ah—several months, actually,” he says, looking down at the paper she handed him and back at her, his eyes slightly wary.

“Oh? I didn’t realize any of the labs down here were in use until today.”

“Yes, well. I keep odd hours, and seldom venture up into the regular parts of the hospital except to obtain samples,” he says, idly sorting through the stack of papers she’s set aside.

“Samples?” she queries.

“Mnhmmm—blood and tissue samples mostly. I’ve been looking at cancer patients, particularly the way cancer cells multiply so quickly. I’m interested in cell regeneration, you see,” he says.

“Cell mutation, huh? Interesting,” she says quickly dividing the remaining papers into the file folders and stacking them neatly.

She glances up at him and finds him staring at her intently, “I didn’t say mutation, my dear,” he says softly.

She straightens her spine and looks him in the eye, “Cancer is just a mutation, isn’t it? Although an
unfortunate one.”

“Yes, it is—Miss Garland,” he says approvingly, his eyes tracking her rapid organization of the pile of paper.

Darcy makes quick work of straightening the mess on the floor, adding two more sheets of paper to his pile before she gathers her files together and stacks them in order.

She gets to her feet, offering him a hand and pulling him to stand beside her.

“Well, I should be going,” she says, “it was nice to meet you, Dr. Erskine—get some rest!”

He nods, idly tapping the papers in his hands into a stack and slowly turning back towards the laboratory.

She’s almost to the stairs when he calls, “Miss Garland, I’ve been looking for some assistance in the lab—perhaps you can recommend an organized individual?” he offers her a small smile when she turns back toward him.

She smiles, “Perhaps I can.”

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Thursday, September 11, 1941

Bucky’s working the heavy bag at Goldie’s. From the corner of his eye, he notes Steve and Tony sitting on the bench against the wall chatting as Steve’s pencil moves swiftly across his sketchbook.

He’s practicing combinations, methodically hitting the bag over and over as Will holds it steady. Sweat glistens on his skin and his undershirt clings to him as he focuses on the sound of his fists hitting canvas and Will’s occasional grunt when his fist connects particularly hard.

After a few minutes he pauses, breathing heavy and rolling his shoulders before wiping an arm across his brow.

Will patiently leans on the bag, asking, “You want me to unlace your gloves?”

“Nah, gotta work little longer. Fightin’ Finnigan next Friday night—rumor has it he’s in good shape too.”

Will nods, “Yeah—heard that. What’s the purse if you win?”

“Twenty dollars. That’s most of our rent right there,” he says.

Will nods and says, “Say, how’re you liking your new place? I certainly haven’t seen much of Darcy at ours lately.”

“It’s swell. Much better than where we were livin’,” He tips his head towards the water fountain in the corner and Will follows, holding down the button so Bucky can drink. He wipes his mouth with the back of his arm.

“Does it bother you that Darce is spendin’ her nights with us?” he says low.
Will raises his coppery eyebrows in surprise, “No! Darcy makes her own decisions—she’s always been supportive of me, how could I do any different? Besides, she’s happy.”

They’re happy.

Since they moved into their new place, Darcy has been helping them feather their nest. She was right about it being bigger than their old place, even if it is a studio. They are directly beneath she and Will’s apartment, so they are at the front of the building.

The apartment is a long rectangular room with a bathroom off of it. There is a sizable alcove created by the tall bay windows to the right when entering the apartment, and to the left was the open space that made up the rest of the studio, with the icebox, stove and sink at the far end.

They’d put Stevie’s drawing table next to the windows, their beds sideways to it and pushed together to form a bigger bed like in the old place. Darcy had spotted a couple of folding screens at the second hand shop and they’d used them to section off their alcove bedroom, lining up the dresser against one wall.

The other part of the room had the shabby brown sofa that came with the place on the end closer to the door, and a coffee table Bucky made out of some scrap wood. He had found an old bookshelf on the curb one day and Will had helped him carry it home. He’d sanded it down and painted it with some spare white paint the super said he could have and now it stands against the wall near the couch.

There’s another window over the sink, like in Darcy’s place, and a small kitchen table that came with two mismatched chairs.

They’d added two of their old kitchen chairs to the table.

The bathroom is loads better, with newer fixtures and reliable hot water— the thing that matters most to he and Steve. The deep clawfoot tub doesn’t hurt, either.

The large window in the bathroom opens to the fire escape—he could climb the stairs directly to Darcy’s bedroom if he wanted.

He grins at Will, “I’m a lucky man.”

Will punches him in the shoulder, “You are—don’t forget it. You ever hurt my sister I’ll find a way to hurt you.”

“Will, if I ever do that, I’ll hold still and let ya.”

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Friday, September 19, 1941

Darcy paces the kitchen of her apartment, glancing at the clock again and huffing in irritation.

Bucky’s boxing match is tonight, in fact, it should be over by now.
Unless it wasn’t over quickly and they are still beating on each other like barbarians.

She knew Bucky had fought competitively and that he’d won several championship titles in his weight class a few years back, but he hadn’t fought anyone in over a year.

Knowing it as something he’d done in the past and experiencing it in the present are two different things.

She’d had to work later than usual assisting Dr. Erskine or she’d be there right now, probably hiding her eyes against Stevie’s shoulder, but still. Both Steve and Bucky said it was probably for the best she couldn’t make it, the crowd can get a little rough.

Steve promised her Bucky knew what he was doing and the fight was above board.

And Bucky was excited—eager really.

Nonetheless, she worries.

She flops on the sofa and picks up her latest knitting project from the basket on the floor. As she works the soft green yarn around the knitting needles her mind wanders to the hours she’s spent assisting Dr. Erskine.

She’d started working with him the day after their first meeting, ostensibly to help organize his notes and file them, but it soon became clear her real job would be reminding him to eat, sleep, and generally take care of himself when he got deep into his research.

Organizing the paperwork had only been a few days of work, after that she began assisting him in his experiments. He showed her how he wanted slides prepared for the microscope, how he wanted the test tubes and slides sterilized, and observed until he was satisfied she would follow his instructions to the letter.

She knows almost everyone in the hospital, from the cafeteria workers up to the administrators, so she’s been able to expedite getting supplies and samples for him.

There were also some rats, rabbits, and several monkeys being used as test subjects, and she made sure their cages were clean and they had food and water.

She feels bad for the animals, but understands the necessity. Her farm background makes it easier for her to handle than it would most.

They’d gotten to know each other a little better in the past week and she’d learned he’d fled Germany, rescued from being forced to use his research to create weapons for the Third Reich.

She’s gathered from the notes she’s organized that his serum was as yet unstable, the mutations uncontrolled and unpredictable in nature.

He’s searching for a stabilizing agent that will allow the serum to alter the subject at the cellular level without creating problematic mutations or killing the subject outright.

Currently, he’s focused on cellular mutation in cancer patients as well as their immune response to it. More specifically, trying to find ways to spur mutation while isolating and bolstering an immune response.

He is also interested in looking at people who have survived or been resistant to disease while others have succumbed. In particular, family members of people with tuberculosis, polio, smallpox,
influenza—any person who recovered quickly or was seemingly immune to these diseases.

He had her poring through files going back five years or more, tracking down certain individuals to get blood samples.

No wonder he needs assistance.

He has barely spoken to her of these things, but the nature of her memory allows her to quickly scan any notes and charts she comes across in the lab and recall the information later, spending time in the evening leafing through her medical texts to understand some of the medical terminology he uses.

He sometimes writes in German, so she’d stopped at the bookstore after a couple of days and picked up a German to English dictionary, working her way through it and picking up enough to understand the written language.

He doesn’t know she can do these things, so he doesn’t bother securing the nature of his experiments from her.

As far as he knows, she is an efficient office organizer and a meticulous lab assistant.

Perhaps he will confide in her once he trusts her more.

She perks up as she hears Will and Bucky’s voices from several floors down as they make their way up the stairs. When they reach the landing she stands, walking to the door and throwing it open.

Will and Steve are propping up Bucky, who is grinning despite his split lip and black eye.

His good eye widens at the sight of her, “Darcy doll! I won!”

Steve snorts, muttering, “Barely.”

“Hey, punk—he’s been training for a year and I’ve been outta the game,” Bucky complains.

Darcy backs up, ushering them into the apartment before she grabs Bucky’s hand and pulls him over to the sofa, pushing him to sit down. She stands between his outspread knees, gently cupping his battered face in her hands, turning it to the light.

He hums, leaning into her hands.

“Baby, your poor face,” she says, gently touching his lips and stroking her fingers across his brow.

Will grabs some ice from the icebox and wraps it in a rag, handing it to Bucky before he flops into the chair next to the sofa.

Bucky gingerly holds the ice to his eye, tugging Darcy to sit on his lap. She glances at Steve who’d stretched out on the other end of the couch after he turned the radio on low.

“Stevie, tell me the other guy looked worse,” she says.

He nods, his sky blue eyes serious, “Yeah, his face looked worse than Buck’s and I imagine his ribs are pretty sore right now— jerk hammered them often enough.”

Bucky removes the ice from his eye and leans his head against her shoulder and sighs. He’s probably getting tired now that the adrenaline is wearing off.

“Say Steve, I have some left over apple pie in the icebox—how ‘bout we bring it down to your place
and get Bucky into an epsom salt bath?” she says.

Will whines, “Aw— but, pie?

Darcy grins, “Don’t worry, I’ll leave you plenty.”

bay window in Steve and Bucky’s studio

bedroom screen

Chapter End Notes

Just a bit of plot development, moving things along the timeline.

Fun fact: high end rent for a NYC apartment in the early 40’s started at $150 a month. $35 a month was average, nationwide. Imagine that.

My canon is the building they all live in is on the edge of a rough part of town, so the rent is low. Bobby charges less than he could, too.

Give me some love, people—leave kudos if you haven’t already or a comment if you aren’t too shy. I love to hear from you!
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

A little domestic fluff—Darcy and Bucky take a bath, Steve interrupts something, Bucky tries something new. NSFW.

Doris helps Darcy develop some pictures.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Wednesday, September 24, 1941

“Come on, doll, get in here with me,” Bucky cajoles, sinking further into the steaming water and resting his head on the rim of the clawfoot tub.

Five days after the fight and his ribs still ache—fading blue green bruises litter his body and his face, though the swelling has gone down from his eye.

Finnegan sure has a mean right hook.

Darcy stands in the bathroom doorway, having just arrived home as he was slipping into the tub. She’s still in her coat with her heavy tote bag slung over her shoulder.

She leans against the doorway, purses her full red lips and slips her bag off her shoulder, dropping it on the floor.

She says, “But I was gonna start making dinner—“

“Stevie ain’t gonna be home for at least an hour, come on, ya know ya wanna,” he grins, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

She rolls her eyes but can’t suppress the grin that breaks free.

“Alright, Casanova. Gimme a second.”

She picks up her bag again and leaves the doorway.

He lathers a washcloth and washes as he listens to the sound of her heels crossing the floor of the apartment, silence— then the icebox opening, sounds of cabinets and drawers opening then shutting, and finally the sound of her heels coming back.

She returns, her coat removed, juggling a plate with a couple sandwiches and two beers in her hands.

He wrings out the washcloth as she cracks open a beer and hands it to him, placing her own beer and plate of sandwiches on the edge of the sink before shutting the lid on the toilet seat and sitting to remove her shoes.
He watches her unsnap her stockings from her garter belt and roll them down as he takes a sip of the cold beer, “Damn, Darce—this is the right way to end the workday.”

Her storm blue eyes gleam from under dark lashes and her lips quirk in amusement as she tosses her stockings in the corner. She stands and unzips the back of her white nursing uniform, turning away to grab her beer off the sink and take a long swallow.

She glances coyly over her shoulder at him and smirks as she shimmies a little, the dress falling to her waist, before she pushes it to the floor with quick wiggle of her hips.

He sighs, drinking in her beautiful curves.

She bends to pick up her dress and he nearly groans at the sight of her heart shaped ass on full display. She tosses it into the corner and saunters back to the sink in her bra and panties, pausing for another sip of her beer and a bite of sandwich.

“Thought we were gonna make dinner when Stevie gets home,” he murmurs, his eyes tracing over the shape of her.

“We will, I needed to eat something. It was a long day without regular breaks,” she says.

She sets the plate of sandwiches and her beer on the toilet seat lid, within easy reach of the other end of the tub.

Then she winks and unhooks her bra, slipping the straps over her shoulders and sliding a finger under the front edge to pull it off, flinging it in the corner.

She smiles at him slow and sweet as she curls her fingers under the waistband of her panties and gives her hips a distracting wiggle. They drop to her ankles and she kicks them into the corner with the rest of her clothes.

The tub is the kind that has the faucet along the long side of it, leaving either end available for a person to rest their back against. As she steps over the side, he grasps her hand to hold her steady as she turns to sit at the other end and faces him, sighing as she Relaxes and sinks further into the water. He spreads his legs so that the inside of his legs meet the outside of hers, and she tucks her toes under his thighs.

She reaches over the side of the tub for the plate of sandwiches and shakes the water from her fingers to grab hold of a half eaten one.

“The other one’s yours,” she says, taking a dainty bite and holding out the chipped ceramic plate to him.

He dries his hand on his bath towel hanging next to the tub and grabs the sandwich.

“Ham and cheese, babe? You really love me,” he says, taking a big bite of the sandwich, “Mmmmmm, didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

She snorts, polishing off her last bite.

“Growing boy, right? At least that’s the rumor,” she teases.

“Mmmmmmm,” he says around the sandwich.

She places the empty plate on the floor next to the tub and grabs her beer, finishing it off and setting
it on the floor beside the plate before laying back and closing her eyes with a sigh of contentment.

He finishes the sandwich and the beer, his eyes tracing over the pale curves of her legs to the dark curls between them, up to the indent of her bellybutton and past that to where the water barely covers her full breasts, her rosy nipples breaching the surface.

Her skin is flushed slightly pink from the heat of the water and the steam is teasing her hair into a riot of dark spirals against her fair skin.

He sets his empty beer bottle on the floor next to the tub and takes one of her small feet in his hands to methodically massage the ball of it with his thumbs.

She sound she makes is almost pornographic and his cock twitches hard in response.

“Consider it payment for the food and drink,” he says, working his thumbs down the arch of her foot.

“Sounds fair,” she says, but after a few moments she slides her other foot up his inner thigh, ghosting over his balls to rub against his rapidly hardening cock.

She grins, flexing her foot against him as he says, “Why don’t ya come down here doll, I got somethin’ to show ya.”

“But my foot massage—“ she mock pouts, a grin curling the edges of her mouth.

He grabs her by her upper thighs and pulls her into his lap, and water laps over the edge of the tub as she giggles softly and kisses him, her lips warm and pliant on his and he wonders if he’ll ever get enough of her.

He kisses her slowly, exploring her lush mouth with his as she weaves her hands through his hair and tugs, her tongue tangling with his.

The slick curves of her breasts press against his chest and he wraps one hand around the nape of her neck as the other grips the soft curve of her hip, pulling her closer as she moans into his mouth.

_God, he loves her._

The hours days have slipped into weeks, into months, and he still wants her, is still amazed by this perfect thing he has with her and Stevie.

She breaks the kiss, panting into his skin as she nuzzles her nose along his jaw, biting gently just under his ear.

“Want you, Bucky—so badly,” she breathes.

He slides his hand into her hair, tugging her head back and kissing the pale length of her throat.

“Have me, then,” he groans as she rocks her hips against him.

Her hands knead the sides of his head, tugging at his hair as he sucks hard over the fluttering pulse just under her jaw. He loves that he can do this, some primal part of him satisfied with leaving his mark on her.

It’ll fade to nothing in a quarter hour, no one else will see it except for him, but he knows it was
there, that she is his. She loves it too, judging by the way she’s writhing in his lap.

He pulls away, rubbing his thumb over the love bite as she looks into his eyes, her lips kiss swollen and cheeks flushed and says, “Bed?”

He nods, “Bed.”

Steve enters the apartment to the sound of the bed springs squeaking and Darcy's strangled moan, “Oh God, Bucky—just like that.”

He smirks, dropping his portfolio and coat on the sofa and peeking around the screen that blocks the bed from view.

Darcy is on her back, her hands gripping the headboard and her legs wrapped high around Bucky’s waist—her breasts jiggling with each hard thrust of his friend’s hips. She turns her head, pinning him with her blue gaze, winking before releasing one hand from the headboard in favor of slipping it between her thighs.

Steve’s clothes suddenly feel too tight.

He unbuttons his shirt.

Bucky groans, “Doll, you’re killin’ me,” as she circles her hips and presses her heel hard into the back of his thigh.

She pants, “Come on, come on—“

Steve toes off his shoes and unbuttons his pants, dropping them to the floor.

Bucky glances over his shoulder at him, “Ya gonna help me out here, punk?”

Steve grins, pulling his undershirt over his head and stepping up to the side of the bed. He runs his hand from the nape of Bucky’s neck to the upper curve of his ass, his skin pebbling with goosebumps and his firm muscles shifting as he thrusts hard into Darcy again.

He drops his shorts and climbs up beside them, laying on his side next to Darcy and replacing the hand between her thighs with his own. He kisses her neck as she arches and gasps mmmmgod, so close, Stevie—so close.

Steve moves to her breasts, licking her nipples before taking one into his mouth and sucking hard as his finger strums the sensitive bundle of nerves between her thighs.

Darcy grunts oh oh, and her back bows, her hands clutching at him as she convulses with a little shriek. Bucky hooks his elbows under her knees and thrusts hard, once, twice—then groans loudly, his head tipped back as he shudders.

Steve releases Darcy’s nipple and pulls his hand from between her legs, curling up at her side with his face buried in her hair as Bucky collapses onto her, resting his head on the pillow next to hers.

After a couple minutes, Steve teases, “Darce—I think the whole floor heard ya comin’ just now.”
Darcy slurs, “Ugh—I couldn’t help it, it felt so good.”

Her hips twitch and Bucky groans, complaining under his breath as he usually does when his cock softens enough to slip out of her, “Aww, no.”

Steve chuckles and leans over the side of the bed to grab one of the slightly damp bath towels from the floor and throws it at Bucky’s head, saying, “Ya can’t stay in her forever, jerk.”

Bucky mutters something unintelligible and Darcy snorts, accepting the folded towel when Bucky hands it to her and wiping between her legs before throwing it over the side of the bed again, “Much as I love you Bucky, that would be inconvenient.”

She turns onto her side and kisses Steve, “Hello there, handsome.”

Bucky curves around behind her, his eyes on Steve, “enjoy the show, punk?” he says, his voice muffled by Darcy’s hair and the corners of his eyes crinkling with a grin.

“Hmmm, yeah—short as it was,” Steve says offhandedly.

Darcy’s eyes glint with amusement as Bucky splutters, “Hey—you walked in at the end, punk.”

She walks her fingers up and down Steve’s chest and glances down at his cock, which has remained unflaggingly hard since he peeked around the screen. “Maybe you oughta show him how it’s done, Stevie?” she teases.

“Dunno Darce, you too worn out?” he asks, running his fingers down her cheek to her chin and tilting her head back for a soft kiss.

“Nah,” she grins against his lips as Bucky grumbles, “Hey—I’ll show ya worn out, it ain’t fair how dames don’t have to recover.”

Darcy licks Steve’s lower lip before sucking it into her mouth, her hand sliding between them to encircle his cock, slowly stroking as the kiss deepens.

He groans and she pulls back, breathing, “do you want in my mouth, between my legs, or maybe—in Bucky’s mouth?”

He glances over her shoulder at Bucky, who’s looking at him intently, raising a brow in question.

He says, “Well, we’ve never actually done that—“

Her hand stills on his cock. “Really? Not even before you came to Iowa?” she asks.

“We were just gettin’ used to the idea of the two of us and then the three of us were together again—and since then, if we’re in bed it’s all three of us,” Bucky says.

She pauses, her brow crinkled in thought, before she resumes stroking him, causing him to shudder in reaction.

“You guys aren’t holding back because of me, right? Because you can do things together when I’m not around—it’s only fair,” she says, wiggling down to nip his collarbone and swirling her tongue over the bite before kissing down his chest.

“Nah, Darce—Bucky’s got the right of it. We’re still figurin’ out how sex works between two fellas is all,” Steve gasps, threading his fingers in her dark hair as she circles his nipple with her tongue.
Darcy kisses and nips at him down to his belly button, dipping her tongue into it and laughing as he squirms, licking down the groove of his hip bone before pausing over his cock, the heat of her breath ghosting over him and making him shiver with need.

She glances at Bucky who’s silvery blue eyes are watching them intently.

She licks a stripe up the underside of Steve’s erection and circles the tip with her tongue and says, “Wanna try, Bucky?”

Bucky nods slowly and Darcy gives him one last swipe with her tongue, crawling to Steve’s other side and giving Bucky some room.

Steve squeezes his eyes shut for a moment, feeling unbearably aroused. The idea of Bucky putting his mouth on him is both forbidden and intensely exciting. Even now, after everything, he still can’t quite believe he and Bucky are doing this.

He jerks, feeling larger hands pressing into his hips and the wet heat of Bucky’s tongue moving up his cock.

Oh my—

After a moment he opens his eyes to see Darcy wiggling further down the bed to lay on her side by his hip, absorbed by Bucky’s actions.

His friend moves to take the tip of Steve’s cock into his mouth, slowly swirling his tongue around the head before he slides his mouth lower.

Darcy whispers, “wrap your hand around the base, Bucky—you don’t want to gag.”

Steve’s hips reflexively rock up, as if to prove her point, and a moan bursts from his mouth as Bucky hollows his cheeks, sucking on his way up.

He pops off, grumbling, “Darce, I have a cock and have paid attention to what you do.”

Darcy snorts, “I know, but being on the receiving end is a totally different experience—” she pauses, smirking wickedly when Steve jerks, Bucky’s teeth scraping a little too rough over the tip of his cock, “watch your teeth.”

Bucky huffs and returns to work, his lips and tongue working the head of Steve’s cock before sinking down again.

After a minute, Steve stops thinking about anything except the sensation of Bucky and Darcy’s mouths moving over him as Darcy moves in to lick and suck at his nipples—the two of them driving him mad.

Bucky’s technique is slightly different than Darcy’s but feels just as incredible. As he gains confidence he plunges further down Steve’s cock than Darcy is able to, sucking hard on the upward stroke and teasingly circling his tongue around the blunt head, leaving Steve whining in frustration.

Darcy works her way back up to plunder his mouth, sucking at his lower lip and licking into his mouth and he tangles his fingers in her hair and tilts her head, fitting his mouth to hers while Bucky relentlessly pulls him closer to the edge.

His friend sucks harder, humming and trailing his fingers under his balls and pressing just behind them, and the sudden jolt of sensation causes Steve to grunt in surprise, the coil of pleasure low in his
gut close to snapping.

After a moment he pulls his mouth away from Darcy’s to gasp, “Coming—I’m coming—“

Bucky sucks harder and Steve moans, his body strung tight, closing his eyes and shaking as a tsunami of pleasure crashes down on him, leaving him trembling and wrung out in its wake.

After a moment he cracks his eyes open to see Bucky resting on one elbow by his hip, his face scrunched up in vague disgust.

His friend grabs the glass of water on the nightstand, taking a big gulp and swishing it around his mouth before swallowing and exclaiming, “Darce—what the hell? Why didn’t ya warn me about the taste?”

Darcy snickers against Steve's shoulder.

“Don’t you sass me, Mr. “I have a cock and have paid attention to what you do”—“ she says lowering her voice to imitate Bucky, “—I figured you’d remember I told you it tasted salty and kinda bitter.”

“Kinda bitter?” Bucky scoffs under his breath.

Steve turns his head to nuzzle into Darcy’s hair, hiding his grin.

Bucky flops against the pillows by Steve’s side, pulling the blankets up over the three of them with a beleaguered sigh and wrapping his arm around Steve.

“No offense, punk, next time I’m pullin’ off before ya come,” he grumbles, his lips pressed to Steve’s hair.

Steve snorts and Darcy breaks into giggles.

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Saturday, September 27, 1941

Darcy stands under the red light beside Doris in the bathroom at her place, watching her work in her makeshift darkroom to develop the film she’d brought back from Iowa.

Will had mentioned the expense of developing the rolls of film to Tony and he’d suggested asking Doris to help them out—interestingly, she earned a little side money with her photography hobby, shooting society events and selling the pictures to local newspapers and magazines.

Doris was willing to do the work for free—they only had to chip in on the supplies she used and Darcy had agreed to sit for a series of photos Doris was working on.

Doris had explained the film could not be exposed to light (other than the red light she’d clamped to the shower curtain rod) lest the film be ruined, thus they were working in the bathroom because it was windowless and she’d only needed to seal around the edges of the door with tape and block the bottom of it with rolled up towels to create total darkness.
After removing the film from the canister, cutting the end of it and wrapping it around a reel, she places it in a developing tank (about the size of the flour canister in her kitchen) and pours the developer she’s mixed into it before screwing the top on. She shakes the tank back and forth for a few minutes before pouring the developer down the sink drain.

She refills the tank with something she calls the “stop bath” shakes it for a minute or so then drains it again. Finally, she pours in the “fixer”, agitating the tank for the first minute, then for 10 seconds or so for each minute that passes until it’s been submerged for about four minutes. She dumps the chemical into a bucket, explaining she’ll reuse the solution with the next batch of film.

She places the open tank in the sink, turns on the faucet, and lets water run over the film for a minute or so before she finally pulls the spool from the water and unravels the film from it, wiping it down gently with a damp sponge before clipping it to a clothesline she’s strung over the tub.

The whole process is fascinating.

“That’s amazing,” Darcy says, peering at the strip of film as it hangs to dry on the clothesline, the images are negatives, Doris will print them later on photo paper.

“It is, isn’t it?” the blonde says, opening another film canister and spooling it onto the reel to begin the process again.

Darcy watches as Doris develops the remaining four rolls of film, chatting about Tony and Will, whom Doris proclaims “adorable together,” the society wedding she photographed last weekend, “the bride was a ridiculous snob,” and their plans to go dancing later that evening.

“So—tell me about these photos you want me to model for,” Darcy says.


Darcy narrows her eyes and says, “Doesn’t bother me in private, not really comfortable about it being for public consumption.”

“How ‘bout tastefully draped and classy for the artsy ones, and anything a little more risqué I’ll give you a domino mask and maybe a wig to disguise your identity?” she says, smiling slyly.

Darcy says, “I don’t know—“

“Aw, come on! It’ll be fun. We can even make some special ones for your fellas eyes only,” Doris waggles her eyebrows suggestively, “you have a fantastic figure—I bet I can sell the photos to some pinup magazines and I’ll give you a cut of the profits.”

She thinks about it for a minute. She could make a gift out of the photos, maybe for Christmas.

She’d let Stevie draw her naked, surely this isn’t all that different?

“Ok. I want half the money for any pinups you sell—it’s my body after all,” she says, “but you can keep whatever you get with your artsy photos.”

Doris rolls her eyes, “Fine.”

“Also, I want the negatives for the ones you take for Steve and Bucky,” Doris nods and Darcy continues, “and I want to hire you in the future to develop some film for me.”

Doris raises an eyebrow, “Oh?”
“Yeah—Steve, Bucky, and I are pretty private about our relationship, but we’d like candid photos from at home—you know—um, private moments,” Darcy stammers, her cheeks growing hot.

Doris takes pity on her, nudging her shoulder, “GOTCHA. I know exactly what you mean. Bess and I have a few of those ourselves,” she says, smiling.

“Oh good,” Darcy says, sagging with relief.

Doris shoulders shake with silent laughter as she rinses the last roll of film with water.

Darcy pouts, “It’s not funny.”

Doris wipes her eyes, grinning uncontrollably.

Darcy huffs, “Oh, Okay—maybe it is,” she says with a small smile.

Darcy and Bucky, kissing in the bathtub

Chapter End Notes

How’d ya like it?

Bucky’s reaction to the taste of semen? Totally stole that from real life. My significant other always wondered why I didn’t like swallowing until I made him taste it. After that—he didn’t expect it. Lol.

But really, the secret to avoiding the taste of come is making sure very little actually hits your tongue—so go deep or go home in my opinion.

Also—all descriptions of photo development stem from a high school photography class ages ago and google. I did the best I could, folks.

If you liked it and haven’t already left kudos, please do. If you can leave a comment it would also be appreciated! Thanks to everyone who has left kudos and comments along the way.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Darcy works with Dr. Erskine. Steve gets paid for his work and gets into a scuffle. Bucky flies. Darcy shows Steve some photos. Darcy has lunch with Helene. Bucky teaches Darcy to box, with some surprising results. Dr. Erskine’s research progresses.

Chapter Notes

Moving the plot along—some bits of German and French. Please pardon all errors as I do not speak these languages and relied on internet translators.

Unbetad, sorry for any grammatical or syntax errors.

Also—warning for an episode of bullying and violence featuring the word kike—which is an offensive term for a Jewish person. Apologies.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Thursday, October 23, 1941

4pm

Darcy hurries down the hallway to the lab, a tray full of blood samples from the oncology ward in one hand and a large mug of coffee in the other.

She arrives, bumping the slightly ajar door with her hip, focusing on the figure of Dr. Erskine, hunched over the microscope with a centrifuge whirring on the counter beside him.

She places the tray on the counter, and gently nudges his elbow and steps back.

He jerks to attention, completely unaware of her presence until that moment. She smiles, handing him the coffee and he relaxes, sitting back on the stool pulled up to the table.

He looks tired, his eyes are slightly bloodshot and his gray hair is wild around his head as he gratefully takes the proffered mug and takes a sip, sighing deeply as he slides his glasses up to rub his eyes.

“Danke, my dear, I’ve lost track of time again,” he glances at his watch, “is it morning or afternoon?” he says, the windowless lab giving him no clue.

“At noon—I came as soon as my shift ended. Dr. Bobby gave me the message to pick up those,” he nods to the blood samples and he perks up with interest.

“Sehr gut, I have been waiting for them,” he says, German peppered his conversation as sometimes happens when he is tired.
It doesn’t matter, she understands him most of the time now.

“How is the latest test subject?” she says, walking over to several cages with rats in them, the test subject in a separate cage, seemingly asleep.

He’d finally told her a little about his experiments and the serum he’s working on. Calling it a “strengthening serum” that would bring any individual to optimum health, even those with genetic abnormalities or diseases.

“I injected the subject 5 hours ago, after an hour of frenetic activity, he grew sluggish and eventually fell asleep. I have checked his vitals every half hour since, and he is feverish, his heart rate elevated. Though he roused when I took his temperature the first couple hours, the last time he did not. I fear he is in a coma,” he sighs.

“So—no discernible improvement?” she asks.

“On the contrary, his muscle mass increased, blood oxygenation improved, and brain activity exceeded expectation. While he was active, it appeared he was faster and stronger, with greater problem solving skills. He ran the maze in half the time he had pre-injection. Alas, the serum is still not stable enough to halt mutation before it becomes harmful. Take a look at these x-rays,” he says, shuffling over to the light box and pinning up a series of films.

“What do you see?” he asks.

She looks at the series, which Erskine has helpfully time stamped and hung in order.

The test rat had been on the skinny side but in decent health. He’d been picked because of some skeletal abnormalities, a slight scoliosis of the spine, a curve in his tail—probably from a break at some point in his life. As her eyes scan the films, she notes the increased bone density, the gradual straightening of his spine and tail. The skull seems to grow slightly larger and the front teeth a bit longer. The faint shadows of the rats musculature also become denser and larger as the films progress. The last film shows the problem—the beginnings of bony tumors on several of the larger bones of the skeleton, and some denser areas in the abdominal cavity which are probably tumors as well.

She leans forward, tracing her fingers over the skeletal abnormalities.

“You see the problem,” he says.

“Yes—the changes continued past the point of being useful. It appears the factors you were able to isolate from the cancer patients blood samples did advance the mutations though,” she says thoughtfully.

“Indeed. I have been at this point in my research before—so much was lost when I fled Germany. If I could only find some way to stabilize it, to arm the subjects natural defenses so the mutation would not become harmful,” he taps his finger against his lips, deep in thought.

After a few moments he says, “Miss Garland, I do not believe the samples from the oncology lab are necessary. The serum is sufficiently mutagenic at this point. I’ll need you to pick up the blood samples from the microbiology department at the hematology lab.”

He walks back over to the cage with the test rat, checking it briefly and shaking his head before returning to the microscope.

“Yes, sir,” she murmurs, tracing her fingers over the ghostly outlines of the rat’s skeleton in the last
Tuesday, October 28, 1941

Steve leans against the brick wall behind Goldie’s counting his money while Billy looks over the new drawings.

“Man—for a little guy you sure have a dirty mind,” Billy chortles, his brown eyes mirthful.

Steve puts on a bashful face, ducking his head and rubbing his hand across the back of his neck in faux embarrassment, "Oh, well, Bucky helped some with explainin’ the details."

Billy nods his blond head in acknowledgment and Steve smirks to himself when his employer returns his attention to the illustrations for the next Tijuana Bible, “Adventures of the Fuller Brush Man.”

Everybody knows Bucky is smooth with the ladies.

Gotta figure he’d tell Steve all about it, right?

“Yeah, and I’ve seen his girl—gotta body like a coke bottle, that one—betcha he gives it to her good,” Billy whistles under his breath.

Steve frowns, he doesn’t like that kinda talk about his girl.

Even if she’d agree that Bucky gives it to her good.

“Shut your mouth, Billy—she ain’t that kinda girl,” he growls.

Billy flashes a gap toothed smile, “Don’t get all bent outta shape—we all know Bucky gets all kinds of tail.”

Steve glowers. It ain’t right to disrespect Darcy.

“Yeah, well—maybe that used to be how it was, but not now. Bucky hears ya talkin’ trash about his girl he’ll beat ya bloody,” he says.

“Yeah, yeah—‘ Billy says, folding the drawings carefully and placing them in the inner pocket of his coat, “so when can ya get the next one done? I like how ya wrote the lines for this one. Fuller Brush Man, huh? Maybe we could do a series.”

Steve nods, still irritated, “End of next week oughta work—I’ll make another one with the salesman,” he grits out, shoving the money in his pocket and slinging his bag over his shoulder.

He turns and walks down the alley, headed home.

Billy shouts cheerfully from behind him, “see ya next week then!”

Steve waves an arm in acknowledgment, not looking back, fearing he’ll want to punch Billy’s stupid face.
The latest drawings had earned him five dollars. If Billy kept asking for them, he could probably keep bringing in an extra ten dollars a month.

So he has to put up with Billy’s crude comments. He supposes it goes hand in hand with the crudity of the product being produced.

He still wants to punch him though.

He sighs, hitching his bag higher on his shoulder as he walks towards home.

It’s dark, probably just after 5 o’clock, the days are getting shorter again as they head towards winter. The wind gusts as he turns the corner, blowing dried leaves and bits of paper across the sidewalk. He shivers and walks faster, his face turned into the collar of his coat.

He’s about two blocks from home when he hears raised voices from the alley and the sound of a struggle. He peers into the darkness, the alley is barely illuminated by the apartment windows above and the streetlight by the sidewalk, but as he walks closer, his eyes adjust to the low lighting.

One of the neighborhood toughs has a scrawny dark haired kid pinned to the alley wall, pushing him against the bricks each time the kid tries to escape.

The tough says, “I told ya if I saw ya again I’d beat yer ass ya dirty kike—“

The kid says something in what sounds like German, then adds a heavily accented, “please, no,” holding his hands up in front of him.

The tough, whose acne scarred face Steve recognizes from several beatings he’s suffered at his hands, slugs the younger kid in the gut, causing him to double over.

“We don’t want none of ya around here—why don’t ya go back to Germany ya little fuck,” he rears back again to punch the kid and Steve drops his bag, walking closer.

“Hey—why don’t ya pick on someone your own size, Phillips?” Steve says.

The kid wiggles against the wall, his shoulder pinned to the bricks by the larger man’s left hand holding him in place.

Phillips pauses and lowers his right arm which was cocked and ready to swing, turning his block head in Steve’s direction.

“Why don’t ya mind your own business, Rogers? Ya need me to remind ya why ya should?” he releases the younger kid, who turns grateful dark eyes towards Steve before he scurries further down the alley to hide behind some trash cans.

“Nah, ya made your point last time;” he says standing firm as the bully steps in his direction, “and the time before,” he mutters under his breath, “ah, crap.”

Fortunately, Phillips isn’t very fast, just big and strong. Steve is able to dodge his first swing, and even the second one, but eventually he’s herded against the wall and finds himself in the same position he’d found the kid in.

His lungs are tightening up pretty bad with all the excitement of dodging Phillips fists, and he pants for breath as the larger man leans in to taunt, “now this seems familiar, Rogers—doesn’t look like Barnes is here to save your ass this time either,” he grins, his greasy hair falling into his eyes.
He tries to block the swing but he’s held in place as the first blow lands, a punch to the stomach that makes him want to throw up.

As Phillips rears back to hit him again, Steve kicks him, a glancing blow to the groin which the larger man mostly deflects by turning his hips at the last minute.

He does let go of him long enough for Steve to wiggle away from the wall, although his way to the sidewalk is blocked by the looming and now even more angry bulk of Phillips.

He dances back and forth, trying to use some of the boxing training Bucky has drilled into him, but he’s tiring, and wheezing—and Phillips has a long reach.

He slugs him again, this time in the ribs and he crashes into the garbage cans, tipping them over with a clatter and falling into the stinking refuse.

The larger man stalks closer, growling, “Rogers, I’m gonna—“


Phillips turns his head and there is a resounding thud, and the larger man hits the wall, head first, falling to into a limp heap next to it.

Steve levers himself up onto his elbows, bewildered as Darcy approaches, her pale skin glowing in the dim light of the alley.

“What’d you get into this time, Stevie?” she says, wrinkling her nose and extending her hand to pull him out of the garbage, her heavy tote bag dangling from her other arm.

“Ah—that guy was beating up a kid and I tried to stop him—“ he says, looking down at Phillips, “Say—what’d ya hit him with anyway?”

She smirks, “my bag,” she swings it by the handle in demonstration, “it must weigh 30 pounds with all the books—the rest was his head hitting the wall,” she says.

She glances behind Steve and he turns to see the Jewish kid warily emerge from behind the trash cans.

She says, “Are you okay, kid?”

And the kid says in heavily accented English, “Thank you,” and nods before walking over to peer at Phillips, nudging him with his foot.

He turns back to them, holding out his hand, “My name—Leo Hirsch,” he stammers.

Steve shakes his hand, “Nice to meet ya, Steve Rogers.”

Darcy says, “Sprechen sie Deutsch?”

Leo nods, and Darcy smiles and holds out her hand, “Meine name ist Darcy Garland.”

Leo babbles something else in German, shaking her hand and sounding excited. She replies, finally making shooing motions at him to head home.

The boy runs down the alley, shouting, “Danke, Darcy—Danke, Steve!” before he disappears around the corner.
Steve looks sharply at Darcy, “Since when do you speak German?”

“I’ve been learning—new doctor I’m working with is German.” she says distractedly, cupping her hands around his face and turning it from side to side, “your face looks fine, what about the rest of you?”she asks.

’S’ok Darce, my ribs are gonna be sore for a while, though,” he winces as she runs her hands over his sides.

She shoots Phillips an angry glare, “sounds like you need the nebulizer too, we should get going,” she says.

Steve walks over to look at the fallen man, “Hey, Darce—shouldn’t he be waking up around now?”

She cocks her head, listening.

After a moment she shrugs, saying, “he will soon, his respiration and heartbeat are picking up—I suggest we leave.”

They limp together towards the mouth of the alley, her arm around his waist, his around her shoulder.

Some of his drawings are scattered on the ground and he slowly bends to gather them up, groaning under his breath before stuffing them in his bag.

He stands, catching Darcy turning one in her hands, her forehead creased in thought, “Huh,” she says, before handing him a sketch from one of the Tijuana bibles.

Steve’s face grows hot, “I can explain, doll—“

She grins teasingly, “Oh—I wanna hear all about it, Stevie.”

She hooks her arm through his and they head home.

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Saturday, November 1, 1941

The noise of the planes engine is deafening as they taxi down the runway in preparation for flight.

Bucky stares out the window as the landscape blurs into a vibrant smear—the autumn hues of the distant tree line blending with the grassy field in his vision.

He grips his knees hard and his stomach drops as the plane surges, lifting off the ground. Next to him, Will whoops, “Here we go Bucky! We’re flying now!”

Bucky grins as he watches the ground drop away, the puffy white clouds suddenly that much closer.

He can hardly believe it—he’s flying.

As they level out he looks down, the airfield looking much smaller beneath them. He narrows his eyes, focusing on the hangar, spotting the distant figures of Darcy and Steve sitting on camp chairs by the hangar and Howard and Jarvis standing further away.
It’s colder up here, and Bucky’s glad Stark gave him a heavy aviators coat to wear and a hat that covers his ears.

Will says, “Now, this plane isn’t designed for dogfighting, so we can’t do any fancy rolls or anything, but it is a dive bomber—wanna try that out after you get a little more used to things?”

“What’s it feel like when ya do a dive?” he asks.

Will grins wide, his green eyes full of manic glee, “Like going over the biggest drop on a rollercoaster—plus some.”

Bucky nods, checks his seat belt and tightens it up a bit, “Ok, then.”

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Friday, November 7, 1941

5pm

Steve’s sitting at his work table, a cup of tea steaming by his elbow and working on a half finished illustration he’s doing for a beer advertisement, when he hears the key turn in the lock and the door opening and closing.

The sharp sound of heels on the wood floor announces Darcy’s arrival, along with her excited exclamation, “Stevie! Doris dropped the photos off today and they’re beautiful!”

Her grinning face pops around the screen and she walks over to the bed, dropping her bag onto it and slipping out of her coat.

He smiles in return, asking, “Which ones?”

He knows she posed for a series of pictures for Doris in payment for getting the film from her parents house developed, he’s interested in seeing some of the artsy ones—definitely the pinups.

“The ones we’ve been taking of each other the last month or so—I paid her to develop them!” she says.

Oh.

He had been a little nervous about getting those developed, they were private moments between the three of them.

He’d taken pictures of Darcy and Bucky tangled up together in the sheets of their bed one Saturday, looking sleepy and sated post morning sex. Nothing too graphic—just Bucky on his back with his eyes closed and a smile curving his full lips, with Darcy draped over him, her cheek against his shoulder and the sheet riding low, exposing his chest and her bare back to the waist. The morning light had been so beautiful on their skin.

She’d taken a few pictures of he and Bucky kissing on the sofa.

He took a couple pictures of Bucky after he emerged from the bathroom after a shower, bare chested and his pants riding low, grinning as he rubbed a towel over his damp hair.
Bucky took some pictures of he and Darcy curled together on the sofa, his head in her lap, her hand absently stroking his hair as she read.

There were pictures of the three of them that Will had taken—cooking together, crammed together into the back seat of Howard’s car, dancing in the living room, holding each other in one of their frequent embraces.

He walks over to sit on the bed beside her as she rummages in her bag, pulling out a manila envelope labeled “DARCY” and a paper bag from which she pulls a fairly large leather bound book.

Darcy hands him the the envelope and pats the book, “I bought us a photo album for our pictures,” she says, flicking it open to show him the blank pages.

He nods, “Good idea.”

He opens the envelope and pulls out a stack of photos, and his breath sticks in his chest when he sees the image on first one.

It is of he and Bucky, asleep. They lay on their sides, his back to Bucky’s chest, his friends arms wrapped around him, his larger fingers tangled with Steve’s slender ones—his head resting on Bucky’s outstretched arm.

The sheet had slipped down, revealing their faces in profile, their tousled hair, light and dark, and their bare shoulders, the muscles of Bucky’s shoulder and arm prominent.

He glances at Darcy, who has a small smile on her face.

“When did ya take this one?” he whispers.

“Oh—a couple weeks ago. You know I wake up early. Bucky always grabs hold of you like a teddy bear if you’re sleeping beside him—it’s adorable,” she says, looking again at the photo before glancing at him from beneath her lashes, “do you like it?”

“I love it,” he says.

“Oh, good,” she says, obviously relieved, “I wondered if you’d feel like it was too intrusive—I wanted you to see what I see.”

“Nah, Darce—I love it. Let’s look at the rest of them,” he says, flipping to next picture, which shows Darcy sitting at her vanity brushing her hair, wearing her white nightgown. Steve is reflected in the vanity mirror, laying on her bed with a sketchbook.

“Bucky’s gonna love this,” he says.

Wednesday, November 12, 1941

Darcy peeks her head around around the half open door to see Helene behind the desk in her office, frowning at some paperwork. She knocks on the doorframe to get her attention.

Her friend looks up, her face breaking into a smile, “Darcy! You’re a sight for sore eyes—what are you up to?” she says, leaning back into her office chair.
“I was wondering if you have time to get lunch with me—I have a little break before I head back to the ER,” she says.

“That sounds like a fantastic idea—these requisition forms are driving me mad,” Helene says, grabbing the stack of papers and tapping them against the desktop to neaten them before setting them aside.

“Admin ignoring your requests for more diaphragms again?” she asks as they start walking down the hallway towards the hospital cafeteria.

“Oh yes—some idiot on the board is making noise about removing funding again, says birth control is against God’s wishes,” she says in disgust, “as if God speaks directly to him! Conneries!”

Darcy nods in sympathy, this is a recurring problem.

After a moment of silence she inquires, “Conneries?”

Helene shoots her a sly grin, “Horse shit,” she whispers out of the side of her mouth.

Darcy smirks.

“Say, Helene—do you know how to speak German? I’ve been practicing so I can understand a German doctor I’m assisting.”

“Eh—a bit. My Bubbe was German. I understand it more than I can speak,” She pauses to pick up a tray as she peruses the cafeteria offerings for the day, “What about French? It is a much more beautiful language, in my unbiased opinion,” she teases.

They get in line at the cafeteria and Darcy nods to the server, “Hi, Martha.”

The older woman grins, her cheeks rosy from the steam rising off the food in front of her, “Hello, Darcy—how are you today?”

“Just great! How’s little Tommy doing?” she asks, pointing to the meatloaf, then the mashed potatoes, which Martha spoons onto her plate in generous portions.

“Oh, he’s gettin’ over that little ‘bout with the flu okay,” she says, turning to Helen, “decided what you want today, ma’am?”

“Oh—I’ll take the meatloaf too,” her friend says.

Helene raises a quizzical brow at Darcy, “So, French?”

“Sure, it’s always a good idea to learn new things,” she says.

“This is why we get along, mon amie,” she pats Darcy’s shoulder.

“Mon amie?” Darcy inquires.

“My friend,” Helene says, holding her tray up and asking Martha for a slice of apple pie as well.

“My friend—mon amie,” Darcy murmurs.
Saturday, November 15, 1941

9am

Bucky looks down at Darcy as she dances back and forth in front of him, fists raised in front of her and clad in one of his shirts, her panties, and nothing else.

“Come on—Will has been showing me stuff for years and I feel like I should be learning more,” she wheedles.

“Darce—I’m not gonna hit ya, doesn’t feel right—“ he says.

She lowers her fists, pouting, “Just try, I might surprise you.”

He glances at Steve, who’s curled up on the couch with a blanket around him, watching them with a worried frown.

“How ‘bout you hit me, doll—I wanna see what your punches look like first,” he raises his arms defensively and waits.

She eyes him, her full lips firming into a determined line and squinting flashing blue eyes at him before she straightens up, dancing back and forth a little and raising her hands again. She feints right before landing a sharp jab to his left side, and he lets out a surprised oof, grabbing ahold of his ribs.

She grins unrepentantly, putting on a heavy Brooklyn accent, “What d’ya think, jerk? Do ya need another example?”

Bucky narrows his eyes and sends her a slow, smoldering smile—he’s got her number now. She can punch, and she faked him out, but he’d only be fooled once. He wasn’t gonna underestimate his girl again.

“Try it again—this time really mean it,” he taunts, as Stevie lets out an exasperated sigh from the sofa.

She comes in swinging.

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10am

He lays on the couch with his head in Steve’s lap, ice pack on his eye.

He’s not actually sure how she managed to hit him in the eye at all—she’s so much shorter than him.

She sorta jumped and swung at the same time?

It happened very quickly.

Darcy flutters her hands around his face, “Oh, god—I’m so sorry—you just made me so mad!”

She huffs, sitting on the floor by his friend’s feet and leaning back against his knees, without a trace of the split lip she’d gotten when he’d accidentally elbowed her during their scuffle.
He’d split her lip and it was gone in a less than a minute.

He’d been so stunned she’d managed to get the drop on him and socked him in the eye.

Bucky whines a little when Steve ceases stroking his hair and lays his hand on Darcy’s head instead. She hums, tilting her head back.

“Shouldn’ta teased her, jerk,” Steve mutters.

“Eh—talkin’ trash is a part of boxing, punk,” he grumbles, wincing slightly as he shifts the ice pack.

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Sunday, November 16, 1941

Darcy glances up from her book at Will, who is seated on the other end of the sofa, scribbling away on some blueprints he has spread over his lap. He flicks the pages of one of the two open books he has resting on the arm of the sofa, running a finger down the page before nodding to himself and resuming his scribbling.

She wiggles her toes under the edge of his thigh, she’d tucked her feet there after resting her head at the opposite end of the sofa.

He absently wraps his fingers around her ankle after she pokes him with her toe.

“Something wrong?” he mumbles around the pencil he’s gripping between his teeth as he flicks through the books again.

“I got Bucky to teach me a little boxing yesterday,” she says.

He turns towards her, pulling the pencil out of his mouth, “Oh?”

“Yeah—I gave him a black eye,” she says.

He smirks, “How’d that happen?”

“Oh—he made me mad, talking tough— and he accidentally elbowed me in the mouth,” he looks alarmed and she rushes to say, “my fault, kinda walked into it.”

She twists a lock of hair around her finger, “So here’s the thing—he split my lip good, and it healed up in less than a minute.”

Will’s eyes widen.

“That’s fast—faster than ever,” he says.

“I know—we never got around to testing it but I think I can confidently say my healing factor has increased.”

“Hmmmm,” Will says, distractedly, his thinking face on.

“So—uh—anything else different?”
“Well, I can’t really tell about my strength or senses, because I use those things every day and don’t really notice the incremental changes,” she says, “but I do know my hair and nails need to be trimmed more often, and—uh—I can hear everything up here when I’m down at Steve and Bucky’s—everything in the building if I really focus.”

Will taps his pencil against his notepad a few times, his brow wrinkled in contemplation. A blush steals up his neck and he clears his throat.

“So—when me and Tony are—” he starts.

“Canoodling?” she smirks.

“Uh—yeah,” he says, rubbing his hand over his face before grinning at her ruefully.

“I’ve learned to ignore it—mostly,” she says.

“Oh, good,” he says weakly.

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Wednesday November 19, 1941

Darcy nudges open the door to the basement lab at 3:30 pm, carrying a cafeteria tray with a sandwich and a slice of cherry pie on it.

She’s dismayed to find Dr. Erskine looking the worse for wear, eyes manic and red-rimmed and his clothes and hair a rumpled mess. He’s hunched at his workbench, writing furiously and muttering in barely intelligible German. She walks over, sets the tray beside him and glances at the cages lined up on the desktop—three rats, all dead, all with varying degrees of mutation.

She sighs, he is so close to isolating whatever it is that created such a strong healing factor in the various disease survivors she’d helped track down.

She gently touches his shoulder and he jolts, surprised as he always is when he’s deep in his work.

“Ah—good day, Meine Liebste. What have you brought me?” he says.

“A little something—late lunch, early dinner, whichever,” she says nudging the tray closer.

“You are too kind,” he says, running a hand through his hair and standing to walk to the sink to wash his hands before returning to sit.

He picks up the sandwich, taking a big bite, exclaiming, “Roast beef! My favorite!” and hums as he chews.

She asks, “How long since you last ate?”

His eyes roam around the room, noting the disarray and his scattered notes, “Yesterday, maybe?”

She raises an eyebrow, “and when did you last sleep?” she says in a chiding tone, sending a pointed look towards the hospital bed she’d finagled to get down here.
If the man wouldn’t go home to rest, he could at least lay down occasionally during his work binges.

“Oh—I don’t know. Don’t fuss,” he grumbles, focusing on making notations to his charts as he finishes the sandwich.

She takes a closer look at the dead rats as he digs into the pie, humming a little tune under his breath as he chews.

One of the rats looks less mutated than the other two, almost normal, actually. She points to it, “that one doesn’t look too bad, at least externally. What happened?”

“Same as usual—tumors, though the last sample of serum seems to stop the growth from going as far or as fast as these others did,” he says, pointing out the other rats, “still, it wasn’t enough to save it’s life,” he pauses, lifting his glasses to rub his eyes, “Mein Gott! I feel I am close to a breakthrough—I just need to keep working. Perhaps the samples I will be getting early next week will yield the answers I seek.”

Darcy’s mind races. This serum could change the world—cure cancer, genetic deformities—everything.

*What could it do for Steve?*

Now that she’s worked with Erskine for a while, she is confident his intentions are good.

He wants to help people.

And she can’t help but wonder what he could do with *her* blood.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Some translations—

Danke— Thanks
Sehr Gut— very good
Meine Leibste— my dear
Sprechen sie Deutsch—do you speak German?

Also, there was an actual series of Tijuana bibles featuring the Fuller Brush man.

Let me know what you thought! Your comments and kudos brighten my day and encourage me to keep writing!
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Bucky is going to hell. Steve and Darcy are along for the ride. NSFW.

Chapter Notes

Again—unbetad. Please pardon any and all errors, for I am an amateur writer.

All French used in this story courtesy of google translate—please forgive me gentle reader if I’m murdering your native tongue.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, November 23, 1941

12:30 pm

Bucky sits in the pew at Our Lady of Angels with Darcy on one side of him and Steve on the other.

He’s amusing himself by occasionally leaning over and dirty talking in Steve’s ear, watching him squirm and turn progressively more red, keeping his heavy bible pressed firmly in his lap.

The added bonus? Darcy is just as stirred up (though maybe not quite as red) because she can hear everything he says.

Fortunately, Ma and Becca are seated in the pew in front of them or the jig would be up. Ma’s not above twisting his ear if she thinks he’s up to mischief.

Also fortunate— Father Mike is feeling particularly passionate today—and is quite loud.

Maybe he’s going to hell, but he cannot bring himself to care at the moment.

He leans in and whispers to Steve, “I’m gonna put my mouth all over you when we get home—get ya good and ready for our girl.”

Steve glares heatedly at him and clears his throat, trying in vain to focus on the sermon as Bucky smirks wickedly at him.

Darcy huffs, leans into his side and breathes, “stop tormenting Steve or I’ll tie you to a chair when we get home and make you watch Stevie and I work each other over—with nothing at all for you.”

Bucky’s cock jumps at the thought—he has no doubt she’d do it too.

His girl is inventive and strong, he bets she can tie a mean knot.

Five minutes pass as he loses himself to that fantasy, eventually pressing his bible into his lap to hide
the erection tenting his pants.

_Oh—he’s going to hell for certain._

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5pm

Darcy heads down the stairs from her apartment to Steve and Bucky’s after she changes out of her church clothes and freshens up.

Dinner with Bucky’s ma and sister had gone well—they’d made a habit of joining them for church and a meal nearly every Sunday since Bucky had introduced her to his family.

Mrs. Barnes (call me Ma Barnes, dear) has been warm and welcoming, making her feel at home. If she sometimes makes pointed comments about marriage and grandchildren—Darcy is good at redirecting the conversation and Bucky straight up tells her to knock it off.

Becca is an unexpected joy.

Darcy never really had anyone to do “girl things” with except for Mama and even then, it was more practical things, like sewing or cooking. Becca uses her significant charm to wheedle Darcy into sitting in her room to gossip about boys, the mean girls at school, and the latest fashions all while doing each other’s nails or hair.

It’s fun.

The only thing that’s hard is pretending Steve is just her friend.

Mrs. Barnes’ sharp eyes follow their interactions and they are careful not to touch too often, keeping it friendly but not overly affectionate and she feels bad keeping Steve a secret from Bucky’s mother, he deserves more and she’s been gracious to her—even invited her and Will for Thanksgiving later this week.

It isn’t her place to tell her about the three of them though.

Bucky feels the pressure of pretending too, she’s sure, because he often surreptitiously stakes a claim on Steve—often at the most inopportune times, like at church today.

She sighs.

Maybe someday they’ll tell Bucky’s ma about Steve, but she doesn’t think Bucky wants to do it anytime soon.

The soft moan and heavy breathing she heard while descending the stairs is followed by more such noises as she unlocks the door with the key Bucky had given her, prompting her to close and lock it behind her quickly.

_No need to shock the neighbors after all._

She toes off her shoes, walking on silent stocking feet to peek around the partition before coming around it to lean against the wall.
It looks like her fellas had been changing out of their church clothes when they’d gotten sidetracked—Steve is still in his undershirt and dress pants, suspenders dangling around his waist, but Bucky is down to his undershirt and boxers, his shirt and pants neatly folded on the dresser.

Bucky is sitting on the edge of the bed with Steve standing between his knees, his hands wrapped in his friend’s blond hair as they kiss, completely absorbed in one another.

Steve pulls back, his lips trailing along Bucky’s jaw, muttering, “Jerk—teasing me in church—lookin’ at me like that all through supper—”

Bucky grunts, his eyes closed and head tilted back as Steve nips the side of his neck.

“Tryin’ to mark me up, punk?” he gasps.

Steve doesn’t answer, just thrusts his hands into Bucky’s hair, and holds him still, sucking at the bite. After a moment, pulls back, murmuring, “Love ya, jerk.”

Bucky murmurs, “not as much as I love you,” and cracks his eyes open, silvery blue eyes focusing on her leaning against the wall.

“Doll—why’re ya way over there?” he rasps as Stevie works his way down to juncture of his neck and shoulder, pressing a kiss there before turning to look at Darcy too.

“I was enjoying the show,” she says, smiling slow as she reaches behind her to unzip her dress.

Their eyes are on her, silvery and sky blue, as she pushes the sleeves down her arms and shimmies her hips a little, letting her dress drop to the floor before stepping out of it towards the bed.

She stops behind Steve, wrapping her arms around his waist and pressing herself to his back, her hands sliding around beneath his undershirt to stroke the soft skin of his belly. He shivers as she whispers in his ear, “I think Bucky deserves a little punishment for teasing you so much today, don’t you?”

Steve nods in agreement, stepping back to unbutton his pants and drop them on the floor before the two of them strip a willing Bucky out of the rest of his clothes and push him back on the bed.

Darcy kneels on one side of him, still clad in her bra, panties, garter belt, and stockings and Steve kneels on the other, in his undershirt and shorts.

She raises her eyebrow at Steve, “So how do we do this?”

Steve’s blue eyes shine with heated devilry, “Slow.”

Steve kneels at Bucky’s feet while Darcy throws one leg over his friend’s waist and sits just above his cock, leaning forward to hold his hands against the pillows as she kisses him.

From Steve’s vantage point, he can see Bucky’s twitching cock, the pale skin of her back, the nip of her waist, and the light blue satin of her panties stretched tight over her heart shaped ass.

His eyes trace over her stocking clad legs and he twitches a bit himself.
He slowly slides his hands up Bucky’s legs, cataloguing the feeling of his friend’s hard calf muscles and the slightly coarse texture of his leg hair crinkling against his palms.

He pauses at his knees, pushing Bucky’s legs apart so he can wiggle between them, and lays on his belly, tracing his mouth over his friend’s sensitive inner thigh, licking a slow circle mid-way between his knee and groin as Bucky shivers and moans into Darcy’s mouth.

He licks his lips before lightly sinking his teeth in, starting a pattern of nibbling then licking and sucking the bite as he slowly moves up Bucky’s thigh. He tongues the crease of his thigh, nudging his nose against his balls, and grins against Bucky’s skin as he reflexively thrusts his hips and Darcy chides, “Stay still—or we’ll stop.”

Bucky groans, “Doll—“ and grunts, “Jesus!” as Steve grazes over his cock, teasing, “Not my name, jerk,” before he starts licking and nibbling down his other thigh.

After he slowly works his way down and then up his friend’s other leg, he traces the fingers of both hands up and down the crease where his thighs meet his groin, drawing closer to his balls with each pass until he finally strokes over them, gently cupping them in one hand and tugging.

Bucky grunts, his abdominal muscles tensing with his need to move.

Darcy climbs off of Bucky and says, “Keep your hands here and stay still, mister,” before she leans forward to circle his nipple with her tongue.

Steve looks up the length of Bucky’s body, gently tugging his balls again. His friend’s hands clench into fists but stay rooted to the pillow on either side of his head, his eyes closed and head tilted back, teeth biting into his kiss swollen bottom lip.

Darcy sucks at Bucky’s nipple, her head turned to stare at Steve, her pupils blown wide with arousal. He smirks and leans forward, slowly licking Bucky’s cock from root to tip, holding her gaze as he circles around the thick head before slowly licking back down.

Bucky shudders, sweat starting to bead on his forehead and his cock dripping as Darcy shifts to his other nipple, alternating circling it slowly with her tongue and sucking it into her mouth. Steve watches, and every time she closes her lips around his friend’s nipple he does the same with his cock, sucking the tip like a lollipop and swirling his tongue around it before he pulls off again.

Bucky growls in frustration as Darcy congratulates, “you’re getting really good at that, Stevie.”

“Practice, practice,” he sing-songs, taking just the head into his mouth again.

She kisses, nips, and licks her way down Bucky’s muscled abdomen, slowing to a stop at his bellybutton to lick him there.

Bucky whines, his hips jerking minutely in aborted thrusts, mindful of Darcy’s directive.

She moves closer, licking Bucky’s cock slowly from the base til they are working in tandem to drive him crazy.

At one point their lips meet in the middle and Steve pauses, pulling off of Bucky wrap a hand in Darcy’s hair and the other around her shoulder, tugging her closer and into a deep kiss, their tongues tangling together and Bucky’s flavor on their lips.

Bucky groans and Steve pulls back from Darcy and whispers, “Ya think he’s had enough?”
She purrs, “Mmm—maybe.”

She encircles Bucky’s cock with her fingers and gently tugs, adding a mean little twist on the upward stroke before sliding down again.

Bucky hisses, “*Please* baby, can I move yet?”

She raises an eyebrow at Steve and he shrugs.

She smiles, and leans forward to kiss him again before she glances at Bucky, “Okay—you’ve served your time.”

Steve smirks and pushes Darcy onto her back next to Bucky, following her down and pressing his lips to hers in an open mouthed kiss.

Bucky wastes no time, nudging him to lay on one side of Darcy so he can take the other. She follows Steve over, turning onto her side, her lips still caressing his and her hands in his hair.

She breaks their kiss, tilting her head back and gasping as Bucky slides a hand over her hip and into her panties, sending him a wicked smirk over her shoulder as her hips rock against his hand.

Steve sucks a trail down her neck and nuzzles into her cleavage as he works a hand behind her to unclasp her bra, after a few moments of struggling with it he gets it off of her, tossing it over his shoulder and leaning forward to lick around her nipples.

She trembles slightly, arching into his mouth, and Bucky moans low as her ass presses against him.

Steve focuses on Darcy’s little gasps and moans, ratcheting up her arousal with licks and sucks and nibbles as Bucky’s fingers work between her thighs. She slides her hand up the back of his undershirt and tugs at it in frustration and he chuckles, briefly separating from her to pull it over his head and throw it behind him.

She sighs when he leans forward to kiss her again, her soft breasts pressed against his chest. After a moment her fingers wander from his shoulder down his spine, leaving goosebumps in their wake as she slides her fingers beneath the waistband of his shorts, stroking over the curve of his ass.

She idles there, stroking and squeezing, gently scoring his flesh with her nails as Bucky tugs at her panties, slipping them over her hips and off.

Steve says hoarsely, “leave the stockings, Buck,” as she slides her hand between them to slowly stroke his cock.

Bucky grunts in affirmation, pressing behind Darcy and pulling her leg up and over his hip. “Ready, doll?” he murmurs and she moans, “*God*—yes.”

Her breath hitches and her hand clenches around him as Bucky slowly sinks into her.

Steve leans back slightly, pushing her leg a little higher on Bucky’s hip to view his friend’s cock slowly slipping in and out of her, her fingers tightening around his own cock with every thrust.

Bucky’s fingers are still rubbing between her legs and Darcy has begun to emit a continuous low keen, interspersed with her babbling *yes, yes, yes* and *oh god, just like that.*

Steve leans forward to kiss her, and she hums against his lips, her tongue flicking over the bottom one before sucking it into her mouth. Her hand slides around his neck, anchors in the hair at the nape
of it as her other one glides up and down his cock, squeezing and twisting on the upstroke until he shudders in pleasure.

“Slow down Darce—“ he gasps against her lips, “not yet—wanna come in you.”

She nods, gentling her hands and releasing him, and he wiggles down to wrap his lips around her nipple and sucks hard, rolling the other one between his thumb and forefinger.

The sound of Bucky’s hips smacking into Darcy’s ass is suddenly loud and insistent, the springs of the bed squeaking and the soft expanse of her breasts jiggling against Steve’s cheek as shockwaves from Bucky’s rapid thrusts reverberate through her.

“Come on, baby—“ his friend mutters and she arches her back, her head thrown back against Bucky’s shoulder and shudders hard, panting and uttering a drawn out moan, her nails digging hard into Steve’s shoulder as she comes.

Bucky follows soon after with an unintelligible shout of pleasure, his fingertips digging into Darcy’s ample hips as he buries himself inside her as deep as possible.

Steve gently kisses each of Darcy’s breasts before nuzzling his cheek next to hers and breathing in her scent.

She gently strokes his shoulders, murmuring apologetically, “Sorry Stevie—I marked you up a little.”

“S’ok, Darce. I like it,” he says.

*He does.*

He likes all the marks she and Bucky leave on him. It’s proof that it happened, that they want him as much as he wants them.

Bucky reaches around Darcy to card his fingers through Steve’s hair and murmurs, “if this is what I get for teasin’ ya in church—I ain’t stoppin’.”

Darcy snickers and soon after Bucky grumbles, “Aww, no,” and Steve snorts, knowing this signals Bucky slipping out of Darcy, an event that always causes complaint.

“Maybe we shoulda left him hangin’, Darce,” he says, pulling Darcy closer to him as Bucky rolls over to grab his shirt from the floor.

“Maybe—I don’t think it’s fair he got to finish when you haven’t,” she says, reaching between them to stroke his still hard cock.

“My choice— I know how I—um—wanna do it,” he stammers.

Her fingers still on his cock and she raises an eyebrow in silent inquiry.

“I want ya on top, so I can see everything,” he says, his fingers tracing over her stocking clad leg and along her garter.

Some devil in him makes him pull back on the garter, snapping it against her thigh and she jumps a little, sending him a heated look as he rubs his finger lightly over the soft skin there.

She just smiles slow and cups his face in both hands to gently kiss him.

Bucky finishes wiping himself down with his undershirt and goes to hand it to her but Steve says,
“leave it—gonna get messy again anyway,” and his friend shrugs, tossing it over the side of the bed and settling on his side to watch.

Darcy sits up and throws her leg over him, straddling and sitting on his lap.

It’s his favorite position—even though he has less control, it exerts him less so he doesn’t get as winded.

And there’s the added bonus of the view.

She rubs the slick furrow between her thighs over his cock, and he imagines the liquid warmth slicking his flesh is a combination of Bucky’s and her release, shivering with the jolt of heat that flashes through him at the thought.

He looks up at her shining blue eyes; her dark curls mussed, face flushed, and lips kiss swollen, and thinks she looks most beautiful this way. He tracks the soft sway of her breasts as she leans down, her hands braced on the bed next to his chest and closes his eyes as she kisses him, licking into his mouth while her hips continue to rock against him.

After a minute he whines in frustration, opening his eyes as she pulls back, grinning.

“Want something?” she teases, sliding her hips back, then forward again, making his breath stutter in his chest.

Oh, just everything.

Just this, all the time.

“Inside— please,” he says.

He’s not ashamed to plead a little, his girl likes to play but she always gives him what he wants eventually.

She bites her lip, her gaze unwavering on him as she rises to her knees, one hand pressed to the center of his chest for balance and the other holding him in position as she slowly lowers herself onto him.

He gasps, helpless with pleasure for a moment as her tight heat clenches around him. It’s always like this—amazing, the sensation overwhelming and more than he ever thought he’d have. He grips one side of her waist and flexes his hips, watching the long line of her neck as her eyes close and her head tilts back.

He loses himself in the heat and pleasure of her as she rocks her hips back and forth, his heart pounding in his chest and feeling so damn alive it nearly brings him to tears.

Something of his struggle must show on his face, because Bucky moves closer, pressing against his side and wrapping an arm around him. Darcy’s eyes pop open, looking down the curved line of her body at them, her lips quirking into a tremulous smile.

“Okay there, Stevie?” she says, her husky voice slightly ragged.

“Mmmm—yeah, just feels so good Darce—so much,” he stammers, and Bucky presses his lips to his shoulder, resting his hand over his pounding heart.

“Let me know if it’s too much,” she says, leaning forward to kiss him again and then turning her
head to kiss Bucky as well.

She sits up, leaning back and resting her hands on his thighs, “Watch,” she orders, lifting up slightly on her knees and dropping down again onto him, her breasts bouncing slightly with the impact.

He glances at Bucky, whose eyes are riveted on Darcy, and follows his line of sight to witness the wet slide of his cock in and out of her.

She twitches her hips, rocking back and forth and moaning low, the arch of her body showcasing the perfect pale globes of her breasts topped by the tight furl of her pink nipples.

Bucky reaches between them, circling his finger over her clit and she hisses, her head jerking forward to watch Bucky’s fingers for a moment before she throws her head back again and focuses on her own pleasure, her eyes screwed shut and her bottom lip clamped between her teeth as her hips churn against him.

Steve feels like he’s running a marathon, the steadily ratcheting power of his impending orgasm making his heart race and breath grow short.

He watches Darcy lean back further onto her hands, giving Bucky more room to work his fingers over her clit and feels her tightening around him more and more as she rocks her hips faster against Bucky’s fingers and his cock.

For his part, he follows her rhythm, thrusting up into her each time her hips rock forward.

Just when he thinks he cannot hold on another second she trembles, a beautiful pink flush spreading from her cheeks all the way down her chest as her muscles lock around him, clamping down on him as she shakes and moans her release above him.

He thrusts his cock into her hard, his entire being focused on the intense sensation at the point where their bodies connect. He feels dizzy, almost lightheaded when he finally shudders, gripping her hips to pull her tightly against him.

She folds forward onto him, the movement creating a little aftershock of sensation that raises goosebumps along his arms, and nuzzles her face into his neck and sighs, her warm body blanketing his.

Bucky scoots closer, resting his forehead against the side of Steve’s head and wrapping his arm around Darcy’s back next to his.

They lay quietly together like this for a few minutes, drifting in post coital relaxation.

Eventually—sadly—he softens enough to slip out of Darcy and she rolls off of him towards Bucky, who grabs his undershirt from the floor again to help her clean up.

He’s tired.

He turns on his side and closes his eyes, snuggling into the pillow. The last thing he remembers is the blankets being pulled up around his shoulders and cracking his eyes open enough to blearily mumble, “love you” as Darcy tucks them around him.
Darcy watches Steve’s eyes drift closed as his body relaxes into sleep.

Her eyes trace over his still face, the way his long eyelashes look like dark gold fans on his flushed cheeks and how the frown line between his brows has smoothed out in his unconscious state.

She gently runs a finger over that place between his brows, tracing the line of his nose before gently pressing it against his lips. They turn up in a slight smile against her fingertip and she sighs—*so adorable*.

After a moment, she turns over to face Bucky, who’s tucked up on her other side, his brown hair tousled and a soft expression on his face. They lay close together, sharing the same pillow.

He strokes a calloused finger over her cheekbone to her chin, lifting it to press a gentle kiss to her lips.

He whispers, “Tired, doll?”

“Nah, it’s early. I was thinking of reading in bed—maybe I’ll get up in a while to clean up and make a snack.”

It’s something they do.

She and Bucky often laze away a naked hour or two after sex reading books and talking softly to each other while Stevie rests.

His eyes light up at the mention of a snack and she grins, nudging his shoulder, “does this mean you aren’t sleepy either?”

“Like ya said, it’s early—punks lungs have been givin’ him trouble the last few days, probably why he’s so tired,” he says.

She frowns, the colder weather does seem to take a toll on Steve.

She rests her forehead against Bucky’s shoulder for a moment, making an effort to push her negative thoughts away.

Steve is so much better than when she first met him.

*The nebulizer helps.*

*Maybe he won’t get sick this winter.*

*Maybe Dr. Erskine’s research will help people like Stevie…*

Her line of thinking is interrupted when Bucky shifts to reach for the stack of books on the nightstand, “Which one are ya readin’,” he says, sifting through the pile.

“‘Terre des Hommes’ by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,” she says.

He glances at it, his expression dubious as he hands it to her before grabbing the newer Chandler novel he’s been reading.

“Is that French?” he asks.
“Yeah,” she says, idly flicking through the pages to find her place.

He raises an eyebrow, looking over the page she settles on, “Since when do you read French?” he asks.

“Since Helene started teaching me a couple of weeks ago,” she replies.

Bucky smirks, “Yeah? Say something to me in French,” he says.

She looks into his eyes, “Je t’aime. Je veux vivre avec vous et faire l’amour avec vous tous mes jours.”

Bucky’s silvery eyes widen, “What’d ya say?”

“I love you. I want to live with you and make love with you for all of my days,” she whispers, her face feeling hot.

Bucky swallows and pulls her tight to his chest.

“Aw, doll—I love you too,” he says, his low voice rumbling against her ear.

She rests her head against his chest, listening to his steady heartbeat.

After a moment he asks, “How do you say “I love you” again?”

“Je t’aime,” she says.

He pulls back a little, gazing into her eyes.

“Je t’aime,” he whispers, and leans in to press his lips to hers.

Chapter End Notes

“Terre des Hommes” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the writer of “The Little Prince.” A story he wrote about his experiences as an airmail carrier for Aeropostale.

And MORE SEX. I think I have a problem. Help.

Up next, Thanksgiving!

Please comment if you enjoyed the frankly smutty contents of this sadly gratuitous chapter. Please leave kudos if you haven’t already, thanks!
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Thanksgiving at the Barnes house. Ma Barnes is nobody’s fool.

Chapter Notes

Quick chapter—should of been part of the last one but it got too lengthy.

You’ll be seeing the next one sooner than next week!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 25

Wednesday, November 26, 1941

Bucky focuses on the apple in his hand, carefully sliding the paring knife under the red skin and peeling it away in a spiral.

He crows, “Aha!” when he manages to remove it in one continuous piece, holding the long spiral of apple skin aloft in triumph before handing the peeled apple across the table to Steve.

His friend snorts, “I guess ya showed that apple,” before he methodically cuts away the flesh from the core and slices it, putting the pieces into a big bowl between them.

Darcy turns from the counter where she’s rolling out pie crust, “You guys are getting pretty good at that,” she says, observing the steadily filling bowl of apple slices.

“You betcha, doll— practically professionals, right Stevie?” he says, carefully peeling another apple.

“Sure. Professional apple peelers and slicers—that’s us alright,” Steve says, rolling his eyes and waiting for Bucky to finish peeling so he could start slicing again. “Maybe we oughta work on our speed, though.”
Darcy chuckles, laying the pie crusts over the waiting pie tins, pressing them firmly and pricking the bottoms with a fork. Bucky watches with interest as she lays parchment paper over the uncooked crusts and pours a cup full of uncooked beans in each one before sliding them into the oven and setting the timer.

“Why the beans, Darce?” he asks.

“Weighs down the crusts while they pre-bake so they don’t puff up—say, haven’t you ever watched your ma bake?” she says.

“Nah—Ma baked mostly holidays and such and she wanted Becca out from underfoot. It was my job to keep her occupied,” he says.

“Huh. Mama loved to bake—probably more than just cooking regular everyday stuff. I think I got Will to be my friend because of the cookies I shared from my lunch,” she says, her expression growing sad and distant as she fills the sink with hot water and starts washing the dishes.

Steve glances at him and pushes his chair back and walks to Darcy, wrapping his arms around her waist and nuzzling his nose into her hair. She leans against him with a sigh.

“I miss her, you know? It’s hard with the holidays—thinking about how it used to be,” she says quietly.

“I know, Darce—I miss my ma every day. It’ll get easier, though,” Steve says.

Bucky finishes peeling the apple and lays the knife down, standing to walk over to the sink.

He leans into her side, picks up the dish towel, and starts drying the dishes Darcy has already placed in the rinse water, holding out his hand for the mixing bowl after she washes it.

“I’m glad I have the two of you—and your ma inviting Will and I over tomorrow for Thanksgiving is a blessing. Bucky, I’m so grateful, but I can’t help but be sad, too.” she says in a small voice.
Bucky dries his hands and turns to wrap his arms around her, and by extension, Steve, who is still pressed against her back with his arms around her waist.

She burrows her face into his chest and sighs.

“It’s okay to be sad, Darce,” Steve says softly.

Bucky nods against the top of her head, “I remember how hard the holidays were after Da died—it took a few years for us to let go of the idea that things would get back to how they used to be. It will never be the same, but we made new traditions for our family that fit with the old ones.”

Darcy tilts her head back, her blue eyes are glassy with unshed tears.

“Thank you—I know it will be hard, but I remember everything Mama and Pop did for me, all the things they taught me,” she wipes her hand across her eyes and sniffs, “I’ll carry those memories with me and they will never truly be gone.”

He kisses her gently on her forehead, her nose, then more lingeringly on her lips. She leans into the kiss for a moment before pulling away to bury her face in his neck, her damp cheek against his skin.

He tightens his arms around her and feels Steve doing the same and after a few moments she lifts her head, straightens her spine, and wipes a hand across her eyes again, “Okay, why don’t you fellas finish up with those apples? We have pies to make!”

They get back to work.

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Thanksgiving Day

November, 27, 1941

Darcy straightens the hem of her red dress after she steps out of the cab, turning back to grab the box containing the apple pies from Steve’s lap.
Will gets out of the passenger side front seat of the car, dressed in his Sunday best and holding a bouquet of flowers, looking cool and collected to the untrained eye but somewhat nervous to hers. She hooks her arm through his and gives it a reassuring squeeze as Bucky pays the cabbie and Steve steps out to to join them.

After a moment, Bucky hops out of the car, wishing the cabbie a happy Thanksgiving after handing him the fare. The cabbie, spying his extra large holiday tip says, “Gee thanks, mister!” calling, “Happy Thanksgiving folks!” before he pulls away from the curb.

Bucky walks over to Darcy, looping his arm around her shoulders, “Shall we?” he says leading them up the steps to the brownstone row house where he’d grown up.

Bucky’s mother and father had bought the narrow two story house just before he was born and it was fairly spacious, with three bedrooms, front parlor, living room, kitchen, dining room and bath. Bucky told her it was fortunate they’d been able to pay it off before his father had died, as they would have likely been unable to afford to rent such a place with Bucky’s income and the little his mother was able to make working in a dress shop as a seamstress.

Money is always tight, but they have a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Darcy notes the twitch of a lace curtain on the second floor before hearing Becca shouting at Mrs. Barnes, “Ma, they’re here! Wait til ya get a load of Darcy’s brother—hubba, hubba!”

Bucky quirks an eyebrow at Darcy’s smirk and her eyes twinkle with amusement hearing Becca thundering down the stairs with Mrs. Barnes following more sedately behind her, admonishing, “Rebecca Jane Barnes! Stop acting like a hooligan!” as she jumps the last couple of steps to run to the front door.

Darcy leans into Bucky whispering, “and 3, 2, 1—” just before Becca swings the door open, leaning nonchalantly against the door frame.

“Oh—hello,” she says casually, her cheeks pink and slightly out of breath from her rush to greet them.

Her studied nonchalance is ruined by Mrs. Barnes arriving behind her and tugging on her arm, “Goodness gracious, don’t block the door, let them in Rebecca.”
Becca rolls her dark eyes and says, “Come in,” backing away from the doorway.

Bucky ruffles his sisters hair as they pass her to enter the house, leaving her squawking in indignation as she pats at her hair self-consciously.

Darcy smiles, “Happy Thanksgiving, Becca, Ma Barnes,” she looks over her shoulder, and pulls Will forward by the hand, “This is my brother, Will.”

Will smiles winningly and says, “Thank you for inviting me for Thanksgiving, Mrs. Barnes,” her eyes light up as he hands her the flowers, “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you—Darcy has had nothing but good things to say about Bucky’s family.”

He pushes an errant lock of copper hair back from his forehead and Becca looks a little starstruck.

Mrs. Barnes brings the bouquet to her nose for a sniff and smiles, saying, “You are very welcome Will, call me Ma Barnes, all of Bucky’s friends do,” she winks before turning to greet Darcy, exclaiming over the pies before greeting Bucky and Steve in turn.

A little while later, Darcy finds herself in the kitchen peeling potatoes with Becca at the kitchen table.

Darcy watches as the older woman pulls the roasting pan from the oven and lifts the lid to baste the turkey before returning it again.

She says, “Turkey’s almost done, you girls got the potatoes ready?”

They affirm and Darcy stands, the metal colander full of potato chunks in her hands. She carries it over to the sink and rinses them before handing it off to Mrs. Barnes who pours the potatoes into a pot and covers them with water, placing it on the stovetop.

“Well, that oughta do it for now—Rebecca dear, could you get James to help set the table? Tell him to use the good china please, it won’t take too long for these potatoes to cook and everything else is pretty much finished.”
“Sure,” she says, happily skipping out of the kitchen, no doubt to join the boys in the card game they’ve started in the next room.

Darcy automatically fills one side of the sink with hot water and soap, the other with rinse water, and starts to wash the dishes they’ve dirtied while preparing the food. Mrs. Barnes grabs a dish towel, pulling the dishes out of the rinse water to dry.

She’s absently scrubbing a mixing bowl when the older woman breaks their companionable silence, saying, “I meant what I said to your brother, dear.”

Darcy dips the bowl into the rinse water, glancing at her. “Which part?” she says.

A small smile curls her mouth, “That you’re good for James. He’s settled down—” Darcy raises an eyebrow in question, “after his father died he got so wild, I was worried he’d get someone he didn’t actually care for in the family way. I know my boy, he’d have married the girl if that happened and been unhappy for the rest of his life.”

Darcy nods. Bucky would marry any girl he got pregnant, regardless of his own feelings about the matter, he would.

He’s not the kind of man to run away from his responsibilities.

“I love him, you know,” Darcy says softly.

“Oh, my dear—anyone can see that. The two of you fairly glow whenever you look at each other,” she says.

Darcy smiles, ducking her head and focusing on washing the utensils left in the soapy water.

She’s handing the last spoon to Mrs. Barnes when she lays her hand on Darcy’s wrist and says, “What I can’t figure out is why Steven lights up the same way—when he looks at you, and when he looks at James,” she pauses, raising an eyebrow, “and the two of you look at him that way too.”

Darcy drops the spoon.
Flustered, she bends to pick it up, standing to swish it in the soapy water and slowly rewash it.

Glancing at Mrs. Barnes she says, “Well, you know Bucky and Steve love each other—they’ve been best friends forever and Steve has been a very good friend to me too.”

The older woman sighs, exasperated.

“Whatever you say, dear.”

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Bucky’s in the dining room with Steve, setting the table when Darcy enters, holding a basket full of utensils and looking flustered.

She drops the basket on the table and places both hands on its surface, leaning forward to whisper yell, “Your mother thinks there’s something going on between the three of us and has been fishing for information for the last ten incredibly uncomfortable minutes!”

Steve snorts, suppressing a laugh, and Bucky reaches over to smack him in the back of the head.

“This isn’t funny, Stevie! I didn’t know what to do!” she continues, flapping her hands in front of her to cool her reddened cheeks.

Bucky walks around the table to take her into his arms and she leans her head against his chest.

“Doll—Ma does this thing where she pretends to know something until you crack and tell her everything—which you didn’t do, right?” Bucky says, leaning back to look into her eyes.

“No, I didn’t. I told her you love Stevie because he’s been your best friend forever and that he is a good friend to me too.”
Steve smirks, “All true. I am the best kind of friend.”

Darcy can’t help but grin, her eyes twinkling as she looks at Steve, “You really are,” she sighs, “I didn’t really lie—I hate lying. I just didn’t tell what kind of friends we really are.”

Bucky kisses her cheek and says, “and what kind of friends are we?”

She purrs, “The kind who get naked and sweaty together.”

Steve chokes, laughing, “Also true.”

Bucky smiles, “I don’t think it will hurt Ma for us to keep that to ourselves.”

Darcy frowns, “I’m not actually worried about your ma, she’s really happy that you’re happy. I don’t know— this doesn’t feel fair to Steve.”

Steve comes around the table to stand next to them, “It’s okay, Darce, I agreed to do it this way,” he says.

Darcy pouts a little, “but do we have to keep us a secret forever?” she whispers.

Bucky rubs her back in circles, “Maybe not? I dunno. Ma wants me to be happy, but our relationship would probably make her worry.”

Steve says, “Besides, nobody else needs to know our business—doesn’t make us less real.”

Darcy steps back from Bucky, “Somebody’s coming—let’s finish getting the table ready.”

Later, when they say grace before dinner, Darcy sits between them holding each of their hands.

If she holds Steve’s hand a little longer than necessary, nobody seems to notice.
Steve laughs at Will’s mildly harassed expression as Becca works to get him to dance with her on the makeshift living room dance floor.

They’d settled there after dinner, Becca turning the radio on and Bucky immediately spinning Darcy into a dance when the music came on.

Will and Steve had pushed furniture out of the way to give them room to move and Mrs. Barnes sat in her favorite chair, clutching her teacup between her hands and tapping her foot to the music as she watched Bucky and Darcy spin in the center of the room, lost in each other.

“Come on, Will! I wanna dance too—don’tcha know how?” Becca prods.

Will rolls his eyes and finally stands, “Fine. Try to keep up, kid.”

Steve sits on the end of the sofa nearest to Mrs. Barnes and laughs out loud at Will’s beleaguered expression as Becca grins up at him, telling him to spin her again.

He glances at Mrs. Barnes, “Ma Barnes, would ya like to dance? Bucky and Darcy gave me some lessons, but I could always use the practice.”

The older woman grins, setting her teacup aside. “That would be lovely, Steven.”

He takes her hand and they manage a serviceable box step and Mrs. Barnes is patient with Steve’s occasional misstep.

When the song changes on the radio, Bucky cuts in, dancing a lively jig with his ma around the room as Steve takes a turn with Darcy, choosing a more sedate pace.

He loves the way he and Darcy fit together—Becca and Mrs. Barnes are both about his height, but Darcy is a couple inches shorter, and their bodies line up perfectly.
Her fingers absently comb through the hair at the nape of his neck as they turn around the small living room, gazing over his shoulder at her brother and Becca’s antics.

“Becca sure is a pistol,” she says, laughing as Will makes exasperated efforts to hold her at arms length.

“Always, has been—maybe you oughta rescue your brother for the next dance,” he says.

“Oh—I’m not worried, Will’s been dealing with interested females for most of his life,” she says.

Steve ponders the delicate balancing act Will must perform—keeping up the appearance of being interested in women without actually being interested. It seems like it’d be exhausting, and Will’s good looks make it a social constant. At least with Becca, he has the added excuse of her being so young, otherwise her little crush would be very awkward.

“Say, what’s Tony doing today, anyway?” he says.

“Family dinner. He’ll be coming over tonight—probably in a mood—his family tends to invite friends with single daughters in an effort to matchmake at most family functions.”

Steve frowns, “That must be hard.”

“It is. He’s the eldest, and the only son. His father expects him to carry on with the family business and people of their social circle seem focused on cementing their position with advantageous marriages,” she says.

“What about Will, though?” he says low.

Darcy looks at him, her expression sad.

“That is the question, isn’t it?” she whispers.
Much later, Darcy is snuggled between Bucky and Steve in the warm cocoon of their bed, the faint
glow from the street lights illuminating the room. Steve’s soft snores and Bucky’s measured
breathing are the closest layer of sound that surrounds her, further away, the ticking of the alarm
clock, the persistent drip of the kitchen sink, the creaking of the floorboards overhead.

Beyond that, the muttered conversation between Will and Tony in the apartment above them.

Tony is crying.

“They just keep pushing and pushing, Will. They invited two families from their social circle—
extraordinarily wealthy people whom my father would like to invest in his company—to dinner. Of
course they brought their lovely daughters, of course, ” he says bitterly, “God—I wish Doris was
there, we play the game together and it doesn’t hurt so badly.”

Her eyes fill with tears at the pain in his voice.

There is a long silence finally broken by Will, “What about Doris, love?”

“What d’ya mean?” slurs Tony, who obviously drank a bit too much this evening.

“You could—you could—get engaged,” Will stammers, continuing after an outraged sound from
Tony, “make it a long engagement—it would keep your family off your back.”

“We’ve talked about it, you know,” Tony says quietly, “it was before you, before she and Bess
became roommates.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah—it’s just—harder to pretend when you’re actually in love with someone else,” Tony says,
his voice breaking.
“Oh love,” Will says, “I know.”

Finally, as Darcy’s eyes are growing heavy with sleep, Tony says, “I love you—never doubt it,” his voice hoarse from crying.

Will says gently, “Never.”

Chapter End Notes

How’d ya like it? Feel free to drop me a comment or a kudo—makes my day and helps me write faster!
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Darcy makes a decision about helping Erskine. Steve gets sick again. Bucky and Steve attend an art class together—where they hear bad things have happened in far away places.

Chapter Notes

Second chapter in a week! We’re back to the usual schedule after this, posting Wednesday or Thursday weekly.

All medical jargon is courtesy of google or made up entirely. I’m pretty sure my nonsense ideas about Erskine’s serum and how it works wouldn’t stand up to scientific inquiry—but then again, neither would Marvel’s, lol.

Not beta’d, please forgive my errors unless they are so glaring it ruins your read. In that case, let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Monday, December 1, 1941

4pm

“Darcy, can you retrieve the latest blood samples from the hematology lab, please?” Dr. Erskine says as she enters the lab, hunched over his work table and scribbling in the margins of his notes.

“Hello to you too, Dr. Erskine,” she teases, leaning against the workbench to look at the latest test subjects.

At least the rats are still alive this time—but for how long?

The older man sits back, pushing his glasses up to rub tiredly at his eyes, “I’m sorry, Meine Liebste, I’m just frustrated. If only I could isolate whatever it is that triggers the immune system in some patients that is not there for others—why a precious few people are seemingly immune to disease while the majority grow ill or even die—“ he breaks off, resting his elbow on the table and leaning his forehead tiredly against his hand.
“Abraham,” she says gently.

“Yes,” he mutters.

“When did you last eat? Or sleep, for that matter?”

He rubs his hand through his hair distractedly, “Oh, I remember coffee some hours ago—I don’t know,” he says tiredly.

“Okay, how ‘bout this, I’m going to go get you something to eat from the cafeteria, and after you eat I want you to lay down,” he starts to protest but she cuts him off, “AND while you eat and take a little nap I’ll go get your samples and clean up this mess,” she says, waving her arm around the room at the flurry of papers scattered over various surfaces and the piles of discarded slides by the microscope.

He nods tiredly and she pats him gently on the shoulder.

He really is brilliant—but he forgets to take care of himself when he’s deep into his research.

“I’ll be back in a jiffy,” she says.

“Wait—you may as well remove the clean test tubes from the autoclave and take them with you when you go to pick up the samples,” he says.

“Are they still hot?” she says.

“Shouldn’t be, I ran it over an hour ago—“ he says.

She walks over to the autoclave and checks the temperature gauge—still quite warm.

“I’ll vent the top so they’ll be ready to go when I come back,” she says.
“Mmmhmm, “ he replies, absorbed in his notes again.

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As she stands in line in the cafeteria, picking up a plate of chipped beef on toast, a side of peas, and then a piece of apple pie for the doctor, she worries about him driving himself into the ground to create the serum.

She is torn.

All of her life she’s hidden what she can do, her “miracle” as Mama liked to call it. She thinks it’s been the right choice, only the few people that she trusts absolutely can know.

The fewer the better.

With Mama gone that number is down to 3–Will, Bucky, and Steve.

Pop never knew.

Dr. Brooks doesn’t know.

As people of science, she’d recognized their curiosity could have gotten her in trouble. Mama always said it was her secret to tell and left it at that.

But now, she thinks her blood could really help people.

Abraham recently told her the reason he started this serum research was because he’d once had a son.

A very sickly son, born premature and never strong, for whom he’d used every trick he knew to aid his survival, but still the boy had died when a common cold turned to pneumonia.
The doctor had looked at her with sad eyes.

“I am an old man and all of my family is gone. My son taken by illness, my wife murdered by the Nazis. All I have left is this—my work. I will make this serum, and little boys like my son will live.”

She will help him.

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After dropping off the doctor’s food and picking up the clean test tubes, she walks up the stairs and down the hall to the hematology lab, slipping one of the tubes and a stopper into her pocket before she arrives.

The nurses, clerical workers, and doctors there have grown quite familiar with Darcy, since she visits often, dropping off orders from the E.R., picking up samples for Dr. Erskine, returning test tubes and so forth.

“Hey Mary,” she says, setting the rack of clean test tubes on the counter and resting her arms against it.

Mary sits at her desk just behind the counter, typing up labels for the various test tubes that get sent out of the lab.

“Hi Darcy,” the bubbly blonde replies, “what brings you down here?”

“Oh, Dr. Erskine wants me to pick up the latest samples that came over from the infectious disease ward,” she says, “and to drop these off,” she pushes the rack closer to her.

“Oh—sure. Gimme a minute,” she says, jumping up and grabbing the test tubes before heading through a pair of swinging doors behind her.

Darcy taps her foot, waiting patiently.
After a few minutes, Mary returns and sets the rack of new samples and the paperwork for each one on the counter. Darcy takes a moment to make sure the chart for each sample is present, matching the names at the top of each chart to the ones on each test tube before glancing up at Mary with a smile.

“Everything seems to be in order. Thanks,” she says.

“You’re welcome, Darcy! So how was your Thanksgiving?” Mary chirps.

“Oh—it was lovely, had dinner with my fella’s family. You?”

They chatter for a few minutes, Mary filling her in on seeing her sister for Thanksgiving, and how big her niece is getting, and tidbits about various other family members before Darcy apologetically cuts her off, “Gee Mary, I’d love to stay and chat longer, but the doctor is anxious to get started with these samples,” she says.

“Oh sure—back to the grindstone,” Mary says, rolling her eyes and returning to sit at the typewriter.

“Yes—” she says, stepping away from the counter, samples in hand, “see ya!” she calls over her shoulder as she walks quickly down the hallway.

She barely registers Mary’s response—her mind already turning over the charting information for each sample she carries.

By the time she arrives back to the lab, she’s narrowed her focus to one particular sample.

It belongs to a transient woman named June Smith who’d accompanied a friend to the hospital when she’d come down with a virulent case of influenza. She’d been nursing the woman as best she could and had eventually brought her in when her breathing had become so labored she feared for her life.

She herself had been checked over, showing a much milder case of the same illness and had continued to visit, her own rapid improvement contrasting with the other woman’s swift decline from the same illness.
The interesting thing about the transient woman was she’d been less healthy than the woman she’d accompanied to the hospital. Underweight, older, a heavy smoker, yet she’d come through the flu with very little trouble.

The most important thing to Darcy is the woman’s transient status—she is unlikely to be located in the future. They always have a few samples from people like this, as they are happy to give a sample for a free meal at the cafeteria.

She slips June’s blood sample into her pocket before she enters the lab.

She needn’t have worried though—Abraham is fast asleep in the hospital bed pushed against the far side of the lab, his gentle snores accompanied by the rustling and chattering sounds from the animals in their cages, and the whirring of the centrifuge.

After placing the rack of samples into the refrigeration unit, she grabs a syringe, measures out some anticoagulant into the empty test tube from her pocket, and shuts herself in the washroom attached to the lab.

She lays out her supplies along the bathroom counter—syringe, rubber tubing to tie off her arm, gauze, tape, the empty test tube, stopper, and the labeled blood sample.

She washes her hands, barely looking at herself in the mirror as she rolls up one sleeve of her dress as high as she can and ties the rubber tubing around her arm, using her teeth and one hand to pull it tight. She lowers the lid of the toilet seat and sits on it, clenching her fist to help the veins of her arm become more prominent.

After a deep breath, she reaches for the syringe. It is equipped with a 16 gauge needle, used for blood draws on the lab animals. It will do for her too.

She taps the blue vein in the crook of her arm, feeling the thrum of her heartbeat through her fingertips as she positions the syringe and winces slightly as it slips beneath her skin.

The shocking red of her blood rapidly filling the attached tube is mesmerizing.
Unfortunately, the flow stops too quickly—her body working to clot around the needle. She exhales, pulling the needle free and watching the hole in her skin seal behind it, a drop of blood on her skin the only sign of injury.

She takes a moment to inspect her arm, turning it so the light hits it—not a sign of injury.

_Hmmmm._

She repeats the process again to get enough to fill the test tube, capping it and gently shaking it so the blood and anticoagulant mix before she sets it aside.

She uses her fingernail to gently pry the label from the test tube holding June Smith’s sample and attaches it to her own blood sample.

Rising to stand next to the sink, she rolls her sleeve down and tips June Smith’s blood down the drain, turning the water on to rinse the crimson swirl of it away.

After methodically rinsing the empty test tube, she places it in her apron pocket, detaching the needle from the syringe and tossing it in the toilet to flush it away with the bloodied gauze. She then cleans the tube attached to it and places it, and the rubber tubing in her pocket.

Finally, she holds her own blood sample to the light—as red as anyone else’s she’s ever seen.

She wonders what mysteries it holds.

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Wednesday, December 3, 1941

8pm

Bucky is curled around Darcy, breathing in the scent of her hair as they both listen to Steve’s labored breathing as he sleeps on the other side of her.
Punk is sick again.

Darcy had stayed home from the hospital yesterday and today to watch over him, feeding him soup and tea and making sure he used his nebulizer.

When he came home she’d had that worried frown that had seldom left her face when Steve was sick last winter, even as she sat beside him in bed and read aloud to him to keep him still.

He’d sat with Steve, tucking the blankets around the two of them and telling him about his day while Darcy went to throw something together for dinner.

She’d returned with a bowl of soup and a mug of tea on a bed tray for Steve, and Bucky had helped him sit up and rest his back against the headboard, tucking a pillow behind him to make him more comfortable.

After Steve was settled, she returned to the kitchen momentarily and came back with two plates, one with two ham and cheese sandwiches for him and the other containing a smaller portion for herself.

She’d brought down the extra radio from her place earlier in the day (shipped from her parents house by Will before he’d closed it up and come back to Brooklyn) and she switched it on, and they’d listened to the radio programs as they had their impromptu picnic on the bed.

Eventually, Steve finished his meal, Darcy had made him do another nebulizer treatment, and he had huddled under the covers again, only a fluff of blond hair visible.

She and Bucky went to the kitchen and cleaned up the dishes, returning afterwards to lay beside Stevie as he slept.

She turns in his arms, looking into his eyes before kissing him softly. After a moment, she pulls back and whispers, “I did something at work—not sure if it was a smart thing to do.”

He cups one hand along her jaw and tips her head back, looking steadily at her.
She frowns, her forehead creasing with worry and she bites her lip for a moment before saying, “Remember the German doctor I’ve been assisting for a couple hours after shift?”

Bucky raises an eyebrow and nods, “Yeah.”

“He’s been working on something—I can’t really tell you all of the details because he said the research is highly sensitive—but I know more than I should because I taught myself German so I could read his notes,” she says quickly.

He’s starting to feel a little worried. “What’d ya do, doll?”

“Well—I gave him some of my blood,” she says.

“Wha?!” he barely gets out before she places her finger over his lips, “Shhhh. I mixed it in with the samples he’s using. I switched out the labels so it can’t be traced to me,” she says.

“Why?” he says softly.

“Because—if the thing he’s working on actually works, it will help people like Stevie. It will fix so many things and make people stronger,” she says.

Bucky thinks this over for a few minutes. He loves reading science fiction and mysteries, but he also reads the papers and listens to the radio—there’s a war on after all. There are a lot of bad people who’d love to get ahold of some super healing medicine right now.

“Darce—are ya sure about this guy?” he finally says.

“Sure enough to want to help him, not sure enough to reveal myself as the source of the sample,” she sighs, “Pretty sure you, Stevie, and Will are the only ones who can belong to that particular club.”

“Maybe nothing will come of it,” he says, pulling her tight against him, his chin resting on the top of her head.
“He’s so close to success anyway,” she says, her breath warm against his neck, “I figure it will only speed up the timeline.”

“Hmmm,” he says, thinking it over as he strokes a hand down her back from the nape of her neck to the curve of her ass, lingering there and pulling her closer.

“Just think though—if it works, it could heal Steve. He’d never be sick like this again,” she whispers.

“I hope you’re right about this doctor Darce,” he sighs, “every winter Stevie survives is a miracle.”

She nods against his chest, her fingers absently tracing down his side to his hip then back up again.

After a while he rolls her beneath him and kisses her neck just under her ear, and says softly, “You’ve had a stressful day—how ‘bout I help ya relieve some tension?”

He nips her neck before swirling his tongue there and she arches into him, hooks her leg around his waist and murmurs, “Don’t wake Stevie.”

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December 7, 1941

Steve is standing in front of the easel, pondering the model stretched on the chaise lounge in the middle of the classroom. The man is dozing, partially wrapped in a sheet that leaves his back and one leg exposed. Bucky grumbles over his own canvas beside him, frustrated with getting the wrinkles in the fabric swathing the model correct.

He’d been looking forward to this class for weeks and though he still felt a little weak from his illness, there was no way he was staying cooped up at home for a minute longer.

Bucky had insisted on coming along, coming home straight after Mass with his ma—an obvious ploy to keep an eye on him.
He dips his brush into the red paint and glances over at Bucky’s painting, which is actually pretty
damn good in Steve’s opinion. It figures—his friend has always been coordinated and detail oriented.

After adding a few touches to his painting, he briefly scans the room—several of the female students
have eyes on Bucky rather than their work. Steve snorts to himself and his friend raises an eyebrow
in question but he just grins in response, shaking his head over the ease with which Bucky has
always gained the attention of women.

There was a time when he felt invisible, like the only person who really saw him was Bucky.

Bucky still sees him.

Darcy sees him, too.

Any bitterness he might have felt about being overlooked has been alleviated a great deal by their
attention.

He smiles, his mind wandering as he brushes red paint across the canvas, the shape of the chaise
slowly emerging from the darker background.

Though the past week had been draining—he’s always slow to recover from illness—he almost
didn’t mind being sick when he had Darcy with him all day. She laid beside him in bed and read to
him, or worked on a knitting project as he sat against the headboard beside her, sketching. She
brought in a box of photos that she’d had Doris develop for them and they worked together to
arrange them in their photo album. They listened to radio shows and music and she massaged his
back a few times when his muscles grew tight from all the coughing.

The nebulizer treatments helped keep his asthma manageable and whatever bug he’d caught hadn’t
progressed into pneumonia, much to everyone’s relief.

When his fever had broken on Thursday morning, he’d insisted Darcy return to work at the hospital
the next day, and she’d left him that morning with a kiss and a pot of tea on the bedside table.

Steve sighs, distractedly rubbing his eyes. He’s still pretty worn out.
Bucky glances at him sharply, his expression concerned.

He stretches his arms overhead in attempted nonchalance but a paroxysm of coughing ruins his efforts and Bucky frowns, leaning in to pat him on the back.

“Maybe we should leave early, punk,” he murmurs.

Steve reluctantly nods—he can finish the painting during the next class.

As they are packing up their supplies there is a commotion in the hall and the door is flung open by a young man who exclaims breathlessly, “They just said on the radio that the Japs have attacked Hawaii! Oh, boy! I bet this means war!”

Steve drops his paintbrush and Bucky freezes, turning his head to look at him with a grim expression on his face as the room erupts in exclamations of shock.

For an endless moment, all there is in the world are the silvery blue eyes of his oldest friend, his love.

He is suddenly, gut twistingly certain that everything has changed.

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Bucky follows Steve up the stairs to their place carrying the bag full of art supplies, his thoughts whirling with anxiety.

He and Steve had both registered for the draft when it became the law a little more than a year ago. He’d hoped that they’d never have to worry about it, but he doesn’t see how the U.S. can avoid being drawn into the conflict now that the Japs have brought it to their proverbial doorstep.

Stevie has always wanted to serve his country, be a brave soldier like his father before him. He believes in it—says it’s the least he could do, the right thing to do.

Bucky is more pragmatic.
He recalls the conversations he’d had with his father about his time at war, and he knows it’s far from glorious. Da always told him to avoid being a soldier if he could, but if he couldn’t, to work hard and try to become an officer rather than a grunt.

Pay is better and you’re less likely to become cannon fodder, he’d said.

Steve unlocks the door to their place and flicks on the lights and they wordlessly shuck their coats and stow the art supplies under the worktable in their makeshift bedroom.

After a moment, Steve says, “I’m gonna use the nebulizer—wanna go up to get Darce after?”

“Yeah, wonder if she heard what happened in Hawaii?” he says.

Steve shrugs, the bedsprings creaking as he sits on the edge of it to prepare his medicine, “Probably. She likes to listen to the radio while she’s at home.”

At least Will was with her so she wouldn’t have been worrying alone.

Fifteen minutes later, Steve knocks at Darcy’s door and a solemn looking Will answers, wordlessly ushering them into the apartment.

Darcy is sitting on the sofa, a half drunk Tony beside her, wringing her hands at the news reports on the radio.

She jumps up when he and Steve enter the apartment, rushing over to wrap her arms around each of them in turn. He pulls her closer, inhaling the comforting scent of her hair as she relaxes into him, her head tucked under his chin.

“Oh, it’s awful. All that’s been on the news this afternoon is updates from the attack in Hawaii—so many killed,” she sniffs, her hands twisting into the back of his shirt.

He rubs circles on her back, feeling the fine tremble beneath her skin and says, “I know, doll.”
Stevie steps up beside them and leans into his side, running his hand over the soft strands of Darcy’s hair.

She leans into the two of them for a few moments as Will returns to sit beside Tony on the sofa. He catches the dark haired man’s eye and he wiggles his ever present flask, an eyebrow cocked in question.

He nods in affirmation, pushes down his worries, and says, “What d’ya say we have a drink, rustle up some grub, and maybe play some cards after?”

Darcy leans back, her shoulders relaxing under his hands, “Sounds like a good idea,” she says.

The news might be bad, but he’d be damned he’d let it suck the joy out of what time he has with his loves.

They’d get through this together.

Chapter End Notes

Meine Liebste—my dear

So—plot happened. What do you think?

Thank you kind readers for all of your comments and kudos—I endeavor to respond to any and all comments, don’t be shy! I do appreciate you all immensely.

Also, the formatting for the last chapter and this one looks different than those previous, not sure why but the Archive is double spacing between paragraphs. If it really bothers anyone reading, I can go back in and tighten it up.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Dr. Erskine has a breakthrough and some news for Darcy. Steve and Bucky train together at Goldie’s Gym. Possible Christmas gifts are discussed. Steve and Bucky share the hot water and Bucky shows Steve something new.

Chapter Notes

Warning for some anal play towards the end of the chapter, so if that squicks you out for whatever reason, skip the last section. Obviously, the last bit is NSFW.

No beta, all mistakes are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Wednesday, December 10, 1941

They were at war.

On Monday, President Roosevelt had made a speech which had been broadcast nationwide, declaring war against Japan.

It’s all anyone is talking about at the hospital and anxiety dogs Darcy’s every moment. Her only respite is focusing on the work at hand.

When her E.R. shift is over at 3pm, she leaves quickly, stopping by the cafeteria for coffee and a slice of pie for herself and Dr. Erskine.

As she walks down the long basement hallway to the lab, she mulls over the conversations that had been swirling in her head since Monday.

Steve wants to enlist. He feels it’s his duty, he’s angry about what happened in Hawaii and the cowardly way the Japanese ambushed the naval base—killing soldiers and civilians alike.
Bucky is more reserved, taking a wait and see approach. He seems resigned, telling her privately that he doubts he’ll be able to avoid being drafted, particularly if the United States also decides to take on Germany, which many consider a foregone conclusion.

Will wants to join the Air Force—his skill as a pilot would make him a desirable candidate, but Howard told him to hold off—something about a science unit he’s been working with that has ties with the British government as well as the United States. Will doesn’t know all of the details, but Howard seems to think his skills as a pilot will be of better use there, especially because of his familiarity with Stark’s weapon and aircraft modifications.

Darcy frowns, entering the lab to find Abraham looking like nothing so much as a dandelion gone to seed—his hair wild and his notes scattered, a manic excitement fairly crackling around him.

She walks over to the workbench, inspecting the rat in the cage there. It’s very active and curious, its coat glossy and eyes bright as it gazes at her with an uncanny intelligence, holding a slice of apple in its front paws, chewing voraciously.

She sets the pie and coffee next to Dr. Erskine’s elbow and he absently picks up the cup and sips at the steaming liquid, before glancing at her.

“How long since you injected this one?” she says, gesturing at the cage.

His eyes scan his watch, noting the time and scribbling it on his notes before grinning at her, elated.

“36 hours,” he breathes in wonder.

Startled, she looks more closely at the rat before walking across the lab to compare it visually with ones who have not been injected.

The test rat is sleek, larger than the others, and significantly more alert.

She turns to Erskine, absentmindedly tapping her chin with her finger, “was it the last blood samples?”
“Yes! There was one sample—uh—“ he shuffles through the paperwork, “June Smith. Her blood was unusual, higher concentrations of white blood cells, more oxygenated red blood cells, and higher amounts of certain enzymes, proteins, and adrenaline. I was able to isolate the proteins and enzymes and introduce them to the serum,” he frowns slightly, “shame she was a transient—I’d like to get more samples from her.”

Darcy struggles to maintain a pleasantly interested expression, “Hmmm, yes. Too bad.”

He shrugs and flicks on the light box, placing an x-ray on it, “this is the initial x-ray, the subject was of average weight and health, young adult,” he takes the x-ray off the light box, lining up three new scans, time stamped 6 hours post injection, 8 hours, 10 hours, “you see the progression—bones becoming denser, brain and skull expanding, muscles increasing in density as well.”

She nods, tracing her fingers over the images.

“I ran him through the maze before the injection, after the initial fever and listlessness passed at the 4 hour mark, then again at 10 hours. Each time his speed improved,” he says, unclipping the films the light box and replacing them with another series.

He points to the first image, “Here we are at 12 hours. Usually at this point, the subject begins showing clear signs of tumors—the mutation going too far—as you can see there were the barest start of them in this film, and I began to think this was another failed experiment,” he says, “the subject began running a fever again, seemed listless, and in some pain.”

He pauses, pointing to the image labeled 14 hours, “but look here—the bones have become denser still, all signs of bony tumors have disappeared! Miraculous!” he glances at her, his eyes shining in triumph and smiling giddily.

She reviews the other films before he unclips them from the light box to show the most current image, at 34 hours. The skeletal structure appears slightly larger than before, definitely denser, the skull larger and thicker with no signs of harmful mutations.

“How was the subject’s behavior?” she asks.

“Once he roused from what seemed to be a comatose state at 16 hours, he was ravenous. I suspect increased metabolism goes hand-in-hand with the healing factor. It takes a lot of energy to do what
his body did! Also, I had him run the maze several more times—he is very fast, and more intelligent.”

She glances at the rat, who is watching them with interest.

It’s a little unnerving, to be honest.

“What are you going to do with a super smart, super strong rat, Abraham?” she says, quirking her lips at his slightly chagrined expression.

“I will study him of course! I will be taking the trial to the next level soon, but not at this location,” he says apologetically.

“Oh?”

“Yes, Meine Liebste, my benefactors have insisted I move my research to a more secure location. Particularly now that the United States has entered the war,” he says, his face somber.

She wonders about his “benefactors” as she squeezes his shoulder gently, “I will miss you. Assisting you has been an honor,” she says softly.

He pats her hand, “It would never have happened without you, Darcy. Thank you for your help.”

She smiles, though she’s saddened he will be leaving.

“When will you be moving?” she asks, following him over to the workbench and beginning to straighten his notes.

“Ah, Friday will be the last day here, I believe. I will require your assistance in organizing my notes and packing up the lab,” he says.

“Of course.”
Saturday December 13, 1941

Goldie’s Gym

Bucky holds the heavy bag as Steve punches it, sweaty and out of breath already, but determined.

He’s going to enlist.

Punch.

He and Bucky will enlist together.

Punch. Punch.

He is just as much of a man as anyone else.

Punch. Punch.

“Whoa, punk—” Bucky says, “pace yourself.”

Steve pauses to wipe his arm across his sweaty forehead. Glancing at Bucky before punching the bag again, he focuses on pushing off with his feet and putting his weight behind the punches, imagining his fist powering straight through the bag. He breathes in through his nose and out through his mouth with each swing—trying to calm his breathing.

It sort of works—but asthma always wins, and eventually and he has to take a break. He collapses on the bench against the wall to watch Bucky take over working the bag, his powerful uppercuts and hooks causing it to swing.
He loosens the laces on his gloves with his teeth and slips them off of his hands, laying them on the bench and flexing his fingers, looking at his red and slightly swollen knuckles.

Sighing, he leans forward and reaches beneath the bench for his bag and rummages in it for his sketch pad and a pencil, deciding to draw his friend until he’s finished his workout.

His mind wanders as he sketches out the strong lines of Bucky’s back and shoulders.

They haven’t told Darcy that they’ve decided to enlist, but he’s pretty sure she knows. Lately, he’s caught her looking at them, the expression her face somber until she noticed him looking and covered it with a smile.

With the President declaring war against Germany two days ago, the likelihood of the government calling up greater numbers through the draft is high, given the fact that the United States will be fighting on two fronts. He and Bucky had talked about it at length—deciding they’d rather enlist than be drafted, it would give them more time to train, a better choice of what branch of the military to enter.

Bucky is also thinking of the money—without having to pay for room and board, he can send more money to his ma and Becca.

His friend had tried to broach the subject of Steve’s health issues making him a poor candidate, but Steve wouldn’t hear it. He’s sure if he works hard enough at the gym and shows how willing he is to defend his country that they’ll take him.

Bucky says there’s important work he can do at home—and neither of them want to leave Darcy alone. She will be alone—Will is getting set to go off with Howard and it worries him.

*His girl will be alone.*

But he doesn’t know what else to do.

His father died fighting the Germans, and he while he certainly doesn’t want to die, it would be a dishonor to his memory if he didn’t stand up and fight.
He closes his eyes, leaning his head against the wall.

They’ll wait til after Christmas.

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Thursday, December 18, 1941

Bucky glances at Steve as they recline on opposite ends of the sofa, their legs entangled, listening with half an ear to the radio while Steve sketches and he flicks through the English to French dictionary Darcy had left at their place.

“When did Darce say she she’d be home?” he asks.

“Ahh—7:30 probably?” Steve replies, cocking his head at whatever was on the page in front of him before the sound of his pencil scratching across the paper resumes.

Bucky frowns, “She’s not takin’ the subway home, right?”

He hates it when she’s out after dark. It’s unavoidable, but there’s all sorts of unsavory types around their section of Brooklyn.

“Well, she said Doris would get her a cab home.”

“Hmm,” he says.

She was shooting some more photos with Doris—she’d brought home a stack of them about a month ago and he and Steve had been briefly shocked by some of the pin up pictures.

Yeah—Doris had put her in a blond wig and a mask, but that was their girl.
Nearly naked.

There was fancy lingerie—but still.

When she’d explained Doris was going to try to sell the photos to some magazines Bucky was seized by the urge to protest (and he could tell by Stevie’s face he felt the same way) but before his impulsive friend could say something that would put him in the doghouse, he’d laid a hand on his knee under the table and squeezed, shooting him a cautioning look before he said, “Doll—ya look amazin’ in these.”

She did.

So amazing.

But some primitive part of him railed at the thought of other men seeing all of her like that.

“Is she gonna try to sell all of these?” he’d said, casually flicking through the photos.

Darcy in a bathing suit, full lips smirking over her shoulder.

Darcy reclining in something black and lacy, her back arched, her full breasts nearly spilling out of it.

Darcy with one heel clad foot balanced on the edge of a chair, adjusting the strap of her garter, the swell of her bare breasts in profile just barely covered by her arm.

Sure, the blonde wig and mask hid her identity from the world—but he’d know that body, those lips, anywhere.

“No, actually. That’s why I brought them home, so you can help me decide which ones she can use. She agreed and she’s gonna give me half of any money she gets for selling them,” she said briskly.

So Steve and Bucky spent a good half hour debating the merits of the photos with her and finally
selected a few that they all felt were tasteful and least likely to reveal her identity.

He still isn’t completely comfortable with it—but hell, he’s smart enough to know it isn’t his decision.

He may have pocketed a few of the more risqué photos for a more thorough examination later.

“Hmmm. Wonder what they’re up to now,” he says.

Steve shrugs, “Dunno. She said it’s a surprise.”

Oh boy.

After a few moments, Bucky says, “Speakin’ of surprises. Do ya still wanna give Darcy your ma’s locket for Christmas?”

Steve looks up from his drawing, a soft smile on his face.

“Yeah—we can put a picture of each of us in it.”

Bucky nods.

“I was thinkin’—I could buy a new chain for it and we could maybe get somethin’ engraved on the inside for her? Then it’ll be from both of us,” he says.

Steve brightens, “Yeah, that would be great,” his happy expression dims slightly and a frown creases his forehead, “I want her to have somethin’ of us for when we ship out.”

Punk.

God.
He wishes this war had never happened.

The thought of Steve rushing into battle and Darcy at home all alone makes him sick to his stomach. Though he know it’s selfish—he hopes Steve doesn’t get in. He wants him to be safe and he can’t protect him if he ends up being a soldier.

Hell—they could end up on opposite sides of the world if one of them gets shipped to Europe and the other to the Pacific. His gut churns at the thought.

“Stevie—maybe you should wait to enlist. Get in better shape before ya try,” he says.

A mutinous expression crosses Steve’s face.

“Nah, if you’re goin’, I’m goin’ with ya,” his friend says.

He wishes neither of them had to go anywhere.

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Saturday, December, 20 1941

9:30 am

Steve wakes alone, the blankets on Bucky’s side rumpled but still warm. Darcy had left early, she’d promised Will she’d go Christmas shopping with him, grumbling about it a bit because she had finished her shopping early, but she went with him anyway.

He sits up and swings his legs over the side of the bed. He stretches briefly, grabs his undershorts from the floor and pulls them on before heading to the bathroom.

Bucky is standing naked by the sink brushing his teeth and Steve sends a sleepy leer his way before
he steps up to the toilet, distractedly scratching his chest as he relieves himself.

That done, he moves closer to his friend, nudging him aside with his hip to turn the faucet on and wash his hands, leaving the water running as Bucky leans forward to spit and rinse his toothbrush under the tap.

He grabs his toothbrush and wets it, absentmindedly dipping it in the tooth powder before sticking it in his mouth, brushing his teeth groggily as Bucky starts the shower. Steve automatically reaches behind him to shut the bathroom door to keep the warm air in and leans against it, watching as Bucky slides the shower curtain aside to step into the tub.

He looks over his shoulder at Steve just before he shuts the curtain and waggles his eyebrows at him.

“Wanna share the hot water with me, punk?” he says.

Steve leans forward to spit in the sink, “Only if ya don’t hog it all,” he mutters, rinsing his toothbrush and dropping it into the cup on the edge of the sink.

Bucky smirks, “You’ll have to stand real close so we can both get wet,” he teases before pulling the curtain closed with a snap behind him.

Steve slips out of his undershorts.

Bucky leans against the tile as the hot water streams over him, his mouth fused to Steve’s and his hands in his blond hair, darker from the water and slick against his fingers.

Steve pulls back with a breathy gasp before latching onto Bucky’s neck and sucking, causing a full body shiver to travel down his spine.

He mutters, “gotta get washed up before the hot water runs out.”
Steve swirls his tongue over the bruise he’s just sucked into his neck and smirks, “I’ll wash your back if you wash mine.”

“Deal,” he says, reaching for the soap and lathering it in his hands.

He pushes Stevie out from under the water to lean against the wall and squats, running his soapy hands over his friend’s feet, then slowly up his calves as Steve’s hands rest on his head.

Bucky looks up at him as he smooths his hands up his thighs, rubbing soapy circles into his skin. Steve’s breath hitches, his bright blue eyes narrowing as he gently rubs his soapy hands over his balls, rolling them between his fingers and bypassing his cock altogether.

He grins as Stevie whines low, thrusting his hips forward in an invitation that Bucky ignores in favor of soaping up his belly and then his chest.

He gets to his feet, running his soapy hands over Steve’s shoulders and down his arms, before meticulously washing each finger.

Steve bangs his back of his head against the wall, frustrated, and Bucky leans in and stops a hair’s breadth from his lips, wrapping his hand around one shoulder and breathing, “turn around,” smirking as he pulls Steve’s shoulder forward and twists him so he faces the wall.

He lathers his hands again, rubbing them through Steve’s thick blonde hair, massaging his scalp and then down his neck, all the while rocking his cock against the small of his friend’s back.

He steps back, slipping his fingers down between Steve’s shoulders, his thumbs pressing alongside the bumps of his vertebrae, massaging his tight muscles as he lathers his skin.

Steve sighs, relaxing into his hands, his head tilted back and resting against Bucky’s shoulder.

He hums, “So good, Buck,” reaching one arm back to wrap his hand around the side of Bucky’s neck.

After a moment, Bucky pulls back a little and slides his hands lower, over the slight curves of Steve’s
bottom, soaping each cheek thoroughly before experimentally sliding one finger down his crack.

Steve tenses slightly as Bucky’s finger slides over his hole then shivers when Bucky circles around it.

“Have to make sure your clean everywhere, right?” Bucky says low, smirking slightly as Steve hums in affirmation and relaxes into his fingers.

He slips his other hand around Steve’s front, fingers encircling his friend’s straining cock.

Steve shudders as he slides his hand upward and twists slightly around the tip before stroking back down.

“So—I’ve been doing a little experimenting on my own,” Bucky murmurs, tapping his finger lightly against Steve’s hole.

Steve shivers again, and grunts, “Oh?”

“Yes—tryin’ to figure out things fellas can do together,” Bucky says, “things that feel good.”

Boy, had he.

His shower time had gotten a little longer when he discovered how intensely he came when he slipped a finger into his ass as he stroked himself.

“I found out this,” he pressed a little more firmly against Stevie’s hole as he slowly stroked over his cock, “is very sensitive, and touching it feels very, very, good.”

“Uh,” Steve stammers, inching his feet further apart and giving Bucky better access, “how—uh—how far in do you touch?”

“Well,” Bucky says, “I liked it best when I slid my finger inside.”
Steve shudders, and Bucky knows he’s close to coming.

“You can do—um—try that if you want,” says Steve, his voice sounding strained.

“You’re sure it’s okay?” Bucky says, circling his finger around and lightly pressing into him.

Steve’s hips thrust forward and Bucky squeezes his hand around the base of his cock, “are ya coming, punk?”

“Nnn-not yet,” he says.

“Okay,” he says, stilling his strokes so Stevie doesn’t finish too soon, “let me know if you don’t like it.”

He slowly presses his finger further into his friend, just past his first knuckle, and turns his wrist so the pad of his finger faces forward. Steve widens his stance a bit more, his breath hissing out as he leans his forehead into the wall and pushes his ass out.

“That’s perfect,” Bucky breathes, “try to relax,” he presses a little further, a little less than half of his finger inside before he feels the small bump he’d noticed in his own explorations.

He focuses on it, rubbing his finger over it as he strokes upward over Steve’s cock again.

“Ugh—oh— god,” Steve stammers, his hips reflexively rocking into him, “that feels—“

“I know,” Bucky assures him and continues rubbing that spot inside of Stevie as he whimpers and shudders, the muscles of his thighs trembling as he gasps oh oh oh and Bucky continues rubbing inside of him and squeezing his hand around Steve’s cock, his hand still as his friend thrusts into it, finally shuddering and seizing up, spilling over his fist.

Bucky continues stroking inside of Steve until he stops spurting, gently withdrawing as he slumps against the wall.
He’s so hard he aches.

“Holy shit,” Steve breathes, turning to face Bucky but still leaning against the wall.

“Stevie—goodness gracious, language,” Bucky smirks.

Steve snorts, laughing as he tiredly rubs a hand over his face.

The water is getting cooler, so Bucky grabs the abandoned soap from the bottom of the tub and quickly lathers his hair and body before stepping under the shower spray.

He pulls Stevie with him to rinse off and the punk grumbles, “Knew there wouldn’t be enough hot water for both of us,” as the water gets cold.

He turns the water off and slides the shower curtain aside to hand Steve his towel before grabbing his own.

As he rubs the towel over his hair Stevie says, “I think we should go back to bed for a while.”

He glances at his friend, raising an eyebrow as Steve looks pointedly at his groin.

“Oh?”

“Yeah—“ Steve sends him a smug grin, “I wanna try that thing you just did to me, with my mouth around your cock.”

Said appendage, which had deflated to semi hard, visibly twitches at the suggestion.

He hisses out a breath, leaning in and kissing Steve soundly before he pulls back, breathing, “Sounds like a plan.”
They end up having a very late breakfast.

More like lunch, really.

Chapter End Notes

Dr. Erskine has left the building, having made a significant breakthrough in developing his serum. Any and all half-baked science is mine, all medical professionals, please forgive me.

Steve and Bucky discovering they have additional erogenous zones—believable or no? Not like they had access to gay porn to figure stuff out—though I suppose Bucky could have asked Will a few questions. Not like that would be awkward at all, lol.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Christmas. A tree is decorated, gifts are exchanged. The specter of war lurks in the background.

Chapter Notes

No beta—all errors are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Tuesday, December 23, 1941

“All right fellas, there isn’t gonna be much left to pick from!” Darcy pronounces, clattering down the steps ahead of them.

Will laughs, jumping the steps two at a time behind her as Bucky and Steve follow at a more sedate pace.

When she gets to the lobby, Darcy waits with Will, bouncing on her toes in excitement.

They’re going to get a Christmas tree.

It will be the first one any of them has ever had living on their own—Steve and Bucky not having the extra space to put one up or the money to buy one, Will and Darcy not seeing the point as they’d both worked like crazy last Christmas and gone home for the holiday the previous year.

Darcy had pushed the issue—having shipped Mama’s Christmas ornaments amongst other family belongings to Brooklyn this past June and July.

She wants the tree.
She knows it might be their last Christmas together for awhile and she’s planning on pulling out all the stops.

Bucky and Steve step into the lobby, Bucky grumbling and tucking Steve’s dark blue scarf around his neck while Steve slaps at his hands in irritation, “I’m not *five*, jerk.”

Darcy grins at Steve’s look of consternation, stepping up to the two of them to grab their hands, swinging their arms and chanting, “Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go!”

Bucky chuckles, “Somebody’s excited.”

“Mmhmm,” she hums as they walk down the steps to the sidewalk.

They’d decided to take the subway over to a vacant lot near the hospital where there are some trees for sale, then they’ll be taking a cab back, the tree tied to the roof.

She walks with her arm looped through Bucky’s, Steve close enough to her other side that their fingers periodically brush as he and Will chatter about the work Will has been doing with Howard lately.

She listens, her head against Bucky’s shoulder. She’s pretty sure Will is going to withdraw from school the next semester—his job with Howard is taking priority, especially with the likelihood of traveling to Europe for whatever secret military operation they’ll be involved in.

Will doesn’t think he’ll be leaving right away—but he’s prepared to leave at a moments notice.

Tony is worried. He doesn’t work with Howard so his choices are enlist or be drafted.

Just like Steve and Bucky.

Will told her Howard has an inside track, and in his opinion, the war won’t be over soon and it’s likely every young man they know will be drafted because the numbers needed by the military are far greater than the number of soldiers currently enlisted.
Will’s making a choice before one can be made for him. Whatever he’s doing with Howard will keep him out of the regular Air Force, but not out of danger.

She frowns, she still isn’t clear what Howard is involved in, actually.

Bucky smoothes a finger between her brows and leans down to kiss her temple, “Happy thoughts, Darce,” he whispers.

She nods, smiling weakly and clutching his arm a little tighter.

They arrive at the subway platform just as the train pulls in and board it along with the rest of the raucous holiday crowd.

Everyone seems to be desperately cheerful this year—as if they all know this Christmas may be the last for many of the young men they know.

That dread casts its shadow over her lately, but she strives to remain cheerful for her fellas.

She won’t add to their burden.

They get off at the third stop, the sound of Christmas carolers echoing across the noisy platform as they exit the train. They stop to listen for a while, Bucky and Will joining in on the chorus with their strong voices as Steve and Darcy laugh. They join the crowd ascending the stairs to street level, pausing to purchase hot cocoa from a street vendor in their walk towards the tree lot.

Large fluffy flakes of snow have begun to fall, swiftly blanketing the sidewalk with a layer of white and Darcy tips her head back, laughing and catching a flake on her tongue.

She glances at Steve, who grins in return, his blue eyes shining and cheeks flushed with cold as steam wreaths his face from his paper cup of cocoa.

“Oh!” She exclaims, “I almost forgot—here Bucky, hold this,” she shoves her cup at him and he
patiently takes it, eyes laughing at her over the rim as he takes a sip.

She raises a warning eyebrow at him, rummaging in her bag until her hands close over the boxy shape of the camera she’d shoved in at the last minute. She withdraws it, holding it aloft, “Ah-ha! Who wants to take pictures?”

Steve holds out his gloved hand and she passes it to him, retrieving her cocoa from Bucky and frowning at the little bit that’s left in the cup.

She elbows him in the side, grumbling, “You’re buying me more before we go back”

Bucky shrugs, his silvery blue eyes twinkling, “Sure, doll.”

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Wednesday, December 24, 1941

3pm

Bucky strolls down the sidewalk, let off early from the docks due to the holiday and eager to get home. His boots squelch through the slush left over from an early morning snow, but the sky is clear now, the afternoon sun reflecting off the snow covered roofs and glinting from the icicles dangling from their edges. He pauses every so often to glance at Christmas displays in the shop windows, enjoying the festive decorations.

He jams one hand in his coat pocket, turning the small box he’d put there over and over between his fingers and smiling as he imagines Darcy’s face when she opens it.

They’re exchanging gifts tonight at Darcy and Will’s place after she gets home from work. Tony is probably already there with Will as their classes are over til the new year.

He already wrapped Steve’s gift (a new set of colored pencils and a small leather bound sketchbook) and hid it under some socks and undershorts in the dresser (punk likes to peek). He’d noticed the small wrapped gift for himself that Steve had tauntingly placed on the nightstand, smirking and
admonishing him about waiting until Christmas.

As if he’s the one who likes to spoil a surprise.

He hurries up the stairs to their apartment and swings open the door to find Stevie standing by the kitchen table, meticulously wrapping what looks to be the last of several parcels in newspaper.

Christmas music plays on the radio Darcy has never moved back to her place, and Steve is singing softly under his breath to “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.”

He looks up as Bucky enters and shuts the door behind him.

“Did ya get it?” he says.

“Of course,” Bucky replies, withdrawing the box from his pocket and bringing it over to set it on the table beside the other presents.

Stevie opens the box and peers at his ma’s locket, the engraved golden oval polished to a high shine and attached to a new chain. He picks it up, opening it and squinting, on the left side it says, Our pilgrim soul, and continues on the right, forever and always. Steve’s initials are engraved underneath on the left side, SGR, and Bucky’s on the right JBB.

“This is perfect,” Steve sighs, “ya think she’ll like it?”

Bucky snorts, “Are ya kiddin? She’ll love it.”

Steve nods, absentmindedly standing and walking behind the screen to their bedroom, returning after a few moments.

He holds a picture in his hand, taken early in the fall. In it, Steve and Bucky sit together, side by side, in camp chairs lined up alongside the hangar at Stark’s airfield. They grin at the camera, beer bottles raised in a toast.
“I had Will give me the negative for this one so I could get an extra one printed, thought we could cut out our pictures from it and put it in the locket.”

“Good idea,” Bucky says.

He watches Steve’s clever fingers as he painstakingly cuts their smiling faces free of the photograph and lays them down on the worktable before he pries the hinged inner frame open on either side, placing their pictures inside and snapping the frame back in place to anchor them.

“There,” he says, “now she’ll always have us with her.”

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5pm

Darcy hides the photo albums Doris had helped her put together for Steve and Bucky in her tote bag for later and places two small wrapped presents under the Christmas tree.

She’d thought long and hard about what to give them and decided on something they could each use and carry with them as a reminder of her.

While she’d been clearing out her mother's belongings this past summer, she’d come across some family heirlooms that she’d decided to give to Steve and Bucky.

For Steve, there was her father’s compass, sent back to her mother along with what little belongings he’d had in Germany during the Great War. It was nicer than the standard army issue at the time, perhaps it had even been his father’s—she doesn’t know.

The silver was tarnished and the chain broken before she’d had the jeweler polish it up and repair it, but it looked good as new now. She’d had a phrase engraved on the inner cover—love...the ever fixed mark from Shakespeare’s sonnet 116, followed by yours always, Darcy.

She’d decided to give Bucky her grandfather’s watch.
It had been in her mother’s jewelry box, somewhat tarnished but still in working order with a lovely chain attached. She’d had it polished and the inner cover engraved as well—using another favorite line from sonnet 116—*Love is not Time’s fool ~forever yours, Darcy.*

Will asked if she was sure about giving them the few things she had from her father and grandfather—but for Darcy there is no question.

She wants them to have something special to carry when they go away, and they are going, of that she has no doubt. She’s heard them whispering about it together, Steve so determined and Bucky resigned.

Even though it terrifies her, she won’t make it more difficult by begging them to stay.

Even though she wants to.

Even though she cries in the shower when she’s alone and lets herself get overwhelmed, recalling the years of her mother sadly looking at her father’s photograph until she finally gave it to Darcy and barely looked at it anymore.

She will put on a brave face and love them with all of her heart while she has them, and she’ll try to silence the small selfish voice that whispers they would try to stay if they really loved her.

The thump of boots on the stairs jolts her from her melancholy thoughts—Will and Tony stumble in, Tony looking festive with a length of shiny garland wrapped around his neck and a small box in hand and Will carrying the larger box she’d sent him to the storage space in the basement to retrieve.

“These what you were looking for, Darcy?” Will asks, setting the box beside her and lifting the lid.

She looks inside and sees the carefully packed ornaments and decorations she’d sent back last summer.

“Oh, that’s just—” she says, glancing at Tony, “the smaller box oughta be the star for the top and the replacement bulbs for the Christmas lights.”
“Great! How ’bout we work on getting the lights up and running while you pop the corn?” Will says.

“Okay,” she says, “hey Tony, we’re gonna have eggnog too—with rum.”

Tony crows, “It’s starting to feel a lot like Christmas already!”

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6pm

Steve sits on the sofa, the bowl of popcorn by his side, holding a needle with a long thread attached and carefully stringing popcorn on it for garland.

Beside him, Darcy methodically pushes her needle through another kernel and slides it down to join the rapidly growing number there.

Will, Bucky, and Tony just finished getting the two strings of lights working, amid much cursing over the tangled strands and the tedious process of unscrewing dead bulbs and screwing in new ones until each strand lit up.

The radio is playing Christmas music and the four of them are drinking their eggnog (Steve’s is more nog than rum, Tony’s is more rum than nog).

Steve smirks as Tony and Bucky argue over the light placement, Will patiently waiting behind the tree for them to pass the strand around to him, rolling his eyes and saying, “It looks good already—Jesus—I don’t wanna be behind here all night.”

Finally the lights are up, and they stand back to view their work, sipping their drinks and congratulating themselves until Darcy says, “now for the garland—“ holding her completed strand aloft.
Tony rolls his eyes and goes to get more eggnog.

Bucky walks over to Darcy, leans down to kiss her cheek and retrieves the garland from her, surreptitiously sneaking a handful of popcorn that he immediately crams in his mouth.

“Bucky! That’s for the tree!” She chides.

Bucky pouts, “Aw, Darce—can’t we make some to eat too?” he gives her the puppy dog look that’s always gotten him his way and she softens immediately, saying, “Sure, after the tree is done.”

Bucky smirks and Steve raises an eyebrow, *that look doesn’t work on me, jerk.*

Finally, Steve finishes his string of popcorn garland and he and Bucky drape it around the tree until it is placed to Darcy’s satisfaction.

She unwraps each ornament from the box, exclaiming, “*remember this one Will?*” or “*Hey! I made this one with Mama!*” as she passes them out to be hung. Eventually, all that’s left is the shiny brass star that goes on top of the tree.

Darcy walks over to Will and says, “Grandpa always put the star on top of the tree—Pop took over when he married Mama. It’s your turn now.”

She passes it to Will and he cradles it in his hands, his head bowed as he turns the shiny star between his long fingers. Darcy squeezes his shoulder, and Tony steps to his side, placing an arm around his waist and they are quiet for a moment.

Finally, Will takes a deep breath, lifts the star high and places it on the top of the tree. After a moment, Darcy flicks off the overhead light so they can get the full effect.

It’s perfect.
Darcy cries when she opens her present and sees the locket, throwing her arms around Steve and then Bucky before lifting it gently from the box to show to Will and Tony.

Will sends a watery look their way, obviously moved at his sister’s reaction. He tugs on Tony’s arm and they go over to the kitchen to refresh their drinks, giving the three of them a little privacy.

She unclasps the chain and hands it to Steve, holding her hair off her neck and saying softly, “Put it on for me, Stevie?”

Bucky watches as Steve gently drapes his mother’s locket around their girl’s neck and clasps the chain behind it, stroking his fingers briefly over the tender skin there and causing Darcy to shiver. She settles on the sofa between them, her hand wrapped around the locket where it rests between her breasts.

“Open it up, doll,” Bucky says softly into her ear and she pries it open, biting her lip and tearing up again when she sees their pictures within.

“Oh—I have both of you in here,” she says, her eyes shining with tears as she smiles and gestures to the locket, “where did you get this?”

Steve ears redden with emotion as he says, “It was my ma’s.”

“Oh—Steve! Are you sure you want to give me this?” she says, holding the locket up to the light to get a better look at it.

“There’s no one else I’d want to have it,” he says, “Ma woulda wanted ya to have it,” he says gruffly, looking down at his lap and clearing his throat.

Darcy throws her arms around him again, squeezing him tight.

Steve presses his lips to her hair and says, “Buck bought a new chain for it and we had it polished up and engraved.”

Darcy straightens up to look at Bucky, “Engraved?” she says.
“Yeah doll, it’s behind the pictures,” he says.

She opens the locket again, looking at the pictures.

“I’m afraid to pull the pictures out—what’s it say?” she asks.

“Our pilgrim soul, always and forever,” Steve says, “and then our initials.”

“Oh—“ she clutches the locket in her hand and turns towards Bucky, wrapping her arms around him and burying her face in his neck, “always and forever,” she sighs.

After a moment she straightens up, closing the locket and letting it fall against her chest with her hand over it. “This is the best present ever,” she says, leaning into Steve’s side, “I love it—thank you.”

“Merry Christmas, Darce,” Bucky says.

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10:30pm

Steve sits on the edge of the bed, his hand cradled around the silver compass Darcy had given him for Christmas. He turns it this way and that, studying the way the light glints off the shiny casing.

He’s never had something so nice in his life.

He pops it open, smiling at the words engraved on the inside and turning it again in his hands to watch the arrow shift to point north.

After a moment he rests it on the bed beside him and leans over to his work table for the new sketchbook Bucky gave him for Christmas, grabbing the box of colored pencils he’d given him as
well and settling back against the headboard to doodle for a bit.

He glances up as Bucky steps around the screen holding a glass of water in one hand and pushing the other through his damp hair. He sets the glass on the bedside table and rolls his neck before he begins his nightly ritual of unloading the contents of his pockets on the small tray there.

First, the pocket watch Darcy had given him, rolling it in his hand and placing it gently in the tray before pulling out the polished chrome Zippo lighter Steve had found him at the second hand store and had engraved with his initials. He thumbs back the cover and flicks it alight a couple times, winking at him and smiling before he closes the cover with a click and sets it next to the watch. Next comes the handkerchief from his back pocket, his wallet, and a couple of coins that clatter against the tin tray as he drops them on it.

Finally, he unbuttons his pants and folds them before placing them on top of the dresser, followed by his shirt. He slips under the blankets, leaning his back against the headboard and reaches for the watch.

He sends Steve a sideways glance, biting his lip as he flicks the watchcover open.

“Darce said you knew what poem this phrase is from,” he says.

“Yeah,” Steve says, leaning over to rummage through the pile of books Darcy has accumulated on the edge of his worktable.

He finds the one she likes to read over and over, flicking through the pages until he finds it.

He clears his throat, “This is the one—Shakespeare’s sonnet 116:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks*
Within his bending sickle's compass come:

*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*

If this be error and upon me proved,

*I never writ, nor no man ever loved."*

Bucky nods and reaches for the book to read it again to himself and Steve tips his head back against the headboard, closing his eyes and circling the smooth surface of the compass with his thumb as he contemplates the meaning behind the poem.

She’d read it to him when he was sick—telling him that it was the most famous of Shakespeare’s love sonnets. She explained that the way the author wrote of love was what she always wanted it to be—accepting and enduring, unshaken by time and circumstance.

At the time, he’d understood she was letting him know that she loved him as he was, no matter what—he didn’t care if he was sickly, that he was poor. She loved him for himself.

The phrase engraved on the compass is a concrete reminder of that love, and she’d let Bucky know her love for him was permanent and unchanging as well.

Bucky closes the book and nudges his side with it and Steve takes it and puts it back on the work table with the others.

Bucky sighs, “She knows we’re enlisting, huh?”

“I’m pretty sure she does, even though we haven’t talked to her about it.”

The gifts definitely feel like some sort of declaration—hell, hadn’t they done the same thing with the locket? They all know this thing they have is real, the kind of love that would normally lead to marriage and babies and a life together.

They aren’t normal though—so all they have is a promise to find a way to be together.

“We gotta talk to her about it,” Bucky says.
“Yeah—soon. Don’t wanna ruin Christmas, jerk.”

Bucky grunts in affirmation, winding the watch a couple times before placing it on the bedside table and saying, “When did Darce say she was comin’ down?”

“In a while, she’s finishin’ up the pies she’s bringin’ to your ma’s tomorrow.”

“Hmmmm—what shall we do in the meantime?” Bucky says, cupping his hand around Steve’s jaw and pulling him close.

He kisses him softly, lips full and plush against his, and Steve melts against him, shifting to wrap his hand around Bucky’s neck to pull him even closer.

After a moment, Steve breaks the kiss, looking into the silvery blue eyes of his lover.

“I can think of a few things,” he murmurs.

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11:30pm

Darcy slips into the boys apartment to find it dark except for the glow from the bathroom light. She sets her bag on the coffee table and shrugs out of her coat, laying it over the arm of the sofa before sitting to unlace her boots.

She picks up her bag, crossing the room to slip past the privacy screen that separates the bedroom from the rest of the apartment. They’d left the curtains on the bay window partially open and the streetlight faintly illuminates the room, and her sharp eyesight allows her to see every detail.

She stops at the end of the bed, smiling at the sight of Bucky and Steve entangled with each other.
Bucky is on his back with Steve curled tightly into his side, the sheets and blankets riding dangerously low on his toned stomach, giving her a perfect view of Steve’s blond head nestled against his shoulder and one thin leg thrown over his hips. One of Bucky’s arms is curled around his head, the other around Steve, his lips turned up in a satisfied smile even as he sleeps. Steve’s making his usual snuffling sleep noises, muffled slightly because of the way his face is burrowed into Bucky’s chest.

She unzips her dress, wiggling out of it, her bra, then her garters and stockings, placing them on top of the dresser before grabbing Bucky’s shirt and slipping into it. She circles around the bed, picking up the rest of their clothes from the floor and depositing them in the laundry basket in the corner.

That finished, she rifles through her bag, pulling out the two small rectangular presents she’s set aside for tomorrow and places them on the nightstand next to the stuff Bucky put into the tray when he emptied his pockets.

She smiles softly when she spies the compass and the watch—they’d really liked the gifts. Stevie’s ears had turned red and his breath hitched—a sure sign of his heightened emotions.

Bucky had just hugged her tight, holding her next to his heart and saying, “It’s too much, doll—thank you.”

It wasn’t too much.

It sometimes felt like there would never be enough ways to show them how much she loved them.

She circles to the other side of the bed and lays down beside Steve, grabbing hold of the edge of the blanket and pulling it over the three of them.

She breathes in the scent of them, clean sweat and sex, bay scented shaving soap, tobacco smoke, the faintest traces of the rum they’d had earlier and the lavender scented bath soap they wash with.

This is home.

She’s awake for a long while, listening to the sound of their breathing, her hand on the warm skin of Steve’s back.
I feel like the compass and the watch were given to Steve and Bucky from Darcy in a fic I read somewhere, but I can’t for the life of me remember which one. If someone knows, let me know so I can credit the idea appropriately.

And yeah—Steve giving Darcy his mother’s locket is pretty much the closest he could do to giving her an engagement ring. He’s that kind of man. Bucky knows it and approves.

If you haven’t noticed, I’m a romantic. I realize this may be too fluffy for some readers (look away if you hate it) but with Infinity War’s impending release and my thoughts regarding Steve’s survival I felt compelled to give him some kind of life before he potentially lost it. (If you’ve seen it in early release don’t spoil it!)

That’s pretty much the impetus for this entire fic, guys. Also—I always felt bad for Bucky, his life was brutally stolen from him.

It seemed particularly cruel that both of these boys went from poverty and not much kindness in their lives to never ending fighting. But I guess life isn’t fair, is it?
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Steve and Bucky go to the enlistment office. Steve is a stubborn little shit. Bucky makes the best of the time he has left. Dinner at the Barnes residence. Bucky leaves for boot camp.

Chapter Notes

No beta. Please forgive the errors, I try my best to catch them in proofreading.

Angst ahoy! And a NSFW section a little more than halfway through.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Monday, January 5, 1942

Bucky sits on the bench outside of the recruitment office, waiting for Steve to emerge. He holds the enlistment packet in his slightly trembling hands.

_Holy shit._

He can't believe it. In thirty days he’ll be leaving for basic.

_Thirty days._

A month.

He drops his enlistment papers on the bench beside him and leans his elbows on his knees, resting his head in his hands as he breaks out in a cold sweat.

He gives himself a moment then takes a deep breath, straightening up and leaning nonchalantly against the wall behind him.
This is what they’d decided to do, he’d told his mother (she cried) and Darcy, (she’d bitten her lip, her eyes downcast, blinking rapidly before looking steadily at he and Steve with tear bright eyes, saying, “I know you feel this is the right thing to do. I support you—but also,” her voice broke, “I’ll miss you. So, so much.” They’d wrapped their arms around her and held onto each other for a long while) and there’s no turning back.

Steve’s been in there forever—he wonders what the hold up is. The recruitment officers had both of them fill out their personal information—they matched it with the information they had from when they registered for the draft more than a year ago—then they’d had to wait with a bunch of other fellas for a physical examination, which for Bucky had been cursory at best.

He suspects Steve’s was a bit more in depth, given his medical history and temperament. His stubborn friend had gone in ready to argue his way into the Army—despite any physical infirmities that might stand in his way.

Bucky sends up another selfish prayer that they do not take him.

He can’t protect Stevie if he’s a soldier. He doesn’t stop to think sometimes—he rushes in, he doesn’t account for his size or weakness in a fight, and in a war it would get him killed.

*Oh God—I’ll go, fight for my country, just keep Stevie safe.*

If Steve was at home, he’d worry less about Darcy too—they’d have each other.

He hears raised voices down the hall, Steve shouting, “You’ve made a mistake! I can do this—I wanna fight for my country!”

Bucky slumps in relief against the wall as a low voice mutters something unintelligible and a door slams, followed by silence.

He straightens as Steve turns the corner and comes into view, his shoes squeaking on the linoleum as he walks his way—his expression frustrated and his thin shoulders slumped.

He jumps to his feet, walking to meet his friend.
“Hey, punk—uh—how’d it go?” He says.

“4F,” Steve says bitterly.

“Oh. Sorry—I know it means a lot to ya,” he says, awkwardly rubbing his hand over the back of his neck.

Steve eyes him shrewdly, taking in the packet of papers in his hand.

“So—they took ya, huh?”

“Yeah,” Bucky says, “30 days til boot camp.”

He looks into Steve’s blue eyes and sees the pain there, heartbreak mixed with frustration and bitterness.

After a silent moment Steve says, “You’ll make a good soldier, jerk,” and nudges his shoulder with his.

*A good soldier.* God knows he’ll try to make something of himself, but he’d rather stay in Brooklyn than go off to war. But there’s nothing for it.

“Ya think?” Bucky says, tossing an arm around his friend’s neck as they walk down the hall to the exit.

“Yeah—leave some Nazis for me though, I’m gonna keep tryin’.”

“Sure, Stevie,” Bucky says as they walk out into the winter sunlight.
Thursday, January 8, 1942

Steve sits at his work table in the late afternoon sun, sketching out some ideas for the newest commission for the lingerie company. His eyes flick to the open photo album propped on the table top.

He’s using one of the photos from the album Darcy gave him for Christmas as his model. He’s altered her features somewhat, changed the hair color and shape of her nose and lips a little, but the body is all her.

The album had certainly been a sweet surprise on Christmas morning—he doesn’t know about Bucky, but he’s spent a lot of time looking at the pictures of their girl.

His was bound in dark blue leather, small, the kind that fits a 3x5 photo on a single page. Bucky’s was the same, except the leather was gray. There were six photos inside, the same types as Doris had taken of her wearing the blond wig and mask, but in these, Darcy wore no mask, and her dark hair was styled into loose waves, her natural curl tamed and flowing just past her shoulders. Her lips were dark, probably red, though the black and white photo gave no clue, and her expressions ranged from playful to downright provocative.

One in particular had him looking again and again. His girl lay back against the pillows of a big bed, her hair a dark halo spread around her pale features, her teeth sunk into her lower lip. A silky sheet winds around her, barely covering her breasts, leaving her belly bare before draping low over her hips, her shapely legs and dainty feet exposed.

It’s provocative, yet leaves something to the imagination. The look on her face is one he recognizes, the one she gets when she wants him to come closer, to kiss her, to stop teasing.

She confessed she’d gotten a little heated thinking about them during the photo shoot, especially the photo from the bed which was the culmination the series.

She also assured them that Doris is completely professional, giving her the negatives for the photo shoot and printing only the ones she’d decided she liked for he and Bucky.

Anyway, he’s using another photo of her in a dark lacy looking brassiere and panty set, pared with a matching garter belt and sheer black stockings. It’s his second favorite, he thinks—because
stockings.

She’s perched demurely in front of a vanity mirror, brushing her hair. It’s the perfect mix of sexy yet everyday that he thinks will appeal to his employer at the lingerie company.

He’s decided to take on extra commissions so he can get some money socked away, especially since Bucky will be leaving. Even though his friend plans on sending money back to help with the rent (something he doesn’t really agree with but acknowledges as necessary, if only in his own mind) things might get tight if he gets sick again.

Bucky is leaving.

*Bucky is leaving.*

The thought circles his brain like water down a drain, pulling at him every waking moment. He wants to rage at the unfairness of it all—he should be going too.

They should be together.

Since he was eleven years old, there’s hardly been a day they haven’t been together. A bubble of panic rises in his chest any time he lets himself think about it. They’d promised each other—*to the end of the line.*

And now, in less than a month, his friend, *his lover*—would be beyond his reach.

He works furiously for another half an hour, attempting to distract himself from his despairing thoughts. Eventually, he calms, pausing in his work when he hears a key turn the lock to the apartment door.

He calls, “Buck? That you?—I’m workin’ on a drawing.”

“Nah—Stevie, it’s me,” Darcy says, her heels clicking on the wood floor as she crosses to peek her head around the privacy screen.
“You’re home early,” he says smiling at her before refocusing on his drawing, meticulously shading the curve of her waist, the shadows beneath her breasts.

“Yep, Dr. Bobby didn’t have any filing for me today after my shift so I left early.”

She lowers her bag to the floor and takes off her coat, draping it over the end of the bed before sitting on the edge facing him, kicking off her shoes and leaning forward to rub her thumb over the ball of one foot. She looks over the drawing in front of him, watching quietly as his pencil rasps across the paper.

“Another lingerie job?” she asks softly.

“Yeah—thought I’d use one of your pictures as the starting point,” he says, holding up the drawing for her to see better.

“Huh, weird how a few little changes and it doesn’t look like me anymore,” she says.

“Well, not the face anyway,” he says, grinning slyly.

“Not the face,” she agrees and lays back on the bed, her blue eyes drowsy.

He glances back at her after a few more minutes, his eyes tracing up her stocking clad legs.

“Say—what’re ya wearing under your uniform today, doll?” he teases, “maybe ya can help a fella out.”

“Oh? Need a model?” she says sitting up and stretching her arms overhead.

“Couldn’t hurt—probably should have plenty of ideas to present,” he says smoothly.

She reaches behind her and unzips her dress, looking steadily at him as she pulls her arms free from
the sleeves and shoves it down to her waist (peach colored satin bra—hmmm) and lays down to push it over her hips and the rest of the way off (matching panties, white garter belt, sheer nude colored stockings).

He clears his throat and sends her a sideways glance under his lashes, focusing on the lacy bands at the top of each stocking.

She smiles and rolls onto her side to prop her head in one hand, biting her lip then saying, “so how do you want me?”

Steve pauses, looking her over from the top of her head all the way to the tips of her toes.

He shoves the drawing aside and steps towards the bed.

A little inspiration never hurt.

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Friday, January 23, 1942

Bucky stands behind the bag, holding it still as he watches Steve punch it, sweaty and determined, even if he’s already out of breath after just a few minutes.

Punk just won’t give up.

They’ve been at this every day after work, Steve pushing himself into an asthma attack before he gives up, Bucky helping him home so he can use his nebulizer—Darcy standing by and exchanging helpless looks with Bucky as Steve struggles.

As his time before leaving for boot camp draws to a close, Steve seems more feverishly determined than ever, taking on extra commissions and working at his table late into the night, mapping out the locations of all of the recruitment centers in New York City, and refusing to entertain the idea that he can do important work at home—that he doesn’t have to be a soldier to count.
Bucky has just about had enough.

When Steve steps back from the bag, bending at the waist to rest his gloved hands on his knees to gasp for breath, Bucky walks over to the nearby bench and start packing up their stuff. He throws Steve’s shirt at his head to get his attention and waits.

Steve straightens up, his shirt falling to the floor and says, “What’re ya doin’?”

“Goin’ home. I’m takin’ Darcy dancing—you can come too—or you can keep wasting time here,” he says, shrugging into his coat and looping the strap of his bag over his shoulder.

“I’m not wastin’ time,” Steve says, frowning.

“Maybe not yours—but you’re wastin’ mine! I got a couple weeks then I’m gone for God knows how long,” he says, “I don’t wanna waste another minute we can be together, Darce deserves time too, ya know.”

He stomps towards the door and exits, slamming the door behind him.

Stupid punk.

He stalks halfway down the block before he sighs, looking up at the sky and praying for patience before he turns around, stopping near the door to the gym to lean against the brick wall and pull out a cigarette.

He turns the zippo in his hand, absently flicking it alight and shivering as the wind picks up and a few snowflakes swirl around him.

He’s just about to call it a quits when Steve comes through the door, still wheezing but not as bad as he’s let himself get in recent days.

Steve walks over and leans against the wall beside him, his shoulder bumping against his arm and
saying nothing.

Bucky keeps his silence—still too angry to speak without saying something hurtful.

A few minutes pass, Bucky finishing off his cigarette and dropping it to the ground to grind it out under the toe of his boot.

Steve heaves a sigh and nudges his arm, “I’m sorry, Buck,” he says quietly.

Bucky says nothing for a moment, gazing sightlessly at his crushed cigarette butt slowly being covered by snow.

“Are ya? Really? Because I don’t have time to have this conversation again,” he bites out, turning to look at his friend.

Steve bows his head, rubbing the back of his neck, “Yeah.”

“You aren’t the only one in this, ya know. I would rather stay here with you and Darce. I’m not happy about leavin’,” he says, his eyes pricking with tears, “I worry about ya, about Darce and Ma and Becca—what will happen to them if something happens to me? But I gotta do this and I’m countin’ on ya to hold down the fort.”

Steve’s brow furrows, and after a minute he nods.

“I’m gonna keep tryin’, jerk,” he says, nudging his arm with an elbow.

Bucky huffs, “I know. You wouldn’t be Steven Grant Rogers if ya weren’t a stubborn little shit,” he sighs heavily and rolls his shoulders before continuing, “just—don’t forget who you’re fightin’ for, punk. The people that love ya need ya to be present, not spendin’ all your time with your head up your ass.”

“Hey!” Steve squawks, elbowing his side with more force.
“Yeah, yeah,” Bucky says, turning to start walking home, he looks over his shoulder and raises an inquiring eyebrow, “Ya comin’?”

Steve hurries to catch up.

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Wednesday, January 28, 1942

Darcy stands in front of the bulletin board in the ER, looking at U.S. Army Nurse recruitment poster. They’re popping up all over the hospital, and she’s heard several nurses discussing joining up.

Dr. Bobby walks over to stand beside her, his eyes scanning the poster before he turns to look at her.

“Thinking of joining up?” he asks.

“Maybe? I don’t know,” she says, “I feel like I could help.”

“When’s your graduation date?” he asks.

“End of May—a little earlier than most of my class, but I never took the summers off of school and did the all extra internships available,” she says.

“Mmmhmm—if you plan on sticking around for a while, I’d like to offer you a place in the ER,” he says quietly and she sucks in a breath, surprised.

“Really?”

“Really. You’ve been doing the work already, your instincts are excellent, and to be honest, you were ready a couple of months ago. We’re gonna lose some staff with the war on—you’d be a good fit,” he says.
“I’d love that,” she says, bouncing on her toes a little with her excitement.

He chuckles, “Good to see you like it here. Admin does the hiring but it’s just a formality in this case. I run the department and they’ll take my recommendation.”

She nods, overwhelmed at the prospect.

“And if you decide to join up,” he tilts his head towards the poster, “you’ll be better prepared than most—I’ll make sure of it.”

“Thanks Dr. Bobby,” she says.

He pats her on the shoulder and snorts, “Don’t thank me yet.”

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Saturday, January, 30, 1942

9:00 am

Darcy is rubbing a towel over her hair in the bathroom, the scissors and comb laid out on the edge of the sink in preparation for trimming her hair.

It’s always grown fast, but in the last year or so it’s gotten ridiculous. Weekly trims are necessary or it would be out of control in no time.

She combs it out, her curls pulled straight enough that they reach just below her shoulders. She’s snipping an inch off the ends in the front when she hears the apartment door open and Bucky calling out, “Doll—where ya at?”

She snips the ends of another section.
“Bathroom!” she calls.

The sound of his footfalls on the wood floor and the scent of his shaving soap precedes his arrival, and he leans his long frame against the doorframe, watching her trim another section, the wet hair falling onto the shoulders of her bathrobe and tumbling to the floor.

“We doing breakfast together this morning?” he asks.

“Mmhmm—I was just waiting for you and Steve to get up,” she says.

“Punk’s still sleepin’, might as well start on it then I’ll go down and wake him,” he says.

“Sounds good,” she says absently, combing out another section of hair from behind her ear and snipping the ends.

He watches silently for a moment before he says, “Ya want me to do the back?”

She raises an eyebrow, looking at his reflection in the mirror as she holds the ends of her hair straight on either side of her face, comparing the length.

“You sure you won’t scalp me?” she teases.

“Nah—I cut Stevie’s all the time,” he says.

“Alright, I always hate doing the back anyhow,” she says.

He walks up behind her, their eyes meeting in the reflection of the bathroom mirror as she hands him the comb and scissors.

“How much ya takin’ off?” he asks, running the comb through the wet strands.
“Oh—take an inch,” she says.

He’s silent, the only sound the snick of the shears as he clips her hair.

“Funny,” he says, running the comb through the strands again before snipping the ends on the next section.

“What?” She asks.

“That this is the first time I’ve seen ya cuttin’ your hair,” he says.

He sets the scissors on the edge of the sink as he brushes off her shoulders, and runs the comb through her hair one last time to check that everything is even.

“Well—I’ve always taken care of it myself,” she says, “grows like a weed, gotta cut it every week.”

“Really? Huh,” he says, reaching around her and setting the comb on the edge of the sink beside the scissors.

He leans into her, hooking his chin over her shoulder to nose her hair aside, pressing kisses to her neck as he wraps his hands around her hips to pull her against him.

“Hmmm,” she hums, tipping her head to the side to give him better access and watching him in the mirror.

After a moment he says, “Whatcha wearin’ under this robe, doll?”

She grins slowly, “Nothing except my locket,” she says.

“Hmmm,” he slips his hand under the edge of her robe at her waist, his fingers skimming over the soft skin of her stomach, “Where’s Will?”
She shivers a little as he runs his hand up beneath her breast, cupping the weight of it in his hand.

“Tony’s,” she says.

“Oh?” he loosens the knot on the sash of her robe, parting either side of it and slowly tugging it down her arms.

He kicks the bathroom door closed and she rests her hands on the edge of the sink, watching his reflection in the mirror as he hangs her robe on the hook.

He steps behind her, running one hand down the length of her naked back and looking intently at her reflection in the mirror.

She shivers again as he palms her ass, goosebumps raising on her skin.

“Diaphragm?” he asks, sliding his hand around the front of her to slip between her legs, parting her nether lips with one long finger and slipping back and forth, spreading the rapidly gathering moisture there.

“Uh—still in from last night,” she gasps.

“Good,” he says.

She leans her head back against his shoulder, her teeth buried in her bottom lip as he rubs over her clit with a calloused fingertip and brings his other hand up to cup one breast.

His silvery blue eyes meet hers in the mirror as he breathes in her ear, “Look at you—so beautiful,” he rolls her nipple between his thumb and index finger and she arches her back, her eyes falling closed at the rush of sensation, “keep your eyes open, Darce,” Bucky growls, rubbing the hard bulge of his cock against her bottom.

She opens her eyes and Bucky tweaks her nipple again, lifting his finger from her clit to dip further between her legs, prodding gently at her entrance before slipping inside. His finger easily slides back and forth, aided by the slick evidence of her arousal, and he pulls out, adding a second finger and
slowly pressing inside. He moves his thumb to rub in slow circles around her clit and she whimpers, “Bucky—“ her legs trembling beneath her.

She grunts as he crooks his fingers inside of her, rubbing that sensitive spot that drives her crazy.

He pauses, grinning at her reflection, and teasing, “Eager, Darce?”

She pouts, circling her hips against him until he continues working his fingers inside of her, and the muscles of her legs tighten and shake as the sensation he’s kindling with his fingers builds and builds.

He strokes his hand from her breast to her side, whispering , “Can ya lean forward and rest your knee on the edge of the sink, doll?”

Yes, she can.

She leans forward, opening herself to Bucky as she rests her knee on the edge of the sink, knocking the scissors and comb into the bowl when she rests her hands on either side of it. He’s pulled his fingers from inside of her but continues to stroke over her clit with them as he fumbles with his pants behind her.

After a moment he presses against her, the naked length of his cock rubbing along the crevice of her ass to prod at her entrance, “Arch your back a little more,” he rasps, meeting her eyes in the mirror. She does, grunting as he surges into her, the sudden fullness sending a rush of sensation through her that pushes her ever closer to orgasm.

Bucky’s nostrils flare and a flush spreads over his cheekbones, his face gorgeously alive with pleasure.

“Mmmmm, god—the way you feel,” he groans, grabbing her hip and pulling back to slam back into her again, her knee slipping on the cool porcelain of the sink as he rocks into her.

There’s something unbearably erotic about being completely naked while Bucky remains mostly clothed, the slick, stretched sensation of him filling her juxtaposed with the rougher texture of his shirt and the edges of his pants abrading the skin of her back and bottom.
She presses one hand to the mirror to balance herself as Bucky thrusts hard against her, little grunts coming from him each time he bottoms out, the squelching sound of their connection and the smacking of his hips against her ass filling the small room.

“Ugh—babydoll—so good—“ he groans, pressing his fingers a little harder against her clit as the first shudders of her orgasm hit her.

She meets his molten gaze in the mirror, his eyes dark and his face flushed as she clenches around him, struggling to keep her heavy lidded eyes open as a paroxysm of pleasure roars through her.

The white noise of her blood rushing through her veins overwhelms her and her head drops, her forehead resting on the mirror as Bucky grabs hold of her hips and thrusts a final few times, moaning Darce, baby and oh yeah, oh—mmm as he empties himself in her.

Their labored breathing fills the silence as he sags against her, wrapping one arm around her waist as his lips press against the back of her neck.

After a moment she lowers her leg from the edge of the sink and Bucky slips from her with a low groan. She turns in his arms to kiss him softly, pulling back to say, “Well—I’ll never think of trimming my hair quite the same way.”

He grins, ruefully glancing at the hair that litters the bathroom floor.

“Yeah—got a little sidetracked,” he reaches for the damp washcloth she’d left hanging on the shower curtain rod, quickly wiping himself down and pulling his pants back around his waist.

He nudges her to the side and she leans against the edge of the sink as he rinses the washcloth and wrings it out, reaching between them to gently wipe the top of her thighs and between her legs, kissing her softly when he’s finished.

“Love you, Bucky,” she whispers against his lips.

His arms tighten around her and he leans his forehead against hers and says, “Oh, doll—I love ya like crazy.”
Sunday, February 1, 1942

Bucky grips Darcy and Steve’s hands under the table as Ma says grace before their meal, his heart heavy with the realization that this is the last Sunday dinner he’ll have with his family for a long while.

From what he’s been told, basic training will last ten weeks, then he will be getting more specialized training, depending on his aptitude. He’s thinking the years of shooting with his da and the more recent weapons testing with Howard will come in handy.

He’s being sent to Camp McCoy in Wisconsin of all places, and he’s not certain where he will go from there. All he knows is he will be far from home and on his own in a way he’s never experienced in his 24 years.

He glances sideways at Steve and his friend squeezes his hand, no doubt in tune with Bucky’s thoughts. Darcy’s ankle nudges his, and she hooks her ankle around his, hugging him the only way she can at the moment.

He’s so wrapped up in his thoughts he doesn’t catch most of what his ma says until his name is mentioned.

“…lastly Lord, please watch over my son, James, as he travels away from us this week to begin his training with the Army. Please help him to exercise sound judgement, to learn well, and to come back to us soon. Keep him safe in all his travels, Amen.”

Bucky’s heart seizes in his chest and he keeps his head bowed a moment longer than necessary in order to get ahold of himself. Steve squeezes his hand once more before taking the bowl of mashed potatoes from Ma, serving himself and passing it on to him.

After a while, the good food and conversation work to relax him, and he pokes fun at Becca over her disappointment that Will didn’t come with them.
He sighs dramatically, “Oh—I guess me leaving for boot camp ain’t such a big deal, compared to Will not coming to dinner.”

Becca’s face reddens, “I didn’t say that Bucky!” she bows her dark head over her plate and mutters, “just wondering where he was, is all,” and shoves a forkful of mashed potatoes in her mouth.

Bucky says dramatically, “Maybe you ain’t gonna miss me at all,” he drapes his arm across his forehead in mock despair.

He peeks at Becca who narrows her brown eyes at him before violently kicking his ankle under the table.

He winces and Darcy snickers, rubbing his thigh in commiseration.

Well, maybe gettin’ kicked in the ankle ain’t so bad.

“Maybe I won’t—if Darcy brings Will to dinner,” Becca says, “Hmmm,” she ponders, taking a bite of meatloaf and chewing thoughtfully.

Ma clears her throat, “Oh, about that, Darcy, Steve, I still expect you for church and supper on Sundays, even while James is off in Wisconsin,” she says, frowning, “I still wonder why they’re sending you there—isn’t there anything closer?”

Bucky shrugs, “Dunno Ma—there’s Camp Lehigh in New Jersey, but maybe they aren’t training new troops there.”

Ma nods and asks Becca to pass her the rolls.

While she’s focused on buttering one, he surreptitiously flicks a small bit of mashed potatoes at Becca, hitting her in the cheek. She looks up from her plate, rubbing her cheek in puzzlement before glancing at him.

He grins unrepentantly at her and her lips tighten ominously as she twirls her fork in the creamed spinach.
Steve’s blue eyes glint with mischief as he sizes Becca up before smirking at Bucky and turning towards Ma, intent on distracting her with conversation while Becca plots her revenge.

Traitor.

Darcy asks him a question and as he turns to look at her Becca strikes, a blob of creamed spinach colliding with his neck and dripping down onto his collar.

He jerks, looking towards Becca, who sends him a toothy grin as she slowly butters a roll, teasing, “Bucky, you heathen, use your napkin! I don’t know how Darcy can stand it—yuck.”

Darcy snorts beside him, handing him her napkin as Ma narrows her eyes at them.

_Uh oh._

“James,” he sits up straighter, “Rebecca,” she squirms guiltily in her chair, “don’t even think of continuing with your nonsense. I have my eye on you,” Ma says sternly, although the corners of her mouth twitch in an aborted grin.

“Yes, Ma,” he says, and kicks Becca’s ankle and she jumps, whispering, “_Ow._”

He’s gonna miss them so much.

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Wednesday, February 4, 1942

1pm

Steve sits on the edge of the bed, gripping the large photo album that contains the pictures of the three of them as Bucky folds the last of his clothing and packs it away in the cardboard box next to
“There,” he says, closing up the box before labeling it with one of his pencils Bucky’s clothes.

Surprising how most of his stuff fits into one large box.

Bucky had decided to pack up all of his things and send them over to his ma’s, reasoning that Steve might actually get into the army and he didn’t want him to be stuck trying to figure out what to do with his things.

Besides, the recruiter told him not to bother bringing clothing or personal items other than those on his back because the army would supply the uniforms which would be all he was allowed to wear for the foreseeable future.

He sits beside Steve and reaches for the photo album, flipping it open in his lap and looking at the pictures.

“I wish I could take this with me, “ he says, “but I’m gonna be stuck in the barracks with a bunch of strange fellas—besides, I’m not even sure how many personal items I’ll be allowed to keep.”

He traces his finger over the picture of he and Steve asleep in each other’s arms. Then flicks to the next page, where a series of photos show he and Darcy dancing, her head tipped back and laughing, then the three of them squashed together in the back of Howard’s car, grins on their faces.

Bucky smiles and loosens the photo from the page, removing it to look more closely as he pulls the everpresent watch Darcy had given him from his pocket and holds the picture up to show Steve, “Would ya mind if I cut down the edges of this one? I think I could fit it into the back of the watch cover,” he says, holding the watch over the picture to visualize how much of the edges he’ll have to cut away.

“Sure—Darcy has all the negatives anyhow, we can make another copy,” Steve says, standing to grab a pair of scissors from his work table before sitting beside Bucky again.

“Ya wanna cut it for me, punk?” Bucky says turning the picture in his hands and opening the watch cover to lay it over it.
“Sure,” Steve says, “Gimme the watch so I can measure.”

Bucky hands the photo and the watch to him and observes attentively as Steve slowly cuts away the edges, periodically laying it on the inside of the watch cover before trimming a bit more away.

Finally, it fits perfectly. Steve grabs a roll of cellulose tape from the table and trims a couple of pieces off, anchoring the picture so Bucky won’t lose it when he opens his watch.

“There ya go,” he says, handing it back to his friend.

Bucky looks down at the photo, closes the cover then flicks it open again.

He closes it and sighs, “Thanks, Stevie,” before returning it to his pocket.

After a moment he leans over to the nightstand, pulling open the drawer and grabbing hold of the small gray photo album Darcy had given him for Christmas.

“You’ll have to keep this safe for me,” he says, “I don’t dare take it with me and I can’t risk Ma finding it in my things.”

Steve nods as Bucky hands it to him, flicking it open to the picture of Darcy in her garterbelt and stockings.

He sighs—*stockings.*

Bucky chortles beside him, nudging him with his shoulder, “You and your love of stockings —*Jesus*.”

Steve smiles, unashamed. Nothing wrong with lovin’ the way a beautiful girl looks in stockings, after all.
“Yeah, I’ll keep it with mine,” he says, setting the albums aside, “Say, maybe ya could take one of those pictures Doris took of Darcy in disguise.” Steve wiggles his eyebrows suggestively.

“Kinda worried that’d get me pent up and frustrated without any privacy for jerkin’ off,” Bucky says.

Steve teases, “I guess—havin’ somebody in the room never really stopped ya before, though,” Bucky shoves him and Steve falls onto the bed, laughing.

“I’m discreet,” Bucky says.

“Not really—unless you count your long showers,” Steve says, laughing harder when Bucky leans over him and tickles his ribs vengefully.

They roll around, laughing and tickling each other until they end up collapsed onto their backs side by side, breathing heavily.

After a moment Bucky rolls onto his side and Steve turns his head to meet his friend’s serious expression.

“I’m really gonna miss you, Stevie,” he whispers.

Steve sighs, “Buck—“

Bucky stops him from saying more, spearing his fingers through his hair and pulling him in to kiss him softly, his lips warm against his.

Steve wills himself to stop thinking and just lets himself feel the sensation of Bucky’s lips pressed to his. Now that time is growing short, he wishes he could take back the days, wishes he’d realized he was in love with Bucky sooner.

Days he could have spent kissing him just like this.

They kiss for a long while, the kind of kissing that doesn’t necessarily lead to sex, but is more for
comfort and closeness. The kind of sweet, soft kissing that makes Steve’s heart ache, his emotions too big for his body to contain.

If after a while tears streak both of their faces, they don’t mention it.

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Thursday, January 5, 1942

10am

Grand Central Station

Bucky hefts his duffel bag over his shoulder, his ticket in hand as he readies to board the train to Wisconsin.

Darcy, Steve, Becca, and Ma stand next to him on the noisy platform. They are surrounded by groups of people saying goodbye to their sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands—all attempting to keep a brave face, not all of them succeeding.

He spies a young father hugging his wife and son a little ways away, the little boy crying, and thinks that would be the worst thing—to leave a child behind.

He looks at Darcy and Steve.

It’s bad enough as it is.

They said their private goodbyes the night before—they’d made love feverishly, as if storing up the memory of it for the future.

He’d tried to sleep afterwards, snug between the two of them, but some part of him couldn’t rest, and he refused to lose a minute to unconsciousness.
Punk had finally fallen asleep, but Darcy had been awake, her chest pressed to his back and her chin hooked over his shoulder, her hands stroking soothing patterns over his skin as he curled around Steve, his hand over his friend’s heart as he slept.

They’d whispered to each other—vague plans for the future, of how maybe being in the army wouldn’t be so bad, that he would see the world, maybe learn a trade, make more money so they could save to get a house someday.

He’d wanted to say something about getting married—he’d thought it. But it seemed a betrayal of his relationship with Steve to even consider it. He knows his friend has always wanted to get married someday, to have a family. He’d always talked about it like it was an unattainable dream because of his poor health and Bucky had always insisted any dame would be lucky to have him.

Now though—he’s not sure what they’ll do, but it will be the three of them, one way or another. They just have to get past the war and they’ll figure it out together.

The speaker crackles above their heads, announcing his train to Wisconsin is boarding.

Ma envelops him in her arms, holding him tight, the familiar scent of rose water filling his nose and her silver threaded dark hair brushing against his cheek. She chokes, “You be good, James. Write me to let me know how things are going,” she reaches into her handbag and pushes a paper sack into his hands, “a couple sandwiches for the trip—I know you get hungry,” she sniffs and steps back, Becca taking her place.

“You be good, kiddo,” he says, his lips pressed against his sisters dark hair, “stay away from the boys.”

She tilts her head back and sends him a watery smile, “Are you kidding? This is my big chance!”

He chucks her under the chin and turns to Darcy and Steve.

Ma pats his shoulder and says, “Come along, Becca—help me to find a washroom,” she raises a dark eyebrow knowingly and ushers Becca away.
Darcy is clutching Steve’s hand, her eyes swimming with tears, and he feels like his heart is a hot coal burning in his chest.

He wraps her in his arms and pulls Steve close to his side.

He says, “I’m countin’ on you two to take care of each other while I’m gone—Stevie, I’ll be sendin’ money to you to help with the rent, and I expect both of ya to look in on Ma and Becca.”

Darcy nods wordlessly, her soft curls tickling beneath his chin. She tilts her head to look up at him, her storm blue eyes glossy with tears, and he kisses her cheek, running his nose along her jaw to whisper, “I love you Darce—so much.”

She smiles through her tears, cupping his face in her hands, “I love you too Bucky.”

He reluctantly steps back and turns to his oldest friend.

Steve’s face is solemn, his brow creased into a frown, and Bucky recognizes the look from every scrap he’s ever been in their entire lives.

“Don’t be stupid, punk,” he says, pulling Steve into a hard embrace.

“How can I, jerk?” he says hoarsely, “you’re takin’ all the stupid with you.”

He chuckles, but it feels like broken glass in his gut as he pulls away, walking towards the train to board.

He doesn’t look back, knowing he’ll break down if he does.

Chapter End Notes

After the Civil War, the term 4-F (4F) continued to be used to disqualify possible
recruits for medical, dental, or other health reasons. (Per Wikipedia)

You may have noticed a bit of borrowed dialogue from Captain America: The First Avenger. I’ll be playing with some of it in the next couple chapters. Also, my timeline will be different than the one portrayed in the movies—mostly because it was vague and parts of it didn’t make sense to me.

For instance, basic training lasted 10 weeks or so once the U.S. entered WW2, it got shorter as time went on and soldiers were more urgently needed at the front. So how did Bucky enlist in December 1941 and not get shipped out til July 1943? I have no answers for that, no idea what the character was doing. So I will be altering what is MCU canon a bit.

Please let me know what you thought! Encouragement helps the author with writers block.

Also, thank you to all of you who have left kudos and comments. It is very much appreciated. I’m behind on answering all of the comments but be sure I will read and reply! Love to you all!
February 12, 1942

Dear Darcy and Steve,

I apologize for not writing sooner, but I’ve never been so tired in my entire life. I thought I was prepared for the Army, but I was wrong. They have us up before the sun and running—the last few weeks have been all about getting us in shape and it’s hard work, and I started out in better shape than most here.

When we first arrived at camp they herded all the new recruits over to the barber, where they shaved our heads.

Darce, my hair has never been so short—you’d hate it.

Then they took us to another room where they had us strip down to our undershorts.

By the way, Wisconsin is cold and the barracks are drafty.

Then we had to pack all of our belongings except for our wallets into a box to be tagged and sent home. I managed to keep my watch by slipping it into my wallet (don’t worry I hid it under the uniforms and stuff in my trunk and only look at it at night—I managed to keep the zippo too and it makes a handy flashlight—nobody in the barracks is gonna snitch on me).

They took our sizes and gave us new pants, shirts, socks, underwear, coats, a pair of boots, and a pair of dress shoes too. We each got a canvas bag to pack it all in and a bucket with some soap, a razor, toothbrush, some toothpowder, and a comb in it.

We have to pay for it all out of our Army wages, which doesn’t seem fair since I could have used my own stuff, but I guess they want us all to be the same.

So now I’m training as a part of the 107th Infantry Regiment, out of New York City.

Stevie—every day we wake up before daylight (4:30am!) and they have us run for miles before...
breakfast.

You might want to rethink enlisting, punk.

I thought I was in pretty good shape from walking all over Brooklyn and working on the docks, but I’m not used to running quite this much so I’ve been a little sore and tired while my body adjusts.

We get three square meals a day, the food ain’t bad, but it’s not like the good meals I’ve been spoiled with in the past year.

Some of these guys came in pretty skinny, and they’re actually putting on weight with all the food. I, on the other hand, feel like I’m losing any softness I might’ve had.

The first week, they had us taking all sorts of tests, trying to figure out our aptitudes, asking us questions about our jobs, hobbies, and interests.

They seemed pretty interested in the boxing and shooting I’ve done, for certain.

Well, there’s more I’d like to tell you but it’s almost lights out, so I’ll close with telling you I love you both. So much.

Bucky

P.S.

You can write me back at the return address on the envelope—the D.I. (Drill Instructor) hands out letters an hour before lights out and that’s pretty much all the free time we get.

Darce, I know you’ll be tempted to send me food, but don’t bother. We catch hell for that kind of thing and everyone else will end up eating it anyhow.

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March 13, 1942

3:30pm

“But, Steve, won’t you get in trouble if you keep trying to enlist after getting turned down already?” Darcy says.

“I don’t care—maybe if they see how much I wanna contribute to defending my country they’ll change their minds,” he says, a familiar stubborn expression on his face.

She sits on the bed, still in her nurses uniform and coat, watching him comb his damp hair in the reflection from her vanity mirror. He’s dressed in his nice church pants, with a white button down shirt and a blue sweater she’d knitted for him.
He crosses the room to sit beside her as he laces up his freshly polished shoes.

She bites her lip, knowing he’s determined and there’s precious little she can say to change his mind when his mind is made up.

“What do you want me to come with you?” she asks hopefully.

He’s taking the train over to Queens, having already been turned down at the enlistment office in Brooklyn.

“Nah, Darce,” he says, rising to his feet and grabbing his coat off the end of the bed, “I’m not sure how long it’ll take—I probably won’t be home for dinner.”

He leans down and kisses her temple, and she turns her head and cups her hands around his face, looking intently into his blue eyes. He stills, the frenetic energy he’s displayed since she got home quieting.

“Ya know it doesn’t make you less of a man if you don’t get in, right?” she says softly.

He closes his eyes, a brief pained expression flashing across his face.

He nods, opens his eyes and says, “Just tryin’ to do my part, Darce.”

Darcy pulls him close and hugs him tight, stroking her hands down his back before letting him go.

His mouth curves into a small smile as he steps away and sends her a mock salute, “See ya later, doll,” he says and turns to head out the door.

“I’ll keep dinner warm for you,” she calls to his retreating back.
April 2, 1942

Dear Darcy,

Thank you for your last letter, it really brightens my day anytime I get something from you or Steve. I’m doing well, despite a stomach virus that went through the barracks last week. It didn’t last long, but I’ve never felt sicker in my life. It was probably made worse by the fact I was stuck with a bunch of smelly, whining fellas who all felt miserable too.

The last couple weeks they had us running drills, crawling through obstacle courses, learning some judo and knife fighting techniques. Turns out my fighting experience gives me a little edge—though there are quite a few scrappy sorts in our group.

During our runs and other exercise, we’ve started carrying a wooden rifle, approximately the same size and weight of an actual one, to become accustomed to the feeling of one in our hands. The D.I. says by the end of training, our rifles should feel like an extension of ourselves.

I don’t know about that.

Speaking of weapons, we’re starting training at the rifle range this week. I’m curious to see how I measure up, considering I have some experience with shooting. Most of the fellas here have never even handled a gun, much less shot one.

Doll, I miss you more than I can say. Days aren’t as bad, they keep us so busy it’s hard to think of much else. But the nights are hard.

The first week or so, the poor fella in the bunk above mine would cry at night. He tried to keep it quiet, but I could hear him. He’s only 18 years old—as lonely as I feel, I can’t imagine how hard it is for him.

I’m sure he’s not the only one who’s shed some tears.

There were a couple of mean fellas trying to give some of the younger guys some grief — calling them sissies and whatnot for being scared and lonely.

I put a stop to that nonsense.

It’s almost lights out, so I have to go.

I love you, Stevie better be treating you right.

Kiss the punk for me—

Bucky
Stevie,

You have no idea how much I wished I was at home with you and Darcy this week. We all had some kind of stomach virus and I never puked so much in my life. Not to mention the shitting. So much shitting.

The barracks smelled something awful.

Anyhow, we’ve been doing some interesting stuff lately, still lots of running and crawling around on our bellies through the woods, but we’ve started some hand to hand combat using something called judo, also, knife fighting.

Turns out all that time at Goldie’s is paying off in more than boxing prizes. Our D.I., Davies, seemed happy with my performance (as happy as he can be anyhow—he stopped screaming for a few seconds) and had me showing a few of the less athletic fellas a few things after he figured I had it down.

It’s still cold here, winter sure does last a long time in Wisconsin. There’s not much to do in our free time—little as there is. Most of the fellas take the time to write letters home, maybe play cards or read a book.

I sure appreciate all the letters you and Darcy have been sending me, she told me in her last letter that you’re still stuck on enlisting, and I gotta say I wish I was in your shoes right now, what with a beautiful girl in your bed every night and time to do things like go to see a show or to take her dancing.

Don’t take your time for granted, punk. Our girl deserves your best.

I love you, stupid.

Kiss Darcy for me—

Bucky

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Saturday, April 25, 1942

2pm

Steve pokes his tongue out of the corner of his mouth in concentration as he carefully spreads the chocolate frosting over the slightly lopsided cake on the counter.
It’s Darcy’s 24th birthday tomorrow and Will took her to do some birthday shopping to keep her away for a couple hours so Steve could get her cake together and put up some decorations to surprise her.

Bucky had sent her some red roses that’d been delivered this morning. They presently stood in a vase on the kitchen table—Darcy had read the attached note, her eyes filling with tears as she buried her nose in the fragrant blooms.

Later tonight they’re going out dancing with Will, Tony, Doris, and Bess. It’s their first time going since Bucky left and he and Darcy are feeling his friend’s absence keenly, hopefully the music and company will cheer them up, even if dancing only ever brings Bucky to mind.

They write to each other every two or three days. Sometimes Bucky sends a letter addressed to both of them, sometimes there are separate letters. Darcy and Steve figured staggering their letters would help Bucky feel more connected to their everyday lives, so she usually sits down on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings to write him about current events or just to let him know she’s thinking of him.

Steve sends a couple letters a week as well, accompanied with doodles that illustrate his stories. He’d even sent ahead a couple of ideas he’d had for the Fuller Brush man series to get his friend’s opinion, laughing to himself when he imagined Bucky opening his mail in the crowded barracks to find pornographic doodles.

Bucky had written back after receiving it and said he’d had to take that letter to the bathroom to be by himself for a few minutes, since the lovely lady he’d drawn had reminded him a little too much of Darcy.

Ha.

He stands back, and tilts his head, a little disappointed with the appearance of cake. It’s definitely listing to one side, not very pretty, but he tasted the frosting (it was good) and followed Darcy’s chocolate cake recipe to the letter, so it should be tasty.

Hopefully.

Maybe a couple birthday candles will distract from its appearance.
He rummages through the cabinets until he locates Darcy’s cake keeper and slides the plate onto the base, placing it on the kitchen table beside the vase of roses before covering it with the glass dome.

He turns in a circle to check the appearance of the decorations he’d hung around the room.

Becca had gone with him to the drug store last week to help him pick out some colorful crepe streamers which he draped around the room with cellophane tape. She’d picked them out since he’s not so great with color. They’d also gotten some balloons, which Will had blown up for him, since he didn’t have the lung power.

A bunch of them are hanging over the kitchen table and around the doorways. It looks colorful and festive—just the thing they all need right now.

Steve figures this is the least he can do for his girl, considering she does so much for him.

He fills the sink with soapy water and starts in on the dishes.

He’d better hurry—they’ll be home soon.

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Sunday, April 26, 1942

12:30am

Steve and Darcy stumble through the doorway into his apartment, laughing. Darcy is holding the remains of a bottle of champagne in one hand and propping Steve up with her other arm.

He’s a little drunk, and Darcy thinks he’s adorable with his mussed up blond hair and goofy grin.

“Doll—ya gonna model those stockings and garters I got ya?” he says, leaning against the wall as she closes the door and locks it.
He reaches for the bottle of champagne and necks it, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand after taking a good slug.

She laughs, “Been waiting all night for that, huh?”

Steve nods, “Mmmhmm,” and hands the bottle back to her.

She walks over to the sofa, tipping the bottle back to finish it off and setting it on the coffee table.

She turns back to Steve, slowly unbuttoning her coat and draping it over the arm of the sofa before walking back to him. He’s still leaning against the wall, flushed and disheveled, his bright eyes focused on her.

She spears her fingers through his soft blond hair, leaning to press him against the wall and kiss him slowly. He tilts his head, slipping his tongue along the seam of her lips and making a noise low in his throat when she opens for him, their tongues tangling together, the tart flavor of champagne on their lips.

She pulls back, tugging him by the hand, “Come on—bedtime Stevie.”

May 15, 1942

Dear Darcy and Steve,

Well, I made it through basic alright and now the brass wants us to do more specialized training. Along with upping everyone’s rank to Private First Class, they have us camping out in the woods, practicing maneuvers for days at a time.

My skill with a rifle got me noticed and I’m now a designated marksman—just like Da was. They gave me a new rifle with a much more accurate scope on it (looks like it might be Howard’s work) and I spend more of my time trying to shoot distant targets.

Rumor has it they’ll be moving us to Pine Camp in upstate New York sometime in July to make room for the next wave of recruits. Apparently the place is huge, a lot of regiments will be there and we’ll be doing maneuvers together.

I’ll be closer to home—but still pretty far north. Even if I get a couple days r&r it’s a long train ride away from Brooklyn.
Sorry this is short, don’t have a lot of free time this evening and it’s almost lights out.

I love you both,

Bucky

June 30, 1942

Bucky,

It’s strange being done with school and a licensed nurse, but I can definitely appreciate not having to tote around so many books in my bag and the existence of an actual paycheck.

I work odd hours, being the newest hire means I get the least desirable shifts. So a lot of weekends, a lot of nights.

Luckily Steve’s work schedule is pretty flexible and I don’t need as much sleep as most people—otherwise we’d be two ships passing in the night.

In other news, Tony enlisted in the Air Force. He’s leaving in a couple weeks and Will is pretty upset.

Will thinks Tony figured it was inevitable he’d have to go and he still wonders if he should have just enlisted when you did, but Howard says the work they’re doing is important too.

Will is going to Camp Lehigh with Howard next week to meet with some Army brass—not sure what that’s all about. Honestly, there’s a lot of stuff Howard and Will are doing that are apparently secrets.

Steve attempted to enlist again, for the third time.

4F, again.

It was really difficult to get him out of his funk afterwards. I think it helps that he’s started doing some volunteer work around the neighborhood. He’s been to some Civilian Defense meetings and seemed happier when he found there are things he can do for the cause.

I’ve been sincerely considering joining the Army Nurse Corps but worry about leaving Steve. I’m not really sure what to do.

I hope you’re well and can maybe come home if you get some leave soon. Steve and I miss you very much.

Love,

Darcy
July 8, 1942

Steve,

Sounds like you had some fun for your birthday, glad you got to go out to Coney Island, even if you decided to stay off the Cyclone. (I still think you would have been fine that one time if you hadn’t eaten a hot dog before we got on.)

Thanks for the photo booth picture too, I’ll carry it in my wallet.

How’s the Civil Defense stuff going? I bet you like being a Ground Observer, hanging out by the bridge keeping an eye on things with binoculars at night. Just make sure you’re looking out over the harbor—not in some dame’s window.

All jokes aside, the stuff you’re doing matters and it’s great you’re finding ways to help.

Kiss Darce for me,

Love,

Bucky

——

July 15, 1942

Dear Bucky,

Looks like Stark is sponsoring some fair type thing over in Queens called The World Exposition of Tomorrow. It’s going to have all sorts of exhibits having to do with future technologies.

Anyway, Will’s been doing a little work with Howard on that flying car he went on about before and they started construction on the Expo site this week.

It’ll be opening in August and running for almost a year. It sure would be swell if you managed to come home to see it before you ship out.

Otherwise, if I’m not at boot camp myself, I’ll be sure to go and take some pictures to send to you.

Saw your ma and Becca last Sunday, we went to church and had a nice supper.

I can’t believe your little sis is sixteen now. Your ma says she still can’t date and boy is Becca sore about it. They argued before supper about some kid named Johnny who wants to take her to the movies.
Of course she can’t go.

She and Darce disappeared to her room for an hour or so while I stayed in the kitchen to peel potatoes with your ma.

Everything seemed okay when they came out later.

I miss you Bucky—it ain’t the same without you.

Love,

Steve


August 15, 1942

Darcy and Steve,

It looks like I’ll be in Brooklyn in a couple weeks, we’re being moved to Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn in preparation of shipping out. I haven’t gotten my exact orders yet, but I should know soon.

I hope we get sent to Europe rather than the Pacific. Much as I enjoy the summer, I hear it’s hot as hell in some of the places they’re fighting now. All the training we’ve been doing has been in a more northern climate and we’re better prepared for the landscapes of Europe, I think.

We’ll probably get a couple days r&r before we ship out, so I guess I’ll get to see Stark’s exposition after all!

Say, did Will tell you guys very much about Stark’s flying car? I really hope he got it to work, that would really be something to see.

That’s all for now—I sure am looking forward to seeing everybody again.

Love,

Bucky

Some interesting stuff about boot camp during WW2

Chapter End Notes
So Bucky is settling in to Army life, Steve is hellbent on joining up, and Darcy is trying her best to be supportive though her world is changing pretty quickly.

All info on boot camp in Bucky’s letters courtesy of google. Fort McCoy, WI, Pine Camp in upstate New York, and Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn are all real places.

Thank you to all of you kind readers who’ve left comments and kudos. The encouragement helps. I’ve been a bit blocked with writing this week—don’t panic, I’m a few chapters ahead. Writing is hard, y’all.

What did you think? Favorite part?
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Bucky goes to the Expo with Steve and Darcy. Steve enlists, again. Bucky and Darcy try to have a good time without him and Darcy has a feeling about the reasons behind Steve being accepted into the army.

Chapter Notes

No beta. Apologies.

You'll notice some bits of dialogue lifted directly from Captain America: The First Avenger. All credit goes to Marvel for those bits.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Saturday, August 29, 1942

Steve’s butt hits the pavement after the loudmouth from the movie theater punches him again. He slowly gets to his feet, breathing hard and wiping his bloody lip on the back of his hand.

The bigger man scoffs, “ya just don’t know when to give up, do ya?”

Steve gasps, “I can do this all day.”

Suddenly, he’s laying on the pavement again between the garbage cans.

He turns over, inhaling the stench of garbage as he struggles to catch his breath before getting to his feet again.

He hears a familiar voice say, “Hey—pick on somebody your own size.”

He sits up to watch a uniformed Bucky Barnes punch the other guy and kick him out of the alley.
Bucky saunters back towards Steve as he gets to his feet, and says, “Knew I’d find ya if I started lookin’ for a disturbance in one of the local alleys,” he sighs, “Sometimes, I think ya like gettin’ punched.”

He bends to pick up Steve’s latest enlistment form that’d dropped out of his pocket during the scuffle.

“I had him on the ropes,” Steve says, straightening his jacket.

Bucky reads over Steve’s enlistment form.

“So how many times is this? You’re from Paramus now? Seriously—Jersey?” His friend raises his brows in disbelief, “Ya know it’s illegal to lie on your enlistment form,” Bucky says.

“Yeah—yeah,” Steve says, waving off his concern, and looking over his friend’s uniform, “you get your orders?“

He wipes his hand under his nose and his fingers come back bloody.

Great.

Darcy’s gonna kill him.

Bucky nods, “Sergeant James Barnes, the 107th, shipping out to England first thing tomorrow,” he says, slinging an arm around Steve’s neck and walking him towards the mouth of the alley and ruffling his blond hair.

“Sergeant already?” He says, irritably smoothing his hair back.

Bucky shrugs, “Guess the brass think I’m doin’ okay.”

“Huh.”
“Let’s head back, get ya cleaned up,” Bucky says.

“What for?” Steve says.

“We’re goin’ out tonight.”

Bucky holds Darcy’s hand as they walk through up to the Modern Marvels Pavilion at the Exposition, Steve trailing slightly behind them.

He looks around at the displays and turns to look at Steve, saying, “This place is amazing,” Steve nods, distracted, his head tilted back to look at the giant metal globe perched just under the elevated curve of the monorail track.

Spotlights strobe across the darkness and fireworks explode in the sky as they make their way through the crowds into the pavilion to the stage where Howard is displaying his flying car.

“What’d Will say about the car, Darce?” He asks, squeezing her hand slightly and pulling her closer to his side.

“That it’s not quite ready yet—he thought they should work out a few bugs in the propulsion system before they showed it, but Howard insisted it was ready for the show,” she says, bumping him with her hip.

“Huh,” he says, coming to a stop in the crowd surrounding the stage where the shiny red car is parked.

He spots Will looking mildly harried over by the curtains next to the stage exit. He brings his fingers to his lips and whistles sharply, waving his arm over his head to get his attention.

The redhead scans the crowd and spots them, grinning before handing off a clipboard to Jarvis and
wading through the crowd to them.

“Bucky!” He cries, pulling Bucky into a firm hug, before stepping back to look him over, “you’re a
sight for sore eyes. They let ya off the base, huh?”

“Yeah, for today—gotta be back early tomorrow morning. We’re leaving for the Army Embarkation
Dock at 9:00am,” he says as Darcy’s hand squeezes his and Steve steps forward, his shoulder
brushing against Bucky’s side.

Will pats his shoulder and steps back, rubbing the back of his neck, “Yeah—Tony’s in Texas in pre-
flight training to be a navigator. He’s had enough hours with me to fly, but his degree in mathematics
pretty much made him too smart to waste on being just a pilot.”

Bucky nods, thinking about how sharp Tony is, the man is nearly finished with a degree in
mathematics with a minor in physics and his father insists he has to come work at the family business
as a glorified accountant after graduation. Idiot.

Darcy says, “How’s it going up there, Will?”

“The usual chaos—Howard disappeared with a couple of show girls he hired for the car presentation
about an hour ago, I have no idea if or when he’ll return,” he says, “and we’re scheduled to start in—
oh,” he glances at his watch, “10 minutes, so yeah. The usual chaos.”

Darcy grins, “Buck up—maybe the flying car will make it off the ground this time.”

Will smiles weakly, “It just has to last for 5 minutes—we’ve got potential investors in the audience.”

Steve chuckles, “Oh boy.”

Will sighs, “Yeah.”

“Anyhow, we’re dancing afterwards—right? Doris and Bess are gonna meet up with us at pavilion
entrance,” Darcy says.
“Sure—sure,” Will says, distractedly looking around the room again.

Bucky pulls Darcy closer to his side, her clean floral scent grounding him.

*God—he’s missed her, missed Steve, and home—so much.*

For a few minutes, he sinks into the moment, the sights and sounds around him secondary to the feeling of being with the people he loves. The familiar warmth of his best girl and his best guy next to him and the cadence of their voices in conversation is a balm for his troubled mind.

Steve looks up at Bucky with shrewd blue eyes and nudges him to draw his attention, “Hey—where’d ya go?” He teases.

He looks down at Stevie, silent for a moment as the waves of sound and color around him come back into focus, “Just happy to be here with you, punk.”

“Me too, jerk,” Steve smiles softly.

The moment is lost when couple of girls attempting to get closer to the stage jostle his friend from the left, breaking Steve’s attention and causing him to stumble slightly into his side.

One of the girls turns, her apology dying on her lips when she recognizes them.

“Oh—Hey, Bucky,” Clara says weakly, looking Bucky over before glancing at Steve briefly, “and uh—Pete.”

Darcy rolls her eyes and Steve utters a long suffering sigh, “It’s Steve .”

Clara waves her hand, “Oh yeah—sorry ‘bout that, I’m terrible with names.”

Darcy mutters, “Can’t seem to forget Bucky’s though,” and Bucky coughs to cover his snort of
Darcy leans into his side a bit more — she’s not really the jealous type, but she expects respect and Clara has always acted as though Darcy and Steve are invisible.

He’s not entirely sure why she does it, it’s some kinda denial.

“Clara—” he says to the brunette, and tips his head to the blonde with her, “Bonnie— you remember my girl Darcy?” Darcy smiles at Clara and it’s all teeth, “And this is her brother, Will,” the redhead nods, his distracted smile quickly replaced by anxiety as Jarvis signals him from the side of the stage.

“Oh—hello,” Clara stammers and Bonnie lifts her hand in a tiny wave.

Darcy says, “Hello Clara, Bonnie—are you enjoying the Expo?”

“Yes, thanks—there’s lots to see,” Clara says as Bonnie merely nods, looking towards the shiny red car on the stage, “Howard Stark is presenting his new invention— “ she pauses lowering her voice and leaning in confidentially, “I heard he’s loaded.”

Bucky says, “Ya don’t say? —huh.”

“Yeah—me ‘n Bonnie are gonna try to meet him,” she says, fluffing her hair absently. A moment later her eyes widen when Will leans in to kiss Darcy’s cheek, saying, “Hey—I’ll meet ya’ later Darce, looks like Howard is ready to start,” before pushing through the crowd towards Jarvis.

Clara says, “Um—Howard?”


As the spotlight flares to life and the music starts, Howard takes the stage.
Steve pauses outside the enlistment office he’d walked towards when Howard’s flying car crashed to the ground, feeling a little bit like a third wheel for the first time in a long time.

He wonders why it feels that way. It never really has before, maybe he’s just gotten used to Darcy being only his while Bucky was gone.

He feels small and mean when he thinks that way, considering Bucky is his too, and he’s leaving tomorrow morning.

*It won’t be the last time I see him.*

*He’ll be okay.*

He looks over the enlistment posters and patriotic displays in the hall. Maybe just one more time—maybe this time they’ll take him.

He’s wandered further down the hall towards the enlistment office when he’s stopped by Bucky shouting his name, “Hey—Steve!”

He waits while his friend jogs up to him, Darcy in tow.

“What’re ya doin’? I thought we were goin’ dancin’?” Bucky says.

Darcy looks over the large poster with Uncle Sam on it with a slightly strained expression on her face. His continued attempts to enlist have become a sore point between them. She doesn’t say anything, but the last time he’d tried she’d slammed things around the kitchen while she was making dinner and went to bed early, her back turned to him when he came to bed shortly after.

She says quietly, “Five times, Stevie?”

He nods, looking down at his feet.
She sighs, letting go of Bucky’s arm and saying, “I’ll be back in a second fellas—gonna find the ladies room,” and walking away.

Bucky’s upset too.

“You’re really gonna do this again,” he says.

“Well, it’s a fair—I’m gonna try my luck, “ Steve says.

Bucky scoffs, “As who? Steve from Ohio? They’ll catch you, or worse—they’ll actually take you.”

His friend shifts back and forth, frustration evident in every line of his body.

“Look—I know ya don’t think I can do this—“ Steve says.

Bucky interrupts, his voice rising, “This isn’t a back alley, Steve. It’s war.”

“I know it’s a war—“

“Why ya so keen to fight? There’s so many important jobs—“ Bucky says.

Steve stands up straight, getting in Bucky’s face, “What d’ya want me to do? Collect scrap metal in my little red wagon?”

“Yes!!” Bucky says, his fists clenched and heartbreak in his eyes.

“Bucky— come on . There are men laying down their lives. I got no right to do any less than them. That’s what ya don’t understand. This isn’t about me.”

Bucky nods, his face a mix of frustration and resignation, “Right—cause ya got nothin’ to prove.”
Darcy had noticed Abraham walking towards them down the hall and had decided she’d rather talk to him than deal with another of Steve’s enlistment attempts. She figures it’s Bucky’s turn to try to talk some sense into him anyway.

“Dr. Erskine!” she calls.

“Miss Garland,” he says, focusing on her face and smiling after he glances over her shoulder at Steve and Bucky, whose argument is getting a little heated. He raises an eyebrow, “friends of yours?”

“Yes,” she says, “very good ones.”

“Hmmm,” he says, leaning his shoulder against the wall, his dark eyes intent on them.

“So, what brings you to the Expo?” She says, “I didn’t even know you were still in New York.”

“Oh—actually, I live in Queens. One of my research partners has a demonstration here and I came to see it, and also, to volunteer at the enlistment office—helping with medical screening,” he explains.

“Ahh,” she says, nodding.

She pauses for a moment before asking, “How goes your work with the serum?”

He tiredly removes his glasses to polish them on the edge of his jacket and says, “We are advancing into human trials, I am almost certain we will be successful.”

She grins, resting her hand briefly on his arm, “I hope all of your hard work pays off, Abraham—I know how much it means to you.”
“Meine Liebste, I believe my success has much to do with you,” he says warmly, adding curiously, “were you ever able to track down June Smith?”

She has a brief moment of panic but smooths her expression, saying regretfully, “Oh—no. She wasn’t at her last known address.”

“Too bad,” he says, his gaze sharp, “I would have liked to have met her. Her blood was the catalyst for extraordinary progress with the serum.”

She makes a vague noise of agreement and shrugs, hoping to redirect the conversation, “So—what kind of demonstration did your research partner have here?”

“A flying car of all things—” he chuckles, “nothing to do with our work together, but amusing nonetheless.”

“Oh? So you know Howard? My brother Will works with him too,” she says.

“The red haired young man assisting Howard today?”

Darcy nods.

“We haven’t met—I work in a different location and though I’ve known Howard for some time, we’ve only recently begun to collaborate,” he raises his eyebrows in question, “what does your brother do with Mr. Stark?”

“Helps with his airplane and weapon designs—mostly airplanes though, Will is wild about flying and is more than halfway through an engineering degree.”

“Hmmm—intelligence must run in the family. Perhaps we will meet during the course of my work with Howard,” he says, pausing as he glances over her shoulder again, “your blond friend—his name?”
“Steve Rogers,” she answers, puzzled.

“Ahhh, well. He seems very determined,” he says.

“He is at that,” Darcy says, “he’s always been the type of fella to stand up for his convictions.”

Bucky calls out, his voice slightly husky from whatever emotions Steve had stirred up during their brief argument, “Darce—we gotta get going to meet Doris and Bess.”

She waves to Bucky, noting the way he and Steve still seem upset and turns back to Dr. Erskine who’s also focused on Steve and Bucky.

She sighs, willing the sadness that skirts around the edges of her thoughts away.

“Well, I guess I should be going,” she says, “it was good to see you Abraham.”

“Indeed, I hope to see you again someday—can I still find you at the hospital?”

“Yes—I graduated early and started working in the E.R.,” she says.

“Excellent!” he beams at her, clasping one of her hands in both of his and smiling, “Enjoy your evening, Meine Liebste.”

“Thank you,” she says patting his hand gently before turning away to head back down the hall.

“Darcy,” Dr. Erskine calls softly and she pauses to looks back at him over her shoulder, “You really were the biggest help to me— thank you ,” he says, his dark eyes gentle and knowing.

She smiles uncertainly, “You’re welcome.”
Bucky had tried his damnedest to wring every bit of pleasure out of the hours he’d had with Steve and Darcy, despite his friend’s reckless need to attempt enlistment yet again.

He and Darcy left Steve behind with the assurance that he’d catch up later.

They’d danced every dance—fast ones, slow ones, his army trained endurance better able to put her natural abilities to the test.

She’d laughed, the skirt of her blue dress flaring around her knees as he pushed himself, attempting more and more acrobatic moves that she met with an easy grace and athleticism she seldom had opportunity to display.

They’d worked together to forget everything but the moment, anxiety and worry spurring frenetic activity and reckless behavior.

They drank—probably too much, but he burned it off quickly and it never affected her for long, he’d shucked his uniform jacket and sweated through his shirt and they’d continued until Darcy’s porcelain skin glowed pink with exertion, her dark hair curling wildly around her face.

Steve never caught up with them at the dance hall and they’d eventually headed home.

He should have been exhausted by the time they tumbled through the door to his and Steve’s apartment, his arm around Darcy and a half empty bottle of whiskey clutched in his hand, but he felt like he was on fire—his need to be as close to his girl as humanly possible overriding everything else.

He’d set the bottle on the table next to the sofa and she lifted an eyebrow in question, “Shower?”

He nodded, and as she walked toward the bathroom he stalked behind her, pressing her against the wall to kiss her—hungry and deep, his gut full of jagged emotions that he desperately needed to just fuck away.

She’d pulled away gasping and he’d said, “Please, Darce—just—please,” and she’d nodded, kicking her shoes off and reaching behind her for the zipper on her dress.
They’d stripped out of their sweat damp clothes, leaving a trail of clothing behind them from the living room to the bathroom. They’d stumbled and clutched at each other, rougher than he could ever remember, leaving marks on each other’s skin with their nails and teeth.

He’d stepped under the warm spray from the shower—the curtain open as he tipped his head back to rinse his hair, dazedly watching as she rummaged in the medicine cabinet for her diaphragm and leaned one foot onto the toilet lid, sliding it into place.

After that—

*After that*, he’d fucked her in the shower.

There’s no other word to describe it— he’d pressed her against the cool tile of the wall, warm water tumbling over them and slicking their skin and *fucked* her.

He was angry.

And scared.

And so was she—he didn’t want to leave and she didn’t want him to go.

They tore into each other, gasping, her nails scratching his back as he thrust into her hard.

“Bucky—“ she’d moaned, tipping her head to the side as he bit her at the junction of her neck and shoulder, so wound up he could barely form words.

He needed this—needed to exorcise the darkness shadowing his every thought.

She’d dug her fingers into the short hair at the nape of his neck and pushed against him, her hips rocking into his and he’d growled, slamming into her.
And god, it felt so good—so good not to think, to just feel the familiar heat and tightness of her around him, the soft press of her chest against his.

It was over far too soon, Darcy reduced to keening cries as he pounded into her, the slap of their flesh echoing around them until she bit his shoulder hard and shuddered, her legs tightening around him.

He was right behind her, tumbling over the precipice and groaning loud, chanting, “Darce, Darce, Darce,” as his brain filled with static and his blood sang in his veins.

He fell back into himself, suddenly heaving with sobs against her shoulder as she held him close, her strong arms never letting him go.

Eventually, he slipped from her body and she lowered her legs to the floor, still holding him as his breathing hitched and choked under the warm water that washed his tears away.

The water is cooling when she finally steps away, her own eyes reddened with tears and she grabs hold of the soap and a washcloth, gently washing him and herself and rinsing under the spray before it becomes too cold.

She turns the taps to shut the water off, silently grabbing a towel and drying him off, rubbing the moisture from his hair, then down his shoulders and arms and to his feet and everywhere in between.

He returns the favor, gently squeezing the bath towel over the dripping length of her hair and rubbing over her entire body, eventually falling to his knees and leaning his head against her stomach after he dries her legs and feet.

She runs her fingers through the short damp strands of his hair and he shivers, the cool air of the bathroom causing goosebumps to break out across his skin.

Finally, she lays a hand on his shoulder and says, “We should get out.”

He mutters a barely intelligible affirmative and she pulls him to his feet. They wrap their towels around themselves, his around his waist, hers around her chest and step out of the tub to lean together by the sink to brush their teeth.
Darcy rinses her mouth and spits in the sink, her troubled blue eyes meeting his in the mirror, “Stevie’s home,” she says softly.

He sighs, wondering what happened and his heart hurts.

_Why couldn’t Stevie just be with him on his last night before he ships out?_

He rinses his toothbrush under the tap and follows her into the living room to find his friend sitting on the sofa, clutching a wad of papers in one hand and the open whiskey bottle in the other, looking pale and shocked.

Darcy crosses the room to sit beside him, leaning her damp head on his shoulder.

Bucky slowly sits at Steve’s other side and watches as he takes a slug of whiskey, grimacing slightly at the burn of it before leaning his head against the back of the sofa.

“I’m in,” he rasps.

Darcy raises her head, and says, “What?”

“I’m in—“ he hands Bucky the wad of paper which he unfolds to find his enlistment form, stamped with a 1A, “gotta get on a train to Camp LeHigh on Thursday morning.”

Bucky’s shocked gaze meets Darcy’s and she asks, “But how, Stevie?”

Steve takes another slug of whiskey, “Special program—I was sitting there looking at the poster over the examination table that said it was illegal to falsify your enlistment form and then an MP came in and I thought I was a goner;” he pauses as Bucky frowns, pulling the bottle from his grasp and setting it on the coffee table, “then a doctor came in and asked me a few questions about killing Nazi’s and he said he could give me a chance—and here I am, enlisted.”

He wilts against the back of the sofa, the alcohol already hitting him, “I can hardly believe it —me , a
soldier,” he smiles wistfully and Bucky wants to punch him in the mouth he’s so mad.

He lurches up, pacing restlessly in front of the coffee table.

Steve’s eyes follow him and Darcy rises to her feet, grabbing Bucky by the arm.

“Say—Bucky, why don’t we get some clothes on and I’ll make us something to eat before bed,” she grips his arm hard and hauls him behind the privacy screen, pushing him to sit on the edge of the bed.

She steps in close between his knees and whispers fiercely in his ear, “James Buchanan Barnes, I know you’re angry—but hold your tongue. What’s done is done, we only have tonight and I won’t have you fucking things up and starting a fight with Steve.”

His eyes widen at the profanity—she hardly ever curses so he knows she’s on edge.

She steps back, looking into his eyes, her face immeasurably sad, “I’m losing both of you for the foreseeable future. I’m unhappy,” her gaze sharpens, “and I’m angry, too—Steve is so damned pigheaded, it drives me crazy.”

She leans into him, resting her forehead on his shoulder, releasing her breath in a trembling sigh she says, “Mostly though, I’m just angry at the world.”

He wraps her in his arms and holds her tight, breathing slowly until the tension leaves his shoulders.

“I love you, Darce,” he says, nuzzling his face into her hair.

“Love you too, Bucky.”

“Okay then, let’s make the best of the time we have.”

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Eventually, Steve and Bucky succumb to exhaustion after drinking a bit more whiskey and eating a couple of ham and cheese sandwiches she throws together for them.

They talked until the early hours of the morning, their words growing more slurred as time went on and she forced both of them to drink a glass of water and to take an aspirin before they got into bed, hoping to stave off a violent hangover the next morning.

Later, Darcy lays awake as Steve and Bucky sleep beside her, pondering what kind of special program would take Steve as a potential soldier and it dawns on her that Dr. Erskine wasn’t just volunteering at the enlistment office.

Her breath catches in a panic—remembering the tortured shapes of the test rats from her time with him.

She’s an idiot.

Oh, god.

She has to believe Abraham would be careful though—that he wouldn’t play with human lives in the name of creating some kind of super soldier.

Surely not.

But still, she doesn’t sleep at all that night.

Chapter End Notes

So Bucky is a Sergeant now, another thing never addressed in the MCU. Even if he’d trained stateside for a year and a half it’s doubtful he’d have made Sergeant so quickly. If he’d been on the frontlines maybe, he could have had a battlefield promotion. Shrug. So let’s not look too closely at that, hmmm?

In my timeline he ships out sooner and has more battlefield experience prior to the
capture of much of the 107th by Hydra in October, 1943. And Steve has more time as a dancing monkey with the USO.

Also, I never really understood why Steve didn’t spend the last night Bucky had stateside with his friend in the movie. Even if the double date was going shitty as usual. Guess Steve is super focused when he has a goal, huh?
Wednesday, September 2, 1942

Darcy sits on the edge of the bed, watching as Steve packs the last of his things away in boxes.

He carefully labels the side of the last box with one of his colored pencils “sketchbooks and art supplies” and comes to sit beside her on the bare mattress.

They’d worked the last few days together to make arrangements for his things.

He’d decided to put most of his stuff in boxes to be stored at the Barnes’ house with the exception of his photo albums and some of his racier artwork, which he is leaving with Darcy.

The studio will be renting out again after Christmas, and she and Will are taking care of moving Steve and Bucky’s limited furniture and household items into a basement storeroom Dr. Bobby said they could use.

Like Bucky before him, he isn’t bothering to bring much with him to boot camp except for the clothes on his back, his compass, and the small leather bound sketchbook Bucky gave him that he refuses to part with.

She’d wondered about his nebulizer—if he should take it with him, but he insisted he’d have to get used to being without it. He gave it to her, said maybe she’d find some kid at the hospital who could use it.

He comes to sit beside her on the edge of the bed and she sighs and leans against him.
It’s amazing how an entire life can fit into a few boxes.

Steve looks around the barren room, “You should keep the privacy screen—maybe set it up in your bedroom,” he says quietly.

“Maybe,” she chokes.

She doesn’t say more, struggling not to cry.

He wraps his arm around her shoulder and hugs her to his side, pressing his lips to her temple, “Love you, Darce,” he whispers.

The tears she’s held at bay spill down her cheeks and she turns in his arms to hide her face against his neck, “Always, Stevie,” she says.

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Thursday September 3, 1942

5am

Steve wakes to Darcy’s fingers tracing over his brow and smoothing through his hair in the early morning dark. He’s warm, comfortable and entangled with her under the thick patchwork quilt on her bed.

He groans, wrapping his hand around the soft curve of her hip to pull her closer and nuzzles his nose along her cheek to bury it in her hair.

“S’ too early,” he grumbles.

She snorts, “Better get used to it, soldier.”
“All the more reason to sleep in a little—seeing as I won’t be able to for a long time,” he says.

She drops kisses along his jawline to his ear, nipping gently at the lobe and whispering, “I can think of something else you won’t be doing for a long time.”

He breathes in sharply as she eases her hand between them to stroke his suddenly interested cock.

“Again?” he asks.

She chuckles softly, wiggling under the covers to lick at his nipples before heading further south.

He’d mapped her entire body with his lips the night before, committing to memory the feel, scent, and taste of her until she shuddered helplessly beneath him.

And then he’d started over.

He’d tried his damnedest to show her how much he loves her, how beautiful and perfect she is.

*And to apologize for leaving.*

She’s never said it, but he knows some part of her feels he’s chosen to leave her—that with his 4F status he could’ve sat out the war.

He could have done like Bucky said and supported the war effort from home. But for him, that was never a choice. He simply had to keep trying or he’d always feel like he hadn’t done enough.

He’ll be a good soldier.

He’ll fight like hell—he has been, his entire life. It’s as much a part of who he is as his blood and bones and he doesn’t know how to be any different.
He threads his fingers through Darcy’s silky hair and shudders as she takes him into her mouth—his eyes suddenly flooding with tears.

He loves her.

So, so much.

But he’s never been able to turn away from a fight.

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10am

They sit on a bench in the train station, waiting for the boarding announcement. She leans on Steve, his thin arm draped around her and holding her close.

“How long is basic training for whatever you’re doing?” She asks.

“Dunno—the officer at the recruitment center said it’d be at least 4 weeks, maybe longer,” he frowns, his blue eyes serious.

“Will you write me? Let me know you’re okay?” She says.

“Of course I will—least I won’t be too far away, just in Jersey,” he says, trying to reassure her.

She nods, turning her face into his neck and inhaling the scent of him, unbearably conscious of the time slipping away. There’s a question that’s been on her mind, a possibility she hasn’t discussed with him because she’s afraid to give him false hope.

She turns in his arms, looking steadily into his sky blue eyes.
“That doctor—the one who said he could give you a chance to fight Nazi’s?”

“Yeah?” Steve asks, puzzled.

“Did you catch his name?” She asks.

“Nah—he didn’t say,” Steve replies.

“Older fella? German accent and glasses?” She says.

“Yeah—how’d ya know?”

“I think it was Dr. Erskine, the doctor I worked with at the hospital,” she says, “I ran into him while we were at the enlistment office.”

“Oh?” he pauses for a second, thinking. Then his eyes widen, “Oh.”

She nods, “Yeah— I’ve been thinking about his work and why he’d be there,” she clenches his hand between hers, “whatever you do, Stevie— think carefully, get as many details as you can, and don’t do anything rash.”

Steve tilts his head, a frown marring his face momentarily before it smooths out, “Sure, Darce. I’ll be careful.”

Oh, god.

Moments like this she misses Bucky so much.

“I’m serious Steve, if he—“ she leans forward to whisper, “ has something he can give you to make you stronger,” she leans back, “find out the risks before you volunteer. Abraham is a kind, brilliant man—but sometimes scientists push the envelope to get results and there are casualties.”
“Alright. But maybe that ain’t what this is about.”

“Maybe not.”

_Doubtful though._

Once she’d started connecting the dots she could only draw one conclusion.

A scratchy announcement over the PA tells them Steve’s train is boarding and she throws her arms around him, hugging him tight and never wanting to let him go.

But there’s no more time.

She walks with him to the waiting train.

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She trudges slowly up the stairs that evening, it’s well after dark and she’s emotionally drained.

She’d worked a shorter day in order to see Steve off at the train station but had arrived to chaos in the hospital.

A fire uptown had brought dozens of patients to the ER.

She’d almost welcomed the insanity—it’d kept her mind too occupied to dwell on Steve and Bucky going away.

She unlocks the door to the apartment, trying to shake the memories of the horrific injuries she’d seen today. The fire had started in a restaurant kitchen on the ground floor of an apartment building, and most of the injured were women and children.
The ER had been noisy with the sounds of people in pain and the stench of burnt flesh and hair. She shudders—it had been a challenge to block out the constant assault on her senses.

She closes the door behind her, leans against it in the unlit apartment for a moment and releases a tired sigh, her eyes unerringly turning towards the sofa, where she spots Will’s familiar outline.

She drops her bag and pushes off the door, walking to the sofa and sinking to sit beside him. He silently hands her the open bottle of whiskey in his hand and she takes a sip, savoring the smooth burn of it over her tongue and throat and wondering if they were all going to become alcoholics before the war is over.

She rests her head beside his and asks, “Why’re you drinking in the dark, darling?”

“Tony’s shipping out,” he mutters hoarsely.

She’s silent.

The world seems to be crumbling around them.

“Where to?” She asks.

“England—they’ve assigned him to a B-17 bomber with U.S. 8th,” he says morosely.

Darcy passes the bottle back to him.

After a moment, Will nudges her shoulder, hands the bottle back to her and asks, “Steve get off on the train okay?”

“Yeah—I’m so worried about him, Will,” her voice quavers and she bites her lip in an effort to get control of herself.
“I know exactly how you feel,” he sighs, wrapping his arm around her shoulder, “guess we’re the last toys left on the shelf, kid.”

“Yeah.”

They sit in silence together, passing the bottle back and forth in the dark. Darcy finds comfort in the familiar sound of his breathing, his heartbeat. Things have been moving so fast lately, she’s scarcely had time to breathe much less think things through. She needs to plan for the future, with Steve and Bucky gone, her priorities have changed. Once, she would have been ecstatic to have her work at the hospital, to live with Will, and socialize with the few friends she’s made; but now, she’s impelled towards a greater purpose.

Steve and Bucky aren’t the only ones who can go to war.

Eventually, her head is swimming slightly and she’s sure Will is going to have a spectacular hangover in the morning.

“Hey—“ she says, poking his thigh to rouse him, “you’re not leaving me too, are you?”

Will rubs his eyes, passing her the nearly empty bottle.

“Not right away—Howard has a project he’s working on locally,” he says.

_Not right away. But soon._

“What’s it about?” She asks.

“Eh, he didn’t give me all the details, but he’s messing around with uh—something he’s calling Vita rays? Whatever those are,” he shrugs.

“Huh,” she says, draining the bottle and leaning forward to set it on the coffee table.

She leans back again, resting her head on Will’s shoulder and says, “Say— have you ever met a fella
named Dr. Erskine when you were with Howard?"

He’s silent for a moment, his brow wrinkling in thought, “No—should I have?”

“Mmmmm. Not sure—I ran into him at the Expo, I used to work with him at the hospital. He said he’s doing some research with Howard,” she says.

“Really?” Will says, closing his eyes as he rests his head against the back of the sofa, “Howard’s got his finger in every pie, I swear,” he slurs.

“That, he does,” she says.

Will’s starting to list into her side so she pushes him upright again, saying, “Did you eat dinner?”

“Nah—got the mail and grabbed the whiskey out of the cupboard.”

“Well,” she says, getting to her feet, the blurry feeling from drinking already fading away, “I’ll make something,” Will mutters, “M’kay,” slumping sadly against the arm of the sofa as she grabs sandwich fixings from the the icebox.

“Are you going out to the airfield this weekend?” She asks.

“Hmmm—yeah. Why?”

“I’d like to come too, if it’s okay,” she viciously cuts the sandwich she’s just assembled in half, “I feel the need to shoot something—and I wanna talk to Howard.”

She hands Will his sandwich and he takes a bite, mumbling, “Alright.”
Saturday, September 5, 1942

Darcy looks downfield at the line of beer bottles Jarvis has set up on a large log at the tree line, more than 700 yards away.

Howard stands at her side, raising his binoculars to check them out before turning to look at her and saying, “I bet ya can’t hit all of them.”

She raises the rifle to look through the sight at the distant targets and shrugs.

*She’ll hit them.*

“What do I get if I win?” She asks.

“What do you want?” Howard’s says, his dark eyes dancing.

“I have a favor to ask,” she says.

Howard frowns and looks at her closely, “Who says I wouldn’t do it for you anyway?”

She raises an eyebrow, “This way, I won’t feel like I owe you.”

Howard raises an eyebrow in return as he mulls it over.

“Alright—but if I win, you have to go to dinner and dancing with me,” he says, a smirk on his lips.

“Really, Howard?” She teases, batting her eyelashes and pouting at him, “Taking advantage of little old me while my fellas are off being soldiers?”

Howard laughs, “Somehow I don’t think they have to worry at all.”
She grins, “You’re right.”

Howard raises the binoculars to his eyes again and she looks through the rifle sight, breathing slowly and centering herself before squeezing the trigger and picking off the first bottle in line.

Howard says, “One down, nine more to go. Say—how do you feel about seafood?”

“Not my favorite,” she says, shooting the next bottle in line.

“Hmm,” Howard says, “Italian?”

She picks off the next three bottles in quick succession, pausing to say, “I like Italian, could we have cannoli?”

“Of course,” he says.

“Hmm,” she hums, focusing downfield again to pick off another three bottles, the glass scattering over the brown grass and glinting in the autumn sun, “only two more to go—maybe you can get me some in a to go box.”

Howard snorts, “not likely,” as she shoots the ninth bottle.

She pauses again to look at him and he lowers the binoculars, one dark brow raised in question.

“Maybe we can discuss the favor I want over dinner—cannoli sounds really good,” she says.

Howard smirks, “So I win either way?”

She shatters the last bottle and grins fiercely at him, “Oh—I don’t know about that.”
Later, Darcy sits at a private corner table with Howard and Will outlining her plans.

“So—I’m joining the Army Nurses Corps as soon as I get things squared away at the hospital,” she says, twirling her spaghetti around her fork.

Will, caught drinking his wine mid sip, splutters, “What?”

Howard merely raises his eyebrow and takes a contemplative sip out of his highball glass.

Darcy says, “Will—I think it’s pretty obvious I can’t sit out the war here when I could be of real use elsewhere. You know that the military doesn’t have nearly the numbers of medical personnel they will require.”

Will sighs, taking a larger sip of his wine, muttering, “Hell—Howard, might as well pass me the bottle.”

Darcy raises an eyebrow. Alcoholics, all of them.

Howard grins and slides it across the table to Will before turning to Darcy and saying, “So the favor you need from me?”

“I want to be stationed in Europe, not the Pacific. Wherever the 107th happens to be operating,” she says, eating her bite of spaghetti then dabbing her lips with a napkin.

She takes a sip of her wine and eyes Howard over the rim of her glass as contemplates the amber liquid he swirls in his.

“Bucky, huh?”

She nods.
“At least I know where he is—Steve’s still in training. I’m not even sure what he’s involved in, actually. Know anything about a special program outta Camp Lehigh?”

Howard looks sharply at her before admitting, “Maybe—but it’s top secret.”

Darcy stares at him in silence until he starts fidgeting with his napkin.

Finally, she says, “Fine. I’ll tell you what I know. Last fall I assisted a German doctor by the name of Erskine over at Brooklyn Hospital. I’d go into the details of his work but I was told the information was sensitive. He had a breakthrough in his research just before the U.S. declared war in December and left the hospital at the insistence of his benefactors in order to relocate to a more secure location,” she pauses, quirking a brow at Howard.

“Interesting—go on,” Howard says smiling slightly and raising his hand in a *gimme* motion.

“I ran into him over at the Expo, the night before Bucky shipped out and Steve attempted to enlist for the last time. Abraham said you and he were working on a project together and that he was proceeding with human trials of his—” she leans in close whispering, “*serum.* Steve got in, said a German doctor gave him a chance as part of a special program,” she finishes.

“Huh,” Howard says, “that’s quite a story.”

“Mnhmm,” she says, twirling another bite of spaghetti around her fork and lifting it to her mouth, chewing slowly.

She waits as Howard trades glances at Will before saying, “Darcy—I think I can do you one better on your favor.”

“Oh?” She inquires.

“I think you should join the Nurses Corps, do the training, but I’m gonna see if I can bring you in on what I’ve got going on in Europe. I have to talk to a few people, get you clearance before I can say more. But basically, you’d be an Army nurse with the clearance to get pulled into occasional side missions with the outfit I’m working with. The General who oversees us just so happens to be in
charge of the 107th as well,” he says.

She looks askance at him over the rim of her wine glass, and Howard says, “I can get you where you want to go.”

Darcy smiles, “I figured.”

Will mutters, “Oh god.”

Howard pushes his plate back and pulls a cigar from his pocket, pulling the ashtray closer as he carefully trims the end of it, “Besides, you know guns—you’re familiar with my work there. You can do more than change bedpans.”

Darcy bristles, “I’ll do a great deal more than that, Howard. I can save lives.”

Howard flicks his lighter, engulfing the end of his cigar in flame and inhaling until the tip of it glows cherry red in the low light of the restaurant. He blows a smoke ring over the table and smiles, “I know, I know—just think of it this way. Sometimes, you’ll be able to save people from getting hurt at all.”

She glances at Will who looks pained but nods encouragingly to her anyway.

“Alright, I’m in,” She says, “how ‘bout that cannoli you promised me—“

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September 16, 1942

Dear Darcy,

Sorry I didn’t write you sooner, but this is the first chance I’ve had—as they weren’t letting us write the first couple weeks here.
So far, this place has been just like Bucky described boot camp to be—a bunch of fellas crammed together in close quarters with little privacy and lots and lots of running and exercises. From what I can tell they’re testing us, watching how we perform in order to pick someone to be the first for their special program with the Strategic Scientific Reserve (I guess this is some kind of Allied effort made up of “the best minds in the free world” as General Phillips explained it.)

I’ve been working real hard to keep up even though this one fella, Gilmore Hodge, keeps making things difficult for me and telling me I might as well go home because I’ll never get picked anyhow.

It rankles sometimes, but I’m not giving up.

At least that’s what I keep telling myself.

Our group is being supervised by a British dame named Agent Carter. She reminds me of you—she laid out Gilmore Hodge with one punch after he disrespected her. She doesn’t take guff from anyone and is tough as nails, I think you’d like her.

She, Dr. Erskine, (you were right, it is him) and General Phillips have been observing us through all of our exercises. I can tell General Phillips has his doubts about me, but Dr. Erskine seems to think I’m worth something. Maybe because he knows you? I don’t know.

I focus on the work, but I still miss you every day.

Love,

Steve

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September 24, 1942

Dear Darcy,
Thanks for your letter, I’ve read it every night just before lights out and it helps keep my spirits up.

I haven’t managed to make any friends here, though most of the fellas leave me alone. A few, like Hodge, are bullies who seem set on making me fail. I do my best to ignore them.

Yesterday, we had a long run and I was last as usual. As I caught up to the others, they were gathered around the flagpole where our D.I., Sgt. Duffy, said the first one to bring the flag down would get to ride back in the Jeep with Agent Carter.

Boy, everyone piled on trying to get the flag, climbing up and sliding down the pole, pushing and shoving each other.

I stood back and watched for a while, there was no way I could even get close with the brawl going on around there. I got to thinking, Duffy didn’t say how we had to get the flag, just to get it.

I sure didn’t want to run the rest of the way back to base, we were only at the halfway point of our run and I was already wheezing. So, after the Sergeant yelled at everyone to get back in formation, I walked over and pulled the pins on the flagpole. It fell over and I picked up the flag.

I gave the flag to Sgt. Duffy, (you should have seen his face, Darce) and hopped in the Jeep with Agent Carter. She didn’t say anything but I could tell she was trying hard not to laugh.

Not my fault the sergeant didn’t say how to get the flag. I followed his instructions to the letter.

That ride back to base is probably the best thing that happened since I got here—even if Hodges gave me hell about it later and threw all my socks into the toilet.

Wearing wet socks today is a small price to pay for victory.

Love you Darce,

Steve
P.S. Any word from Bucky yet? I’m guessing it will take a while for letters to reach home, but soon as you get one, can you send me the address so I can write him too?

October 15, 1942

Dear Steve,

I miss you and Bucky every day, and the nights are the worst. My solution has been to work myself into exhaustion, but I never sleep long anyway and the silence in my bed in the dark hours before dawn is the loneliest thing. Sometimes, I just crawl into bed with Will—the sound of his breathing comforts me and he doesn’t mind too much.

I still haven’t heard from Bucky, but I talked to Howard and his contacts let him know the 107th is still in England, there is a large base near Belfast where the U.S. forces are headquartered and are practicing maneuvers in preparation for future operations.

I’m guessing it may be awhile before we receive news from him, but at least we can be assured his unit isn’t in the thick of the fighting as yet.

I’m sorry to hear some of your fellow soldiers aren’t treating you well. It’s their loss, as you are a determined and brave man who should not be underestimated.

There’s something about you Steve, almost from the moment I met you I knew you were someone I could trust. Not many people are like that, you know.

I didn’t tell you in my last letter, but I’ve decided to join the Army Nurses Corps. I’m waiting until Will gets some solid idea from Howard about when they’ll be leaving the United States for Europe. Howard has some deal with both the United States Army and the Allies but I haven’t gotten all of the details yet.

Anyway, it’ll be a bit before I sign up, Will and I have to do something with our things if we’re both going to ship out.
I heard the training is over on Staten Island and lasts 4 weeks and then I’d be sent wherever I’m needed. Howard says he can swing it so I’ll end up wherever Bucky is.

At least I can keep and eye on one of you.

If you get a chance to speak to Dr. Erskine tell him hello from me, and remember what I told you about his work. Try not to do anything rash, Stevie.

I love you—

Always and Forever,

Darcy

P.S. Agent Carter sounds like my kind of gal—maybe I’ll meet her someday. I’m really curious about how a woman gets to be an agent in the British military.

P.P.S. Will got a letter from Tony, he’s navigating on a B-17 with the U.S. Army Air Force along with the RAF in strategic bombing missions over Germany. Please keep him in your prayers.

Chapter End Notes

I’m having the training at Camp LeHigh last longer than in the MCU (I think it was maybe a week before Phillips agreed with Erskine about his choice. That’s like, zero soldier training and kinda ridiculous). Steve is actually going to learn some stuff before he becomes super serumed.

Thank you to all you readers who have commented or left kudos, it means a lot to me! I noticed some new people finding this fic and commenting and it made my day. Don’t be
shy darlings, let me know what you think!
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

Steve at the SSR lab in Brooklyn. Darcy gets a letter from Steve and kinda freaks out. Will and Howard let her know how the experiment went.

Chapter Notes

The dialogue between Steve, Erskine, and Howard Stark in the lab is lifted directly from Captain America: The First Avenger. Credit where credit is due.

These are Marvel’s characters, but this is my puppet show.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Monday, October 26, 1942

6:30am

Darcy is leaning against the kitchen counter, working on her second cup of coffee when Will wanders in, his shirt half buttoned and groggily rubbing his eyes.

She grabs his favorite chipped blue coffee mug and fills it up, handing it to him as he slumps against the counter next to her.

“What’re you doing up so early?”

Will slurps his coffee, groaning, “Ugh. Howard sent me a message last night that he needed some help crunching the numbers before he uses his Vita Ray machine today. Jarvis will be here in 15 minutes.”

“Huh—I wonder what that’s about,” she asks.

“Dunno—it’s all very hush, hush.”
“Hmmm,” she says, “you working out at the airfield?”

“Nah, Howard’s been in Manhattan, mostly,” he shrugs, draining his coffee and refilling it from the percolator.

“Will you be home tonight?”

“Yeah—probably late. You know how he gets,” he says, turning to dig around in the icebox and pulling out the leftover meatloaf from the night before, “so what’re you up to today?”

“Oh—my shift doesn’t start til 10am. I should be back by 8 tonight.”

She watches as Will slices off a piece of meatloaf and sandwiches it between two pieces of bread, taking a big bite as he shoves stuff back into the icebox.

He moves to stand beside her, leaning over the sink as he eats his sandwich.

“You want a plate for that?” She teases.

Will swallows, chasing it with a slurp of his coffee and smirks, “Nah—I’m fine.”

She sniffs, “Heathen.”

Will shrugs, finishing off his sandwich and coffee.

“Well, gotta go—Jarvis will be here in a few minutes,” he says, dusting the crumbs from his hands and setting his mug in the sink.

“Hey—you’ll let me know if Howard says anything about Steve? I’m pretty sure whatever he’s working on with Erskine is part of the special program Steve is involved in.”
“Of course,” Will says, rushing to button his shirt before throwing his coat on and grabbing his briefcase.

He smooths his hand through his coppery hair and winks, “See ya later.”

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10:30am

Steve is sitting alone in the examination room at the SSR’s secret Brooklyn laboratory (located beneath Brooklyn Antiques, of all places) and wondering if this is a big mistake. Time has a way of making people have second thoughts, perhaps that’s why he’s always gotten himself into trouble—he doesn’t usually give himself enough time to have them.

They’d gotten him up very early to move him here and he’d shared a car with Agent Carter. He’d never really conversed with her before and it was kind of thrilling to talk to her, even though he put his foot in his mouth as usual when talking to a pretty dame. He definitely hadn’t been impressive with his litany of locations he’d been beaten up before and he had so many questions—like why would someone as beautiful as her join the army? (He said that out loud and that was definitely a mistake, Bucky would have kicked him.) He’s seen her throw a punch and shoot a gun after all, and she certainly seems tough enough to do whatever she wants.

She reminds him so much of Darcy with her capable manner, except his girl is softer, more innocent.

Agent Carter is made of harder stuff.

The thing is—she’s never been dismissive of him. That counts for a lot in Steve’s book. Most dames he’s met his whole life have overlooked him, except for Darcy (and he’d considered her an anomaly) so he wonders about Carter and the way she watches him, seemingly trying to measure his worth.

And he supposes she does understand what it means to be underestimated, doing what she’s doing. It ain’t easy, always fighting to get heard and being talked down to all the time. She must get pretty damn tired of proving herself over and over.
He knows he does.

There’s a sound outside the door and Dr. Erskine is there to check him over one last time before they head to the lab.

The older man smiles warmly at him, “How are you feeling Steven?”

“Um—I’m okay,” he frowns, “Maybe a little nervous.”

“Ah—you wouldn’t be human if you weren’t.”

Steve nods, not really knowing what to say to that.

Erskine asks him to remove his shirt and listens to his heart and lungs with a stethoscope, then takes his blood pressure, making notations on his clipboard all the while. He has him stand on a scale, and measures his height, humming to himself and nodding as he writes his notes.

Finally he says, “Everything seems to be in order,” he looks up from his clipboard to pin him with his sharp gaze, “I’ll remind you again—I am confident that you are the right man for this. You are a good man, one I am sure will not abuse the power the serum will give you. It will remake you, as you could have been in a kinder universe. You will be stronger, faster, and smarter. I cannot with certainty tell you how you will feel at the end of it. I imagine you’ll need to adjust to your new self.”

Steve nods, speechless for the moment.

Erskine pats him on the shoulder and glances at his watch, “Ahh, it is time, come Steven—the adventure begins!” He teases.

Steve feels like he could puke from nerves. He takes several deep breaths before following the doctor down the hallway to the lab.

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He enters the laboratory, squinting his eyes at the sudden brightness. There are people scurrying around the outskirts of the room and he looks up to see a second level viewing booth which appears to be full of military brass and a bunch of suits. He spots General Phillips before he turns to follow Erskine to a weird contraption in the center of the room.

He glances around again and sees Howard (of all people) behind a bank of control panels and standing next to him is a frazzled looking Will, whose eyes widen comically as he mouths “holy shit”.

Somehow it comforts him to see someone just as overwhelmed as he is. Especially a friend.

Dr. Erskine says, “There now, Steven. Get up on the table and lay down please.”

He steps up on the metal stair and gets up on the strange looking table, wiggling a little to get accustomed to the feeling of the cold leather against his skin.

Dr. Erskine says, “Comfortable?”

He glances around the the table, “It’s a little big,” he says.

Dr. Erskine’s lip quirks and he turns as Howard (followed closely by Will and a concerned looking Agent Carter), approaches the table, “Mr. Stark? How are your levels?”

Howard says, “We’re at 100%. We may dim half of Brooklyn, but we are ready,” he pauses briefly and mutters, “as we’ll ever be.”

Erskine quirks a brow in question as Will leans towards the table to whisper, “Holy shit, Steve. You better not die or Darce’ll kill me.”

Steve can’t help but smile at that. A small and slightly terrified smile—but a smile nonetheless.

Howard nods at him and walks quickly away, followed by a worried Will.
Erskine says to Carter, “Agent Carter? Wouldn’t you be more comfortable in the booth?”

And she nods, reluctantly turning away to climb the stairs to the viewing booth.

He tenses as the nurses begin strapping him in and he listens to Dr. Erskine describing the procedure—the micro injections of serum, the exposure to vita rays to induce growth. It all sounds kinda crazy to him.

They load up some vials filled with a weird blue liquid to the sides of the table and metal arms clamp onto his chest and legs.

Erskine steps back over as the nurse gives him an injection in his shoulder and Steve winces, but says, “that wasn’t so bad.”

Dr. Erskine quirks a brow and sighs, “That was penicillin.”

Oh.

Oh.

Dr. Erskine lays a comforting hand on his shoulder and begins the countdown and Steve breathes harder, the beginnings of an asthma attack tightening his chest as needle tipped metal arms pierce his arms, legs, and chest.

He focuses on Erskine’s voice, 3...2...I

There’s a hiss and he feels a cold sensation as the serum floods the injection sites. It quickly turns to fire in his veins, as he grits his teeth and tenses against the pain.

He’s barely aware of the table tipping upward and the sides closing around him like a coffin—a sudden blaze of brilliant light blinding him and setting every nerve afire.

The pain is awful—like burning from the inside out.
He screams, the agony unlike anything he’s ever felt in his life.

He vaguely hears voices from outside of the coffin, calling to stop the experiment, and he deliriously shouts, “No! I can do this!”

He can.

*He will.*

The light grows exponentially brighter, he feels like he’s at the center of a star—burning, his eyes boiling in his skull and his body being unmade.

Finally—*finally*, after an eternity of pain he finds himself in darkness again, the sound of his own heartbeat deafening, his gasping breaths, the oxygen tube hissing and voices muttering outside a distant second.

He feels strange. The pain he’d experienced is rapidly receding but so sharp in his memory he cannot believe he endured it and is still alive.

The sound of the locking mechanism disengaging is loud and there is suddenly more light, shining red through his closed eyelids.

Oh—his eyes are still closed.

*Thank god.*

He’d half believed he’d gone blind.

He lifts his heavy eyelids to see people staring at him in amazement as he hangs from the straps holding him to the table. The belt is tight against his chest, much tighter than before and his trousers, once too loose and too long now feel snug around his thighs.
Dr. Erskine and Howard rush over and loosen the straps and help him step down to the ground, which is mysteriously much less distant than before and he looks over the crowd of people goggling at him, his perspective far higher than ever in his life.

He looks down at the doctor beside him and realizes he is tall.

Really tall.

Agent Carter rushes over to him, Will right behind her and she asks breathlessly, “How do you feel?”

He’s still out of breath, panting from the exertion of the experiment, “Taller.”

She reaches out briefly touching his chest and he barely notices it, transfixed for a moment by the red of her lipstick, so much brighter than he ever knew. She shoves a shirt at him and says, “You look taller.”

The lab is a dizzying kaleidoscope of color—colors he has never seen before, and there are so many sounds layered one over the other, people’s heartbeats, breathing, voices, the click of machinery and footsteps across the floor.

He cannot focus.

His gaze connects with Will’s shocked green eyes and he says, “I guess I didn’t die, huh?”

Will shakes his head slowly and Howard laughs, “Definitely not.”

Steve looks for Dr. Erskine, who has stepped away, a concerned expression on his face. He follows the doctors line of sight to a pale dark haired man, who’s inching closer as he pulls a lighter from his pocket. Erskine startles, pointing towards the man and there is a deafening explosion from the observation booth.
People scream and shout, buffeting him on either side.

Suddenly the pale man surges forward, grabs the last remaining vial of blue serum and turns to flee.

Dr. Erskine steps towards the man and shouts, “He’s got the serum—somebody stop him!”

The man turns, a gun in hand and sneers, firing twice before he runs towards the stairs.

Steve is momentarily confused by the chaos, the noise and movement overwhelming him until he sees Erskine on the floor, the bullet holes blooming like red flowers across his white lab coat.

“Oh, no—“ he whispers, quickly crossing to Erskine’s side and kneeling beside him. The doctor is wheezing, clearly unable to speak.

He points at him and Steve looks down, his eyes following Erskine’s hand as he touches his fingertips to his chest and brings them back to his own, smiling slightly as he taps over his own heart, conveying paragraphs with his dark eyes before they flutter closed, his body going limp.

Steve listens as the doctor’s heartbeat falters and slows to a stop, remembering their conversation from the night before when Erskine explained why he had chosen Steve to receive the serum. He’d insisted that a weak man would not take strength for granted and would have compassion —that he was chosen not because he is a good soldier, but because he is a good man.

In a space of seconds, the clamor of the crowd around him is interrupted by more gunfire as Agent Carter shoots at the fleeing assassin.

Steve is up and running before he knows it.

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8:30pm
Darcy enters the vestibule to the apartment building, crossing the black and white tile to the mailboxes to grab the items within.

She’s halfway up the stairs, absentmindedly sifting through the advertisements and bills when she sees—a letter from Steve!—and grins, eager to read it, fumbling with her overstuffed bag and fishing her keys out.

In a minute she’s dropping her bag and coat by the sofa, collapsing onto it and ripping the envelope open to pull the letter free.

October 22, 1942

Dear Darcy,

Your last letter had me upset. I worry about you joining the Army Nurses Corps. My immediate thought was to tell you not to do it, to stay home where it was safe.

Then I realized how hypocritical that would be, especially given my actions of late.

Yesterday I did something Bucky would call incredibly stupid but in my defense it was a reflexive response—I literally acted before I even thought about it, but it seems to have been some kind of test which turned things in my favor.

We were busy doing our exercises, when General Phillips yelled, “grenade!”

Darcy, I swear I don’t have a death wish, but I jumped on the grenade. My only thought was to protect the others.

Turns out it wasn’t a live grenade at all, and everyone else had run away.

Well, everyone except for Agent Carter who seemed to have the same instinct that I did but was further away from the grenade than I was.
I’ve been asked to be the first subject for the special project we’ve all been training for. They’ve told me they will be taking me to a secret location in a couple days for the experiment.

I confess, I’m a little scared. But I trust Dr. Erskine not to be careless with my life.

By the time you get this—it will be all over, for better or for worse.

I love you.

Always,

Steve

P.S. I know you must follow your own path. But, please doll—keep yourself safe.

The letter trembles in her grasp as she reads it again.

Oh no.

Oh nonono.

She has no way of knowing what has happened to Steve. She doesn’t know where he is.

She doesn’t know.

She leans forward, resting her head in her hands and rocking back and forth, the letter crumpling in her grasp as she tries to contain the dueling urges to cry or destroy something.

She’s angry.
And scared.

She wishes she could go down to the gym and punch a bag until she’s tired, but that’s not an option for her.

She stands, pacing back and forth in front of the sofa before finally marching over to the kitchen cabinets to grab Will’s mostly full bottle of whiskey and a bottle of red wine she’d been saving for a special occasion.

She snorts. This occasion is pretty damn special.

Alright.

This will do.

If she drinks quickly she might get enough in her system to calm down before it burns off.

She takes the bottles to her room, dropping her dress onto the floor to change into one of Bucky’s old shirts and pulling the cork from the wine bottle with her teeth—thinking she could at least start off classy in her pursuit of drunkenness. She’d forgotten to bring a glass with her so she shrugs and drinks from the bottle.

*Guess I’m not so classy after all.*

After ten minutes, she’s marginally calmer as she pulls out their photo album from the nightstand.

So many happy memories.

*There’s Bucky and Steve laughing, their arms slung around each other.*

*There she is dancing with Bucky, her head thrown back and toe pointed as he dips her over his arm.*
There’s Steve in the driver's seat of the hearse, a wild grin on his face even though he has a white knuckled grip on the steering wheel.

There’s Steve laying with his head in her lap, her hands in his hair as she reads a book.

She doesn’t even realize she’s crying until the images blur in front of her. She pushes the album aside.

Goddamnit.

Steve and his lack of impulse control and his idiotic self sacrificing bravery.

Jumping on a grenade.

She tips the wine bottle back, empties it, and throws it hard against the wall. It dents the plaster and shatters in a satisfying crash. She feels marginally better as she twists the top off the whiskey bottle, gulping a mouthful and savoring the burn in her throat and the warmth that trails down to her stomach.

She flops onto her back, her legs dangling over the side of the bed, breathing deeply as she sightlessly stares at the familiar crack in the plaster above her, only lifting her head occasionally to take another gulp from the bottle.

There it is.

She’s feeling warm now—a little blurry.

Her panic has subsided enough for her to plan.

She needs to talk to Howard, she’s pretty sure he’ll know where Steve is and if he’s okay. She distractedly wraps her hand around her locket, dragging it back and forth on its chain as she thinks, the weight of it in her hand a comfort as she reviews what she knows.
Erskine and Howard have been working on a project together. Howard has been working on a Vita Ray machine (whatever that is) and Will was called in early this morning to look over some test readings for him. Will said the project was very hush hush.

*Hmmmm.*

Steve said the procedure was scheduled in a few days when he wrote the letter.

Howard *definitely* knows what happened.

There’s a familiar tread on the stairs and sits up abruptly, her head swimming slightly with the sudden movement.

*Will.*

And someone else—she listens, the familiar cadence of Howard’s voice in the stairwell too.

She hurries into the living room, heedless of the fact that she’s bare legged in Bucky’s shirt, a whiskey bottle dangling between her fingers.

They’re barely through the door when she pounces, Will’s eyes widening as she grabs Howard by the front of his shirt and roughly shakes him.


Howard’s eyebrows raise in surprise, “Hey there, sweet cheeks—uh—you’ve got quite the grip there,” he pats ineffectually at her hand and she frowns, releasing his shirtfront and rolling her shoulders before raising the whiskey bottle to her lips.

She wipes a hand across her mouth, “I know you know,” she says and eyes him suspiciously, “Erskine said he’s been working with you—and I got a letter from Steve today telling me he’d been chosen for the procedure.”
Her eyes suddenly well with tears and she chokes, “Did he survive?”

God. She hates being emotional in front of Howard, it makes her feel weak.

Will swoops in, handily wrapping his arm around her and fishing the bottle from her grasp. He walks her over to the sofa and she doesn’t resist as he pushes her to sit, placing the bottle on the coffee table before settling down beside her and tugging her into his side. His fingers sift through her hair soothingly, the way he’s always done to comfort her when she’s distraught.

“It’s alright Darce, he’s alright—” he glances over at Howard who’s still standing flabbergasted in the doorway, “Howard, close the door and get over here.”

Howard, in an uncharacteristically compliant response, does as Will asks and comes over to gingerly sit on the chair next to the sofa.

He glances around, “Nice place—” he says, bouncing his knee with nervous energy, his eyes darting around the apartment before settling on Darcy’s bare legs, “Hey, kid—not that I’m complaining, but did ya forget some of your clothes?”

Darcy looks down at her legs, covered by Bucky’s shirt to mid-thigh and mutters, “M’covered up enough,” and tilts her head into Will’s massaging fingers.

“Alright then,” Howard shrugs, leaning forward to retrieve the bottle from the coffee table and tipping it to his mouth.

Howard wipes his mouth and sighs, saying, “Steve’s alright, better, in fact, than ever before.”

She raises her head from Will’s shoulder and stares intently at Howard, whispering, “Better?”

Will says, “Erskine’s serum worked,” Howard raises a brow and he adds quickly, “aided by Howard’s Vita Ray machine. He’s bigger, stronger and faster than before,” she looks sharply at him and he adds dreamily, “much bigger.”

Howard snorts, “He’s built like a goddamn Greek god, ya mean.”
Darcy tries to picture it but her imagination fails her. Steve in her mind is just a little bigger than her, slight but beautiful. A pencil gripped in his clever fingers, always sketching, his blond hair flopping over his forehead.

She sits up, suddenly sober.

“Tell me everything.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry I killed Erskine, guys. It had to happen.

Good thing Darcy burns through alcohol so quick or she might develop a problem—as it is, Will needs to find some other coping mechanisms, maybe.

Thank you to all of the readers old and new who commented and left kudos on the last chapter. It’s gratifying to see new readers coming out of the woodwork and letting me know what they think!
Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

Bucky reads some letters. Steve adjusts to his post-serum body, Senator Brandt has a proposal.

Chapter Notes

I struggled some with this chapter, I have a little writers block and it’s slow going. I felt it was important to detail some of the experiments that may have been conducted on Steve by the SSR post-serum, as well as give the reader a glimpse into his feelings about all of the changes.

Also tried to show how there could be a Steve and Peggy relationship were he not with Bucky and Darcy. Her noticing him and him noticing her is my wave to canon—there will be no cheating or petty jealousy here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

November 18, 1942

near Belfast, Ireland

Bucky rips open the V-mail envelopes he’d (finally!) gotten from home. One from Darcy, one from Steve, one from Ma and Becca. The V-mail set-up is lighter and quicker than the regular post, but all of it goes through censors now that they are overseas. He’d warned everyone he’d written that he can only speak in generalities about his activities, lest the words be blacked out by censors. All incoming correspondence is also inspected and censored as well. Frustrating, but at least they can communicate to let each other know they are alright.

It would have to be enough.

He opens Darcy’s first, eagerly pulling the letter from the envelope and collapsing back onto his bunk to read.

October 30, 1942

Dear Bucky,
While V-mail is ingenious in terms of cost reduction and speeding up delivery, I struggle with how to tell you what’s been happening here.

Oh, well, I’ll start with the easy part.

The second week of November is my last at the hospital, I’ll be joining the Army Nurses Corps and will be training at the Staten Island base for 4 weeks. Beyond that—I am unsure where I will be going.

Will and I are keeping the apartment for now, he’s still working with Howard in the area and we’ve made plans together about how to handle packing up our things and storing them when the time comes for him to follow Howard to Europe for his business, as anticipated.

Dr. Bobby has been extraordinarily helpful.

In other news, Steve completed his training and was selected for the special program, which was a success. I haven’t seen him but Howard assures me he is well, and I did receive a letter from him verifying that too.

I cannot describe what went on but you should know the medicine I helped the doctor develop was used and was successful.

Sadly, the doctor was killed—I wish I could say more, but well, you know.

I don’t exactly know where Steve is, but he’s alright and is going to serve in the Army, probably that unit Howard is mixed up with, as soon as he’s finished with the testing they are doing now.

I’ll try to write you as often as I can, but you will probably be unable to reach me while I’m training as I will only be there for a month.

I miss you and think of you every day—

Always yours,

Darcy

Bucky frowns, reading the letter again to understand what Darcy had communicated with the few details she could pass through censorship.

Dr. Erskine’s serum had worked and Steve has been cured of his ailments—enough so that he can serve in the Army. Bucky wonders about the extent of the changes as Darcy had described the successful test on the rats resulted in a bigger, stronger, smarter, rat.

He hopes Steve is okay.

He hopes he hasn’t changed too much.
Dr. Erskine was killed? What the hell is Stevie involved in anyway?

And then there’s his girl, joining the Nurses Corps. He sees plenty of those gals around camp—there’s a makeshift dancehall where the NCO’s go grab a drink and he’s been a few times.

He’s not stupid, he knows he could make time with more than a few of the nurses he’s seen there, but they just don’t compare to what he has with Darcy and Steve.

He still likes to dance though, and it never hurts to hold a pretty girl in his arms for a dance or two.

Most of the regiments had shipped out a couple weeks ago, rumor has it they were headed to North Africa, part of a planned invasion of Algiers and Morocco to gain a foothold before continuing on to Sicily, then Italy.

It will be the first joint British and American operation but the 107th is staying in Ireland to be part of the next wave.

Until then, training, maneuvers with incoming U.S. regiments and with the British troops, and waiting for orders.

He sighs, setting the letter aside to open the one from Steve.

November 3, 1942

Dear Bucky,

I was relieved to finally get word of your location from Howard—Darcy passed the information to him as soon as she got your letter, as she didn’t know where I was at the time or how to reach me.

Speaking of Howard, I haven’t seen him in a few days and I don’t know if I will see him any time soon—he is very busy with whatever he is doing and is not a part of the testing we’re doing here.

Darcy enlisted in the Army Nurses Corps and is getting set to start training. I’ll be honest—I hate the idea of her anywhere near the fighting.

I know she’s capable, but I hate it.

There’s a female officer who was supervising our troop while we were training and I saw the way she was treated, always having to work twice as hard to prove she could do the job. She kept a stiff upper lip, but I could see how frustrated she was (I understand the feeling) and I wonder how the
doctors and soldiers treat the Army Nurses.

They deserve all the respect in the world and Darcy better get it.

Looks like I will be here for a while, so any letters you send should reach me if you send them to the address I’ve provided. They’re running lots of tests on me now—so many tests, Bucky.

I’m sure you heard from Darcy but I’ll tell you myself, Darcy’s doctor friend gave me some medicine that cured all my ills and now I’m better than ever before. There was a disturbance just after the procedure that resulted in the doctor being killed, I can’t tell you the details of the incident, but the world suffered a great loss with his passing. He was brilliant, but best of all, he was kind.

Because of him, I can finally fight for our country like I always wanted, if they ever let me out of the lab, that is.

I’m ready to do my part.

My days are filled with science types and I’m getting really tired of being cooped up here. There’s so much I want to tell you—to show you, but there’s no way the censors would let that slide.

Just know that I miss you, and I will keep writing you—even if you may not be able to write me back if I’m on the move.

Take care of yourself.

Always,

Steve

Bucky rests the letter on his chest, frowning. He has so many questions, and until he sees Darcy, Steve, or hell—Howard, again, he’s not likely to get any answers.

All he can do is pray for their safety and focus on doing his job. He digs the ever present pocket watch from his pocket and flicks it open, checking the time.

Damn.

He’s gonna have to read Ma and Becca’s letter later. He’s gotta do evening rounds to make sure everyone is where they’re supposed to be before lights out.

He studies the picture of he, Steve, and Darcy on the inside of the watch cover for a moment before he slowly clicks it closed, rubbing his thumb over the smooth surface of the silver contemplatively before he rolls out of his bunk and shoves it in his pocket once more.
He shrugs into his uniform jacket and heads into the barracks.

December 7, 1942

It’s more than a month post-serum, and save for the occasion of Dr. Erskine’s very private funeral which he had attended under the thinly veiled supervision of an SSR soldier and Agent Carter, Steve hasn’t been able to leave the grounds of Camp Lehigh, where he’d been moved later in the day after his transformation.

He’s still getting used to the changes in his body—and the scientists seem hellbent on testing it’s limits, not to mention collecting so much of his blood that he’s beginning to wonder if they’re a bunch of vampires.

He’s run for miles, at speeds he’d never thought a person could achieve (60 miles per hour!)—and he did not tire. As time has gone on and he’s grown more comfortable in his body, his endurance and speed have only increased.

They’ve tested his strength repeatedly, having him lift heavier and heavier objects as he’d gone on, marveling at how quickly his body builds muscle. He’d been muscular when he came out of the lab, but had no idea how strong his new body was until the testing began. He can pick up the end of a car and lift it over his head—which is crazy and a little bit scary when he thinks about it. He’s had to consciously limit his strength when touching others, it wouldn’t do to crush someone’s hand when he shakes it.

To this end, the scientists have him doing fine muscle tasks as well, one of them coming up with the bright idea of him building model planes and ships in a bottle in his spare time. The ships in particular require an incredibly steady and delicate touch and he works on them at night in his room when he can’t sleep. He’s built quite a collection now, given the fact that sleep is something he no longer needs a lot of anymore.

They had him in a tank of water yesterday, testing how long he could hold his breath. At first, they just had him duck under the water and hold his breath. He’d eventually managed to hold it for 10 minutes. Later, they’d told him to breathe deeply and then, much to his horror, shut the lid and finished filling the tank to the very top.
He’d held his breath for what seemed like forever and for a few eternal minutes as he pounded on the lid to be let out, he thought he was going to drown.

It was the closest he’d felt to the terrible asthma attacks he’d had as a child, when he’d grown lightheaded and passed out from the lack of oxygen. Only those experiences had allowed him to keep a clear head and start kicking the walls of the glass tank until a hairline crack had formed, spraying water across the lab and forcing the scientists to quickly open the top of the tank before he completely shattered the wall.

They’d explained that they wanted to test his limits and if he knew he could escape the water easily, he probably would have at the first sign of discomfort.

The scientists had clocked him under the water at 17 minutes that time, and he was furious, refusing to do further tests that day.

He hasn’t seen any of the group of men he’d trained with upon his initial arrival at Camp Lehigh, they have him quartered in a dormitory type room not far from medical. He’s occasionally seen groups of soldiers running in formation around camp, but he didn’t recognize any of them and the brass has taken pains to keep him separate.

Other than the scientists and administrative types he interacts with, he’s fairly isolated.

Agent Carter drops in to see his testing at the lab on occasion and they have become something like friends. She told him to call her Peggy after he’d told her to call him Steve, and they’ve eaten lunch together on the few occasions their paths have crossed in the mess hall.

She’s an interesting woman, undeniably beautiful and intelligent. If not for Darcy and Bucky, he has no doubt he’d be half in love with her already.

As it is, he may have a small crush.

He admires her quite a bit and hopes that they can become good friends, especially since he feels like he has few of them here.

He’s asked her several times when they would let him out of the labs to go fight with the other soldiers and she avoided the question, shrugging her shoulders and changing the subject.
After the incident yesterday though, she’d come to visit him, angry on his behalf and saying the scientists had gone too far.

He’d explained to her he felt less like a person lately and more like a science experiment and she’d looked sad, convincing him to leave his room to go down to the mess for dinner where she told him in confidence that Dr. Erskine had left no notes for the final stages of developing the serum so they didn’t know if they’d be able to duplicate the results they’d had with him.

“Nothing at all?” he’d asked.

Peggy shook her head, “Nothing. Unbeknownst to the other people working on the project, he destroyed the records—he was always concerned Hydra would get their hands on the formula, especially after his experiences in Germany, so I imagine he felt it was the safest thing to do.”

Steve wondered if any of the work Darcy had done at with the doctor at the hospital would be useful in replicating his serum, but he stayed quiet. Besides, Erskine worked at the SSR lab in Brooklyn for nearly a year after he left the hospital and he did a lot of work in that time that Darcy knows nothing about.

Still, as the scientists had run him through his paces, he often pondered how much of his physical abilities were directly derived from Darcy’s blood and how much were from the serum Erskine developed.

He wondered how much of her strength and endurance she held in reserve.

“When can I leave here, Peggy? I joined up so I could fight for my country, not spend all my time hidden away in a lab,” he’d said.

She’d looked down for a moment, pushing some peas around her plate with her fork, before she said softly, “They don’t know what to do with you.”

Steve scoffed, “What d’ya mean? I’m made for fightin’.”

“Well—the government invested quite a bit of funding into Project Rebirth, expecting an army of
super soldiers that would help us defeat our enemies. But the only success has been you and they haven’t been able to duplicate,” she paused, “basically, you’re too valuable an asset to just throw onto the front lines. Senator Brandt may have a proposition if you want to hear his idea.”

“What kinda proposition?” He asked warily, he’d met Senator Brandt and he’d struck him as calculating at best.

“I’m not sure of all the details, but he and General Phillips had a meeting yesterday and I may have eavesdropped a little,” she grinned.

“Yeah?” he smirked in return, raising an eyebrow in question.

“General Phillips is disappointed in the return on the project—what can he do with one soldier? And Senator Brandt is trying to figure out a way to recoup the funds the government invested in it. Sounds like Brandt wants to use you for increasing morale and maybe to help sell war bonds. Not exactly what you want, but you’d get out of here.” she said.

He sighed, “I gotta tell ya, Peggy. I’m gettin’ to the point I’m ready to do just about anything to get outta here.”

She patted his hand in consolation, “I know. I think you should think about it. Your appearance since the serum is—um— impressive,” she grins wryly, “I bet you could definitely help boost morale,” she mutters, her eyes tracing over his face and across the breadth of his shoulders, a look of interest in her eyes that he’s become familiar with since the serum.

Steve ran his hand over the back of his neck and grimaced slightly. He was aware of how he looked now—the attention from the secretaries in admin was discomfiting after so many years of being overlooked by women. He’s noticed the way their eyes follow him and hears the whispered comments they make to each other in his wake.

He’d never known women could be so objectifying.

Yeah, it gave his ego a boost to get that kind of attention, but he knows these same women wouldn’t have given him the time of day before the serum.

Darcy did, though.
Peggy had treated him with respect as well, and it’s with this in mind he tries to be honest with her.

“I dunno what to do with the way people—women—look at me now. I have a girl back home and I love her. She loved me before all this,” he waved his hand over himself, “and I’m not interested in flirting with other gals,” he said.

There’s a flash of something, disappointment maybe?, that had crossed her face before she straightened her spine to look steadily at him, “So that’s who you’ve been writing all those letters to.”

Steve had realized she’s one of the people who handled the correspondence that was distributed to his group during training in addition to the letters he received and sent after being brought to the lab for study.

“Um—yeah. And also to my best friend, Bucky,” he said.

He still didn’t like lying about Bucky. He’s so much more than a friend, and Darcy isn’t just his girl.

“Mmmhmm. There will be lots of people interested in you now, for various reasons. You’re going to have to become accustomed to it, I suppose,” she said.

“Yeah,” he rubbed a hand over his face, “So—the senator?”

“Will probably approach you soon,” she said.

A couple days later he’s waiting in the reception area outside of General Phillips office, uncomfortably shifting on the too small chair as the blond secretary idly types a letter, occasionally sliding a glance his way.

She’s pretty, he’s seen her before and heard her whisper to another gal from the steno pool about maybe taking the “new guy” for a spin. Whatever that means.

Oh hell, he knows what that means.
One of his post-serum problems is he gets sexually aroused very easily. He finds himself getting erections at the drop of hat, sometimes out of the blue like when he was 13 years old. Not only is it potentially embarrassing but also it could be misinterpreted as a sign of actual interest when in reality he may have just had a passing thought.

He’d mentioned it to one of the doctors—embarrassed, but he figured it was worth noting, and the man said he suspected the problem would subside when he became more accustomed to his new body and it’s enhanced senses. Something about increased hormone levels and excessively sensory stimulation.

In this instance, he’s noticed the girl is pretty—he’s not blind. She has lovely long legs that she keeps crossing and uncrossing, the whisper of her silk stockings a constant distraction. He can’t help but compare them mentally to Darcy’s legs, which may be shorter but are also beautifully formed and with that thought comes the sense memory of the way her skin felt beneath his fingertips, and the feeling of her legs wrapped around his waist.

And stockings.

_Gah—now he’s uncomfortably hard._

He clears his throat, “Excuse me, miss, is there a restroom close by?”

She glances up from her typewriter and says, “Sure, just down the hall on your right.”

He jumps to his feet and hurries out the door, calling, “Thanks, please let the General know I’ll only be a minute!” over his shoulder as he strides down the hallway to the restroom, quickly entering and locking himself in a stall.

He pushes his pants and undershorts to his knees, rucking up his shirt and wrapping his hand around his painfully hard cock with a low groan.

_God._

He hasn’t jerked off so much since he was sixteen and his newly enhanced body rebounds
remarkably fast. Something the scientists are interested in studying but he’s avoided it so far.

He strokes himself quickly, aware he has minutes before the General will want to see him and the man is not terribly patient.

His mind replays images and sensations from past encounters with Bucky and Darcy—Darcy’s straddling him, her back arched and breasts bouncing, Bucky’s lips trailing over his chest, then wrapped around his cock, the way Darcy tastes between her legs, Bucky’s cock rocking against the small of his back as he strokes his hand slowly up and down Steve’s cock, whispering dirty things in his ear...

He comes, shuddering as he spurts over his fist, slumping against the stall door.

He sighs, grabbing a wad of toilet paper and scrubbing his belly and hand, before tucking himself away and righting his clothes.

He sincerely hopes his body adjusts soon, his overactive libido is an unwanted distraction at present.

He washes his hands, checking himself briefly in the mirror before heading back to the General’s office.

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Turns out General Phillips wasn’t the only person waiting in his office. When he’s finally called in to see him Senator Brandt is there, sitting casually in one of the seats in front of the General’s desk smoking a cigarette.

Steve enters the room and salutes General Phillips.

Phillips waves an irritated hand at him from behind his desk, “At ease, soldier.”

“Ah—Private Rogers, there you are,” Senator Brandt chuckles jovially.
Steve raises an eyebrow, “Yes—here I am,” he turns to General Phillips, “you wanted to speak to me, sir?”

“I do. Have a seat, son.”

Steve sits in the chair beside the senator and waits patiently as the general shuffles through some papers on his desk, tapping the pile into a stack that he sets aside, removing his reading glasses and folding them before placing them in his shirt pocket.

He leans back in his chair, looking at Steve intently.

“Agent Carter informed me you’re chafing at the bit to get out of the labs,” he says raising his eyebrows at Steve.

“Yes, sir. I think I can do more for our country as a soldier.”

“Well, the government disagrees. Seems they feel being a soldier won’t adequately pay back on their investment so the senator has a proposal.”

Steve turns to look at Brandt, “Sir?”

“We have some ideas. The government is struggling to fund this war and you could be of great service to us. You’ll help us make a few short films, tour with the USO, rally the people for the troops and encourage them to buy war bonds.”

Steve has no idea what he’d do with the USO.

And films?

Brandt continues, “Picture it,” he spreads his hands, “You are the perfect soldier, representing our great country. We have a whole gimmick figured out,” he leans forward, smirking, “How’d you like to be a Captain?”
Steve’s surprise must show on his face and the General snorts, “Son—they want to call you Captain America. You’re about to become as iconic as Uncle Sam.”

*Oh boy.*

**Info on V-mail**

**Info about the U.S. army in Ireland circa WW2**

**Chapter End Notes**

I’m trying to follow the actual timeline of events in the European theater during WW2. Of course, there will be some fudging to align with the events of Captain America: The First Avenger, but I think using historical fact is fun.

Credit for the ship in a bottle idea goes to my daughter, who is brilliant.

Let me know what you think! All of the lovely comments and kudos help me to stay motivated.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

Darcy ships out to England. Bucky on the battlefield. Steve tours with the USO.

Chapter Notes

This is half of what ended up being a very long chapter—it was slow to write because of all the research I had to incorporate. Hopefully, I did it justice.

No beta—I apologize for any errors.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

April 13, 1943

The sound of retching is loud in the small cabin as the ship violently rocks under the assault of the storm. Darcy kneels by her friend’s side, placing a cool damp cloth on her neck and holding back her blonde hair as she heaves again over the bucket.

She wishes she could do more to help her feel better.

She and May Kelly met on her first day in Army Nurses training and the blonde’s wide grin and amiable, hardworking nature endeared her to Darcy from the start. May is a city girl, born and raised in the Bronx, the only girl in a family of six children born to Irish immigrants. She’s been a nurse for five years, working at Fordham hospital caring for post-operative patients. She joined the Army Nurses Corps not only because of her sense of duty, (three of her brothers were old enough to join the military and had, two in the Army and one in the Navy) but also because she craved adventure.

They'd bunked side by side for four weeks and stuck together through basic training at Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island, then further as they worked with the other nurses and doctors for three months to become part of a well oiled medical unit. In addition, from their training group, only she and May had opted for training in administering inhaled anesthetics and blood and blood derivatives, putting them in a class of nurses that would work closely with the doctors in trauma and surgery.

It was also likely to place both of them near the front lines.
Basic training had been less about medicine and more about familiarizing the nurses with the Army organization. They’d learned things like military customs and courtesies, field sanitation, and defense against air, chemical, and mechanized attack. Knowledge of the chain of command and supply requisition were key to getting the necessary equipment and medical supplies while in the field. They’d learned how to quickly set up on-site medical facilities, even doing things like digging latrines and trenches during training. Of course, their work was physically demanding and they all needed to be fit, so daily exercise had become a way of life.

Darcy actually enjoyed the physical challenge—much to May’s disgust. In her civilian life she’d rarely had an opportunity to really stretch herself and see her physical limits. She still hadn’t really, because she purposely held back so as not to stand out too much. Nevertheless, she seldom tired and didn’t complain, which she’d heard several of the higher ups take note of.

They’d even had a brief introduction to guns due to the fact many of them would be very close to the front lines, the brass had deciding to include it in their training for protection.

Darcy had excelled at the rifle range even though she deliberately missed some shots. Their DI had been impressed and asked where she’d learned to shoot and she’d explained how she’d grown up in the country hunting with her grandfather from a young age. All true, her skill completely plausible if not usual.

Interestingly, all Army nurses are officers, given the rank of Second Lieutenant. Technically, she outranks Bucky, which she’s sure he’ll find amusing.

After a moment, her blonde friend pushes back from the bucket, leaning against the side of the bunk, shuddering in disgust.

Darcy quickly hands her a canteen and May sends her a grateful look before she rinses her mouth, spitting the water into the bucket before leaning back against the side of the bunk again, looking thoroughly miserable.

“I kinda hate you right now,” she says listlessly, grabbing hold of the edge of the bunk and looking a little green as the ship rolls again.

Darcy says, “Aw, now. Even after I held back your hair and everything?”
May rolls her eyes, “Ugh. I guess I don’t hate ya. Even though I’m jealous as hell that you aren’t sick at all.”

Chalk one up for her quirky physiology, she hasn’t had an inkling of seasickness, despite the rough weather since they’d left New York Harbor nine days ago. They were told the convoy of ships should reach Londonderry in Northern Ireland in two or three days, the unfortunate weather has slowed them a bit but it’s entirely within the timeframe of ten to fourteen days that the journey usually takes.

Unfortunately for May, her seasickness, which had eased after the first couple days, had reared its ugly head again as soon as the latest squall shook the ship.

“Maybe you could lay down now? The waves seem a little less violent,” Darcy says.

She helps May up from the floor and pulls the covers over her shoulders once she lays in her bunk. She scoots the bucket close to the bed in case her friend needs it again.

“Ugh. What time is it anyway?” May mutters.

Darcy glances at her watch, “Nearly midnight,” she says, “do you think you could sleep some?”

May grabs the damp cloth Darcy holds and lays it across her forehead. She huffs out a breath, her brown eyes glassy and red rimmed with fatigue, “God, I hope so. They’ll have us up and doing exercises tomorrow morning. Probably more practice drills too,” she groans, rolling to her side and pulling her pillow over her head.

True.

Much of their time since boarding ship has been spent organizing supplies, practicing various defense drills (Darcy is very much over putting on her gas mask as they pretend to be under attack), and making alterations to the men’s olive drab field uniforms they would have to wear once they were in the field, as they hadn’t received the new nurses uniforms with pants. Practicality had finally won out—the brass acknowledging that the uniforms they currently wore would be impractical in field conditions, considering they were skirted.

Darcy is thankful she’s skilled with a needle, since the smallest men’s field uniform required quite a
bit of alteration to fit her. Shoes were another problem. While she had been issued lace up shoes for both her dress and hospital uniform, she had not received boots, which would be necessary in the cold and damp conditions they would likely encounter outside of summertime. Consequently, she’s been issued the smallest men’s lace up boots that could be found until some her size could be requisitioned, and Darcy, being petite, will be forced to wear several pairs of socks and lace them tight. She sympathizes even more with Steve’s childhood predicament of stuffing newspaper in his shoes so they fit.

Some of the nurses had asked for her help in altering their jumpsuits and she’s been working on their uniforms in addition to her own.

“Yeah—okay if I turn the light out?” Darcy asks glancing once more at the lump of blankets obscuring her friend’s slender form.

May grunts in the affirmative and Darcy switches off the lamp before clambering into her bunk. She settles down in the darkness, only the light from the outside hall shining through the cracks around the doorway illuminates the tiny room, though she bets it’s nearly pitch black to her bunkmate.

At night, especially as they’ve drawn closer to England, they sail without lights, except those in the interior hallways of the ship, the portholes covered with shutters in an effort to avoid detection by enemy ships or planes flying over. Of course, they still have to worry about radar detection but thus far they have been lucky.

Besides, their ship travels in a convoy, with a naval escort. The convoy system has been very successful so far in delivering cargo and personnel to England.

At least this is what she tells herself at night when she lays in the dark.

She spends many of her sleepless hours in her bunk thinking about Bucky, Steve, and Will.

She knows Will traveled to England with Howard several weeks ago (they flew, lucky bastards) and Steve is traveling with the USO all around the United States doing something—for security purposes he’d been unable to tell her much. She sends her letters to him through Senator Brandt’s office and she can only hope they are forwarded promptly. The last letter she’d received from him was a month ago and he’d sounded frustrated, chomping at the bit to fight with the other enlisted men.

The 107th had shipped out of Ireland several weeks ago, headed towards North Africa she imagines
—there’s been very little news but she knows the American and British troops are still fighting German forces there. If the Germans surrender North Africa, she thinks the troops will move on to Europe from there—who knows when.

It’s frustrating that she’d missed Bucky by a matter of weeks. She may have thrown things around her room in a temper after she received a phone call from Howard informing her just before she left New York.

She misses her boys. It’s an ache, a persistent feeling of something missing, like a phantom limb of sorts. She tries to take her mind off of it by focusing on her work as much as possible and she writes letters often, trying to connect in some small way with them.

Howard told her he would endeavor to get as much information as he can about Steve and Bucky before she sees him again. It is likely he and Will will be contacting her once she reaches England, he said he had gotten approval to bring her in on the work they have been doing since the war started.

The rolling of the ship has finally lessened and May’s breathing evens out as she slips into sleep. Darcy is not long behind her, the gentle rocking of the ship lulling her in the darkness of her bunk.

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Sicily

July 21, 1943

Bucky squats in the muddy foxhole beside his men as the sun slowly sinks below the horizon. The day has been blisteringly hot and they are all sweaty and covered in mud from the trenches, the muttering of the men interrupted by the occasional sound of gunfire and overlaid by the constant low buzz of the clouds of mosquitoes that hover over them.

Despite all this, the mood is somewhat cheerful because of the cessation of German bombing affords them the chance to change their socks into the cleanest, driest ones they carry and maybe have a smoke as they rest their backs against the muddy walls.

He digs into his jacket pocket and pulls out the crumpled pack of cigarettes he’s been attempting to conserve, not knowing when he’ll be able to buy more. There are only a few left and he sighs mournfully, straightening a slightly bent cigarette before placing it between his lips and inhaling
deeply as he lights it with his zippo.

God.

He slumps against the wall for a moment, enjoying the way his nerves relax somewhat under the sway of nicotine. There’s a nudge to his shoulder and he looks into the dark eyes of Corporal John Russo, who cocks his eyebrow and leans forward expectantly with his own cigarette clenched between his white teeth.

Bucky lights it for him and flicks the zippo closed, turning it meditatively in his dirty fingers a couple times before placing it safely in his pocket again.

He and Russo sit companionably together in silence, their smoky exhalations keeping the mosquitoes at bay.

They’ve steadily pushed forward for nearly two weeks, sleeping in their foxholes and following the retreating Italian forces as the Germans make frequent air raids over the island.

They’d landed on July 10th on the beach at Torre di Gaffe with British and Canadian forces to the east and most of the Americans to the west. Though the weather had been rough, they’d met little resistance at landing, quickly moving to take the port of Licata.

From there they continued north, presently outside of Palermo, in an effort to cut the north coast road and hinder German and Italian troop movement and their ability to receive supplies.

The resistance had been much greater, with several Italian battalions protecting their troops withdrawal with relentless fire. They’d lost quite a few men both to injury and death.

Even now, the groans of the injured can occasionally be heard, the medics doing their best to take care of them as they wait for the Army nurses and doctors to catch up to them.

A few hours later at full dark, Bucky is awakened from a light doze by Private Tiller, who is peering over the edge of his foxhole. “Sergeant Barnes, sir.”
“Yes, Tiller?” he says, rising to his feet.

“Medical has arrived, they need us to bring out our injured. Also, one of the nurses asked to see you.”

_Huh._

He follows Tiller back down the line of foxholes to the road where there are a group of Army nurses busy setting up a makeshift hospital, unloading supplies from a truck and setting up a tent under the canopy of some nearby trees.

There is very little light, but they seem to be untroubled, working quickly and efficiently despite the lack of visibility.

After a moment, a small female form separates from the group and walks their way, her khaki field uniform blending with the shadows and her face obscured by a helmet. Walking closer, she reaches up to remove it, and though her features are blurred by darkness he knows that face.

_He knows that face._

Private Tiller says, “Lieutenant Garland, this is Sergeant Barnes.”

He steps closer, removing his helmet and choking out, “Doll?”

She laughs, the familiar sound loosening something in his chest that’s been paining him for months.

“It’s Lieutenant Garland now, Sergeant Barnes,” she teases, stepping closer to take one of his hands in hers. He squeezes her hand convulsively, and she says softly, “Bucky, I didn’t think I’d ever find you.”

And he laughs.

He picks her up and swings her around and she laughs too, ignoring the confused looks from the
nurses and the few soldiers assisting them.

_Only his girl._

Only Darcy would manage to find him in the middle of a war zone.

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Chicago

Saturday August 21, 1943

Steve waits backstage for his cue, his eyes distractedly following the USO dancers as they move across the stage in the crowded theater. The flash of their legs kicking up the skirts of their red, white, and blue costumes elicits cheers from the crowd and he closes his eyes momentarily, tipping his head back and sighing before he pulls the cowl of his costume forward, obscuring half his face with the mask.

He pulls at his sleeves and wiggles a little to adjust the costume. It’s quite form fitting, and he still feels a bit silly in it. He adjusts the shield over his arm and walks onto the stage.

He passes the rows of singing girls to center front stage, standing straight and looking out over the audience. He says his lines, memorized and smooth with practice and he watches the faces in the audience, children smiling, their faces lit up with wonder as they clutch their new Captain America comic books, pretty young ladies giggling to each other and looking at him with flushed cheeks and a glint in their eyes, Senator Brandt seated off to the side with his assistant, looking smug and pleased at the crowd reaction.

They’ll definitely sell a lot of war bonds after the performance.

The last few months have been filled with shows like this, traveling from town to town, posing for photographs, (he’d even made a couple short movies!) interspersed with trips back to the SSR Lab for whatever tests the science types devised for him.

But offstage, he’s getting more and more frustrated as news of the war filters back and he feels like a hamster on a wheel, running in place and going nowhere.
The girls in the show flirt and some are pretty bold, making suggestions about meeting him later at his room and he turns them down as gracefully as he can, (which is not gracefully at all) his face hot with embarrassment.

He doesn’t really know how to handle all the attention and it somehow makes him feel even more lonely.

He misses Bucky and Darcy. He hasn’t heard a thing from either of them for some time—he’s not sure if it’s because he’s moving so often in his USO schedule or if they’re so busy with whatever they’re doing that he’s become an afterthought.

What will they think about how he looks now? Will it change how they feel about him?

He misses waking up Saturday morning with Bucky spooned behind him (however will they fit together now?) and Darcy humming in the kitchen as she cooks breakfast.

He misses the people that love him. That want him. The him he was before he turned into Captain America.

And while it’s flattering and it sort of thrills him in a way to have all these beautiful girls throwing themselves at him, he knows they’d never have given the little guy he used to be the time of day.

So he spends his evenings alone in hotel rooms in strange cities and writes detailed letters to Darcy and Bucky that he can never send, and V-mail letters where he can’t say what he really wants to, and draws in his sketchbook while he listens to the radio. He still has the books from when he was in basic, the ones about military strategy and survival skills. He studies them in his spare time—easy really, as his memory is now photographic.

Sometimes he goes out, catches a movie and one of the short films he’d made as Captain America plays after the newsreel and he smiles at the reaction of the kids in the audience.

Sometimes he goes to dinner with Senator Brandt and is introduced to various important people who treat him like a commodity instead of a person and he wonders if they’ll ever let him fight like a real soldier.
He has nightmares occasionally that he is struggling to breathe, that he’s so weak he can’t even sit up in bed. He wakes panting and sweaty, running his hands over his new body to reassure himself he’s not weak anymore.

But what good is it really? Other people are in control of his life. It’s ironic that he felt more free when he was small and sick.

His thoughts return to the present, the actor playing Hitler creeps out from behind the line of USO girls and charges at him. Steve plays his part, pretends to punch Hitler and the crowd cheers.

They take a bow, another show over.

At least they’re heading to England soon. Gotta keep up the the troops morale after all.

At least he’ll be on the same side of the world as the people he loves.

Army Nurses in Mediterranean Theatre—conditions and timeline

Army Nurses Corps history, training, etc.

Chapter End Notes

So—the timeline for the invasion of North Africa matched up pretty closely for when I had Bucky’s unit arrive in Europe so I’ve made brief mention of that, then catch up with him during the invasion of Sicily.

The description of Darcy’s training is as close to historically accurate as possible—however, the training for anesthetics was usually 6 months. It’s true 90% of Army Nurses were ranked Second Lieutenant. The logic being that rank would give them some protection in the all male world of GI’s.

All locations mentioned are actual places.

I am woefully behind in responding to comments kind readers have made on this fic. I have read every one—I will endeavor to respond in some way in the next day or so.

Thanks to all of you who have left comments and kudos. They truly make my day and
it’s wonderful to know this story brings some pleasure to people.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

The Allies have won Sicily, Bucky and Darcy have some time together.

Chapter Notes

NSFW. No beta, apologies for any errors.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August 24, 1943

Troina, Sicily

8pm

Darcy sits on the edge of her camp bed in the tent she and May share, finger combing her wet hair. It's getting too long, well past her shoulders now and she’s been unable to cut it for more than a month.

But it feels so good to be clean.

With the Italian and German troops evacuating Sicily by August 17th, they’d finally been able to set up a more permanent space in a hospital in Troina. Bathing and clean clothes are finally possible again. Unfortunately, the town is mostly rubble, thanks to the pitched battle which had taken place there during six days of fighting from July 31st to August 6th.

She and the other nurses and the doctors of her field unit had followed closely behind the front line, setting up a makeshift hospital to serve as a clearing station for stabilizing wounded soldiers before they could be taken to the evacuation hospital further away.

She’d been tasked to work with the surgeons performing front-line surgery on those soldiers too injured to transport. It was tense, bloody work, the injuries often horrific.
Sometimes, she’d lay awake at night, exhausted but unable to sleep because of the constant images of the injured soldiers she’d seen scrolling through her mind.

She says a prayer of thanks each time Bucky sends her word he’s okay.

As if this wasn’t enough, disease is a lurking problem that’s causing as many if not more casualties than the actual fighting. They are in the midst of malaria season, and despite all efforts by the Army to distribute Atabrine in addition to spraying insecticides around their quarters and in places where mosquitoes might breed, there are still many soldiers sickened by the disease.

She’d taken the required dosage of Atabrine just like all the other medical staff and suffered through the initial side effect of her skin turning a disconcertingly bright yellow, even though she knew her body would overcome any infection on its own. She was quicker to show this effect and to have it dissipate than anyone else, something one staff doctor attributed to her smaller stature rather than any biological difference she possessed, much to her relief.

After the initial dose, she began saving her pills to give to Bucky—there were times when the soldiers would be fighting, separate from medical supplies for long enough they could run out.

At present, there is a tent city formed around the few standing buildings at Troina. The hospital, several houses, and a school have become makeshift headquarters and sleeping quarters for the officers. Medical personnel, NCO’s, and the other soldiers have set up tents near the hospital for housing.

Bucky’s unit is close to the hospital as there is running water and showers in the hospital that are set aside for the soldiers use. The majority of toilets unfortunately, are outdoor latrines as there is no way for the ones at the hospital and the school to accommodate everyone.

There’s a locker room with showers on the surgical floor. Nurses and doctors alike take advantage of the possibility of getting clean after each shift in the hospital with a barrier being put up to separate the women from the men.

The soldiers use the ones in another part of the hospital and in the school.

It’s all rather luxurious compared to the conditions they’ve become accustomed to.
Tonight, May is on night shift and Darcy is off duty until morning.

Earlier, she’d come back to their tent with wet hair from a quick shower she’d been lucky to get after grabbing her meal at the mess hall post shift.

Her friend was sitting on the edge of her camp bed lacing her shoes when Darcy had entered their tent.

“Hey, Darce. All quiet up at the hospital?” she’d said.

“Yeah. Mostly malaria cases now, the last of the severely injured were stable enough to move to the hospital ships offshore today. There are still some civilians recovering from injuries from the last battle.”

They were responsible for the medical care of the civilians of Troina as well, since they had taken over their hospital and there was no other medical care available. Those civilians who hadn’t managed to flee the town had been caught in the crossfire between the German and U.S. soldiers, unfortunate casualties of war.

She crossed to open her trunk at the end of her camp bed, rifling through it for clean clothes. She held up a shirt and sniffed it, shrugging. Clean enough.

May hummed in acknowledgement and stood, straightening her nurses cap in front to the small mirror they’d tacked to the center tentpole.

“Your fella came by about an hour ago,” she said, patting an errant lock of blonde hair in place before turning to smirk knowingly at her.

Darcy paused in sorting through her clothes, “Yeah?’

“Mmmm—mmm. Tall drink of water that Sergeant Barnes is,” May teased, unable to keep a straight face for even a second before she grinned widely.
Darcy huffed. May liked to tease Darcy, knowing how she and Bucky hadn’t seen each other more than in passing for weeks now. It’s incredibly frustrating to be so close but unable to spend any time together. With the fighting at a standstill and the worst of the casualties handled, they might actually have a few moments to themselves.

Finally.

“What’d he say?” She asked.

“Oh— he has the evening off duty and was wondering if you’d be available.”

Darcy dropped her shirt and stood to walk over to May, grabbed her friend by the shoulders and gave her a little shake as she giggled.

“What’d you say?” She said.

“That you’re off duty this evening too—of course,” she rolled her eyes playfully at her and snickered again as Darcy bounced on her toes in excitement.

“What else?” She said.

“He’ll be here after dark,” she pulled away from Darcy and folded back the tent flap to leave, “Maybe you should rest up a little before he gets here,” she says dryly, waggling her eyebrows suggestively as she exits.

“May!” Darcy shouted and her friend’s answering laugh was her only reply as she’d walked away from their tent.

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9:00pm

Bucky sits on the edge of Darcy’s camp bed with her straddling his lap, her hands clutching at his
hair as she presses against him. He traces his fingers over the familiar curves of her hips and kisses her, reveling in the pliant softness of her lips.

*God.*

It’s been a year since he held her like this.

Since she’d found him, their moments together had been few and far between and never alone, given the nearly continuous fighting that had gone on until the German and Italian armies retreated from Sicily. Even after, she was busy at the hospital tending to the wounded and he was supervising the men in his unit as they set up quarters, dug latrines, and secured the encampment.

But now, he has her for a few short hours and he plans to use them well.

He pulls his mouth from hers and nuzzles into that spot just behind her ear that drives her crazy and sucks the skin there briefly before muttering, “May’s gone til morning?”

“Hm?—yeah,” she says, “how long do you have?” her nimble fingers dance over the front of his shirt, unbuttoning it and pushing it off his shoulders.

He lifts one arm then the other as she pulls his sleeves free and drops his shirt to the ground. “I have to be back to the barracks by eleven,” he says, leaning away from her searching hands to pull his undershirt over his head and drop it next to his shirt on the floor.

She sighs and leans in again, running her lips up the side of his neck and whispering next to his ear, “God, Bucky. I missed this—the feel of you, the way you smell,” she inhales, circling the pads of her fingers over his chest, down the chain of his dog tags, trailing further to the waistband of his pants. She strokes one finger teasingly under the edge there and smirks as goosebumps raise the skin of his arms.

He growls, “One of us is overdressed,” and she grins, pushing up on her knees to untie the side of the brown and white striped seersucker dress that all the nurses wear now that they’ve settled in one place for a bit.

He keeps his eyes on her as her dress joins his clothes on the floor, working his belt loose and unbuttoning his trousers, noting the changes in her figure. She’s a bit thinner than before, still
gloriously curved but definitely more lean, with taut muscles shifting under her skin.

She grins at him and steps back, sinking to her knees on the ground in just her bra and panties, loosening the laces of his boots and pulling them from his feet.

He lifts his hips and slides his pants and undershorts down to his knees in one go and Darcy tugs them the rest of the way off, pushing his legs apart to lean in, brushing her lips up his inner thigh and inhaling as she rubs her cheek over him like a cat marking territory.

The silk of her hair tickles against the sensitive skin there and he shivers again, his cock so hard it could hammer nails.

“Darce—” he starts and she interrupts his thoughts, sliding her hands up the outside of his thighs and up his sides to rest on his chest, “Lay back,” she says, giving him a little push.

He does, resting on his elbows on the narrow camp bed, his head brushing against the canvas wall of the tent.

He groans low as she licks and sucks little marks along the groove of his hip bone, shuddering as she traces the crease of his thigh with her tongue, her hot breath ghosting over his balls.

God.

How has he lived without this?

It’s been so long since he’s been touched beyond shaking someone’s hand or a slap on the back, and he feels ravenous, like he could wallow in the sensation of her skin against his.

It’s too much and not enough, his skin so sensitive he worries this will be over far too quickly if she continues on.

“Baby—come up here, I wanna touch you,” he rasps.
She lifts her eyes to his and licks her full bottom lip, her pale skin glowing in the low light from the kerosene lantern.

She reaches behind her and unclasps her bra, pushing the shoulder straps down and hooking a finger between her breasts to pull it the rest of the way off.

He sits up, tracing his fingers over ridge of her collarbone and down the chain of her necklace to the locket that nestles between her breasts. The metal is warm from her skin and he takes it in his hand, tugging gently to pull her closer.

He kisses her soft and long, stroking his fingers through the heavy silk of her hair, longer now than he’s ever seen it, to where the ends rest between her shoulder blades. She licks at his lower lip, nipping at him and surprising a low groan from him and he tilts his head to slot their mouths together — their kisses growing feverish and rough.

For some time, the wet slide of their lips and damp satin of her skin are all he knows. He almost feels drunk—blurry with desire and desperation.

She breaks the kiss, gasping for breath and he pulls at her, his lips searching for hers again. But she lays a hand on his chest and pushes him back, rising to her feet and he looks up, confused until she hooks her fingers around the edge of her panties and shimmies out of them.

He wraps his hands around the curve of her hips and pulls her back to him again, rubbing his face against the soft skin of her belly and breathing in the scent of her.

Too much. Not enough.

She cradles his head in her hands and cards her fingers through his hair, her fingernails scratching against his scalp.

He shivers and chokes, “Darce—I need—“ and pulls her into his lap, rolls her onto the camp bed, and follows her down to rest over her, his elbows on either side of her head with their bodies pressed together from chest to hip.

She releases a gust of air, followed by a breathy sigh of pleasure as he rolls his hips against her and she wraps one leg around him, the smooth skin of her calf sliding against the back of his thigh.
“What do you need?” she whispers.

He leans in, whispering against her lips, “You—I wanna touch ya everywhere,” he says, punctuating his words with light kisses along her jaw and over the curve of her shoulder, “I wanna taste ya,” he licks the pale skin of her throat and sucks a bruise there, “I wanna bury myself in ya and forget this goddamn war,” he mutters, slipping a hand between them to trace his index finger through the damp curls between her legs as she trembles against him.

She nods, flexing her hips and shuddering as he sinks one finger into her wet entrance, “Mmmm—me too,” she breathes.

He wiggles lower on the camp bed, cursing it’s narrow confines but determined to have his way. He nudges her legs wider with his shoulders and grabs one of her knees, bending out and spreading her wide beneath him.

He leans in, licking a slow stripe from her entrance to her clit and she bucks beneath him as she releases a low growl, “Ugh—God, Bucky.”

He grins against her and begins flicking his tongue in earnest, the familiar scent and taste of her ramping up his own arousal to near unbearable levels.

Soft little sounds fall from her lips as he curls his finger inside of her and she rocks her hips up and gasps when he adds a second finger. He lays a hand on her stomach, holding her in place and whispers against her, “Shhh—baby,” conscious of the thin walls of the tent as he quickens the pace of his strokes inside her.

He circles his tongue around and around the sensitive nub at the apex of her slit, bringing her to the edge but not over it as her legs tighten around his shoulders and she throws her arm over her mouth, biting into her own flesh as she arches against him.

After a few moments she’s trembling hard and pleading, quiet as she can, “Please Bucky, please, I’m right there—please—“

As if he’d ever refuse her.
He presses his tongue directly onto her clit and removes his hand from her stomach, allowing her to rock her hips against his face however she pleases as he curls his fingers inside of her, feeling the gush of moisture inside of her as she gasps out muffled *oh, oh, oh’s* from behind the arm thrown across her lips.

As her shaking subsides he rises to his knees, pulls his fingers from her and distractedly sucks on them as her arm flops to the pillow beside her head. Her cheeks and chest are flushed pink and her pupils blown wide, her eyes dark and half lidded as they flick from his mouth and then to between his legs, her teeth digging into her bottom lip as she wraps her leg around him to press her heel insistently into his lower back.

“Bucky—come on—inside me,” she says, kicking his ass like she’s spurring a horse.

He chuckles, leaning forward and bracing his elbow next to her shoulder to kiss her, and she opens under him, her tongue licking against his as he lines up his cock and slowly presses into her.

He groans into her mouth and she wraps her legs around his waist, digging her heels hard into the back of his thighs and grinding against him.

*Ah god.*

Perfect. *Perfect.* He hasn’t felt so right in a year.

He groans, “Love you, Darce—so much.”

She cups his face in her hands, her eyes bright with tears as kisses him again, whispering against his lips how much she loves him, her legs tightening around his hips and holding him with her entire body.

He slowly rocks into her, marveling at the tight squeeze of her around him and despite his desire to make it last his breathing quickens, sweat slicking both of them as she undulates beneath him.

“Can you come again?” He whispers near her ear, between kisses to her neck.
“Mmmm—yeah, almost there already,” she groans low, “god, you feel so good.”

He hunches his back, working his mouth from her neck, to her chest, and rubs his nose against the soft skin of her breasts.

So soft.

He’d almost forgotten how soft she is.

He gets his knees beneath him, pulling her hips tight to his and thrusting up hard as her legs flex around him, her back arching against the camp bed with only her shoulders touching it as he pulls her against him again and again, her breasts bouncing in time with each slapping impact.

He strokes his fingers over each breast, pinching lightly at her nipples and then harder when he feels her tightening around him, her full lips forming an “O” and her hips swiveling wildly against his.

The way she’s grinding against him is driving him crazy, he knows in this position he hits her clit with each thrust of his hips and he watches the flush of impending orgasm spread down her chest.

She gets her arms beneath her and levers herself up to change the angle, her full breasts thrust out and her head tilted back, her long dark hair streaming behind her to brush against the sheets.

Two more hard thrusts and the bed creaks ominously as she clamps down, feeling impossibly tight around him as she shakes, her eyes screwed shut and digging her teeth into her lip to stifle her moans.

Electricity shoots up his spine and he shudders, groaning low, “Darce—baby, Ugh,” as he spills inside of her for a moment and forever, panting for breath and folding forward to lay his head on the satiny softness of her breasts.

He drifts in the aftermath, lethargic as she strokes his hair, the gradually slowing thud of her heart in his ear marking time. Eventually, he shifts, grimacing because he’s softened enough to slip out of her. The camp bed creaks again and they both freeze, braced for it’s possible collapse.
When it doesn’t collapse, he hastily plants a foot over the side, rising to walk over to the wash basin to one side of the tent, filling it with water from the pitcher next to it before turning to glance at Darcy, lying naked on her side watching him.

“Washrags, doll?” He says and she throws her shapely legs over the side of the camp bed, pausing to straighten one of the legs at the end of it before opening her trunk, briefly rifling through it before bringing one to him.

His eyes slip over her form, admiring her pale skin and soft curves. Her dark hair falls over one shoulder, the lovebite he’d sucked into the curve of her neck rapidly fading as she passes him the washcloth and he dips it in the water. Her expression is soft as she watches him wring it out and gently wipe the sweat from her chest then lower, cleaning between her thighs before rinsing it in the water again and wiping himself down.

“What time is it?” She says quietly.

He glances at his wristwatch, “near 10pm,” he says, taking her hand and crossing back to the camp bed to lie down again on his back, pulling her to lay on top of him, her head tucked under his chin.

He wishes he could stay all night.

As much as he’s missed sex, the thing he misses more often is this comfort. Especially when nightmares rip him out of sleep breathless and scared in the middle of the night, his mind crowded with gunfire and oceans of blood.

He misses the feeling of his two loves beside him.

It feels strange that Steve isn’t here. He wonders how it felt for Darcy and Steve when he went off to boot camp.

Were they happy when it was just the two of them or was there the feeling that something was missing niggling them like it is him right now?

“Have ya heard anything about Steve?” He says.
“Not since just before we left England. Howard told me he’s doing okay, frustrated because he wants to be part of the fighting over here,” she says.

Bucky snorts. *Stupid punk.*

“I know,” Darcy says, drawing circles over his chest with her fingers, “he’s so stubborn—but he’s strong now, changed. Howard said he looks like a *Greek god.*”

Darcy tilts her head back and looks at him, her expression one of amazement and he shrugs, unable to picture it himself.

“What exactly is he doing? V-mail is so censored it’s hard to get details about anything,” he says, frustrated.

“Yeah—Howard said something about working with the USO to raise morale and funds for the war. All I know is he’s traveling a lot,” she says, “Maybe now that we’re settled here for a bit the mail will catch up to us.”

“I hope so,” Bucky says, “I haven’t heard from Ma or Becca in a while either,” his brow furrows, “I hope they’re alright.”

Darcy turns her head into the curve of his neck and inhales, pressing a kiss to his skin before she says, “I’m sure they’re fine. I got a letter from them just before I left England and they sounded alright—worried about all of us, but alright.”

He sighs. He hopes he hears from them soon.

After a minute he asks, “You finally find out what Will and Howard are up to?”

He combs his fingers through her hair, it’s so long—he loves it. She keeps it pinned up all the time so he hadn’t noticed the length until tonight.

“It’s a secret,” she whispers, glancing up at him and he mimes locking his lips and throwing away the key.
“They’re part of an Allied think tank called the Strategic Scientific Reserve—SSR, for short. They’re the ones Dr. Erskine worked for and the ones that ran the project Steve was a part of,” she says, frowning, “I guess the Germans have their own version of the SSR and they’re in a race to develop new and better ways to kill the enemy and win the war.”

He nods. Unfortunately, he’s been on the front line of that killing. “So what are Howard and Will doing for the SSR?” He asks.

“Weapons development. Also, Howard had something to do with Dr. Erskine’s project and was building aircraft for the British and American military before the United States even joined the war—still is. Will flies Howard wherever he needs to go, helps with testing and development of his new designs, things like that.”

Huh.

Howard sure is one busy fella.

He turns onto his side and Darcy wiggles so her back is pressed against his front. He wraps his arm around her waist to hold her, remembering how Steve always fit against him this same way.

He suddenly misses him with an intensity that leaves him on the verge of tears. He swallows, closing his eyes and burying his face in Darcy’s hair. He whispers, “I miss Stevie.”

She sighs, curling her fingers around his and breathes, “Me too.”

How the troops dealt with malaria

Chapter End Notes

Malaria was a big problem not only in the Pacific theater but also in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy. Take a look at the link at the end of this chapter if you’re interested.
Darcy and Bucky finally had some alone time! Time marches on—next chapter, we’re in Italy. Azzano to be precise.

Let me know what you think!
Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

Bucky fights at Azzano. Darcy waits for news as she works in the field hospital. Captain America gets a cool reception from the troops and some news from Peggy.

A rescue plan is hatched.

Chapter Notes

Ok—the dialogue in the scene with Bucky, Dugan, and Jones in the trenches outside of Azzano comes directly from a deleted scene from Captain America: The First Avenger. Really wish they’d included it in the movie, y’all.

Also, dialogue from the scene after Steve gets booed by the troops during his USO performance is from the movie too, with some minor alterations.

No beta—I apologize for any errors. All medical info courtesy of google and my imagination.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

October 5, 1943

Azzano Decimo, Italy

3am

Bucky peers over the edge of the muddy trench, squinting as flares illuminate the darkness enough to spot the German troops advancing on them.

Dugan shouts over the sound of artillery fire, “There’s gotta be at least five mortar companies out there!”

Bucky’s heart sinks, they’re outnumbered and trapped. He turns to look at Jones, the radioman from the 92nd, “Get ahold of B Company! Tell them we need cover!”

Jones grimaces, his white teeth flashing against his dark skin, “That might be tough,” he says, holding the radio up to show the smoking bullet holes in it.
Shit.

He flinches, ducking down as the ground rocks with mortar fire. Peering over the edge of the trench again, he scrabbles to raise his rifle to his shoulder when he sees the German soldiers running down the slope towards them.

“They’re coming!” He shouts, mechanically looking down the sight and shooting at the dark silhouettes of running men as Dugan rises to his feet beside him and mutters, “I hate these guys,” and raises his Tommy Gun.

The *rataatat* of machine gun fire from he and Jones overlays the sounds of his rifle and the shouts up and down the trenches from the men.

The onslaught of Germans is suddenly interrupted by a loud *bzzzzzt* sound as flashes of blue light carve through the darkness to hit the running soldiers. His eyes widen as they simply disintegrate—gone in a terrifying flash.

*What the hell?*

The Germans begin to flee as blue fire cuts across the darkness again and again, the men disappearing as if they’d never been there at all.

“What the hell was *that*?” Dugan says beside him.

*Nothing he’s ever seen before.*

He lowers his rifle and rises to his feet in disbelief, Dugan and Jones beside him.

They watch as the blue light makes a few more men disappear, Dugan tipping his ubiquitous bowler hat back and saying, “That looks—*new.*”

Bucky glances at the few remaining German soldiers fleeing over the hill then back towards the
direction the blue light came from, tensing as the familiar squeal of churning tank treads echoes over 
the torn field.

*They gotta be on our side, right?*

A massive tank rolls over the crest of the hill, looking unlike anything he’s seen the Allies use. A 
blue glow infuses the base of the gun and increases in intensity, the turret slowly turning towards 
them.

*Shit.*

Field Hospital

2 miles west from the front line, near Azzano Decimo, Italy

Darcy holds the mask to the soldier’s face, smoothing his sandy hair back and slipping the elastic 
band around his head, listening carefully to his heartbeat and respiration while the ether and oxygen 
combination does it’s work. She holds his hand, the skin clammy and cold from shock, and in less 
than a minute his fingers release their grip and go limp as he slips into unconsciousness. She 
continues listening, the slowing of his heartbeat and deepening of his breathing signaling his 
readiness for surgery. She makes a show of listening with the stethoscope before telling the surgeon 
that the patient is ready.

The soldier, nineteen year old Private Matthews of the 107th, lays with his arm outstretched, a steady 
flow of blood running from the elevated bag into the pale crook of his elbow. Her eyes trace the 
tubing, checking for kinks in it before glancing again at the bag, nearly drained.

The nurse assisting the surgeon quickly cuts away the reddened dressings applied by the medic in the 
field, revealing two oozing bloody holes, one through his shoulder and another through his side. 
From what she can see, he’s gotten lucky. It doesn’t appear any vital organs have been hit, though 
there may be more serious damage with the side wound.

She maintains her focus on Matthews’ vital signs as Betty, the assisting nurse, cleans the wounds 
with Dakin’s solution, replacing the shoulder bandage with a clean one as the doctor focuses on the 
more serious hole in the patients side, skillfully wielding a scalpel to open it further to determine the 
extent of internal damage.
Time passes and Darcy keeps her ears open, listening to the minute noises of the patient's body that only she can hear.

His breathing remains steady, and she rises to replace the blood bag on the stand next to the table before standing again near his head, her eyes occasionally flicking to where Dr. Ames carefully stitches the abdominal wound closed.

He notices her attention and his blue eyes crinkle at the corners as he smiles behind his surgical mask, “Been practicing your stitching, Darcy?”

“You know it,” she says amiably. She likes Dr. Ames. He’s older, with a wife and two children he writes to every week. He’s taken an interest in her since she is often on hand for surgeries because of her training in anesthesia and also because she’s developed a reputation for having uncanny instincts about the patients under her care, anticipating trouble before others are aware of it and acting to circumvent it.

“Maybe you can finish this last bit up so I can take a look at our patient’s shoulder?” He says.

She nods agreement since Matthews is stable and exhibiting no signs of regaining consciousness.

Betty raises her eyebrows at her in surprise and Darcy shrugs at her, moving to stand beside Dr. Ames who hands off the needle and sutures to her and turns his attention to the patient’s shoulder.

She carefully swabs the blood away from the incision site and quickly and methodically stitches the wound closed, conscious of Ames occasional glance her way. After she knots the last stitch and cuts the excess suturing thread off, she wipes the skin again with the Dakin’s solution Betty hands her and tapes fresh gauze over it.

“Good work,” the doctor says.

“Thank you,” Darcy says, returning to the head of the table to check the blood bag and tubing again, as well as assuring the patient is still receiving the proper amount of anesthetic. Everything seems to be in order so she watches with interest as the Doctor repairs the wound in the patient’s shoulder.
She hasn’t seen Bucky in two days.

He’d gone ahead with the other soldiers, the men from the 107th joined by the 92nd and the 69th Infantry Regiments to take the city from the German soldiers camped there. The distant sound of mortar and gunfire had been intermittent for the last day and a half, a steady stream of wounded soldiers flooding the field hospital as the hours went on.

She recognized more than a few of them from around camp, many from the 107th, a few from Bucky’s unit. Corporal Russo had come in early in the evening with a bullet wound to his leg. A half an inch over and it would have nicked his femoral artery. He was lucky, a little R&R and he’d be good as new.

That was the last direct news they’d had from the front, it had been several hours since any more injured have been sent back.

Maybe it’s over.

There’s no sound of gunfire from the east.

Darcy is startled out of her musings by Dr. Ames tying off the last stitch and saying, “That should do it ladies,” he lays the suturing kit on the tray next to the bloody gauze pads and scalpel, and stretches his arms overhead, groaning, “Damn, my back is killing me. Betty, could you bandage this shoulder? He should be okay after that to go to recovery.”

He glances at Darcy as she removes the mask from Matthews face and begins the process of cleaning up the anesthesia equipment and says, “There seems to be a lull in the surgical emergencies at the moment, you ladies should get some rest while you can—new shift should be coming on in an hour or so.”

He waves to them as he heads out of the makeshift operating room, no doubt heading out to get some rest himself. They’ve been on duty nearly twelve hours.

Darcy and Betty work together to clean Matthews up, then call for the medics to help move the soldier out to a recovery bed in the field hospital. As soon as the patients are stable they will be transported in trucks back to the station hospital where they can rest and recover if they have minor injuries. Otherwise, they will be moved to one of the general or convalescent hospitals further from the front.
Eventually, Darcy makes her way out of the hospital tent and walks down the row of smaller tents towards the one she shares with May. She’s tired, but her head is too full of blood and worry to rest.

She climbs the hill just beyond where the tents are set up, nodding to the soldier keeping watch as she heads toward the lightning blasted tree standing sentinel at the top. She rests her back against it, her fingers tracing circles against the rough bark as she looks east.

*Please god, let Bucky be alright.*

She’s there a long time in the blue dark, finally walking back down the slope as distant gunfire heralds the dawn.

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November 2, 1943

Italy

Ten miles from the front

The show’s over, the stage is dark and the crowds of soldiers are gone. Rain pounds the muddy ground as he sits alone on the covered steps backstage sketching a monkey dressed in the Captain America costume.

The battered soldiers had booed and thrown things at him, though they seemed happy enough to see the USO girls.

While he was stateside, he was able to convince himself he was doing some good. The crowds loved him and Senator Brandt was ecstatic over the amount of money raised for the war effort through the sale of war bonds and patriotic merchandise purchased after each show.

But here, *here* —he feels ashamed.

He’s a joke.
A propaganda tool.

He’d hoped to somehow convince the Army to let him fight with the others here, but Senator Brandt refused and General Phillips is only interested in him as a lab rat, a key to unlock a potential army of super soldiers.

He sighs, bracing his elbows on his knees and dropping his head into his hands.

He knows Bucky and Darcy are somewhere near the front lines, but he doesn’t know where and even so, it’s unlikely the USO will travel so close to the fighting. The latest letters he’d gotten were dated almost a month ago and are soft and worn from the number of times he’s unfolded and folded them.

He’s so lost in his thoughts he startles when he hears a familiar voice behind him.

“Hello, Steve.”

“Hi—” he does a double take when he sees Peggy Carter, “what’re you doin’ here?” He asks.

“Officially, I’m not here at all,” she says, taking a seat on the top step, “that was quite a performance.”

Steve looks away, gazing unseeingingly at the dancing monkey he’d drawn, embarrassed.

“Yeah—uh, I had to improvise a little bit. The crowds I’m used to are more uh,” he sighs, closes his sketchbook, and mutters, “twelve.”

“I hear you are America’s new hope,” she says in her crisp accent.

He looks off across the camp, “Bond sales take a ten percent bump in every state I visit,” he says flatly.
“Is that Senator Brandt I hear?” She mocks.

He looks down at the rain pummeled mud at the end of the stairs, “least he’s got me doin’ this,” he turns to look at her, perfect as usual—not a hair out of place, and says, “Phillips woulda had me stuck in a lab.”

She raises an impatient eyebrow at him, “and these are your only two options? Lab rat or dancing monkey?” Her eyes flick towards his sketchbook, and her voice softens, “you were meant for more than this you know.”

He feels his ears grow hot with humiliation.

It’s not like this is what he wants to be doing.

“So, ya just here to bust my chops Peggy?” He says abruptly.

“No—actually. I recall you mentioning your best friend was with the 107th. Your audience today contained what was left of them,” she pauses, her eyes softening with sympathy, “The rest were killed or captured.”

He tenses and hunches over, incipient grief twisting in his gut. He takes a deep breath, trying to hold himself together when he feels as if his heart is shattering.

“Tell me everything you know,” he says grimly.

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November 3, 1943
9am
Azzano Decimo, Italy

Darcy sits at the small table in the room she and May were assigned once the base hospital had been set up in Azzano. The Army had taken over several buildings in the city, including the hotel that is
currently housing hospital personnel and Army officers.

She should be sleeping, she’d gotten off shift hours before and had attempted to rest, but her mind refuses to still. Instead, she’s writing another angry letter to General Phillips, who’s thus far flatly refused her pleas to rescue the soldiers declared MIA after the battle nearly a month ago.

News of their capture had trickled down from the remnants of 107th and several other regiments who had managed to avoid death or capture and had made it back to camp after the battle.

As soon as she realized Bucky was not amongst the dead or injured, she’d insisted on talking to the General.

Not that it helped at all. Even using Howard’s name hadn’t swayed him, he’d said they were too far into heavily fortified enemy territory for it to be even worth attempting rescue.

She’d written Steve, trying to let him know what had happened but wasn’t sure if he’d gotten her letter and even if he did, the censors probably blacked out anything they considered sensitive information. She’d sent a telegram to Howard’s office in Manhattan telling him to contact her immediately— but has heard nothing.

It’s been weeks since Bucky was declared missing in action and she’s beginning to lose hope. She’s held off writing his Ma and Becca—unsure of what to tell them.

What the hell good is her supposed SSR clearance if she can’t get ahold of Howard?

Suddenly furious, she stands, kicking the chair over and stalking across the small room.

She paces back and forth, her nightgown flapping around her legs and her hair tangled down her back, unconscious of the tears wetting her cheeks. She feels powerless and frustrated.

The sound of footsteps pausing outside and a knock at the door draws her attention and she absently wipes her cheeks and pats at her tangled hair. It’s a mess and she gives it up as a lost cause, slipping into a robe before heading towards the door.
An elegant female voice with a cut crystal British accent says, “Lieutenant Garland?”

Darcy opens the door just a crack and meets the intense brown eyes of a beautiful dark haired woman, “Yes?”

“My name is Agent Peggy Carter and I’ve someone with me who’d like to speak with you,” she says as a tall blond man steps up behind her, Darcy’s eyes widen comically as she sees his familiar face and gasps, “Stevie?”

Peggy hurriedly says, “Perhaps inside would be more prudent.”

Darcy swings the door wide.

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As soon as the door shuts behind them Steve steps around Peggy and goes to Darcy.

She looks beautiful but more fragile than he’s ever seen her. It’s obvious she’s been crying.

“Darce?” He says softly.

She steps closer to him, her head tilted back to look up at him as she slowly reaches up to trace her fingers over his features. He sighs, his eyes closing at the familiar sensation.

“You’re so tall,” she whispers, and he opens his eyes as she strokes along his jawline and down his neck, wonderingly following the width of his shoulders, “Howard and Will said you were bigger, but I couldn’t picture it.”

“Still the same on the inside, doll,” he says.

She pauses, looking at him searchingly, “Are you?” she whispers.
“Yeah,” he says, stepping closer and wrapping his arms around her to pull her into his embrace.

It’s strange how she fits against him now, he’s tall enough that the top of her head just reaches his shoulder. She’s so fierce he’d never really thought of her as small before, but now she seems tiny. She tucks her head under his chin, his large hand encompassing the back of her neck, and he savors the familiar scent of her hair.

“Well, at least you have the body to back you up when you get in trouble now,” she mutters against his chest and Peggy snorts behind him.

He smiles at the familiar lament, releasing Darcy and looking down at her tear stained cheeks. She sniffs and wipes her thumbs under her eyes as he wraps his arm around her shoulders, tugging her to his side.

“Peggy, I’d like you to meet my girl, Darcy Garland,” he says.

Darcy sends a brief glance of surprise his way, he supposes he’s never really introduced her to anyone as his girl.

“Pleased to meet you,” Peggy says smiling and extending her hand to Darcy, “I’ve heard good things about you.”

“Likewise,” Darcy says, nudging Steve with her elbow, “this guy is dazzled by your moxie—he was real impressed when you hit that smartass cadet during basic.”

Peggy raises an eyebrow at him and Steve ducks his head, ears hot as he rubs his nose against Darcy’s hair. He flicks a glance at Peggy to see her grinning smugly as Darcy beams a watery smile at her.

Ugh. The two of them are gonna run circles around him.

After a moment Darcy looks up at him, her expression serious and asks, “Are you here about Bucky?”
Steve frowns, sighing heavily, “Yeah—Peggy let me know what was going on and I tried to talk to Phillips about it. He refuses to rescue the prisoners—not even for Captain America. Especially not for Captain America.”

Darcy looks at him quizzically. “Captain America?”

Steve nods, loosening the top buttons of his coat to reveal the red, white, and blue costume he wears beneath it.

Darcy’s eyes widen and she chortles, “No way—that’s what you’ve been doing?”

“Yeah,” he sighs.

*Man, he’s never gonna live down wearing tights.*

Peggy says, “Didn’t you recognize him in the news reels?”

Darcy waves her hand, “Nah—I haven’t been to a show in ages. Not sure I woulda recognized him anyway. Seen a few of the comic books that have been sent to the soldiers though—doesn’t he usually wear a mask or something?”

“Yes, actually,” Peggy says, pursing her lips, “I suppose they wanted to keep his identity somewhat of a secret.”

Darcy nods, stroking a finger over the star on his chest. Steve shivers a little at the sensation.

She says, “Stevie—I have so many questions. But first, General Phillips. I’ve been arguing with him for weeks—all I could do was send a telegram to Jarvis at the Manhattan office since I’m not sure where Howard or Will are at the moment. I was hoping Howard could prod Phillips into action,” she impatiently pushes a lock of hair behind her ear, “When we last talked in England, Howard said he’d contact me in Italy if anything came up. I stupidly failed to realize I might need to contact *him.*”

Peggy says, “Howard?”
“Yes, Howard Stark,” Darcy says, “My brother Will works for him. I did some weapons testing for him back in New York.”

Peggy gives Darcy an appraising look.

“I’ve met your brother. He’s an excellent pilot. He and Howard are arriving in Italy tonight and I’ve been told you’re aware of the SSR—Howard seems to think you are wasted as a nurse,” she smirks.

Darcy tenses against him, “Howard would be happiest if I spent my time shooting stuff with his guns and making him look good. My work here is just as important as his,” she says.

Peggy nods firmly, “Undoubtedly,” she says, and Darcy’s shoulders lose some of their tension.

Steve says, “Darce—Peggy says Howard and Will can fly me close to the Hydra munitions factory in Austria where Bucky was taken.”

“Fly you?” She asks.

“Yeah—I’ll parachute from the plane, then approach the factory on foot and free the prisoners.”

Darcy’s eyes widen, “Parachute? What the hell, Steve? Have you ever done that before?”

Steve looks to Peggy for assistance and she merely raises her eyebrows, having made her thoughts on the subject clear to him several hours ago.

“Uh—no? But somebody’s gotta do it and I’m a lot more durable now,” he says.

Peggy interjects, “At least he’s willing to let Howard fly him there now. He was getting set to walk 30 miles across enemy territory before,” she says, nodding at Darcy’s dumbstruck expression.

_Uh-oh_. 
Darcy steps out from under his arm and begins pacing, muttering to herself. After a moment she glares at him saying, “Steven Grant, this is a stupid plan.”

“Darce—I can do this. I was literally made for it,” he says.

Darcy pokes his chest angrily, “You’re only one man—no matter what Abraham’s serum made of you. You can still die. If you get injured—” she suddenly chokes, pressing her hand to his breastbone as her eyes fill with tears, “it still hurts, Stevie.”

He supposes she’d know better than anyone.

Steve darts a glance at Peggy, who’s watching their argument with fascination. Shit. He wonders if Peggy knew about Darcy working with Erskine. If she didn’t already then she will soon enough.

Darcy wipes her eyes and squares her shoulders, “I’m going with you,” she says resolutely.

“How—” he starts but she interrupts him, “Can it, Steve. I’m going. Besides, Howard said he wanted me for some of this SSR stuff. You know I can shoot and you can bet some of those boys will need medical attention if you want them to make it back.”

Peggy sighs, “About that—this is technically not an SSR mission. We’re disregarding Phillips orders. We’re likely to be court-martialed.”

Darcy is silent for a moment, then she says, “Seems to me there are two choices here—possible court-martial or letting Bucky and all those young men rot in that factory,” her blue eyes are resolute, “I choose court-martial.”

Peggy says briskly, “Alright then, we need to start planning.”

8pm
The Douglas C-47 Howard had stolen from the Army airfield outside of Azzano is a big plane, meant for transporting paratroopers. They’d decided on taking it rather than the smaller plane Howard and Will had flown to Italy because it had the design and equipment necessary to get the job done.

The noise of the engines is loud, but she can still hear Howard muttering with Will and Peggy about the plan towards the front of the plane. He and Peggy are both bothered that she’s jumping with Steve, despite Will’s half hearted assurances that she can handle it.

She glances at Steve sitting on the bench beside her, and wonders if he can hear them based on his expression.

She nudges his knee with hers and whispers, “You hear them too?”

He nods, whispering back, “Yeah—serum gave me super hearing. Don’t know how you stood it in Brooklyn, Darce. It’s overwhelming sometimes in crowds.”

“You get used to it, learn to tune stuff out,” she shrugs, “don’t know what it’s like to be any different, anyhow.”

Steve nods, glancing at her from under his ridiculously pretty eyelashes.

_God._

_Same Stevie, but so different._

She finds herself distractedly measuring the width of his shoulders and wondering about the rest of him. He looks like him, but not.

It’s odd.

And absurdly attractive.
“Peggy seems to think you’ll slow me down on the ground,” Steve smirks.

“We both know that’s not true,” she replies.

“Yeah, well—she has no way of knowing that. Howard is objecting even though he knows what a great shot you are,” he says, and she snorts, “I can hear them too, Stevie,” and leans forward to sort through her medical kit, packing bandages, a bottle of Dakin’s solution, splints, syringes, morphine, sutures, and scalpels neatly and efficiently as she listens to him as well as the conversation going on up front.

She glances towards the cockpit again and catches Will’s eye as he glances away from the instrument panel towards her. His face is tight with worry but he winks, knowing she’s uniquely prepared for what they plan to do.

The part that makes her nervous is the jump. She’s never done it before.

Then again, neither has Steve.

That should actually make her more nervous, but somehow it doesn’t. They’ve learned things together in the past just fine, after all.

She’d spent the afternoon looking over the map Peggy had produced, poring over the location of the factory and the surrounding terrain, and blueprints they’d gotten of the factory. Unfortunately they aren’t current, but at least it gives them a general idea of the building layout.

After that, she’d curled up in her bed with Steve, content to be held against his broad chest as they attempted to get a couple hours of sleep since it was unlikely either of them would be getting much rest in the near future.

*His disconcertingly broad chest.*

*Steve had barely fit in her bed.*
She shakes her head at her thoughts, finishing up the medical kit and setting it on the bench next to her as Steve sorts through the crate of guns and ammunition Howard had asked him to move onto the plane just before they took off.

He hands Darcy a Colt 1911 and a Lee-Enfield MK No. 4 rifle.

“Howard, can you come back here?” Darcy shouts over the engine noise, and he glances back at them from the copilots seat, checking with Will who’s piloting the plane before making his way back and sitting on the bench across from them.

Steve places the ammo box between the two of them and Darcy begins tucking spare cartridges in the pockets of her army green field uniform. The modified soldiers uniform is one she’s worn when on the march and when working close to the front lines in field hospitals. It’s equipped with quite a few pockets.

She says, “I’m curious about the modifications to these,” she gestures to the rifles and pistols.

Stark rolls his eyes, “Of course,” he picks up the rifle and flips the strange looking sight from side to the top where it clicks into place, causing the regular sight to flip to the side, “This has a modified scope, we’ve been developing night vision ones, most of the ones the Allies use are too bulky for use on anything smaller than a tank turret. I made it smaller and lighter—it amplifies existing ambient light sources to allow you to see your target in near darkness.”

He demonstrates, flipping the night vision scope to the side and flipping the regular scope back up. He hands it to Darcy and she practices flicking between the night and day scopes and finally leaving the night vision one in place.

“I also added a silencer to this model—figured the element of surprise is pretty key here,” Darcy nods, having noted the additional length on the muzzle of the rifle.

Howard reaches into the ammo box and hands Darcy several cartridges, “The rifling on the barrel of the Enfield increases bullet velocity, the ammo is heavy enough to travel a distance of 1,300 feet without losing accuracy but light enough to have maximum speed. It has a ten round magazine.”

Darcy loads the rifle and tucks some extra cartridges into her pockets. Steve has been busy packing ammo into his pockets too, in addition to a canteen of water on his utility belt, and a pistol in his belt holster.
Howard picks up Darcy’s pistol, “I’ve modified these to take ten shot cartridges rather than the standard seven, they have a heavy recoil but I’ve seen you shoot a Colt without a problem. They make up for that with efficiency and reliability—it won’t jam on you and the .45 caliber rounds give them serious stopping power.”

He hands Darcy the pistol along with a waist holster that she puts on. He watches as she loads and holsters the pistol at her hip and packs a small rucksack that contains her water and some C-rations with yet more ammo.

Steve has the Captain America shield at his feet. She’d laughed earlier when she realized he still wore the costume under his army jumpsuit.

Howard had taken one look at the shield and said, “What’s with the shield?”

Steve had said, “I like it,” holding it in front of him. She’d smiled softly at him, remembering a skinny Brooklyn kid with a garbage can lid.

Howard had looked at it critically.

“I’ll make ya a better one,” he said.

The red, white, and blue certainly is conspicuous, but she supposes it provides a layer of protection.

Peggy rises from her seat behind Will and makes her way to the back of the plane, “We’re 20 miles out from the factory, approaching some heavily fortified areas. We may experience some flack,” she says, sitting down on Steve’s other side and leaning forward so she can look at both of them.

“Darcy, I’m concerned about the two of you losing each other on the ground—neither of you are experienced paratroopers.”

Steve glances at Darcy, raising an eyebrow and she can read the expression on his face easily. He’s about to spin some bullshit.
He says, “Yeah—been thinking about that. Is there a way we could jump in tandem? Darcy’s pretty small compared to me and I can carry her once we’re on the ground.”

*Carry her? That’ll be the day.*

Peggy says, “Well, that solves the problem of the two of you landing in the same place and Darcy keeping up on the ground. Howard, find something in your stuff to strap them together.”

Howard nods and goes over to the supplies he’d hauled onto the plane and starts rummaging around and muttering to himself.

“She, how’re you gonna carry me and hold onto your fancy shield,” she teases.

“I can hold ya with one arm, doll,” he says, grinning.

Peggy rolls her eyes and says to Steve, “Let me go on record to say I don’t like this plan. Darcy should stay on the plane, you can radio us, and we’ll arrange a rendezvous point.”

Darcy sighs, “Peg, no matter how super he is now, he needs backup. I won’t go in the factory with him. I’ll find a high point and cover him on his way in and on his way out. I know you haven’t seen it, but believe me, I am a really good long distance shooter.”

Howard grudgingly interjects, “Best shot I’ve ever seen, Peg,” he holds up a thick canvas belt typically used to strap down supplies, “this’ll do to tether you two together.”

Darcy ends up strapped to Steve, her back to his front, her rifle and small rucksack strapped in front of her. They are both wearing aviator goggles to protect their eyes, and helmets. She reaches up to tighten the chin strap of hers, it’s a little big, but the bulk of her tightly braided hair helps it fit better. Steve has the med kit strapped to his side and his shield on his arm. Tucked away in one of his pockets is a small beacon he’s to set off once they have freed the prisoners and are away from the factory. Howard will be looking for the signal and they will rendezvous.

She glances down as Steve wraps the arm with the shield on it around her, positioning it so it covers her chest.
She feels like she’s in a turtle shell with Steve at her back and the shield at her front.

Howard and Peggy are rigging several large crates of supplies to parachutes. The plan is to drop them right after Steve and Darcy are safely away. They contain rations, blankets, and some basic supplies to hold them and the captives over until they can make their rendezvous. There are high frequency beacons on them that Steve (and unbeknownst to them, Darcy) should be able to hear and locate once on the ground.

Will calls from the front, “We’ve got trouble!”

The flash and boom of flack rattles the plane as the Germans begin firing their anti aircraft guns.

Howard quickly returns to the copilot seat and Peggy belts herself into the seat behind him.

Steve’s arm is snug beneath her breasts as he grabs ahold of a strap hanging from the ceiling with his free arm while the plane rocks with turbulence.

“How far are we from the factory?” Steve shouts.

“10 miles,” Howard says.

Steve lowers his head and whispers in her ear, “We should jump as soon as we can. The closer we get, the more the plane will be under fire.”

Darcy nods, taking a deep breath and gripping Steve’s arm tightly as he makes his way to the back of the plane when there is a pause in fire. He flips the lever that opens the back of the plane and a rush of cold air whips around them.

Peggy yells, “Steve, no! The plan is to get you closer to the factory!”

Steve says, “Don’t worry—this is close enough.”

He tightens his arm around Darcy and they jump.
What is a C-ration

Image WW2 nurse administers anesthesia

Battle of Azzano deleted scene

Chapter End Notes

So—a lot happened. What did you think?

Thanks to all who have left comments and kudos. It really helps to hear somebody is enjoying this story.
Chapter Summary

Darcy and Steve rescue the captives from the Hydra weapons factory.

Chapter Notes

No beta. Sorry.

This was tough for me to write—action sequences are definitely not my forte. Hopefully, it’s not disappointing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

November 3, 1943

1 mile outside of Hydra Munitions factory

10:30pm

The jump from the plane is simultaneously terrifying and exhilarating.

Darcy utters a brief shriek when they exit the plane, her fingers digging painfully into his arm, (had she always been so strong?) her racing heartbeat thrumming against his chest as the wind whistles in his ears.

Remarkably, as soon the chute opens and their momentum slows, her heart rate evens out and she laughs.

“Better than the Cyclone, Stevie!” She says and he squeezes her tighter, relieved that she’s okay.

Steve has always moved into danger without much thought and the serum hasn’t changed his determination to be in the thick of things. Fortunately, his increased brain processing allows him to examine possible outcomes very quickly and plan accordingly.

He also has heightened adrenaline levels, the SSR scientists theorized it aided his strength and
created a constant state of hyper awareness. Consequently, he can be terrified but still somehow think clearly and react quickly, which is a bonus considering his current predicament.

They’d drifted away from the German ground forces as they’d fallen, and they land rather awkwardly in a thicket of trees, dangling from the parachute rigging 15 feet off the ground. He manages to maneuver his legs downwards after dropping the shield and uses his utility knife to cut away some of the lines. After that, he’d tightens his arm around Darcy and releases them from the rigging, bending his knees slightly to absorb the negligible impact of their fall.

As soon as Darcy works the buckle loose that holds her to him she turns, wrapping her arms around his neck and kissing him soundly.

“That was the scariest and most thrilling thing I’ve ever experienced,” she whispers against his lips.

He has to agree with her assessment.

The thrill of the jump definitely did something for both of them because they spend the next few minutes heatedly kissing, their heart rates spiking again with arousal instead of fear as they press against each other.

Darcy reluctantly pulls away, grinning ruefully at him and whispering, “Much as I’ve missed kissing you, I suppose now isn’t the time.”

Steve exhales slowly, willing his cock to settle down. He sighs, kissing her forehead gently before releasing her to look up at the parachute tangled above them.

“We should take care of that,” he says.

They climb the tree and use their knives to cut away the rigging where it’s entangled in the branches so they can pull it free, bundling it up and covering it with some leaf litter and branches when they return to the ground.

It wouldn’t do for anyone to find it and start looking for them.
Steve pulls out his compass and they head northeast towards the factory at a fast clip. He has to slow down some, though Darcy keeps up better than he’d expected, even knowing her abilities.

Super she may be, but the serum has amplified his speed and strength beyond hers. He wonders what the serum would do to someone like her? Knowing the sequence of events that would likely precede that happening, he decides it’s better they never find out.

A couple miles later they hear the pinging sound of Howard’s beacons and follow it to find the supply crates dangling from the trees. Steve cuts them free from the parachutes and drags them into some thick underbrush while Darcy marks several tree trunks with her knife to help them find their location again in case the beacons stop transmitting. They pull the chutes free and bury them.

After it becomes apparent the bulk of the German troops are behind them, they follow the road leading to the factory, speaking only in whispers and moving quickly into the trees anytime they hear someone approach.

They are a mile out from the factory and hiding again in the brush by the side of the road when they observe several trucks heading away from the factory.

As the sound of the engines fades away, Darcy whispers, “We should get as close as we can and watch for a while, try to figure out how many guards are there on the night shift.”

Steve nods and they jog down the road, finally veering into the woods again when they are about half a mile from the factory.

They climb a small rise and peer down at the building. Spotlights strobe through the darkness—the factory is massive, a fortress surrounded by a wall topped with barbed wire and teeming with soldiers.

“Shit Stevie, how the hell do you plan on getting in there?” Darcy whispers.

“We’ll figure it out,” he whispers back, tracking the movements of the Hydra soldiers as they load several trucks with crates before opening the gates for them to depart.

“Shit, shit, shit,” she mutters as she pulls the strap of her rifle over her shoulder and looks down at the factory through the scope, “that’s a lot of soldiers down there.”

He pulls binoculars from one of his pockets, counting the armed soldiers at the gates and around the
perimeter. He notes the tanks and armored trucks marked with Hydra insignia around the yard and all of the entrances into the factory.

The rumble of trucks from the direction they’d come draws his attention and he turns to look back down the road, peering through the binoculars to see headlights approaching—maybe a mile away.

He focuses on the gates again.

He nudges Darcy, “I have an idea, but we have to hurry.”

November 3, 1943
Austria
Hydra Munitions Factory
11:20pm

Bucky opens his eyes to blearily look around him, recognizing the shadowy contours of the laboratory ceiling.

*Still here, then.*

His arm aches where the needle is dug under the tender skin at the crook of his right elbow with tubing leading to a bag of some weirdly glowing liquid that drips slowly into his veins.

He’s lost all sense of time.

It seems like he’s been here weeks, months, *forever* as Zola asks him questions and slowly poisons him, shocking him occasionally to see if he can get whatever reaction he’s searching for.

He’s hot, the fever centered around his arm spreading throughout his body like poisonous vines, clouding his thoughts and reducing him to begging on more than one occasion.
The violation of it turns his stomach.

That the vile little scientist has had his hands all over him, poking and prodding, and hurting him—just to see how he reacts makes him feel ashamed, even if he’s helpless to stop it.

When he’d done the mental arithmetic of the worst thing being a soldier could lead to, he always figured injury or death.

Not this.

Not tied helpless to a table, his every breath held hostage to the whims of an amoral Hydra scientist.

He hears a scuffling sound behind him, and turns his head to spot Zola muttering to himself, stuffing file folders into his bag before approaching the table to look down at him.

“Ah,” Zola says, his doughy face a mixture of frantic and frustrated, “it seems I will be bidding you goodbye Sergeant Barnes,” he opens the cabinet next to the table and quickly stuffs papers and several vials of glowing liquid into the valise he holds in his shaking hands.

His eyes dart around the room and he pauses, reaching for the IV stand and opening the drip further, a cold smile on his face as Bucky gasps at the increased burning in his arm.

“A parting gift for you, sir,” he says, pursing his lips petulantly, “You were such a promising subject, too.”

He tucks the bulging valise tighter under his arm, plants his hat on his head, and scurries away.

The burning sensation increases in his arm and Bucky arches against the straps holding him down.

His entire body clenches, his muscles spasming and sweat beading on his forehead.
It hurts.

He wonders if this is how he’ll die—none of the others had come back once they’d been selected by Zola and dragged away.

His mind drifts, the fever building in his body and voices echoing in his head. Memories of Zola’s voice repeatedly asking him questions about Army troop movements, weaponry, or weirdly, questions about himself.

What is your mother’s name?

Do you have any siblings?

Have you had any serious illnesses in the past?

Are you a good soldier, Barnes?

What are your skills? Fighting? Shooting?

He refused to answer, repeating his name and serial number on loop, gasping and gritting his teeth as the sadistic bastard shocked him again and again with a prod, finally reduced to begging him to stop, please stop after a particularly long shock had left a painful burn on his chest and his heart shuddering.

He had told him some things.

Nothing too important he thinks. It’s hard to remember.

The pain in his arm is receding and he falls into dazed lassitude, his vision blurring with tears.

He’s so thirsty.
When is the last time he’s had a drink of water? He can’t remember.

He wets his chapped lips with his tongue and mutters, “Sergeant James Barnes, 3-2-5-5-7…”

Suddenly there is a man bending over him, his face familiar but the rest of him—not.

“Bucky—“ he says.

It sounds like Steve.

It can’t be him though.

He’s hallucinating again.

“Oh my God,” Steve not Steve says, ripping the IV from his arm, then the straps that hold him to the table.

He’s leaning over him, pulling him upright.

“Is that—“ Bucky says groggily.

“It’s me—“ the man says, his familiar face worried, “it’s Steve.”

Steve.

“Steve,” he can’t help smiling, hazy as it may be.

Steve grabs his shoulder, pulling him into his arms, “I thought you were dead,” he chokes against his hair.
Bucky tilts his head and looks up at him, perplexed at the height and width of his oldest friend, and says, “I thought you were smaller.”

000000

11:30pm

Darcy balances on a thick tree branch twenty feet off the ground and about three hundred yards from the factory gates. She peers through the rifle scope at the soldiers shifting crates into the trucks near the loading dock, wondering if Steve is okay. He’d made her promise to come no closer, insisting she keep watch from a distance.

He’d jumped into the back of one of the cargo trucks heading towards the factory, and she’d held her breath as several soldiers were abruptly ejected from the back of it.

He must have hit them hard because they lay still on the road as the truck continued on.

Eventually, he’d slipped onto the loading dock and all she could do was wait.

It’s been quiet for a while, with no sound of alarm from the building so she has to believe Steve is still undetected.

She tenses, hearing a distant grumble of raised voices which sharpens into the shouts of men inside the factory. Soon, ragged looking prisoners begin streaming out of the doors, drawing the attention of the Hydra soldiers outside.

She grits her teeth, firming her hold on the rifle as the first shots are fired at the unarmed prisoners. She’s pulling the trigger before she knows it, automatically picking off the armed men converging on the escaping prisoners. Her weapon is nearly silent, a low muffled pop pop pop belying it’s murderous capability.

She tries not to think too hard about the fact that she’s shooting people and makes it quick, dispatching the Hydra soldiers taking aim at the escaping prisoners with clinical precision before the rest of them even realize what’s happening.
She pauses during the ensuing confusion and watches the prisoners rapidly strip the corpses of their weapons and begin firing on the swarming Hydra soldiers. The rest of the prisoners rush them en masse and a ferocious brawl breaks out.

She pivots, scanning the yard and searching for an opening, wary of hitting any of the escapees. Her mind is in the still place she goes to when shooting, her brain automatically calculating distance, wind drift, and the movement of her targets, before homing in with deadly accuracy on them.

She calls on the emotional compartmentalization she’s developed as a nurse, her conscience walled off and screaming at being the cause of so much death.

She’s never shot a person before.

She’s dedicated her adult life to healing and killing the Hydra soldiers causes a pang of remorse in her gut. But as she observes a one of them raising his weapon to shoot at some of the unarmed prisoners, she pushes that remorse aside in favor of pragmatism.

Hydra is the enemy, they’ve kept these men prisoner and from the looks of them they haven’t been treated well.

She thinks of Bucky suffering at the hands of these men and a cold rage rises within her. She starts shooting again, methodically taking out one Hydra soldier after another until she has to stop to reload.

She raises her rifle again, peering through the scope at the soldiers trying to pinpoint who is shooting at them.

It’s a fruitless endeavor, of course.

The yard around the factory is lit by spotlights, making them easy targets and decreasing her own visibility in the dark. Additionally, she’s up off the ground and Howard’s silencer is brilliantly effective at both muffling her weapon and hiding the muzzle flash.

The battle on the ground has turned, most of the prisoners are armed now, and they’re effectively neutralizing the Hydra soldiers.
She keeps watch, shooting the occasional Hydra soldier when her view is unobstructed and then several more who attempt to access the tanks parked in the yard.

Can’t have that after all.

Soon, the prisoners have taken over one of the Hydra tanks themselves and they drive it towards the gate, the remaining enemy soldiers scattering in front of it as a pulse of blue light shoots from the large tank gun, obliterating the gate. The remaining prisoners stream through it, fleeing the factory.

After a few moments, a series of explosions rock the factory, and she looks up from the rifle scope to see most of the windows blown out and glass littering the yard, the flames so bright they hurt her eyes when she looks through it.

Further explosions engulf the trucks that had been left by the loading dock and then there is a ripple of explosions from there, no doubt fueled by the ammunition loaded within them, swiftly followed by a wave of fire that engulfs much of the yard.

The large group of prisoners that had made it out of the gate cluster together on the road, standing beside the tanks they’d managed to liberate from the factory yard and holding the weapons they’d wrested from their captors.

She scans the road and further, watching the flames raging in the blown out windows of the factory, repeatedly scanning the surrounding yard.

She didn’t see Steve's distinctive form amongst the fleeing prisoners. She’s not sure if Bucky is among them either.

Oh god.

Where is he?

If he was caught inside—no one could survive that. Not even Steve.
She folds in on herself, crouching on the tree branch and leaning against the trunk, resting her face on her knees as despair floods her.

She rocks slightly, an involuntary keen erupting from her. Tears stream down her cheeks and a yawning emptiness somewhere in the vicinity of her heart threatens to swallow her whole.

Her grief is cut short when a cheer rises from the men on the road—startled, Darcy raises her head and wipes her eyes.

There, a familiar figure skirts the flames and passes through the demolished gate, his arm supporting the slightly shorter man hobbling beside him.

The men surge forward, boisterously greeting them, clapping Steve on the shoulder and rushing to help the other man—Bucky.

Steve fiercely scans the crowd before looking towards the tree line, raising his fingers to his lips and whistling sharply.

She whistles back, slinging her rifle over her shoulder and scrambling down the tree.

She hits the ground running.

She slows as she gets closer to the road, the bright fires from the factory backlighting the silhouettes of the men who’ve turned to see her approach. The crowd parts, leaving her a clear path to Steve and Bucky.

She removes her helmet, her thick braid falling down her back, and says, “what the hell took you so long?”

Bucky looks between her and Steve, bewildered, and says, “Doll, if I’d known you were waitin’ I’da told him to get a move on.”

She rushes forward, a sob caught in her throat, and wraps her arms around Bucky and Steve’s necks, pulling them close.
She gasps low enough that only he and Steve can hear it, “I thought you were dead.”

Bucky tightens his arm around her, his cheek resting against the top of her head.

He mutters, “I thought I was too.”

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November 4, 1943
1:00am

After Darcy met them on the road Steve pulled the radio beacon from his pocket only to find it busted all to hell.

There would be no rendezvous with Howard. They’re on their own.

He stands watch just inside the factory fence line as the men quickly scavenge what they can from the yard.

Whatever was inside the building is a wash, in fact, the building is still burning. But there are some cargo trucks and a storage shed that were far enough from the explosion to have yielded some supplies they can use on their trek back to base.

Howard’s gonna have a field day with the Hydra weaponry they’ve managed to confiscate—the tanks and guns oughta keep him busy for a while.

But they’ll be walking back through heavily fortified enemy territory and they can’t go as the crow flies. Fortunately, he has an idea of where the German encampment lies, so they can skirt around it.

Unfortunately, they have more than a few injured soldiers that will require transportation and even the uninjured are skinny and worn down from hard work, little food, and frequent beatings.
Darcy’s outside the gates about a half mile down the road, with Bucky and the worst of the wounded, patching them up as best she can with her limited supplies and assessing who can walk and who needs to ride in one of the tanks they plan on taking.

The quicker they get away from here the better.

The few Hydra soldiers that had survived the fight had either died when the building exploded or fled. They haven’t found a single living Hydra soldier in the area.

Though, based on the foam around the mouths of some of the fallen soldiers, they may have chosen suicide rather than capture which seems to be Hydra’s modus operandi.

Steve recalls the man who’d killed Erskine foaming at the mouth and convulsing to death and frowns.

He needs to get everyone back to base as quickly as possible, not only for their sakes, but also because of the map he’d spotted inside the factory. The locations of other Hydra operations were marked on it, and the sooner Phillips has that information, the sooner they can act on it.

Sergeant Dugan leads a group of men back over to Steve, followed by Major Falsworth and his group. Some members of the captured French resistance bring up the rear.

“Find anything good?” Steve asks.

Dugan tips his bowler hat back and squints his blue eyes, “Some more guns and ammo, some canvas we can uses to make some kinda shelters, some blankets and such,” he says.

Steve sighs, “I suppose it’s too much to hope for c-rations or a radio?”

“No such luck,” Dugan drawls.

“Well—we have a supply crate about eight miles out. There’s a stream a mile down the road, we can
at least get some water and rest a bit before continuing on,” Steve looks around the yard, most of it is littered with broken glass from the explosion and there are several vehicles still burning, “Maybe we should take the cargo trucks if we can find some that aren’t too damaged.”

“Captain, uh—sir,” Major Falsworth falters, smiling wryly, “I’m not sure what to call you.”

Steve rubs the back of his neck, not sure himself, “Rogers will do—Captain America seems a bit much, I think,” he says.

Falsworth nods, “We have enough weaponry here, along with the tanks, that we could do some damage to the German line on our way out. At least cause enough confusion to perhaps divert their attention away from our wounded and allow them to slip through.”

Steve sighs, suddenly incredibly weary.

“Let’s get back to the others and away from here first,” he says, “then we’ll iron out our plans.”

“Yes, sir,” Falsworth says and Dugan sends them a dubious look before they begin searching for some trucks that’ll do the job.

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Bucky grips the Hydra weapon in his hand, watching Darcy move from one man to another of the injured escapees, briefly assessing each one and identifying those with the most critical needs.

They’re down to just under four hundred men, most of them able to march but there’s a couple dozen who will require transport. The ones who’d been most grievously injured hadn’t made it out of the gates at all before the explosions.

Steve had taken the most able bodied from the group up the road to salvage what they could of the Hydra weapons and supplies, insisting Bucky stay behind to keep watch over Darcy and the injured.

Punk.
He’d seen the look in Stevie’s eyes. He’s worried about what had happened to him in the lab.

It’s not something he plans to discuss. The only way he is holding himself together at the moment is by pretending it was nothing.

He’s fine.

Just a little feverish.

But he keeps hearing things—rustles in the underbrush, the rasp of the wounded men’s breathing. His own blood sounds loud in his veins.

He rubs his forehead tiredly. His head aches.

Everything is too much right now—his skin feels tight and sensitive, everything is loud, and he’s so warm.

Darcy finishes patching up the last man and approaches, handing him the nearly empty canteen.

He hesitates, tilting it her way and she says, “Drink it all. I’m fine.”

He raises it to his mouth and the cool metallic flavor of the water on his tongue is the best thing he’s ever tasted. He’s sorry when it’s gone after only a few swallows.

He says, “Just before the factory blew up, the head Hydra guy, Schmidt, confronted Steve, said some stuff about Erskine’s serum. Sounds like he took a version of it too—he was strong like Steve but it had a nasty side effect.”

She tilts her head in question.

He distractedly presses the cool metal of the canteen to his forehead and closes his eyes, sagging
against the tree. *He’s so tired.*

“*Darce*— he peeled his—what I thought was his face—*off*, but it turns out it was just a mask. His *face,*” he shudders at the memory, “*It looked like a red skull.*”

He opens his eyes when her small fingers run through his hair, pausing at the nape of his neck and resting there, her expression concerned.

After a few minutes, Darcy shakes her head and says, “You’re feverish and your heart rate is elevated. I’d like to look you over if it’s okay.”

He shakes his head, shivering, and says, “S-Someone needs to keep watch,” though he hears distant voices and the sound of trucks coming down the road from the direction of the factory.

They must be close.

Darcy says, “There are plenty of armed men here, and the others are on their way back,” she tilts her head, listening intently, “sounds like they’re bringing some trucks—they’re about halfway here.”

That can’t be right. They sound so much closer to him.

“Y-Yeah, let’s wait til Stevie gets back and I’ll rest for a bit,” he says starting to shiver.

Darcy’s eyes trace his face, and he looks away, knowing she sees the bruises and the shaggy growth of his beard, the blood and grime of almost a month in captivity. He’s pretty sure he stinks too, though he’s become so accustomed to it he can’t really smell himself anymore.

He bites his lip, a fine tremor shaking him as she runs the tips of her fingers along his jaw.

She sighs, patting his shoulder gently, “why don’t you sit down and lean your back against the tree,” she pulls the strap of her rifle from over her shoulder and stands with her back against the tree beside him, “I’ll keep watch with you.”
He says, “I’ll just sit down for a minute,” and slides to the base of the tree, resting his weapon on his knees.

He feels her fingers in his hair again, stroking slowly.

“It’s alright Bucky, you can rest,” she whispers.

He tries to fight it, but her hand in his hair is the closest to home he’s felt in a long time.

Eventually, he closes his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Independence Day to all of my American readers and Happy 100th Birthday Steve Rogers!

Big thanks to all of the readers who have taken the time to comment or leave kudos, it is very much appreciated. I will be responding to everyone’s comments from the last chapter in the next day or so.

I was so stoked to see some new readers commenting! Yay!
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

The POW’s make their way back to base.

Chapter Notes

No beta—sorry.

French language by google translate—I’m not going to be putting too much French and German in the story, since translate is unreliable. I’ll just let say something like—“they conversed in French” which will have to suffice.

November 4, 1943

3am

A line of cargo trucks slowly bumps down the road in the darkness, two tanks rolling in front of the convoy and one behind. Steve ranges ahead on foot, ready to run back and warn them if any German or Hydra soldiers are coming their way.

Darcy sits to the rear of the last truck in the line, the canvas that covers the back pulled aside so she can periodically look through the rifle scope and scan the darkened landscape for threats.

Howard’s night vision scope is remarkable. Her eyesight is very keen in the darkness, but the scope takes it to a whole other level.

The man seated beside her clears his throat and she turns to look at him. She flicks a glance beyond him at the men crammed together on the long benches on either side of the truck bed—most of them are leaning into each other, asleep. The worst of the wounded lay on pallets they’d arranged between the two benches, Bucky among them at her feet. He hasn’t awakened from his fevered sleep, not even when Steve picked him up and laid him in the back of the truck.

“You should rest while you can,” Darcy says.
There is a lantern turned very low towards the front of the cargo bed, it sways in the dark and she catches the white flash of the Frenchman’s teeth, his Gallic shrug eloquent. “Eh—my mind is restless,” he says in his heavily accented English.

She switches to French, “Comment vous appelez-vous?”

He tilts his head, his expression surprised, “Jacques Dernier, et toi?”

“Darcy Garland,” she replies.

She holds out her hand to him and he clasps it gently before letting go. Bucky mutters and stirs at her feet and she leans forward, humming low as she rests her hand on his forehead until he relaxes.

She waits until his breathing evens out again before sitting up and raising her rifle to peer once more into the darkness. A quick scan shows nothing amiss and she lowers it and leans her head against the side of the rocking truck once more.

Dernier clears his throat again, nudging his knee against hers. He says in French, “I wanted to thank you.”

She rolls her head in his direction and replies in the same language, “For what?”

“When we emerged from the factory, there were armed Hydra soldiers ready to shoot us. Someone shot them just as they were taking aim at us—that was you, I assume?”

She bows her head, her heart like a stone in her chest. “Yes.”

“You saved my life, and the lives of many other men. I owe you a great debt—thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” she says softly.
“You’re a nurse?” He says, gesturing to the medical kit at her feet.

“Yes—U.S. Army Nurses Corps,” she says, wondering if May had gotten her note and if Peggy, Will, and Howard escaped to safety. She frowns, “Though I’m likely to be court martialed when we return to base.”

“Why?” Dernier says, surprised.

“I abandoned my post to come with Steve, uh—Captain America, to break you out. This isn’t an official mission, we’re AWOL,” she says.

“Hmm—perhaps the General will be generous. Captain America is very impressive. But then again, so are you,” he says with a flirtatious grin.

She rolls her eyes at him. “Me? The captain got you out of the factory, I was just backup,” she says.

“Backup that helped save the lives of nearly 400 men,” he counters.

She shrugs, not comfortable with accepting praise for killing people.

Even if they were bad people.

He must sense her discomfort because he hums to himself, closes his eyes, leans his head against the side of the truck, and changes the subject, “where did you learn to speak French? Your accent is very good,” he murmurs.

“A friend I worked with back in Brooklyn. I thought it would be fun to learn—never imagined using it under these circumstances,” she mutters, lifting the rifle again to do a visual check out the back of the truck.

He chokes out a ragged laugh.
“Yes, these circumstances aren’t something I imagined either,” he says.

They chat softly together for a few more minutes until it becomes obvious Dernier is tiring. When she turns back after scanning the surrounding area again through the rifle scope, she finds he’s fallen asleep.

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5:30am

Steve is frustrated. They’re slowly following the road away from the factory and he realizes the distance he could run in half an hour is going to take several days if they hope to evade the German troops.

Using the tanks and trucks as transport is necessary because some of the men are injured and most are weakened by their time as captives. They need to stick to the road as long as possible to give them a chance to rest up, but they’ll be forced to march when they travel off road. Only the most injured will ride in the Hydra tanks as they travel closer to the German line.

He’s looking for a logging road he remembers from Peggy’s map. It’s off the beaten path, cuts through some heavily wooded areas, and will take them 15 miles closer to Allied territory.

There is also the matter of the supply crates he and Darcy had left behind in the forest. When they find a spot to make camp he’ll have to go get them, leaving the band of escapees unprotected for a short while.

It makes him nervous.

His breath fogs the air as he jogs ahead, keeping an ear out for trouble while he scouts the area. It’s cold, and while his increased metabolism keeps him warm, many of the men are underdressed.

*The faster they can get back to base camp, the better.*
He’s trying not to think about Bucky. He’d shared a worried glance with Darcy as he’d lifted his unconscious friend into the back of the truck.

He still doesn’t know what had happened to him in that lab.

He’d asked Dugan and Falsworth and they only said Bucky had been badly beaten after the prisoners had arranged an accident to kill a particularly brutal Hydra overseer. Already weakened, he’d sickened and become unable to work. At that point, a Hydra scientist named Zola took him away, since he was of no use if he couldn’t work in the factory.

Nobody ever returned once Zola took them.

Private Jones, a soft spoken colored fella who spoke French and German, said he’d heard the Hydra guards talking about Zola’s work. Seems even the guards were uncomfortable with some of the things the scientist had been doing.

Jones had said, “They all thought he was cold as hell.”

Bucky had been with Zola for nearly a week when Steve broke him out. No telling what was done to him.

He slows as he spots the logging road, venturing down it a little ways to determine if it’s passable. The road obviously hasn’t been used in a while, there are several downed trees blocking it. None of them are too large, he’ll be able to drag them to the side to allow their convoy to pass.

Probably a good idea to knock a few down behind them, too.

He turns, jogging back down the road to join the others.

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6pm
Bucky wakes suddenly, his eyes widening as he frantically turns his head to scan the confines of the unfamiliar space he finds himself in.

Not the lab.

He releases the breath he’d been unconsciously holding and relaxes, the memory of Steve (Captain America?) rescuing him filtering through his mind just as Darcy’s familiar face appears above him.

“You’re finally awake,” she says, and he blinks, focusing on her face. She pulls a canteen from her belt and says, “Thirsty?”

He nods and she kneels beside him, using one arm to prop him up as she tilts the canteen to his lips.

He sips at the water, cold and delicious, and forces himself to deny the urge to gulp it down lest he end up vomiting it all up. It’s quiet in the truck, the soft sighs of several people breathing drawing his attention and he tilts his head to see four men laying in the bed of the truck, sleeping.

Otherwise, they are alone.

“Where is everybody?” He says, his voice rusty with misuse.

“Outside. We’ve stopped for the night—tomorrow we need to ditch the trucks and Steve thought we should rest here for a few hours. Give everyone chance to stretch their legs and maybe eat something,” she says.

The last thing he remembers is standing watch while Steve and the others were up at the Hydra factory—then nothing.

“How far are we from the factory?” He says.

“About twenty miles. It’s been slow going. We had to stop several times for Steve and the others to clear debris from the road, then we waited for a little while just before dark while Steve retrieved the crates of supplies Howard left us.”
His stomach rumbles and she quirks an eyebrow. “Hungry?”

“Starving,” he says, sitting up.

*Ravenous,* actually.

“Good. I’ve got some stew cooking over the campfires outside—figured it was the best way to stretch our supplies. I gathered up a few country boys and we went hunting for something to add to the pot,” she says, “Steve was mad I didn’t take him with me, but I took Gabe—he says you’re friends? Anyhow, he knows how to hunt. We brought back a few rabbits and a couple pheasants to stretch the rations for another day.”

Bucky’s head spins. Rabbits? Pheasants? *What the hell?*

She rests a hand against his forehead and says, “Your fever broke a couple hours ago. You’ve been pretty out of it.”

He feels better though. Energized.

But so hungry he could cry.

“Why don’t we join the others and get you some food?” She suggests, rising to her feet and holding out a hand to pull him up, “I’ll have to come back here, bring some soup for these guys,” she tilts her head towards the back of the truck where he sees the still forms of four sleeping men, “the morphine should be wearing off soon and they’ll be waking up.”

He nods and follows her to jump down from the back of the truck. The familiar figures of Dugan and Jones stand guard alongside the road and he nods to them both.

Dugan says, “Good to see your sorry ass up and about, Barnes.”

Bucky rubs a hand over his shaggy hair, “Likewise.”
Dugan pats him on the shoulder and Jones’ smile flashes in his dark face, and he teases, “Captain America will be happy to know you’re awake.”

Bucky says, “Aw, now. He’s just Stevie from Brooklyn to me.”

Darcy rolls her eyes—“Gentlemen, if you’ll excuse us—I gotta get my fella fed,” she says and wrinkles her nose, “and maybe a trip down to the stream for some wash water wouldn’t be a bad idea either.”

Dugan chuckles, “You’re in for it now, Sergeant.”

Bucky rasps, “She’s always been bossy.”

“Bossy she may be, but she saved our bacon back at the factory. Leave it to you to find a gal who’s a deadeye shot,” Dugan says admiringly.

Bucky raises an eyebrow at Darcy and she shrugs, clearly uncomfortable with the subject.

“There’s more than one reason I let her boss me around,” he acknowledges.

Jones and Dugan chuckle as Darcy huffs, grabbing his hand and pulling him through the underbrush into the deeper shadows of the forest.

“What’d Dugan mean, Doll?” he whispers as they walk.

She mutters, “Steve needed backup while he infiltrated the factory—” she lowers her eyes, studying the trees around them, her voice is shaking when she continues, “had to use my rifle quite a bit.”

He stops, touching her arm and turning her towards him.

She looks down, not meeting his eyes.
He remembers how he felt, the first time he’d killed in battle.

*Confused by how easy it had been to end a life.*

*Relieved to be alive.*

*Guilty.*

He pulls her into his arms and holds her, feeling the fine tremor that shakes her.

“The fact that you’re upset shows ya have a conscience—killin’ people shouldn’t be easy, baby. It *ain’t* easy,” he says gently.

She presses her forehead against his chest, silent for a moment before stepping back and wiping under her eyes with her thumbs, “It’s not,” she sniffs.

“If it makes ya feel any better, unlike the regular troops, Hydra soldiers *volunteer*—they believe in their cause,” he pauses, recalling his time in captivity. “and they treated us worse than animals,” he says fiercely.

She nods, “I owe you an apology, actually.”

“What for?” He says.

“You were talking about that Hydra guy, Schmidt, before you passed out—going on about his *red skull,*” he nods and she smiles wryly, “I thought you were delirious. But Steve confirmed everything. Guess that’s the guy Dr. Erskine escaped. He took the serum Abraham was developing and ignored his warnings that it wasn’t ready.”

She takes his hand and they walk another few yards yards in silence. Bucky whispers, “So—your blood is what made the difference? What made Steve strong but not—like *that*?”
She shrugs, “I guess? Best I can figure it stopped the cell mutation before it became harmful. Steve is pretty much the best he could possibly be, and then some,” she says.

Bucky squeezes her hand, hearing the soft muttering of voices close by. About twenty yards from the road beneath the thick canopy of trees are the rest of his fellow prisoners, huddling around small campfires like a bunch of gypsies.

Their faces are lit by the low burning flames and the smell of something delicious wafts from the large metal ammo cans repurposed as soup pots and set on flat stones in each fire.

Steve spots them and his face lights with a smile, “Buck! You’re awake!” He says, pushing off from the tree he’s leaning against to come to his side, placing one large hand on his shoulder, “how’re ya feelin’?”

Bucky inhales deeply, the scent of whatever’s in the nearest fire making his mouth water, “Hungry,” he says.

Darcy picks through the men around the closest fire and wraps her hand in a rag to grab the lids off the nearest cans. The bubbling stew releases an even more potent waft of steam and she pulls the handle of a long knife from her belt to poke at the contents, humming thoughtfully before declaring it done.

The ragged men stir themselves and each of them grabs a tin bowl and spoon from the stack on the ground near some large crates.

Steve follows his gaze and says, “Howard included medical supplies, c-rations, bowls, utensils, some extra canteens and water purification tablets, blankets, and some canvas to create crude shelter if we need it. He didn’t anticipate us being out here for too long though, so we don’t have cooking implements or enough food for more than a couple meals. We’re gonna have to make due til we can get outta German territory.”

Bucky nods as Darcy comes around the fire, cradling two bowls in her hands, she hands one to Bucky and the other to Steve, “Careful, it’s hot,” she says and Bucky gratefully takes the bowl, looking around for a place to sit before settling on the ground not far from the fire, leaning his back against a tree. Steve sits beside him, his broad shoulder just touching his.

They watch Darcy dish out stew for the men who’ve lined up at the closest fire, chatting and
laughing with them as she hands them the first hot food they’ve had in ages. When they’ve all been served, she fills two more bowls, heading back towards the road.

Steve jumps to his feet and says, “Darce, ya should eat—I can take those up to the guys.”

Darcy eyes him and Bucky can see Steve won’t take no for an answer. She knows him well enough not to bother fighting him on it either.

Steve takes a one steaming bowl from her and hands his empty bowl to her as she passes him the other and melts into the darkness. He’s remarkably quiet for such a large man. Darcy gets some stew for herself and sits beside him, dipping her spoon into it and blowing on the contents.

He’s slowly finishing the last of his meal, he’d been tempted to wolf it down but Darcy had rested her hand on his arm as he’d dug in, obviously ravenous, and warned him to eat slowly or he’d get sick.

God knows what Darcy had used from the usually unpalatable rations to make it so flavorful, but he’s pretty sure it’s the most delicious meal he’s had in the field.

There are the usual cigarettes included with the c-rations, and Falsworth and Dernier pass some out after supper. Most of the men smoke, relaxing with their bellies full for the first time in at least a month.

Bucky’s just lit his cigarette when Steve returns. Darcy glances up at him and says, “the guys in the trucks awake yet?”

Steve squats down next to her, leaning his back against the tree. “Nah. Dugan and Jones say thanks for the grub. Pretty sure you’re gonna have half these fellas in love with ya by the time we get back to base.”

Darcy snorts, rises to her feet to stretch, and gestures to her empty bowl, saying, “More stew, Stevie?”

“Yes, please,” he says, stretching his long legs in front of him and turning to look at Bucky, his face slightly embarrassed, “I need a lot of food now, because of this,” he waves his hand in front of himself, “I have a higher metabolism. Haven’t been eatin’ much the last couple days and I’m feelin’
Darcy returns with another bowl of stew and hands each of them part of a chocolate bar. It’s standard in the rations. Sugar for energy or something.

She sits between them, nibbling on her piece of chocolate as the voices of the men wash over them and the firelight flickers on their faces, pushing back some of the night’s chill.

Darcy asks Steve questions about his post-serum body in a low voice—

*How the hell did you carry those supply crates back by yourself? Really? You picked up a motorcycle with three showgirls sitting on it?*

*How fast can you run, full out?*

*How much sleep do you need?*

*Healing factor?*

Bucky listens in, chiming in occasionally when he has questions. It seems fantastical that little Stevie from Brooklyn is Captain America but the evidence is sitting right here with them.

He teases Steve about the costume and feels a curl of jealousy in his gut as he wonders if anything happened with the showgirls on the USO tour.

*He’s still his fella isn’t he? His and Darcy’s?*

He frowns, his eyes distractedly traveling over the group of men, searching for familiar faces. He’s seen Dugan, Jones, Dernier, and Falsworth. After a few moments he spots Morita playing cards with a couple of fellas the next fire over. He catches his eye and Morita winks.

Bucky sends him a small smile, relieved to see all of his former cell mates have survived the escape from the factory.
His thoughts are interrupted by Darcy saying, “Are we staying here til morning?”

Steve says, “Probably wanna move while it’s still dark. We can stay til 2am or so, I suppose. I’m gonna talk to Falsworth, work out a watch schedule so everyone can get some rest.”

He realizes Steve has worked out who the highest ranking officer is amongst the prisoners. Major Falsworth is the only surviving officer, about fifty of the prisoners were from his original command. He and Dugan are Sergeants and accustomed to some degree of command, but on a smaller scale. Plus, Falsworth has years more experience than them. The rest of the captives are mostly junior enlistment ranks and members of the French Resistance.

Darcy says to Steve, “I want you to get a couple hours of sleep. I know you don’t need much but it’s been two days without rest.”

It’s a testament to how tired he must be that he just nods wearily. “I’m gonna sort out the blankets and sleeping arrangements—pretty sure most of these guys are okay with sleeping by the fire, the wounded can stay in the trucks and there’s room in the tanks for some of them to sleep too.”

Bucky says, “So ten men patrolling the perimeter around camp and four up by the road?”

Steve nods and says, “That oughta work. I’ll get somebody to go up and relieve Dugan and Jones.”

He stands and walks over to Falsworth. Bucky watches them converse for a moment before turning to Darcy.

“You mentioned something about a stream and cleaning up?” He says.

“Yeah—we can bring an empty ammo box down to the water and fill it up, if we put it in the fire it’ll heat up. It’s definitely too cold to wade in,” she says.

“Okay,” he says, “where ya sleepin’, doll?”
“Probably up in one of the trucks— best to stay close to the wounded in case they need anything,” she says.

“Wanna share that pallet I had on the floor?” He whispers, a soft smile ghosting across his face.

“Sure,” she whispers back, licking a stray bit of chocolate from her fingers, her mouth curling into a sly smile.

Steve sends him a look from across the clearing and he knows he’s been listening to them. *That’ll take some getting used to.*

Darcy squeezes his arm before getting to her feet.

“Let’s see about that wash water,” she says.

It’s late when Steve finally seeks his own rest, nodding to the men on watch before slipping into the back of the cargo truck with his blanket. He glances around the dark interior, noting the slow heartbeat and respiration of the sleeping men and the way Darcy has her pistol and rifle lined up on the bench near where she and Bucky are curled together. Darcy gazes steadily at him from where she lays cradled in Bucky’s arms, her back to his chest and his arm holding her close.

He squats beside her, unfolding the blanket and spreading it out before laying down on his side, reaching behind him to pull the edge over his shoulder to enfold him. Darcy snakes a hand under his blanket and a grabs his arm, urging him closer and he wiggles over, his legs entangling with hers. He strokes his thumb over her cheekbone and she smiles, wrapping her fingers around his wrist and nuzzling her face into his hand.

He whispers, “Did I wake ya?”

“No—I just finished checking on these guys about ten minutes ago. Managed to get a couple hours of sleep before that,” she says.
Bucky grumbles in his sleep and his arm tightens around her, his eyes moving back and forth behind the thin skin of his closed lids. His brow puckers in a frown before he nuzzles his face into Darcy’s hair, relaxing again.

Steve watches his friend with concern.

“Is Bucky really okay, Darce?” He whispers.

She purses her lips, then says quietly, “He’s as okay as he can be. His fever is gone, he seems to be on the mend physically—as for the rest, I can’t say.”

Steve sighs, “I found him strapped down in a lab, delirious, with an IV and an empty bag attached to his arm.” He rubs his hand distractedly over his face, the few days growth of beard itchy on his cheeks, “God knows what they were pumpin’ into him.”

Darcy reaches for him, tugging him closer. He goes willingly, craving the comfort of her embrace.

“Whatever it was, he’s recovering—he’s not getting worse, which is a good sign,” she whispers against his neck.

“Mnhmm,” he says, still feeling doubtful. It’d unnerved him to see his friend, who’d always been his protector, made helpless—he can’t shake a bone deep uneasiness regarding Zola’s goals.

Darcy rubs circles on his back, the way she always did to calm him when he was sick or to comfort him when he was in pain. They lay together, neither of them feeling the need to speak as Steve focuses on the sound of her heartbeat, her slow and steady breathing. The tension slowly drains from his shoulders and he kisses the top of her head, slinging his arm over her and resting his hand on Bucky’s side.

“We’ll figure things out—gotta focus on gettin’ us back to base,” he mutters.

She hums drowsily against his chest and he closes his eyes, mentally reviewing the route they need to take to get back to base. If all goes well they should be back in Allied territory within 48 hours.
Interesting fact: chocolate and cigarettes were actually included in C-rations. Wonder how much money the tobacco business made during the war?

Wanna know another thing that was handed out like crazy? Condoms. Can’t have the soldiers coming down with the clap, after all.

Note: someone commented that the term gypsy is considered offensive to the Romani people, know that I am using period appropriate terminology and there is no intent to offend, I am merely using a descriptive that would be used by the characters in their time.

I cannot stress enough how much of this chapter is made up stuff that would never really happen in the middle of a war zone—I am not a soldier and certainly didn’t live through WW2, so suspend your disbelief darlings and go with it.

Also, many thanks to all who have left kudos and comments on this story. It’s encouraging to read what you think! Also, greetings to all of the first time commenters from the last few chapters! You are very welcome here.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

Steve leads the rescued POW’s back to base camp and they are ordered to report to SSR headquarters in London.

Steve puts together a squad to take on Hydra. The Howlies celebrate their survival. Peggy is a little confused.

Chapter Notes

Some dialogue from events in CA:TFA borrowed and twisted into a slightly different shape. See if you spot it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

November 7, 1943

6am

Steve trudges down the road leading to base camp next to Bucky, bracing himself for his imminent arrest. Maybe he can convince General Phillips that he coerced Darcy into the mission and somehow keep her out of trouble.

Doubtful.

He can’t picture Darcy denying responsibility for her choice, she’d probably yell at him if he tried to make like it was all his fault and blow any chance of deceiving Phillips.

They’d hit a few snags in the last two days, encountering several German patrols which they’d swiftly engaged and defeated with the help of the Hydra weapons.

Falsworth’s idea to scramble the German line with the tanks had gone off without a hitch. He’d taken what was left of his command and two of the three tanks at about 3am, firing on the German front line from behind and sowing chaos.
In the ensuing confusion, Steve and the rest of them had slipped through and headed to the road that lead directly to the base, managing to rendezvous with Falsworth’s group shortly afterwards.

They encounter the first checkpoint on the road half a mile from camp with the light of dawn just barely breaking over the Italian countryside. They’re flying white flags from the tanks in lieu of the stars and stripes—it would be a painful irony to get this far only to be cut down by friendly fire.

“Halt! Who goes there?” A sentry cries, raising his rifle.

They stop and the word is sent down the line to all of the soldiers marching behind them to pause.

Major Falsworth cocks an eyebrow at Steve and he nods.

“Major James Montgomery Falsworth of His Majesty’s 3rd Independent Parachute Brigade, sir,” he says crisply.

“Advance one to be recognized,” the sentry says, nervously eyeing the Hydra tanks.

Falsworth crosses the ten yards or so separating them from the checkpoint and commences answering questions, he tells the sentry they are what remains of several U.S. Army and British infantry brigades and some French Resistance fighters.

Oh, and *Captain America*.

That last bit certainly gets the guards attention.

The guard relaxes some, but keeps his rifle at the ready as he motions to one of the other soldiers to radio for permission to let them pass.

Soon after he waves them through, and as they approach the camp soldiers pause in their activities and shouts go up as they are recognized. Soon, a crowd gathers and people line the path cheering as they head towards the center of camp. He glances at Bucky, smiling slightly as they both absorb the fact that they’d made it.
They continue on, and he spots the weathered face of General Phillips, closely followed by a slightly stunned Peggy Carter. They come to a halt in front of the General and Steve steps forward to salute him.

He says, “Some of these men need medical attention,” he glances at Peggy, who stands with her hands on her hips, as small smile pulling at her lips as she surveys him and the happily chattering men behind him, “I’d like to surrender myself for disciplinary action.”

The General firms his jaw and says, “That won’t be necessary.”

“Yes, sir.” Steve says softly.

Phillips comes as close to smiling as Steve has ever seen, his eyes narrowing as he takes his measure before he nods sharply in approval, turning to walk away.

He says, “Faith, huh?” to Peggy as he passes her.

He doesn’t know what that’s about—Peggy says nothing, approaching Steve with a slightly exasperated look on her face, “You’re late,” she says, her eyes tracing over him, no doubt noting his ragged appearance.

He pulls the busted radio from his pocket, and smirks, “Couldn’t call my ride.”

Peggy’s lips purse and her dark eyes flash, he’s sure he’s gonna catch hell but Bucky shouts behind him, “Hey—Let’s hear it for Captain America!”

Steve looks over his shoulder at his oldest friend grinning mischievously at him and the crowd roars, men converging on him to pat him on the back and shake his hand.

He searches the crowd, spotting Darcy standing next to one of the Hydra tanks, her rifle slung over her shoulder and bracketed on either side by Dugan and Dernier. She tucks an unruly lock of hair behind her ear and smiles at him, her heart in her eyes.
It’s better than any applause he’s ever received performing with the USO.

Thursday, November 11, 1943

Whip and Fiddle Pub

London, England

8pm

Bucky leans against the bar, tossing back his whiskey and signaling for another as Darcy throws her head back and laughs at the smoke wreathed table across the room. He smirks slightly, watching her uncross and cross her legs, jiggling her foot as she glances at the cards in her hand.

She’s sitting with Dugan, Jones, Morita, Falsworth, and Dernier, a glass of whiskey and a pile of bills on the table in front of her. Everyone except for Dugan has folded, Bucky had done so pretty quick—his hand was crap and he’d never beat Darcy yet.

His girl is a damned card shark.

He turns back towards the barkeep for his whiskey and glances at the door just as Steve walks in, looking impossibly handsome in his uniform. It feels like the breath has been knocked out of him for a moment when Stevie spots him at the bar and smiles.

It oughta be a crime for a fella to be so beautiful.

A shout from Dugan and jeers from the rest of the table announces Darcy’s inevitable win, and he catches his breath, grinning at Steve and turning to watch her rake the pile of money towards her.

Dugan jams his bowler on his head, pouting until Darcy offers to buy a couple rounds for the table as a consolation and he smiles grudgingly, leaning back to light one of the smelly cigars he favors.

She scoops her winnings from the table into her bag and walks over to the bar, her curves beautifully outlined in her sharply tailored dress uniform. Her red lips tilt up in a welcoming smile when she
“Hey there handsome, looking pretty sharp in your uniform,” she says to Steve, winking as she leans on the bar on next to Bucky, close enough that their shoulders brush.

Bucky pouts playfully, tucking a wayward curl behind her ear.

“What about me?” He teases, “I’m in uniform too.”

She scans him from head to toe, grabbing hold of his tie and straightening it then running one finger along his freshly shaven jaw.

“Oh, you’re all right I guess,” she sighs and Steve snickers beside her.

She leans in and whispers confidentiality, “I’m not used to the way our boy fills out a uniform now, is all.”

He bumps her shoulder with his and whispers back, “Me neither.”

They both turn, looking Steve over and Bucky grins as his friend’s ears turn red.

Darcy giggles and Steve sighs, “I can hear ya, ya know.”

Bucky says, “We know.”

The barkeep lines up the shots Darcy had ordered and she asks for a tray—carrying them over to the table with a flourish.

Steve asks for a whiskey and leans against the bar next to him, watching Darcy handing out the drinks and laughing at something Dernier says in French. Jones laughs too.
He’s gotta learn French, dammit.

Further back, Howard and Will hunch over a table, a bottle of whiskey and two glasses between them as they bicker over whatever Howard has sketched out on the paper between them.

Will snatches Howard’s pencil away, shaking his head as he scribbles a few lines himself. Howard smirks, leaning back in his chair and pulling a cigar from his pocket, trimming the end and lighting it, nodding as he follows whatever Will is sketching out on the paper.

Bucky takes a sip of his whiskey and leans his back against the bar, next to Steve.

“How’d the debrief go?” He asks.

After declining to press charges against Darcy and Steve, Phillips had sent all of the escaped POWs, Darcy, and Steve to London. The POW’s are on leave, Steve is to debrief the SSR on the rescue as well as the locations of the Hydra bases he’d seen on the map inside the factory.

Darcy had been upset about leaving her unit in the Army Nurses so abruptly, after she’d been informed in no uncertain terms that she was a part of the SSR now. She knew too much to go back to what she’d done before and was unable to tell any of her former unit, even May, anything except she was being transferred. All information about the events leading up to and during the rescue at the Hydra plant were confidential.

They’d arrived this morning—Bucky, Steve, and Darcy staying in rooms provided by Howard. The flashy bastard had paid for a block of rooms at the Savoy while the rest of the men were quartered temporarily in the U.S. Army or SSR barracks.

Howard and Will spend most of their time in the London SSR lab, and Steve’s friend Agent Carter is based in London and has quarters provided by the SSR.

They’d wanted Steve to stay there too—but he declined. He said he’d had enough of SSR digs from his days at Camp Lehigh. The brass is giving Steve a hell of a lot of latitude now that they’ve realized what he can do for them.

He frowns, thinking about about Carter—she’s just the kind of dame that’d make Steve dizzy, and he’s seen the speculative looks she sends his way.
Hell—to be fair, everyone sends Steve speculative looks.

Just before they’d left Italy, Steve had a short meeting with Phillips regarding the Hydra locations he’d uncovered and soon after had approached Dugan, Falsworth, Dernier, Jones, Morita, and himself about forming a squad to hunt them down with him. They’d all joined up—eager to give hell to the bastards that’d killed so many good men.

As for him, there was no way he would let Stevie go without him.

Steve sighs, dropping onto the barstool beside him and leaning his elbows on the bar, “The General had some SSR soldiers in mind for the new squad, so I kinda blindsided him when I told him I’d already put together my team. He reluctantly accepted my choices.” He sips his whiskey frowning, “I went over the whole operation at the factory backwards and forwards with him.”

Steve looks troubled and Bucky raises a questioning eyebrow.

“He’s real interested in Darcy.” He says quietly.

Bucky frowns, glancing across the room at their girl laughing at whatever Dugan is going on about, smiling and waving his arms to punctuate his statements.

“What’d ya tell him?” He mutters.

“Nothing more than he knew from talking to Howard and Peggy. That she’s a crack shot, experienced nurse, and is familiar with both Erskine and Stark’s work.”

“What about Erskine’s work?” Bucky said tightly.

“Phillips didn’t know about it until after she and I went AWOL to get you guys outta the factory. Erskine never mentioned her to the higher ups at the SSR and he destroyed all his notes. Howard inadvertently spilled the beans because he assumed they all knew about her,” Steve sighs, scrubbing his hand against the back of his neck.
Steve tosses his drink back, placing his empty glass on the bar and turning on his stool to get the barkeep's attention.

Bucky raises his eyebrow, “Maybe you oughta slow down?”

Steve shrugs, “Ain’t gonna do anything but warm my belly—serum changed that.”

_Huh._

“Great. Now Darcy _and_ you can drink me under the table,” he sighs, sipping at his whiskey morosely.

Steve claps him on the shoulder (damn he’s strong), “Yeah—but at least ya can forget for awhile if you want.”

_Funny._

He still feels pretty clear headed.

Steve says, “I told him I wanted Darcy to be part of the squad.”

He stares at his friend, “Why the hell did ya do that? She could stay here, work with Howard and be safe,” he protested.

“Because she won’t wanna be left behind and because we’re gonna need a field medic,” Steve says, and lowers his voice further, “and because I don’t want Phillips or the SSR scientists to get too interested in her. She’ll be safer with us.”

Bucky doesn’t see how anything they’re gonna be doing could even be remotely considered safe. But he figures Steve understands how the SSR works better than he does. He seems to have developed a healthy distrust of government agencies.

Someone starts playing the piano in the corner and Bucky looks away from Steve’s worried blue
eyes to see Will dancing with Darcy, the men at the table are drunkenly singing along to the tune.

It’s been a long while since he’s danced. Longer still since he has with his girl. He finishes off his whiskey and sets his glass on the bar next to Steve’s elbow.

“Think I’m gonna cut in, punk,” he says.

Steve glances over his shoulder and smiles softly at the sight of Darcy being twirled around the dance floor by her brother and nods.

Bucky claps him on he shoulder and heads over as one song changes to the next.

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Steve’s leaning against the bar watching Bucky and Darcy dance when the door to the pub opens, a blast of cold air heralding Peggy’s entrance. She’s wearing a red dress and looking all business despite her attire.

He’d have to be blind not to notice how beautiful she is, and his fingers get the familiar itch to draw as she stands in the doorway, outlined by the darkness outside.

She certainly makes a striking picture, and he ducks his head, grinning when the drunken singing stutters to a halt and he hears Dugan whistle low and mutter, “Well, fuck me,” as he catches sight of her.

Oh boy.

He sincerely hopes Dugan doesn’t say anything like that within Peggy’s hearing.

She scans the room and her brow furrows slightly as her eyes settle briefly on Darcy and Bucky dancing rather closer than friends typically do, before spotting Steve leaning against the bar.

He straightens as she strides to the bar, placing her pocketbook on its shiny surface and leaning next
to him, ordering a gin and tonic.

She’s silent for a moment, her expression distracted before she shakes her head minutely and says, “Captain. Howard has some equipment for you to try tomorrow morning—after you meet with the senior members of the SSR.”

“Sounds good,” he replies, glancing at Peggy as she thanks the barkeep for her drink and turns to lean her back against the bar next to him, taking her first sip.

“General Phillips asked that you bring Lieutenant Garland, as well,” she says, her lips tightening slightly as she observes Bucky’s hand slipping lower on Darcy’s waist than is strictly appropriate.

Steve watches as Bucky twirls Darcy, her laugh ringing over the music and the chatter from the men. She tips her head back, a smile curving her red painted lips as his friend leans down and whispers next to her ear, “can’t wait to see how Stevie looks under that uniform later—do ya think everything got bigger?”

Darcy’s eyes widen slightly and she looks towards him, catching a glimpse of his smirk before he takes another sip of his drink.

She whispers, “pretty sure he can hear you.”

Bucky’s molten gaze flicks towards Steve as he twirls her out then snaps her back against him, “Good,” he breathes.

Darcy raises an eyebrow and both of them glance his way, a lazy smile curving Bucky’s lips as Steve raises his glass in salute.

Peggy’s lips thin as she observes the byplay between them.

Steve asks, “What does Phillips want with Darcy?”

“Oh—um, he wants her observations regarding the factory and confirmation of a few statements made by Dugan and Dernier about their rescue,” she replies, sipping carefully at her gin and tonic.
Steve hums vaguely in affirmation, focused on the elegant length of Darcy’s pale neck as Bucky gently tucks one of the rebellious curls that have sprung from her updo behind her ear.

He feels a little warm.

“We’ll be there." He firmly sets his empty glass on the bar top and straightens, tugging his uniform jacket into place, “if you’ll excuse me, Peggy, I’m gonna steal a dance.”

She nods, tossing back the last of her drink and turning to the barkeep for another.

When he approaches, Bucky and Darcy separate and his friend claps him on the back, heading back to the bar for another drink. Darcy smiles and takes his hand, melting into his embrace.

He remembers the steps she’d taught him and they settle into an easy box step, the sensation of dancing so different in his new body.

She looks up at him, a smile quirking her lips, “Any idea why Agent Carter is sore at Bucky?”

She tilts her head towards the bar where Peggy has just stalked away to go sit with Howard after Bucky asked her if she’d like to dance.

“I think she’s angry he was taking liberties with my girl,” he says, grinning mischievously at her and glancing at Bucky’s bemused expression as he shrugs and takes his drink to sit between Dugan and Jones at their table.

“Oh, boy,” Darcy sighs after a few moments of thinking it over, “Is this going to be a problem? Because the rest of them—other than Will and Howard of course—think I’m Bucky’s girl.”

Steve bites his lip to keep from grinning. It must be the devil in him that’s enjoying the idea of confusing everybody a bit.

Especially Peggy.
She’s always so self-contained and it’s kinda fun to rattle her.

“Maybe—can we just not say anything to anybody unless they ask us?”

Darcy quirks her eyebrow at him, “you’re enjoying this.”

“I sorta am,” he says.

“How?”

He shrugs, “Dunno. I guess I’m done worryin’ what people think? There are more important things to worry about.” He twirls her then tugs her close again before ruefully admitting, “Also, for once someone might actually believe you’re with me instead of Bucky.”

She looks searchingly into his eyes for a long moment then sniffs, “Fine. But if this blows back on Bucky or I, you have to fix it,” she says, poking him in the chest, “We all have to work together and I don’t exactly relish the idea of people thinking I’m some cheating hussy—” she chides, then apparently loses her train of thought as she strokes her hand over the muscle she’d just prodded in fascination.

“Darce?” He asks.

“You feel so different,” she whispers, raising her blue eyes from where her fingers are inscribing a circle over his heart to look into his.

Her breath catches and he feels drowned—all other sounds in the room muffled by the beat of his own heart.

He pulls her a little closer, his hand sliding from her waist to the upper swell of her bottom. A shiver, undetectable to observers but as obvious as a semaphore signal to him, courses up her spine, and her nostrils flare as she inhales deeply.
“Stevie?” She breathes, wetting her lips with a flick of her tongue.

“Howmm?” He hums, keeping them swaying in some semblance of a dance while he tamps down the urge to press her against a wall and kiss her senseless.

“Can we go back to the hotel soon?” She says in a small, desperate voice.

Finally—he can have this.

He can let go of duty for one night. The mission is over, they are alive and together, and God—he wants them so badly.

He cocks his head, then nods slowly, catching Bucky’s eye.

As always, his friend knows exactly what’s on his mind. He rises from the table and heads in their direction.

“How ‘bout now?” Steve asks.

A slow smile spreads across her face and she replies, “Yes, please.”

Chapter End Notes

So, what did you think? Darcy is gonna be a Howlie!

Also, the chapter for next week won’t post til Saturday, cause I’m gonna be on vacation. Hopefully I’ll get a little time to write!

Thanks for all of the lovely reviews and kudos. It really makes my day.
Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

Steve, Bucky, and Darcy go to the hotel. Steve struggles with maintaining control.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

So, this chapter is a little short but the next one is quite long. It was all one thing but it became ridiculously long and I’m behind in my writing schedule so I divided it up, hopefully you all won’t be too disappointed!

Also—in case anyone wonders, Darcy brought her diaphragm to Europe. I imagine she also got a second one from Helene before she left for Army Nurses training, being the prepared sort of person she is.

Don’t get too excited, the chapter is only very mildly NSFW. The bulk of our favorite trio’s sexy times is in the next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

9:30pm

Darcy says goodnight to Howard, Will, and Peggy, who mentions the morning meeting to her while giving her a speculative look.

_Dammit._

She likes Peggy, actually thinks they could be friends, but she doesn’t really know her well enough to explain her unconventional relationship with Bucky and Steve.

She’s noticed during her time on the battlefields of Sicily and Italy that often people turn a blind eye towards things that would’ve been scandalous before the war. The specter of death looms large over them all and no one begrudges anyone finding comfort where they can.

She’s hopeful that the people who are close to them will take that attitude.
Besides, the three of them in a relationship is unconventional, scandalous if they weren’t balancing on the knife’s edge of war—but it’s not illegal.

Steve and Bucky’s love is though.

Hopefully, that will change someday. Until it does, the fact that her fellas are just as close to each other as they are to her won’t be discussed outside of the three of them.

Will has an idea, of course. He’s not stupid but he’s never pried and she’s never brought it up because it feels like it should be Bucky and Steve’s decision to tell anyway.

Howard has never blinked an eye about the three of them. He simply assigned them adjoining rooms as a matter of course.

Smart man.

She joins Steve and Bucky to say goodnight to the newly dubbed Howling Commandos and walks with them to the door, Steve taking her arm and Bucky trailing behind as they exit into the chill of the evening.

Bucky steps up to the curb, whistles and waves his arm and they scramble into the cab that pulls up.

She settles onto the worn leather seat of the car, flanked by the comforting bulk of her fellas on either side. Bucky grabs her hand, rubbing circles in her palm with his thumb as he tells the cabbie their destination.

Steve jiggles his knee beside her, his body humming with energy. Warmth radiates from him and the scent of his skin is familiar yet slightly different—she supposes his body chemistry has changed after all.

She lays her hand on his thigh and he stills, his muscles bunching under her fingers.

“Too much energy?” She whispers.
He nods, smiling wryly. “Spent hours in the meeting with Phillips, answering his questions then copying the map I saw at the factory—I’m used to moving around more.”

“Mmhmm,” she hums, stroking his leg absently. He’d told her he doesn’t need much sleep anymore and the serum makes him antsy. He needs a lot of exercise to burn off the excess energy.

She understands completely. It’s strange that he’s experiencing life the way she’s always lived it—awake when the world is sleeping and hyper aware because of his sharp senses.

Steve doesn’t have to hide his abilities like she does. He can run as fast as he wants, jump, climb—actively use his gifts because most of the people around him know what he is.

However, she still believes it’s for the best that she hides the extent of her difference. The proprietary attitude the government and military have displayed towards Steve has only convinced her more.

Steve is a scientific marvel, a poster boy for human ingenuity and brilliance. The SSR is assured that he is something they created, therefore, they control.

*She*, however, was *born* not made.

They’d be driven to figure her out what makes her tick, which would really be about controlling her. She doubts she’d ever be able to live a normal life.

She wonders if Steve will ever be allowed to do so.

She squeezes his leg, distressed by her thoughts, and he lays his hand over hers, sensing her disquiet.

“Ok, doll?” He whispers.

“Yeah—I just need to get away from prying eyes,” she sighs, eyeing the cab driver, “I feel like I haven’t actually relaxed in ages.”
Bucky nods next to her and squeezes her hand in commiseration, “Me neither. Lookin’ forward to sleepin’ in an actual bed tonight.”

Steve glances over her head at Bucky, a slight flush crawling over his cheeks from whatever he sees in his friend’s face. He says, “We’re almost there.”

His knee starts to jiggle again.

Bucky snakes his arm behind her and pulls her into his side, leaning down to breathe the barest whisper in her ear, “Though I plan on doin’ a lot more than sleepin’ in those beds.”

She shivers, the fine hairs on the nape of her neck standing up as his lips graze her skin.

Steve sucks in a breath beside her, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Bucky leans back, his lips curving in a sly grin.

“Definitely heard that, huh, punk?”

Steve groans.

“Mean,” he mutters, shifting restlessly again, and looking out the window.

Darcy can’t help but notice the bulge tenting Steve’s uniform trousers and she leans her head on his shoulder, smirking slightly.

Poor Stevie. It’s been even longer for him than for she and Bucky and she’s sure his enhanced senses are making him—well, sensitive.

They pull in front of the hotel and Steve groans low, “Oh— thanks god,” and swiftly opens the door, tugging Darcy from the cab and scarcely waiting for Bucky to pay the cabbie. She nearly runs to keep up with his long stride as they head towards the opulent entrance of the hotel, with it’s Art Deco “Savoy” sign.
Bucky chuckles behind her and she looks over her shoulder to see him grinning as he jogs across the polished marble floor of the lobby to catch up.

“Somebody’s in a hurry,” he teases, catching up to them and matching his stride to Steve’s.

“You have no idea,” Steve says.

Bucky mutters, “Oh—I think I do.”

Bucky makes small talk with the elevator attendant as they wait, asking him questions about places to see in London as he opens the brass elevator grate and escorts them into the car.

She and Bucky had only ever ridden in the elevator at the Empire State Building before this afternoon (Steve had ridden in many during hotel stays on his USO tour) and she feels a little thrill when the drop in her stomach signals their ascent. Bucky watches the attendant closely, asking him questions about how the elevator operates as they climb to the fifth floor. Steve is quiet, his eyes scanning the interior of the elevator car as they rise.

The hotel is the fanciest place she’s ever been. The ceilings are high and ornate, with sparkling chandeliers lighting every room, highly polished black and white marble floors in the lobby and wood floors covered in elegant Persian carpets elsewhere. Large windows provide views of the Thames, Strand, and the heart of London, though the picture is somewhat marred by damage from years of German bombing.

Since the advent of war, the Savoy, like much of London, has had to tighten its belt. War rationing and a drop in wealthy foreign visitors has put a dent in their business, but since the United States entered the war it has become a favorite of Americans, British politicians, and journalists.

Earlier in the day, they’d been informed at the front desk of their superior air raid shelters, located beneath the hotel in case of German bombing.

The building had suffered some damage during the Blitz in 1940, but had not closed.

It amazes her how quickly people adjust to terrifying circumstances.
Londoners are made of stern stuff for certain.

Howard had given them the keys to two rooms. One for her and one for Steve and Bucky. They’d discovered earlier in the day that the rooms were connected by an adjoining door and each room had its own ensuite bathroom. It was ridiculously luxurious and very much Howard’s style.

They arrive at their floor and Bucky tips the attendant before they exit the elevator and they walk down the hall. Plush carpet muffles their footsteps and she could almost believe they were the only guests, it’s so quiet.

They walk in silence, Bucky taking her hand as they approach their rooms.

As Steve searches his pockets for the key, Bucky presses her against the wall beside the door, leaning his elbows on either side of her head and caging her in with the length of his body.

She looks into his silvery blue eyes and cups his cheek in her hand, dragging the pad of her thumb over the pink fullness of his lower lip, “Someone might come along—” she whispers.

He leans closer and she closes her eyes, tilting her head to the side as he traces his lips along her jaw, “Don’t care—can’t wait, baby,” he murmurs as she inhales the scent of him, sandalwood mixed with the smoke from his cigarettes and the whisky he’s been drinking.

His sucks the flesh just beneath her ear where her pulse is suddenly hammering and a tremor runs through her, her nipples pressing diamond hard against the lace of her bra.

“Bucky—” she breathes, fisting his hair in her hands and arching under the press of his lips.

Steve growls next them, muttering a frustrated, “goddammit,” before he finally finds the room key and unlocks the door.

He yanks at Bucky’s arm and her dark haired love laughs, stepping back from her and tilting his head towards the open door, “After you, doll.”
She rubs her fingers over the fading bruise on her neck and teases, “Such a gentleman,” and sidles past him through the door.

She crosses the room to flick on the bedside light next to one of the two full size beds before turning the crystal knob on the door separating their room from hers and opening the door. She glances back at them and says, “Gimme a couple minutes to freshen up fellas.”

A look of frustration briefly crosses Steve’s face and she pauses, “Bucky, why don’t you help Stevie loosen up while I’m busy—he seems tense.”

Bucky, who’s already shrugged out of his jacket and thrown it over the bench at the end of the bed closest to the door, raises an eyebrow as he loosens his tie and pulls it free from his collar.

“Sure thing, doll”

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Steve holds himself still as he leans his back against the door, a slight tremor in his fingers the only outward sign of his tension.

Sometimes he struggles to hold his strength back.

Sometimes, like now as he watches Bucky move towards him, his silvery blue eyes intent, he has to stop himself from just taking what he wants.

And he wants Bucky and Darcy so badly.

It’s been ages since anyone has touched him with care. He’s been poked and prodded, been on the receiving end of unwelcome contact from men and women alike, but he’s missed being close to his loves—skin to skin.

He hadn’t realized how much he needed Bucky and Darcy until they were apart—he relies on them in ways that hadn’t been obvious to him when they were together and he feels like a fool for taking that love for granted as he pursued his dream of joining the military.
He doesn’t regret volunteering for Project Rebirth.

He wouldn’t wish that away.

But he regrets the single-minded pigheadedness of how he got there.

He listens with half an ear to Darcy in the next room, the thunk of her shoes being discarded, the rustle of her clothes, the sound of running water in the bathroom as she hums to herself and he struggles to calm his racing heart.

Bucky steps closer, his brow furrowed with concern, “ya okay there, punk?” He says.

Steve realizes the tremor from his fingers has spread to the rest of him, and a shiver runs through him, the hairs on his arms standing on end.

He swallows, “I think so? It’s—um—just a lot,” he shrugs and looks helplessly at Bucky, “sometimes, it’s a lot to process.”

Bucky pulls him into his arms, holding him tightly as Steve shakes against him, tears blurring his eyes as he presses his face against his friends neck. The familiar smell and feel of him is grounding, and he sighs, relaxing into Bucky’s hold.

“Missed ya so much, jerk,” he mutters against Bucky’s neck and wraps his arms around his friend.

“Me too, Stevie. Thought I was a goner there in the factory—“ Bucky mutters, “kept thinkin’ bout how I hadn’t seen ya in so long.”

“I came as soon as I could—I’ll always come for you, Buck,” Steve says.

After a moment, Bucky steps back, his arms still around him and smirks, “Will ya?” He teases, dropping his hand between them to stroke over his cock which is doing it’s damnedest to bust out of his trousers.
Steve presses his hips forward before he can even think about it, rocking his length against his friends fingers, “Oh hell—yes,” he says and lets go of his tightly leashed control.

He pushes Bucky back, walking him into the wall and spearing his hands through his dark hair, lowering his lips to his in a ravenous kiss.

He can’t even be gentle, their teeth and lips clash as both of them work to find the way they fit together now.

Steve pulls at Bucky’s shirt with greedy hands, trying to get them up under it to touch skin as his friend tugs on the lapels of his jacket.

Bucky pulls his mouth away from his with a gasp and Steve sucks at his neck, trying to be careful not to bruise him but probably not succeeding. Bucky groans, “Steve—” but he barely hears him, so focused is he on unbuttoning Bucky's shirt, and pushing it out of his way, “Steve!” Bucky says louder, tugging on his hair in an attempt to get his attention.

Steve raises dazed eyes to his friend’s, his heart pounding in his ears.

“Slow down, punk—” Bucky gently runs his fingers through his hair and says, “we have all night.”

Steve nods, taking a calming breath and stepping back.

Bucky steps closer and says softly, “Besides, I wanna get a good look at you.”

He steps around Steve and shrugs out of his shirt, tossing it on the bench at the end of the bed and sitting down to unlace his boots.

Steve stands still near the door, feeling unsure for a moment til Bucky raises an eyebrow at him, pulling his undershirt off, dog tags jingling, and says, “Well?” grinning in challenge.

Steve ducks his head, suddenly shy.
It’s strange—he wants Bucky to like the way he looks but he doesn’t want him to *prefer* the way he is now. He still feels like that little guy on the inside and he still considers that guy to be the *real* him.

Even now, he feels awkward in his skin.

Bucky looks at him steadily, crooking his fingers in a *come on* gesture—prompting him to unbutton his jacket and cast it aside, untying his tie, then slowly unbuttoning his shirt with shaking fingers. He slips out of it and casts it aside, swiftly following it with his undershirt.

When he stands with his chest bared, Bucky breathes, “Whoa.”

The air stirs behind him and Bucky looks past him towards the open door between their room and the next as Darcy whispers, “Holy shit, Stevie.”

He continues to look at Bucky as she steps up behind him, the warmth of her body radiating against the skin of his back. Her breath ghosts over the skin between his shoulder blades as she runs the fingers of one hand from the nape of his neck to the base of his spine. She scratches her fingernails against him and he closes his eyes and tips his head back response, his nipples hardening and goosebumps raising across his flesh.

Darcy mutters, “Howard wasn’t exaggerating. *At all*.”

She traces the breadth of his shoulders with her fingers and he opens his eyes again as she circles in front of him to lay her hand over his pounding heart.

“You’re so warm,” she says, tilting her head curiously, half of her dark hair is trailing over her shoulders and the rest still caught up in pins, her hairbrush dangling forgotten from her other hand.

Steve reaches for her, burrowing his fingers through her hair and plucking the remaining pins from it before tucking them into the pocket of the blue robe she’s wearing.

He takes the brush from her hand and laces his fingers with hers, leading her to where Bucky is silently watching from the bench. He sits beside his friend and tugs Darcy into his lap with her legs draped over Bucky’s thighs. He cards his fingers through the silken waves of her dark hair, grown
long enough to hang between her shoulder blades, then runs the brush through it, methodically working the tangles from her hair. Bucky rubs his hands over her stocking clad feet, slowly slipping his hands higher and higher on her legs, tracing along the edge where her stockings end and the bare flesh of her thighs begins.

She sighs, relaxing into the brush strokes and he struggles to focus on the familiar action of brushing her hair rather than the sight of her stocking clad legs.

When he’s finished he passes the brush to Bucky who adds it to the pile of clothes beside him as Darcy turns towards Steve. She digs her teeth into her plush bottom lip and pulls her robe up further around her thighs, freeing her legs enough to kick one over him to sit astride his lap. He rests his hands on her hips and pulls her closer—her small, capable hands on his shoulders.

He traces one finger along the deep vee of her robe, parting it further to reveal the pale curves of her breasts. He gently traces a finger over them, marveling at the silky feel of her skin.

Memory hadn’t done justice to how soft she feels, the curves of her body cradled against the harder angles of his.

He can hear her heartbeat, smell the dampness between her thighs, and feel the heat radiating from her skin. In fact, whatever control he’d managed to gain from his months in the lab and with the USO is rapidly slipping away.

He clears his throat as her fingers stroke over his shoulders and across his collarbones, “I need ya to do somethin’,” he says, darting a glance at Bucky who’s moved closer on the bench to slip his hand further up Darcy’s thigh.

“What?” Darcy says.

“I need you to be in control—the two of ya,” he pauses, rubbing the back of his neck and feeling like his skin is too tight, “this body —my body is really strong. And I’m really excited right now.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow, “Worried ya might hurt one of us?”

Steve sighs with relief that he doesn’t have to say more, “Yes.”
Darcy and Bucky share a look and his friend smiles, a devilish glint in his eyes.

“I have an idea,” he says.

_Oh boy._

The Savoy, London

More Savoy info

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is a little late in the day—I arrived home later than expected from vacation.

Hope everyone enjoys this! Feel free to leave kudos or comments to let me know how I’m doing.
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

Bucky helps Steve control himself, Darcy gets rewarded, Bucky tells them a little about his ordeal in the factory.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

Very NSFW, guys. Find yourself someplace to be alone before reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bucky tugs on the knots in the Army uniform neckties tethering Steve’s wrists to the bedposts, satisfied they will hold—well, at least serve as a reminder for the punk to manage his strength. He has no doubt Steve could rip the bedposts right off the bed frame if he wanted to.

He looks down the golden length of his friend’s body, now clad in only his undershorts—traveling over the broad shoulders to his narrow waist, the taut muscles rippling under his supple skin.

His shoulder to waist ratio is ridiculous—Steve’s body is a work of art exemplifying the perfect male form. It’s hard not to stare.

Bucky eyes the prodigious tent in his friend’s shorts and ponders the potential changes in that area as well.

Hmmm.

“Ok, Stevie?” Darcy says.

She kneels on the bed beside Steve, stroking her fingers over the defined muscles of his chest and arms with a slightly dazed expression. The edges of her robe are split over her thighs, revealing the lacy bands at the tops of her stockings.
His friend is mesmerized, his blue eyes glued to their girl’s legs and barely paying attention to Bucky as he finishes tightening the bindings around his wrists.

Punk and his love of stockings—Darcy knows him well.

His friend sighs dreamily, “very okay,” and Bucky snorts in amusement as Darcy kisses along Steve’s jaw to his neck, sucking forcefully there for a moment and making the blond squirm, his back arching slightly and a flush spreading over his skin.

As soon as Bucky started tying Steve’s hands to the bedposts she’d slithered onto the bed next to him, leaning down to kiss him soft and slow, as if in apology for trussing him up.

Thing is—he’s pretty sure Stevie is A-okay with the arrangement.

He knows he is.

Calling the shots is doing something for him, some darker part of him enjoys the feeling of domination and some broken part of him craves the control.

Especially after what happened with—

Yeah, not gonna think about that.

Bucky unbuttons his trousers, slipping out of them and his undershorts as he gazes unwavering at Darcy’s red lips trailing sucking kisses across Steve’s skin, leaving a constellation of tiny bruises in their wake. Finally, he pulls off his socks to throw them on the bench with the rest of their clothes.

Darcy flicks her eyes appreciatively over Bucky and winks as she lifts her mouth from Steve’s neck, rubbing her fingers curiously over the new bruise she’s made and saying, “how long till it fades away?”

“Dunno—they didn’t actually test that in the lab. Maybe you should test it—for science,” he teases
breathlessly and Darcy smirks and works her mouth lower, nipping at his collarbone.

Bucky climbs on the end of the bed, crawling between Steve’s legs and tracing his fingers over the taut muscles of his thighs. They’re massive. He imagines just the bones of Steve’s new legs are the circumference of his former legs.

Darcy pauses in her exploration of the ridges of defined muscle on Steve’s abdomen to share a wondering glance with Bucky and he tunnels his hand under her dark hair to pull her close, kissing her pillow soft lips. They get lost for a while, Bucky twisting his hand in her hair to tilt her head, slanting his mouth against hers as she opens for him, their tongues stroking against each other.

The bedposts creak and Bucky pulls his mouth from Darcy’s to look at his friend’s flushed face—his pupils blown so wide his eyes look nearly black.

Darcy licks her lips, resting a hand on Steve’s chest and teasingly circling one hardened nipple with her fingernail, “someone is impatient,” she says.

Steve shivers and his shoulders flex, the bed frame creaking again under the force of it.

“Settle down, punk,” Bucky says and works his fingers under the edge of Steve’s undershorts, a feeling of anticipation buzzing through him— *it’s like Christmas came early*—as he tugs them down and off of him. 

*Holy hell.*

Steve’s cock is as much of a work of art as the rest of him.

His friend had always been surprisingly well endowed for a little guy, but now—it’s to scale with the rest of him. He’s grown a little bit longer and significantly thicker than before.

He and Darcy grin gleefully at each other.

She unconsciously licks her lips as she strokes a single finger from base to tip then back again before encircling Steve’s cock with fingers which *absolutely do not meet.*
Steve groans, his hips jerking and says, “just so ya know—I’m still gettin’ used to how sensitive things are—I’ll—mmm—probably finish fast.”

Darcy feathers her fingers over the length of him studiously, twisting them around the exposed head and slicking her hand with the moisture there, “How fast?” She asks, pausing to lick her palm, a curious expression on her face.

Steve’s breath hitches and he stammers, “Uh—a couple minutes at the most? I was jerkin’ off all the time in the first few months after the serum. Had to—got hard all the time,” he pauses, looking embarrassed, “But I’ll recover real quick and last longer after the first one.”

She nods as Bucky grins and runs his palms up Steve’s muscled thighs, then diverts course to curiously fondle his friend’s heavy balls.

_Damn. They’re bigger too._

Steve shivers, muttering curses as Darcy leans forward to circle the tip of his cock with her tongue before slowly taking him into her mouth.

Bucky pushes her hair back, draping it over her shoulder so he can watch her lips stretch around Steve’s girth, taking more than half of his length in before she pulls up, her cheeks hollowing out at the tip before she plunges down again, taking a bit more of him in.

_Jesus Christ. He could come just from watching._

Steve twitches helplessly, “Ah —goddamn , feels so good.”

His cursing is a sure sign that he’s almost at his end so Bucky crawls up the bed to look into Steve’s heavy lidded blue eyes, leaning down to kiss him, rocking his needy cock against his friend’s hip as their tongues tangle.

With his eyes closed and his hands in Steve’s soft blond hair, he can almost believe he’s kissing little Steve. His lips feel the way they’ve always felt against his, his hair has the same texture, and he makes the same humming noises of pleasure and frustration that he’s always made.
This is Stevie shaking against him.

His oldest friend.

His love.

He pulls back, looking into Steve’s sky blue eyes as his trembling increases, the mattress springs squeaking as his hips vibrate against Darcy’s mouth, little gasps escaping him as he babbles *oh god, oh god, oh god.*

The bedposts creak ominously but do not break as Steve’s back arches, the muscles in his arms bulging as he comes—his eyes fluttering closed and his angel face contorting with pleasure.

After a few moments he stills, collapsing breathless against the pillows.

Darcy crawls up to lay face down on his chest, her head turned towards where Bucky lays on his side next to Steve. She sweeps her index finger along the edge of her lush mouth and licks it.

Her brow wrinkles and she hums, “Hmmm, tastes pretty much the same—maybe a little less bitter and uh—there’s a lot more of it than before.”

Steve chuckles hoarsely, “Good to know.”

Bucky grins and leans over Steve’s shoulder to kiss her, licking the seam of her plush lips and teasing them open. The faint taste of Steve’s release doesn’t bother him that much—she mostly tastes like the whiskey they’d been drinking at the bar and he tugs her towards him, sliding her off of Steve to lay between them as he runs his lips along her jaw.

“Baby, you were so good to Stevie—you deserve a reward,” he murmurs.

“Oh?” She says, wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling him closer.
He looks over her head at Steve, who’s turned his head on the pillow to watch them.

“Mmhmm—hey Stevie, if I untie ya are ya gonna be good?” He says.

Steve dazedly nods, “Yeah—that took the edge off.”

“Alright, then.”

Bucky pecks Darcy on the lips before he stands and unknots the ties from Steve’s wrists, a task made a bit more difficult because his friend had pulled the knots so tight in his excitement. When Steve’s arms are free he grabs Darcy, rolling her under him with a playful growl, kissing her all over her face as she giggles.

Bucky smacks Steve’s firm ass, “Hey—stop squashing our girl. I need ya to help me reward her.”

Steve reluctantly rolls onto his back, one blond eyebrow arched in inquiry and his cock already at half mast.

_He wasn’t kidding about a quick recovery._

“Sit up with your back against the headboard, punk,” he says and watches as his friend scoots up to the head of the bed.

Bucky leans down, pulling Darcy to her knees and loosening the knot of her blue bathrobe. He slowly parts the edges of it to find she’s wearing nothing but her garters and stockings under it and raises an eyebrow at her little smirk. He slides the material down, his fingers stroking over the silken skin of her shoulders, the dip of her lower back, and finally to the upper swell of her ass—the robe falling away to pool over Steve’s legs. His friend sighs wistfully, tracing his fingers over her black satin garter belt, then over the curves of her hips to the lacy edge of her stockings.

Bucky grabs the robe and tosses it to the end of the bed.

“Doll—go sit in front of Steve and lean back against him,” he orders.
She looks over her shoulder at Steve, who’s sprawled against the headboard, beautiful and disheveled. He curls a finger in a *come here* motion, grinning and spreading his legs so she can crawl up between them, settling her back against his chest.

Bucky walks to the end of the bed, absorbing the picture the two of them make. Steve’s large muscular form is wrapped around Darcy’s small curvy one, her dark hair spilling over the solid wall of his chest, her black stockings sharply contrasting against her moonlight skin.

“Beautiful,” he breathes, crawling up between Steve’s legs to kiss her, pressing her back into his friends chest as she hooks one leg around his waist to pull him closer.

After a few minutes, he’s nearly forgotten his plan he’s so absorbed in the soft sensation of her curves against him, her hips rocking up as he circles one tight pink nipple with his tongue.

Steve squirms restlessly, and mutters, “Are ya tryin’ to torture me or reward Darcy?”

Bucky releases the nipple he’d sucked into his mouth with a pop, glancing up at Steve’s pained expression.

“Oh—sorry, got a little sidetracked,” he smirks as Darcy digs her heel insistently into the back of his thigh.

“You’re not sorry at all, jerk,” Steve mutters.

*He’s really not.*

He reluctantly pulls back from Darcy, disentangling her hands from his hair as she grumbles in complaint and sits back on his heels, running his fingers over the lacy bands at the tops of her stockings. Steve slides his arms around her, his big hands cupping her breasts before he traces his fingertips over her damp nipples. Darcy shivers, arching her back reflexively as his friend gently rolls the hardened pink nubs between his thumbs and index fingers the way she likes.

His sky blue eyes are intense as he watches Bucky hands rove over Darcy’s stocking clad legs before hooking his hands beneath her knees to spread them wide, draping them over Steve’s thighs.
Darcy flushes pink and turns her head, biting her lip hard as she rests her cheek against Steve’s chest.

“Babydoll—” Bucky croons, “so beautiful,” the muscles in her thighs tighten and she closes her eyes, shuddering as he strokes his fingers over the slick cleft between her legs, “look at me.”

... 

After a moment, Darcy turns her head and looks at Bucky, her blood singing in her ears as she resists the urge to close her legs.

Steve’s chest is hot against her back and his heart is pounding like a bass drum against her shoulder blades and all she can think is she feels so naked.

It’s strange, even after all the time she’s known these men, experienced all the ways they fit together, sometimes she still feels a bit shy. Here she is, her legs spread wide over Steve’s thighs with Bucky kneeling in front of her and oh god it makes her so hot that she wonders if she’s going to hell and she struggles with it.

Until she looks into Bucky’s silvery blue eyes and sees the love and want there.

She slowly relaxes against Steve, knowing that she loves them and they love her and nothing anyone says will change that. Even here, in the midst of this godforsaken war she feels so damned lucky—she’s not gonna waste a single minute she has with her loves.

Bucky must see something of what she’s feeling because he leans in and gives her the softest sweetest kiss, like he’s promising her something.

And she wraps her arms around his neck, kissing him back, trying to make up for all of the nights they’ve been apart and all of the pain he’s suffered and every last terrible thing in the world as she closes her eyes and melts into the sensation of his lips on hers and his hands gripping the soft curves of her hips.

He pulls back when they need to breathe and whispers against her lips, “Love you so much, babydoll.”
Her eyes burn with tears and nods, “So much Bucky.”

Steve’s arms tighten around her and she tips her head back to graze the underside of his jaw with her lips, “Love you, Stevie.”

Steve’s face crumples slightly, like he’s fighting tears and he chokes, “You too, Darce.”

She pokes Bucky in the chest, “Kiss him, stupid.”

And Bucky grins and presses against her to get closer to Steve, murmuring, “Love you, punk,” before he kisses him.

Both of their hearts begin to gallop and a fine tremor shakes Steve as he spears his fingers through Bucky’s dark hair, their kiss going from soft and sweet to feverish want in seconds.

Darcy squirms between them, rocking her hips against the hardness of Steve’s cock at her back and Bucky’s at her front.

She licks and nips at Bucky’s collarbone, wiggling to get a better angle and after a moment he pulls away from Steve and teases, “now who’s impatient?”

She rolls her hips against him suggestively, pressing back against Steve and he groans, pushing her hair aside to mouth her neck.

“You said something about a reward?” She says.

“Mnhmm, I haven’t forgotten ya,” Bucky sends a loaded look over her shoulder at his friend, “Help me out Stevie?”

Steve lifts his lips from behind her ear and says, “sure thing—“ and hooks his arms under her knees and pins them back, spreading her legs wide and immobilizing her like a butterfly on a pin.

Bucky lips curl in a slow grin as he lowers his mouth to nuzzle at the tops of her breasts, “Now
you’re in trouble,” he says, circling one nipple with his tongue and pulling lightly at the other one with his fingers.

_God—he mouth._

Her breath stutters, hips jerking reflexively against Steve’s hold as Bucky slides his fingers down her belly to rub achingly slow circles over her clit.

She arches her back, lifting her arms behind her to drape over Steve’s shoulders, scratching her nails against the soft hair at the nape of his neck. He turns his head against her arm, sealing his lips over the pulse point at her wrist as his hips jump against her.

Bucky is working his mouth lower, pausing to lick around her belly button before nipping lightly at her hip, circling his tongue on her skin as he slides his fingers away from her clit. She whines in frustration at the loss and he prods at her entrance in response, sliding a finger in part way then out then all the way in, moving his mouth lower to lick a lingering stripe between her legs. She jumps a little, letting out a little _yip_ when Bucky skims over her clit—she’s so on edge that she finds herself trembling. He does it again. And again.

“ _Bucky—_ stop teasing,” she pleads.

He looks up the length of her body and meets her eyes, his silvery blue gaze wicked as he inserts a second finger and curls it inside of her to stroke against that one spot that feels _so, so good._

“How recovered are ya Stevie?” Bucky growls.

“Hmm?” Steve hums distractedly.

“How ya _hard_?”

“Y-Yeah—” Steve stutters.

Bucky smirks, “I have an idea.”
Oh god.

Bucky says, “lift her up, punk.”

Steve raises an eyebrow in question but then a lightbulb goes off in his head.

Oh.

He slides his hands from under her knees to the lower curve of her plush bottom, lifting her off of his lap until her head is nearly even with his. She turns her head against his shoulder, her hair brushing against the side of his face as she mouths at the hinge of his jaw.

Bucky reaches under her for Steve’s cock, encircling it with his fingers and stroking up the stiffened length of it.

Steve whines, “Bucky—*dammit.*”

His friend chuckles, a low dark sound, “Just makin’ sure you’re ready—now lower her down—slow.”

He lowers her, Bucky’s hand holding him erect and lining him up so he slowly sinks into her. She gasps and he grits his teeth, the feeling of her enveloping him somehow tighter and hotter than he remembers it being.

Bucky leans forward, turning Darcy’s face towards him with gentle fingers, “Alright, doll?” He whispers, “our fella is kinda,” he glances down between them. “*gifted.*”

“Mmhmm—” she slurs, “it’s a tight fit—but I’m okay.”
After a moment she wiggles impatiently under his hands so he slides them out from under her and she sinks the last couple inches until he’s fully seated inside of her and she sighs, “Oh—,” and arches her back slightly to rock her hips experimentally against him.

Steve groans, clamping his hands around her waist to hold her still.

“Lemme get used to it—Jesus, feels like it’s my first time.”

Bucky chortles and says, “Lay back and relax Stevie—I’m gonna reward Darcy now.”

He huffs out a breath and leans against the headboard with Darcy reclining against him as Bucky leans in and starts licking circles around her clit, his fingers stealthily reaching lower to fondle Steve’s balls and occasionally flit around the point where he and Darcy are tightly joined.

Jesus Christ.

He’s killing him.

Darcy trembles, her internal muscles clamping down on his overly sensitive cock and a high pitched whine escapes her as her hips strain against his hands in aborted thrusts.

Once he adjusts to the heat and tightness of her, he slides his hands to her sides, palming her breasts and letting her have her way. She rocks and clenches around him, her soft voice breaking as she chants, oh god, oh oh oh and the deafening roar of his heart soon overlays the noises she’s making when she finally lets go.

She convulses helplessly against him as he passes his fingers over the hardened points of her nipples, and he shudders as a flood of wet heat glazes his cock.

He holds still—trembling on the edge of orgasm and refusing to let go just yet.

As her tremors slacken, Bucky lifts his head from between her legs, his mouth glistening and a smug grin curling his lips.
Steve bites his lip, breathing slowly through his nose as he experimentally slips back and forth inside of her.

Bucky eyes Steve for a moment before smirking wickedly and sliding his fingers behind his balls and pressing hard—causing Steve to lose all semblance of control.

“Ah shit—goddammit, you jerk.”

He grips Darcy’s waist and thrusts hard—pushing and pulling her against his straining hips with abandon, his vision whiting out as he comes so hard he loses feeling in his extremities.

He’s so dazed he scarcely pays attention as Bucky lifts Darcy from his lap a minute later and follows her down to the mattress to kiss her passionately.

000000

Bucky rests his elbows on either side of Darcy’s shoulders to take most of his weight off of her as she smiles up at him, her storm blue eyes shining and her face utterly relaxed.

“That was some reward,” she breathes, “I think we may have broken Stevie.”

They glance towards the blond, who lays spread eagled with his eyes closed, a hazy smile on his face.

Bucky snorts, “Not for long—super soldier.”

Her lips quirk playfully, “Good to know we can briefly incapacitate him if necessary.”

Bucky snorts, leaning down to press a kiss to her wicked mouth.

She wraps her arms around his neck, pulling him closer still, until they are aligned from chest to hips,
their legs intertwined.

She pulls back after a few moments, breathless, and rocks her hips against his neglected cock, “seems like you’re the only one who hasn’t gotten a reward,"

“Care to do something about it?” He says.

“Mmm—yes,” she whispers, wrapping her legs high around his waist.

Things move fast after that.

He’s been hard for the better part of an hour and the little show she and Steve had put on had left him in quite a state.

He nudges the blunt head of his cock against her entrance and she presses one dainty heel into his ass, insistently tilting her hips against him. She’s slippery with her own arousal and Steve’s release, decadently slick and tight as she rolls her pelvis to engulf him.

He’s helpless to go slow—he bottoms out inside her as she threads her hands through his hair, nipping at his bottom lip, licking over the small sting before tilting her head to slot their mouths together.

This. This.

Is everything.

He’d been so lost.

He’d thought he was never coming back.

He’d thought he’d never feel this way again.
Steve rolls over beside them and runs a big hand down Bucky’s back, his fingers gentle against his skin. He shivers, lifting his mouth from Darcy’s to trail kisses down the length of her neck, his eyes shifting to meet his friend’s sky blue gaze.

Steve watches them, his blue eyes drowsy and his cheeks flushed—his expression one of such love that he’s overcome, his heart burning like a coal in his chest as Darcy turns her head to kiss him just under his ear.

“Love you, baby,” she whispers against his skin and Bucky closes his eyes, rocking his hips slow into her, luxuriating in the sensation and ignoring the burning feeling in his chest.

It feels so good, everything is more sensitive than he can recall feeling since he was a green boy, it’s like his cock is a lightning rod and Darcy is the storm.

“Mmmm—I’m so close love—can you go again,” he gasps.

Steve moves his hand from his lower back to stroke one long finger along his crack, pressing lightly against his hole and it’s like every pleasure center in his body lights up at once and he’s falling—

“Oh—oh, god,” he gasps and Darcy pulls him closer whispering, “Let go—it’s all right,” she presses her lips to his neck like a benediction and he comes, conscious thought washing away in the intense flood of pleasure.

When he returns to himself he feels raw, exposed—like the walls he’s put up to make it through the last few days have crumbled. He hides his face against Darcy’s neck and shudders as the dam finally breaks.

Darcy holds Bucky as he cries, his tears wetting her neck as he buries his face under her hair.

She shares a troubled look with Steve and he scoots closer, wrapping his arm around the both of them and pressing a kiss to the top of Darcy’s head.
After a minute, Bucky softens enough to slip out of her and he sighs regretfully, lifting his tear stained face from her neck and wiping the back of his hand across his eyes.

“Sorry, Doll,” he murmurs, his eyes downcast.

“Nothing to be sorry for,” she says, nudging him onto his side between she and Steve and turning to look at him.

Steve flicks off the bedside light and pulls the covers over the three of them, fitting himself around Bucky’s back, his big hand resting over his friend’s heart.

In the near dark, the tension in Bucky’s shoulders melts somewhat and he begins to talk.

“I thought I was gonna die in that factory—there were times when I wished for it. It would have been a relief.”

Steve’s heart rate escalates and Darcy grips his forearm in warning—now is not the time for him to fly off the handle.

Bucky sighs and continues, “Then I’d think of you two, and I—” he chokes, his voice failing for a moment, “and I didn’t want it to be over, I didn’t want everything to end—it kept me going.”

Steve’s arm tightens around Bucky and she wiggles closer, her face so close to his that they are breathing each other’s air. Even in the dark, she can see the wet shine of his eyes.

He whispers, “I don’t remember all of it—I was delirious from a fever when they took me to Zola. He stuck a needle in my arm and shot me up with stuff that made me feel outta my head, asked me a bunch of questions—and shocked me with a prod, over and over. Not sure what he wanted really—I’m not sure what he was doing, but he seemed real disappointed when he had to leave me behind.”

They lay in silence for a few minutes, absorbing the impact of Bucky’s recollections.

Bucky chuckles halfheartedly, attempting to lighten the mood, “and then this punk shows up, and I was so far gone I thought he was an angel.”
Steve’s voice is rough when says, “Well—I am real pretty now.”

Bucky snorts and Darcy smacks Steve’s arm playfully, and says, “You were always pretty, Stevie.”

Bucky murmurs, “Pretty as a picture,” and yawns, closing his eyes, obviously exhausted and unwilling to talk any further.

Darcy runs her fingers through his hair over and over as Steve holds him, his body molded around him like a protective wall. Eventually, Bucky’s breathing evens out and deepens and his body goes slack, drifting into sleep.

She squirms, the uncomfortable stickiness between her thighs making itself known.

She edges off the bed, rising to her feet and throwing her arms over her head to stretch.

“Darce?” Steve whispers.

She looks over her shoulder to see Steve gazing steadily at her in the dark.

“I’m gonna go clean up,” she whispers, motioning towards the door that adjoins the two rooms.

“Gonna take a bath?” He asks.

“Yeah,” she’d promised herself a long hot bath as soon as she’d noticed the beautiful clawfoot tub in the adjoining bathroom, deep enough to soak in water up to her shoulders.

He snuggles against Bucky’s back, sighing with contentment.

“Alright if I join ya in a bit?” He murmurs, his words muffled by Bucky’s hair.
“Sure,” she says, slipping through the doorway to her room.

A half hour later Steve disentangles himself from Bucky’s sleep leaden limbs and slips out of the bed, pulling on his undershorts and turning to tuck the extra pillows around his friend, before pulling the blanket over his shoulders.

Bucky doesn’t stir, his breathing heavy and even.

He follows the sound of lapping water and Darcy’s low humming to the next room, tapping on the door and entering after she says, “Come in, Stevie.”

She hasn’t turned on the overhead lights, opting for the softer light of several candles she’s placed on the vanity next to the sink and on the edge of the tub.

Fragrant steam wafts from the water, she’s sitting with her back against the end of the tub, her shoulders and head the only thing visible over the edge of it. Her skin glows pink from the heat of the water, her dark hair is piled on top of her head and a book dangles from her fingers.

She quirks a smile at him, “Are you gonna get in?”

“If it’s alright,” he says.

She rolls her eyes, “of course it is, silly.”

He slips out of his boxers and she pulls the plug from the drain with her toes, placing her book on the closed lid of the toilet.

She explains, “I better let some of the water out or it’s gonna end up on the floor.”

She scoots forward so he can step in behind her, sinking into the hot water with a sigh.
She replaces the plug and leans back against his chest and he slouches so his neck can rest on the rolled edge of the tub, arms resting along the sides. For a few minutes they are quiet, enjoying the heat and quiet comfort of being together.

“Bucky alright?” she whispers.

“Mmhmm—he’s asleep. Still recovering, I guess.”

Bucky’s always been so strong, it’s unnerving to see him so torn up.

He still has questions about what Zola was doing in that lab—Bucky doesn’t seem to know and the explosions at the factory destroyed any documentation that may have given them a clear idea.

Darcy interrupts his line of thinking when she says, “Any idea what Phillips wants to talk to me about tomorrow?”

Steve sighs, “Peggy said he wants confirmation about some the things the others said when they were debriefed,” he pauses, wrapping his arm under her breasts to pull her more firmly against him. “Be careful, Darce—Phillips is real interested in you now. I guess he didn’t know about your time with Erskine and Howard assumed he did.”

She tenses slightly against him, “Didn’t Abraham mention me when he went back to work at the SSR labs?”

“I guess not. Maybe he didn’t think it was relevant—maybe he thought to keep you off of the radar. Dunno. He destroyed all of his notes leading up to the experiment and the SSR’s been trying to duplicate the serum ever since.”

Darcy swishes her legs restlessly in the water, leaning forward to grab the bar of soap from the soap dish and absentmindedly lathers a washcloth.

“What kinda stuff have they been doing to figure it out?” she says.
“Takin’ lots of my blood and studying it. Reverse engineering is what Howard called it. They haven’t had much success,” he says.

“Huh,” she says, running the washcloth up and down her arms and legs then leaning forward a bit to glance over her shoulder at him, “do my back for me?”

“Sure.”

She wordlessly hands him the washcloth and leans forward, bending her knees to rest her forehead against them as she relaxes under the slow circles Steve rubs over the slick skin of her back.

“I’m not exactly sure what Abraham did after he left the hospital, but I’m fairly certain it had to do with whatever he discovered in my blood,” she murmurs.

Steve draws circles in the lather on her back with his fingers and she shivers, goosebumps raising on her skin.

“I figured,” he says.

“I’ll just play dumb. Abraham was pretty secretive so it will be believable that I don’t know much.”

“True,” Steve says, dipping the washcloth in the water to wring it out and slowly rinses the soap from Darcy’s back and shoulders, leaning forward to kiss the nape of her neck before pulling her back against his chest.

She says, “Your legs are longer than mine—use your toes to turn on tap for more hot water.”

He obliges her and she sighs, sinking down further against him with the fresh influx of heat.

“There’s another thing,” he says.

“Hmmm?”
She tips her head back and he brings his mouth close to her ear, and kisses the edge of her jaw. “I told Phillips I wanted you to join the squad I’ve put together to go after Hydra as our medic,” she makes a sound of surprise and he’s quick to add, “but you can stay in the SSR London lab with Howard and Will if you’d rather not.”

She’s quiet for a moment, one finger rubbing slow circles on his thigh as she thinks.

“I want to be with you and Bucky,” she says quietly.

He sighs in relief, “I wasn’t sure if it was the right thing to do, but I thought you’d wanna and I’m a little leery about leaving you with the SSR brass, especially with Phillips so curious.”

“Not to mention, I’m a good shot I—I can help,” she stammers slightly.

“Yeah—of that I have no doubt.”

“Alright then,” she says, resting her head against his chest again.

“Alright,” he whispers.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry everyone for the erratic update schedule! I’m still not back on track with my writing. Vacation was lovely, but I couldn’t write a thing so I’m a bit behind, not to mention the agony of getting closer to the tragic end of CA:TFA.

Also, I have read every single comment you kind readers have left me and I cannot overstate how much it helps me to stay motivated when I feel like my writing is a silly pastime. I’m glad people find enjoyment from this and let me know! I’m going to respond to all of the comments left for the last two chapters (I’m so behind! Sorry!) in the next couple days.
Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

Darcy interviews with Phillips. Steve gets tangled up with Lorraine. Peggy gets pissed. Howard shows Steve some gadgets. Darcy and Peggy have a conversation and come to an understanding.

Chapter Notes

No beta

Some dialogue lifted from CA:TFA.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

November 12, 1943

SSR Headquarters, London

9am

Darcy follows General Phillips into his office, glancing back once to wink at Steve, who’s sitting in one of the too small for his frame chairs in the outer office under the predatory eye of Phillips pretty blonde secretary, Lorraine.

The frown line between his eyes deepens slightly with concern as he watches her go. Poor fella, fending off the flirtatious secretary while trying to listen in on her meeting with Phillips is probably more frustration than he wants to deal with at the moment.

Luckily, Peggy should be along soon to bring him down to Howard’s lab and he can escape Lorraine’s covetous stare.

Phillips gestures to one of the uncomfortable chairs in front of his desk and moves to seat himself behind it, silently removing his reading glasses from his pocket and donning them to read over some papers on his desk. There are a few drawn out silent moments before he shoots her a sharp look over the top of them.
She sighs internally. She’s experienced this type of intimidation tactic from hospital administrators in the past. She forces herself to relax, amusing herself by listening to the stilted conversation between Steve and Lorraine in the next room.

The squeak of Phillips leather chair signals the General leaning back, his elbows resting on the padded armrests and his fingers steepled under his chin.

“Lieutenant Garland, you’re here today because I need your version of the events at the Hydra weapons factory in Austria,” he finally says.

“Yes, sir,” she says, keeping her posture straight and her gaze steady.

“Why don’t you start at the beginning,” he says, “starting with how you came to be involved in Captain Rogers defiance of orders.”

She and Steve had discussed the events at the factory in depth the night before, and thanks to his (and her) perfect recall, she was able to tell the General the same story Steve had, with little additions from her own point of view, of course.

Yes, she had insisted she accompany Steve to the Hydra factory, knowing she could back him up with her marksmanship and that the prisoners would be in need of medical attention.

Yes, she had a personal interest in rescuing the POW’s, both Bucky and Steve were longtime friends of hers from back home.

Phillips eyebrows went up at her description of Bucky and Steve as friends—she knows he remembers her relentless pleas to rescue Bucky and the others from the Hydra factory, but she didn’t feel any particular need to detail her personal relationships with him.

Steve had told her Phillips may be laboring under the impression that he had something going on with Peggy—apparently the man had berated Peggy’s part in the rescue as the result of her “crush” on Steve.

But really—who wouldn’t love Stevie? Stupid people, that’s who.
Peggy’s no dummy.

But she also knows from the brief time she’s known Peggy that loyalty and duty are paramount to her. Perhaps she considered it her duty to inform Steve about what had happened to Bucky, but also she’s loyal enough of a friend to back him up when it became apparent Steve would go forth with the rescue with or without her help.

She tells Phillips about the jump from the plane, “strapped to captain Rogers chest,” and how they made their way roughly ten miles on foot to the factory from there, ”Captain Rogers carried me,” she widened her eyes, and chortled in the inside, “he’s so strong!”

The sticking point came when Phillips read aloud several accounts from the prisoners, most notably Falsworth and Dernier, who claimed it was likely she’d killed 20 Hydra soldiers from her perch 300 yards away from the factory.

It was actually 38 soldiers— each one is seared into her memory.

She tells Phillips she’s not sure how many she’d killed.

Phillips raises his eyebrows, “I took the liberty of pulling up your training records from the Army Nursing Corps. Your D.I. at Staten Island was very impressed with your marksmanship and physical stamina.”

She waits, quiet as he eyes her from behind the desk.

“How’d you come to work with Dr. Erskine, Lieutenant Garland?” He asks.

“Interesting, not the question she was expecting.

“I ran into him one day at Brooklyn Hospital when I was returning from the records room with some
files—it was August, 1941, I think. He startled me and we both dropped our files—we got to talking as I sorted them out and he asked me if I knew of anyone who could help him organize and assist him in his research,” she said, smiling softly as she recalled the gentle scientist.

“I volunteered. I was always searching for extra jobs around the hospital—I was still a student nurse and the doctor offered to pay me for my services. I assisted him until just after the United States entered the war in December and he informed me he had to move his research to a more secure location—I didn’t see him again until the following summer. I ran into him at the World Expo in Queens,” she wrinkles her brow as if struggling to recall something, “I think it was the end of August in ’42. He said he was volunteering with the Enlistment Office at the fair,” she lowers her eyes to her lap, sad at the recollection, “it was the last time I saw him.”

Phillips taps his index finger against his lips in thought, tipping back and swiveling slightly in his chair.

“How involved were you with the actual research Dr. Erskine was working on?” He says.

“I put together a filing system that allowed him to more easily organize his notes, collected blood and tissue samples for him from various departments in the hospital, and went through hospital records to target patients whose medical history would be of interest to Dr. Erskine. Other than that, I kept the lab clean, took care of the test animals, and made sure he slept and ate with some regularity,” she smiles wryly, “he had a tendency to forget basic human needs when he was deep into his research.”

“Mmhmm,” Phillips says, is brow furrowing as he tips back in his chair absently swiveling it back and forth.

After a moment he sits straight, pinning her with canny dark eyes and says, “Stark tells me you’re the best shot he’s ever seen, that you and your brother have assisted him with weapons testing. And you worked with Abraham Erskine. Dernier and Jones tell me you can speak French and seemed very comfortable in the field. Agent Carter tells me you’ve known Steven Rogers since before Project Rebirth.”

He’s leans his elbows on the edge of his desk and looks at her, silent.

“Sir?” She says.

*Probably best she doesn’t inform him of her ability to speak and read German.*
“Lieutenant Garland, I wonder how you seem to have had your fingers in some very top secret pies at the SSR and I’m only recently aware of it,” he says.

“I’m not sure what you mean, sir. There’s a lot of interesting folks in Brooklyn, I just met the most interesting ones to the SSR, I guess,” she says.

He sighs, a resigned expression on his craggy face.

“I’m a suspicious man Lieutenant Garland—and something about you makes my brain itch,” he pauses, scribbling on the papers in front of him, “for now, you are definitely useful to us. But I have my eye on you and I’ll know if you step out of line,” he says firmly.

Well—seems like Steve was right to be concerned.

She looks him in the eye, “I’ll be sure to cross my t’s and dot my i’s then, sir.”

“You do that, Garland. Now, I believe you’re expected down at Howard’s lab. I’ll call your brother to escort you there,” he says, picking up the telephone handset.

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10:15am

SSR London
Research and Development Lab

Steve glances over at Will as he picks up the phone and listens to his conversation with half an ear as Howard shows him a few things he’s working on.

They’ve gone over the newest modifications to the pile of guns on the lab table already, Howard is very excited about utilizing some of the energy weapons they’d brought back from the Hydra factory.
Will says, “Say fellas, I’ll be back in a minute—gotta go get Darce from Phillips office.”

Steve feels some of the tension in his shoulders release. She’ll be here soon, hopefully her meeting with Phillips went well.

His shoulders bunch up again when he realizes he’s gonna have to tell her about the awkward situation he found himself in with Lorraine. He’d had no idea what to do when the blonde had grabbed him by the tie and smashed her mouth against his. Just as he was getting over his shock and starting to push her away, Peggy had shown up to take him to Howard’s lab.

He’d awkwardly tried to explain, “Peggy, that’s not what you thought that was—“

She had leveled him with an absolutely glacial stare, saying, “I didn’t think anything Captain, not one thing. You always wanted to be a soldier and now you are—just like all the rest.”

She’d left him at the lab without another word.

_Dammit_.

Peggy’s disappointed in him. Probably thinks he’s a dog, playing around on Darcy.

He sincerely hopes Darcy believes him when he tells her about Lorraine.

Howard nods distractedly, waving Will off, “Sure, sure, see ya in a few minutes—Say, Steve—I gotta get your measurements, I’m workin’ on a new suit for ya, usin’ this new fabric,” he points to a length of heavy fabric on the counter, encouraging him to feel it, “it’s a carbon-polymer—should withstand your average German bayonet. Although Hydra’s not gonna attack ya with a pocket knife.”

Steve rubs the fabric between his fingers, it’s dense, tightly woven yet not too heavy.

“Could ya maybe make somethin’ outta this for the rest of the fellas in the squad? Darce too?” He
Howard raises his eyebrows, “Darcy? I figured she’d be workin’ here with us?”

“Nah, she did so well on the rescue mission I asked if she could join us as our medic and also of course, because she’s a helluva shot,” Steve says.

Howard frowns, “I know she’s a great shot, Steve. But aren’t ya worried about her bein’ out in the field?” He lowers his voice to mutter, ”there’s a reason we don’t have lady soldiers.”

Steve darts a glance at Howard, “Better not let Peggy hear ya talkin’ like that,’ he says.

He sighs, bowing his head and rubbing the back of his neck.

Yeah, he’s worried. She could get hurt or captured.

Or killed.

But she’d pointed out that those things could have happened at any time during her work with the Army Nurses, she’s been close to the front lines, sometimes right in the thick of it, actually.

She’d been amazing on the rescue mission.

Somehow, he feels more sure of himself when she’s with him. She holds him steady—like Bucky always has, and makes sure he doesn’t go off half-cocked.

Nevertheless, they’re gonna have to be very discreet and all business on the missions. No need to cause resentment with the men, though from what he’s noticed, Darcy has managed to make friends with all of the members of the Howling Commandos—particularly Dugan and Dernier. As a group, they’re still working on their chemistry, but from what he’s seen of Bucky’s former cell mates, they’re already pretty tight.

He supposes working side by side to survive being held captive by an evil organization would do
He and Darcy are gonna be the odd ones out for a little bit, but they’ve both earned quite a bit of respect from the men because of the rescue.

“Darcy wants to help, and she thinks it’s the best way she can. Bucky and I will look out for her, Howard,” he pats Howard on the shoulder, “but ya know she can take care of herself, right?”

Howard mulls it over, running his fingers absentmindedly over the pistols on the table, then grabbing a knife, testing the weight of it in his palm.

“Yeah—I guess. She’s such a pretty little thing, sometimes I forget,” he admits, setting the knife back on the table, “Maybe I should make her something special? Like in case somebody gets too close to her?”

Steve raises an eyebrow, “Like what?”

“Dunno, I gotta think about it,” he says, humming to himself as he walks along the counter to where Steve’s Captain America shield from the USO rests on the table. Howard taps it’s battered surface with his finger, “So I gather you’re pretty attached to this thing?”

Steve shrugs, “It’s handier than ya might think.”

Howard nods, strolling over to another table, “I took the liberty of coming up with some options,” Steve looks down the line of potential shields on the table as he points to one and continues, “this one’s fun. She’s being fitted with electrical relays that allow you to—“

Steve spots a plain round shield on the floor off to the side and picks it up—the metal is strangely light and sings slightly as he lifts it from the cement floor.

“What about this one?” He says, holding it in front of him experimentally. He likes the way it feels, like it fits him.

“No, no,” Howard says, “it’s just a prototype.”
“What’s it made of?”

“Vibranium,” Howard says, “it’s stronger than steel and a third of the weight.”

Steve flips the shield in his hands, looking at it from all angles.

Howard continues, “it’s completely vibration absorbent.”

Steve’s not sure why that’s important, but he’s thinking this shield is the one he wants.

“How come it’s not standard issue?” He asks.

“That’s the rarest metal on earth. What you’re holding there? That’s all we’ve got.”

The staccato noise of high heels on concrete announces Peggy’s return. She says in a cool voice, “If you’re quite finished Mr. Stark, I’m sure the Captain has some unfinished business.”

Steve hopes she’s over the thing with Lorraine.

He holds the shield in front of him, “What d’ya think?” He asks, smiling the puppy dog smile that usually gets Darcy to forgive him.

She sniffs slightly, grabbing one of the pistols off of the table and raising her arm to aim at him.

Howard dives behind his bench and Steve manages to get the shield up just in time as she shoots it dead on, four times.

The flattened bullets fall to the ground at his feet and he looks over the edge of the shield, stunned.
She sighs and returns the pistol to the table and smiles tightly, “Yes. I think it works.”

She steps past him, her shoulders rigid as she marches out of the lab, passing Darcy and Will on their way in.

“Hello Peggy—” Darcy says, her smile dying on her lips as Peggy nods curtly at her and continues on her way. She frowns in confusion, raising a questioning eyebrow at Steve.

Will’s eyes widen as he says, “Did I hear gunshots?”

Howard pops up from the behind the bench and mutters, “Yep—Peggy’s on the warpath about somethin’.”

Darcy narrows her eyes at the shield Steve is still holding and he shrugs.

“There was a misunderstanding. She’s still mad—I’ll tell ya later,” he stammers, reaching in his pocket for the folded paper on which he’d sketched out some ideas for his new suit.

He hands it to Howard, saying, “I had some ideas about the uniform.”

Howard barely glances at it as he takes it, still mildly stunned by Peggy’s actions, “Anything for you, pal,” he says.

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7pm

The Savoy
London

“So let me get this straight,” Bucky says as he stands behind Darcy at the vanity, combing her wet hair in preparation of cutting it, “Peggy shot at you point blank while you were holding the shield
“and that’s how you know it works?”

He sends an incredulous look toward his friend who’s sitting at the small table over by the window, sampling from one of many plates of food they’d ordered from room service an hour ago.

Steve nods, “Yep.”

Darcy meets his gaze in the vanity mirror and says, “She’s disappointed in Steve—caught him necking with General Phillips secretary.”

“What?” Bucky says, narrowing his eyes at Steve, who pauses with his fork midway to his mouth.

He sets his fork down and huffs, “I didn’t kiss her, she kissed me.”

He pulls the plate with an interesting looking chocolate trifle on it his way and mutters, “Why can’t anyone get that straight?”

Bucky eyes his friend before he snatches the scissors from the top of the vanity and mutters, “Ya sure ya want it cut doll?” He runs his fingers through the length of her dark hair wistfully, “It’s beautiful the way it is—“

“Yes. It grows incredibly fast and I don’t know when I’ll get a chance to cut it when we’re in the field—just cut it to above my shoulders,” she says.

He sighs, combing her hair down to cut the first section.

He works his way around Darcy’s head, absentmindedly fingerling her curls as they spring up when he removes length from each section. He ponders the animosity Peggy had shown towards Steve.

“Ya sure Peggy ain’t jealous, punk?” He says.

Darcy freezes beneath Bucky’s hands, watching Steve’s face in the mirror.
His friend pauses, his brow furrowed as he licks a blob of chocolate from the side of his finger.

“No? We’re just friends and I never led her to believe we could be more. In fact, I told her I had a girl early on when I was goin’ through all the testin’ at the SSR. Told her I wasn’t comfortable with all the attention I was gettin’ from the ladies after the serum,” he says, pulling the dessert plate closer to dig his fork into the trifle again.

Darcy’s shoulders relax as Bucky runs the comb through another section of her hair in preparation of cutting it.

She says, “Maybe she thinks you’re getting a big head after the factory rescue. They gave you the actual rank of Captain, after all. Maybe she thinks you’ve changed.”

“She said something like that—she said, ‘Now you’re a soldier, just like all the rest.’” He says.

Darcy ponders, “Perhaps she bought the Captain America propaganda a bit more than you realized, Stevie. I mean, she’s really only seen you being stupidly brave and long suffering before now—”

Bucky snorts and mutters, “Stupid punk,”

She continues, “and she’s realizing you aren’t perfect after all.”

Stevie rubs the back of his neck looking mildly chagrined, “Maybe.”

Bucky grins and says, “She sure doesn’t like me, and I’m a goddamn delight.”

Darcy chuckles, her mirthful eyes meeting his in the mirror.

Steve grimaces, “Yeah—about that. Pretty sure she thought you were hittin’ on my girl when you two were dancin’ last night—you were a little handsy and she noticed,” Bucky furrows his brow, trying to recall if he’d been too forward in public, and Steve says, “Peggy notices everything, she’s very good at what she does.”
Darcy sighs, “I think I’m going to have to have a conversation with Agent Carter about the three of us.”

Steve says, “What? Why you?”

“Because I’m the only one she doesn’t think is a scoundrel at the moment. Hopefully, she won’t end up thinking I’m a whore,” she says quietly, “I was actually hoping she’d be my friend.”

Bucky brushes the hair off of her shoulders and squeezes them gently, “Doll, if she decides not to be your friend because of who ya love she ain’t worth feelin’ sad about.”

“Well, we aren’t exactly meeting societal expectations with our relationship, are we? Maybe it’s too much to expect other people to accept us,” she says.

Steve rises from the table and crosses the room to stand beside Bucky, slinging his arm around his shoulders and resting a hand on hers.

Darcy looks from one to the other of them in the mirror, her blue eyes sad.

Steve says, “I don’t need other people, Darce. I only need you and Bucky. Other people’s approval of our relationship doesn’t make it more real to me.”

She bites her lip and nods and Steve pulls her from the chair into his arms, her head tucked under his chin. Bucky molds himself to her back and they hold onto each other for a few minutes.

He rests his forehead on Steve’s shoulder and mutters, “It’ll be alright, doll,” and turns his head to press his lips against his friend’s jaw, whispering against his skin, “to the end of the line, punk.”

Steve whispers, “to the end of the line,” and squeezes them a little tighter.
The next morning finds Darcy having tea with Peggy in a small meeting room near the SSR labs while Bucky and Steve are getting their measurements taken for the uniforms Howard is designing.

She’d be lying if she didn’t admit Agent Carter is a bit intimidating. Especially when she’s not feeling particularly friendly.

She always seems effortlessly put together, her uniform spotless, wrinkle free, and perfectly tailored. Her hair is neat and lipstick perfectly applied.

To be honest, Darcy feels like a bit of mess in comparison.

Peggy is beautiful, with a tall shapely figure and a commanding presence, no one can ignore her when she enters a room. Men who have any sense snap to attention, those who do not are threatened by her and attempt to diminish her, fools that they are.

Conversely, when Darcy’s clothes are tailored to her body, she draws unwanted attention. If she dresses to hide her curves she looks like a slob. There’s no winning that battle so she doesn’t fight it anymore.

Her hair is thick and shiny, but the curls are somewhat unruly. It’s definitely hard for her to look pristine—there’s always something a little wild about her.

So, she dresses for herself, she stands tall, works at being strong, and she pursues the things that matter to her, even if it’s sometimes difficult. People usually underestimate her.

It can have it’s advantages, she supposes. Nobody sees her coming.

Probably part of the reason Phillips is suspicious of her.
Peggy might be the type of woman the world would picture with perfect Captain America, but Darcy’s perfect for Steve Rogers, who’ll always be a little shit.

That thought makes her sit a little taller.

Peggy expertly pours their tea, apologizing for the lack of sugar (rationing being what it is) and Darcy assures her it’s just fine without it.

After they are settled, Peggy says, “What did you want to discuss with me Lieutenant Garland?”

“Oh, just call me Darcy please,” Darcy says, “this isn’t a formal meeting.”

Peggy raises one brow, and says, “Alright—Darcy, why are we here?”

“I wanted to talk to you about what happened yesterday in Howard’s lab,” Darcy begins.

A flash of discomfort is crosses Peggy’s face before her expression smoothes out again.

“Oh?”

“Yes. I understand you were upset with Steve?” She says.

Peggy sighs, “I confess, I may have overreacted. I caught him in a—compromising situation and it upset me.”

“Are we talking about the incident with Lorraine?”

Peggy pauses in bringing her cup to her lips, instead choosing to set it on the table with a clink.

“Yes, actually,” she replies.
“It wasn’t what you thought. Steve still doesn’t know how to handle women at all and Lorraine took him by surprise,” Darcy smiles ruefully, “just between you and me—I bet he let it go on a little longer than necessary, strictly for the novelty of it.”

Peggy frowns, “I was angry. I couldn’t believe he’d do something like that—it jeopardizes the integrity of the team if you and he fall out, not to mention, your brother works with Howard.”

“That’s true.” Darcy says.

Peggy sighs, “I was disappointed too. I expected better of him,” she fiddles with the handle of her teacup before lifting it to take a sip. She says, “I suppose I owe him an apology.”

“Eh—he’ll probably do something stupid soon, I’d just leave it,” Darcy says with a grin.

They sip their tea in silence for a few moments while Darcy tries to muster the courage bring up the other thing she wanted to talk to Peggy about.

“So, the other night I couldn’t help but notice you don’t seem to like Bucky much,” Darcy says carefully.

Peggy is silent for a moment, rubbing her finger along the edge of her tea cup.

The smooth skin of her brow puckers briefly before she declares, “Sergeant Barnes is a flirt.”

Darcy smirks slightly, “That, he is.”

“He seems awfully—friendly towards you considering you and Steve are an item,” she says thoughtfully, shooting a sharp glance at Darcy.

“Not overly so, I’ve known him just as long as Steve,” Darcy says.
Peggy mulls on that for a second before saying, “My reservations about him are much the same as the ones I had when I saw Steve kissing Lorraine. His brainless flirting could damage the team, not to mention his supposed friendship with Captain Rogers.”

Darcy sighs.

Yep. Peggy definitely didn’t miss the way Bucky had his hands on her when they danced.

She puts her teacup on the table and squares her shoulders.

“Peggy, I’m going to tell you something in confidence, because Steve trusts you and because I can see you are an honorable person. Bucky isn’t doing anything wrong when he flirts with me or touches me because he’s my fella just as much as Steve is.”

Good thing they’d agreed to leave out the part about Steve and Bucky being in love with each other, because Peggy’s eyebrows nearly disappear into her hairline and her mouth drops open slightly, her body going absolutely still with her surprise.

After a moment Peggy gathers herself enough to say, “What?”

“You heard right. I’ve been with the both of them since 1940. That isn’t changing. If we could have figured out a way for the three of us to get married we probably would be engaged—a long engagement, there’s things I want to do, but engaged nonetheless. Now you know. The only other people who know are Will, because he’s my brother and he knows everything, and Howard, though we’ve never actually told him anything.”

She frowns, thinking about that. Howard. Such a nosy bastard.

She doesn’t include Tony in the equation because that’s Will’s business, not hers.

Peggy shakes her head and sits back in her chair, a wry smile on her lips.

“You know, before the war and all of this,” she waves her arm to indicate their surroundings, “what you just said would have been scandalous. Now though, it really pales in comparison to the bigger
Darcy grins slightly, slumping with relief.

“Yeah—there’s a skinny kid from Brooklyn who got turned into Captain America and a crazy German megalomaniac whose face looks like a red skull running around Europe. This is small potatoes,” she says.

Peggy snorts, pours her another cup of tea, and nods decisively.

“Small potatoes,” she agrees, raising one perfectly arched brow playfully, “though I must compliment you on your exceptional taste in men.”

Darcy lets out a surprised bark of laughter and says, “Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! I really wanted to include Peggy shooting the shield without making her be the love interest. Hopefully the reasons for her actions are plausible the way I wrote them.

Also, I’ll confess to having a thing for hair—the sexiest thing in the world is a man brushing a woman’s hair, Bucky helping Darcy cut her hair? ROWR.

Thanks for all of the encouraging comments and kudos on the last chapter—I’ve managed to work a bit ahead, still not quite where I’d like to be in terms of having a few cushion chapters in case of writers block, but I’m getting there.

Also, thinking of writing the future after Steve wakes up as a separate story, so this would be the 1st story then we’d go into the sequel right away. No big, it would just involve editing the tags on this one a bit.

Let me know what you think!
Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

Howard gives the Howlies their new uniforms, Darcy isn’t pleased. Howard tries to make it up to her. The Howlies go to the gun range. Steve loves his shield. Everyone relaxes a bit at their favorite pub.

Chapter Notes

No beta

All descriptions of shooting, poker, and billiards aren’t from my knowledge, google helped some, because I don’t know a thing about the first and have very seldom played the latter two.

November 19, 1943
SSR London

11am

Bucky’s eyes widen when Darcy steps out of the storeroom after changing into the prototype uniform Howard has made for her, a disgruntled expression on her face.

Though she’s completely covered up, it leaves little to the imagination. It’s made out of the same carbon polymer fabric that all of their uniforms are made from, dark blue, like the his new coat and the majority of Steve’s slightly less ridiculous Captain America costume, and it fits her like a second skin.

Actually, it’s a lot like Steve’s get-up, minus the red, white, and blue theme.

She wears tall leather lace-up boots nearly to her knees, trousers that are fitted to her small waist and rounded hips, a long sleeved shirt with zippers up either side which she’d have to unzip to wriggle into or out of it, and a thick utility belt around her waist with multiple compartments for ammo, supplies, and a gun holster attached.
She looks sexy as hell, her recently shorn hair a wild tumble of curls around her shoulders and her cheeks flushed with indignation.

She marches up to a very pleased looking Howard and pokes him in the chest. “Absolutely not,” she says, “I look like some kind of comic book character—‘‘ she waves her hands in front of the fabric molded to her ample chest and hips and pokes Howard again, hard.

“Fix. It.” she fumes.

“What?” Howard says, as the rest of the Commandos return to the lab in their new uniforms.

Dernier whistles low, and Dugan mutters, “Ya hopin’ to maybe distract the enemy, Stark?”

Darcy’s cheeks flush deeper pink with embarrassment and she glares at Stark accusingly.

Bucky shrugs out of his jacket and wraps it around her shoulders, it covers her to mid thigh and she relaxes slightly into his side.

Howard says, “You said you wanted something that allowed freedom of movement, would be durable, and offer protection from the elements. I know you’ll be climbing up trees and whatnot, excess fabric will snag on things. This fits the bill—and it looks smashing I might add.”

She huffs in frustration, just as Steve and Peggy round the corner into the lab.

Darcy looks pleadingly at the only other female in the room, “Peggy—tell Howard this is ridiculous.”

She holds open the sides of the coat to show the uniform underneath and Steve’s eyes widen with surprise before he frowns a little bit, noticing the focus of all the other men in the room.

Except for Will.
For obvious reasons.

He catches Bucky’s eye and he can see the punk ain’t wild about the rest of the Howlies seeing Darce in that get-up.

Peggy gives Darcy a once over, her eyes narrowing.

“I see the problem,” she says, turning to Stark.

“Howard, I suggest you make Lieutenant Garland a coat like Sergeant Barnes’, to go over this layer of her uniform. Cut it similarly up top, nipped in at the waist but a bit longer—perhaps to just below mid thigh? and give it plenty of pockets,” she says, then turns to Darcy, “Will that do?”

“Yes,” Darcy says, relieved, “thank you,” a mischievous smile curls her lips and she bumps her hip into his, “now we can be twins, Bucky.”

Bucky chuckles, “Well—at least our coats will match.”

It’ll give her an extra layer of protection too.

He looks over the rest of the men, who’d all decided on variations on their old uniforms, in mixes of olive drab and brown but streamlined, though everyone seems to have more pockets sewn into their jackets and trousers for supplies.

Dugan still has his bowler, now constructed of a heavier grade material and Falsworth wears the beret from his former uniform.

Morita has a sword strapped to his back.

Bucky says, “Jim, since when is a sword part of your kit?”

Morita grins, unsheathing the weapon to hold it in front of him, “I might be from Fresno, but my grandfather was from Osaka. He taught me some things,” he says, twisting the slim blade in a blurry
figure eight, “Stark here has quite the arsenal.”

“How right, I do,” Howard preens while Will rolls his eyes at Darcy from the table where he’s been demonstrating the new radio to Jones.

“Much as I love my Tommy gun,” Morita says, “I like to have a silent option if I’m in a tight spot.”

“I prefer something a little less conspicuous myself,” Dugan says, removing a Bowie knife from his belt.

Bucky chuckles, “Dugan, you’re about as inconspicuous as a heart attack.”

Howard snaps his fingers and exclaims, “I almost forgot!” He opens a few drawers until he finds what he’s looking for, and holds it aloft, grinning in triumph, “Darcy, maybe this will earn your forgiveness—I made ya a present.”

Darcy moves closer and warily asks, “What is it?”

Howard holds the small device in hands, vaguely shaped like a snub nosed pistol except the barrel is thicker and ends in a couple of metal prongs.

“I call it the shocker,” he says, “I thought ya might need something for close quarters, just in case. Let me demonstrate,” he squeezes the trigger and a blue current snaps with a buzz between the prongs, “just press this baby into an opponent and they’ll go down like a sack of potatoes. Won’t kill ‘em, it’ll just lay ‘em out for a while.”

Darcy steps forward, seeming mollified by the gift, and Howard releases the trigger and hands it to her. She turns it over in her hands as her lips curl in a wicked grin, “I’ll call her Sparky.”

Steve huffs out a laugh and claps Howard on the shoulder, obviously pleased that their girl will have her terrifying little weapon.

Will searches the drawers and comes up with several battery cartridges, joining his sister and Howard to show her how to load a new battery into the base of the gun and explaining how she’ll only get
two good shocks from each new battery, so she needs to use it as a last resort.

Peggy claps her hands and says, “Alright everyone, if we’re done with your uniforms and Sparky,” she pauses to grin at Darcy who frankly looks tickled with her new toy, “We need to get out to the rifle range—the Captain needs space to practice with his new shield and the rest of you should practice your shooting. Practice makes perfect, gentlemen, and lady.”

“I’m gonna get out of this get-up and back into my regular uniform, fellas,” Darcy says, slipping out of her borrowed coat and handing it back to Bucky.

He’d like to say his eyes weren’t glued to the sway of her hips as she walks away, but he’d be lying.

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1:00pm

SSR Weapons Testing and Rifle Range

Fifteen miles outside of London

Darcy sits between Will and Howard on the shooting platform with her legs dangling over the edge. The rest of the Howlies stand with Peggy on the brown grass in front of the platform watching Steve practice throwing (throwing!) his shield at targets downfield.

The more Steve throws it the more deadly accurate his aim becomes, and some weird property of the metal it’s made of allows it to absorb energy on impact and bounce away. That, in combination with Steve’s super serumed spatial awareness allows him to throw it and hit multiple targets in addition to anticipating it’s trajectory to catch it on return.

Howard explains that the shield is made from a vibranium/adamantium alloy, making it damn near indestructible while also making it capable of absorbing tremendous energy. When the edge of it hits the targets the shield resonates from the impact and it emits a slight hum as it bounces away.

Steve is like a kid in a candy shop, figuring out the angles and trying to hit as many targets in one throw as possible, the shield zipping from one target to the next like a cue ball spinning across a billiards table.
Below her, some friendly wagering has broken out between Bucky and Dugan regarding the number of targets Steve can hit with a single throw.

Bucky pulls a crumpled pack of cigarettes from his pocket and tilts it towards Dugan who nods and extracts one, leaning over the flame from Bucky’s lighter and inhaling.

“Bet ya first round of drinks tonight he can hit four in one throw,” Bucky mutters, releasing a stream of smoke skyward.

Steve’s head cocks to the side, undoubtedly listening to the chatter behind him and he makes a show of resting the shield by his side and stretching his arms as if they are getting tired before readying himself for the next throw.

Dugan narrows his eyes at Steve and nods, “I’ll take that bet.”

Darcy smirks to herself. Steve is such a little shit.

An SSR scientist who’s recording the distances Steve can throw the shield has been setting up the targets in different configurations down field then scurrying back to the platform to observe. When the targets are set again, Steve scans the targets briefly and picks up the shield, whipping his arm back and throwing it like a giant discus.

The shield wings away, a red, white, and blue blur as it hits the first target with force then rebounds to the next, then on to the next after that, until five targets are down.

Bucky grins wide and cheers, “Drinks on you, Dugan.”

Jones teases, “Gee, thanks Dum-Dum,” and Dugan grumbles, “I was just supposed to buy your drink, Barnes.”

“Eh, it’s only polite to include everyone,” Bucky says.

Dugan huffs a long suffering sigh and stubs out the remains of his cigarette on the sole of his shoe.
Peggy turns to the scientist and says, “Can you set up the rifle targets now please? Place them starting at 300 yards and take them out to 1000 yards using 100 yard increments.”

The scientist hops in a Jeep with an assistant from the range and they quickly set up the seven wooden target boards, which are roughly 6 feet tall with bullseye targets tacked at the head and chest height, respectively.

Her gut twists nauseatingly as she has a flash memory of the Hydra soldiers she’d killed—she swiftly pushes those thoughts away.

*These are wooden targets.*

*That’s all.*

While this is going on, Howard levers the top off a crate he’d brought along and starts lining up rifles and ammo boxes on a canvas tarp he spreads on the ground.

Peggy walks over to the platform and says, “Lieutenant Garland, I’d like a shooting demonstration, please. I understand Sergeant Barnes is a marksman as well? Let’s see how you do,” she calls to Steve, “Captain Rogers! You should try your hand at long range shooting as well, to see how you’ve improved.”

Darcy hops off the platform, walking over to Howard and picking through the rifles and checking the scopes til she finds a Lee-Enfield MK4 that feels good to her. Howard hands her two 5 round clips and she loads them into the magazine as Bucky and Steve pick out their rifles.

She takes a moment to look downfield through the scope, noting the low and high bullseye on each target.

The ground is damp from an earlier rain, so she elects to kneel when shooting rather than get down on her belly and use the bipods Howard has provided for bracing their guns.

The sound of a vehicle approaching from the road interrupts them and she glances over her shoulder to see General Phillips arriving along with two members of the SSR brass.
Bucky and Steve finish loading their rifles and are standing by her side at attention as Phillips exits the Jeep and approaches Peggy and the rest of the Howlies, also standing at attention while the SSR officers climb the platform to stand next to Will.

“At ease,” Phillips says, his dark eyes crinkling as he squints downfield at the targets before an aid hands him pair of binoculars which he raises to eyes for a moment before continuing.

“Agent Carter, I heard you were running drills out here and came to see what you were up to,” he eyes Steve in his new uniform with the shield strapped to his back and pauses when he notices Darcy.

“Lieutenant Garland—good. I guess we’ll be seeing why the Captain insists you need to be on the team,” he says.

“Yes, sir,” Darcy replies, sighing internally. She feels a bit off center—some part of her wants to prove that she’s skilled, another part knows she cannot reveal the extent of her abilities. She’s going to have to walk the line between very good and extraordinary so as not to raise further suspicion in his mind.

After a few minutes Phillips and the other officers are on the platform with binoculars and Will has come down to stand off to the side with Howard next to the ammunition. Peggy stands at the base of the platform with the Howlies and Steve and Bucky are on either side of her as she drops to one knee, steadying her elbow on the other one as she rests the butt of the rifle against her shoulder and looks at her first target through the scope, 300 yards away.

Peggy says, “Lieutenant Garland, you may begin—we’ll need to pause after you’ve shot at all sixteen targets to evaluate.”

Darcy nods, “Yes, ma’am,” and takes a deep breath, letting it out slowly as she makes minute adjustments to her aim before pulling the trigger.

She hits just to the left of bullseye on the first target, reasoning that it’s possible for an experienced shooter at the closer distance, even if they aren’t warmed up. She hits perfectly center on the next target, hearing the low exclamation of surprise from one of the officers on the platform as she rapidly chambers the next round.
She’s half conscious of Bucky at her side, and Steve next to his, their heartbeats steady as her mind clears of everything except for the feel of the rifle in her hands and the targets through the scope. She breathes slow, holding her breath as she pulls the trigger and exhaling just after. She falls into the familiar rhythm of aiming, pulling the trigger, and chambering the next round, pausing only to stand when she’s used the last of her ammo, glancing at Bucky as he peers through his rifle scope at the targets. Steve squints downfield and raises one dark blond eyebrow at her, smirking slightly.

Howard hands her two more clips and she reloads, kneeling again to take aim at the last set of targets at 900 and 1000 yards.

There is utter silence behind her except for Dugan and Dernier muttering wagers and she hopes she hasn’t revealed too much. She’s taken care to shoot outside of the targets a couple times, even though it pains her to do so, even though there is some part of her that wishes for once to shine unimpeded.

At least she knows that the bullets went exactly where she wanted them to go each time.

She focuses on the last four bullseye targets.

She should miss them.

Maybe just hit the edge of the board for the 1000 yard targets at best.

One of the men on the platform whispers that she’ll never make the shots. She thinks of the Howlies behind her and how they will need to know they can count on her in the field.

Bucky speaks beside her, so low it’s the barest whisper of breath passing between his lips and only she and Steve can hear him, “Show ‘em, doll.”

She does.

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7pm
Whip and Fiddle Pub
London

Steve glances at the cards in his hand, as he sits with Bucky, Dum-Dum Dugan, Jim Morita, and Jacques Dernier playing a game of poker. He glances across the smoky room at the billiards table tucked in the corner where Falsworth is explaining how the game is played to Darcy as Howard racks the balls in preparation of starting.

“Ah—I see,” she says, her eyes bright, “I’ll just watch you and Howard play and maybe I can play the winner?”

“That would be just fine, Lieutenant Garland,” Falsworth says in his upper crust British accent.

“Oh—just call me Darcy,” she says, smiling at him and Falsworth tells her to call him Monty.

She takes her drink and sits on a bench against the wall with Gabe Jones and Will, her brother’s coppery head tilting towards her as he whispers in her ear.

Steve bows his head, smiling to himself as he hears Will say, “Better not show them up too bad with this, sis—you’re trying to make friends after all.”

She pouts slightly, taking a sip of her drink and leaning her head against her brothers shoulder to lazily watch the game.

Bucky nudges Steve’s knee under the table and mutters, “Ya payin’ attention, punk? If you’re not, I can just take your money right now.”

Steve focuses on his cards again and smirks, “Not so fast, jerk.”

Fifteen minutes later Bucky has folded and Dugan squints suspiciously at Steve’s face, then at Bucky’s before grumpily folding also.

Dernier cocks a confident brow, tossing another pound in the pot, “Raise.”
Steve tosses a pound in the pot and says, “Call.”

A minute later he’s raking his winnings across the table as Dernier cusses in French, his flush not standing a chance against Steve’s four queens.

He glances at Bucky and tilts his head towards the bar and his friend stands, clapping Dernier on the back, “Next round is on Cap, fellas, but we’ll have to be calling it a night soon.”

Steve follows Bucky over to the bar and orders whiskey for everyone, leaning next to his friend and watching Howard’s eyes rove appreciatively over the curves of Darcy’s bottom as she bends low over the billiards table across the room.

Bucky grumbles low, “Goddamn it, Stark.”

Steve grunts in agreement, his lips curving unconsciously when her laugh rings across the pub and Howard curses. She straightens, her blue eyes meeting his across the room, a sly smile curving her red lips after executing a perfect break.

“Dammit, shorty—ya sure ya never played before?” Howard says after she calls solids, sinking two balls in rapid succession.

“Never—“ she smirks, “I’m blessed with excellent hand eye coordination.”

She sinks one more ball before whispering low, “except for this one,” and misses the next one.

Howard struts around the table his mouth going a mile a minute as he works on catching up to her lead.

Steve glances at Bucky and mutters out of the side of his mouth, “She missed that last one on purpose.”

Bucky nods, “I know.”
Steve thinks about how she’d held herself back at the range today—he knows in his gut she could’ve hit every target dead center if she’d let herself. Nonetheless, the General had been impressed with her performance and the rest of the Howlies had looked at her with renewed respect.

Bucky had shot better than he'd ever remembered him doing before, hitting every target. He’d done as well as Darcy had let herself do in front of an audience, actually slightly better. The rest of the Howlies had clapped him on the back, congratulating him on his superior shooting.

The nearly two years Bucky has been a soldier have improved his marksmanship greatly.

He wonders how much it bothers Darcy to pretend to be less talented than she is just to convince everyone that she’s talented but normal.

As if she’s anything less than extraordinary.

It occurs to him that no one has seen the full extent of her abilities—there’s either been a lack of opportunity to test them or witnesses that made her feel like she needed to dial back on her talent. In fact, she probably doesn’t even know what she can do either.

At the range today, everyone had expected he’d outshoot everyone, but he hadn’t. He’s better than he’d been pre-serum, of course, but shooting just doesn’t come naturally to him. He’s always been a scrapper, he prefers wading into a fight, not working from a distance. The only long distance weapon he’s felt an affinity for is the shield.

Throwing it around today had been loads of fun, the more confident he got with it, the more accurate he became. The combination of his strength and the indestructible nature of the shield made it a formidable and unexpected weapon.

Plus, it looked really swell.

The barkeep returns with the round of drinks Steve bought for the table and he and Bucky carry them over to the men before returning to rest against the bar with their own.

Bucky takes a measured sip of his whiskey and says, “Any idea what the meeting tomorrow at
“Pretty sure SSR is already running reconnaissance on the nearest Hydra base I saw on that map and it’s only a matter of time before they clear us for a mission—probably gonna have us run drills in preparation, tighten up the team and get a bead on everyone’s skill sets.”

“Mmhmm,” Bucky says, “How much longer ya think Phillips will let us stay at the Savoy?”

Steve rubs the back of his neck and smiles wryly, “Another night at the most. Now that we are officially a team we’ll need to move to headquarters. It’s better for morale if we all have the same digs anyhow—Howard gets away with it because he ain’t military and they don’t want him to take his toys and go home.”

“True.”

Bucky reaches into his pocket, fishing out the watch Darcy had given him forever ago. He’d left it with some of his personal belongings back at base camp that fateful day he’d been captured—otherwise Hydra woulda taken it for sure. He glances at the time and raises an eyebrow at Steve, “Time’s a wastin’ punk, if we ain’t gonna get to stay in that fancy hotel for much longer, I wanna make sure I thoroughly enjoy the amenities before we check out.”

“Oh, really,” Steve says, grinning.

“Really,” Bucky teases, “‘Sides, we gotta get back before 9 if you wanna get room service. You know you’ll get hungry otherwise.”

His stomach rumbles in agreement. Ever since the serum, he feels hungry most of the time. Darcy told him she’s always had to eat more than a person her size should need and even more than that if she’s injured.

He figures her blood did more to Erskine’s serum than just stop the mutation of his cells and with his greater size and muscle mass he requires quite a bit of fuel.

He catches Darcy’s eye from across the room and she winks, missing her shot and “accidentally” setting up Howard’s next shot in the process.
It’s over pretty soon after that—Howard crowing over his win before smugly telling Darcy she’d done great for her first try, and patting her consolingly on her shoulder. Will stands beside her, rolling his eyes and snorting as he chalks the end of his cue in preparation of playing.

Bucky pushes off the bar and heads across the room and Steve follows behind him, slinging his arm around Darcy’s shoulders when he gets there.

Bucky says, “Doll, we were thinkin’ of callin’ it a night. Ya ready to go?”

Howard protests, “What! The night is young gentlemen! You can’t leave yet.”

Steve says, “I was just tellin’ Buck that Phillips wants us to move into SSR quarters with the rest of the fellas, he reminded me we gotta leave if we wanna take advantage of room service on your dime one more evening.”

Howard huffs under his breath, “Damn super serum. Good thing I’m rich or I’d go broke feedin’ ya.”

Steve grins, “Aw, Howard. I am what ya made me after all.”

Howard perks up a bit that, always happy to be reminded that he had a significant part in making Captain America. He huffs, “You kids get going then—“ he waggles his eyebrows suggestively, “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

Darcy scoffs as she links her arm with Bucky’s and turns to leave, “Now the possibilities are endless!”

Some ideas about Captain America’s shield because wtf
Chapter End Notes

Things of note:

Howard made Darcy a stun gun! Also, Morita has sword. Yeah—it’s stereotypical, but come on. It’s cool. I suck at writing action scenes though, so I’m not sure if I’ll ever write about his mad sword skills.

In addition, Bucky’s marksmanship is greatly improved. Lots of practice or something else? Hmmm.

Also, you may notice the characters shift between calling each other by rank and last name or just surnames or first names at times—it depends on whether a gathering is of a more formal or casual nature.

Let me know what you think, kind readers.
Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

The Howlies in action. Darcy takes a tumble.

Chapter Notes

No beta

All locations of Hydra factories gleaned from various online theories and wikis and the map shown in the Hydra factory. I’m just making stuff up to fill in the blanks, y’all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February, 1944

France

30-40 miles west of the Maginot Line near Strasbourg

9:30pm

Bucky breathes slowly through his nose, trying to stay calm as they bump down the road in the near absolute darkness of the cargo truck.

Dernier sits in the cab between two members of the French Resistance who are transporting them to their next target, their chattering in rapid French and occasional exclamations at something one or the other of the men says muffled by the the window separating the cab from the cargo area.

He really needs to learn French.

Darcy slips her hand into his and squeezes, whispering, “almost there,” and he relaxes marginally, his shoulder bumping against Steve’s as they hit a particularly bumpy patch of road.

“What’re they sayin’,” Bucky mutters to Darcy.
“Local gossip mostly—Dernier checking up on friends in the Resistance, finding out who’s been caught, who’s been killed, who’s still active,” she says.

“You forgot about them teasing Dernier about leaving France and all of the pretty ladies for them,” Jones says softly, “seems our friend is quite the ladies man.”

A snort comes from the other side of Steve from Falsworth, who mutters, “Bloody Frenchmen.”

Darcy giggles softly and Steve says incredulously, “Is Dum-Dum actually sleeping?”

A long suffering sigh comes from Darcy’s other side, “Yeah—and probably drooling on my shoulder as we speak,” Morita grumbles.

Dum-Dum is gifted with the ability to sleep just about anywhere, and takes advantage of it whenever possible.

It’s hardly likely that any danger would slip past Steve’s (and Darcy’s) excellent hearing so he can be excused for not remaining alert.

This is their second mission, the first having been in December at a Hydra plant near the coast in Belgium.

Accessing the Hydra plant 20 miles east of Bruges had been somewhat easier because it was closer to London—they’d been able to cross the channel under cover of darkness and continue on foot to the Hydra factory with Steve ranging ahead and helping them avoid the German soldiers occupying the area.

Fortunately, Hydra likes to build it’s factories and research facilities in fairly isolated areas, so they didn’t have to be very concerned with civilian casualties. Which was great because they’d blown the Belgian facility to kingdom come.

Bucky had a whole new layer of worry added to his anxiety cake when Darcy started tagging along whenever Dernier tested out Howard’s new grenades and incendiary devices.
He ain’t knockin’ the Frenchman’s usefulness to the team—the man is a genius with explosives. He just wishes Darcy would stay far from anything that goes boom.

Anyhow, the last mission had Darcy hanging back and covering them as they’d approached the factory, handily taking out the perimeter guards before they’d raised the alarm and allowing them to quickly place the explosives Dernier had prepared in key locations before escaping the building.

Dernier shouted a gleeful, “Vive la France!” after the bombs detonated and the building was reduced to a burning pile of rubble in seconds. Darcy had whooped from the tree line in response, jogging over to the road to meet up with them.

They’d basked in the warmth radiating from the burning building for a minute then decided they’d better skedaddle before someone came to check out the commotion. They followed Steve as he ran ahead faster than they could drive in a stolen truck Dernier hotwired. (Really? What the hell?)

His life is officially crazy.

The members of the French Resistance have a whole lot of interesting talents, he and Darcy had insisted upon their return to base that the Frenchman show them how to hotwire a car. The rest of the Howlies ended up sitting in on that lesson because they all felt it was a useful skill.

The truck slows to a stop and Steve tenses beside him, rising to a crouch at the sound of one of the cab doors opening and footsteps on gravel preceding the canvas flap at the back of the truck being nudged aside, a flashlight pointed at the floor illuminating the space around them.

Dernier says in English, “Out of the truck,” and frowns in frustration before lapsing into French which Jones translates, “My friends tell me there is a checkpoint a half mile down the road—we’ll have to cut through the field to get to our target.”

Morita elbows Dugan awake and they all scramble out of the back into the cold night air.

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They walk over the frozen field in darkness, silent except for the occasional muttered curse when one of the men catches their boot on a stone or furrow in the dead grass.
Steve is on point, Bucky bringing up the rear and Darcy just ahead of him, her sharp eyes scanning constantly as they walk, their breaths fogging the chilly air with each exhalation.

Steve calls a halt as they enter the tree line of the heavily wooded area surrounding the Hydra weapons facility.

Darcy lifts her rifle from her back, peering through it’s scope over the rolling fields they’d traversed in the last half hour. Nothing anywhere, except the distant shape of a farmhouse to the north and the steady light of the stars.

Steve pulls the map from his pocket and drops to one knee, smoothing it over his thigh as he pulls the compass from his pocket. Not much starlight filters through the winter trees and he says, “Buck, hold your lighter over this so everyone can see.”

They form a circle around Steve, effectively blocking the wind and hiding the light of Bucky’s lighter from view as they look down at the map.

Steve flicks the compass cover open, and there is a brief flash of the old photo taped into the inside of it with pre-serum Steve, Darcy and Bucky sitting together on the sofa in their old apartment. He glances at it briefly before orienting himself and tracing his fingers over the map.

“We’re here—“ he says, snapping the compass cover closed and pointing to a place on the map indicating the forested area just west of Strasbourg and the Maginot Line, and parallel to the road they’d taken with the Resistance fighters. “We need to get here,” he points to the “x” marking the weapons facility, slightly north of their current position and a mile from where the road curves to the east, “and circle around the facility. When we get there I want Darcy covering the front of the building and Bucky covering the back. We will enter through the back, place the explosives and get out. SSR reconnaissance indicates no prisoners here, it is primarily a weapons storage and development facility,” he pauses glancing at Dernier, “How much time do we have once the explosives are in place?”

Dernier frowns, he still understands English far better than he speaks it and tends to keep his remarks brief unless using his native French, “10 minutes?” He shrugs.

Steve nods, “Soon as they’re set, everyone out. We’ll meet up at Bucky’s position at the rear of the building and make our way back to the road for pick up.”
The Resistance fighters have agreed to meet up with them just off the road about a mile from where they’d dropped them off. Of course, they’re getting paid with a crate of Howard’s modified rifles when this is all over so they’re particularly motivated.

Forty minutes later they’re standing at the tree line looking down slope at the Hydra facility, Dugan muttering a constant stream of profanities under his breath as he and Jones pass a pair a binoculars back and forth.

Falsworth says under his breath, “It seems our intelligence was lacking.”

Morita scoffs, “Ya think so? Goddamn.” He turns his head to follow the rapid movement of Hydra soldiers across the yard, loading trucks with crates of weapons.

Bucky and Steve stand tense and silent on either side of her, and Dernier works silently behind them unpacking the explosives and charges from the heavy bag Steve had dropped at their feet.

Steve says, “New plan. Dernier—how many grenades do ya have on ya?”

Dernier rummages through the various pockets in his uniform jacket, “Eight?”

Steve nods, “I’m thinkin’ big goddamn explosion up front followed by lots of shooting to distract ‘em while I slip through the back door with Dernier and plant the explosives. I’ll need someone to cover my six, though.”

Bucky snorts, “Looks like it’s the usual for me then,” he glances at Darcy, “Darcy covering the rest of them?”

Steve nods, “Yep,” his eyes cut towards her then points out a rather large tree 10 yards away, “can ya climb that one, doll?”

Darcy nods. It’s no problem. Tall tree, big side branches with an excellent vantage point on the yard.
“Okay then. I’m gonna throw the grenades as close to the trucks as possible—there’s probably 
ordnance in them that will add to the explosions and create more chaos. Darcy, start taking out 
Hydra soldiers as soon as the smoke clears, the rest of you eliminate as many threats on the ground as 
you can. See if you can take some alive for questioning. I’ll send up a flare as a signal for you to get 
away from the building, meet back at this spot afterwards.”

Darcy hustles over to the tree and starts climbing, stopping when she’s about 20 feet up, balanced on 
a large branch.

Steve had been following her progress and when she raises her rifle to her shoulder and peers 
through the scope she watches him throw the first grenade into the yard where it rolls under one of 
the cargo trucks.

Seven more follow in rapid succession, perfectly on target and thrown from a distance thanks to 
Steve’s super strength and excellent hand eye coordination.

As soon as he throws the last grenade, Steve signals Bucky and Dernier and they run in along the 
tree line to the side of the building just as the first grenade thrown explodes, creating complete chaos. 
The shocked soldiers shout and run in every direction as the rest explode in rapid succession, looking 
like angry ants boiling out of an anthill.

Steve, Bucky, and Dernier are nearly to the back of the building by the time the last grenade 
explodes and the yard in front of the factory is awash in flames and smoke. A siren from within the 
building blares, muting the shouts and groans of the soldiers who remain alive on the ground.

Darcy breathes slowly through her nose and out through her mouth as she watches Dugan, Jones, 
Falsworth, and Morita approach the open gate to the yard, their guns at the ready.

The explosions have blown out the lights from the loading dock, so the only light is from the fires 
still burning on the ground. From her vantage point, Darcy can clearly see several armed Hydra 
soldiers emerging from behind a truck that remains unscathed, heading towards the gate. They spot 
the Howlies and raise their guns, shouting in German for them to put down their weapons.

Dugan responds by raising his Tommy gun and sending a spray of bullets their way, prompting the 
soldiers to scatter for cover, though several fall to the ground dead or injured.

Darcy picks off Hydra soldiers as the Howlies make their way across the yard to take shelter behind
some large metal shipping containers.

The next fifteen minutes are an intermittent firefight between the Howlies and the Hydra soldiers, with Darcy occasionally picking off one of the enemy when they emerge from cover.

Someone from inside the factory eventually flicks on two spotlights on the roof of the building, followed by the *ratatat* of multiple machine guns from the upper windows. Fortunately, the Howlies are adequately sheltered behind the shipping containers.

Darcy promptly shoots out the lights in a shower of sparks then waits in the ensuing darkness for a shot at whoever is shooting from the building.

There is silence from the yard, each side waiting for the other to make a move. She scans the truck behind which a group of Hydra soldiers have taken shelter before returning her focus to the roof.

She pauses to flick her scope to night vision and *there they are. The bastards.*

A small group of soldiers are on the roof, rolling a large gun into position—the trademark blue glow of an energy weapon kindling along the barrel. *Shit.*

Of course that’s when Steve sets off a flare and the Howlies pinned down in the front yard decide they’d better get moving away from the building pronto. She takes a deep breath and starts shooting the men around the big gun, ignoring the twist in her gut as each one falls. Bucky told her what those energy weapons do. There would be no saving of any of the squad if they’re vaporized.

Dugan runs towards the gate with Jones, Falsworth, and Morita firing repeatedly at the roofline and at the group of soldiers who keep popping up from behind the truck to the side of the yard.

She fires on the last soldier attempting to operate the big gun on the roof and watches as he falls, only to be frustrated as another soldier pops up to take his place. *Dammit.*

There’s an explosion from the side of the yard and she realizes someone, probably Dugan, threw a grenade behind the truck which was sheltering the Hydra soldiers on the ground.
Well, that takes care of them.

She focuses again on the roofline and is startled to see a man with a rifle trained on her position and the high whizzing sound of a bullet passing by is closely followed by a spray of splinters from the trunk of the tree. She jerks back, nearly losing her balance on the tree limb.

She steadies herself, jumping to a lower branch which puts the trunk of the tree between herself and the shooter, breathing slowly to steady herself as she moves to leans her left shoulder against the tree, peering through the scope at the roofline again.

There.

The shooter has a bead on her again and she reacts quickly, pulling the trigger just as he does, the buzz of a bullet loud and suddenly eclipsed by the burning punch to her right shoulder.

She slips off the branch, making a futile grab at a lower one before slamming into several more, her rifle flying from her grasp and hitting the ground with a muffled thunk.

She lands hard on her right side, the breath knocked out of her and her shoulder wrenching with a sickening pop. She curls in on herself, fighting for air and remaining silent when all she wants to do is scream in agony.

The sound of continued gunfire rises from the yard in addition to the familiar singing sound of Steve’s shield flying through the air. She breathes slowly, the white plume of her exhalations swirling from her mouth into the cold night air as she winces at the throbbing torment of her shoulder. She carefully presses her hand to it, pulling it back to see the dark stain of blood against the palm of her hand.

Shit.

She levers herself to one knee, scanning the ground for her rifle and spotting it near the base of the tree. Thankfully, the ground is covered in a soft layer of fallen leaves, so it is undamaged. She slowly heaves herself to her feet, groaning low, her right arm dangling useless at her side as she staggers over to the tree to lean against it. She unbuttons her jacket slowly with the trembling fingers of her left hand, gingerly freeing her right arm from the sleeve, unable to move it at all as she uses her left to drag the material down to dangle from her wrist. By the swelling in her shoulder and her inability to move it she’s pretty sure it’s dislocated (something she’s done before) and her clavicle is possibly
Peering at the blood darkened shoulder of the tight uniform shirt Howard had designed, she probes at the ripped fabric high on her arm, realizing the bullet had carved a deep crease through the muscle but had hurt nothing vital. In fact, the bleeding has pretty much stopped.

She’ll need help to pop her shoulder back into place though.

She leans against the tree, trying to ignore the twitching agony of the muscles and tendons around her shoulder attempting to pull it back into place and looks down the slope at Steve whipping his shield toward the roofline of the building. It slices through the barrel of the energy weapon and causes it to explode in a blinding blue flash which vaporizes the Hydra soldiers on the roof.

She pulls the sleeve of her jacket back over her arm at a glacial pace, keening softly each time she puts pressure on it as it aggravates the spasming muscles there. She hopes to hide the rapidly healing bloody gash as it will definitely raise questions considering the amount of blood on her shoulder compared to the state of the wound.

Thank god they are working in darkness.

She watches as the Howlies flee the yard as quickly as they can, headed in her direction.

They’re nearly halfway to her when the building explodes, leaving nothing but rubble behind them.

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Steve arrives at the tree where Darcy is positioned slightly ahead of the others, alarmed to find her leaning at the base of it with her rifle at her feet, trembling slightly with her arm dangling useless at her side.

“What happened?” He says, the coppery scent of blood assailing him as he draws closer. He automatically reaches for her but stops abruptly when she flinches away.

“Careful, Stevie,” she says, her voice hoarse with pain, “I got a little banged up,” Bucky and the rest
of the men arrive, and she continues, “Could use a little help with my arm.”

Bucky steps closer to look her over and swears under his breath, “Fuck. You shot, Darce?”

“Sorta. Hydra had a sharpshooter on the roof and he figured out there was someone in the trees after I shot out the spotlights—he just winged me,” her brow wrinkles in thought for a moment, “He was wearing goggles, probably for night vision. Anyhow, I fell out of the tree and landed hard—shoulder is dislocated,” she says.

Bucky nods, stepping closer. Of everyone in the squad, Bucky is the most equipped to handle injuries other than Darcy. He has medic training, has always been interested in medical stuff, especially after he met Darcy.

“Gotta pop it back into place, doll,” he mutters.

“I know. Let’s do it quick—we gotta get out of here.”

Bucky sends Steve a significant look and he nods infinitesimally. He says to the rest of the the Howlies, “Okay, let's give them a minute,” and leads them a little distance away and says, “Dugan, Falsworth, give me a quick rundown of what happened while we were placing the explosives in the building.”

He listens with half an ear as Bucky croons low at Darcy, “Sorry baby, this is gonna hurt,” and she says, “I know—“ her voice is bitten off by a moan and her heartbeat elevates as Bucky pops her shoulder back into place.

He glances over to see her sitting with her back against the tree, her forehead pressed against Bucky’s chest as he kneels beside her with his hand wrapped around the nape of her neck. He holds her against him as he mutters it’s okay now and you need to be more careful.

God.

He wants to pick her up and run with all of his considerable speed to the rendezvous point.

He has to put those thoughts away, his duty is to all of the Howlies and to their mission. Darcy would be the first to remind him of that.
After informing Bucky of the location of the various medical supplies in her utility belt, she’s on her feet in less than 10 minutes—the wound on her shoulder cleaned and bandaged (mostly for show, he’d wager) and her arm immobilized in a sling.

Bucky picks up her rifle and she carefully slings it by it’s strap over her left shoulder, moving her pistol from it’s holster on her right hip to tuck in a pocket by her left hand.

“Gotta work on shooting with my left hand in case something like this—“ she tilts her head towards her right arm, “happens again,” she straightens her spine, blowing a stray piece of hair out of her eyes, “Alright, let’s go.”

He catches Dernier raising his eyebrows at Jones in silent amazement as they head to the rendezvous site.

Someone made this super cool timeline on tumbler, it’s a fun read and has pics and movie clips too!

Another interesting timeline via Marvel Wiki

Chapter End Notes

So what’d you think? I’m not at all confident in my ability to write action scenes, but hopefully it wasn’t too confusing. Mostly, I just wanted to show how the Howlies work together and the kind of things they do on missions.

Thank you all for all of the kudos and comments. It thrills me to see new people coming out of the woodwork to comment and it’s great to hear from those of you who’ve been commenting from the start. It’s cool that this story is still attracting readers!
Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

Darcy spends some time with her brother while on medical leave. The Howlies continue destroying Hydra bases and storm the beaches of Normandy. Darcy arrives after the Allies have control of the beach, and briefly meets a taciturn Canadian soldier, Corporal James Howlett.

Chapter Notes

No beta

See the end of the chapter for more notes

March, 1944
SSR Headquarters
London

Darcy grumbles to herself as she throws another handful of raisins and adds two cups of oats and some flour into the large green mixing bowl in front of her.

“Don’t be such a grump. You get to hang out with me for the next week and Tony is on leave in two days so you’ll get to see him too,” Will says from his position on the counter, swinging his legs gently against the rather utilitarian metal cabinets and stealthily grabbing another chunk of chocolate from a bowl on the black linoleum countertop.

“Mmhmm,” She smacks at his hand absently, “Stop it—I need that for this.”

Having been put on medical leave because of her injury (from which she’d been nearly recovered before they’d even returned to headquarters) she’d only just been allowed to stop wearing the sling the SSR doctors had insisted she’d need to heal properly.

She had underestimated how annoying it would be to deal with an injury in front of others. The last one she’d had where she’d needed to do more than slap a bandage on it was years ago, and no one even knew about it except she and Will so she could go on with her life as soon as she’d healed.
Not anymore. She’d had to make excuses to avoid the SSR doctors from checking up on her—using her own medical expertise and an explanation of having had a similar injury in the past to keep them at bay.

She’s been spending most of her leave in Howard’s lab with Will. She’d already organized all of their blueprints and notes, cleaned out and organized several storage rooms (one handed!), and dealt with the generally disgusting state of Howard’s workspace.

Today, she’s working on developing a nutritious cookie for Steve to carry on missions. He is hungry all the time and the C-rations just don’t cut it. He’s tried beef jerky, but the stuff the army issues is tough as rawhide and not very tasty. He needs something calorie dense and easy to carry, requiring no preparation before eating.

Too bad the current activity in the kitchen slash break room located off the SSR labs isn’t working to distract her from the fact the rest of the Howlies left on a mission to Greece this morning without her.

Greece.

She’s always wanted to go there.

Though she supposes it would be hard to appreciate the scenery when dealing with Hydra and their stupid Uber tank.

She frowns at the mixture in the bowl, adding a cup of peanut butter, two eggs, and the chocolate she’d chopped into chunks after Howard had reluctantly donated some of the expensive stuff he’s been hoarding.

She glances at Will as he slides off of the countertop and pulls a mug from the cabinet and pours some of the ever present coffee into it.

“Want some?” He asks, raising one coppery brow.

“Sure,” she replies, scooping the mixture from the bowl and spreading it evenly across the greased rectangular cake pan.
He grabs another mug and prepares her coffee just the way she likes it from long practice, and sets it on the countertop in front of her.

She slides the pan into the oven, setting the timer then grabbing the steaming cup to lean against the counter next to Will.

“So how long has it been since you’ve seen Tony?” She asks, taking her first sip of coffee and nearly moaning with pleasure. Howard keeps the best coffee in the labs, hands down.

Will frowns for a moment, “Six months, at least.”

“Hmm,” she nudges his side with her elbow and teases, “are you sure I’m going to see you at all? Bet you two will be holed up in your room as much as possible.”

Will’s pale skin flushes slightly and she squawks when he shoves her, trying not to spill her coffee.

“Shhhhh! Geez, somebody might hear you,” he mutters.

“Don’t worry—nobody’s close by, I’d hear them,” she assures him.

“Sure,” he mutters, sipping his coffee and keeping his eyes trained on the doorway to the kitchen.

“Anyway, how is Tony doing, really?”

“Last time I saw him, he was pretty quiet at first,” he frowns and rubs a hand over his face, “he didn’t really wanna talk about what he’s been doing or how he feels. Then he got really drunk and we uh—” he lowers his voice, “ended up in bed but not for uh—fun, really.”

She nods, she’s seen her share of mentally stressed soldiers. Hell, she’s pretty sure Bucky isn’t dealing so well with the things that happened at the factory. He cries sometimes in his sleep, thrashing around when she or Steve try to comfort him and getting a haunted look on his face when he wakes up and they assure him it was only a dream and it’s over.
The rest of the Howlies aren’t much better off, keeping their focus on removing as many Hydra weapons facilities as they can rather than giving themselves time to recover from their ordeal.

“Maybe this time he’ll be a little better,” she says.

“Maybe,” Will says softly, turning away to wash out his cup in the sink.

She set her cup on the counter and wraps her arms around his waist, pressing her forehead between his shoulder blades, “Love you.”

He sighs, leaning into her, “Love you more.”

She ends up staying at Will’s place at the Savoy that night.

The dormitory style room provided at SSR headquarters is nice enough she supposes, actually better than the one she’d shared with May before shipping out to Europe, definitely better than any of the various tents in Sicily and Italy.

Nonetheless, it’s small and sparse with few homey touches to warm it. There is a bathroom connecting it to another room which Peggy stays in when she’s in London. Bucky and Steve are down the hall with the rest of the men, sharing a setup like hers and Peggy’s—though Steve had pulled his weight a little to get a bigger bed, saying the standard twin size was too small for him.

*Ha.*

Too small for he and Bucky (and her) together, more like. She doesn’t think Bucky has slept in the bed on his side for a single night and most nights she stops by their place and stays there too. It helps that both she and Steve can hear anyone coming or going long before they come into sight, but she’s pretty sure they aren’t fooling any of the Howlies.
Really, it doesn’t compare to the Savoy at all and since the Howlies are on a mission without her and Peggy is off doing super secret agent work elsewhere, she and Will take advantage of his superior digs and get room service on his tab at the hotel for their dinner.

They sit cross legged on his bed in their pajamas, drinking whiskey and eating roast beef and potatoes while listening to the radio Howard got him for his room.

Will sops up the last bit of gravy with his bread and pops it into his mouth, setting his plate aside and leaning against the headboard with his whisky glass propped on his belly.

She rises from the bed moments later, taking his empty plate and hers and setting them on the bedside table before returning to sit beside him on the bed, whiskey decanter in hand.

She tips a couple inches of the amber liquid in her glass and raises it, “Cheers,” she says and they clink their glasses together before drinking.

She sighs as the alcohol warms her belly, leaning her head on Will’s shoulder.

“I missed this,” she says.

“What?” he says.

“This—us, spending time together,” she says.

“Really? Seems like those two handsome fellas you call yours would keep ya from feeling lonely,” he teases.

“M’not lonely, sometimes I just miss my brother,” she lifts her head to look at him, “I miss when things weren’t so complicated. I miss home.”

Will takes a sip of whiskey and tilts his head back against the headboard, staring sightlessly at the ceiling, “Yeah, me too.”
May, 1944

Poland, coast of the Baltic Sea

“Goddamn,” Dum-Dum hisses as Darcy cleans the deep gashes on his side, courtesy of the shrapnel that had hit him as they fled the exploding Hydra facility.

“Hold still,” Darcy says unpacking gauze and syringes from her kit, “I can give you morphine for this—two of the wounds are gonna need stitches.”

Steve, the rest of the Howlies, and the small platoon of SSR soldiers Phillips had handpicked to assist them in taking down the largest Hydra operation yet are strapped in on benches on either side of the plane.

Bucky holds a flashlight steady on Dugan’s side as Will and Howard prepare for for takeoff up front, their original plan of leaving Poland by sea scuttled by a German blockade. He glances briefly across the aisle at his friend, who’s been silent since they’ve boarded the plane.

Steve hunches forward, his elbows resting on his spread knees and face blank, five sets of dog tags jingling faintly as they dangle from his fingers. It’s all that’s left of some of the men from the SSR squad, their bodies vaporized by Hydra energy weapons.

They’ve been lucky thus far, running with the smaller crew of the Howling Commandos has allowed them to move quickly, get in and get out fairly stealthily most of the time. Plus, they’ve worked together long enough they almost instinctively anticipate each other’s moves and they work like a single organism.

The eighteen man platoon Phillips sent had their own Lieutenant (now deceased) who took orders from Steve and was responsible for his men in turn. Though they’d been briefed on Hydra’s weaponry, they hadn’t experienced it and it had cost them. Damn Hydra didn’t even need to be able to shoot particularly well with those ray guns—just pointing in the general direction of their target and pulling the trigger does the job.

Stevie always thinks he can save everyone, but they’d been spread pretty thin on the ground and Hydra had been anticipating them, Schmidt is no fool and each facility has been more heavily guarded than the last. His friend had thwarted an ambush from the trees before they were even at the gates of the facility.
Losses were bound to happen—Bucky’s just glad it was none of the Howlies this time. He’s sorry about the men who died, but he’s not devastated.

If that makes him a bad person, so be it.

Howard shouts for everyone to strap in and Darcy presses gauze to Dugans side as they buckle the harness around him. The C-47 shudders as they taxi down the runway and Darcy jabs her cranky patient with a morphine stick, muttering about stubborn men after he grumbles he can take a few stitches just fine.

Ten minutes later when they level out at 10,000 feet, Darcy unbuckles her harness and pulls the gauze away from Dum-Dum’s side, wiping the area clean with iodine again and he barely hisses at the sting of it. She raises her eyebrow and begins methodically laying out the suturing kit on the bench beside her.

Steve unbuckles from his harness to come sit at Dugans other side, holding him steady as Darcy begins closing the wounds. Bucky holds the flashlight and occasionally hands Darcy things from the kit at her feet, and Dugan is stitched up and sleeping in his harness within fifteen minutes.

Dernier leans across the aisle after she’s repacked her kit, handing her his flask and whispering, “Pour un travail bien fait.”

“Merci,” she says, a small smile gracing her face before she takes a swig of the whiskey and passes it back. Dernier nods, tucks it back in his jacket and leans his head against the side of the plane to close his eyes.

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June 12, 1944

Normandy

Darcy arrives in Normandy six days after the rest of the Howlies came ashore with the initial invading force of 156,000 Allied soldiers from England, Canada, and the United States. The fighting at Omaha beach had been particularly brutal, the troops facing heavy resistance. It had the highest level of casualties of all of the five landing points along the coast of Normandy.

Thank god the Howlies had landed with the Canadian and British troops at Juno. The beach there
was some of the most heavily fortified, thus the decision to send Steve there, but the casualties were far less. Captain America and the presence of DD amphibious tanks had given the troops an advantage those at Omaha hadn’t possessed.

As upsetting as being left behind had been, she cannot disagree with Phillips decision to send her ashore with the Army Nurses 42nd and 45th Field Hospitals to rendezvous with the rest of her squad.

Her participation in the invasion would have been a distraction for Steve and Bucky as well as the other soldiers and would definitely have caused some questions about her role with the Howlies. She, like Peggy, works in a gray area—the SSR knows what she does, but it’s classified information for regular military.

As for the Army Nurses she travels with, they know she is a nurse (she’s wearing her Army Nurses field uniform) and that she is meeting up with her assigned unit further east.

She arrives at the field hospital set up near Le Havre and is soon met by a gruff Canadian soldier named Corporal James Howlett tasked with transporting her to where the Howling Commandos are quartered with the British and Canadian troops near Arromanches.

He’s tall, with broad shoulders and a lean muscled form.

He looks her over from head to toe, his brown eyes focusing briefly on the rifle slung over her shoulder before shrugging irritably and saying, “Lieutenant Garland?”

“Yes, sir,” she says.

He wordlessly points to a muddy Jeep, turns on his heel and walks away.

*Huh.*

She grabs her duffle bag and follows him, tossing it into the back and scrambling into the passenger side without waiting to be told.

He glances briefly at her as she pulls the rifle strap over her head and rests the gun on her knees.
He raises a dark eyebrow, “Thought you were a nurse.”

“I am—among other things,” she replies.

He grunts in reply, fishing a chewed looking cigar from his pocket and lighting it before turning the key in the ignition.

Corporal Howlett drives like a bat out of hell and isn’t much for conversation, so Darcy focuses on the scenery and holds onto the side with a firm grip.

Though not on duty at the field hospital, she’d caught a glimpse of some of the horrifically injured G.I.’s within and sent up thanks to god that none of the Howlies had been casualties.

In the twenty minutes it takes for them to reach her destination, she sees evidence of the massive conflict that had taken place on the beach in the gouges left in the earth all along the coastline and the pervasive stench of decay carried on the breeze—the collection of the dead is far from over. There are groups of men from the Graves Registry working to collect dog tags from the bodies strewn along the shore before they are carried to trenches dug into the sand for burial.

At one point she sees several modified Sherman tanks making their way slowly along the shoreline, and she asks Howlett what they are and he says, “Sherman Crabs,” and she asks what they are doing and he replies, “Minesweeping.”

She watches as a whirling contraption at the front of the tank flings chains tipped with heavy metal balls toward the ground, causing several explosions as they trigger the buried mines.

She imagines the thousands of explosive devices planted in the sand and shudders at the damage they must have done and would continue to do in the future.

Finally they arrive at the busy encampment, which could easily be described as a tent city divided by nationality and regiment.

They pull to a stop and the corporal quickly exits the Jeep grabbing her duffle bag before she even gets out, pausing to heft it experimentally in his hand and shooting her a speculative glance before motioning her to follow.
The duffle bag is really heavy. Heavier than someone her size should be able to easily carry.

Hopefully Howlett won’t think too much about it.

She spots Steve’s broad shoulders about twenty feet away, his blond head bent over the map spread over the hood of a nearby Jeep, Bucky and the rest of the Howlies watching as his finger traces a path across it.

She says softly, “Stevie.”

Howlett cocks his head in front of her and Steve turns, a broad smile stretching across his face.

“Darce!” He cries and Bucky straightens beside him, rushing over to swing her off her feet in a whirling hug.

“Doll, you’re a sight for sore eyes,” he says and sets her on her feet beside him and turns to the corporal, “Thanks for gettin’ her here safe and sound.”

He nods as Steve jogs over and takes her bag from him and the rest of the Howlies gather round to greet her.

“Wait til ya see the tent Jones rustled up for ya Garland,” Dugan says, nudging her with his elbow, “it’s small but ya got it all to yourself, seeing as you’re the only gal around here except the nurses over at the hospital.”

“Really?” She grins and says, “all to myself? I must really rate.”

Howlett snorts and abruptly says, “I’ll be going back to my men, Captain,” Steve nods and says, “Thank you for your assistance, Howlett.”

The gruff man turns on his heel and walks away, jumping into the Jeep and gunning the engine before he drives away, leaving a cloud of dust behind him.
Darcy tilts her head and watches the swiftly receding vehicle. “Not a very friendly fella, is he?”

Steve shrugs, “Nah, he isn’t. But he was over at the hospital checkin’ up on some of his men—no doubt it put him in a worse mood than usual.”

Morita chimes in, “Good man in a firefight, though. Sure is lucky too—heard he’s been shot up a few times, survived it all.”

“Huh,” Darcy says.

“Let’s go get you settled in and get some grub,” Bucky suggests.

“Alright—hey Steve, brought ya some cookies,” she says, smiling as they walk down the row of tents. She figured he gave away as many of the nutrient rich meal supplements she’d whipped up as he ate himself and could use some more.

“Oh, thank god,” Steve says, “I’m so sick of beef jerky I could cry.”

**Tank contraption sweeping the beach for mines**

**Interesting article about the Allied camps along the Normandy coast**

**soldiers description of the days following the D-Day invasion**

Chapter End Notes

Darcy invents protein bars, lol.

“Pour un travail bien fait” Basically, “for a job well done” according to google translate.

The descriptions of the Normandy invasion are as accurate as google can help me be.
Also—this is all we’ll be seeing of James Howlett aka Wolverine, for now. It’s a fun cameo that does service to the idea that he and Cap ran some missions together during WW2.

In the MCU Wolverine participated in many wars as a soldier with his brother. (I’m leaving Sabertooth out of my story for now, sorry.) The film montage of their many battles shows them storming the beaches at Normandy and based on the appearance from that clip they were putting them at Omaha beach which was the beach the Americans took. There weren’t Canadians there so I’m not sure what that’s all about.

Thank you very much for the kudos and comments! They mean so much to me. Please let me know what you think of this most recent chapter.
Chapter 47

Chapter Summary

Bucky sneaks into Darcy’s tent for a little comfort. The Howlies take out a Hydra base in France and camp out in the field that evening before heading back to SSR headquarters.

Chapter Notes

No beta

NSFW AT THE START.

Get some privacy if you have a crappy poker face.

Be warned: next posting will be probably more like a week and a half from now. I am behind in my writing thanks to upsetting events in my personal life which have mostly been resolved. For the moment anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

June 12, 1944

Normandy

10pm

Later that evening, Steve is on watch and Bucky sneaks over to Darcy’s tent.

The Howlies are set up in four small wall tents, big enough for two men to sleep comfortably—he and Steve in one, Darcy in the next, Falsworth and Dugan on the other side of hers, with Dernier, Morita, and Jones crowded together in the one after that. Fortunately, Morita and Dernier aren’t big fellas or they would be pretty uncomfortable.

The tents are about four feet apart, and Bucky is silent as a ghost as he crosses the ground between their tent and Darcy’s and scratches lightly at the tent flap, “Darce,” he whispers.

A rustling sound comes from within as she unties the tent flap then pokes her head out.
“Bucky? Something wrong?” she whispers.

He holds a finger to his lips in a shushing motion and she backs up, giving him room to slip into the tent.

He understands why she would think something is wrong. They have a standing rule while in the field, their focus is on the mission, they treat each other like comrades in arms, not lovers. As the lone woman in the squad, Darcy is painfully aware of the precarious nature of her position.

Of course, this doesn’t stop he and Steve from taking advantage of the fact they share a tent. The unfairness of the situation is something she reminds them of regularly and which they make up for in spades as soon as they’re off mission.

He pulls her close, whispering in her ear, “Steve’s on watch and I don’t want to be alone.”

It’s true.

He can’t sleep.

The only sleep he’s gotten since they’d come ashore on the 6th has been sporadic at best and only when Steve was lying beside him. Neither of them have talked about it, but he knows his friend is shaken as well. He’d never experienced a pitched battle with so many casualties like Bucky had.

Even so, it was worse than anything he’d ever seen and he would never forget the sight of so many dead and dying men for as long as he lived.

As soon as they had been alone he and Steve had wordlessly clung to each other, distracting each other with lips and tongues and fingers until they were exhausted enough to sleep.

But when he’s alone in the dark, the terror he’d felt as Steve charged up the hill at a German pillbox while bullets buzzed through the air like an angry swarm comes back. His brain crowds with the screams of the injured and dying and he cannot find rest so he gets up, walks it off, stays busy.
But he’s so tired.

He says none of this to Darcy, following the outline of her figure in the near darkness to sit beside her on her camp bed.

He wraps his arm around her shoulder and pulls her into his side and she lays her head against his chest, her steady presence calming him. He presses his lips to her hair, inhaling the familiar scent of the homemade soap she uses, even now. She packed a dozen bars of it when she shipped out from New York for England, insisting she needed something that reminded her of home.

It’s got to be nearly gone now.

She still wears her uniform pants, but she’d removed her shirt and jacket— leaving the men’s undershirt she favors to wear beneath her uniform in the field. Her boots are lined up beside her bed, laces loosened and ready for her to step into at a moments notice.

Bucky whispers, “Okay if I stay here til I have watch?”

“Of course,” she whispers back.

He nods, leaning down to loosen his laces and line up his boots next to hers, then unbuttoning his jacket and shirt to toss over the end of the bed.

They lay down together and it isn’t long before they are exchanging the kind of soft slow kisses she loves best and the terrible images in his mind drift away like smoke—his entire focus on the feel of her in his arms.

He feels the quickening pulse beneath her skin as he slides a hand under her shirt, palming the pillowy softness of her breasts as she curls one leg around his hip, her mouth opening under his as their kisses deepen.

This is not the time or place to completely disrobe and he knows she doesn’t typically bring her diaphragm with her on missions, given the the fact they usually abstain—but he wants her so badly.
He needs to forget everything and disappear into the pleasure her flesh offers.

“Babydoll,” he whispers against her throat, as his hand drifts between her legs, “can we please? I need—“

She nods and fumbles with his belt and unbuttons his fly, “condom?” She whispers and he searches a trouser pocket for the packet he’d shoved in it before sneaking over to her tent.

He literally has dozens of them in his pack—all the branches of the military hand them out like candy.

Thank god.

He grins in triumph when he pulls it out and she quickly grabs the packet from him, holding it between her teeth as she works the buttons on her trousers loose and pushes them and her panties down her thighs, pulling one leg free and leaving them to dangle from the other.

He shoves his pants and undershorts down only far enough to free his cock and groans low when she wraps her fingers around it, squeezing firmly before stroking it slowly.

His eyes have long since adjusted to the dark, her pale skin standing out in sharp relief against the dark green army blanket on her bed. Her features are blurred in the darkness, but he can make out the twist of her lips and the shine of her eyes as she tears the packet and smoothes the condom over his length.

“I wish we could be naked—I want to feel all of you,” she whispers as she pushes her fingers beneath the hem of his undershirt, stroking up his abdomen to trace circles on his chest.

He does too.

In the field, a soldier has to be up and ready in seconds, especially on the front line, however secure it may seem at the moment. They sleep in their clothes, sometimes with their boots on, with their weapons always at the ready.
He knows Darcy’s rifle is under the edge of her cot and his is resting near the entrance to the tent.

They’re breaking rules they’ve made for themselves just by being in the same bed together on a mission and neither of them will make themselves and the team more vulnerable to attack by taking all of their clothes off.

Hell, he and Steve have been making do with barely shoving their pants out of the way, their encounters quick and dirty.

“Me too,” he breathes, pushing her undershirt up around her neck and leaning forward to suck one pebbled nipple into his mouth.

She shivers underneath him, her hands moving to cradle his head and pull at his hair as he slips a hand down to cup her between her legs, one finger sliding through the damp curls there and along her slippery furrow, then back up again to circle her clit.

“Mmmmm,” she hums, her breath hissing from her nose as she rocks her hips against him.

He silently works her, sucking on her nipples hard as he shifts his hand to slip a finger inside of her, continuing to rub her clit with his thumb.

She spreads her legs wider, dropping one leg over the edge of the cot as he slips a second finger inside of her and her hips rise to meet each thrust.

He can feel her heart thundering in her chest, hear the tiny near silent gasps she makes each time he brushes over that particular spot inside of her that usually gets her babbling yes yes yes but at the moment causes her to clamp one hand over her mouth as she arches against him.

He takes her right to the edge with his fingers, her legs tensing with her impending release and when she’s on the verge of breaking he pulls his fingers from her and thrusts into her, hard, his thumb pressed to her swollen clit.

He grunts, shocked motionlessness by the tightness and heat of her.
A muffled moan emerges from behind her hand and her body arches like a bow, her hips rocking against him and tremors racing through her as she clenches her eyes shut, her face contorting with pleasure.

He pulls her hand from her mouth and presses his lips to hers, swallowing her gasps as she digs her nails into his shoulders in an effort to stay silent.

His hips snap against hers, sweat breaking out on his skin as the build to his own orgasm ascends sharp and steep, her tight heat holding him in an almost punishing grip.

She pulls her mouth from his, working her lips over his jaw and sucking just beneath his ear, panting against his skin, “Love you — god — so good Bucky,” she takes his earlobe between her teeth, suckling there for a moment. He changes the angle of his hips slightly and she gasps, “ right there, right there, oh god — yes, yes,” and she shakes apart again, her legs tightening around his waist and her hips rising to meet his as he bottoms out inside her, his hips rocking in short erratic thrusts while his vision whites out with pleasure.

He collapses against her, his mind blissfully empty, burying his face against the side of her head and breathing slow, the scent of her hair filling his nose and grounding him.

Her fingers stroke soothing circles over his shoulders and down his back while he drifts, exhaustion suddenly a heavy weight pressing down on him.

After a moment he forces himself to pull out of her and take care of the spent condom as she wiggles back into her pants and rearranges her shirt. He does the same, then lays down again beside her, turning onto his back as she lays nearly on top of him with her head tucked under his chin.

He presses his lips to the top of her head and whispers, “Love you, Darce.”

“Always and forever,” she whispers back, tangling her legs with his.

“Always and forever,” he sighs and closes his eyes.
He lurches into consciousness when there’s a scratching at the tent flap.

He tenses then relaxes when Darcy grips his arm, whispering, “It’s Stevie.”

She gracefully lifts herself off of him and walks to untie the entrance to the tent.

He swings his legs over the side of the cot and slips his feet into his boots, lacing them up as Steve silently enters the tent (it still shocks him how he can be so big and move so quietly) and Darcy crosses over to sit beside him, lighting the lantern next to the bed and turning it very low so as not to attract attention from anyone outside.

Steve crosses to stand by the cot and raises one golden brow, smirking. “I thought we weren’t doing this on missions?”

He waves a hand at the rumpled bed then spots the spent condom on the floor next to the cot and toes it with the tip of his boot.

Bucky clears his throat, “Uh—extenuating circumstances.”

Steve gazes steadily at him, his blue eyes measuring before he whispers, “Well, it’s your turn for watch, better get your shit together Sarge.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Bucky mutters, slipping into his shirt and jacket quickly and rising from the bed.

Darcy sighs and lays back down, turning onto her side to watch them.

“What time is it anyway,” Bucky says. He’d smashed his wristwatch sometime during the invasion and refuses to bring his pocket watch on missions.

It’s too precious to lose or damage.
Steve glances at his wrist, “0300.”

“Mhhmm,” he hums, leaning down to kiss Darcy before heading for the exit. Steve grabs his arm as he passes and Bucky pauses.

“Where’s my kiss, jerk?” Steve whispers.

Bucky cups his friend’s face in both hands and pulls his mouth forcefully to his. Steve groans against his mouth and pulls him closer and they lose themselves for a quick moment before Bucky pulls away, patting Steve’s flushed cheek playfully and crossing to the tent flap.

He shoulders his rifle and glances back one last time to see Steve working the buttons of his uniform loose as he stands over Darcy who’s turned onto her back to look up at him.

His lips curve into a devilish smile, “Keep it down, huh?”

Darcy smiles and whispers, “Quiet as a mouse, right Stevie?”

“Right,” he whispers, and throws his shirt over the end of the bed.

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Late October 1944

French border near Montreux, Switzerland

9pm

Blowing up the last Hydra base from the factory map had been rather anticlimactic.

Steve had ridden ahead over the French border into Switzerland on the Harley-Davidson Liberator
motorcycle the SSR and Howard had modified for him, staking out the facility near Montreux while waiting for the rest of the Howlies to catch up in the cargo truck. Bucky complained bitterly about super soldiers getting special treatment—he really liked the motorcycle and wanted one too.

Of course, he got to sit beside Darcy in the truck out of the 40 degree wind, which made up for it a bit.

Not really.

The motorcycle is really, really swell and Steve absolutely loves it.

Anyway, the factory had been running on a skeleton crew, much of the weaponry developed and stored there had been moved, probably since most of France had been liberated from Germany by September.

They haven’t been able to locate Hydra Headquarters, rumor had it somewhere in Switzerland but the location has eluded the best of SSR’s intelligence officers and the lower level Hydra agents running the facility had either died resisting or broken the cyanide tooth in their mouths, leaving no one to interrogate.

He and the Howlies had gone over the entirety of the facility before Dernier had set the explosives to blow it up, and there was nothing there to help them in locating Schmidt, Zola, or Hydra headquarters.

They do manage to come away with some weaponry and a few blueprints for Howard and Will to dissect in the SSR lab, at least.

Presently, dinner is cooking over a campfire some 35 miles northwest of Montreux in the French countryside and about 150 miles northeast of their destination at Dole/Tavaux Airfield where they are scheduled for pickup in three days.

Camping out isn’t nearly so stressful in France now that the Germans have mostly left it, their biggest problem is adequate protection from the elements overnight and getting some grub.

Bucky leans forward to lift the lid on whatever Darcy has cooking over the fire and she smacks the back of his head as she passes by, carrying several blankets that she passes out to the men, “It’ll
never cook if you keep lifting the lid Bucky.”

Bucky replaces the lid with a huff, opting to sit on a the end of large log Steve has pulled up next to the fire and fishes his battered pack of cigarettes from his jacket.

Soon the rest of the men are gathered around, sitting on the bedrolls some of them have spread out.

Though it’s a chilly evening, the sky is clear and there’s no rain in sight so they’ve elected to sleep around the campfire under the stars.

Darcy returns from the cargo truck with a couple more blankets and a flask of whiskey, which she tosses to Dernier with a grin before sitting on the log between Bucky and Steve. She rummages in her pockets, triumphantly fishing the black watch cap she’d knitted for herself out and dragging it over her wild curls.

She lifts her rifle from over her shoulder and rests it between her and Bucky and after a moment, she shakes out her blanket and spreads it at her feet, sliding off the log to sit on it.

Resting the small of her back against the log and grabbing her rifle, she quickly unloads and field strips it, methodically laying the parts onto the blanket in front of her before cleaning and lubricating them.

Bucky watches her work for a minute, taking a deep drag of his cigarette and stubbing it out on his boot before spreading his blanket beside hers and doing the same with his rifle.

Steve fondly watches the two of them work in a synchronized rhythm, Darcy sharing the cleaning rod and gun oil with Bucky, wiping down each part before reassembling her rifle and meticulously wiping down the barrel with a thin layer of gun oil.

Dernier passes the flask of whiskey around the fire, everyone taking a swig before passing it on except for Steve, whom everyone agrees whiskey is wasted on, especially when it is in limited supply.

He grumbles a little about it but after Darcy finishes reloading her rifle she rises to her feet and pours him a truly excellent cup of coffee from the French press she’d stolen from Howard and all is forgiven.
She sits beside him with her own cup, close enough that their thighs nearly touch and he can feel her body heat, even as cold as it is.

If they were alone, he’d pull her into his lap.

If they were alone, Bucky would sit beside him and he could wrap his arm around him, could bury his nose against his neck and just breathe.

It frustrates him sometimes, the line they have to walk in front of others. But even if everyone knew about Darcy and him, they could never know about Bucky and him. And even though the Howlies probably know something is going on between Darcy, Bucky, and him, they still try to be professional and tone it down on missions.

As it is, her bedroll is set up between he and Bucky’s by the fire at the same distance it would be if she were any other soldier, and none of the Howlies comment on it.

Pretty soon the stew that Darcy put together for dinner is ready and they all eat it along with the hard rolls from their rations. Stories are exchanged around the fire, and they play the “when the war is over” game as they sometimes do after the fire burns low and they’re all thinking of home.

“A soft bed and sleeping late on a Saturday morning,” Dugan says as he shifts his bedroll to pluck a stone from beneath it and chuck it over his shoulder, “—my back has never been so fucked,” he groans, stretching his arms over his head.

Falsworth grumbles in wordless agreement, rolling his shoulders.

Jones says reverently, “I’m gonna have some of Mama’s fried okra and the roasted chicken she makes on Sundays after church.”

They all sigh, thinking of roasted chicken. Lord knows Darcy is creative as can be with the C- rations, but it ain’t the same as good home cooked meals.

Falsworth leans forward and pokes a stick at the fire, tilting his head to watch as sparks spiral up into the night sky. He sighs, “A decent afternoon tea, with all the fixings—cream and sugar, biscuits and
Bucky groans and Steve snickers, reaching around Darcy to shove his shoulder. Jerk never can get
enough sweets.

Dernier grins wickedly and says, “I’m going to visit Nanette. And Adele. Oh, and Marie.”

The men guffaw and Darcy throws a piece of her roll at Dernier who catches it in his mouth and
laughs.

Bucky sighs, “Apple pie at that diner down the street from our place, eh, Stevie?”

“Yeah,” Steve nods.

“And church with Ma and Becca. Never thought I’d actually miss that,” Bucky mutters.

Jones smiles softly, his white teeth flashing in his dark face, “Me too. I sure do miss the singin’.”

“I’ll go see my grandfather,” Morita says, his eyes sad, “he’s old, and I didn’t appreciate my time
with him enough. I will be more patient.”

They all shift uncomfortably. They know that the entirety of Morita’s family is in internment
camps in California, stripped of most of their possessions. It’s an uncomfortable reality of which they hadn’t
been aware until he explained it to them.

Steve had been incensed by the unfairness of it—Morita is Nisei, born in the United States. His
parents had immigrated to the United States as children and were citizens. Nonetheless, if he weren’t
a soldier he’d be imprisoned with the rest of his family. Instead, he’s over here fighting for the same
country which has stripped his people of their rights as citizens.

It ain’t right.

Right and wrong aren’t so clear cut as he used to believe when he was a scrawny kid back in
After a quiet moment Darcy says softly, “I think that’s a good plan, Jim. I don’t have my parents anymore and I wish I’d taken time while I could,” she sighs, “when this is over I think I might like to go back to Iowa—check on the farm. Take a dip in the swimming hole if it’s summer.”

“I’ll go with ya, doll,” Bucky says.

She smiles and nudges him with her shoulder, “We’ll work on your swim lessons.”

He laughs, “Ya shoulda seen me a coupla summers back, fellas. Poor Darcy tried her damndest to teach me to swim and my natural inclination was to sink like a stone.”

Darcy chuckles, “You got it—eventually.”

“I guess. But Stevie sure picked it up fast, huh?” He claps Steve on the shoulder, “course, that was before he got all big and strong—maybe you’d sink now, punk.”

“Nah—the SSR tested that one in the lab,” he replies, frowning a little at the memory.

That gets them to talking about swimming and it turns out neither Dernier, Morita, or Dugan can swim much at all.

Eventually, they all turn in except for Steve, who takes first watch.

He leans against a tree just outside of the firelight, relaxed and listening as everyone’s breathing slowly deepens and slows with sleep.

Darcy and Bucky are the last ones awake, lying on their sides facing each other. Bucky slips his hand under the edge of her blanket and Steve hears him whisper, “When the war is over, we’ll get a place, you, me, and Stevie.”

She whispers back, “With a big bathtub.”
Bucky’s lips curve into an indulgent smile, “With a big bathtub,” he whispers, “and a big bed.”

“Mmmhmm,” she hums, “Go to sleep Bucky.”

“G’night, doll,” he whispers, his eyes cutting to where Steve leans against the tree in the darkness, “Night, punk.”

“G’night,” Steve murmurs.

Captain America’s motorcycle

Japanese American Internment Camps, WW2

Chapter End Notes

So—that happened. Time is marching on, Darcy, Steve, and Bucky continue to operate under a don’t ask, don’t tell kind of thing with the rest of the Howlies. They aren’t exactly hiding their feelings, (well, everybody still thinks Steve and Bucky are just friends) they just aren’t rubbing anyone’s face in them.

Let me know what you think! And as always, thank you, dear readers, for your comments and kudos. You are so encouraging!
Chapter 48

Chapter Summary

Christmas morning at the Savoy. Darcy argues unsuccessfully with Peggy about her role on the Howlies next mission. The Howlies wait for the train in the Austrian Alps and Bucky ponders the wisdom of boarding a moving train.

Chapter Notes

First half NSFW. No beta.
Some dialogue at the end of chapter from CA:TFA.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

December 25, 1944
Savoy Hotel, London
6am

A rhythmic shaking of the mattress and soft sounds of satisfaction on the other side of the bed jostle Bucky from sleep.

He cracks his eyes open, trying to orient himself in the dark—his eyes tracing the shadowy patterns on the ornate ceiling of their room at the hotel (oh yeah, Stark got rooms for them at the Savoy for their r&r) before turning his head on the pillow to see Darcy and Steve in profile.

This is how he often wakes up when they are off mission these days.

Darcy has never needed much sleep, now Steve needs even less than her, and both of them tend to wake up earlier than him.

They keep each other occupied, much like he and Darcy used to back when Stevie was still a little guy who slept like the dead. Steve’s serum enhanced libido is a perfect match for their girl’s willingness to test its limits.
For science.

Yeah, sure.

The defined muscles of Steve’s back and ass bunch rhythmically as he thrusts into Darcy, whose head is thrown back on the pillow, her dark curls wild around her head —the force of of Steve’s motions rocking the bed.

He rolls onto his side, keeping his gaze steady on them—the semi hard state of his morning erection swiftly becoming a rock hard distraction as he eyes the bounce of Darcy’s breasts and the defined muscles of Steve’s back.

“Harder Stevie,” Darcy gasps and Steve pauses, glancing at Bucky and smirking as he lifts her legs from around his waist to hook over his broad shoulders before turning his head to kiss her calf.

“This alright, baby?” He breathes and Darcy braces her hands against the headboard.

“God—yes,” she moans as Steve snaps his hips into her, the change in angle obviously working for her.

Steve growls as she arches her back, her hips rocking forward to meet his as he slams into her again and again.

Bucky wiggles out of his undershorts and kicks them to the end of the bed, pushing the sheets down his thighs to grip his hardened cock.

“Mmmm,” she hums turning her head on the pillow to look at Bucky, “Stevie—we should include Buck—y,” her voice breaking when Steve lowers himself to his elbows and folds her nearly in half beneath his large frame, nuzzling his lips over her breasts.

He sucks one rosy nipple into his mouth with a wet sound and she squeaks, her breath coming in fast pants as Steve rolls his hips in a slow dirty grind.
Bucky watches as his friend releases her nipple, pinching it between his fingers and rolling it contemplatively, “Ya think? What d’ya wanna do with him?” Steve teases.

She reaches towards Bucky, her gaze pleading as her fingertips just graze the back of his hand as he lazily strokes himself.

“So many things,” she slurs and his friend laughs, shifting onto his knees and lifting Darcy so only her head and shoulders make contact with the bed when he snaps his hips again. Darcy moans, “Oh yeah—right there,” the fingers that had been reaching for Bucky fall to twist in the sheets beside her.

Bucky stops stroking himself and reaches for her hand, twining his fingers with hers. She turns her head towards him and squeezes them hard as she comes, nearly sobbing as Steve keeps pistoning into her, drawing out her orgasm for as long as he can before groaning low and shuddering through his own release.

Darcy sighs, lowering her legs from Steve’s shoulders and curling them around his waist, her hand still clutching Bucky’s. She grips his friend’s neck and tugs him towards her so his chest covers hers and his face nestles in the pale curve of her neck.

Steve holds his weight on his elbows until she whispers, “Stevie, loosen up—you won’t crush me,” and he relaxes against her.

She hums contentedly, stroking her fingers up and down Steve’s back.

Bucky’s mouth curves into a soft smile. She loves to stay connected after sex for as long as possible just like he does, though she teases him whenever he whines because he slips out of her.

Stevie still worries about crushing her, more conscious of her small stature than Bucky is—still hyper aware of the size difference between them even now, more than two years after the serum.

It’s been a long time since Bucky saw Darcy as small, and she’s never been weak.

They lay quietly together for a few minutes, Darcy scratching the fingers of one hand through the short hairs at the nape of Steve’s neck as she holds Bucky’s hand with the other.
Bucky scoots closer to them, curling on his side with his head sharing Darcy’s pillow.

She turns her head towards him and Steve grumbles, burrowing his head into her hair. Bucky loosens his hand from hers and raises it to trace his fingers over the shadowy curve of her cheek, down the angle of her jaw, and finally to her bottom lip. She opens her mouth, gently nipping at his fingertips and whispers,

“Someone’s perking up.” Her lips quirking against his fingers as she rocks her hips slightly against Steve’s slow thrusts.

Bucky grins (Steve’s recovery time is phenomenal) and whispers, “God bless America.” She snorts in amusement.

He watches the steady uptick in the movement of Steve’s hips for a moment before pouting and lightly smacking his friends ass, “I’m feelin’ a little left out. Where’s your Christmas spirit Stevie? Share the love.”

Steve sighs and levers himself onto his elbows and turns his head, his lips swollen and eyes half lidded with pleasure.

“It’s Christmas—you shouldn’t be greedy,” Darcy declares and loosens her legs from around Steve’s waist, pushing on his shoulder, “I think Bucky deserves a present.”

Steve groans, dropping his head. “You’re right,” he sighs and pulls out of Darcy slowly, his breath hissing through his nose, “but I was really enjoyin’ that,” he grumbles.

Darcy ruffles his hair, “Greedy.”

Steve clambers over Bucky to lay on the other side of him and curls himself around Bucky’s back. He thrusts his hips playfully and Bucky pushes back, feeling the slippery length of Steve’s cock slide against his ass.

His flagging erection is instantly achingly hard.

Darcy squirms closer, whispering, “I have an idea.”
“Oh?” Bucky says, stifling a gasp when Steve reaches a hand over his hip to encircle the base of his cock and slowly stroke him as he continues rubbing himself against his backside.

“Yeah,” Darcy says with a wicked smirk, scooting closer to lay on her side, their faces inches apart, “How ‘bout you lay there and let Steve and I wish you a merry Christmas?”

“Alright, I guess,” he says teasingly and she leans into him, fitting her lips to his in a soft kiss.

After a few moments Darcy pulls back to kiss across his jaw, then down his neck, nipping and sucking her way down his chest to lick over his nipples and down his stomach, her nimble fingers stroking around and under his balls as she finally takes the tip of his cock into her mouth. She slowly circles around it with her tongue as Steve’s hand strokes him from the base to midshaft, his hips thrusting against his ass in counterpoint, his cock skimming over the exquisitely sensitive opening there.

Bucky unconsciously clenches the muscles of his ass when Darcy increases the suction of her mouth and Steve groans and rocks his hips a little faster.

Darcy abruptly releases the head of Bucky’s cock from her mouth and quickly wiggles back up his body, “Let’s try this,” she whispers, throwing one leg over his hip. Steve slows his thrusts and holds Bucky’s cock steady as Darcy pushes her hips forward, slowly sinking onto it.

_God, it feels so good._

Steve reaches around his hip to grip Darcy’s bottom and pulls her closer, and Bucky grunts as he bottoms out inside of her. He tangles a hand in her hair and tips her head back to kiss her hard, her lips parting beneath his and their tongues tangling as Steve rocks them together, his large hand gripping her hip and holding her in place while he thrusts against Bucky.

Steve latches his lips to the back of his neck, panting against his skin and whispering, “Have you thought of it Buck? Me inside you _here_?” He presses his hips against Bucky’s ass and Bucky shivers, the sensation of his friend rubbing against him combining with his words to tighten the coil of his impending orgasm near to snapping.

He pulls his lips from Darcy’s and gasps, “ _Yes—yes._”
Steve growls, “I think about it—*a lot.*”

They haven’t ever done that.

Bucky’s thought of it, wondered about it. But they haven’t gone that far and he wasn’t sure if Steve wanted to until now. Strangely, he’d almost convinced himself he wasn’t really queer as long as they hadn’t done that. Like it’s the point of no return or something.

It’s bullshit.

He wants Steve every way he can have him.

Always has.

It just took him a while to recognize it.

“We will,” Bucky says, thinking it’s probably something they'd have to figure out slowly—especially with Steve’s size.

Darcy tightens around his cock and small tremors race over her skin as she follows their exchange, the idea obviously working for her. She traces her lips over the edge of his jaw to his ear.

“I wanna watch—” she whispers, “do you think it will feel good? what if he’s inside of you while you’re inside of *me*?”

Bucky groans in affirmation, and she tightens her leg around his hip, changing the angle of her pelvis so the base of his cock rubs against her clit with each thrust.

Steve is processing Darcy’s words based on how the metronomic quality of his pistoning hips falters and becomes erratic with excitement.
Bucky is lost to the sensation of being sandwiched between the two people he loves most in the world, their heated skin against his, the sound of their gasping breaths and pounding heartbeats meld into a sensory overload that has him pumping hard and fast into Darcy. His mind whirls, blanking out completely as she convulses around him, her internal muscles gripping him so tightly he shudders and spills uncontrollably into her.

He drifts back to himself to find the inside of his thighs slick with Steve’s release and Darcy draped over him like a wet noodle.

“Merry Christmas,” she slurs against his chest and Bucky chuckles.

He grimaces slightly as Steve peels his belly away from his backside and flops tiredly onto his back.

“Don’t fall asleep, punk—you gotta get something to clean up the mess and I ain’t movin’,” Bucky grumbles as he wraps his arm around Darcy, pulling her closer. She tucks her head under his chin, sighing drowsily.

“Sure, sure,” Steve mutters, scratching his fingers through Bucky’s hair before rising from the bed.

“What time is dinner, doll?” He murmurs against the top of Darcy’s head.

Howard is having a bit of a get together for the Howlies in his extravagant suite later. Christmas dinner, drinking, and games are on the menu. Everyone except Falsworth, who’s visiting his family, will be there. Peggy will be coming later for drinks as she is spending the day with her family as well.

“4 o’clock,” she says as Steve returns to the bed and wipes down Bucky’s back with a damp washcloth before handing it to Bucky to finish.

“I vote we stay in bed for as long as possible,” Bucky says, folding the washcloth and tossing it onto the bedside table, dimly noting Steve handing Darcy a second washcloth.

Darcy stretches, turns onto her back and says, “Seconded,” as she gingerly cleans herself up before tossing the washcloth back to Steve who promptly plucks the other one from the bedside table and returns to the bathroom.
Bucky turns onto his back then pulls his pillow from beneath his head, punching it a couple times before slipping it underneath his head again. The squeak of the taps and the cessation of running water in the bathroom signal Steve’s imminent return.

After a moment his friend pads across the plush carpet and flops onto the bed next to him, crossing his arms beneath his blond head and contemplating the crystal chandelier in the center of the ceiling. He muses, “What about breakfast?”

Darcy punches a fist from beneath the blankets and waves it in the air, crowing, “Room service!”

Bucky grins, pulling her closer. She turns onto her side and throws one leg over his hips, relaxing into him. Her hand rests over his heart and soon Steve turns on his side, weaving his fingers with hers.

“So—eggs and bacon?” he says.

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January 20, 1945
SSR Housing
London

Darcy flops facedown on the bed in Peggy’s room.

She likes when Peggy is around because she can cross through the bathroom between their rooms and talk to her. It’s been more than a year since they first met and they’ve managed to build a comfortable rapport. Peggy is an excellent sounding board and usually able to give her a cool analysis of missions.

Darcy huffs, “But Peggy, why? I could jump onto the train with Bucky and Steve instead of Jones.”

Peggy calmly rises from her desk chair and crosses the room, sitting beside Darcy.
“Two reasons. Jones is an expert radioman who speaks German. He will be able to communicate back to the rest of the squad when they have achieved their objective and speak to the engineer on the train. In addition, there will undoubtedly be close quarters fighting. It isn’t your specialty area, Darcy,” Peggy says sympathetically, patting her on the back.

Darcy sighs into Peggy’s chenille bedspread. She speaks German, not that she’s advertised the fact, but admittedly not as well as Jones—she needs more opportunity to practice.

As for close quarters fighting, it could be her specialty area — if she could get some more training in hand to hand fighting.

Unfortunately, the people who know all of her secrets and could possibly train her are so worried about hurting her that she cannot get real help from them.

Steve’s super strength makes him extra cautious and Bucky still holds back, even though they both know they cannot do her permanent injury.

In addition, the fighting style they’ve learned assumes the opponent will be of a similar size and weight. She needs the kind of training that assumes all of her potential opponents will be larger than her and adjusts to that.

She turns her head to eye Peggy speculatively.

“Do you have much fight training?” she says.

Peggy tilts her head, her dark eyes slightly unfocused in thought, “I have some basic military hand to hand training, but I’ve picked up a few additional things along the way. Being a woman and generally smaller and weaker than a man means you have to use whatever is at your disposal. I usually just try to hit them hard in the head with something heavy,” she smirks.

Darcy grins, “I could do that.”

“Yes, you could,” Peggy says, “it helps that men tend to underestimate women. You can use that.”
Darcy hums in affirmation, folding her hands under her chin and staring sightlessly at the slightly peeling wallpaper next to the bed.

“Maybe we could practice together some time?” Darcy asks.

“Of course,” Peggy replies, laying back to gaze at the ceiling.

After a few minutes of comfortable silence Peggy says, “There’s another reason, you know.”

“Hmmm?”

“Steve and Bucky have each other’s backs, but they’re confident about each other’s ability to handle most opponents. However, they are very protective of you—it would be a distraction in close quarters fighting.”

Darcy huffs, “I can handle myself! Plus—I have Sparky!”

Peggy looks pointedly at Darcy, “I know, and hopefully you’ll never have to use it. They’re men though. Honorable, protective men who cannot help but view you as weaker. If Phillips knew how involved you were with the two of them he’d probably pull you off the squad.”

“Really?” Darcy says.

“Really,” Peggy nods affirmatively, “Conflict of interest, that sort of thing, just like they wouldn’t let brothers or a father and son serve in the same unit.”

*Good thing nobody knows just how involved Bucky and Steve are then.*

*It would be a blue discharge at the least, court martial at worst.*

Darcy can’t really argue against the logic of it. She’d already abandoned her post once when Bucky
was a POW, after all. It’s fortunate her ability to follow orders hasn’t been tested against her loyalty to Steve and Bucky during her time with the SSR.

Darcy groans in irritation, rolls onto her side, and says, “You wanna go down to the gun range and practice? I feel the need to shoot something.”

Peggy grins and sits up, rising to her feet and tugging Darcy by the hand.

“Sure. Always good to practice,” she says.

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January 29, 1945
Brennan Pass
Alps between Italy and Austria
9:30am

They’ve spent a cold few hours huddled on the mountain ledge overlooking the sweep of train track circling the edge of the mountain.

Earlier, Steve hammered the adamantium spike Howard had designed into a rocky outcropping behind them and attached one end of a carbon fiber cable to it. The other end was tethered to a harpoon like anchor loaded into a sort of crossbow. He’d peered across the gorge at the train tracks, gauging the distance to where they’d need to anchor the cable on the other side of them and pulled the trigger.

They now had a wire high enough that they wouldn’t slam into the side of the train when they slid down it, but low enough that they could land with as little rebound possible onto the top of the train.

However, they had a very small window of opportunity.

They’d practiced the maneuver over and over back at SSR headquarters, sliding down the line and letting go to land on top of shipping crates roughly the shape of boxcars.
But this is different. The train will be in motion and possibly slick with snow. If they slip off of it—the fall is very far.

Very far.

He glances down at the bottom of the gorge and feels slightly dizzy at the view.

Bucky wonders if he’d done something wrong in another life to be in this predicament. The only thing driving him right now is the rage he feels whenever he considers Zola being on that train and the need to watch Steve’s back.

Punk’s so focused on getting Zola and whatever information they can pry out of him that he’s forgotten to be scared.

Darcy had bitterly objected being left behind with the others, but there’s a 10 second window to get on top of the train—only time enough to get three men on it. Besides, they need a radioman and neither of them want Darcy in a close quarters fight.

She stands beside him, her breath swirling into the cold Alpine air, head cocked and listening as Jones and Morita work on picking up the radio frequency from the train.

Her storm blue eyes meet his and her brow furrows with concern. She whispers, “I don’t like this.”

He edges closer to her and links his fingers with hers, their hands hidden in the folds of her coat.

“It’ll be alright, doll. We practiced over and over. Steve’s pretty okay in a fight,” he smiles, squeezing her hand twice. It’s their code, two squeezes mean love you. He’s trying to lighten the mood, but he can tell she’s not buying it.

She squeezes his hand three times (love you too) instead. After a moment she clears her throat and mutters, “When this is all over, I want chocolate.”
“That expensive stuff Howard hoards?” He whispers.

“Yeah. And the bathtub at the Savoy,” she sighs.

“Mmhmm,” he has fond memories of the bathtub at the Savoy.

Steve stands on Bucky’s other side, so close their shoulders brush.

“I wouldn’t mind room service,” he says under his breath, raising his hand to grip Bucky’s shoulder, his eyes cutting towards his then over to Darcy’s worried face before returning to the curve of track below them.

“Only on Howard’s dime,” Bucky mutters and Steve chokes out a little laugh.

After that they’re silent, the only noise is the whistling of the wind through the pass and the staticky voices speaking in German from the radio Jones and Morita labor over.

Snow swirls around them as Falsworth lifts binoculars to his eyes and scans the track, then hands them to Dugan. There’s no sign of the train as of yet.

Bucky’s eyes trace the wire once again and the steep drop beneath it. His guts feel watery every time he looks too long at it.

Fuck.

“Remember when I made you ride the Cyclone at Coney Island?” Bucky mutters.

“Yeah, and I threw up?” Steve answers.

“This isn’t payback, is it?” Bucky asks.
Steve smirks, “Now why would I do that?”

Jones lowers the headset from his ear and interrupts, “We were right, Dr. Zola is on the train. Hydra dispatcher gave him permission to open up the throttle. Wherever he’s going they must need him bad.”

Steve glances at Bucky and squares his shoulders, donning his helmet.

The sound of the fast approaching train echoes down the canyon and Falsworth raises his binoculars again and lowers them saying, “Let’s get going, because they’re moving like the devil.”

He squeezes Darcy’s hand twice more before letting go to follow Steve to the wire.

**what is a blue discharge from the military**

**Some historical info about gays in the military**

Chapter End Notes

Yeah—I know. We are approaching Bucky falling from the train. *sob*

The hand squeezing thing Bucky does with Darcy is something I took from my life—my kids and I started doing that when they were smaller as a way to tell each other “I love you” even when it was awkward for them to say it. Like in front of their friends, lol.

I’m sorry for the wait on this chapter, I’ve fallen behind in my writing due to crazy shit in my personal life that has left me with a bit of writers block. I’m still working, albeit more slowly. It’s especially difficult to write given the sad canon events that I’m not planning to change.

I just hate what happened to Bucky so much. Sigh.

Next chapter will post in a week or so, weekly posting probably isn’t happening again for a bit. Thanks for your patience and all of the lovely comments and kudos, they really make my day.
Chapter 49

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve fight their way through the Hydra train. Bucky falls from the train. Steve and Jones escort Zola to the rendezvous point while Darcy and the rest of the Howlies complete their part of the mission.

Steve tells Darcy the terrible news.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

A few lines of dialogue from CA:TFA used.

I’m sorry, gentle readers. This is where the heartache begins.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

January 29, 1945

Hydra train in the Austrian Alps

They have no trouble entering the train.

Steve pulls his pistol and Bucky raises his rifle as they cross the strangely silent train car, empty and sterile except for the racks of weapons down the center of it.

Steve glances at his friend, who is all business, his face blank and eyes laser focused on their surroundings. He’s suspicious about the lack of Hydra guards, and cautiously approaches the connection to the next car, eyeing the open doors and the space beyond warily.

As Steve passes through the darkened passage between cars he hears Bucky’s breathing behind him, his heart rate elevated, no doubt from adrenaline.

He has his back.
Steve focuses on moving forward, his serum enhanced brain quickly cataloguing the stacks of metal boxes lining the next car. He steps over the threshold slowly, and in a millisecond there is a click behind him—he whirs to see the door closing between he and Bucky, his eyes darting from the anxious furrowing of Bucky’s brow, to behind him at the other end of the car.

A Hydra soldier steps through, his gun raised.

He pounds on the thick glass window of the steel door between them, tamping down panic at their separation. He has no time to attempt breaking through—Bucky turns away and the ratatat of his Tommy gun begins in earnest just as an armored soldier steps through the door at the other end of Steve’s car.

The distinctive whine of an energy weapon has Steve diving to the side as the soldier fires at him, a blue flare of light flashing past him. He fires repeatedly from behind the metal weapons crates, pulling the shield from his back and deflecting another blast from the weapon as he gets to his feet.

Boxes from the racks lining the car crash to the floor, creating an obstacle course between himself and the armored Hydra soldier.

The sound of intermittent gunfire behind him is strangely reassuring—Bucky’s still fighting.

Steve’s eyes trace the ceiling, noting the cargo hook mounted onto a track down the center of the car and he steps forward, and just as the armored soldier readies his weapon again he jumps up, grabbing the hook and swinging his legs to create momentum. He deflects another energy blast with his shield just before forcefully impacting with the enemy soldier’s chest, knocking him to the ground.

He rains blows on the fallen man with his shield, disabling him and swiftly running back to the other end of the car to peer through the window at Bucky.

Shit.

He’s out of ammo.
Bucky ducks behind the crates again and listens carefully to the approaching footsteps of the Hydra gunman. He looks wildly around himself, searching for some defensive weapon, but there’s nothing.

As the footsteps grow closer he feels his heartbeat thundering in his chest, his fight or flight instinct nearly overwhelming him.

Suddenly the commotion coming from the next car turns to silence and Steve’s tense face appears in the window, his blue eyes worried as they cut towards Bucky and then further down the car.

Suddenly the door whooshes open and the Hydra gunman starts up again, bullets pinging against the metal crates around him. Steve’s standing to the side of the doorway and he holds up a clip for his gun, raising his brows before he tosses it to him. Bucky quickly ejects the empty clip from his pistol and slots the new one in place as Steve roars and charges full throttle at the rack full of weapons crates, sending a metal case forcefully towards the Hydra gunman with his shield.

The enemy soldier steps to the side to avoid the case and Bucky downs him neatly with one shot.

He strolls towards Steve and says, “I had him on the ropes.”

“I know,” Steve says distractedly as he looks down at the Hydra soldier at their feet.

A high pitched whine comes from behind them and Steve shouts, “Get down!” pushing Bucky to the side and raising his shield.

Bucky barely registers the sight of the strangely armored Hydra soldier before his weapon discharges, a bolt of blue light impacting with Steve’s shield and glancing off of it to rip a hole in the side of the train car.

The whistle of the wind and rattle of the train over the tracks fills the car, the air suddenly frigid.

Steve is thrown hard into the side of the car and the shield slides across the floor to stop at Bucky’s feet. He bends to pick it up, his ears ringing as he holds it in front of him. He glances at Steve’s crumpled form and steps forward, raising his gun to shoot repeatedly at the Hydra soldier.
The menacing whine of the energy weapon charging up fills the air before it discharges, hitting the shield hard. It’s flung from his grasp and he tumbles out the open side of the train car, barely catching himself with one hand on a railing.

The click clack of the train speeding over the rails and the whipping of the wind is loud in his ears as he clings to the side of the car, trying and failing to pull himself up to steadier footing.

He glances over his shoulder and his guts churn—the empty air below him filling him with dread.

*Oh god.*

*Oh no.*

Steve pokes his head out of the train car, “Bucky! Hang on!” He cries, edging along the side of the car and holding his hand outstretched.

“Grab my hand!”

He nods, working closer to Steve, his arms aching and hands numb as he clutches the cold metal of the creaking railing. He reaches for his friend, their hands nearly touching—

There’s a metallic snapping sound and he’s falling.

Bucky screams, Steve’s face is a rictus of abject horror growing more and more distant as the train speeds away and he’s *falling*, the wind whistling loud in his ears and—

*Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, oh God*

*Oh—*
Later, Steve will have trouble recalling the hours just after Bucky fell.

He methodically works his way through the empty cars of the train after checking on the armored Hydra soldier he’d thrown the shield at in a terrified fury when Bucky had been blasted out of the car.

The soldier was dead.

He made sure of it this time.

Too late.

Too late.

Too late—

When he finally makes it to the engine car it is to find Jones standing guard over a tightly bound Dr. Zola and the body of a very young looking Hydra soldier at his feet, white foam around his mouth.

Typical Hydra, suicide before capture.

Jones lowers his gun when he sees it’s Steve coming through the door, glancing behind him in puzzlement.

“Where’s the Sarge?” He says.

Steve looks at him with dead eyes.

“Gone—he fell from the train.”

Jones eyes widen and after a moment he sighs heavily, “I’m so sorry, sir.”
Steve nods, mute with pain.

Jones says, “I’ve contacted SSR via the radio, we should be arriving at the rendezvous point in about ten minutes. I’ve looked over the controls, they’re like those we studied back at base.”

He, Bucky, and Jones had gone over the mechanics of operating the train, just in case they had to stop it themselves. Steve glances at the dead man on the floor, “I assume this was the engineer?” He says.

“Yes,” Jones replies.

Steve nods again, finally allowing himself to look intently at the squat Hydra scientist lashed to a chair against the wall.

The man’s watery blue eyes widen slightly, panic and malice warring on his doughy face.

Steve glances at Jones, “No cyanide for him?”

Jones shakes his head reaches in his pocket and pulls out a slightly larger than normal false tooth, “Took it before he could use it. Good thing he’s afraid of dying—the engineer bit his seconds after I broke through the roof.”

Zola chooses that moment to speak, “Captain— so sorry about Sergeant Barnes loss. We were acquainted, you know,” he smirks, and sighs wistfully, a malignant expression on his face, “If only I’d had him longer, he could have been extraordinary.”

Steve stiffens with rage.

He knows the scientist is winding him up but this cowardly toad of a man had tortured Bucky—

He punches the wall beside the scientists head hard, leaving a dent in the wall. He rests his hand there, looming over the sweating man and bites out, “I suggest that you not speak unless we ask you
a question.”

He straightens and raises his hand, flexing his fingers in front of him. The scientist eyes him with trepidation as his knuckles pop, the bruises fading quickly.

Jones nervously asks, “You need a minute, Cap?”

Steve heaves a sigh, “Yeah—Maybe. Don’t radio ahead about Bucky. I need to—“ his voice falters as he thinks about telling their girl that Bucky is gone.

He bows his head for a moment and clears his throat, before continuing quietly, “I need to tell her in person.”

Jones nods in understanding, his dark eyes sad.

“Sure thing,” he says, “I’ll let you know when we’re close to arriving.”

“Thanks,” Steve says, and turns away.

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He loses time.

It seems a moment and forever before Jones makes his way to the car behind the engine where Steve had retreated to gather himself.

He mutters, “Time to get off the train Cap, it’s the end of the line.”

“Just a minute,” he says quietly and Jones nods, patting his shoulder gently before turning around and returning to the control room.
The end of the line.

Oh god.

The end—and Bucky is gone.

Gone—

He hunches forward, his chest heaving with the agony of his loss. He wants to scream, but instead he clamps his hand over his mouth to muffle his sobs as tears stream from his eyes.

It’s all his fault.

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January 29, 1945

6:30pm

They make their way to the rendezvous point by walking along the train track.

After Steve, Bucky, and Jones had jumped onto the train, the rest of the Howlies had reported their progress to Peggy via the radio Morita was operating regarding the successful boarding of the train and began their portion of the mission, which was setting explosives along the bridge leading into the pass, effectively disabling Hydra and the German troops from using it to ferry supplies between Austria and Italy.

They’d backtracked a mile and a half to the bridge and under Dernier’s watchful eyes set the explosives at key point along it. They’d cheered gleefully after it had blown up in a spectacular fashion—the noise of it echoing through the mountains and bringing a landslide of snow down the side of the mountain nearby as well.

Fortunately they were well out of the way.
Then they began the long trek down the track towards the rendezvous point some 15 miles away.

The last portion of which has been spent traversing a tunnel through the mountain—which had Morita complaining bitterly about the darkness. The tunnel itself is half a mile long, and as they pick their way alongside the tracks in the frigid darkness, the only light is from their flashlights—not even the openings to the tunnel providing any light as the sun had set a little more than two hours ago.

The sounds of their footsteps and the clanking of their gear echoes weirdly in the tunnel, definitely contributing to the claustrophobic feeling Darcy isn’t having much success ignoring—her brain can’t stop calculating the sheer weight of the mountain above them.

Dernier walks alongside her and Morita behind them, with Falsworth and Dugan leading—everyone holding their flashlights on the ground in front of them, but occasionally one of them would pan their light around, giving a broader view of the moisture slick walls and high ceiling.

“Ya think there are rats in here?” Dugan ponders, “there ain’t a tunnel in New York without rats.”

Falsworth calmly answers, “I don’t know that rats live at this altitude. What would they eat?”

Dugan shudders, “Not sure I wanna know.”

Darcy’s lips curve in amusement. She had noted some bats on the ceiling not long after they entered the tunnel and it had caused a mild panic from both Morita and Dugan, the two of them declaring they were no more than diseased flying rats.

Dugan had crammed his bowler a bit more firmly on his head as if to protect it.

Anyway—they are nearly to the end of the tunnel and will be meeting up with Peggy and a squadron of SSR soldiers about two miles past it.

They’ve heard nothing on the radio from Peggy except they had Zola in custody, much to her relief.

After a few more minutes of walking in the claustrophobic dark she begins to sing “Swing on a Star” softly under her breath,
Would you like to swing on a star  
Carry moonbeams home in a jar  
And be better off than you are  
Or would you rather be a mule

Morita chuckles behind her and joins in on the next stanza,

A mule is an animal with long funny ears
Kicks up at anything he hears
His back is brawny but his brain is weak
He's just plain stupid with a stubborn streak
And by the way, if you hate to go to school
You may grow up to be a mule

Pretty soon Dugan joins in and the three of them muddle their way through the song finishing it just as they reach the end of the tunnel.

“Say,” Morita says, “that last bit of tunnel didn’t seem so dark with us singin’.”

Darcy smiles, “Yeah.”

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They radio ahead when they are approaching the rendezvous point and Darcy picks out the silhouettes of Steve and Jones standing sentry in the darkness at the edge of the encampment.

“Cap!” Dugan calls, “I hear you got your man!”

“We did,” Steve says, but his voice sounds hoarse and the lines of his body are strangely tense.

Darcy steps forward, scans the camp behind them and says, “Everything okay?”

Bucky was always near Steve when they were out on a mission, but as she focuses on the small encampment she doesn’t see or hear him anywhere.
Jones takes a sharp breath, his heart rate increasing and Steve’s faster than normal heartbeat is like a drum in her ears.

Steve says nothing but he gently takes her arm and leads her away from the group. She looks over her shoulder to see Jones ushering the Howlies in the opposite direction.

He circles around to one of the cargo trucks in the clearing and steps over the tailgate, turning to place his hands under her arms and lift her bodily into the truck.

“Stevie—“ she whispers, “what’s wrong? You’re scaring me.”

“Darce,” he starts, his voice going higher and his breath shuddering through his large frame, “it’s Bucky—“ his voice hitches and she grabs his hands and grips them tightly as his shoulders hunch beneath whatever emotional weight he’s carrying.

She wishes she could clearly see his face but the interior of the cargo truck is dark and she can only see the outline of him and the pale oval of his face, his expressions obscured.

“He’s gone,” he whispers.

“Gone? What do you mean, gone?” Panic twists in her chest making her throat tight—it feels hard to breathe.

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Darcy grips his hands so tightly it would be painful if he were a normal man.

But he isn’t.

Not anymore—and this is where it has led them.
He struggles with how to tell her what happened when he can barely understand it himself. One minute his friend was with him and the next he was gone—ripped away from him and disappearing from view before he’d even processed that Bucky was lost to him forever.

He will never forget the sound of Bucky’s screams and the absolute terror on his face.

Never.

The photographic memory he’d gained with the serum is as much a curse as a blessing.

But perhaps he deserves the punishment of it.

*It was all his fault.*

Finally, he says, “He’s dead.”

He doesn’t know how to make it not hurt. No way to explain it that won’t rip her heart to shreds.

“What? No—“ she cries, “I want to see him!”

“He’s gone,” he repeats, his mouth carefully shaping the words while he screams on the inside *He’s gone! Gone! It’s my fault that he’s never coming back! All my fault!*

Over and over in his mind’s eye he sees Bucky’s face as he falls, his silvery blue eyes wide and the sound of his terrified screams.

*Oh god.*

*He feels like he’s losing his mind.*

He pulls her against his chest and she trembles against him, her fingers twisting in the fabric of his
She lets out a pained gasp, “I wanna see him, Stevie—I gotta see him. Where is he? Where?"

Steve tips his head back in the darkness, squeezing his eyes shut against the tears that have gathered in them and replies hoarsely, “He fell from the train—hundreds of feet. We can’t see him.”

Darcy sags against him, and he is drowned in the tsunami her grief.

“Swing on a star” Bing Crosby

Chapter End Notes

*passes around tea, tissues, and chocolate*

That was really hard to write. Really hard. Weird to get so attached to a fictional character, but...yeah.

Let me know what you think.

Thanks to all of you thoughtful people who continue to comment and all of you new ones who’ve come out of the woodwork and taken the time to let me know what you think. I appreciate all of you so much! If you haven’t left kudos or commented yet, please do! It lets me know that people want me to continue.
Chapter 50

Chapter Summary

The Howlies go back to England. Steve and Darcy can finally be alone to process their grief together.

Chapter Notes

No beta. All errors are mine.

Grief is a strange thing. Everyone handles it differently. I can only guess what went through Steve Rogers head when he lost his best friend. Hope I’m doing the character justice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

February 1, 1945

SSR Airfield outside of London

7pm

Will and Howard are standing on the tarmac when Steve exits the plane, closely followed by Darcy and the rest of the Howlies. Will’s expression is haunted as his green eyes trace over him and the tall redhead nods solemnly to him, frowning with worry as he looks beyond Steve to his sister.

He knows what Will sees.

Darcy is hanging on by the barest thread.

She’s been practically catatonic since hearing of Bucky’s death, quickly and efficiently going through the motions necessary to complete the mission but her mind far away, her gaze a blank agony only he seems able to bridge.

If she’s near him she’s touching him. Even now, he feels her hand rest on the small of his back as they step down from the plane and it grounds him knowing she’s there.
The contact is necessary for both of them.

Everyone around them seems to understand and leaves them in their bubble, the rest of the Howlies trying their best to help by running interference with the SSR soldiers on mission with them.

Peggy stays close.

She’d personally debriefed he and Jones on their part of the mission and then Darcy and the rest of the Howlies while they were still in the field, saving them from a meeting with Phillips when they return to base.

She also made sure they were on leave for the next two weeks.

Both he and Darcy had argued against it, being the type of people who used work as a distraction from hard times, but Peggy wouldn’t have it.

Besides, their next mission is stalled until Zola is interrogated. The German is a cowardly bully, and Peggy is confident they can pry the location of Hydra headquarters from him.

He very much wants to be in on that interrogation and Darcy’s expression becomes predatory any time she sees the man, her small body fairly bristling with antagonism and her gaze burning with thwarted fury, shackled and under guard as he is.

Peggy has kept both of them away from Zola, no doubt because his idea of interrogation might devolve into beating the German to death and Darcy becomes slightly unhinged any time the man is mentioned.

Will rushes forward, Howard hot on his heels, as soon as they separate from the squad of SSR soldiers exiting the plane behind them. He heads to Darcy, whose chin begins to tremble as soon as she spots her brother. Steve grips her hand tightly in support and she takes a deep breath, resolutely calming herself in front of the others.

She crushes his fingers in a bruising grip and the small pain centers him, bringing his mind into sharp focus.
“Will—,” he says hoarsely, clearing his throat before continuing, “Do you and Howard have your own car?”

Howard mutters, “Yeah, we’re taking you two to the Savoy,” he hooks a thumb behind him and Steve spots the shiny black Bentley parked by the hangar.

Will moves to take Darcy’s bag and wraps his arm around her shoulders and she sags into his side, still clutching Steve’s hand.

Will says, “Howard already cleared it with Peggy—we all thought you two might need some time alone.”

Darcy nods, sending Howard a wan smile. “Thank you, Howard,” she says softly.

Howard says, “You’re welcome,” he looks at Steve, his dark eyes serious for once, “Barnes was a good man—“ he ducks his head and clears his throat before adding, “Anything you two need, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Steve nods stiffly and they all head to the car.

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The Savoy

8pm

Darcy leans against the wall as Steve fits the key into the lock and pushes the door open to her room. They have the same connecting rooms as always, but they’ve wordlessly agreed to avoid the room he always shared with Bucky and stay on her side.

Discretion has fallen by the wayside now that they’re off mission and he can’t be bothered to care what anyone else might think.
He holds the door, gesturing for her to go ahead and she crosses it to flick on the bedside lamp, turning back as he shuts and locks it, then drops the hastily filled bags they’d packed at their SSR quarters next to it.

He leans heavily against the door, sighing wearily and watching her unholster her pistol and lay it on the vanity, followed by her utility belt. She unbuttons her jacket, throwing it over the back of the vanity chair and sits on the edge of it to unlace her boots, kicking them to the side and rolling her thick wool socks off to flex her bare toes into the plush carpet.

Steve hasn’t moved from the door, his body feels coiled with tension, the weight of the last few days pressing down on him like a mountain.

She says quietly, “I’m gonna order room service, neither of us has been eating enough,” and Steve makes a wordless noise of affirmation, distractedly loosening his tie as he pushes off the door and crosses the room to sit on the edge of the bed while she dials the front desk.

He listens with half an ear as she orders enough food for five people. His stomach cramps and rumbles and he realizes he’s actually hungry, a sensation he’s been too numb to acknowledge until now.

Now that they are finally alone the careful lid he’s put on his emotions and physical state is starting to slip, hunger and fatigue are the least of the things beginning to leak through.

She hangs up the phone and stands, stretching her arms over her head with a groan, “Food will be here in an hour, I’m gonna shower.”

She turns her back to him, unzipping the zippers at the sides of her tight uniform shirt and wiggling out of it, tossing it onto the chair and rolling her shoulders.

Steve begins silently working the fastenings loose on his uniform, his eyes tracing over the deceptively fragile length of her neck to her dark hair, braided tight to her head for the mission since it’d gotten too long again.

He has a sudden flash of Bucky sitting on the edge of the bed pre-mission, weaving her hair into two long plaits and carefully pinning them in a coronet around her head.
Bucky was always better at braiding.

His vision blurs with tears as he pulls his shirt over his head and tosses it on the end of the bed. He rubs at his forehead, tilting his head back and willing the tears away, choosing to focus on the rustle of Darcy removing her clothes instead.

When he looks over at her again she’s pulling one leg free of her trousers and balancing on it, hopping slightly while she pulls her other leg free and kicks them off.

Her lips quirk slightly though her eyes remain tired and sad, “Wanna share the shower, Stevie?” She says softly.

“Sure,” he murmurs, pulling his undershirt off and tossing it on the end of the bed, scratching absently at his chest. Neither of them have been able to bathe since they’d left for their mission five days ago. “Lemme know when the water is warm.”

She nods and heads to the bathroom, pulling her undershirt off and tossing it behind her.

His eyes travel the familiar smooth line of her back and the dip of her waist before she disappears from sight. He stands, unbuttoning his pants to quickly shove them off, leaving them crumpled on the floor.

The squeak of the taps and the sound of running water come from the bathroom as he pads towards the door, clad in his undershorts.

Darcy utters a low sound of distress and he quickly enters the bathroom to find her standing naked in front of the sink with her hands hovering around her head, her chin trembling with suppressed sobs.

He steps behind her and meets her tearful eyes in the mirror.

“What is it?” He says, resting his hands on her shoulders.

“My hair—my,” she stammers, dropping her hands and her shoulders slumping, “braids,” she whispers, “he won’t be able to do them for me ever again.”
“Oh, sweetheart—shhhh,” he pulls her against his chest and wraps his arms around her, “don’t cry,” he whispers, turning her in his arms and stroking his hands down her back and up again. He presses his lips to her hair, “I’ll take care of ya,” he promises.

*He will.*

Darcy closes her eyes and leans her forehead against the warm skin of Steve’s chest as he carefully removes the pins from her hair. She counts the plink of each one as he sets them on the edge of the ceramic sink, opening her eyes only when he loosens the braids and combs his fingers through her hair, grabbing the ends and gently tugging her head back.

Steam swirls around the ceiling and the humid warmth loosens the tightness in her chest as she gazes into Steve’s worried blue eyes. He looks exhausted, the bones of his face prominent from weight loss and fatigue. Neither of them have slept or eaten much in the last few days and the stress of it is beginning to show.

She reaches up and cups his cheek in her hand, rubbing her thumb over his cheekbone and the hollow under his eye.

He leans into her touch, closing his eyes briefly before exhaling, “Hot water ain’t gonna last forever.”

“Yeah,” she nods, leaning her forehead against his chest for a moment before she steps away from him to open the shower curtain, testing the temperature briefly before stepping under the steady fall of heated water. She turns her face into the spray, the temperature nearly too hot—closing her eyes and letting it wash over her like a benediction. Turning and tilting her head back, she lifts her arms to stroke through the length of her hair as the water sluices over her.

Steve steps into the tub, the shower curtain rings jingling as he jerks the curtain closed and wraps his large hands around her waist.

She opens her eyes and slips her arms around his neck, tugging him closer, backing up just enough so they’re both under the spray from the shower head. She leans into him and tucks her head under his chin, his hands tightening on her hips before sliding around her in favor of hugging her tightly.
against him.

The only sound is patter of water in the tub and his beating heart. She relaxes against him and allows herself to just feel the comfort of being with him skin to skin.

After a few silent moments, Steve steps back and reaches for the soap and washcloth she’d placed on the side of the tub, his expression pensive as he lathers it. He tugs her from beneath the spray and gently turns her back to him, lathering her shoulders and arms, rubbing soapy circles on her skin, his concentration absolute.

She shivers at the sensation, her skin raising in goosebumps and her nipples pebbling as he works his way down her back and over her buttocks, his hand clenching on her waist briefly as he pauses there before kneeling to continue down the length of her legs.

“Turn,” he says hoarsely.

She does, finding him kneeling at her feet, his blue gaze unwavering.

*So beautiful.*

She watches the muscles in his forearms shift as he lathers the washcloth again and rubs circles over her chest, tracing gently over her nipples—his lips pursing slightly at her indrawn breath before washing over her belly, skipping down her legs and lifting one foot as she balances a hand on his shoulder to carefully clean between each of her toes.

“Missed a spot,” she whispers.

”Hmmm,” he hums, raising one brow, “Did I?”

She nods and he traces up her legs again, slowly rubbing the cloth between her legs. The sudden jolt of lust startles her and sends shivers over skin. She grips his shoulder tighter and the corner of his mouth tips up teasingly as he pulls away.

She strokes her fingers from his shoulder to his fingers and tugs the washcloth away, stepping
beneath the shower spray to rinse off, rinsing and soaping the cloth again.

He gracefully rises to his feet and she switches places with him so his back is under the water, stepping close to rub the soapy cloth over the pale golden skin of his wide shoulders and down his arms, tracing gently over the long fingers of each large hand.

He sighs, tipping his head back and closing his eyes, his long lashes forming wet points against his cheeks as rivulets of water wash down his face.

She circles the cloth over his chest and down his belly, lightly washing between his legs where his cock has sprung to attention. She traces one finger over it's length from root to tip and Steve’s hips jerk minutely, she smirks slightly then kneels, rubbing the washcloth down the muscled thighs and calves of his legs before carefully washing his feet.

When she’s finished her eyes retrace the path all the way up to his face, finding his gaze sharp and focused.

“Rinse,” she says softly and he steps back further under the spray. She watches as he leans his head back and closes his eyes, his hands slicking his wet hair back from his face.

His breath catches and his eyes pop open when she braces one palm on his thigh and encircles his cock with the other, stroking up and down slowly as she maintains eye contact with him. A flush rises in his cheeks and he inhales sharply, his breath hissing through his teeth as she leans forward, licking around the blunt head before carefully slipping it into her mouth.

They haven’t been together this way since before Bucky...since before.

It still seems unbelievable that there could be an after, like the world should have stopped turning and she and Stevie should be wherever Bucky went.

His hands tangle in her wet hair and tug as she works her mouth over him, her lips stretching around his girth. She catalogues the familiar taste and feel of him—narrowing her focus to this moment alone, letting go of the pain of the last few days to just feel—to just be alive.

*She needs this.*
He’s still here. Despite everything.

They still have each other.

Steve groans as she moves her mouth up and down, her tongue swirling around his length and cheeks hollowing on the upstroke with a filthy sucking sound.

“God—baby,” Steve moans and tugs harder at her hair, the mild pain of it welcome and grounding, anchoring her firmly in the present.

After a few moments he’s panting, tugging at her hair gently and stammering, “Stop—stop. I need you closer,” she pulls off of him and he releases his grip, slipping his hands under her arms and helping her to her feet. She raises her eyebrows in wordless question and he presses her against the wall in response, she shivers at the sensation of the cold tile against her skin and his hands frame her face as he leans down to kiss her.

The kiss soon becomes uncharacteristically rough, almost painful— they nip and suck at each other’s lips in a frenzy, neither of them feeling like they can get close enough, both of them raw from the emotional upheaval of the last few days.

Steve grips her waist and lifts her so their faces are even and she wraps her legs around him, grinding against the underside of his hard length.

He trails his lips over her jaw to just under her ear and sucks hard and she closes her eyes, shivering with sensation and digging her fingernails into his shoulders. Random patterns coalesce in the darkness behind her eyelids as he moves his mouth further down her neck and does it again and again, his teeth digging in just hard enough to sting.

“Need you sweetheart,” he whispers against the fast fading bruises on her skin and she trembles with the force of her feelings, her legs tightening around his waist to pull him as close as she can.

“Then have me,” she says, her voice rough with pain and desire, tugging at the wet hair at his nape as he wraps one hand around her waist to push her into the wall, pulling his hips back to align himself with her opening.

He slips in slowly, gasping brokenly against her neck, “God—Darce—“
She feels it too—her body electrified by finally feeling something that doesn’t hurt, something *good*.

The familiar sting of him stretching her open fades almost immediately to be replaced by delicious fullness—she swears she can feel the throbbing of his heart through his cock when he stills, buried to the hilt inside of her.

She clenches around him, rolling her hips to encourage him to move and he pulls back and slams back into her, the wet slap of their bodies echoing in the steamy bathroom.

“Stevie—“ she gasps, “Don’t stop.”

*Don’t ever stop.*

*Ever.*

*Always and forever.*

Tears spring to her eyes and she closes them, anchoring her shoulders against the wall and angling her hips so each thrust hits just the right spot inside of her. He leans down and molds his mouth to hers, his tongue licking the seam of her lips before delving inside.

She pulls back slightly and breathes against his lips, “Love you, Stevie—“ her voice breaking as she mindlessly repeats, “Love you, love you, love you,” while he thrusts into her hard, then harder still.

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He knows he’s being rough but he can’t stop.

How close is close enough?

He feels like he can’t get close enough, that he can’t outrun the guilt and anger in his heart.
Bucky should be here.

_He never would have been on the train were it not for me._

_He should have checked to make sure the Hydra soldier wasn’t getting up again._

_He should have moved faster._

Darcy’s breath stutters with the force of his thrusts but she eggs him on, digging her nails into his shoulders til it stings.

“Give it to me,” she gasps, “I want it.”

He slips his hand between them, his thumb pressing tight circles on her clit and she keens, her heels digging hard into his ass and her head tipping back against the wall as she shudders around him.

He watches her eyes slam shut and her face contort with pleasure and he feels like he’s about to combust, barely able to move within her because she’s gripping him so tightly.

_God._

It feels so good—he wishes he could stay in this moment forever.

He pushes against her, working his cock in and out until her tremors cease and she relaxes against him. He stills, buried to the hilt and so close to the edge as she presses open mouthed kisses to his neck and runs her fingers through his hair.

“You close, Stevie?” She whispers.

“So close,” he groans, resuming his movement within her.
Suddenly she pulls back with a gasp.

He looks down at her mildly panicked face.

He stills, “What is it?”

“My diaphragm—” she stammers, “I can’t believe I didn’t even think of it—holy shit.”

_Holy shit._

They’ve always been so careful.

How could they forget?

There’s a nanosecond when Steve contemplates what could happen, if he comes—she could get pregnant. She wouldn’t be able to fight any more.

She would be safe.

_He could be a father._

Then, his conscience, which sounds disturbingly like Bucky, chimes in.

_No, punk. It ain’t time for that, she doesn’t want it. Besides, you ain’t married, you’re in the middle of a war. It ain’t safe._

He presses his forehead to hers and carefully pulls out. She unhooks her legs from around his waist, sliding down the front of him til her feet touch the bottom of the tub.
He’s painfully hard and he wraps his hand around himself, stroking slowly.

She says, “Here—let me,” and pushes his hand away, wrapping hers around his cock instead. After a moment she turns him to lean against the wall so she has room to bend at the waist and take him in her mouth.

Her tongue swirls around him as she takes him as far as she can into the hot cavern of her mouth, seemingly unperturbed by the glistening remnants of her own release coating his length. He gathers her hair in his hands and watches her head bob, groaning low.

It’s not long before he’s thrusting into her mouth and she’s humming encouragement, one hand gripping the base of his cock and the other digging into the tense muscle of his ass.

“Coming, baby—oh—“ he gasps and she hums in acknowledgement, pressing her tongue against the underside of his cock and setting him off.

He closes his eyes, shaking as an entire universe of sensation condenses to the point where her mouth moves over him and explodes to engulf him in a seismic wave of pleasure.

He leans weakly against the wall in the aftermath, his heart pounding and only half aware of her kissing her way up to his chest before leaning her forehead against it.

The water is starting to cool and he suddenly feels the weight of exhaustion like an anchor dragging him down.

Darcy pushes off of him and sighs, “Guess we better finish up,” and grabs the soap to begin lathering her hair.

They hastily finish washing and he turns the taps off.

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Later, they curl together skin to skin under the covers in the dark, the dirty dishes from their meal stacked on a couple trays on the dresser.
Neither of them are asleep. Darcy stares sightlessly at the wall listening to Steve’s breathing behind her. She grips his arm tightly where it’s slung over her waist.

After he broke the news of Bucky’s fall to her she’d cried until she was exhausted, soul sick in a way she hadn’t even experienced when Mama and Pop had died. Since that first breakdown though, she’s felt numb, as if she’s traversing time underwater—deep, dark, and cold.

Steve is just as bad. She’s never seen him lose his drive for anything. He’s always been a fighter, pushing forward when others would give up. Now he seems rudderless and withdrawn.

They’ve always been able to talk to each other, but now—they’re both lost for words, communicating with touches and looks more than anything else. In fact, it’s difficult to stop touching each other, each of them needing the reassurance that the other is still here, still within reach.

She simply cannot wrap her head around Bucky being gone from her life. The knowledge of his loss eats at her, and it took everything she had to remain stoic and professional in front of the rest of the Howlies and the squadron of SSR soldiers Peggy had led to meet them at the rendezvous point in the Austrian Alps.

She and Steve had gone through the motions, silently doing their jobs and keeping it together on the trip back, the concerned Howlies doing their best to insulate them from the other soldiers.

Peggy had come to speak with she and Steve privately the evening of Bucky’s death, expressing her condolences, upset herself and in tears at their obvious devastation.

Darcy and Steve had lobbied hard to retrieve Bucky’s body.

Peggy said she’d talk to Phillips about it but it quickly became clear it would be months, even til after the war (will it ever be over?) before they could go looking.

Steve’s breath stutters, small gasps of air and the trembling of his chest against her back the only thing revealing his sobs.

Tears gather in her eyes and she whispers, “Stevie—“ and turns in his arms, wrapping her her arms
around his neck and pulling his head to rest against her chest.

He shudders against her, his tears wetting her skin as he cries.

She hasn’t seen him let go since Bucky fell from the train. He’s been stoic, his emotions hidden beneath the impenetrable mask of Captain America.

Her grief for Bucky sears her heart and she wonders if she’ll ever recover—but Steve has lost much more.

Bucky was his best friend, his stalwart support, and as good as family for most of his life. He loved him in all the ways a person could love another and it has to feel like he’s missing a part of himself.

He cries for a long time.

Finally, he sighs, lifts his head and flops onto his back, wiping his eyes.

“Sorry,” he chokes.

“Nothing to be sorry for,” she says softly.

He says nothing, grabbing his handkerchief from the nightstand to blow his nose.

“God—I haven’t cried like that since Ma died,” he mutters tiredly, turning his head on the pillow to look at her.

She strokes a finger under his eyes and over his cheeks.

“Crying helps—I think,” she says, “At least, I feel like I can rest afterwards.”

“Yeah,” he sighs, “I’m so tired, Darce. So tired. And every time I close my eyes I see the look on his
face when he—“ he chokes, shaking again, unable to speak.

“Fell?”

“Yeah,” his voice scratchy with tears.

There’s nothing she can say to that so she snuggles closer, wrapping herself around and him wishing there was something more she could do. They’re both hurting and there’s nothing they can do to fix it.

He’s silent, pulling her closer to tuck her head under his chin, his breathing slowly becoming more even.

“How do you forget things?” He whispers.

“Hmm?”

“Your memory—near photographic right? Mine is too, now. How do you forget things? I feel like I’m going crazy,” he says roughly.

They’ve talked about the changes the serum wrought within him, beyond the obvious size, strength, and endurance of his enhanced body; his thought processes have sped up, patterns and strategies quickly come to mind now, and his memory is like hers, if not better. He’s somehow more Steve than he was before, like the purest distillation of all of his talents and character traits.

She’s not sure how it works for him but she tells him what she knows about herself.

“I don’t really forget, it’s more like with time there are so many other things going on I don’t focus on it as much. I don’t remember everything I see, all the time. It’s more like I have a library full of books and if I look for a particular one I can read it over again. Traumatic memories are harder,” she says, pausing to think about it, “for a while, the memory keeps popping into the present, keeps nagging at me. Sometimes, things trigger those memories, like scents or sounds.”

Steve nods against the top of her head, whispering into her hair, “That’s what it feels like—like
Bucky falling is on a constant loop in my head and the horror of that moment never ends.”

“Oh, Stevie,” she says, hugging him close, “I’m so sorry.”

“Not your fault,” he mutters.

“It sort of is,” she says. He might have gotten his memory from her part of the serum, after all.

“I’m the idiot who volunteered to be a science experiment,” he says, “even so, I wouldn’t take it back—another illness coulda easily ended me.”

She shivers at the thought, remembering how sick he used to be. How she’d prayed Dr. Erskine’s serum would help people like him.

She never anticipated this outcome.

“I think as time goes on, new memories will be at the forefront of your mind, layers will form around the painful memory like an oyster turning a grain of sand into a pearl. The memory will be there, completely clear if you focus on it but it will become less sharp—if that makes sense,” she says.

“God, I hope so,” Steve says, “I don’t want to remember Bucky like that.”

“I know,” she says, lifting her head from his shoulder, “Say, maybe I can help you get to sleep. Roll over so I can rub your back.”

Steve has always loved when she massages his head and back, when he was small and sick it was sometimes the only thing that would help him rest.

He rolls onto his side and she works her fingers through his hair and he groans as she presses her thumbs into the base of his skull then rubs circles down his neck, feeling the tension in the muscles slowly loosen.

“Focus on what I’m doing—how it feels, nothing else,” she whispers.
“M’kay,” he murmurs.

It’s not long before he’s asleep.

She follows soon after.

February 3, 1945
London
SSR Living Quarters
8pm

Darcy walks down the hallway to Steve’s room and knocks at the door. A few doors down Dugan exits his room and stops when he sees her, scanning her briefly before offering her a solemn salute and heading for the stairwell at the end of the hall.

She can’t be bothered to care if anyone sees her entering Steve’s room. None of the Howlies care too much about it anyhow.

Steve opens the door with a stricken expression, a bed pillow dangling from his fingers. He wordlessly takes her hand and pulls her inside, shutting and locking the door behind him and leaning against it—clutching the pillow to his chest.

She’s pretty sure it’s Bucky’s pillow.

She inhales and—–

Oh god.

She can smell him.
Bay scented shaving soap, tobacco smoke, and some ephemeral scent that is uniquely Bucky wafts from the pillow and her eyes immediately fill with tears. She wipes them away before they can spill down her cheeks, aggravated with herself.

Will she ever stop crying?

She doesn’t want Steve to feel any worse so she gets it under control.

Steve pulls her to him anyway, and they clutch at each other, the pillow sandwiched between them like Bucky used to be.

“Darce—how’re we gonna do this without him?” He whispers against her hair.

This.

Being together.

Fighting the war.

Going on with their lives as if a gigantic piece of what makes them them isn’t missing.

“I don’t know,” she says, “I just don’t know.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the angst. We’re gonna be here for awhile.

*passes out tissues, tea, wine, whiskey, and chocolate*

Thank you for all of your kind comments and kudos, Please feed the author, let me
I don’t know how I’m doing because writing this depressing shit is hard, y’all.
Chapter 51

Chapter Summary

The business of grieving.

Chapter Notes

No beta. Sorry for any errors.

Sorry for the wait, looks like I’m going to be posting every 2 weeks until I get out of my writers slump.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

February 4, 1945

SSR Living Quarters

7am

They sit wordlessly side by side on the edge of Bucky’s bed, their hair sleep tousled and both of them barely dressed. Steve’s barefoot, wearing his undershirt and hastily pulled on trousers and Darcy’s small form is engulfed in his button down shirt and wearing long wooly socks pulled up to her knees.

They’ve spent the last few days in their private bubble of grief at the Savoy doing nothing more than crying, talking, eating, fucking and sleeping. Wash, rinse, repeat.

The sex had been intense, rough, and consuming. If not for having accelerated healing, he’s certain they’d both be black and blue. He doesn’t know why, but the only thing that shuts down his brain and allows him to at least temporarily exorcise the last images of Bucky on loop in his mind is to be buried in her.

As for Darcy, she seems determined to be as close to him as possible, even telling him several times that she felt like she couldn’t stop touching him, like she would come unmoored without tangible proof that he’s with her.
He’s fairly certain he’d have lost his mind without her.

There’s no one else who comes close to understanding the magnitude of his loss. Sure, people know Bucky was his best friend, a few knew or guessed the relationship he and Bucky shared with Darcy.

No one but Darcy knows he’s lost a lover, too.

Will and Howard checked in with them periodically, Howard visibly uncomfortable dealing with their sadness, instead sending lavish care baskets full of toiletries and some of the strictly rationed coffee, tea, and sweets from his hoard in an effort to provide comfort. He’d even managed to scrounge up some oranges from somewhere and he and Darcy had lounged in bed peeling and eating the rare treats until their hands were sticky from the juice.

Will had brought soup, and messages from the Howlies, and sat and drank Howard’s expensive scotch with Darcy until she was as drunk as it was possible for her to get.

Jesus.

He wishes he could get drunk, just forget everything for awhile.

Neither of them are ready to sort through the personal effects in Bucky’s trunk.

It’s hard to believe this is all they have of him now, an Army trunk full of his belongings and their memories.

Steve takes a deep breath, girding himself for the task. “I guess we oughta do this.”

“Yes,” she whispers, gripping his hand tight.

They kneel together at the end of the bed and he raises the lid.

Bucky’s scent rolls over them, and Steve’s hands shake as he lifts a large wooden cigar box that rests on top of his friends neatly folded clothing. He hands it to Darcy and she lifts the top, her expression
pensive and her teeth nervously biting at her lower lip.

Inside is the pocket watch Darcy had given Bucky years ago, before he left for boot camp and everything went to hell. She rests the open box in her lap and lifts the watch by it’s chain. It spins and swings back and forth in the light, it’s polished silver surface glinting.

She takes it in her hand and flicks open the cover, and on the inside is the picture of the three of them laughing in the backseat of Howard’s car that Steve had cut and taped there forever ago.

They look at the picture in silence, Darcy tracing her finger over Bucky’s laughing face.

*Oh god.*

*How did they get here?*

After a moment she closes the cover and wraps the chain around it, gripping it tightly in her hand before unclenching her fingers and holding it out to him.

“Stevie—do you want it? I feel like you should have it.”

“I dunno—it was your grandpa’s—“

She shakes her head, “He’s gone. Bucky’s gone too,” she exhales a shaky breath, “But we’re still here.”

He doesn’t know how that can be.

Even now, his brain tries to trick him, convince him there’s some way to take it back, if he just *does something*— Bucky will come back. But then, the image of Bucky falling, the look of terror on his face and his screams will flash into his head and he’ll be crushed again by the horror of it.

They promised each other til the end of the line.
Why am I still here then?

She presses the watch into his hand and curls his fingers around it, “He’d want you to have it,” she whispers and he sighs heavily, nodding before shoving it into his trouser pocket.

Under the watch there are several packets of letters bound by string. Steve lifts the first packet and sees it’s a stack of letters from Darcy to Bucky.

He hands them to her and she flicks through the edge of the stack, looking at the postmarks before setting them aside. “Looks like he saved them all,” she says, her edges of her lips curving up slightly.

Bucky was a romantic, utterly sentimental despite his casually flirtatious demeanor. The letters look careworn, no doubt read over and over during the long nights they'd been apart.

The next stack of letters are the ones Steve sent Bucky, then the ones he and Darcy wrote together.

As Steve digs deeper he finds the letters Mrs. Barnes and Becca sent, the strip of photos from the photo booth at Coney Island that Steve sent Bucky while he was away at boot camp, an envelope labeled “future” with about a hundred bucks in it, a few coins from Italy, England, and France, and lastly, four sealed envelopes labeled, “Steve”, “Darcy”, “Ma”, and “Becca”.

Steve passes the envelope with her name on it to Darcy and turns his over and over in his hands.

“What d’ya think is in there?” He whispers, holding the envelope up to the light.

“It isn’t gonna bite ya, Stevie. Just open it,” she says, sliding he fingernail under the envelope flap and pulling a sheet of paper filled with Bucky’s looping handwriting from it.

She reads the first couple lines and looks up at him, her eyes swimming with tears. She sniffs, wiping the corners of her eyes with a finger and whispers, “I think we oughta lay down for this.”

He nods, getting to his feet and tugging Darcy to hers.
They sprawl side by side on the bed Bucky rarely slept in (he was always over in Steve’s) and read their letters.

Steve swiftly tore open the envelope in his hand and removed the folded sheet of paper within. He unfolded it slowly and began to read, the familiar handwriting occasionally blurring with his tears.

Steve,

*If you’re reading this then I’m gone, I guess.*

*Shit.*

*It sounds dramatic—but I’m trying to be realistic here. There’s a chance I won’t make it back home. I mean, I’m planning to and everything, but you never know.*

*When I was at the factory I was pretty sure that was gonna be the end of me. I witnessed the other prisoners dropping like flies, being taken away to never return and all I could think about were the things I wished I’d told you but couldn’t because you were back home and I was well—a prisoner.*

*Anyway, there’s some things I need to say, but hopefully none of them will come as a surprise or I’ve been doing things wrong.*

*First of all, I love you.*

*You are a stubborn asshole sometimes, but you have the biggest heart, Steven Grant Rogers. The way you always stick up for the little guy, regardless of what it will cost you—it infuriates me and fills me with admiration in equal parts.*

*I’ll always be grateful I decided to check out the commotion in that alley when I was twelve, only to find the scrappiest little shit-stirrer ever born, standing up to a couple of kids twice his size.*

*I’ll never forget the way you looked, standing there with a bloody nose and a rip in your pant leg from when those guys knocked you down, breathing like a fucking bellows but still holding your hands up ready to fight. They knocked you down, but you never gave up.*

*You’ve always been so strong, Stevie. Even before the serum made your body match your spirit, you were strong.*

*You drove me crazy, always running your mouth and getting into trouble, but never for an instant would I have left you to face that trouble alone.*

*I never could. It was like the moment I saw you my center of gravity shifted.*

*Also, it ain’t your fault.*

*I know how you are and you’re probably busy thinking you could have done something different and are beating yourself up about it but you need to just stop that. If anything, you gave me a second*
chance. I have no doubt I would have died in that factory had you not busted your way in and saved the day. I'm grateful I got the chance to be with you again, to see you transformed and fight by your side.

I couldn't have wished for a better friend.

My only regret is we didn't realize how much more we could be to each other sooner. All those nights I slept with you when the heat went out in winter I could have been kissing you.

But maybe it's for the best. If we'd been together we might've missed Darcy and I can't imagine life without our girl, can you? Thank god you ran into her that rainy day years ago.

Look out for her Stevie, and keep yourself safe. Don't go running into trouble without thinking things through. Make it back home, find yourselves a place, and live. Settle down, have a family. It's what we always talked about when we were kids and I know it's what you've wanted with Darcy since the moment you gave her your heart.

Maybe, if you have a son you can name him after me? You have to admit, James Rogers sounds pretty swell. Oh my god! You could call him Buck Rogers—like in the comic strip.

Steve’s mouth curves into a smile at Bucky’s suddenly wobbly handwriting and the smudge beside it. Buck Rogers—oh boy, that would be something.

Okay, I had to stop writing for a minute because I was laughing so hard at the idea of your son being named Buck Rogers. Think about it, punk.

I wish I could be there to see it, but I’ll see you again, some sweet day.

Yours forever and always,

Bucky

P.S.

I was saving up some money so we could get a place after the war was over, in the envelope I marked “the future.” Use it when you and Darcy get home. Also, I've been sending most of my pay to Ma and Becca, please make sure they get whatever money I have coming to me and that they get the letters I wrote to them. I wrote to Ma about you and me and Darcy. I’m sorry if it makes things awkward with her—I have to hope she’ll accept it. She’ll kind of have to, won't she? I mean, if I’m dead there’s no talking me out of it anyway.

I’m sorry to burden you Stevie, but please take care of them. Help them out when you can.
Steve drops the letter to his chest and presses the heels of his hands to his eyes, overcome.

Darcy’s eyes trace over the loops and whorls of Bucky’s familiar handwriting and her chest grows tight with grief.

Darcy,

I wrote this letter just in case something happens to me.

You need to understand that when I was held prisoner, the thing that tormented me most (other than my immediate surroundings) was the thought that I’d never see you and Steve again.

There are things I want to say, things you need to know.

First and most importantly, I love you.

You burst into my life like a firework, so beautiful and bright and full of plans. I’d never met a girl like you and I think I loved you almost instantaneously, even though it took me a while to realize it was more than blind lust, and believe me, there was a lot of that.

You see, before you came along, lust was definitely my primary motivation when I went out with a girl. Girls are pretty, and they smell good and are so soft—how could I help myself anyway?

But then you came along.

You’re so beautiful, so smart, always so kind to Stevie—even when he was a skinny little guy that everyone else wrote off. You loved that punk the way I’d always thought he deserved and it knocked down the walls to my heart.

You made me think bigger.

Before you came along, I was spinning my wheels, not particularly ambitious but lucky to have a great friend and family plus some charm and small talents that got me through. After I met you, my dreams started to solidify into plans, I wanted a future with you and Steve, however we could work it out.

During the darkest times, I like to picture the place we’ll get, the big bathtub, the extra big bed. I like to think about us being a family, even though I’m not sure how we would make it work.

If you’re reading this, I guess those dreams won’t happen for me—but you and Stevie can have them. You can win this war and go home. You can work as a nurse, or go to school some more. You can learn new languages and travel like you always wanted. Stevie can go to art school, he can draw comics (maybe Captain America ones? Ha.) He can do so many things now that he isn’t sick anymore. You can have a life together, have a family.
I want that for you.

Also, I wanted you to know that it’s because of you I realized I was in love with Steve, that he was more than my friend, my brother. Loving you with him made me see him as something more and you can believe I kicked myself quite a bit for not realizing it sooner.

I don’t know if I ever would have let those feelings come to light without the safety and acceptance of your love.

Thank you for that. Thank you for loving me, thank you for loving him.

Take care of each other. I need you to keep an eye on him, Darce—he may be bigger now but he’s still stupid. He’ll run off half cocked and I’m counting on you to reel him in since I won’t be there to do it.

Please remember you can get hurt too, doll. I know you heal up fast, but you aren’t invincible. I worry about you.

Do me a favor and check in on Ma and Becca sometimes. I asked Steve to make sure they get any back pay I’m owed and to take care of them.

I wrote them letters in case something happened to me and I told Ma about you and Stevie.

No secrets. I was gonna tell her after the war was over anyway. I’ve never been ashamed of our relationship, just protective of it. If we had to get a place in France so we could live together after the war I would have done it and Ma would’ve found out one way or the other.

We would have found a way Darcy.

If there is a god in heaven, I’ll see you again sweetheart.

I’ll be counting the days.

Always and forever,

Bucky

Darcy clutches the letter to her chest and curls onto her side against Steve, the agony in her heart causing her breath to come in stuttering gasps.

She sniffs, wiping her eyes on the edge of the sheet and burrowing into his side. He drops his arm from his face and pulls her closer so his chin rests on the top of her head, her nose against his neck.

She breathes in slowly, inhaling the scent of him, centering herself and regaining her emotional balance with each breath. Steve subconsciously mirrors her breathing, the beat of his heart slowing and the tension in his muscles gradually loosening.
“That was really hard to read,” she whispers.

“Yeah,” Steve sighs, “It hurts to think of him planning ahead like this, worried about us and his Ma and Becca.”

“Mmhmm,” she hums affirmatively, pressing her lips against the pulse point under the edge of his jaw and counting his heartbeats—letting them be her sole focus for a few moments.

“Love you, Stevie,” she says hoarsely.

Steve’s arm tightens around her, “Love you too.”

“I loved him so much—“ she stammers, her voice quavering, “so much.”

Steve swallows thickly, tightening his arm around her and pulling her so she lays atop him like a blanket, Bucky’s letter crinkled between them.

“I did too,” he whispers.

Hymn: some sweet day

Who the heck is Buck Rogers?

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, babies. Grief sucks. *leaves booze and chocolate* Please feel free to partake *hands you a hankie* hope it helps you get through.
Thanks to all of you who have left comments (I heard from some new people, always lovely!) and kudos.

Please let me know how I’m doing. Apologies again for the pain.
Chapter 52

Chapter Summary

Darcy and Steve are back on duty. The Howlies blow off some steam and an impromptu wake occurs.

Chapter Notes

No beta. All errors are mine.

Sorry for the wait, everyone. I’m struggling to get ahead in this story because I know the upcoming holidays will add more interference to my writing.

Also, some dialogue with a slight twist from CA:TFA, I’m sure you’ll all recognize it.

In addition, Gabe Jones refers to himself as colored at one point in this chapter. It was common terminology of the time, though today it would be considered a slur.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

February 12, 1945

London

The American Bar at the Savoy

8pm

Steve looks over the smokey room, readily spotting the Howlies at a table in the corner, not far from the bar. Peggy, Will, and Howard are there too—they were all back from leave today and Steve had spent most of the day in meetings with Phillips and various other SSR bureaucrats, then down in Howard’s lab being fitted for a new uniform and looking over a few of his newest gadgets.

He’d spent some time with Darcy there, she’d been organizing Howard’s notes and blueprints while she waited for the rest of the Howlies. When they’d arrived an hour later they went out to the SSR gun range and testing grounds to practice shooting and try out some of the new explosives Howard had given to Dernier for testing.

Steve wished he could have gone too—busting up stuff would have been preferable to going over the train mission briefing with Phillips and then poring over pages of coded messages with Peggy to see if he could find the pattern that’d break it. He was finally able to spot it some time after Peggy
left, turning the key over to the codebreakers so they could begin translating all of the data. Turns out pattern recognition is one of his major talents, thanks to the serum.

Still, it’s tedious work, and they haven’t figured out where Hydra headquarters is, despite having Zola in custody. He wishes he could get his hands on the evil doctor for just a few minutes.

He could probably get him to squeal.

It’s easier than he thought it would be, getting back to work. He finds keeping busy helps, though he feels like he’s somehow lost his way. All he wants is for the war to be over, he wants the killing to stop. He misses Bucky by his side acutely, is constantly assailed with the sensation of his absence like a missing limb.

He wonders if he should be leading the Howlies at all. After all, he lead Bucky straight to his end, didn’t he?

*Didn’t he?*

He shakes his head minutely, meeting Darcy’s eyes across the room and tipping his head towards the bar. A smile curves her red lips and she raises one dark eyebrow at him, lifting her near empty glass of amber liquid and wiggling it in her hand. He nods and steps up to the fancy bar to ask for two whiskies and leans against it to wait.

He watches her tip the last swallow of her drink into her mouth and lean over and mutter something in Peggy’s ear before she gets to her feet and walks over to him. Various men in the room follow her progress, the sway of her curves drawing their gazes like a magnet grabbing metal filings.

Oblivious to the attention, her smile widens slightly as she gets closer to him. She sets her empty glass on the chrome Art Deco bar, turning her back to it to lean next to Steve and survey the room.

Her shoulder brushes against his and her scent washes over him, flowers and whiskey and something that’s just *Darcy* and he feels some of his tension ease.

“You’re late,” she says.
“Codebreakers had me working on pattern recognition for hours,” he says.

“Hmmm,” she nods, “how’d it go?”

“Cracked it. How long you been here?” He asks.

“Oh, an hour and a half maybe. Shame about the Whip and Fiddle, this place is a bit too swanky for real fun,” she says eyeing the mirror finish of the bar and the chandelier hanging over it.

Steve nods in solemn agreement. Their old pub had been bombed just after their last mission. Steve had found out after they’d returned to their regular quarters at SSR.

He’d gone for a long walk one afternoon, anxious with the pent up energy from the serum and his grief over Bucky and found a burnt out building where their favorite bar used to be.

He’d sat alone in the darkness at a dusty table, drinking whiskey that couldn’t get him drunk, crying and remembering his friend. The way he’d leaned against the bar, still rough from his time in captivity but unable to keep the wonder from his eyes each time he looked over Steve’s new body.

Strangely, it was Peggy who eventually found him there.

*She’d walked in, red lipstick in place and as impeccably dressed as always, gracefully picking her way over the rubble to him.*

*He’d poured himself another drink and said, “Dr. Erskine said that the serum wouldn’t just affect my muscles, it would affect my—cells. It’d create a protective system of regeneration and healing. Which means, um,”* he took a long swallow of his whiskey, *“I can’t get drunk.”*

*He paused, turning his head to look at her, “Did ya know that?”*

*She nodded, infinitesimally, “Your metabolism,” she said crisply, turning to pick up an overturned chair and scooting it close to the table, “burns four times faster than the average person,” she sat down, “he thought it could be one of the side effects.”*
He looked up from his glass into her piercing dark eyes, her back ramrod straight and hands wrapped around his pocketbook in her lap. He looked down at his glass again.

“It wasn’t your fault,” she said.

“Do you remember the report?” He said.

“Yes,” she nodded.

He shook his head, “then you know that’s not true.”

“You did everything you could,” she said, her voice soft and certain.

He swallowed hard.

Did he?

He should have saved him.

“Did you believe in your friend?” He jerked his gaze to hers and she continued, “did you respect him?”

He couldn’t answer, he was so stunned by the question. He nodded slightly.

“Then stop blaming yourself. Allow Barnes the dignity of his choice. He damn well must have thought you were worth it.”

There’s nothing he could say to that. He circled his glass slowly in the dust on the table.
“I’m going after Schmidt,” he gritted out, “I’m not gonna stop til all of Hydra is dead or captured.”

He won’t either. Otherwise Bucky died for nothing.

Nothing.

He looked up at her and she nodded firmly. “You won’t be alone.”

He sighs and turns as the barkeep approaches, sliding a couple whiskies in cut glass tumblers to him.

He nods his thanks, handing the man a couple bills and passing Darcy her drink.

He glances at her as she takes a swallow, “They still haven’t got the exact coordinates for Hydra headquarters, though they’ve narrowed it down to a particular area in the Swiss Alps. Schmidt is in the wind—no chatter about him either,” he mutters.

“Zola will crack,” Darcy says quietly, “he’s a coward interested in saving his own skin.”

Steve nods and pushes off the bar, “Let’s hope it’s soon. We should probably join the others, hmm?”

He crooks his arm and she wraps her small hand around it, giving it an encouraging squeeze, and the warmth of her body burns into his side as they cross the room.

000000

Much later, the get together becomes an impromptu memorial for Bucky, with everyone sharing stories about him. All the other patrons have left the bar and Howard paid the staff extra to stay open for them.

Everyone except Darcy and Steve is a couple sheets to the wind. Even Peggy is slightly glassy eyed, her perfect posture relaxed as she slumps slightly in her chair, leaning against Darcy’s shoulder.
Will shakes his head, a wry smile on his lips, “Bucky taught me how to box, started showing me not long after we met—he was somethin’, eh, Steve?”

Steve smiles softly, “Yeah, he was a three time YMCA welterweight boxing champion. Always down at Goldie’s Gym.”

Darcy smiles, “I asked him to show me how but he always worried that he’d hurt me.”

Dugan chokes on his whiskey, sputtering, “Course he did, little thing like you ain’t no match against a man hand to hand.” He tips his bowler back and swipes the back of his hand across his lips.

Darcy smirks at Peggy who looks mildly aggravated.

Steve raises an eyebrow at her and Will crosses his arms over his chest, leaning back in his chair.

“Well, I dunno,” Darcy says, “I did manage to give him a black eye that one time he was showing me stuff.”

Dernier guffaws and raises his glass in a cheer, “Bien sûr.” Of course.

Steve smiles, remembering the occasion and Bucky’s cocky attitude until she clocked him. “He let down his guard, underestimated her,” he rubs the slight stubble along his jaw contemplatively, “Always a mistake.”

“Damn right,” Peggy says waspishly, clinking her glass with Dernier’s.

Will nods, smirking, and pours another couple inches of whiskey in his glass, and Howard snags the entire bottle from him, his cigar dropping ash on the floor.

“Barnes was a helluva dancer too,” Howard says, waving his cigar around, “I remember the first time I saw him at that New Years Eve party,” he looks to Will, “What was it—1940?” Will nods. “Anyway,” Howard continues, “I was sitting with a couple gals not far from the dance floor and he and Darcy were out there cuttin’ a rug. Got a little steamed because the ladies couldn’t stop talkin’ about what a great dancer he was and weren’t payin’ any attention to me. Course, I finally had a look
and I was more interested in the dish he was movin’ around the floor,” he wiggles his eyebrows suggestively at Darcy and she snorts.

Will says dryly, “None of your flirting ever worked on Darcy, Howard.”

Howard pulls a long face and exhales mournfully, “Not for a lack of trying,” he admits, “I never stood a chance with Barnes and Rogers around.”

Steve mutters, “Hear, hear,” and Howard looks mildly affronted.

Darcy laughs, “Howard, you never could settle down with just one woman anyway.”

Howard grins, “True,” he slouches in his chair and inhales from his cigar, blowing smoke rings across the table.

Jones waves the smoke away and mutters, “Damn stinky cigars.”

Morita clears his throat carefully and says, “When we were in the factory, they put us all in cages—mixed up the regiments and tried to create division amongst us. Barnes never once had a problem with me being Nisei —in fact he stopped a couple fights where some of the others wanted to take my food, said I wasn’t a real American anyway.”

The other men nod in remembrance.

Morita continues, “He said our best chance for survival was to look out for each other, to not fight amongst ourselves. I’m pretty sure I survived til the rescue because of him.”

Jones nods in agreement, “He never treated me any different because I’m colored. In fact, when he found out I’d been to college he was impressed and wanted to know more. He always said he’d have to pick my brain someday and pick up some German, or maybe some French,” he smiles softly in remembrance, his liquid dark eyes turning to Darcy, “said something about impressing a girl.”

Darcy says softly, “Oh, yeah. He knew I was interested in learning languages.”
Dernier cocks one dark eyebrow and drawls, “It is good to know, oui?”

Darcy’s lips quirk, “Oui.”

Falsworth rests his elbows on the table, a cigarette dangling between his fingers. Smoke forms sinuous shapes in the air as it rises towards the ceiling. “Barnes was probably curious about what the two of you were chattering about,” he says wryly.

Darcy shrugs and Steve says, “Probably. He was a curious sort. Never woulda met him if he hadn’t decided to investigate the racket coming from an alley in our neighborhood. I was gettin’ beat up after mouthin’ off to a coupla bullies.”

Darcy nudges his shoulder with hers and mutters sarcastically, “No kidding?”

Peggy smirks, “One of those alleys you pointed out to me near SSR Brooklyn?”

“Probably. Hard to say. Think I had my ass kicked in nearly every alley in Brooklyn. Bucky started patrolling the neighborhood lookin’ for me the minute I was late for anythin’,” he absentmindedly swirls the whiskey in his glass, lost in thought. He exhales heavily, “He pulled my ass outta the fire countless times,” the heavy feeling of loss settles over him again, “always tellin’ me to quit writin’ checks I couldn’t cash, but I never listened,” he ducks his head and wipes his eyes, muttering, “Lucky thing he was always there to back me up.”

Peggy reaches around Darcy and pats Steve on the shoulder. “He was a good friend, Rogers. It’s what good friends do,” she declares with certainty. After a moment of silence she raises her glass, “a toast to Sergeant Barnes, a good man to have at your back.”

Everyone raises their glasses high, “To Sergeant Barnes,” they cry.

Darcy raises her glass to Steve and whispers, “To Bucky.”

Steve clinks his glass against hers resolutely, “To Bucky.”
who are the Nisei?

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for all of the encouraging comments and kudos left for the last chapter. Thank you all for sticking with the story, I know it’s hard to read angsty stuff. It’s hard for me to write too. I’m usually pretty even tempered and unflappable. However, I have experienced loss and writing about Darcy and Steve’s feelings at this point in the story is really hard. Please be patient.

To my American readers, Happy Thanksgiving! May your travels be safe and the day be filled with joy.

Let me know what you think!
Chapter 53

Chapter Summary

Darcy, Steve, and the rest of the Howlies keep busy as they await their next mission. Will gets some bad news.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

Sorry for the wait—looks like my posting schedule is going to be every two weeks, especially with how busy this time of year is. Thank you for your patience!

February 16th, 1945
SSR London Lab
1pm

Steve sits at the table in the break room nursing a cup of coffee, lazily following Darcy’s bustling movement from the counter to the oven and back, moving hot baking sheets full of her newest creations to the counter and slipping new ones into the oven to bake. The oven is solid cast iron and huge, something called an Aga that Howard had installed after the old range broke, perfect for the large batches of energy bars she made each time they were off duty and on base for any length of time. She’d increased the size of the batches to include enough for the labs and all of the Howlies, experimenting with different flavor combinations each time.

The new range throws off quite a bit of heat, managing to warm the entirety of the subterranean lab, a fact much appreciated by the scientists who work there but slightly too much for Steve with his enhanced metabolism. He’d had to remove his uniform jacket and roll up his shirt sleeves once Darcy started baking.

She in turn, is rosy cheeked, loose ringlets of her dark hair escaping her braided coronet and spiraling wildly around her damp forehead and at the nape of her neck as she moves about the kitchen.

She still hasn’t cut her hair, the length of it falling to the middle of her back when she lets it down. She complains it’s unstylish and impractical but he loves brushing it at night before they go to bed.
and he’s taken up braiding duty whenever he can, enjoying the feeling of her silky hair wrapped around his fingers, so she hasn’t cut it yet.

The first time he’d taken over Bucky’s job she’d held herself absolutely still, tears streaking her cheeks as he worked with her hair. Strange that something so everyday had become so inextricably Bucky, but it had—for both of them.

It got easier after the first time.

The two of them have taken to hanging around the lab between training sessions and meetings, Steve to give feedback to Stark about weapons performance and possible modifications and Darcy to mother hen the scientists in the lab. She’d organized Howard and Will’s work space to within an inch of its life, causing the millionaire to gripe about being unable to find anything anymore.

Howard was the type who liked all of his projects and notes within sight, he’d move from pile to pile, adding a bit here and there, the chaos comprehensible only to him.

Will, as his assistant and the last line of defense for the rest of them, welcomed the changes Darcy had wrought. It made it so he could continue working even if Howard wasn’t around to locate the current notes, blueprints, or prototypes for him in the mess.

Howard refuses to admit it, but Darcy’s efforts have increased his output, creating greater focus and documentation of his work and allowing rapid duplication of his successful inventions by others.

Darcy sighs, wiping her hands on her apron after she slides the last pan into the oven and shuts the door. She sets the timer on the counter and its metronomic ticking becomes another background noise as she fills a plate with a few of the baked treats. She places it on the table in front of him and he wraps his arm around her, tugging her gently into his lap.

She lets him, just as aware as he is of the location of every scientist in the lab.

She lifts one of the bars to his lips, “Try this one, I did something different,” she says softly.

He raises an eyebrow, leaning forward to take a bite, the scent of vanilla, cloves, and cinnamon wafting into his nostrils. Flavor explodes onto his tongue, slightly spicy, slightly sweet and nutty. Delicious.
He swallows and licks the crumbs from his lips, his eyes steady on Darcy’s. Her head tilts to the side, a small smile on her face, “Well?”

“I love it. Sorta tastes like carrot cake,” he says.

“Mmhmm. Thought I’d try to give you some vegetables in addition to protein,” she teases, taking a bite for herself and chewing contemplatively, “not bad,” she declares, handing the rest of the bar to him which he doesn’t hesitate to finish in two large bites.

She leans her head on his shoulder, stroking his chest with one small hand as he polishes off the rest of the treats on the plate.

Darcy pats his arm where it’s wrapped around her and says, “Let me up, Stevie. The teapot’s about to whistle.”

He loosens his arm and she pecks him on the cheek before rising to take the teapot off the burner just as it starts to shriek. Steve winces slightly, the sharp sound piercing his sensitive ears. Darcy distractedly shakes her head and winces at the sound, placing the tea infuser into the teapot and pouring the steaming hot water over it.

She’s developed a taste for the stuff the more time she spends with Peggy, given the Englishwoman’s disdain for coffee. Tea is like apple pie to the Brits he supposes, a part of their national identity.

She turns back to grab the empty plate from in front of him and open the oven just as the timer dings on the counter.

Steve twists in his seat and rummages through the pockets of his jacket slung over the back of his chair, pulling out a small worn sketchbook and a stub of a pencil. He settles into sketching Darcy, capturing her graceful, efficient movements as she unloads the newly baked treats from the oven and slides a couple more pans in to bake. She resets the timer and loads his plate with a more bars and places it in front of him, along with the teapot, a teacup, the sugar bowl and the bottle of milk she pulls from the icebox.

He tugs her into the circle of his arms again and she sits on his lap, perching on his knee as she fixes herself a cup of tea. He hooks his chin over her shoulder and inhales the familiar scent of her hair,
shading in the lines of his quick sketch. She hums with pleasure as she takes her first sip, tilting her head to look over his work.

After a moment of silence she says quietly, “S’been a while since I’ve seen you drawing.”

“Been a while since I felt like it,” he replies.

She nods slightly, making no further comment.

It’s true. Not since before Bucky fell—

He hasn’t felt like it.

He can’t even look at the sketches he’d done before that, many of them featuring Bucky.

_He can’t._

Maybe someday.

He reaches for one of the treats Darcy has set before him and distractedly nibbles at it, the burst of tart and sweet flavor taking him by surprise. He takes a larger bite, chewing slowly.

He swallows, holding the bar to his nose and inhaling its lemony sweet scent. “What’re these? They’re delicious.” He takes a larger bite and rolls it in his mouth with an ecstatic groan, emphasizing his point.

Darcy shrugs, a wry smile on her face, “Lemon bars. They’re Howard’s favorite. I figured I could make some actual dessert items during this experiment—it’s the least I could do to thank him for his generosity.”

He’d wondered what she was doing with the small bag of lemons Howard had given her earlier (he’d brought them back from Spain of all places)—now it makes sense.
“Mmmhmm,” he hums, finishing off the last of the lemon bar and reaching for Darcy’s teacup to take a sip.

She lightly kicks his shin, “Hey—don’t drink all my tea.”

He grins playfully over the rim at her and takes a big gulp, emptying her cup. She rolls her eyes and lets out a beleaguered sigh, “Greedy,” and grabs it from him, pulling the teapot close to pour some more into it and also into his empty coffee mug.

She fixes his just the way he likes it, not too sweet—Bucky always made it too sweet—with just a splash of milk and hands it to him.

She leans her back against his chest, her cup cradled in her hands with steam wafting from it and hums contentedly. He takes a sip from his mug and sets it down, grabbing his pencil again to work on the details of drawing he’d started.

They sit in silence, the only sounds the scratching of his pencil across the paper, the ticking of the timer on the counter, and the clanking and murmuring from the scientists working down the hall in the lab.

He likes the silence with her.

When they’re together he can just be. He finds some peace in submerging himself in the familiar sensory input of her presence, the steady beat of her heart, the silky warmth of her skin, and the scent of her hair. He doesn’t have to be the Captain with her—he’s just Steve. If he just focuses on the moment, his mind is less likely to slip sideways into grief, the horrible image of Bucky’s fall on repeat in his head.

He doesn’t need to talk much and it’s good, he doesn’t feel like talking. He doesn’t feel like doing much of anything, honestly, but he pushes through, going through the motions and distracting himself as best as he can with work and furious physical challenges.

He runs a lot. Miles and miles.
Darcy spends more time with Will down in Howard’s lab than ever before, helping him with his work and badgering he and Howard to eat and rest with some regularity. She’s also been keen to blow things up with Dernier out at the testing range—the two of them thick as thieves and sharing a disturbing love of burning things down.

They’ve all been preparing for a move to an SSR base in Switzerland in a few days, since the brass sent down the info about Hydra headquarters being somewhere in the Swiss Alps.

It means increased drills, and physical and weapons training. They need to be ready to go at the drop of a hat and Steve feels more responsible than ever before for his team.

They cannot fail.

Unfortunately, they haven’t been able to pry the exact location from Zola, though they have their top interrogators on it.

He frowns, pressing his pencil hard into the paper. He doesn’t even know where they are keeping him.

The sound of footsteps approaching the break room interrupts his thoughts and Darcy rises from his lap to sit in the chair next to his just before Howard turns the corner into the room with Will hot on his heels.

The inventor inhales deeply, a blissful smile on his face.

“Is that my favorite dessert I smell?”

Will heads to the counter, pulling a chipped red coffee mug from the cabinet and pouring himself a cup of coffee from the percolator.

Stark drifts toward the cooling treats on the counter and lifts a lemon bar to his nose, snifffing it before taking a delicate nibble of one corner. His lips turn up and he quickly stuffs half of it into his mouth, making garbled sounds of pleasure as he chews, crumbs scattering down his shirt.
Darcy rolls her eyes, quickly getting to her feet and opening the cabinet to grab a plate, which she holds under Howard’s chin until he takes it. She places another lemon bar on the plate and herds Howard over to the table and pushes him into her vacated seat.

Stark grabs her abandoned teacup and takes a gulp of tea before turning his single minded focus on eating the treat on his plate.

Darcy huffs and turns to open the icebox.

She glances over at Will who’s leaning against the counter with his cup of coffee, an amused smirk on his face as he watches Howard’s antics.

“You eat lunch yet?” She says.

Will rubs a hand through his hair and says, “No? What time is it anyway?”

Steve looks at his watch, “1:30.”

“Damn, time gets away from us down here,” Will says, and takes a seat at the table as Darcy slices some bread and places it, a hunk of cheddar cheese, a container of Spam, and a jar of pickles on the table.

She says, “Mustard?”

Howard mutters, “There should be some in there towards the back.”

There is. She places it on the table and hands Steve a stack of plates, a cutting board, and a knife.

“Make yourself useful Stevie and slice up the cheese and meat,” she says.

Steve gets to work and he, Howard, and Will construct their sandwiches while Darcy pulls the last baking pans out of the oven.
Darcy is cleaning up the last of the baking pans when she hears the distinctive sound of Peggy’s heels hitting the tile floor of the lab and heading their way.

She shoots a look at Steve and sees his shoulders square, already watching the doorway while Will and Howard chatter on, oblivious to Peggy’s imminent arrival.

She arrives slightly out of breath, obviously having hurried to get there. Howard calls out, “Pegs! Come to join us for lunch?”

“Not today, Howard. I came to deliver this telegram that just arrived to General Phillips office—for you Will. It seemed urgent so I brought it down,” Peggy says.

She holds out the envelope to Will and he sets his half eaten sandwich on his plate, taking it with a bewildered expression.

Darcy wipes her hands on a dish towel and passes Peggy a tea cup, focusing on her brother as he opens the envelope and pulls out the telegram. His eyes track over it and he pales, the light freckles on his face standing out starkly on his skin. He sets the message down and stares blankly at it for a moment.

“Will?” Darcy says, approaching his side.

He looks up at her, his green eyes swimming with tears, “The message is from the pilot of Tony’s crew. Their plane took heavy damages on a bombing run over Germany a week ago, they lost two crew members and Tony was injured. They moved him from the evacuation hospital near Normandy to Churchill Hospital in Oxford for surgery. He doesn’t say what kind of sur—surgery,” he stammers, “he just says he promised Tony he’d tell me.”

Howard wipes his mouth with his napkin and says, “Let’s go.”

Steve looks at Howard, “What d’ya mean let’s go? We’re moving to Switzerland in 3 days.”
“Well maybe you are,” Howard says, “but I’m not Army and neither is Will,” he pats her brothers shoulder, “we can take my plane, Oxford is only a bit more than 50 miles away.”

Peggy pauses in pouring her tea and interrupts, “Howard, you need to be ready to move to Switzerland. We’re close to breaking Zola.”

Steve’s mouth tightens at the mention of the German scientist and Darcy lays a hand on his shoulder, rubbing absent circles in an attempt to calm him. Peggy glances at her and raises one eyebrow and she shrugs in response.

She can get behind Steve’s desire to inflict pain on Zola.

“No worries, we’ll get to Oxford by dinner and figure out what’s going on with Tony,” Howard says confidently.

She desperately wants to go with Will and offer her support.

She turns to Peggy, “Is there any way—“

“No,” Peggy says firmly, though her eyes are sympathetic, “You and Steve are both on duty though you are between missions. There’s still a lot of prep work to be done before our move to the Swiss base.”

Darcy sighs.

Howard says, “We should get going,” he walks to the counter and grabs a couple more lemon bars and wraps them in a napkin. He winks at Darcy, “for our trip.”

Will stands and she hugs him tightly, whispering in his ear, “Send a telegram as soon as you can and let us know how he’s doing, and give him my love.”

She releases him and Steve rises and clasps Wills shoulder, pulling him into a brief embrace, and
muttering, “I’d go with you if I could.”

“I know,” Will says softly.

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February 17, 1945

SSR London outdoor training grounds

Steve stands behind Dum Dum and watches as he takes aim at the target 300 yards downfield. He’s trying to get accustomed to using it instead of his Tommy gun, as they no longer have Bucky to handle half of the sharpshooting for the unit. Darcy is the best shot he’s ever seen but Bucky had rivaled her. They’d made a formidable team.

Dugan doesn’t come close to matching their skills, but he’s working on it. Morita is better, and Dum Dum’s competitive spirit cannot let it rest.

Just as he squeezes the trigger, Dernier’s distant shout of “Fire in the hole!” reaches Steve’s ears from about a quarter mile behind them.

Dum Dum jerks his rifle upward and misses the shot when a disturbingly loud explosion echoes across the field, followed by faint cheers from Darcy and Dernier.

“Jesus fuck,” Dum Dum exclaims, pushing his bowler back and looking over his shoulder at the fireball rising over the tree line, “what the hell are they testing over there anyway?”

“Tank killer,” Jones supplies from his seat on the edge of the observation platform, passing one of Darcy’s ever present energy bars to Morita who grins and swings his legs beside him.

“Hmmmm,” Falsworth pauses in the act of lighting his cigarette and raises an eyebrow at the fireball, “those two are becoming quite the menace.”

Steve sighs.
Like him, Darcy is hellbent on wiping Hydra from the earth. Channeling the pain of Bucky’s loss into anger at them is a welcome distraction. He understands, but it hurts him to see his girl becoming so bloodthirsty.

The distant sound of a Jeep approaching has Steve turning to look towards the road.

When it arrives, Peggy gracefully steps down from the passenger side, turning her dark eyes to the smoke on the horizon before saying, “Tank killer?”

“Yes,” Steve replies.

“Hmmm, that’s quite a bit of smoke.” she muses before motioning Steve to walk with her, when they are a little distance away from the Jeep the Howlies go back to gun practice, the sound of Dum Dum and Morita bickering background noise as Peggy says, “Howard called.”

“Oh?” Steve asks, bracing for bad news.

It must show on his face because she’s quick to add, “Your friend made it through surgery just fine, though his injury was severe and he will be going home.”

“How severe?” Steve says.

Peggy sighs, “They had to amputate his leg below the knee. Apparently he’s lucky to be alive, he lost so much blood.”

Steve bows his head, thinking of Tony. A man who was always laughing and in motion, and like Bucky, loved to go dancing.

He wonders how he’ll adjust to the loss.

So much loss.
Will it ever end?

“Let’s go tell Darcy,” he says, and Peggy takes his arm as they walk up the hill.

What is Spam?

Chapter End Notes

Both Steve and Darcy are struggling with depression.

They deal with it differently, but Steve is less resilient in recovering from Bucky’s loss for two reasons. One, he still feels guilty about Bucky’s death. He feels responsible, even when he’s not. It’s problematic. And two, he’s lost his childhood friend. It’s like losing his history and part of himself.

He’s not dealing well and copes with it by using strenuous physical activity, sex, and obsessing over Hydra as distractions.

Sigh.

Thanks for all the wonderful comments and kudos, it’s helped me tremendously with staying motivated to write. Please let me know what you think!
Chapter 54

Chapter Summary

The Howlies move to Switzerland. Tony and Will arrive at the Swiss base. Steve indulges in a bit of voyeurism.

Chapter Notes

No beta, sorry.

Next update in a couple weeks, God willing.

End of the chapter NSFW or around visiting relatives.

February 20, 1945

4am

SSR base near Saint-Maurice, Switzerland

Steve wakes early as usual, the strange sounds of the mostly underground base heavy in his ears. Darcy lays sprawled on her back beside him, one arm curled around her head and the dark waves of her hair flowing over the pillow.

She breathes slow and deep, her eyes moving behind the thin skin of her closed lids as she dreams.

He turns onto his side, curling one arm beneath his head as he focuses on her pale face in the near darkness, lingering on the lush curves of her lips and the dark fan of her lashes on her cheeks. It’s not often he sees her so still, when awake she is always in motion and her face is as animated as the rest of her.

It’s only since the serum that he catches her sleeping. Even so, it’s never for long.

He absently coils one silky curl of her hair around his finger as he listens to the soft whir from the air vents and a steady drip from the leaky faucet in the bathroom down the hall.
They’d moved to the base in Switzerland the evening before, flying in from London and landing on an airstrip in the valley below. The area is riddled with fortifications the Swiss government has continuously added onto since before the first war, with tunnels and half buried bases throughout the mountains. They had been preparing for German invasion for years and it had taken the Allied invasion of Normandy to shift Hitler’s attention from gaining control of Switzerland, but that tide could turn at any time.

Somehow the SSR had gained a stronghold of their own, halfway up the side of the mountain and a short drive up the twisty road from the airstrip.

The Swiss have looked the other way, not aiding the SSR as they were still striving for neutrality in the war, but not resisting their occupation of the base either. Clearly, the Allies have no interest in invading Switzerland so they turn a blind eye to their presence.

And somewhere in this stretch of mountains lies Hydra Headquarters.

They are so close to locating the base—Steve practically vibrates with anticipation each time Phillips calls a meeting.

Darcy stirs beside him, her lips quirking into a satisfied smile at whatever she’s dreaming.

He strokes a finger over the curve of her cheek and she unconsciously turns her face into it, crinkling her nose before she sighs, “Stop teasing, Bucky—“

Steve freezes, his heart aching, and her eyes pop open, quickly scanning his face and the room, her face growing sad as she realizes she was only dreaming.

He pulls her against his chest and she presses her nose to his neck, inhaling deeply and releasing her breath slowly.

“I was dreaming of him,” she whispers, “it seemed so real.”

“I know,” he says quietly, pressing a kiss to the top of her head and breathing in the scent of her hair.
He dreams of Bucky too. It hurts to wake up and know that he’s gone, but he wouldn’t give up the dreams to avoid the pain of that realization.

Sometimes he doesn’t want to wake up.

Sometimes he dreams he’s back in Brooklyn in their old apartment, Bucky spooned behind him in his cramped bed.

It feels as perfect as it ever did and he feels so safe.

Bucky always made him feel that way.

Now he’s the bigger man. It’s his job to protect people and he spends his waking hours focusing on that.

Someday they’ll finish Hydra and he and Darcy can go home.

He’ll make sure of it.

“What time is it?” She says, her voice hoarse with sleep.

He glances at his watch, “A little after 4.”

She sighs, “I should probably get back to my room—it’s a bit more difficult to be discreet here.”

Steve rolls her into her back, resting his weight on his elbows as he leans down to kiss along her jaw, “We have a little more time—” he whispers before he sucks at the skin just behind her ear.

She shivers beneath him, wrapping her arms around his neck to pull him close.
“A little,” she hums and he presses his lips to hers.

Later in the morning, they receive word Howard and Will will be arriving with supplies and a troop of SSR soldiers.

It had snowed rather heavily the night before and early this morning so the Howlies head down to the airstrip in several jeeps mounted with snow plow blades to clear the area for landing. The road has already been cleared so Steve opts to run ahead, eager as usual to work off some of the edgy energy the serum creates.

Darcy drives one of the three jeeps with Dum-Dum bitterly complaining from the passenger seat. He’d never learned to drive because he lived in Boston where most people used public transportation. Jones’ family never owned a car and Morita had also lived in an area with public transportation as the preferred way to get around, so they can’t drive either.

That leaves Darcy, Dernier, and Falsworth to drive down and plow the runway while the others use shovels to clear the walkways to and around the hangar.

The road is twisty and slippery but not too much for her to handle with her enhanced reflexes and experience driving during Iowa winters.

She grins to herself at each sharp turn and skid of the tires—Dugan swears profusely under his breath and grips the edge of his seat with white knuckles. She glances in her rear view mirror with concern, the last turn had a particularly steep drop over the side and was slick with ice. Dernier grinds the gears of the Jeep he’s driving as he inches around the curve.

Dugan mutters, “Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes on the road.”

She flicks her eyes forward then back at him, grinning, “Don’t worry Sarge, it’s under control,” she says as she whips into the next curve, letting out a whoop as they skid a little into the turn.

She slows as Falsworth’s Jeep comes into view and she’s forced to take a more sedate pace until they
reach the airfield, at which point Dugan practically leaps from the vehicle with his shovel and hurries
to join Steve and Morita by the hangar. Steve has already made quite a bit of progress in clearing
away the snow.

She shrugs, hopping out from the drivers side to lower the plow blade to the ground before she
begins clearing the airstrip.

A couple hours later most of the Howlies have returned to the base while she, Steve, and Jones
remain to greet the plane when it arrives. They’re sitting at a small table in the control room at the
hangar playing cards and passing a thermos of coffee back and forth when the radio crackles on the
counter and Howard’s voice comes through with his flight designation number requesting a landing.

Jones tosses his cards on the table and leaps to his feet and she listens with half an ear as he okays
them for landing, focusing instead on the sound of the plane’s engine as it approaches.

Steve tilts his head, “He’s coming in a bit fast ain’t he?” He says quietly.

“Yeah—Howard must be piloting. Will’s more careful.”

Which is true.

Howard can be reckless. He’s a good pilot, but not nearly as good as Will. She wonders why
Howard is piloting at all, actually.

She gets her answer after the plane lands.

The SSR military unit exits the plane first, saluting Steve then filing into the shelter of the hangar to
wait for their transport up to the base.

Howard exits last with a staggering Will, his arm draped over the inventor’s shoulder for support.

Her brother, for lack of a better word, is blotto.
Steve utters a low, “Shit,” and hurries to meet them, Darcy on his heels.

Will eyes them blearily as Steve wraps an arm around his waist and takes his weight off Stark’s shoulder.

Darcy says quietly, “What the hell happened, Howard?”

Howard straightens his jacket and smoothies a hand through his dark hair.

“They’re shipping Tony back to the States tomorrow—Will was already half in the bag when we left SSR London and kept it up throughout the flight.”

Will searches his pockets with a look of bewilderment, “Where’s m’bottle?” He slurs.

“Finished it up on the plane, pal,” Howard says, patting Will on the shoulder.

Will looks around, seemingly noticing her for the first time, “Darcy!” He says, beaming at her then lunging out of Steve’s arms towards her. She wraps her arms around his much taller form and he sags against her, dropping his forehead to her shoulder and pressing his nose into her hair and slurring sadly, “Darce—Tony don’ want me anymore.”

Darcy raises her eyebrows at that, and focuses on Stark.

“What’s he talking about?”

Howard shrugs uncomfortably, “I don’t know. He keeps saying that. I gather Tony said he didn’t wanna hold Will back and they shouldn’t be together anymore,” he frowns, looking vaguely harried “Can we not do this here? I feel like we shouldn’t do this here. Where’s our ride?”

Steve points over his shoulder at the Jeep Darcy drove down to the airfield and Howard heads towards it.

Steve says to her, “Ya want me to drive, Darce? You can sit in the back with Will.”
Her brother’s weight sags even further against her and she’s practically the only thing holding him up.

“Yeah, sure,” she says, and tosses him the keys.

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February 21, 1945

The next afternoon Darcy sits next to a brutally hungover Will at a corner table in the mess hall drinking coffee as he explains in a low voice what had happened with Tony.

“When we got to the hospital Tony was still unconscious, and he looked so bad,” Will says lowly, his eyes distant as he rests his elbow on the table and slowly sipping at his coffee, “he lost a lot of blood. It wasn’t just from his leg either. Bullets and flack had peppered the entire side of the plane, the pilot said he’d barely been able to land. Howard and I waited for as long as they’d let us but eventually we were shooed out. When we went back the next day, he was awake.”

She reaches for his hand and squeezes it.

“He was groggy, but he knew me. Howard and I sat by his bedside and talked to the nurses, talked to him when he seemed lucid, which wasn’t often. After awhile, he turned his face to the wall. I figured he was tired—that he was in shock.”

Will sets his cup down on the table and cradles his head in his hands, sighing deeply.

“I wanted to go home with him,” he mutters, “But even if I could, I know they’re sending him to Halloran Hospital until he’s well enough and then he’ll be discharged and at his folks place. What could I do there? He won’t be able to live on his own for a while. He’ll need help getting used to doing things with—uh, one leg.”

Darcy says, “He understands that, I’m sure.”
“Yeah—there’s just so much we couldn’t say. Howard would leave us alone much of the time but still, so few moments of privacy. I couldn’t tell him how I really feel,” he says hoarsely.

“I know, I’m sure he knows it too,” she says gently.

Will says nothing, taking another sip of his coffee, which is beginning to grow cold.

“The last day I could stay, he was very withdrawn. I didn’t know what was going through his head—we’ve spent so much time apart. Maybe—he just doesn’t love me anymore,” he whispers.

“Oh, Will. You can’t believe that,” she says.

“He said maybe we’re better off apart,” Will mutters.

Darcy thinks of Tony, suave, flirtatious Tony who always insisted Will was his. Who struggled with his family’s expectations and despaired of having the life he really wanted. Maybe the loss of his leg made it feel even less possible to him.

She exhales slowly, choosing her words carefully, “He’s had a horrific injury. They’re giving him morphine for the pain of it—trust me, people say crazy things when they’re taking it,” she clasps Will’s hands in hers, “Keep writing him. Let him know you miss him and that you can’t wait to come home—this war will end eventually and we’ll go home.”

She has to believe it.

This hell will end.

“You can work on changing his mind until then,” she says firmly.

Will raises watery green eyes to hers, “You think?”

She nods, “I do,” she nudges his shoulder with hers, “you’re pretty irresistible, you know.”
His lips twitch into a weak smile and he says, “Damn right.”

“Damn right,” she mutters and steals the rest of his coffee. He sends her a reproachful look and she smiles and wiggles his empty cup, “Let’s fill up a thermos and go find Dernier. We can blow some stuff up—it’s cleansing.”

“I dunno. I spend half my time stopping Howard from doing that,” he says, “plus, my head is killin’ me.”

“Nothing a little fresh air and adrenaline won’t cure,” she argues.

He sighs and gets to his feet, “Oh, alright.”

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February 23, 1945
10:45pm

Darcy arrives back at her room, rubbing a towel over her damp hair after her shower.

She likes to bathe late at night after everyone else is asleep. Her minimal need for rest provides many stolen hours of quiet in the middle of the night—often not so quiet when Steve is with her.

She cocks her head before opening the door, her lips quirking at the familiar sound of a pencil scratching across paper—revealing Steve’s presence in her room.

She enters the room, closing the door and leaning against it as he glances at her from where he sits on her bed, leaning against the headboard in his undershirt and shorts.

“I thought we were meeting in your room,” she says quietly, crossing to the laundry basket at the foot of her bed and dropping her towel into it before turning to grab her brush from the dresser. She sits on the edge of the bed beside Steve and begins working the tangles out of her long hair.
Steve sets his sketch pad aside and holds out a hand for the brush. He scoots behind her, his long legs aligning with her thighs and his feet touching the floor as he patiently smooths the length of her hair.

She sighs, watching him in the dresser mirror, her body relaxing under his gentle hands and the heat that radiates from his body.

“I decided to surprise ya—besides, there’s gonna be more activity happening in the hall down by my room tomorrow morning. Peggy told me we have a meeting with Phillips first thing. I told her I’d let you know.”

“Hmm,” she hums, closing her eyes and tipping her head back as Steve sets the brush aside and rakes his fingers through her hair in preparation of braiding it.

She automatically hands him a hair tie from the pocket of her robe when he reaches the bottom of the braid, opening her eyes to watch the tip of his tongue poking out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrates on tying it off.

He smiles softly, running his hand down the length of her hair and raising his eyes to meet hers in the mirror as he tugs gently on the end of her braid.

He smirks, “Would ya look at that.”

She raises an eyebrow, “What?”

His blue eyes turn molten as he works the tie at the front of her robe loose and grips the edges of it, spreading it open and revealing the lack of clothing beneath it.

He pushes her braid aside and nips lightly at her neck, causing her to shiver, her skin erupting in goosebumps as she tilts her head to give him greater access.

He murmurs in her ear, his eyes steady on her as he traces his fingertips over her collarbones then across the tops of her breasts, “Don’t have a big mirror like that in my room.”
Her eyes meet his in the reflection, her breath catching as he slides his hands lower, grasping her first behind one knee and then the other to drape her thighs over the outside of his, spreading her open for him to see.

“Look at you—so pretty,” he whispers, slipping one hand between her legs and stroking up and down her damp slit while bringing the other up to cradle one of her breasts.

Her belly clenches, the memory of she and Bucky and a bathroom mirror long ago battling with the heat that flashes through her at the sight and sensation of Steve’s large hands on her body, her hips rolling against him in counterpoint to his stroking fingers.

“Not as pretty as you,” she says, her eyes tracking over his flushed face, always so beautiful, even before the serum.

He shakes his head in disagreement, his brow furrowed with concentration and eyes dark with arousal. He exhales with a drawn out hiss when she presses her bottom against the very obvious erection tenting his undershorts.

“I wanna watch you, pretty girl,” he murmurs against the soft patch of skin just behind her ear as he continues stroking between her thighs, the resulting wetness glistening on his fingers, “I wanna see you come apart.”

“Stevie—“ she breathes, biting her lip and groaning low as he pinches one of her nipples. After that, she shamelessly rocks her hips against him, unabashedly seeking her own pleasure.

After a moment he abandons her breasts to push the robe further down her arms, and she lifts up a little so he can pull it away from her and drop it on the floor. Steve shifts his hips behind her and there’s a rustle of fabric as he pushes his undershorts down enough to free his cock.

All this and he never pauses in stroking between her legs, spreading the moisture leaking from her entrance up and over and around her clit.

Excellent multi tasker, her Stevie.
She breathes, “Shirt too,” and he reaches behind his neck to pull it over his head, tossing it behind him on the bed before pulling her back against the warm expanse of his chest.

*God—he’s always so warm.*

She scoots back in his lap, smirking slightly at the low groan that rips from him when she rubs against his cock.

She looks so small sprawled on him, his arms caging her in, and though she resents the assumptions that others make regarding her strength and capabilities because of her small stature, she loves the feeling of him surrounding her. She loves the way he looks at her in the mirror—like she is precious, like she is *his*.

*Always and forever.*

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He can’t tear his eyes away from her reflection as he ghosts the fingers of one hand over her breasts while working the other between her legs.

She shivers and a low moan accompanies the wet sound of his fingers moving between her legs and she arches against him, pressing the curves of her glorious bottom again and again against his aching cock.

*Glorious.*

Without a doubt, naked Darcy is *glorious*. Her skin glows in the dim light from the bedside table and the rosy tips of her full breasts are tight with arousal, the tell-tale flush of it flooding her cheeks and working it’s way down her neck.

The grey fog that has dulled his existence since losing Bucky is pushed back whenever he makes love to her. His focus narrows to his physical senses—the scent of her hair, the slide of her silken skin under his fingertips, the sounds she makes when he touches her just right.
And the sight of her—*god* he loves it. Loves seeing her like this, like no one else sees her.

It’s not as good as watching her with Bucky but it almost is.

*Almost.*

“*Stevie*—“ she gasps, “*Want you.*”

He scoots back a little on the bed so she can rest her shins on the edge of it and wraps a hand around her waist, “*Lift up,*” he says steadying her as she raises her bottom off his legs. He takes his cock in hand, slipping the head of it up and down the wet furrow between her legs before positioning himself at her entrance.

He eyes their reflection in the mirror, watching as she slowly sinks down his length, the muscles of her thighs trembling and a soft keen erupting from her lips as she stretches around him.

When he’s buried to the hilt he resumes the slow circling of her clit with his index finger, hooking his chin over her shoulder to whisper in her ear, “*Stay still—no coming til I say so.*”

She tips her head back to lay on his shoulder and groans, her eyes closing and breath coming in short pants as she struggles to stay still, her internal muscles squeezing rhythmically around his cock as he winds her up.

It feels *so good.*

Every awful thing empties from his mind and all he can do is *feel.*

“*Open your eyes—I want you to watch.*”

“*Stevie*—“ she whines, her pretty lips pouting, but opens her eyes to look dazedly at him.

He pinches one of her nipples firmly and she gasps, “*Mean,*” although her heart rate ratchets upwards and she clutches almost painfully tight around his cock in reaction.
He grits his teeth against the sensation and taps her clit with his fingertip, growling, “Stay still.”

She bites her lip, the flush on her cheeks deepening and her thighs trembling with her need to move.

*God.*

He holds her on edge for a long while, teasing her and himself, watching as the pink flush from arousal deepens and spreads down her chest, perspiration dewing her face and making her luminous.

Finally, her nostrils flare and she shudders against him, begging, “Please Stevie—*please.*”

He peppers open mouthed kisses from the juncture where her shoulder meets her neck up to her ear, sucking hard on the sensitive skin below it until she moans, her hips lurching reflexively and he pulls off with a pop, eyeing the rapidly fading purple mark on her pale skin in the mirror with satisfaction.

He smirks at her in the mirror and whispers in her ear, “*Now.*”

She shudders, the muscles of her legs tensing as she leans forward to place her hands on his knees and pushes back against him, the sway of her breasts mesmerizing in the mirror’s reflection. He groans, she’s so wet each movement causes a squelching sound to echo in the room.

He thrusts upward in counterpoint to the undulation of her hips and she babbles low, *shit, oh God Stevie, oh god*—and tenses and shakes around him, throwing her head back and closing her eyes as she comes.

She’s scarcely finished shaking when he grasps her hips and bounces her on his lap, eyes riveted on the sight of his cock pistoning in and out of her slick entrance—her breasts jiggling with each impact. Her head lolls back against his shoulder, her face the picture of lazy satisfaction as he seizes beneath her, snarling, “*Jesus—fuck—*” and comes so hard he sees spots.

He falls back onto the bed, panting. She falls with him, the top of her head coming to rest beneath his chin, the scent of her hair amplified by the heat radiating from her.
Christ.

God almighty.

Even after all this time she wrecks him.

He wraps his arms around her waist and turns onto his side, his half hard cock still snug inside her. He curls his legs up so the front of his thighs cradle the back of hers and less of his legs dangle over the side of the bed.

She laughs, “That was—“

“Yeah,” he sighs dreamily.

She snorts, wrapping her hands around one of his and pulling his arm up to cradle it against her chest.

“You and your voyeurism. Bucky always said—“ she cuts off and he tightens his arm around her.

He nuzzles his nose into her hair and kisses her head.

“Shhh,” he whispers, “I know.”

The lay together silently, skin to skin, until he softens enough to slip out of her and they take a few moments to clean up.

Steve kicks his undershorts off before turning out the light and climbing under the covers with her.

He listens to her breathe, the sound comforting and familiar and he wishes they could stay in the warm darkness of this bed forever.
Inevitably, his mind turns to the meeting with Phillips in the morning.

“I wonder what that meeting is about tomorrow morning.”

“Yeah?” She says.

“Yeah—all of us are supposed to be there.”

She’s silent for a moment, then she turns in his arms, pressing her lips against his throat. The soft surface of her lips brushes against his skin like butterfly wings as she whispers, “You think they finally broke Zola?”

He sighs, “God, I hope so. The waiting is killing me.”

“Me too,” she says and kisses his shoulder, her fingers stroking down his side to rest on the bare skin of his hip.

His cock stirs but he ignores it, they have to get up early in the morning.

Her lips curve into a smile against his neck and she strokes circles around his hip and over the curve of his ass. “You tired?” She whispers.

_Not really._

The serum has made it hard for him to sleep much.

“I was just thinking we have to wake up early.”

“Hmmm,” she hums, tracing her nails up the center of his back, causing him to shiver.

“I’m not tired,” she whispers into his ear, and throws one leg over his hip.
She giggles softly as he rolls her beneath him.

“I’ll show you tired,” he growls and catches her laughing mouth with his.

actual Swiss fortifications in the Alps

Hydra Headquarters

Chapter End Notes

Moving along. Tried to give you guys a little treat for Christmas—no one wants to be sad at Christmas, right?

Thank you everyone for your lovely comments and kudos, it’s very encouraging. Especially at this point in the story. I’m sure we all realize why Phillips has called a meeting, right? :(  

Let me know what you think.
Chapter 55

Chapter Summary

The Howlies prepare to invade Hydra Headquarters. Steve jumps the gun a little.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

Sorry for the wait guys, the holidays made it hard to write. Here’s a little something, hope to get back with the next part in less than two weeks.

You’ll probably recognize this scene from the CA:TFA.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

February 24, 1945

SSR Switzerland

Operations Room

8am

Darcy stands near the large map showing Hydra bases across Europe—tiny flags marking all of them destroyed thanks to the efforts of the SSR and the Howlies more specifically.

She sips her tea, the steam spiraling like ghosts over the rim of her cup in the chilly Operations Room. Her eyes veer to the section of the map depicting the Austrian Alps and pause for a long moment.

Brennan Pass—the place where they lost Bucky.

Bucky did not die for nothing.

They will make sure of it.
If all goes well, they will root out the last of Hydra, cutting off the final head and ending them forever.

The rest of the Howlies are clustered around the long oval conference table looking over pages of information she’s already scanned and absorbed unbeknownst to all of them except for Steve, who’d done the same thing and is pacing restlessly on the other side of the room near where Howard and Will are setting up a projector for the meeting.

Phillips and Peggy haven’t arrived yet, but the rest of them are in agreement that they finally have the location of Hydra Headquarters.

Steve pauses in his constant movement in front of the radar screen, clenching his hands behind his back, the green glow from the screen tinting his face in profile as it emits blipping sounds in steady cadence, over and over.

She pushes off the wall and Steve turns to look towards the door as the distinctive sound of Peggy’s heels hitting the stone floor sound in the distance.

His eyes flick towards her and she drifts over to stand next to him, nudging his shoulder with hers and wordlessly passing him the last of her tea.

His shoulders relax and the edges of his lips tilt up slightly as he takes it, leaning against the wall, his eyes focused on the door as he finishes it off and hands the cup back to her.

“Not long now,” she mutters and heads over to the tea and coffee caddy in the corner for a refill.

She’s stirring sugar into it as Phillips and Peggy enter the room.

The Howlies stand at attention as he enters and she sets her tea down to do so as well, but Phillips glances around, his face haggard with exhaustion and distractedly waves his hand saying, “At ease.”

She fixes a second cup of tea and walks it over to Peggy who takes it with a grateful smile before gracefully sinking into her seat at the table.
Everyone finds their seats and Phillips’ aide hands him a cup of coffee along with a folder. The General flicks through the papers within quickly before taking a sip of his coffee and clearing his throat.

His sharp brown eyes circle the room, pausing briefly on her and stopping at Steve, who sits to her left at the other end of the table.

He leans forward, resting his arms on the table and begins, “As I’m sure you all realize, SSR has been working diligently to pry information from Dr. Zola for the last month and it has been slow going—the man is terrified of Schmidt and loyal to Hydra’s cause.”

She glances at Steve, who has straightened in his chair, his stern “Captain America” face firmly in place. Even now, it can be somewhat jarring to see Steve’s righteous fury distilled into his serum enhanced form.

“Zola has been giving us bits of information, particularly about some of the weaponry Hydra has been developing—“ he glances at Howard, “it’s obvious they are ahead of us in weapons development from what we’ve been able to reverse engineer.”

Howard clears his throat, obviously irritated. He never likes anyone to make better toys than he can.

“In recent days, Zola has had a change of heart—while he is still devoted to Hydra, though only so much as they allowed him to pursue his particular avenues of research—“

The table creaks slightly where Steve is gripping the edge with white knuckles and she nudges his knee under the table.

“—it is clear Zola believes Schmidt has become unstable and his allegiance to Hydra isn’t so much about advancing their ideology as it is about advancing his own. The doctor finally gave us the location two days ago.”

He signals to his aide to lower the lights and Howard flicks on the projector while Will passes around some pictures of confiscated weapons.

“We had SSR surveillance teams fly over the location and were able to get some pictures and as you can see,” he gestures to the map image projected on the screen, “they’re about 45 miles north of us.”
Phillips rises from his seat and walks over to the screen, standing alongside the projected image. He uses a pointer to indicate the location of the Hydra base, tracing the safest and shortest route from their location to it.

“We’re running on a time crunch now,” Phillips continues, “Johann Schmidt belongs in a bug house. He thinks he’s a God and he’s willing to blow half the world prove it, starting with the U.S.A.”

Steve leans forward in his seat, his eyes trained on the picture of the Hydra base, “How, sir?”

Phillips says, “Hydra’s scientists have been working on bombs and they’ve built a bomber—The Valkyrie, to deliver them.”

Howard interrupts, “Schmidt's working with powers beyond our capabilities. He gets across the Atlantic, he will wipe out the entire eastern seaboard in an hour.”

Gabe Jones clears his throat and says, “How much time we got?”

Phillips looks grim. “According to my new best friend, under twenty four hours.”

Steve says, “Where is Schmidt now?”

Phillips turns and taps the pointer on the location of the Hydra base, “Here. Five hundred feet below the surface.”

Morita lowers the pictures he’d been looking at to the table and snorts, “what are we supposed to do? I mean, it's not like we can just knock on the front door.”

Steve tilts his head, his expression thoughtful. After a moment he says, “Why not? That's exactly what we're gonna do.”

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Howard jogs over to the open door of the armory where Steve is handing ammunition to Darcy and says, “I’ve made a few adjustments to your bike.”

Steve pauses in packing his bag with ammunition and protein bars to glance at him, “Adjustments?”

He’s a little concerned. Only because he really loves the bike and Howard’s adjustments occasionally result in explosions or fires.

“Yeah—some stuff I figured would help with getting into Hydra’s headquarters,” he points over his shoulder to where the bike is parked beside several vehicles which are currently being loaded up by the rest of the Howlies.

Further away from the staging area Phillips and Peggy are addressing several platoons of SSR soldiers, pointing out key locations on a map pinned to the wall behind them.

“Like what?” Steve says and Howard motions for him to follow. Steve glances at Darcy and she waves him off, her lips quirking in an amused smile, “Let him show you what he’s been working on, Steve. I’ll take care of the rest of this.”

He nods, sending a brief smile her way before following Howard over to his bike.

“So, a few things,” Howard says, circling around, “I’ve mounted two modified M7 grenade launchers to the front of the bike, you press the buttons here,” he points to a control panel mounted on the left handlebar, “to launch. They have about a 220 yard range and I’ve loaded anti tank grenades.”

Steve nods, wondering if the bike will explode if he crashes.

“Also, there is a self destruct button you can set—“ he points to another panel on the right handlebar, “we thought you could jump off it and let it ram into the entrance to the base. There’s enough tnt packed into the device to create quite an explosion.”
“So you’re telling me this is the last time I get to ride my bike,” Steve says, slightly aggrieved.

Howard pats Steve on the shoulder, “Sorry, pal. Not to worry, I have another one for ya back at SSR London. It’s pretty snazzy.”

Steve sighs, “Oh, alright.”

He walks around the bike, noting the new reinforced tires with deep tread to handle the mountain roads as well as possible off-road situations.

There’s still a spot to hook the shield on the front at least.

“Anything else,” he asks.

“Well, if ya press that button,” he points to a red button on the left control panel, “the bike’ll shoot flames out the back, about 15 feet.”

Steve’s eyebrows climb nearly to his hairline, “Flames?”

Howard grins, “Yeah. You’ll be able to roast anybody who’s chasin’ ya.”

Steve nods slowly, “Great.”

“Isn’t it though?” the inventor chortles, his dark eyes sparkling with manic glee.

It is, actually.

The bike is a weapon unto itself, like his own personal tank, though it offers him little armored protection—he has the shield and his new body really doesn’t need as much protection as a normal man would anyway.
The end of Hydra is so close that he itches to just go, to not wait a moment more to hasten their end. He imagines himself riding into the midst of the Hydra forces and burning their base to the ground and the fog that has enveloped him since Bucky’s death lifts and everything comes into sharp focus.

He will do anything and everything to make sure Schmidt fails in his plan to strike a blow against the United States to kickstart his vision of world domination.

He will end it.

Darcy and everyone he loves will be safe.

And Bucky will be avenged.

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2:30pm

Near Hydra Headquarters in the Swiss Alps

The sun is obscured by a heavy cloud cover, the taste of snow is in the air, and there’s only a few hours before sunset.

Darcy lays on her belly beside Steve on an overlook near the Hydra base, ignoring the cold of the snow beneath her and peering at the forested area leading up to the heavily guarded gate through her rifle scope.

She breathes in slowly and lets it out, taking note of the number of targets between them and that gate.

“I don’t like this,” she mutters to Steve, lowering her rifle and flicking her gaze to his resolute face.

The rest of the Howlies are well behind them, methodically sorting through the ammo and equipment, whilst Peggy and Phillips are hanging back with the SSR soldiers near the road, awaiting report from Steve after they surveil the area to determine the best approach.
Steve is lobbying for the element of surprise—insisting if he goes in alone he can reduce Hydra numbers and blow open the door for the rest of them to come through.

She doesn’t like it.

“At least let us go with you—I could set up a position in the tree line and cover you as you ride up to the gate,” she insists.

He raises his binoculars to his eyes and sweeps the area again, shaking his head, “No, I can do this part alone. Hell, this ain’t nothin’ compared to when I broke into the factory.” His lips curve up slightly but she can see the tension in his shoulders.

He’s raring to go—vibrating with the need like a dog waiting on the starting bell of a race.

“Stevie—“ she starts, frowning but the radio crackles behind them and Jones calls him over to talk to Phillips.

She listens with half an ear as Phillips and he discuss Steve’s plan—Phillips finally agreeing but stating the Howlies will be coming in close behind Steve after he provides the initial distraction, the rest of the SSR soldiers bringing up the rear.

She sighs.

Goddammit.

If Bucky were here he’d protest Steve going in alone too. Phillips sometimes forgets Steve is something more than a weapon—that he isn’t indestructible.

She rummages through the pockets of her bag and pulls out the silencer for her rifle, screwing it in place.

She’s backing Steve up, one way or another.
They spend the next half hour organizing their gear and planning their attack, Steve rolling out a map onto a flat rock that serves as a makeshift tabletop and letting everyone know their role and position.

Darcy is looking through binoculars at the forested area around the Hydra base for a good spot to set up when the radio crackles and Peggy’s voice comes through the headphones. Jones lifts them to hold to one ear, his head cocked in concentration.

She can hear her just fine and so can Steve, who suddenly straightens up and puts his helmet on, sliding his shield onto his back.

A group of Hydra soldiers on motorbikes is heading up the road, their timeline to attack has suddenly moved up.

Darcy eyes the cloudy sky, fat snowflakes have begun to fall and the late afternoon is slowly edging towards darkness.

Steve revs the engine of the bike and she says in alarm, “Steve, wait a second—we still gotta figure out—“

Steve looks at her and says resolutely, “Let Peggy know I’m intercepting the soldiers on the road,” he winks and shoots her a feral grin, “see ya at the bottom, doll,” and takes off through the trees leading to the road.

Darcy throws her hands up as he speeds away, “Shit!” She cries, turning to see the rest of the Howlies rapidly loading up, Jones talking into the radio while Peggy’s irritated exclamations can be heard from the other end.

Dernier pushes off of the rock he leans against, casually tossing a grenade from hand to hand.

“Come, ma petite—let us go rescue the Captain.”

“Right,” she grumbles, snatching the grenade from midair and stalking over to where Dugan, Falsworth, Jones, and Morita are scrambling to start down the mountainside after Steve.
Steve speeds down the road with the Hydra soldiers in pursuit, the sounds of their energy weapons dispersing then deflecting off the shield on his back causing him to duck and glance back.

*Shit.*

Eight of them. All of their bikes are armed similarly to his, except with their special weaponry.

As he whizzes around the curve he presses one of the buttons on the panel Stark had shown him and detachable cables shoot out of either side of the back of the bike and anchor into tree trunks alongside the road as he guns the engine and speeds away.

He glances over his shoulder as the first pair of Hydra soldiers duck the wire, but the next couple and are flung from their bikes. His momentary satisfaction is somewhat dulled by the sight of the rest continuing after him, but remembers Howard’s flamethrowers and slows slightly before he pushes the button.

The flames shoot out the back of the bike with an audible *whoosh* and a wall of heat builds behind him, accompanied by the sound of screams and metal crunching—it’s music to his ears.

He looks back to see nobody in pursuit, but it soon becomes apparent that the remaining soldiers had veered off the road and circled around as they pull in front of him, attempting to cut him off.

*That ain’t happening today.*

He revs the engine of the bike, putting on speed and coming up between the two remaining soldiers. As he passes, he pulls the pin on a grenade strapped to the side of one of the bikes and speeds away, the boom of the explosion and the heat at his back heralding the demise of the last of his pursuers.

He lifts the shield from over his shoulders and anchors it in front of the handlebars as the gate to the
Hydra base becomes visible, just in time too, because a tank rolls out, energy weapon blazing.

Steve weaves back and forth, attempting to dodge the bolts of blue light while hitting a button on the left control panel, sending off the tank killer grenade.

The tank explodes spectacularly, flinging debris everywhere and he jigs to the left, accelerating as he rides up one of the cement embankments on either side of the gate and using it to propel him into the yard.

He lands hard but doesn’t pause, unhooking the shield from the front of the bike and triggering the self destruct button before leaping from it to tackle a Hydra soldier.

He barely notices the explosion as the bike blows the door to the subterranean base open—there are so many soldiers converging on him he scarcely has time to look.

He alternates between using the shield to bludgeon his opponents and using his fists, flinging the shield over and over to catch opponents from a distance before they can fire on him.

Just as he catches the shield again on its return he turns to confront his next opponent, who is wearing a very familiar armored suit.

He flashes back to the train, momentarily stunned into inaction as the memory of the tragic conclusion of that confrontation plays in his mind.

The armored man raises his arms, flames shooting out probably 20 feet and stopping Steve from advancing—there’s a click of ignition behind him and he turns to see another armored man, flames shooting from his arms, the wall of fire closing the door on possible retreat.

_Oh hell._

Things aren’t going as he’d hoped.

He looks up and around for a way out of the predicament and sees none, in fact, the flamethrowers go out and reveal he is the epicenter of a circle of Hydra soldiers, their energy weapons pointed at
him.

Shit.

Darcy’s gonna kill him if Hydra doesn’t first.

Chapter End Notes

Sigh. Oh, Steve.

Thank you to everyone who commented and left kudos. I appreciate all of your encouragement and ideas! Let me know what you think about this chapter.
Chapter 56

Chapter Summary

The Howlies rescue Steve, take the Hydra base, and Steve boards the Valkyrie and makes a hard decision.

Chapter Notes

No beta, sorry for any errors.

Some dialogue from CA:TFA, which you’ll likely recognize.

Get your hankies ready, faithful readers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

February 24, 1945

Swiss Alps

In the forest just outside Hydra Headquarters

Darcy’s stomach is in knots as she watches from her perch in the trees while Steve is surrounded by dozens of Hydra soldiers and herded through the blasted remains of the door and out of sight.

“Goddammit, Stevie,” she mutters under her breath and scrambles down the tree quick as a monkey to report to the rest of the Howlies.

Dum-Dum stands at the base of the tree, scanning the area for threats. He lowers his binoculars abruptly when she jumps from a branch nearly 10 feet up and lands in a crouch by his side, straightening quickly to say, “Steve’s in trouble.”

She tells him what she’d seen and he tips his hat back and gazes sightlessly at the darkening sky for a moment before pinning her with a worried stare.

“How many men did ya see in the yard?” He asks urgently.
“At least forty,” she replies.

“Aw, shit,” he curses softly, waving his arm in a *come on* motion before hustling down the hill with her to where the rest of the Howlies are waiting for them.

Dum-Dum says, “Jones, get Phillips on the radio, we’ve gotta move now.”

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Steve’s heart is beating hard, adrenaline surging through his system and his muscles tensing with the urge to do something—*anything* other than be frog marched into the base.

Angles of escape and plans of attack play out in his mind and none of the outcomes look good.

The soldiers drag him down the hall and into a dimly lit room, the majority of the light coming from a single bank of windows with a view of the surrounding mountains.

A slim figure emerges from the gloom and reveals itself to be Schmidt. Steve still cannot help but be startled by the deformity of his face. How can the serum that flows through his veins be similar to what the mad Hydra leader has running through his, and yet the outcome be so different?

He prays no one ever figures out the difference. The world doesn’t need more super soldiers.

He clenches his jaw, holding himself in check. Lashing out won’t help him at the moment.

Schmidt approaches, his posture erect and hands clasped behind his back and says conversationally, “Arrogance may not be a uniquely American trait, but I must say, you do it better than anyone. But there are limits to what even you can do, Captain. Or did Erskine tell you otherwise?”

“He told me you were insane,” Steve grits out.

“Ahh—he resented my genius and tried to deny me what was rightfully mine. But he gave *you* everything. So, what made you so special?” He says waspishly, looking Steve up and down with

...
Steve smirks, he knows Schmidt considers himself superior. It’s gotta sting that he doesn’t look like he’s had his face burnt off. “Nothin’—I’m just a kid from Brooklyn.”

Schmidt’s red skull-like face twists with rage and he lashes out, hitting him hard—twice in the face then once in the gut, bringing him to his knees. He coughs, the taste of blood in his mouth and the breath knocked out of him. He shakes his head to clear it.

*Damn.*

*The red faced bastard ain’t pretty but he sure packs a punch.*

Steve looks up, the scene reminiscent of dozens of Brooklyn alleys. He flicks out his tongue to lick the blood on his lip and pants, “I can do this all day.”

Schmidt sneers, “Oh, of course you can, of course. But, unfortunately, I am on a tight schedule.”

He swiftly unholsters the pistol from his side and points it at Steve’s face, a malicious expression twisting his visage as the familiar whine of the energy weapon fills the room.

Steve braces himself, his mind furiously working over his options, but is distracted by a faint noise outside the windows—Schmidt turns to look for the source of it before focusing again on Steve.

Times up.

“So am I,” Steve grits out, yanking one of the Hydra soldiers holding his arms in front of him.

Several things happen very quickly— Schmidt fires the energy weapon, the soldier he’s using as a shield disintegrates in a wash of blue light, and Dum-Dum, Falsworth, and Jones break through the windows, guns ablaze.
Darcy squats beside Dernier, placing explosives on one side of the heavy metal door while he does the other. He wiggles his eyebrows and grins after he sets the final charge and she smirks in return.

They both love a good explosion.

They hurry back down the hallway and meet up with Morita, who’s on the lookout for any stray Hydra soldiers who might head their way.

Falsworth, Dugan, and Jones had circled around to the other side of the fortress, planning to zip line through the windows to access the area where the soldiers had taken Steve.

Phillips, Peggy, and the rest of the SSR soldiers are awaiting the signal from Morita when they’ve breached the door. They’ll be coming in behind them.

Darcy’s eyes flit past Morita to the fallen Hydra soldiers littering the courtyard beyond—she’d covered the rest of the squad from the tree line as they’d converged on the base, downing a dozen of the enemy in quick succession while Jones, Dugan, and Falsworth had circled around to the backside of fortress.

She’d followed Dernier and Morita through the doorway Steve had managed to destroy with his bike. Most of the Hydra soldiers had gone wherever they’d taken Steve and they’d met little resistance once they’d entered the base.

Dernier checks his watch, “Now,” he says and they cover their ears as he detonates the charges, Morita lifts the radio mouthpiece to shout, “We’re in! Assault team, now!”

They surge forward, guns at ready and enter the hallway beyond the door running.

The sound of increased gunfire echoes behind them—no doubt the explosion has brought scores of Hydra soldiers to the yard, and ahead of them the familiar whine of energy weapons fills the hallway.

She raises her pistols, holding one in each hand and rapidly firing, moving on automatic pilot to eliminate any threats ahead of them. Beside her, Morita and Dernier raise their Tommy guns and do the same, moving further down the hallway and occasionally checking behind them for the SSR
soldiers led by Phillips or for Hydra soldiers, whichever came first.

Unfortunately, her rifle isn’t much good in close quarters so she leaves it strapped to her back.

As they reach an intersecting hallway she pauses, catching Dernier’s eye and signaling her need to reload before leaning against the wall and dropping the clips out of her guns while he covers the hallway behind them.

She checks the stun gun on her utility belt, loosening the strap that holds Sparky in place and Morita glances back at her, his eyebrow raised in a non verbal ready? She nods decisively, pistols raised. The drum of combat boots hitting the floor—lots of boots—echoes down the hallway as they turn the corner, their sudden appearance startling the squadron of Hydra soldiers marching their way.

Darcy immediately opens fire, the ratatat of Dernier and Morita’s Tommy guns quickly joining to produce a destructive symphony. She targets those in the front with the energy weapons—there’s no coming back from being vaporized after all.

Though they are able to reduce the enemy squad effectively, they are outnumbered and soon the Hydra soldiers have closed the distance between them—guns giving way to fists (and a sword in Morita’s case). The three of them work to keep the remaining soldiers from slipping past them, but eventually a few get past and they find themselves fighting back to back against a loose circle of aggressors.

Darcy ducks and weaves, shooting several men in rapid succession at close range and grimacing at the resulting blood splatter. Ugh.

She loses track of what her companions are doing when a grinning mountain of a man lunges at her, grabbing her by the hair and taunting, “Ich werde dich zum Schreien bringen, kleine Schlampe.” I’m going to make you scream, little bitch.

She promptly unholsters Sparky and jams it into his neck, pulling the trigger—he lets go of her hair and utters a choked cry, convulsing and falling at her feet.

“I’m a lady, you piece of shit,” she growls, pausing to kick him in the side—hard. “Only one of us is making noise and it ain’t me.”
There’s a snort behind her and she glances back. Morita is leaning against the wall behind her with Dernier by his side, wiping down the sharp edge of his sword with a handkerchief and surrounded by downed Hydra soldiers.

Peggy has arrived with an SSR platoon.

She raises an eyebrow and gestures to the stun gun in Darcy’s hand and says dryly, “That’s certainly effective.”

Darcy grins manically at her friend, “Isn’t it though? I can’t wait to tell Howard.”

The man at her feet groans again and she nudges him onto his back with her foot. He’s convulsing, foam dripping from his mouth.

She frowns, muttering, “Dammit. Stupid cyanide.”

Peggy eyes the soldiers on the ground critically and sniffs, “If you’re done here, we’ve got places to be.”

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They’re a short distance from an intersecting hallway when the blur of a red faced (skulled?) man running past is followed by a bright burst of flames. Darcy squints her eyes against the light, recognizing the outline of one of the flamethrowing Hydra soldiers from the courtyard, Steve’s shout is audible somewhere beyond him.

Beside her, Peggy raises the Tommy gun she clutches with a white knuckled grip and lets loose a spray of bullets. The Hydra soldier falls, flames dancing over his back and consuming him.

They enter the hallway just as Steve jogs up.

He smirks at Peggy, “You’re late.”
Darcy rolls her eyes.

*Man, he’s never gonna let Peggy live that one down.*

Peggy snorts, “Captain,” and claps him on the back, striding past him to continue down the hall with the rest of the soldiers as Steve pauses to look down at Darcy.

She punches him in the shoulder. Hard.

“Ow.”

He gingerly rubs his shoulder, giving her his patented puppy dog eyes.

*Not today, mister.*

“That’s for running off half cocked and getting captured,” she says.

“I knew you were right behind me.”

She braces one hand on her hip and gives him a stern look.

He rubs the back of his neck, grimacing. “Ok, maybe I was a little hasty.”

She grumbles, “A little? Holy shit, Stevie.”

He frowns, cupping her face in his hand and lifting her chin. He rubs his thumb across her cheek—it comes away red. He wipes it off on his pant leg and gives her a critical once over, “You alright, Darce?”

“None of it’s mine,” she replies.
He nods, his shoulders relaxing. She glances in the direction he’d been headed, spotting his shield wedged in a metal door down the hallway and holding it open, she tilts her head towards it, “Weren’t you gonna?”

Steve nods, “Yeah—“

“Let’s go then.”

She follows as he runs ahead and they burst into the airplane hangar to find a pitched battle taking place between the Hydra and SSR forces.

Her eyes scan the chaotic scene, the intermittent flashes of blue light from the Hydra weapons casting an eerie glow. The acrid stench of smoke, the sound of men screaming, gunfire, and the zapping of energy weapons fills the air.

In the distance, the roar of Valkyrie’s engines firing up draws their attention and Steve’s brow furrows as he looks at it then back at her. She raises her voice to be heard above the cacophony, “Go on—I’ll catch up!”

He gives her a long look, the frown line between his eyes deepening as the plane begins moving.

“Be careful,” he says.

She rolls her eyes and shoots a couple Hydra soldiers coming their way, “Of course!” He raises his shield before nodding to her and running full tilt across the hangar towards the runway, nimbly dodging Hydra fire.

She follows at a slower pace, taking cover behind a shipping container and strategically removing as many Hydra soldiers from action as she can.

Her pistols are nearly out of ammo when Phillips pulls up in a long dark convertible with Peggy in the passenger seat, “Get in girl,” he barks and she vaults over the side into the backseat, “cover our backs.”
She holsters her pistols and pulls the rifle off her back and rests it on the back of her seat, steadily picking off any Hydra soldiers who attempt pursuit. Before long they’ve outpaced them and are speeding down the runway, quickly catching up to Steve.

Darcy grips the edge of the seat, swaying as Phillips brakes hard and shouts at Steve, “Get in!”

She scoots over as far she can as Steve scrambles over the side and drops down beside her, panting, the length of this leg hot against hers as he squints down the runway at the rapidly accelerating plane.

Phillips floors it, the tires squealing as he hits the gas.

The wind whips around them, loosened pieces of hair that have fallen from her braid flying around her face. Steve’s hand grips hers in her lap and squeezes twice as Phillips hits a button on the dash catapulting them to even greater speed.

She squeezes his hand twice in return.

The roar of the plane’s engines is deafening as they drive beneath it. Steve crouches beside her, bracing one hand on the back of Peggy’s seat as he prepares to leap out of the car.

“Wait!” She cries, he turns to her and time slows—she drinks in the incandescent blue of his eyes and contours of his face before she cups her hands around it, tugging him forward to kiss him.

His breath catches and one large hand pulls her closer, his lips moving against hers until she pulls away, looking into his eyes, “Go get ‘em,” she says softly.

Steve nods, inhales deeply and firms his jaw, putting on his Captain America face. He glances briefly at Phillips. The General raises a sardonic eyebrow and yells, “I’m not kissing ya!” as he maneuvers the car beneath the plane.

Steve lips tilt briefly in amusement and he looks at her one last time before he gathers himself to jump. The thick muscles of his thighs bunch and he springs onto the long hood of the car, crouching low as the propellers whirl just inches above them. She clutches the back of Peggy’s seat with white knuckles as he leaps onto the landing gear of the plane, scrambling over one massive wheel and
clinging to the struts as the plane leaves the ground, ascending into the late afternoon sky.

Even as Phillips hits the brakes hard and they’re thrown forward, skidding to an abrupt stop with the front wheels nearly over the edge of the cliff, she doesn’t take her eyes from Steve’s form—watching until he disappears from her sight.

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An hour later they’ve secured the base.

Howard, Will, and a group of SSR scientists are en route and she sits next Peggy in the control room, sorting through various maps, blueprints, and documents as Morita monitors the radio across the room.

Phillips restlessly paces the room behind them, pausing every so often to examine the endlessly blipping radar screen, the Valkyrie having long left it’s range.

She shuffles through a file full of blueprints and mutters, “Howard’s gonna have a field day with this stuff.”

“Mhmm,” Peggy hums in agreement, rubbing tiredly at the side of her neck.

The radio crackles and Steve’s urgent voice fills the room, “Come in, this is Captain Rogers. Can you read me?”

Everyone in the room tenses and zeroes in on the radio. Peggy straightens from her exhausted slump and gets to her feet as Morita grabs the mouthpiece and says, “Captain, what is your—“

Peggy strides over and leans towards the radio, interrupting Morita, “Steve is that you? Are you all right?”

Darcy feels frozen, a feeling of immense dread churning her gut.

“Peggy, Schmidt’s dead!” Steve shouts.
“What about the plane?” Peggy asks.

Darcy gets to her feet and drifts closer, placing her hand on Peggy’s shoulder.

“That’s a little tougher to explain,” he says weakly.

Darcy bites her lip, her pulse thrumming like a trapped hummingbird. Steve’s voice—his false bravado isn’t covering the underlying anxiety in his tone.

Peggy says, “Give me your coordinates, I’ll find you a safe landing site.”

There’s a brief pause before Steve replies, “There’s not gonna be a safe landing—but I can try to force it down.”

Peggy stammers, “I’ll get Howard on the line, he’ll know what to do.”

“There’s not enough time—this things moving too fast and it’s heading towards New York.”

There’s another pause and Peggy glances at Darcy, a frown marring her beautiful face.

Darcy squeezes Peggy’s shoulder. Her friend gives her a long look and steps back. Morita glances between the two of them and rises from his chair, gesturing at Darcy to take a seat in front of the radio.

She sits down and leans towards the mouthpiece and says, “Stevie?”

Steve gasps, “Darce?” His voice wobbles a bit and she’s barely conscious of Peggy placing her hand on her shoulder and Morita backing away.

“Please don’t do this—“ her chest feels tight, like she’s fighting for breath, “We still have time. We can work it out.”
Peggy’s hand slides from her shoulder to grip her hand. Darcy squeezes her hand in return and hears Morita and Phillips retreating from the control room. Her eyes swim with tears and the many lights of the instrument panel blur in front of her.

She closes her eyes and tips her head back, tears escaping to flow down her cheeks as Steve continues, “Right now I’m in the middle of nowhere. If I wait any longer a lot of people are gonna die.”

“Oh—Stevie,” she whispers brokenly.

“Darce—this is my choice.”

Her breath hitches on a sob and Peggy squeezes her hand tighter.

Steve is silent for a long moment and the only sounds coming through the radio are some mechanical clicks followed by the increased roar of the Valkyrie’s engines.

“Baby—” he says softly.

“I’m here,” she says.

“Tell me again what we’re gonna do when we get home?” He says, his voice raw.

“We’re gonna get a place, like we always said,” she smiles through her tears, “it’ll have—” she shudders with another sob, “oh—it’ll have a big bathtub.”

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Steve looks out over the tops of the clouds, the setting sun painting them shades of pink and gold. The cold arctic wind whistles through the crack in the windshield and ruffles his hair as the plane accelerates into it’s dive.
He glances at the open compass he’d placed on the instrument panel in front of him—the picture of
the three of them laughing together in the back seat of Howard’s car from a lifetime ago. He focuses
on her laughing face, his eyes lingering on the curve of her full lips and the dark silk of her hair.

“Yeah,” he sighs, “and a big bed.”

He remembers. He looks at the picture—Bucky’s head thrown back, laughing. He’d always said
they’d get an extra big one.

He hears her breath hitch and he feels lost.

Somehow he always knew the gifts he’d been given came with a steep price.

“Yes,” she chokes out, “And—and church with Ma Barnes and Becca on Sunday’s.”

He’s cleared the clouds. The dark water is dotted with ice for miles and miles—the fading light of
day reflecting silvery blue off of it’s surface.

The force of the plane’s rapid descent pushes him back into his seat.

He clears his throat, clenching his hands on the armrests, “We’ll go to the diner? You know the one
near our old place?”

“Yeah,” she says softly, “for apple pie. I—I love you, Stevie.”

The plane rattles around him and he reaches for the compass, gripping it hard as the wind nearly
shrieks through the cracked windshield. The deep blue water fills his vision until there is nothing
else.

It is nearly the color of her eyes.

*Oh, he loves her so much.*
So much.

He takes a deep breath, bracing himself.

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Steve exhales raggedly, “Always and for—“

His voice is cut off by static.

She gasps, shaking her head in silent denial, “Steve?”

There’s nothing but static.

“Stevie?” she chokes out, pressing her hand to her mouth as if to hold in her anguish.

Peggy wraps her arms around her, holding her tight and Darcy sags against her friend and sobs.

Chapter End Notes

*Passes around vodka, chocolate, tea, and tissues*

So, yeah. It finally happened.

Let me know what you think!

Thanks to all of you who have taken time to leave kudos and comments. It means so very much to me. I am behind on replying to comments, but I will—promise! So if you get a reply to a comment you left a month ago, don’t be surprised.

Love to you all!
Chapter 57

Chapter Summary

Will is worried about Darcy. The war isn’t over yet and the Howlies still have work to do. Some gruesome discoveries are made.

Chapter Notes

No beta. Will’s POV appears in this chapter, as it will on occasion now that two of our three protagonists are out of the picture for a while. I’m trying to not do a retread of the grief cycle Darcy went through when Bucky fell from the train by inserting another point of view. Obviously, Darcy is still processing Bucky’s loss and now there’s Steve’s. She’s in a bad place.

Also, fair warning—some graphic descriptions of medical experiments and death occur in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

April 20, 1945

SSR Swiss base

Will glances briefly at the blueprint spread on the table before he solders the loose wire linking the triggering mechanism to the energy source then closes the instrument panel with a click. He glances at Howard who’s pacing restlessly beside him.

“All set,” he says, “Should be ready to test.”

Howard rubs his hands together and sends him a manic smile as he lifts the energy rifle to his shoulder and fires at the decommissioned tank they’re using as a target.

The high pitched zap of the weapon resonates throughout the subterranean testing area and leaves a smoking hole the size of a bowling ball in its wake.

Howard punches a hand in the air and hisses, “Yes. Finally.”
They’ve been working for months to reverse engineer the Hydra weapons and only after the successful raid on Hydra Headquarters did they get enough blueprints and scientific notes to figure out the energy source and how it works. Howard is still annoyed that Hydra has better tech than he could produce.

Will shakes his head, *fucking Nazis.*

After recalibrating the weapon and firing it a few more times they pack up and head back to the lab.

As they walk back, Howard chatters about projects they’re working on and bits of gossip he’s gleaned from his network of lab techs and secretaries within SSR. He listens with half an ear, responding with noises of surprise and the occasional eyebrow raise. They’ve known each other long enough that Will knows half of Howard’s conversation is him thinking out loud, not requiring much response. Howard pauses at the foot of the stairs leading to the lab, searches his pockets briefly, and pulls out one of his expensive cigars, lighting it and puffing on it a bit before exhaling a stream of sweet scented smoke. He tips his head back against the wall, his dark eyes tracking the smoke spiraling towards the ceiling contemplatively.

Will recognizes his friend is working his way up to asking him something. Howard is a good man, but emotionally constipated. He usually expresses deeper feelings with gifts and favors.

He sets the case holding his tools and notes on the floor and leans against the wall across from Howard, patiently waiting for him to say whatever it is he has to say.

“So, uh—how’s Darcy doing?” He finally asks.

Will sighs and rubs his hand on the back of his neck. Darcy is—not good.

Some part of her sister died when Steve’s plane went down and he’s not sure if it’s coming back.

She’d held herself together, focusing on locating the Valkyrie, but eventually they’d all given up on Steve surviving the crash after weeks of searching yielded no sign of the plane’s wreckage.

Steve was superhuman but even if he didn’t go down with the plane, nobody could survive being in
bitterly cold water for very long.

It’s no coincidence that Darcy’s breakdown came just after SSR made the official announcement that Steve Rogers aka Captain America was presumed lost in a plane crash at sea.

Darcy’s heart broke completely with that last bit of hope gone.

Once they’d made it back to the Swiss base, she’d retreated to Steve’s room and hadn’t emerged for the better part of a week.

He’s pretty sure she only managed to sleep after exhausting herself with crying and drinking bottle after bottle of the whiskey that Howard continued to leave for her outside the door.

If she were a normal girl, she’d be dead from alcohol poisoning.

He’s not sure how Howard rationalized the sheer amount of alcohol that disappeared into Steve’s room only to be replaced by empty bottles stacked neatly outside it but somehow he had. To be fair —Will and occasionally Peggy kept her company for much of the time, bringing her sandwiches and tea, gift baskets from Howard, and treats from the Howlies.

Maybe the inventor assumed she had help drinking all that liquor.

She hadn’t really.

Finally, she’d emerged from the room pale and hollow eyed when rumor got back to her (no doubt through Peggy) that Phillips was thinking of removing her from the Howlies —maybe sending her back to SSR London to work a desk job due to combat fatigue.

She’d cleaned herself up, put on her uniform, and marched down to The General’s office. He doesn’t know what was said but there was no more talk of her being sent back to London.

She started blowing stuff up with Dernier again. Spent long hours at the shooting range. Started organizing the labs, working closely with Howard to trace the flight plan of the Valkyrie to figure out where the plane had gone down.
Howard hasn’t given up on retrieving Steve’s remains, he’d even developed some sonar drones that could be dropped from a plane into the water to assist in locating them.

So far, no luck.

With the war still raging, there are limited resources available to continue searching but Howard has vowed to his sister he’d continue as long as it takes.

That’s just how Howard does things.

He didn’t need to do half of what he’d done to assist with the search. The SSR was certainly ready to give up on it long before they’d closed their official search. The inventor had pushed for it to continue, using his own funds and inventions to aid it.

Howard had considered Steve his friend, and Will knew he probably loved Darcy in his weird way.

With this in mind, he’s completely honest when answering Howard’s question.

After glancing up the stairs and down the hall he says, “Not good, pal. I’m actually really worried she’s gonna get herself killed in the field. Dernier’s keeping an extra close eye on her, but I don’t think she’s got an ounce of self preservation right now.”

Howard’s forehead wrinkles with concern and he says, “They’re due back from Germany later today, right?”

“Oh, yeah,” Will sighs.

The Howlies had been back in the field for more than a month with Dugan in charge, running short missions any time they got word of isolated Hydra labs. So far there’d been no significant resistance, just a few soldiers guarding tech and weaponry and some scientists that hadn’t been working at the facility in the Alps.
Their first mission out they’d parachuted into Germany—Dernier had worriedly told him later that his sister had been the last to deploy her chute, waiting dangerously long to do so.

She’s been reckless with herself in the field, short tempered when back on base, and distant with him—barking at him whenever he asks how she’s doing.

The dead look in her eyes sets alarm bells ringing in Will’s head.

This war can’t end soon enough.

Howard says, “They sent them near Weimar—to Buchenwald concentration camp.”

“Yeah,” he replies softly.

They’d all seen the reports after the Russians liberated Auschwitz back in January. There had been abundant evidence of the mass murder that had been done there in addition to the condition of the evacuated survivors, which was horrifying.

The camps were the stuff of nightmares.

The SSR decided to send people in after it became apparent the Nazi doctors at the camps were using the prisoners for human experimentation. The Howlies main mission objective is to gather as much information as possible for SSR analysis and destroy whatever they cannot take with them. In the case of any survivors of experimentation, they are to be aided by the SSR and evaluated by their scientists.

He’s worried about what Darcy will see and how it will effect her fragile state.

“I looked over some of the preliminary information they sent back—they were injecting prisoners with experimental immunization serums, testing poisons on them, and giving them phosphorus burns to test various treatments on them,” Howard shakes his head and says in disgust, “I really don’t understand how anyone could justify what they did there, it was torture, plain and simple.”

Will nods, “I know.”
Howard sighs and stubs out his cigar against the stone wall.

“I guess better stock up on more whiskey,” he says.

Will lifts his bag and pushes off the wall, starting up the stairs.

“I think that’s a good idea,” he replies.

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Darcy arrives at the base late in the afternoon with the rest of the Howlies, grim faced and grimy from the field. She only has time to greet Will briefly, clutching him into a hug and whispering, “Meet me later at my room,” before she’s hauled off to debrief Phillips.

The General interviews the Howlies as a group in the conference room, shooting off questions at each of them when necessary. She keeps her comments short and succinct, not wanting to draw his attention too much. Nonetheless, she is asked plenty of questions regarding their findings due to her medical background.

Some Polish prisoners had managed to send out an SOS via radio on April 8th, revealing the Germans intent to evacuate ahead of the U.S. Army’s arrival and their intentions to destroy the prisoners. It had been received by the U.S Third Army and quickly answered, assuring the prisoners they were rushing to their aid. With the assurance that the U.S. forces were indeed coming, the prisoners had revolted. Apparently they’d been squirreling away weapons since 1942.

They’d stormed the watchtowers and killed the remaining German guards.

The arrival of the American troops on the 11th was met with jubilant cheers from the starved prisoners.

The Howlies had arrived at the camp on the 13th along with a large contingent of Army medical personnel, prepared for it to be bad—they’d received briefings before the mission containing documentation from the Auschwitz liberation.
The reality of it was a horror beyond imagining.

After entering the gate she’d looked back, some part of her desperate to leave the place, her gut churning at the sheer ugliness of what the high walls enclosed. That’s when she spotted it, embossed on the inside arch of the main entrance gate were the words, “Jedem das Seine”. To each what they are due.

The words could only be read from inside, not outside—so obviously it was meant for the prisoners to see every day.

She turned away quickly, catching Jones eye as he read it, scowling.

Though they’d arrived days after liberation, the camp was still chaos and suffering the likes of which she’d never seen. The former prisoners were dying at a rate of forty a day, weakened from months of starvation, exposure, and the illnesses that had swept the camp like wildfire.

The air was putrid with the scent of filth, sickness, and death—Darcy had to breathe slowly through her mouth to give her overloaded sense of smell a chance to adjust.

Evidence of the staggering cruelty the prisoners had suffered was everywhere and if Steve were here— if Steve were here—

The thought of him echoed through her, reigniting the pain of his loss before she forcibly shut down that line of thought and pushed the wave of grief away.

There was no time for it.

Falsworth whipped out a handkerchief and covered his nose, grimacing in disgust. “By God, it’s worse than I imagined,” he muttered.

The rest of them made noises of agreement, following Dugan as he headed towards the SS side of camp and away from the prisoners barracks.
In the medical labs, they discovered the camp doctor’s detailed notes on their torturous experiments and a black book simply listing the hundreds of prisoners experimented on with crosses next to their names if they were deceased.

There were rows and rows of crosses.

Towards the end of the list there were some names not followed by a cross, and Dugan asks the Army soldier who had escorted them to the medical building if there was any chance they could be located. A first hand account would be helpful.

He gave the soldier the names of the survivors—there were only about twenty, and after another hour of going through medical paperwork and boxing it up, the soldier returned with two women, one older, perhaps fifty, the other very young, maybe sixteen years old.

They were both extremely pale and thin, their eyes darting nervously over the men and back to her, their posture wary.

The older woman, Lena, was Polish but spoke a little English. The younger, Annette, was French. Both of them had learned some German out of necessity while in the camp.

Darcy glanced at Dugan and said, “I would like to sit in on the interviews—my medical background might come in handy.”

He nodded in agreement, “It’ll maybe put them at ease to have a woman there too,” he called out, “Dernier, Jones—we’ll probably need interpreters.”

What followed was a description of cold blooded torture she could scarcely recognize as the behavior of a sane individual, much less that of a physician.

Both women were survivors of experiments in which the good doctors of the SS had endeavored to figure out the best course of treatment for chemical burns. The subjects skin was painted with white phosphorus (a common incendiary substance used in grenades and shells) which was exposed to air until significant damage took place, then treated using a series of ointments and balms, none of which made any great difference in healing and certainly did little to mitigate pain.

Darcy knew from her experience as a nurse that burn wounds were tremendously painful and slow to
heal. Even if the wound healed well, the scarring could cause problems—not just appearance wise, there could also be mobility issues.

Phosphorus could burn down to the bone.

Both women rolled back their sleeves to show them the deep, pitted remains of the burns on their arms.

Lena said, “The burning was terrible. The doctors did not care for our screams—offered nothing for pain,” she rotated her arm, the thick scarring pulling with the motion, “it took a long time to heal.”

Annette nodded in agreement, the twisted scars a blasphemy on her otherwise smooth, youthful skin.

And so it went.

It turned out the women were lucky to have been a part of the burn experiment because there were no survivors amongst the group of prisoners subjected to poison.

After further questioning, the women confirmed the doctors had fled in a hurry with the last wave of evacuees just before the prisoner revolt.

Annette whispered that the doctors had removed a couple prisoners from the medical experiments but took them elsewhere—never to be seen again.

“I had a friend—Adam,” she smiled briefly in recollection, “he had the most beautiful red hair,” she ran a self-conscious hand over the short black stubble on her head, “They burnt his arm too but it got better very fast,” she sighed, “I did not see him again.”

Later in the day, Dugan blew the lock off the door to the basement level and they discovered what had become of Adam.

They filed down the narrow stairs to a laboratory, the flurry of papers on the tile floor and congealed blood in test tubes and in the centrifuge on the counter a testament to the panicked nature of the past occupant’s departure.
It was cold and incredibly quiet, the only sounds were the ticking of a clock on the wall and the faint buzz from the overhead lights. The faintest scent of decay polluted the room and she glanced around, trying to determine the source.

The papers on the floor rustled underfoot as Jones and Morita joined the rest of them to peer around the room.

Darcy snatched up a few papers at her feet and peered at them—the writing was in German but she could read it.

She frowned, running her eyes down the page quickly before flipping to the next one.

Jones followed suit—it figured as he was the only one other than herself able to read the German. He raised an eyebrow at her, “Are you understanding this?”

“Mostly,” she said.

*Completely, actually.*

“Been boning up on your German, huh?” He said.

“Yeah,” she said absently, absorbing the information on the page. *The prisoner showed accelerated healing*—

Her reading was interrupted by the loud report of Dugan’s shotgun.

Jones jumped beside her and cried, “What the hell?” and turned to look at where the others had fanned out across the room to investigate the three doors that lead from the laboratory.

One was a storage closet, one was a bathroom, and the last was locked.
Until Dum-Dum blew the lock off, anyway.

The Sergeant tipped his hat back and winked at them before kicking the door in.

The stench of putrefaction flowed into the lab and Falsworth pulled out his handkerchief again to cover his nose.

Morita peered around Dugan’s bulk as he stood stunned in the doorway and whistled low, “Damn.”

There was a small figure strapped to the bed in the room. Closer inspection revealed an adolescent boy, his brilliant red hair contrasting horribly with the sickly greenish cast of his skin and the bullet hole in his forehead.

He’d obviously been dead for days.

His emaciated arms and legs, exposed in the skimpy grey hospital gown, were covered in scars. An I.V. was still plugged into his arm, the tubing, black with old blood, lying limp on the floor next to a low I.V. stand.

Dum-Dum rubbed a weary hand over his eyes and said, “Goddammit, he’s just a kid,” his shoulders slumping dejectedly.

Darcy leaned against the wall by the door, her gaze riveted on the small figure of the boy.

She said softly, “They took his blood.”

Jones muttered, “Huh?”

She gestured to the empty I.V. stand, “There’s nothing on the hook, the stand is lower than the bed—they bled him and took the bag.”

Morita stepped closer to the bed, examining the bullet wound before stepping back.
“Then why shoot him?” He said.

Darcy sighed, gesturing to the sheaf of papers in her hands, “Because he was different.”

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8pm

Will knocks on the door to Steve’s old room—now Darcy’s room. He juggles the plate full of sandwiches and the bottle of whiskey Howard had handed to him as he left the lab.

Darcy whips the door open, clad in her bathrobe and patting at her short damp curls with a towel.

Will glances at her hair, still unaccustomed to how short it is.

When she emerged from her week long bender in Steve’s room her hair was cut brutally short and even now it just barely brushes her jaw.

She whisks the bottle from his grasp and steps back, giving him space to enter the room before shutting the door behind him.

He sits on the edge of the bed with the plate of sandwiches in his lap and watches as she walks over to the dresser and slings her wet towel on top of it. She unscrews the top off the bottle and glances briefly at the glass on the dresser before shrugging and drinking directly from it.

She wipes her hand across her mouth and sighs, “Thanks—I needed that,” she glances at the glass again and picks it up, wiggling it in his direction, “you want some?”

Will pats the bed next to him and says, “Sure—forget the glass, we can share.”

“Ok,” she says, crossing the room to hand him the bottle before sitting beside him and grabbing a
sandwich and taking a big bite. She polishes off two sandwiches to his one while he fills her in on events at the lab.

She makes noises of surprise and aggravation when he describes some of Howard’s antics.

He sets the plate aside when they’re both finished and takes one last swig of whiskey before laying back on the bed.

She takes the bottle from him and lays down on her back beside him, scooting closer til her her head rests on his shoulder.

He stays quiet, knowing she’ll tell him whatever’s on her mind when she’s ready.

Eventually she exhales, reaching out to absently pick at one of the buttons on his shirt.

“You read some of the reports we sent back, right?”

“Yeah—about the conditions in the camp and the medical experiments.”

“It was so much worse than I could have ever imagined, Will,” she says in a shocked whisper.

He stills her fingers where they continue to pick at the button on his shirt with his own, covering her hand with his and pressing it against his chest.

She continues, “They tortured those people, Will—unarmed men, women, and children—simply because their regime deemed them less. Less human —expendable .”

She angrily wipes her eyes with the sleeve of her robe and sniffs, whispering softly, “I’m almost glad Stevie wasn’t here to see it. It would have killed him that all those people were suffering and dying for years and we did nothing.”

She props herself on her elbow to take a swig from the whiskey bottle and lays down again, silent for several long minutes.
He strokes his fingers through her hair, eyes tracing over the ceiling but seeing nothing but the pictures she’d painted in his head.

She relaxes against him, obviously exhausted.

He thinks she might be falling asleep when she whispers, “We found a dead boy in the basement—his name was Adam. He was like me.”

He raises his head to look down at her and she meets his gaze, her eyes glassy and frightened.

“What d’ya mean?” He asks.

“He was different. Healed fast—probably not as well as me or he wouldn’t have been covered with scars, but he healed better and faster than normal and they tortured him. Cut him, burned him, broke his bones to see how long it took to heal. Took his blood, tried to figure out how he was different—how they could use him. And then—and then, when they heard we were coming they put a bullet in his head.”

Will wraps his arms around her and pulls her close wishing he could protect her from everything. His shirt grows damp from her tears.

After awhile she sniffs and says quietly, “You’re the only one left who knows about me, Will. We have to be very careful.”

Will says, “I know, but Darce—the SSR isn’t the SS.”

She’s quiet for a long moment before she replies, “Maybe.”

Liberation of Nazi Camps

Nazi human experimentation info

Info on Buchenwald
Chapter End Notes

So—this was something I debated including in the story but in the end I felt the liberation of the concentration camps would have been something the SSR (the Howlies by extension) would have been involved in and decided to not gloss over a very important part of the last months of the war in Europe.

Also—Darcy now realizes she is not unique in being “different.” Hmmm.

Descriptions based on historical info gleaned from the internet. Obviously I’m not being strictly accurate with the facts as I am weaving Marvel characters and events alongside actual history.

Thank you all for your comments and kudos. The various responses were so gratifyingly supportive and it helped me to keep working. I know some readers were disappointed that Darcy didn’t go down on the Valkyrie with Steve. Sorry—I have other plans that tie in more with future canon.

Let me know what you think of this chapter!
Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

The war in Europe ends and Darcy and Will go back to New York and stay as guests in Howard’s house. Darcy struggles to integrate back into a normal life as WW2 finally comes to a close with the surrender of Japan.

Chapter Notes

No beta

This is kind of a set up chapter describing where everyone ends up after the war. Time is going to move more quickly, jumping ahead months then within a couple chapters we’ll be leaping ahead decades.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

May 8, 1945

SSR Swiss Base

Darcy is working a conference room with Gabe Jones, Peggy, and a number of SSR agents sorting through the boxes of lab notes and medical records retrieved from Dachau two weeks ago.

Jones had informed Peggy and Phillips when they’d returned from the mission at Buchenwald that she’d learned enough German to be able to read the language.

She figured it’d been long enough for it to be believable. She had borrowed a book from Gabe after all and he’d casually quizzed her on occasion—whenever they’d had downtime.

So here she was—sorting through the files and trying to organize documents chronologically and by type of experiment to at least provide some order before everything is sent off to the translators then on to the scientists.

She rubs a hand over her aching eyes.
She’s so tired.

It’s just so hard to keep going. Every day is a fresh horror and she just—misses them.

She wonders if the pain of it will ever end.

Peggy makes a quiet noise of disgust beside her, her lips tightening at whatever she’s reading on the page she holds.

More descriptions of cruelty, no doubt.

Dachau had been just as awful as Buchenwald, though the experiments were different. There were high-altitude experiments using a decompression chamber, malaria and tuberculosis experiments, hypothermia experiments, and experiments testing new medications. Prisoners were also forced to test methods of making seawater potable and of halting excessive bleeding.

There had also been records of experimentation done on prisoners described as mutants. People who were different—like her.

She was amazed to find there were others, that she’s not the only one. Amazed that there were different sorts of abilities.

There were people who could move things with their minds, could fly, could breathe underwater, that displayed remarkable strength, stamina, and agility. There was even a reference to a boy who had been held at Auschwitz who could control metal.

Unfortunately, there was no one to question, the prisoners had been killed or spirited away—only notes, the occasional photograph.

Above all, it was abundantly clear the minute their differences were revealed the so-called “mutants” became even less human to the scientists and more curiosities for them to study.

Peggy shakes her head, shuffling the document into the appropriate file.
She glances at the clock and says, “Maybe we should—“

She’s interrupted by cheers coming from the outer office.

Darcy turns as the door opens, revealing Howard’s smiling face, the office and lab personnel in the background are laughing and embracing one another, “Pegs—Darce, the Germans surrendered!” He cries, “it’s over!”

Darcy drops the file she’s holding onto the tabletop and turns towards Peggy, who throws her arms around her.

“Oh—it’s over,” Peggy whispers against her hair.

Darcy clutches Peggy for a moment, letting her forehead rest against her friend’s shoulder, then steps back, wondering why she can’t feel anything except tired.

Jones laughs softly, nudging her shoulder with his, “We can go home.”

*Home.*

Darcy’s eyes fill with tears and she wipes them angrily on her sleeve. If she starts crying now she may never stop.

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August 16, 1945

Stark Mansion

Manhattan, New York

2pm
Darcy stands in the large brightly lit kitchen washing dishes while Ana Jarvis fusses behind her.

“Miss Garland, I can take care of the dishes! It’s my job, after all,” she says in her lovely accented English.

Darcy shrugs, dipping the mixing bowl into the rinse water.

“I know, Ana. It relaxes me to do something so—normal. And call me Darcy, I thought we were past that formality,” she says, handing the frowning Ana a dishtowel, “you can dry if you like.”

Ana bustles over and takes the towel, her red hair catching the light from the sun shining through the bank of windows over the sink. Her shoulder brushes against Darcy’s as she begins drying the dishes, the only sounds the sloshing of water and the background noise of the radio on the end of the counter as they work in companionable silence.

For days, the predominant chatter on the radio has been about the bombing of Hiroshima on the 6th and then Nagasaki on the 9th of August.

Suddenly they are in the atomic age.

The 12th had brought further details of the Manhattan Project and Darcy is fairly certain that is what Howard has been doing in New Mexico since June.

The shocking power of the new weapons is reminiscent of the Hydra bombs Steve had died to stop. It turns out there is no stopping the development of weapons of mass destruction, they can only try to control who got them first.

She’s grateful when the news announcements end and Doris Day’s warm voice singing “Sentimental Journey” begins playing instead.

Darcy likes the kitchen. She spends more time there than anywhere else since her return from Europe nearly a month ago. She occupies herself with baking and helping Ana with the cooking, much to the housekeeper’s consternation. She knows she needs to find something more to do soon or she’ll go crazy.
Keeping busy is the only way to keep her mind off of things she’d rather not think about.

Howard and Will had left SSR London weeks before she was discharged, Howard returning to the U.S. to work on a project in New Mexico and Will returning to assist Jarvis in moving Stark Industries R&R lab to a new larger location in Manhattan.

Howard made a lot of money during the war.

The inventor had informed her before he’d departed that his home was open to both she and Will for as long as they wanted, a very generous offer considering their apartment had been rented out years ago and they hadn’t quite decided on their living arrangements yet.

Peggy, Dugan, Morita, and Jones had remained at SSR London.

Morita didn’t have anywhere to go—his family was still in the internment camps.

Jones’ language skills had earned him a promotion—he was helping translate the thousands of scientific documents they had removed from the concentration camps. He’d jokingly said his mother’s roasted chicken would have to wait til he was finished.

Dugan was career Army, he might get back to the States on leave but there was still a lot to do over in Europe.

Peggy was sticking with the SSR for the time being, her particular skills were in demand and she wanted to make a go of it. Privately, she told Darcy she wasn’t sure how long she’d be able to put up with being passed over for promotions in favor of male agents. Desperate times had forced the brass to recognize talent and reward it. Whether they would continue to do so during times of peace remained to be seen.

Falsworth had gone home to Birmingham, where she hoped to god he finally got a proper high tea.

Dernier returned to France, likely to fall into bed with one of his many paramours. He’d given her his mother’s address and asked for her to write him and let him know how she was doing, his dark eyes concerned. She’d written him as soon as she got settled at Howard’s place.
She’d written all of the Howlies actually—she didn’t have much to fill her time these days.

As for herself, she’d been discharged, though Phillips had offered her an administrative role.

She had never wanted to be a soldier. The people she’d fought for were gone and their mission was finished. She wasn’t an agent like Peggy, she was a nurse who happened to be an excellent shot.

She turned Phillips down.

When she’d reached the debarkation point at New York Harbor, she’d called the number Howard had pressed into her hand before leaving SSR London. Soon after, Mr. Jarvis and Will arrived in Howard’s long black car, it’s elegant lines sticking out like a sore thumb amongst the jeeps, buses, and cargo trucks.

Their conversation had been mercifully brief, the Englishman blessedly stoic after the initial niceties and Will content to sit with his arm around her, her head leaning tiredly on his shoulder. She’d watched with dull eyes as the familiar neighborhoods passed outside the window and wished for oblivion.

She doesn’t sleep well.

Howard’s home is massive. No wonder he wants she and Will to stay with him, the place, though gorgeous, feels weirdly vacant. She’s unused to the traffic sounds from Fifth Avenue and the sensation of so much space around her after living in tight quarters for so long.

In truth, she hasn’t slept well in months. *Not since Bucky—*

Not in a long time.

She feels on edge much of the time, loud noises startle her, walking down the crowded sidewalks of New York sets her teeth on edge. She feels hyper aware of everything around her, her senses on alert for any perceived threat.
It had taken more than two days for her to get up the nerve to contact Dr. Bobby—she’d written both him and Mrs. Barnes of her imminent return and she’d needed to retrieve the things she’d left with him in storage.

She had very few civilian clothes, she wore her old Army Nurses uniform home since her role in the SSR had been top secret. Once it had been announced Captain America was missing in action, the press began prying into his private life.

“Captain America, the man behind the mask” articles had flourished, and there had been a memorial in D.C. on the Fourth of July, a statue unveiled at Arlington National Cemetery—Captain America with the costume, the shield.

It had all been politics and propaganda—the vultures in Washington cashing in on Steve’s death for a photo opportunity.

She’d heard a portion of Senator Brandt’s speech on the radio and promptly switched it off.

Captain America’s grave is at Arlington, but Steve Roger’s is in Brooklyn. He had entrusted Darcy with his final wishes and she had denied any requests for his headstone to be anywhere except in a plot by his mother’s side at a small cemetery in Brooklyn. The same cemetery where James Barnes Sr. and Bucky’s graves also lay.

She’d wired the money Bucky had saved for their first place together to Mrs. Barnes after weeks of searching for the Valkyrie had ended in failure and the SSR had declared Steve missing in action, presumed dead.

She’d asked her to arrange everything for Steve, as Darcy was unsure when and if she’d be returning to Brooklyn since they were still at war.

Of course, she visited the cemetery with Ma Barnes and Becca (She can’t believe she’s nineteen! So grown up and engaged to be married!) on a Sunday two weeks after her return to the States. She’d laid flowers on her fellas graves and attended church with Bucky’s family, spending the entirety of the service listening to the whispers of parishioners who remembered she’d been “Bucky’s girl.”

It had been hard.
Later, over a quiet Sunday dinner, she had answered their questions about the work they’d done as a part of the SSR (as much as she could, anyway) and answered their questions about how Bucky and Steve had been lost.

It hurt, but it helped a little to have someone to share her grief.

Howard had flown the Howlies to Brennan Pass after the Germans surrendered and they spent days searching the area for any sign of Bucky’s body. They’d found nothing—not even bones. The spring thaw had caused the river to rise, it’s raging waters likely washing any evidence away.

She wished there was something she could give Bucky’s ma and sister, some closure, but there was nothing except the letters he had written them, which she’d given them before she left after dinner.

It was long overdue, the letters had remained unsent because she and Steve had known they’d be poured over by censors with many parts of them redacted.

Mrs. Barnes had hugged her tight at the door, whispering in her ear that she was welcome to their home whenever she wanted to visit and that she expected to see her on Sundays.

She’d pulled back, her dark eyes shrewd and said, “You and Steve would have been a part of this family, if things had worked out.”

Darcy had been unable to do anything but nod, her throat aching from holding in tears. Mrs. Barnes had always known where her son’s heart lay, and his last letter would confirm it for her.

Her true role in the Howling Commandos and in Steve’s life would never be known. Phillips listed her official position as a nurse with SSR medical, and somehow, the government propaganda machine had cast Peggy Carter as Captain America’s great tragic love.

All the people who knew different had no comment for the press and Darcy told Peggy she might as well go with it—she had loved Steve, (probably as more than a friend and Darcy couldn’t blame her for that) and she was certain he had admired her a great deal.

Besides, it was the kind of love story the United States government could get behind for Captain America. She didn’t really care what people thought—they could keep their symbol, she’d loved Steve Rogers.
Their relationship was a secret when he was alive and would remain so now that he was gone.

She had her memories, all of their letters to one another, Steve’s sketchbooks, and after she’d met up with Bobby and retrieved the boxes of stuff she’d stored in the basement of her old apartment building—she had her photos.

She’d spent several days holed up in her room as drunk as she could get on Howard’s expensive whiskey with all of their photo albums. Eventually she’d boxed them up and slid them to the back of the closet.

It hurt too much.

One day, maybe she’d feel better and she’d frame some of those photos, scatter them around wherever she chose to live.

One day.

Dr. Bobby had been overjoyed to see her, offering her a job in the hospital whenever she was ready and inquiring about her living arrangements.

It was hard, being social, acting like she was happy to be home.

Her home was lost in the mountains of Austria and in the Arctic Ocean.

She didn’t know if she’d ever really be home again.

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Later, Will arrives as she’s sitting on the sofa in the sunroom, listening to a radio show and working on taking in some of her old dresses as the setting sun paints the treetops of Central Park with it’s dying light.
He wanders past with a glass of whiskey in one hand and his briefcase in the other, absently bending to kiss her head as he passes her and sets his glass on the wide desk in the corner, spreading his papers over its surface.

He shuffles through them, organizing them into piles and pulling a pencil from the drawer before leaning back in his chair to look at her while he leisurely sharpens it with a pen knife he pulls from his pants pocket.

“So what’d you do today?” He asks.

“Finished unpacking the boxes I got from Bobby. Baked a cake,” she holds up the blue dress draped over her lap, “Started taking in the waists on a few dresses —I really have lost weight,” she mutters.

She folds the dress and sets it aside, “What about you?”

“Finished organizing the lab at the new Stark Building, it’s a much larger space than the old place, bigger than SSR Brooklyn too,” he sends a small pleased smile her way, and says softly, “went to visit Tony at his parents house. He’s doing much better, talking about moving out into his own place. And—um—I think he might be coming around.”

“Oh?”

“Mmhmm. We don’t have much privacy at his folks place but we talked about maybe getting a place together.”

Darcy smiles tremulously, clenching her hands in folds of her skirt. She’s happy for her brother but she can’t deny the stab of jealousy that he still has his love while hers are gone.

“Oh, Will! That’s good news,” she says softly.

“Yeah.” he says, “but I’m not abandoning you Darce. Maybe we can get a three bedroom place? We could get a nice apartment if we combine expenses.”

She sighs, it’s time to figure things out.
“True. I don’t know if I should live with you and Tony though—he’s not my brother and you know how people talk. Maybe I could get something in the same building as you two?”

Will smiles, “Sure, that’d work out. Also, Howard called, he’ll be back in a week,” he says, folding the pen knife and placing the sharpened pencil on the desk. “Have you decided if you’re going to take the job at Brooklyn Hospital? We could get a place in a better neighborhood in Brooklyn, closer to the hospital and I could take a train over to the new lab.”

“I think so. I don’t need the money right away but I need to find something to do with myself. Also, I’d like to get back to Iowa before winter, just to check on things,” she says.

Will nods, “Alright, what do you think about—-“

The radio show is suddenly interrupted with an urgent announcement and Will rises quickly to cross the room and turn up the volume.

“This just in—-Emperor Hirohito of Japan has announced the surrender of Japan to the Allies! The war in the Pacific is officially over!” the announcer shouts jubilantly.

A wide grin lights up her brother’s face and he pulls her to her feet, grabbing her by her waist to swing her around.

“Darce! It’s all over now! It’s all over!” He cries.

She clutches the back of his shirt and leans her head against his chest, breathing in his familiar scent.

Finally.
Chapter End Notes

The descriptions of Stark Mansion are based on the comics—apparently it became the base for the Avengers and took up an entire city block on 5th Avenue across from Central Park.

There isn’t much info about Ana Jarvis in the MCU wiki, but I went with a little of what was there and improvised some. To be clear, I never watched Agent Carter and do not plan on doing so, the character details from that series may or may not play into this.

Thanks as always for all of the excellent feedback! Let me know how I’m doing.
Chapter 59

Chapter Summary

Darcy explores her options and is blindsided by some after effects of the war. Howard has a proposal.

Chapter Notes

No beta.

Sorry for the delay in posting, I’ve been wrestling with wrapping up this part of the story before starting up the sequel. Also, some renovations in my house have made writing pretty difficult.

Expect some delays before the next chapter, I’m 3000 words into it and there’s still a ways to go.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Friday, August 24, 1945
Brooklyn Hospital
11:30am

Darcy arrives early for her meeting with Dr. Bobby and swings by the birth control clinic on the off chance Helene will be there.

The student nurse manning the desk is one of those freckled redheads whose skin flushes pink at the slightest provocation. At the moment, she is red faced and harried looking, with one arm full of charts and the other bouncing a angrily screaming baby whose face is so red it’s nearly purple.

Darcy glances at her name tag, reading Janet O’Neal, and raises her voice to be heard over the racket, “Hi Janet, I’m Darcy Garland, a friend of Helene’s—I was hoping to catch her before my meeting with Dr. Lowenstein. Uh—do you need some help?”

Janet shoots her a relieved smile, revealing a deep set of dimples in her cheeks and cries, “Could ya maybe hold Timmy here for a sec?”
Darcy nods and takes the screaming baby from her, jiggling him lightly and rocking back and forth in an attempt to calm him, after a moment he takes a deep shuddering breath, his crying abruptly stopping as he gazes quizzically at her with teary crystal blue eyes.

She smoothes her hand over the downy fuzz of blond hair on his head and smiles softly at him, crooning, “Hellooo Timmy, my name is Darcy.”

Janet bustles around her desk and grumbles, “Of course he decides to pipe down now. Don’t worry, Nurse Helene should be done with his Ma in a jiffy.”

Darcy nods, her focus never breaking from the baby’s face as she gently rocks him in her arms. He pops one finger into his mouth and gurgles happily at her and she grins, talking quietly to him as she walks around the waiting room.

“Look at that—” she points to a colorful poster on the wall featuring a dancing syringe and the caption, “Don’t forget to vaccinate.”

Timmy’s eyes stay focused on her face and she mutters, “That’ll really give you something to cry about, pal.”

He gurgles in reply, his mouth stretching into a gummy grin and she laughs, lifting him in her arms so he can look out the window at the cars driving past on the street. They stay there for a little while before circling back to the reception desk to see Janet finishing sorting through the files and looking much more calm.

The student nurse exhales audibly and chuckles wryly, “Sorry about that—he was makin’ such a ruckus!”

Darcy distractedly strokes her fingers over the baby’s hair—so soft—and says, “He certainly has a healthy set of lungs.”

Janet nods in agreement and Darcy sits in the chair closest to her desk, engaging in idle small talk with her as she files charts from earlier in the morning. Timmy’s little hand reaches up, patting at her chest and rubbing his face against the underside of her breast.
“Sorry kiddo, no food for you there,” Darcy murmurs and shifts him to her shoulder. He fusses a bit, grizzling and nuzzling at her neck and wrapping one tiny hand in her hair. She rocks back and forth, rubbing circles on his small back until his body slowly relaxes into sleep.

She lowers her nose to sniff at the crown of his head without a thought, the sweet smell of infant infinitely soothing.

Janet says, “You’re a natural. Have any kids of your own?”

Darcy freezes, her heart suddenly like a stone in her chest.

_They’d talked about children. Maybe someday, after the war—_

She clears her throat and finally says, “Ahh—No. The war got in the way of those kinds of plans.”

Janet, perhaps sensing Darcy’s discomfort mutters, “Boy, did it ever,” and lets it go.

Darcy concentrates on unwrapping the baby’s fingers from her hair and contemplates how delicate his fingernails are. She wonders if she and Steve would have had a little boy like this, blond hair and blue eyes with a great set of lungs.

_They would have named him James._

Funny how something she hadn’t thought she wanted any time soon could hurt so badly now that it was out of reach.

Her chest tightens painfully and she gets to her feet, turning away from Janet and patting Timmy’s back as she walks to the window to dully watch the cars go by, the baby’s sweet smell no longer a comfort.

She hears Helene’s voice down the hall, her voice growing mercifully closer until the door leading to the waiting room pops open.
Darcy walks over and hands Timmy to his mother.

Ten minutes later she’s rushing to the ER to meet Dr. Bobby.

Her reunion with Helene had been brief, they'd arranged to have lunch together next week after a heavily pregnant woman had entered the clinic and her friend had to hurry back to work.

Bobby looks the same, maybe a little grayer and more tired around the eyes, but his booming voice is the same and his hugs are still pretty great.

“Darcy! Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes—“ he hugs her briefly, before releasing her to to hold her at arms length and says, “you wanna go down to the cafeteria for coffee? Maybe pie?” He wiggles his eyebrows playfully after taking a quick glance at his watch.

“Sure,” she says and they walk together down the hallway that leads to the cafeteria.

On the way she sees a few familiar faces and they eye her curiously, but there are quite a few new people too. When they get in line in the cafeteria she spots Martha working behind the counter in the cafeteria.

The older woman’s eyes widen in surprise and she says, “Darcy! Well I’ll be. I didn’t know you were back!”

“Yes, I’ve been home nearly a month,” she says.

“Back from your adventures, eh? I bet you have loads of stories,” she says.

“I suppose,” Darcy says noncommittally, pointing to the cherry pie, “Can I have a piece of that?”

“Sure thing, honey,” Martha says jovially, plating a generous piece then glancing at Bobby, “what can I get for you Doctor?”
“A piece of the apple pie, dear,” he says.

They make their way to a table in the corner and Darcy sits with her back to the wall, automatically scanning and assessing the room as she and Bobby catch up. He fills her in on all of the latest happenings at the hospital. They have a few new doctors in surgery and whole new crop of student nurses who are nearly finished with their training.

“Seems like it wasn’t long ago you were just starting out here. Have you considered coming back to work in the ER? You certainly showed great promise while you were here and your experience in the war would make you better prepared for an emergency than most of my staff.”

Darcy swallows the last bite of her pie and pushes her plate away. “I’m pretty sure I want the job, I’m starting to go crazy from the lack of activity, actually,” she says.

“I imagine,” Bobby says, “and what about a place to stay? I might have something for you in your old building.”

“Oh, no—Will and I are staying with a friend over in Manhattan at the moment. But we’ve been looking for something closer to the hospital. Maybe Park Slope.”

Bobby whistles, “Places over there are a bit more expensive—what about your friend Steve?” He lays his hand gently over hers, “I was so sorry to hear about Bucky. You know I rent to a few of his mother’s friends from church, word got around after he was lost.”

She nods slowly, swallowing the lump in her throat. The American public doesn’t know Steve Rogers, they only know about the exploits of Captain America.

Now everyone wants to know about the man behind the mask but that information has been sharply edited by the government and would probably remain so for a while.

“Steve was involved in a top secret Army project. He uh—he died too,” she says quietly.

Bobby’s forehead crinkles and his mouth turns down in sadness, “Oh my dear,” he pats her hand gently, his dark eyes awash in sympathy, “I am so sorry. They were both such fine fellows.”
She blinks her eyes rapidly and clears her throat, “Yes. They were,” she murmurs, ducking her head briefly to rub at her eyes and sniffs, “I miss them very much.”

Bobby fiddles with the edge of his plate for a moment as they sit in loaded silence.

She hates this. *Hates it.*

Explaining Steve and Bucky’s loss over and over to people who didn’t know them well—even well meaning people like Bobby, is awful.

What can she say about it anyway?

Nobody wants to hear how her heart is broken. How the days stretch on endlessly in front of her and she doesn’t know how to live her life anymore.

It’s all platitudes and pleasantries and nothing feels okay at all.

“Yes, well. I’m sure you do,” Bobby says softly, “give it some time, it will get easier.”

“I hope so,” she says in a very small voice before straightening her shoulders and looking him in the eye, “I think work will help. Keeping busy helps.”

“Please let me know if you need anything—whatever it is, I will try to help. The job is yours if you want it. Just let me know,” he glances at his watch and rises to his feet saying, “I’ve got to get back—walk with me. I’d like to introduce you to a couple new people in the department.”

They never get to the introductions.

Shortly after their arrival in the ER several ambulances pull up and critically injured people are rushed in.
Darcy leans against the wall, forgotten in the crush as the nurses converge on the injured.

Her eyes trace over the broken and bleeding limbs of the patients, words like “car wreck” and “several dead at the scene” filling in the blanks. A man’s bloody arm dangles limp over the side of the stretcher, blood dripping from his hand onto the floor.

There is a woman on another stretcher flailing and screaming, “Johnny? Where’s Johnny?”

Darcy can’t breathe. Her heart is pounding so hard it hurts.

All of the sounds in the room have become distorted and faint—the buzz in her ears overlaying it all.

She can’t stop looking at the blood.

_She pulls the trigger and the bullet goes through the target’s head, a spray of gore marking it’s exit._

So much blood.

She pushes off the wall and stumbles unnoticed towards the exit, her breath hitching in little sobs.

She scrambles down the stairs and walks quickly away, ducking into an alley to lean against the brick wall.

She folds at her waist, leaning her palms against her thighs and letting her head hang low, breathing slowly in through her nose and out through her mouth as she gazes sightlessly at the pavement beneath her feet.

_Oh god._

Why is this happening _now_?
Darcy finally gives up on the idea of sleeping, tossing the covers aside and shrugging into her robe before exiting her room. The carpet runner in the hallway is soft against her bare feet and the house is silent but for the ticking of the grandfather clock at the end of the hall and the soft snores coming from the room next to hers.

At least Will can sleep.

She pads down the long staircase to the first floor, not bothering with flicking on the lights and utterly comfortable in the dark, making her way through the silent rooms (so many rooms) to the kitchen.

The large room is illuminated blue by the full moon shining through the bank of windows facing Fifth Avenue. Vehicles drive past, the beams of their headlights strobing light patterns across the ceiling.

She opens the cabinet where Ana keeps the liquor, selecting a full bottle of whiskey and then a cut crystal tumbler before slumping into a chair at the kitchen table, cracking the seal, and pouring herself a generous drink.

She’d returned home earlier in the day exhausted and discouraged and had spent the evening distracting herself in the kitchen, helping Ana with dinner then playing a couple hands of gin with Jarvis, Will, and Ana in the sunroom as the sun set.

She understood now what had happened in the ER.

She’d seen it before while working as an Army Nurse, soldiers minds stretched to breaking under the strain of war, suffering from what they called shell shock.
She knows it was a stress reaction. Combat fatigue is common, it’s the reason the military rotates troops back from the front lines and replaces them with fresh soldiers whenever possible.

She’d done well with compartmentalizing things when she’d been in the thick of things, but apparently being confronted with traumatic injuries at home had triggered panic.

She leans her elbow on the table and props her head on her hand, distractedly swirling the whiskey in her glass.

It’s a problem, one that she hopes will diminish with time.

The rumble of an automobile comes up alongside the house, continuing past it to the carriage house out back where Howard keeps his cars. The opening and closing of car doors is followed by Howard and Jarvis’ low voices in conversation.

“Thanks for picking me up so late,” Howard says, his voice slurred with fatigue and no doubt some drinking, “sorry for gettin’ ya outta bed.”

“It’s fine sir, I wasn’t asleep,” Jarvis says.

“All the more reason for me to be sorry about getting ya up,” Howard says slyly, laughter in his tone.

Jarvis replies mildly, “Perhaps.”

Darcy throws back the last of her drink and pours herself another.

The men separate in the front hall, Jarvis’ steady tread heading away towards he and Ana’s quarters, the click of Howard’s shoes veering towards his first floor suite.

Darcy relaxes in her seat, tipping her head back and closing her eyes, resting her glass against her belly and taking occasional sips until it’s empty. There’s enough alcohol in her system to make her feel loose, her thoughts drifting in that space between wakefulness and sleep.
Some time later she rouses at the click of a door opening—Howard’s suite, the soft shushing sound of his feet (probably in slippers) traversing the distance between his room and the kitchen loud in the otherwise silent house.

She remains still in the darkness, unnoticed as Howard, his dark hair rumpled and clad in pajama pants and an undershirt, enters the kitchen then crosses to the same cabinet she’d raided earlier.

He flicks on the light switch by the sink, the yellow glow illuminating the black marble countertops and the warm maple of the cabinets. She slits her eyes against the sudden brightness and says softly, “No need to open a fresh bottle.”

Howard jumps, whirling to face her, his dark eyes startled. She smirks, pouring herself a fresh drink.

“Dammit. What’re ya doin’ sitting in the dark?” He grumbles, grabbing himself a glass.

She shrugs, “Couldn’t sleep.”

He pulls out a chair at the table and she looks him over, he’s got what looks like the start of a shiner and some gauze wrapped around his hand. He also has a rather livid looking love bite on his neck. She shoves the bottle over to him and he pours himself a drink.

“What happened to you?” She says, gesturing to his eye.

Howard takes a gulp of whiskey, grimacing slightly at the burn. “Ah, a little disagreement.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. Some hothead thought a pretty girl was his date and I proved him wrong,” he wiggles his eyebrows before wincing slightly and pressing the cool glass against his eye.

Darcy snorts, “you’re ridiculous.”
Howard says, “So you say,” he sighs and stretches like a satisfied cat, “it was worth it.”

“Guess I’ll have to take your word for it,” she mutters and tosses back her drink.

She pushes back her chair walks to the icebox, grabs the ice tray and a clean dish towel and drops a few cubes onto it.

“Here,” she says, “hold this on your eye.”

He silently presses the ice to his eye and leans his head against the back of the chair.

Darcy grabs some sandwich fixings and kicks the icebox door closed behind her.

She glances at Howard, who’s watching her intently with his one good eye. “You want a sandwich?”

“She says,” he says.

She slices the bread, slathers on a bit of mustard and stacks the roast beef and cheese on it.

“Say, Will told me you were meeting with that doctor at the hospital today about a job—how’d it go?” He says as she hands him a plated sandwich and places hers on the table.

She turns away, putting the sandwich supplies away quickly, ignoring his question for the moment. She holds up a jar of pickles, “Want one?”

“Sure,” he mutters, taking a bite of his sandwich.

She slams the door to the icebox closed and sets the jar on the table and he unscrews the lid, fishing a pickle out then raising his eyebrow at her in question. She takes a bite of her sandwich and nods.
He lays a pickle on her plate and then on his and takes another bite of his sandwich, chewing slowly and looking intently at her.

She avoids his eyes, focusing on eating.

Howard finishes half of his sandwich and clears his throat, leaning back and pressing the ice pack to his eye again.

“What happened?” He says softly.

She sighs.

“Bobby offered me the job. I told him I was interested, then we walked back to the ER. There were incoming trauma patients—a car accident or something, a lot of blood and screaming,” she rakes her hands through her hair in frustration before slumping dejectedly in her seat, “and I panicked.”

She pauses to viciously bite off the end of her pickle.

Howard winces and nods slowly, his face thoughtful. He’s uncharacteristically quiet for a moment before he says, “So—are you not taking the job?”

She rubs her fingers tiredly over her eyes and says in a low voice, “I think—um,” she pauses, exhaling slowly, “—the war did something to me and I don’t—don’t think I can right now.”

Howard silently slides the whiskey bottle her way and she refills her glass.

He waits for her to take a few fortifying sips and sets the ice pack on the table next to his plate, leaning back in his chair with his glass cradled in his hands.

He clears his throat, “I have a proposition.”

She raises her eyebrow at him in question and he says, “I’d like to offer you a job—“
“Howard—” she interrupts and he holds up a hand, and says, “Hear me out. I need an assistant. Jarvis handles the house, often acts as a bodyguard and drives me around. Will is an engineer—he’s the one I bounce ideas off of and helps me make my ideas a reality. I need someone to be a middleman, middle—lady?” He shrugs and continues, “between me and potential investors and clients. I need someone to keep track of my appointments, keep my projects organized, and patch me and the other scientists up when we have the occasional explosion at the lab. It helps that you have language skills, I’m looking to expand my business overseas now that the war is over. You’d be a jack of all trades and hardly have any free time but I think you need to be busy.”

True.

She tilts her head thoughtfully.

She’s not the same person she was before the war.

She struggles to find a reason to get out of bed every day, much less figure out what she’s going to do with herself once she does. She wishes she could simply slot herself into her old life and go on as if nothing has changed.

But it hurts.

Like forcing her foot into a shoe she's outgrown and trying to walk like it isn’t agony.

He reaches across the table and lays his hand over hers and says quietly, “There are very few people I trust and you’re one of them.” He pauses and leers exaggeratedly, “It doesn’t hurt that you’re easy on the eyes.”

She slaps playfully at his hand and leans back in her chair again.

She says quietly, “This isn’t some misguided idea that you need to take care of me, is it?

Howard shakes his head and says, “No—I really do need the help. I’ve also been looking at some business opportunities in California and it’s very obvious that I’m overextended. I need Will to be able to stay in the labs when I meet with clients and ride herd on the employees there. In the past, he
and Jarvis kinda split up the job I outlined for you between the two of them and it’s really just become too much.”


Howard slaps both hands on the table and crows, “Great! You and Will can have an apartment on the second floor. You’ll love it.”

“Wait—What?” She says in a dazed voice.

“Keep up, Garland. Did you really think a three story mansion that takes up an entire city block wouldn’t have apartments?”

info on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Chapter End Notes

I don’t recommend using alcohol as a frequent coping mechanism but I understand many people turn to it for that reason.

Alcoholism for many returning soldiers after the war (any war really) was a real problem and without her healing factor Darcy would be in trouble. She, at least is safe from liver damage and actual physical addiction. Not so other people.

I’m pretty sure Tony Stark’s epic binges are rooted in his family tree—in my head canon it comes from both sides of his family.

Thanks for all of your support—the kudos and comments keep me going!! We are so close to the end of this part of the story, I can’t wait!
Chapter 60

Chapter Summary

Life moves on. Darcy adjusts to life in Stark Mansion and working with Howard. Howard studies a strange object in the basement. Peggy comes for a visit.

Chapter Notes

No beta. All errors are mine.

Deepest thanks to all of you who commented and/or left kudos. It means so very much to me! Please take time to let me know what you think.

Next chapter in 2 weeks or less.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

October 23, 1945

Stark Mansion

10pm

Darcy grabs the papers from her desk and sets off to find Howard, the sound of Ella Fitzgerald’s velvety voice crooning from the record player diminishing as she exits the study. She distractedly shuffles through the paperwork in her hands as she traverses the short hall to the kitchen in the Stark Mansion apartment where she, Will, and Tony live.

Howard had offered her a smaller apartment on the 3rd floor but she’d felt uncomfortable with the idea of taking any more gifts from him, even if he insisted it was part of her salary. Also, she doesn’t like being alone—the third floor is eerily quiet and her thoughts become too loud when she’s not busy with work. Will and Tony offer welcome distraction from the emptiness that sometimes threatens to swallow her.

Her brother had convinced Tony to move in with them a month ago. Howard had sweetened the deal by offering him a job managing his finances and researching investments.

Turns out Tony is a whiz at the stock market.
His father was angry at first that he wouldn’t take the accounting job at the family business, but his acceptance was eased somewhat by the canny investment advice he’d had given that was already turning a tidy profit.

However, his parents still labor under the misconception that Will is just his roommate because Tony is unwilling to widen the rift caused by his defection from the family business by revealing the truth of their relationship.

She doesn’t know what they’d make of her living with them (it’d probably worry them—she’s not the kind of girl they’d like their son to marry) but Stark mansion is so spacious she could certainly make herself scarce if for some odd reason they ever came to visit.

Anyway, Tony and Will have mostly gotten past the rough patch in their relationship though Tony still struggles with a host of mobility and body issues since his leg was amputated just below his knee.

Howard had made Tony a replacement for the prosthetic leg the Army had issued him, declaring it a piece of junk. The new leg is miles ahead of anything currently available for amputees and Tony has been working to convince Howard to market it.

She enters the brightly lit kitchen to find Will and Tony sitting at the table playing cards, a bottle of whiskey between them. Smoke wreathes their heads, floating in lazy spirals up to the high ceiling—both of them are puffing on the expensive Cuban cigars Howard favors.

Will glances away from his cards at her as she enters the room, crossing to the counter to pick up the tin of lemon bars she’d baked the night before from the black marble countertop.

“Going to pry Howard out of his lab?” He mutters around his cigar, frowning when Tony says, “Gin.”

He slaps his cards on the table in disgust and drops his cigar in the ashtray to take a sip of his drink.

Tony smirks, wordlessly gathering the cards together and expertly shuffling the deck.
“Yeah,” Darcy says, balancing the papers on top of the tin and tucking it under her arm, “he’s been holed up down there for two days with whatever he’s working on and I need these papers signed.”

Will snorts, “Good luck,” and she exhaled a long suffering sigh, tiredly raising her arm in goodbye as she heads out of the kitchen, through their living room where her gaze pauses mournfully on her ridiculously comfy reading chair in the corner before she sighs and leaves the apartment.

There were a lot of things about the mansion that she hadn’t known before she took the job with Howard and she and Will accepted his offer to live in the second floor apartment.

The elevator, for one thing (another reason Tony was convinced to move in with Will, not that he needed much convincing).

The three basement levels beneath the mansion for another.

Howard likes to tinker and he often has a brainstorm in the wee hours so the first basement level contains his home lab, the place he works on whatever new ideas that scramble around in his brain. A lot of products start in the basement before they end up in further development at Stark Industries R&R.

The second level contains material storage and some projects Howard has set aside in frustration.

She’s not quite sure what’s on the third level. Howard calls it “the vault.”

She shuffles through the papers in her hands and absentmindedly pushes back the brass gate before exiting the elevator when it arrives at the first basement level. She walks across the plush Persian carpet of the antechamber to a steel door, keying in the code next to it and hearing the thunk of the lock disengaging.

She enters, turning to shut the door and re-engage the lock before casting her eyes over the dimly lit area. Most of the overhead lights are off, the primary illumination a blue glow from the far corner of the lab, it’s source obscured by the tall shelves of materials blocking her view.

The lab is one floor, maybe a quarter of the size of the first floor above it, but it is nevertheless a large space with high cavernous steel enforced ceilings. It is sectioned into areas and interests, a maze of divider walls open to the high ceilings.
Her heels click quietly on the gray tile floor as she weaves her way towards the sound of Howard’s low voice, no doubt talking to himself as he records his observations as he sometimes does. The blue light grows brighter as she approaches, revealing the rumpled inventor sitting at a workbench, his face with more than a day’s growth of beard and his goggles shoved back into his dark hair as he feverishly scribbles in the notebook in front of him, talking under his breath.

She turns her head to determine the source of the light and freezes at the sight of the glowing blue cube suspended within a glass case against the wall.

She distractedly deposits the tin of cookies and her papers next to Howard’s elbow as he obliviously scribbles on and walks closer to the cube, the blue light shining from it utterly transfixing.

It’s odd, the feeling she gets looking at it. Her thoughts drift as she raises her hand to press against the glass and—

She’s dancing with Steve in a crowded dance hall. He’s so handsome in his dress uniform, his blond hair shining under the light from the crystal chandelier hanging above them. His lips quirk in amusement as he looks over her shoulder.

She hears a familiar laugh and turns her head and there, sitting at the bar, is Bucky, grinning good naturedly at Will before throwing back the shot of whiskey in his right hand.

He catches her eye and winks playfully at her, his silvery blue eyes magnetic.

“He’s doing so much better,” Steve whispers in her ear.

“Better?” She asks, puzzled.

“Yeah, even with his injury—we’re just so damn lucky Darce. I can’t believe we’re going home.”

She nods, hiding her confusion as he pulls her close, she presses her forehead to his chest and inhales deeply, her mind racing.
Is she dreaming? It feels so real.

They turn again on the dance floor and she spots familiar faces. Peggy is dancing across the room with Falsworth. Howard, Dernier, and Morita are engaged in a game of cards in the corner. The next turn brings Bucky into view and her breath catches in her throat as she drinks in the familiar beloved lines of his face. She’s missed him so much—

He signals the barkeep and she notices his left arm, the sleeve of his uniform jacket pinned up to his elbow.

She sucks in a shocked breath.

His injury.

She glances up at Steve and says, “What—“

“Darcy? Darcy!”

She startles, jerking her hand away from the glass and turning to look at Howard.

“Yes?” She says distractedly, glancing around her in confusion as a crushing sadness settles on her heart like a stone.

“Maybe ya oughta step away from the cube. It’s kinda—hmmm—unpredictable.”

She steps away, rubbing her temple as she moves to his side.

She must be tired.

Diagrams of the cube fill the pages of his notebook along with questions, measurements, and notations.
“What does it do?” She says, glancing at the cube warily.

“Mmm. Not sure, some sort of energy source,” he pauses, noticing the tin and papers she’d left beside him. He sets the papers aside to pry the lid off the box, leaning in to sniff appreciatively at the lemon bars within, before grabbing one and unceremoniously stuffing it in his mouth. He rolls his eyes and mumbles, “Marry me. Seriously.”

She shoves his shoulder in reply and says, “The cube—is that the same one that was on the Valkyrie?”

They’d had information of an energy cube that Schmidt had used to fuel the Hydra weapons. It had been on the plane and assumed lost.

Howard swallows and clears his throat, grabbing another lemon bar, his face suddenly grim.

“Yeah—I, uh—located it on my last search for the plane.”

He’d returned from that search three days ago, merely shaking his head at her hopeful expression when he’d returned. She knows he considers it a personal failure that he hasn’t located the wreckage.

He’s been holed up in his lab ever since.

“Huh,” she says softly.

Howard polishes off the second lemon bar and says, “It’s strange that we were able to find the cube but the plane was nowhere near it. Darcy—” he rests his hand on her shoulder and earnestly continues, “I’m gonna keep looking.”

She bows her head, tracing a finger over the scarred surface of the workbench.

“I know.”

She reaches for the stack of papers he’d set aside and fans them out in front of her.
“While you’ve been locked away down here the last couple days—” she pauses and eyes him critically, “Have you even slept?”

He shrugs, hooking a thumb over his shoulder at the battered leather davenport pushed against a wall of shelves.

She rolls her eyes, “While you’ve been ignoring all my calls, things have been backing up. Mr. Hughes’ lawyer needs you to look over the paperwork and to sign these. Also, they want a deposit for the property in California.”

Howard nods, scribbling notes in the margin of his notebook.

“Why’re you buying a house in the a Hollywood Hills anyway?” She asks.

“Mmm—the movie business is really taking off. I’d like to try my hand at it. Hughes says it’s a moneymaker but frankly, I’m in it for the ladies,” he wiggles his eyebrows suggestively.

“Really?” She sighs.

“Of course,” he says grinning, “but there’s also a lotta movers and shakers out there with money to invest, doll. Gotta rub shoulders with money to make money.”

“Whatever. It’s your money to waste,” she says reaching for a lemon bar, she takes a bite, the sweet citrusy flavor working to disperse her low grade headache. “Say—does that thing,” she points at the cube, “make you feel weird at all?”

Howard stops scribbling to glance at it, “The cube? I don’t know—I’ve felt pretty energetic the last few days,” he frowns contemplatively. “So many new ideas—if I could just duplicate it in some way—just think, a clean, constantly renewing energy source. It could power cities,” he says wistfully, his eyes going unfocused as he stares at the cube.

“Hmmmm. Maybe you oughta sleep in your bed tonight, pal,” she says, uncomfortable with the idea of him spending so much time exposed to the strange artifact.
He waves a dismissive hand at her, “Oh, I’ll be up later.”

“You better. Big meeting tomorrow,” she says.

“Yeah, yeah,” He mumbles, returning to his notes.

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Saturday, November 10, 1945

Darcy wears her best church dress (dark blue, rather somber as she’s still mourning Steve and Bucky) and sits beside Mrs. Barnes in the pew as a radiantly lovely Becca Barnes walks on her Uncle Mikey’s arm down the aisle to meet her husband to be.

The groom, Thomas Finnegan, is a tall, thin young man with curly light brown hair, serious gray eyes, and possessed of a determined demeanor that reminds her of Steve.

Something in his posture—the tilt of his chin, the way he squares his shoulders when he spots Becca heading towards him—sends a stinging wave of sad recognition through her.

*Becca always liked Stevie.*

She wonders what Bucky would make of his sister getting married just shy of her 20th birthday.

It’s not too young by most people’s standards but she’s sure Bucky, much like herself, would still view Becca as the fifteen year old they left behind when they went away to war.

It seems like a hundred years ago and like yesterday.

Many are rushing to get married now that the war is over—she’d had lunch with Helene last week and the nurse had marveled at the increase of pregnant young women visiting the clinic.
Helene had wrinkled her nose, “What is the rush? Why not enjoy being married for a little while before having babies? There is birth control, after all!”

Darcy supposes it’s some kind of human instinct after the loss of so many young men in the war.

Mrs. Barnes pats her hand and passes her a hanky from her handbag and sends Darcy a watery smile as she pulls a second one out for herself.

Darcy discreetly dries her eyes and manages to hold it together through the rest of the ceremony, letting her eyes wander over the small wedding party (just the best man and maid of honor standing up with the couple) and the groom’s family across the aisle from her.

She watches as Thomas gently lifts the filmy veil from Becca’s face and smoothies it over her dark hair. The bride smiles, her lips curling into a wide grin that’s so reminiscent of Bucky’s that Darcy has to look away, twisting her borrowed hanky in her hands.

Later, she stands at the bottom of the church steps in the pale autumn sunlight and throws handfuls of rice with the jostling crowd of well wishers as the newly married Mr. and Mrs. Finnegan rush to the shiny black Bentley (on loan from Howard and driven by Jarvis just for the occasion.)

The joyous couple laughs and waves as the car pulls away from the curb, the cans tied to the bumper rattling behind it and the “just married” sign flapping in the breeze.

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December 29, 1945

2pm

Will rides along with Jarvis to the La Guardia airport to meet Howard’s flight from London.

They pull up to the terminal and Will steps onto the curb, leaving Jarvis in the idling car as he enters the building to find Howard.
Transatlantic flights are becoming more common, the war having spurred growth in commercial air travel, but the cost of such flights is still beyond most people’s means.

Howard flies often—only using his own plane for flights within the United States.

The inventor had spent Christmas in London after meeting with Peggy Carter at SSR Headquarters.

SSR is in the process of being decommissioned now that the war is over, the scientists slowly trickling back into the private sector or being absorbed by other government agencies and the soldiers returning home.

Howard still has military contracts however, and most of the Allied nations are committed to having a larger standing army than existed prior to the war.

Needless to say, business is booming. In fact, he imagines there will be a surge of new products in the public sector as a direct result of technological developments during the war.

He rises to his tiptoes to peer over the crowd, spotting a bedraggled Howard and an elegant as ever Peggy Carter emerging from the gate and heading his way. He hurries in their direction, pondering the woman’s presence.

*Howard hadn’t mentioned she was coming back with him.*

Perhaps it would be good for Darcy to see her friend. They had gotten close during the war, oftentimes the only women in a roomful of SSR agents and scientists.

He likes Peggy, she’s intelligent, dedicated, and loyal. Her temper is occasionally fiery but she has a long fuse. The only time he’d seen her really blow up was early on after Steve joined the SSR as Captain of the Howlies.

Steve’s tendency to charge ahead without waiting for backup drove her just as crazy as it did Darcy and Bucky.
Despite being frustrated with Steve on occasion, Peggy had been his friend. Both of them were focused on their duty and capable leaders.

It’s probably why the rumor mill at SSR churned out that nonsense about the tragic romance between Captain America and Peggy Carter. The two of them were a lot alike.

He knows it doesn’t bother his sister at all but it bothers him.

*It isn’t fair.*

Darcy loved Steve and Bucky with all her heart and had lost them both. That’s the real tragic love story and few people will ever understand the depths of her suffering.

She saved the Howlies bacon on more than one occasion but nobody will ever read about *that* in the history books, he thinks bitterly.

His sister is a goddamned hero as far as he’s concerned.

And God, he doesn’t know what to do for her.

She’d been so quiet on Christmas after she’d returned from the Mass she’d attended with Mrs. Barnes, Becca, and her new husband.

She spends her days running Howard’s business and cleaning up his messes—she’s an absolute tireless pillar of efficiency and organization.

But her eyes are so sad.

Will raises his arm and waves to get Howard’s attention and Peggy’s sharp brown eyes spot him first, her red lips curving into a welcoming smile. She firmly grasps the inventors arm and tugs him towards Will, an overburdened porter pushing the cart containing their luggage behind them.

“Will! It’s so lovely to see you,” she says as they draw closer and Howard raises a hand in a limp
greeting and grunts tiredly, “Garland.”

Will lifts an eyebrow at Howard’s obviously exhausted state and says, “I wasn’t expecting to see you here, Peggy. Howard didn’t mention you were coming.”

“Yes, well. Howard and I have some business to discuss and he was kind enough to invite me back for the New Years party at The Plaza, so—“ she shrugs eloquently as they walk towards the exit.

“Ahh,” Will says, “Well, I’m glad to see you. Darcy will be thrilled. How was your flight?”

Peggy shudders delicately, “Long.”

Howard groans, and massages his forehead tiredly, “I can’t understand how Pegs is fresh as a daisy after a seventeen hour journey and I feel like I’ve been hit by a truck.”

Peggy sniffs, “I slept the night before we left. I also attempted to nap on the plane while some people felt their time would be better spent drinking whiskey, smoking endless stinky cigars, and relentlessly flirting with the stewardesses.”

Will grins at Howard, “Sounds about right, pal.”

Howard grumbles wordlessly under his breath as they exit the terminal and are met by the frigid late December wind.

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Stark Mansion

Manhattan

It’s late afternoon when Will knocks on the doorframe to the study.

Darcy glances up from the shipping contract in front of her and smiles at her brother, “Hey, you’re
back. How’s Howard?"

She reaches for her tea and takes a sip, grimacing when she finds it cold.

Will crosses the room to the record player, flipping through the stack of records distractedly before flopping in the cushy chair on the other side of her desk.

“He’s alright. Drank too much on the flight and didn’t sleep a wink the last 36 hours or so. He retired to his suite. I’m guessing we won’t see him til morning.”

Darcy hums, “Mmhmm, sounds about right.”

“He brought back a surprise guest,” Will says nonchalantly.

She scribbles an addendum at the bottom of the contract and sighs, “Oh?”

“Yes—Ana’s airing out a guest room down the hall. Why don’t you go down to the big kitchen and say hi to Peggy? She said something about making a decent cup of tea,” he says.

She drops her pen on the desk and quickly rises to her feet, “Why didn’t you say so right away?!” She cries.

A sly smile uncoils on Will’s face, “Oh—I didn’t know you’d get so excited.”

She rounds the desk and smacks his shoulder as she passes.

“Ow!” He complains as she darts out the door, “Hey—did Tony come back yet?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” she tosses over her shoulder as she exits the study.
A few minutes later, Darcy enters the mansion’s kitchen to find her elegant friend seated at the kitchen table, a steaming teapot at her elbow and teacup in hand, gazing out the window at the cars streaming past on 5th Avenue.

Peggy’s head turns at her arrival and she makes to rise from her chair but Darcy hurries over and says, “Oh no—don’t get up! You must be exhausted. Give me a minute!”

Peggy watches, her lips quirking in amusement as Darcy rummages in the pantry to find the tin of cookies she and Ana had baked on Christmas Eve before grabbing a teacup for herself and seating herself across from a her at the table.

Darcy opens the tin, pushes it towards her friend and says softly, “I’m so glad to see you.”

Peggy smiles, the corners of her dark eyes crinkling the way they only do when she’s genuinely happy. “And I, you,” she says.

“Why didn’t you let me know you were coming? Why didn’t Howard?” Darcy asks, reaching for the teapot to pour herself some tea before adding a bit of sugar from the bowl on the table, rising to grab the milk from the icebox and returning to her seat.

“I didn’t know I was coming until the last minute,” Peggy says, “I have a meeting with General Phillips in Washington in two weeks and Howard wants in on it,” she pauses to select a cookie from the tin and continues, “He has some ideas about extending the purpose of the SSR now that the war is over. It seemed like a good reason to come visit.”

Darcy lays her hand on Peggy’s arm and says, “Any time is a good time to visit. You don’t need a reason.”

Peggy pats Darcy's hand and smiles, “I’ll try to remember that.”

“So—tell me what you’ve been up to lately and what have you and Howard cooked up to replace the SSR?” Darcy says, selecting a lemon bar from the tin.

Peggy huffs in irritation, “I trust that Howard hasn’t been telling all and sundry about his latest idea?
Not that you should be kept out of the loop—it’s just that he likes to brag, and to drink…”

Darcy frowns, disappointed that Peggy would think Howard incapable of discretion. The man has an entire vault of secrets beneath this very house.

Yes, his personal affairs are often sloppy. Yes, he’s a show off. But, he is deeply loyal to his friends and committed to protecting the interests they’d fought for during the war.

She chides, “Peggy, you know Howard can keep a secret. Will and I were a part of the SSR and we are crucial to Stark Industries. There may be things in the future that you do not wish for him to share with us. Simply tell him so.”

Peggy sighs, “You’re right,” she rubs her forehead tiredly, “I’m just exhausted. Also, I thought you were done with SSR business?”

“I am. But I work for Howard. It’s inevitable I will occasionally be involved with whatever you get up to. Besides—I’m not done with helping my friends when I’m needed.”

Peggy nods and pulls the tin of cookies closer, fishing out a gingerbread man. She dips it into her tea before nibbling at his legs. “Mmmmm. Tastes like the ones my mother used to make,” she says approvingly before continuing, “I know you’re done with fighting. I’m hoping that’s not something you’ll be needed for again. Nonetheless, I’m glad you’re working with Howard. The man needs someone to temper his obsessions. Did Will tell you he’d been awake for nearly two days when our plane landed today?”

Darcy nodded, well acquainted with Howard’s binges, both in work and play.

“He’ll probably sleep for twelve hours and then hole up in his lab as soon as he’s up and running,” she says.

“Yes. Speaking of—have you seen the energy cube he retrieved in his last search for the Valkyrie?” Peggy inquires.

Darcy thinks about the blue cube and shudders. The thing is unsettling—she doesn’t like it and really wonders if it’s good for Howard to spend so much time with it.
“Yes. I’m frankly surprised he pulled himself away from it to go to London. He’s a bit obsessed,” she says wryly.

Peggy nods and leans back in her chair, cradling her teacup between her long graceful fingers. She taps one red lacquered fingernail against the side thoughtfully.

“I’d like to see it,” Peggy says.

“Yes, well—maybe you can think of somewhere else for him to study it. Seems dangerous having the energy source Hydra used to power their weapons under the house.”

“Agreed,” Peggy says quietly.

**MCU Tesseract info**

**other versions of the “cosmic cube”**

Chapter End Notes

Yes, that strange object is the Tesseract. In canon Howard studied it for some time before Peggy convinced him to give it to SHIELD for safekeeping. He continued studying it there.

In my story, the Tesseract can influence mood, perhaps bringing out the more dominant or negative emotions of those who are exposed to it, much like the stone in Loki’s scepter the mind stone—which was blue.

The Tesseract houses the space stone, also blue (confusing) and reputably able to open gateways which allow interdimensional space travel. It also is somewhat sentient and a source of unlimited energy. It leaks low levels of gamma radiation to unknown effect. In the comics, certain versions of the cube can also alter reality or show potential futures. That’s a bit of what Darcy sees when she gets close to it.
All in all—the Tesseract is kinda bad juju.
Chapter 61

Chapter Summary

New Years Eve—Peggy gets a look at the cube, a fancy party at The Plaza is attended, Darcy meets a couple of famous people, old friends drop by to visit, Darcy deals with a man who can’t take no for an answer.

Chapter Notes

No beta

Sorry for the wait. This chapter was hard to wrestle—there’s a lot of domestic moments that set up the future. Sigh. This should have been it, but the chapter became massive and I decided to cut it here and finish off the last bit for next chapter.

Thanks so much for your patience and comments! It means so much to me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

December 31, 1945

Stark Mansion

Manhattan, New York

6pm

Darcy leans closer to the mirror and carefully slicks on a coat of crimson lipstick. She rubs her lips together and caps the tube, tossing it into her black beaded clutch on the vanity top before she traces her pinky finger over the corner of her mouth, her red lacquered nails flashing as she cleans up the edge.

She’d spent the afternoon with Peggy, they’d set their hair and done each other’s nails, having an afternoon tea in Darcy’s room and relaxing in each other’s company.

It was good to have a woman to talk to—oh, she had Ana, but it wasn’t quite the same. Peggy had been a soldier, like her. There were things about her experiences in the last few years that Ana couldn’t understand.
There were things Darcy simply couldn’t talk about.

Peggy, on the other hand, shared most of her secrets already.

Darcy had heard all of the latest gossip about people she knew in the SSR—General Phillips had returned to Washington two months ago and had been swamped by debriefing meetings with various Senators and committees who wanted an accounting of SSR activities during the last year of the war in Europe. Senator Brandt in particular was focused on the Howlies missions and the loss of Captain America. He was quite peeved about the loss of such a lucrative propaganda tool.

That’s all Steve had ever been to those people—the people who didn’t actually fight in the war. A tool.

Dum-Dum had returned to Washington as well and was part of a small contingent of SSR soldiers still active.

Morita had returned to California in November, when his family had finally been released from the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California. Fortunately his grandfather had survived the four years of internment (the conditions had been poor and the sick and elderly were the most at risk) and the family had been able to return to Fresno to start over again.

Peggy had flushed slightly when she told Darcy about the work Gabe Jones continued to do in translating the German documents gathered from Hydra bases and the concentration camps and his decision to stay in France when the work was completed.

*Darcy had teased, “What’s that look for Peggy? You and Gabe have a special friendship?”*

*Peggy’s lips had tilted up into a pleased smile, “He’s very smart—and quite lovely, really.”*

*“Lovely, huh?” Darcy had raised an eyebrow.*

*“Yes,” her friend had stretched languorously, a look of satisfaction on her face, “we really hit it off—he’s the only man working in translation who treated me as an equal from the get go. He understands how it feels to always have to prove himself, as quite a few of the American soldiers underestimated him because of the color of his skin. He will be able to go much further in France than he could here. I hope to continue to see him occasionally.”*
“Huh,” Darcy said, “his mama will be disappointed he’s not coming home to Georgia.”

“Ah well, she’s happy about the opportunities he has and the money he sends home to help her out.”

It was a rare treasure to spend time with her British friend without the threat of war looming over them.

She’d gone with Peggy the day before to an exclusive boutique uptown (Howard pulled some strings—he provided a lucrative stream of clients to the proprietor, often appeasing disgruntled paramours with pretty baubles and accessories) and they’d been able to find Peggy a beautiful gown at a private evening fitting.

Darcy rises from her seat and turned towards the bed, gripping a bedpost as she slips her feet into the black patent high heeled Mary Janes she’d lined up on the floor, pausing to clasp the rhinestone buckle on each ankle.

She turns towards the long mirror in the corner, twisting this way and that to check the hang of her dress. Ana had done a brilliant job tailoring one of Mama’s party dresses.

Howard had offered to buy her something for the event, as she would not have attended if not for professional purposes (apparently the guest list this evening will be a veritable who’s who of New York society) but Darcy had refused.

Her mother’s dress is fine, it only needed some small alterations.

Fortunately, fashion hasn’t evolved very quickly during the war years due to shortages of fabrics for clothing and leather for shoes, and while Darcy is a talented seamstress, Ana Jarvis is an artist.

Over time, Ana had told her about her past, becoming less formal as Darcy worked beside her in the kitchen or the sunroom or the library with her knitting or reading a book while Ana darned socks, hemmed her husbands pants, or sketched designs for future dresses.

Ana told her about growing up in Hungary and how before the war she’d worked in a hotel tailor
shop in Budapest. It was where she’d met Edwin Jarvis who at that time served as an aide to a
general in the British Armed Forces.

She’d sold him a beautiful tie—it was the beginning of their relationship.

By 1939, World War II had broken out and Hungary had aligned itself with Germany and had
adopted their anti-Semitic policies. Ana, as a Jewish person, was at risk.

Jarvis was still serving as the general's aide. The general had several letters of transit that could
secure Ana's safety from the Third Reich, but the general refused to sign them. Jarvis stole one of the
letters and forged the general's signature.

It had been a scandal when the forgery was discovered.

Jarvis had been accused of treason which was punishable by death.

Enter Howard Stark, who was at that time securing contracts with the British military and had some
influence with the general. Somehow, through some savvy maneuvering, Howard had gotten Jarvis
off with a dishonorable discharge and whisked he and Ana to the States, where they’d served in his
house ever since.

It was all very dramatic. Very Howard.

The only explanation Howard ever gave for his actions was that he couldn’t stand by and let an
honorable man be executed for making an effort to save an innocent person's life.

Ana is as loyal to Howard as her husband, the inventor had literally saved their lives.

Anyway, Ana had altered her mother’s modest dress— praising its unusual color, a deep dark red
reminiscent of black cherries—by taking in the waist and removing the sleeves to create a more
streamlined sleeveless silhouette, declaring the square neckline and low v in the back perfect.

Darcy has fuller breasts and hips than her mother had possessed, so the square neckline put more
emphasis on her décolletage than she’s usually comfortable with but Ana insisted—claiming it a sin
to cover up her assets.

Darcy had learned to go along with Ana’s ideas about fashion as she was far more of an expert than she was.

The bias cut silk skims over the curves of her hips to the floor and is made more ornate by the shimmering jet beads Ana had taken from the hoard of dressmaking materials in her quarters and sewn into elaborate flower patterns over the wide straps holding up the bodice and around the waist, creating a glittering black swirl of flowers that emphasized it’s small circumference.

Darcy wore her mother’s jet earrings, a delicate dress watch on her wrist and the ever present gold chain from her locket dips into her cleavage.

She smooths the dress over her hips, barely recognizing the woman in the mirror. She isn’t as elegant and refined as Peggy, but she has her own power. The dark red of the dress makes her pale skin glow and the lush curves of her breasts and hips are accentuated by the flow of silky fabric.

It’s a double edged sword, of course.

Her body is the kind that makes men forget she has a brain, perhaps making them not mind their words, but maybe causing them to let down their guard—assuming she won’t understand whatever it is they’re discussing. It’s one of the reasons Howard likes her to mingle with potential clients and investors.

The worst of it is always having to prove herself, over and over.

Still—Bucky would have loved this dress.

Steve would have loved the sheer black seamed stockings and lacy black garter belt she wears beneath it.

She remembers that long ago New Years Eve when her loves had first kissed her and wraps her hand around the locket, squeezing her eyes shut to hold back tears.
She can do this.

She will.

She sniffs, straightens her spine and gently wipes her finger at the corner of each eye before patting her dark curls into place. She grabs the bottle of Chanel No. 5 Howard had given her for Christmas, lifting the stopper to dab her wrists and neck with the fragrance before returning it to the vanity.

She’s not the same girl she was in 1940.

She’ll go—dance, drink champagne, keep Howard out of trouble, and mingle with the rich and connected.

There’ll be time for crying later.

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She emerges from her bedroom and continues down the hall, glancing into Will and Tony’s room to find her brother’s fella standing in front of the full length mirror in an elegant charcoal gray suit, leaning on his black lacquered cane with a white knuckled grip.

His usually mobile face is blank, his coffee brown eyes sad as he gazes at himself.

Darcy knocks on the doorframe and whistles low, “Well hello, handsome. Ready to go?”

Tony starts in surprise, his eyes meeting hers in the mirror as he pastes a brittle smile on his face.

“Oh sure. Always up for a party,” he says, turning away from the mirror to walk with his uneven gate to the dresser, where he pulls out the top drawer and removes a flask which he shoves into his jacket.

“He turns to her and says, “Did you hear? Doris and Bess will be there tonight—guess Will will have plenty of dance partners this evening.” He rubs absently at his thigh, wincing slightly.
The ladies are still “roommates” even after all this time. Doris’ family has lost their leverage in their campaign for her to marry given the fact they cannot hold money over her head anymore.

She makes a tidy profit as a society photographer these days.

Bess does the books for a couple bars her older brother owns and he’s never said a peep about who she lives with. She’d laughingly told her once that he’d have been happy if she joined a nunnery and preferred to believe she leads a life of celibacy.

She’s glad they’ll be there—she’s missed Doris. She’d successfully sold her pictures to pin up magazines before and during the war. Darcy’s had been in demand and when she had returned home there was a decent nest egg deposited in the bank account Will set up for her before the war—courtesy of her photographer friend.

She eyes Tony as he reaches into his jacket and pulls out the flask to take a swig from it.

“Leg bothering you tonight?” She says softly.

She seems to be the only one Tony can talk to about his leg. He gets snippy with Will when he hovers with concern and Howard’s interest has only extended to making improvements on his prosthetic.

She guesses her medical training and the losses she’s suffered make him feel less prickly when she asks him how he’s doing. Even before he’d moved in with them, she was the one who more often anticipated his needs—it helped that she could hear the difference in his breathing and heart rate when he was experiencing pain.

“A little—probably just the cold getting to me.”

It is cold.

Darcy had peered out the frost patterned kitchen window this morning to look over Central Park covered in a fresh blanket of snow, blindingly bright in the winter sunlight.
She’d allowed herself a moment to admire the pristine beauty of the park, grateful that she could still find some beauty even after so much loss.

She walks forward, reaching up to straighten his tie and smooth her hands over his shoulders and feels the tension in them slowly ease.

She looks into his dark eyes, noticing how weary he looks, “You didn’t take any pills did you?” She asks gently.

Tony had taken the pain pills the hospital had given him for far too long—a dangerous combination with the alcohol he steadily imbibed.

Tony sighs, no doubt irritated that she even has to ask. He’d finally taken heed of her warnings not long after he’d moved in with them—tossing the bottle at her in a tantrum and and telling her he didn’t need them anyway.

“No. Though it was pretty damn achy last night,” he pauses and his lips curve into a sly smile, “Will gave me a massage this morning with that liniment you gave me—really loosened me up.”

She rolls her eyes, “I bet. Where is he anyway? We’re supposed to leave soon.”

“Went off in search of Howard about an hour ago—haven’t seen hide nor hair of him since.”

“Hmm,” she hums, tapping her nails on his shoulders before stepping back, “I’ll go look for them.”

Darcy exits the apartment to find Peggy striding down the hall, her full length pewter satin gown swishing against her legs and the sound of her high heels muffled by the plush Persian carpet.

She raises an eyebrow at her friend in silent question and Peggy huffs, “Have you seen Howard?”
Darcy smiles wryly, “I have an idea where he may be hiding. Let me show you the elevator.”

Peggy nods and follows her past the apartment to the end of the hall where she pauses at the last door on the right. Darcy turns the knob and steps into a small room, not much bigger than a closet, where Ana has appropriated space for storing her cleaning supplies against the wall and on the large freestanding shelving unit Howard had used to divide the room and obscure the elevator doors behind it.

Peggy’s eyes trace over the shelves and Darcy smiles and says, “Howard has gotten suspicious—apparently there were a couple break ins during the war. He wanted this room to look like a storage closet at first glance.”

Darcy walks over to the shelving unit and pulls a latch hidden beneath one of the middle shelves and a section of shelving unit swings inward to reveal a small vestibule and the elevator door.

Peggy breathes, “Ah—a hidden bookcase door. Lovely.”

They enter the vestibule and Darcy carefully closes the hidden door behind them before crossing to the elevator door and opening it, sliding the brass collapsible gate aside for she and Peggy to step in and shutting it again when they are inside.

She glances at Peggy—her friend’s sharp mind no doubt absorbing all of the important details. She pushes the button to the first level basement and says conversationally, “I didn’t get a chance to tell you how fantastic you look in that dress.”

The deep gray gown clings to Peggy’s curves and is deceptively modest from the front. It has a high neckline and close fitting long sleeves and is ornamented with glittering silver beading that swirls over one shoulder and breast before continuing on the opposite hip and down the skirt to the floor. When she turns around that the view is more provocative, the pale smooth expanse of her back exposed to her waist and framed by shimmering satin.

Peggy smirks, “Why thank you, darling. You’re looking quite gorgeous yourself.”

Darcy wiggles her shoulders in a playful shimmy and says, “Ya think?”

Peggy grins and says “Very fancy.”
She grips her arm to maintain her balance as they come to a jolting stop and Darcy says apologetically, “Howard needs to work on smoothing the ride in this thing.”

They exit the elevator and Darcy quickly punches in the code and swings open the steel door to Howard’s lab.

Howard’s voice echoes across the dim room from a familiar blue lit corner.

Darcy sighs.

She really kind of hates that damn cube.

No one else seems to have the same reaction she has to it—Howard is inexplicably energized and even more obsessive about his work in its presence while Will merely gets jittery after a while.

Being around it makes her heart feel heavy.

Howard’s voice drifts to her as she and Peggy navigate the maze of shelves and materials as they cross the lab.

“Zola managed to harness the energy of this cube into batteries that powered all of Hydra’s weaponry. You’ve seen those weapons—we have no idea how long it will take for those batteries to die. This thing could power cities, I bet,” Howard mutters.

Will says worriedly, “Maybe you ought not touch it Howard.”

“Seems harmless enough. Hard to see what all the fuss is about.”

The gentle blue glow in the corner flashes brighter as Darcy and Peggy round the tall shelving unit to see Howard thrown back from the cube to land on his back on the floor, a metal rod clutched in his hand.
Will scrubs his hands over his face in frustration as Darcy rushes to help the inventor to his feet. He impatiently waves her away and gets to his feet, pushing his safety goggles up his forehead into his hair, he points at Will and says, “Write that down.”

“What?” Will says incredulously, “Don’t poke it with a stick?”

Peggy snorts and Howard quirks an eyebrow at her and finally focuses on Darcy who’s standing beside him feeling pretty miffed.

“Hey, Darcy—Pegs. Don’t you two look fabulous,” he wiggles his eyebrows suggestively and Darcy swats his arm with her clutch.

“What the hell Howard! We’re supposed to be at the Plaza by 7,” she glances at her watch, “it’s 6:45 and you’re not even dressed yet.”

Howard yanks the goggles off his head and rubs his eyes tiredly, “Yeah, yeah. Have you spoken with Hughes’ assistant today?”

“Yes. Mr. Hughes and Miss Gardner are settled in their suite at the Plaza,” she says.

“Good. Did you make sure to send them the case of champagne?”

“Yes, Howard,” Darcy says, glancing nervously over at Peggy, who’s wandered rather closer to the cube than she would like.

Howard follows her gaze and says, “Hey Pegs, maybe step away from that. As you saw, it’s a little moody.”

Peggy gazes silently at the cube for another moment before turning away, a slight frown marring her smooth forehead.

“Howard, don’t you think it might be a good idea to move this cube to a safer location?” She says quietly.
“What? No—“ Howard says, turning to gather up his notes from the work table and pass them to Will, who rises to file them away, “I’ve upped my security—speaking of,” he points at Darcy, “did we decide to bring Carter down here?”

Darcy says firmly, “We did.”

Howard sighs, and digs in his pocket for a cigar and rolls it between his fingers as he searches for his lighter. Will finishes filing the notes and absently digs in his pocket to produce a lighter which he hands to the inventor.

“How about, Howard says, sticking the cigar in his mouth and talking around it, “I guess we're sorta partners.”

Peggy says pointedly, “Sorta.”

Howard takes the cigar out of his mouth and a familiar obstinate look crosses his face.

Darcy hastily claps her hands, “Alright—Let’s hustle. We’ve got a party to get to.”

She herds everyone ahead of her and is the last to exit, turning off the few lights that had been on when she gets to the doorway.

The cube glows in the corner, casting its light over the lab like a small blue sun.

Darcy shuts and locks the door.

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The Plaza Hotel

7:30pm

Snow swirls outside and dots the windows as Jarvis pulls the Packard limousine to the curb in front
of the Plaza. It seems ridiculous to her, accustomed as she is to walking miles on foot to ride in a chauffeured luxury car for the less than ten minute walk between Stark Mansion and the hotel. However, she appreciates the ride when Will opens the door and takes her hand and she steps out into the slush on the sidewalk, quickly stepping aside so Peggy can exit the car behind her.

Even with her higher metabolism and body temperature she shivers.

One thing she misses about her time in the SSR is the trousers she wore with her uniform. So much more practical in winter.

Even walking carefully, her toes are still cold and wet from the slush by the time she enters the opulent lobby of the hotel behind Howard and Peggy, and she’d bet her friend was suffering the same fate.

Will whistles low beside her and Darcy glances up, her eyes tracing over the high ceiling and ornate crystal chandeliers that hang from the golden hued vaulted ceiling before slowly panning around the room, taking note of the individuals milling about the entrances and exits to the lobby.

While the men are dressed in darker colors, navy, black, and charcoal grey suits—the women’s gowns span a rainbow of rich colors, though the pastels and airy fabrics of spring and summer are not represented.

Will glances around and they decide to separate from Peggy and Howard (who are heading towards one of the two staircases that curve up to the mezzanine level) in favor of searching for an elevator that will take them to the Grand Ballroom located on the second floor.

Tony shifts with discomfort beside her as Howard and Peggy slowly move away through the crowd, the inventor greeting and glad handing his way towards the staircase.

She takes Tony’s arm and says, “I believe the elevator is down that hall,” she points past several glass display cases to the back of the lobby and they make their way down the wide hall and finally gain entrance to an elevator.

Fifteen minutes later she leaves Tony and Will at their assigned table to go in search of Howard and finds him just outside the ballroom near the coat check, gesticulating with his cigar at a man she’d estimate to be in his early 40’s with a stunningly beautiful young brunette clad in emerald green silk on his arm. Peggy stands beside Howard, her expression inquisitive as the inventor inquires of the
man whom he calls Hughes about his journey from California and if he’s satisfied with the suite provided.

_Ah, Mr. Hughes—movie mogul, aviator, inventor._

Stark unreservedly admires the man, modeling his own career on Hughes’.

During the war, Howard had competed with Hughes for several defense contracts, losing out on some but winning others. While the California inventor was building and flying the fastest planes possible during the 1930’s and eventually got into commercial aviation (becoming the controlling shareholder of TWA in 1940) the bulk of Stark’s business was almost exclusively in the military sphere and didn’t really take off until the war started in Europe. His own plane designs and modifications had won contracts with the British initially but eventually he gained some American aviation contracts as well. His involvement in SSR had been the catalyst for his shift to weapons development.

In fact, Howard’s recent military contract had brought him to California—thus his current infatuation with Hollywood and making movies. He’d purchased a property from Hughes in the Hollywood Hills and expressed an interest in producing movies.

Closer inspection of the brunette on Hughes’ arm reveals her identity—the movie star Ava Gardner, recently married to the bandleader Artie Shaw.

_Huh._

She wonders where Mr. Shaw is.

She approaches quietly and says, “There you are Mr. Stark. Your table is ready if you wish to be seated.”

Inwardly she rolls her eyes. Howard loves it when she calls him Mr. Stark and teases her about it whenever they are in more casual settings.

She’s the one who insists on it when they are at work.
This is one of those situations where the line is a bit blurry but she’s still here in her professional role, after all.

Peggy’s lips quirk slightly in amusement as Howard turns towards her, his eyes twinkling, “Ah—Darcy, there you are. Let me introduce you to my guests tonight, this is Mr. Howard Hughes,” Darcy nods at the man, smiling winningly and says, “Pleased to meet you, sir,” the older man blatantly stares at her chest and wordlessly nods in greeting.

How the man could look at anyone else with Ava Gardner on his arm is a wonder.

“And his companion for the evening is Miss Ava Gardner—‘ Howard pauses and says teasingly, “or do you prefer Mrs. Shaw?”

The brunette lets loose a husky laugh and snags a champagne flute off the tray of a passing waiter, “Oh—I kept my maiden name for professional purposes,” she says, smiling at Darcy, “just call me Ava.”

The woman is truly gorgeous, younger than her but her green eyes are far from innocent. Hollywood must be a tough place for women.

Darcy smiles in return and says, “Of course, I’m pleased to meet you.”

Niceties settled they make their way into the ballroom to join the festivities.

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At the dining table reserved for their party, they are joined by Hughes’ aide, Nadine Henley, and an oily Hollywood movie executive named John Good, whose actual job is unclear beyond the copious ass kissing he applies to the California mogul.

Ava seems vaguely annoyed with the man and ignores him in favor of getting progressively more drunk and chatting amiably with Darcy and Peggy.

Will is absolutely starstruck by Mr. Hughes, given his lifelong fascination with all things aviation and
he and Tony both seem to enjoy discussing aeronautics with the man. Hughes is visibly intrigued by the information that Tony had navigated on a bomber during the war and peppers him with questions about the plane’s efficacy and the sorts of missions he’d flown.

As for Will and Howard, much of what they did for the SSR is top secret so they pick Hughes brain regarding transatlantic flight and the challenges of increasing plane speed.

During dinner the band had assembled onstage and began tuning up and after the first song begins Doris and Bess wander over from their table to say hello. Darcy is so pleased to see Doris she jumps from her seat to greet her friend with a hug, narrowly avoiding the camera she holds in one gloved hand.

“Darling!” Doris exclaims as she embraces her, “You look smashing!” She hisses in her ear, “introduce me to your new friends.”

Ahh.

Darcy introduces Doris and Bess to Hughes, Ava, Ms. Henley, and Mr. Good. It’s clear whom Doris is interested in meeting, so she explains the blonde’s occupation and Mr. Hughes and Ava give permission for her to photograph them.

Peggy unobtrusively moves away from Howard to stand next to Darcy and mutter about what an intolerable suck up Howard is as the inventor grins and leans in to pose casually next to a serious looking Hughes while Ava tilts her head up and looks provocatively through her lashes at Doris, a sultry smile on her face as the photos are snapped.

It’s amazing how the woman knows precisely how to angle her body and face for the best effect. Even more amazing considering how inebriated she is.

After the photos are finished, the band strikes up another song, most of the diners are finished eating and people begin moving to the dance floor.

Doris snags Tony who says he can’t dance given his bum leg but the blonde is unperturbed, exclaiming, “Don’t be silly! It’s a slow song—why wouldn’t I want to sway gently with a war hero?” Will asks Bess to dance, Howard and Peggy pair off and Hughes tosses back his drink and extends a hand to Ava, who slinks to the dance floor as if she hasn’t been steadily downing champagne for the past hour and a half.
Miss Henley excused herself just after dinner as she had some phone calls to make on Mr. Hughes behalf and that left Darcy uncomfortably dancing with Mr. John Good. Despite his surname, he is not good at all and having had a few drinks too many, is intent on ignoring every signal of her lack of interest in him based on the number of times she’s had to remove his hand from her bottom and return it to her waist.

It strikes her that she hasn’t been held this close to a man’s body (other than her brother’s) in nearly a year.

Too bad the man who is currently doing so is rather irritating.

He’s a decent dancer at least.

He’s good looking, she supposes, in a rather forgettable way—average in height with light brown wavy hair and hazel eyes. But his entitled attitude puts her off. Evidently she should be grateful he’s giving her the time of day, given his importance.

She wonders how many desperate starlets have fallen into bed with him under the false belief he’d help them with their careers.

He isn’t even the palest shadow of the men she loved—she isn’t at all impressed.

Unfortunately, he takes her lack of interest as a challenge.

Two miserable dances with the handsy Mr. Good and she’s relieved to see her brother crossing the room to cut in.

Thank god.

She was wondering if she’d have to resort to violence.

She smiles gratefully at Will as they move into the first steps of the tango, a challenging enough
dance that some couples vacate the floor when the paid professional ballroom dancers start to get flashy.

She gets lost in the pure physical challenge of it—it’s been years since she’s danced like this, and she and Will know each other so well they move like they’re parts of the same body.

As they finish her focus is broken by the clapping of a small circle of people who’ve gathered round to watch them dance. Will grins, holding her hand in his and bowing theatrically.

They dance together for two more songs before Howard cuts in, wanting her to accompany him as he shmoozes his way around the room.

She pays attention, noting the key players and lingering behind a couple of times to chat with women in the various groups in order to overhear what the men say after Howard leaves.

Eventually, she ends up leaning against the bar with Peggy, knocking back a couple of whiskeys as her friend sips her gin and tonic, watching the crowd.

“So, Agent Carter—gathered any useful information this evening?” Darcy teases.

Peggy shrugs and says, “Nothing too unusual—see the blond in the red dress over there?”

Darcy follows Peggy’s gaze to the dance floor to a curvy blond dancing with a man who looks old enough to be her father.

“Dottie Everhart?”

“Is that her name?”

“Yes,” Darcy says

“She’s sleeping with her stepson,” Peggy drawls.
“Really? How did you glean that information?” Darcy says, intrigued.

Peggy tips her head towards a table near the dance floor where a handsome young man broodingly watches the couple on the dance floor.

*Charles Everhart Junior, recently returned from the war.*

*Huh.*

“ He’s rather obvious isn’t he?” Peggy says.

Darcy examines the younger man a bit more carefully. Yes, his dark eyes are trained on his father dancing with his young wife and he doesn’t look particularly happy about it.

However, there are many unhappy men just returned from the war. The young man tips back the last of his drink and signals the waiter for another.

“I don’t know—he could have other reasons for being upset,” she says dubiously.

Peggy grins unrepentantly, “Yes, well. I did see he and Mrs. Charles Everhart Sr. exiting the cloakroom looking rather rumpled. He had a touch of lipstick right here,” she grazes one elegant finger across her neck, just under her ear.

Darcy snorts and bumps Peggy’s shoulder with her own, “So—information gathered not from your superior powers of observation then?”

Peggy smirks and shrugs again, “I suppose their lack of discretion played into my deductions,” she says primly.

“Well—they aren’t the only ones being indiscreet.”
Darcy scans the room, noting the many partygoers in various stages of inebriation. She spots Mr. Good heading in their direction and straightens from her slouch against the bar.

“Pardon me Peggy, I think I need to visit the powder room,” she says.

“Coward,” her friend mutters under her breath, “you can handle him easily.”

Darcy sighs, “I don’t want to,” as she grabs her clutch from the bar top.

“Oh, well, I guess I see your point. I think I’ll go see what Howard is up to,” Peggy says, and saunters away.

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Fifteen minutes later Darcy is holding back Ava Gardner’s dark hair as she vomits into one of the toilets in the fancy powder room furthest down the hall from the ballroom.

Miraculously, there is no one else present except for the attendant who stands guard in the luxurious antechamber to the actual bathroom.

“Ugh,” Ava rasps, her formerly unaccented voice melting into a distinct southern drawl, “Fuck a diddle. I shouldn’ta drank that vodka.”

Darcy helps her to her feet and Ava staggers across the immaculate black and white marble tile and sinks onto a velvet padded bench near the door with a sigh.

Darcy grimaces and flushes the toilet, crossing to the sink to grab one of the plush hand towels stacked on the marble countertop and hands it to Ava who scrubs at her mouth before passing it back to Darcy.

“Gimme a second, Ava,” Darcy says and the starlet waves her hand listlessly as she slumps against the wall.
Darcy pushes the bathroom door open to find the attendant outside.

“Hey sweetie,” the uniformed woman says, her brown eyes sharp with curiosity, “Miss Gardner okay? Would you like some mints? Maybe a comb? I have a selection of hand lotions and lipsticks as well,” she gestures to the cart beside her.

“Um, yeah—she’s alright. But maybe a couple mints and a comb would be a good idea.”

“Sure thing,” the woman says, handing her a handful of wrapped peppermints and a comb.

“Thank you ma’am,” Darcy says and hurries back into the bathroom.

Ava is hunched over the sink, sipping from her cupped hand as water dribbles between her fingers.

She straightens when she sees Darcy, swaying slightly.

“Hey—“ she says, patting her lips with a towel, “there you are.”

“Here I am,” Darcy says dryly, handing her the mints and the comb.

“Thanks,” Ava murmurs, unwrapping a mint and popping it in her mouth before taking a few moments to straighten her hair. She pauses to glance around, “did I leave my bag by the toilet?”

Darcy walks over to the line of stalls and finds the starlet’s jeweled black bag on the floor.

She hands it to her and watches as Ava extracts a tube of lipstick, uncapping it and smoothing it over her full lips before spritzing some perfume on her neck.

The heady scent of gardenias wafts around them as her green eyes meet Darcy’s in the mirror, “I never woulda drank so much if not for Artie being such a prick.”
“Oh?” Darcy says, leaning forward to refresh her own lipstick and wondering what the famous bandleader had done to upset his actress wife.

“Yeah—men are terrible. He’s my husband, sure, but all he ever does is hang out with his intellectual friends talking philosophy and politics. Always tells me to keep quiet because I don’t know nothin,” she pauses, clearing her throat, to continue bitterly. “he scheduled a performance in London for New Year’s Eve and didn’t even arrange for me to go. So I made my own plans.” She cleans up the edge of her full lips with her pinky finger.

Darcy marvels that this same woman was puking her guts out a few minutes ago. You’d never know to look at her, though Darcy’s certain if she were sober the actress wouldn’t be blabbing to her about Artie Shaw.

“They’re not all terrible,” Darcy murmurs.

“What?” Ava says distractedly, extracting a compact from her bag and powdering her nose.

“Men,” Darcy says.

“Yeah?” She pauses, powderpuff dangling from her fingers, “You got a good one?” Ava asks curiously.

Darcy sighs, “I did. I had the very best.”

Ava gives her a searching look before saying, “Lucky girl.” She clicks the compact closed, drops it into her purse and pulls a pack of cigarettes out, placing one between her lips with practiced ease. She lights it with a gold plated zippo engraved with “AG” on the side, inhaling deeply before flicking her wrist to snap the lighter shut.

Was she lucky really?

She would never wish the time she had with Steve and Bucky away.

But she still feels like the place where her heart used to be is hollowed out, with only occasional
weak flickers of the joy she used to experience so vividly reminding her that she’s alive at all.

“So—are you and Mr. Hughes good friends?” Darcy asks, hoping to change the subject.

Ava tips her head back and blows a stream of smoke towards the sparkling chandelier, laughing. “In a matter of speaking. Howard has lots of friends,” she murmurs.

Darcy doesn’t really know what to say about that so she just nods.

Darcy tips her head at the sound of a familiar voice addressing the attendant in the outer room. She turns away from the mirror as the door opens and Doris comes in, her eyes darting to Ava before exclaiming, “There you are, Darcy! I was hoping to catch you before the end of the evening,” she pulls an envelope from her bag and hands it to her, “I found some negatives and photos that belong to you amongst my things. It’s the last roll of film you had me work on before you left for Army training.”

She remembers—the photos span the time from just before Bucky shipped out to Europe to just before Steve left too. In the rush of packing his things away and settling her own business she’d never gotten them from her photographer friend.

Darcy turns the envelope over in her hands, swallowing hard before stuffing it into her purse.

*God, she needed to get ahold of herself.*

She clears her throat and says, “Thanks Doris.”

The blonde smiles kindly at her, “Anytime darling. In case I don’t get a chance to talk to you later, I wanted to invite you over to my place. I’ve got a better darkroom now, you should check it out.”

“Sure, sure—I’ll have to do that. I actually have a couple of rolls of film to develop. Would ya mind me using your darkroom maybe sometime next week? I’ll pay for any supplies.” Darcy says.

“Sure! That’d be fine,” Doris says before turning to Ava, “Miss Gardner, I do so appreciate you allowing me to photograph you. I hope you enjoy the rest of your visit in New York.”
“Oh, you’re welcome. I’m sure I will,” the starlet says and Doris smiles and says, “see you out there!” before she turns and pulls the bathroom door open and leaves.

The door closes with a click and there’s a moment of silence before Ava says, “Army training, huh?”

“Um, yeah. I was a nurse.”

“Huh,” she tilts her head and looks her over assessingly, “you’re just full of surprises,” she says, turning away to stub out her cigarette in the crystal ashtray on the counter.

Darcy says softly, “I guess so.”

“Thanks for helping me out, I mean, a lotta people try to make hay from my indiscretions,” Ava says.

“I’m not a lot of people,” Darcy says.

Ava grins and raises her hand in a jaunty salute, “Good thing for me.”

By 11:15 Darcy has had enough of Mr. Good and she angrily heads towards the powder room again to dodge the persistent man.

Surely there is someone else for him to fixate on given the number of guests attending the gala?

Being amongst polite company has limited her to verbal rejection of the man’s escalating affections but she’s not sure how long she can carry on without making a scene. Her job is to look pretty and gather information, not to make a spectacle of herself.

Best to lay low until the clock strikes twelve lest the man attempts to grab her for the customary New Year’s kiss.
She lingers in the antechamber to the bathroom chatting with the attendant for as long as possible, hoping the coast will be clear for her to make her way back to the ballroom.

Finally, she pops one of the proffered mints into her mouth and slips out of the powder room to head back.

The hallway leading back to the ballroom isn’t too long, but there are several shadowy alcoves along the way, and she can’t help but notice the occasional whispers and sighs emanating from the deep shadows and wishes she could sometimes turn her hearing down.

After passing one such occupied alcove she is surprised to have her shoulder grabbed roughly and to be pulled into the shadows by none other than the annoying Mr. Good.

He crowds her further into the shadowy alcove, placing himself between her and the hallway, leaning his hand on the wall behind her to slur, “There, you are—been waitin’ for you to come out. Didn’t want to miss midnight did ya?”

“Actually, I did,” she says waspishly, shoving at his chest. “You know, Mr. Good, you really are shit at reading social cues. I think I have clearly expressed my disinterest in you all evening.”

He reaches out one hand to stroke her cheek and she smacks it away, beyond irritated and not holding back.

“Ow!” He exclaims, shaking out his hand, his expression turning angry, “You don’t have to be such a bitch. I know how it works—no need to play hard to get now.”

He pushes her back, slamming her against the wall and grabbing the back of her hair and pulling her head back, pressing sloppy kisses to her cheek and worming his way towards her mouth while his other hand roughly kneads her breast.

She has a moment of panic—he is bigger than her and her movement is restricted by both the space and her dress.

It’s only a moment though, her training kicks in, rusty as it may be.
She’s still holding her purse in one hand but the other is free so she wiggles it between them and the fool moans in response as she ghosts over his groin.

At least until she grabs ahold of his balls and squeezes.

Then he cries, “Ah! What are you doing!” and attempts to back away.

Darcy maintains a firm hold on him and glares at the writhing man, saying coldly, “Now that I have your attention—” she twists her hand a little and he whimpers, “You will stay away from me. I am not interested in anything you have to offer,” He nods frantically and she continues, “in the future, when a woman says no or is clearly uninterested I want you to remember this and respect her wishes.”

She gives him a hard look and squeezes again and he whimpers, “I will—I will.”

“Good,” she says pushing him against the wall so she has an opening to leave when she releases him, “I’m gonna let you go and we won’t be discussing this again.”

He nods and she sighs, releasing him and stepping out of the alcove into the light, leaving him in the shadows.

She glances back to see him bent over at the waist, clutching is groin and muttering to himself. She walks away quickly, eyes front but her ears trained on the man behind her.

She’s nearly to the ballroom entrance when she hears him say, “that fucking cunt, telling me what to do—the blond photographer seemed friendly enough—maybe I can—”

She stops dead in the hall, sighing deeply and tipping her head back to gaze sightlessly at the ornate ceiling before resolutely turning on her heel to head back to Mr. Good.

Seems like she’s going to have to remove the man from play for the rest of the evening.
She remembers Bucky’s instructions from long ago—

“I know you’re extra strong but ya ain’t big, somebody comes after ya knock ‘em down so ya have time to get away,” he’d frowned, looking over at Stevie as he sat on the sofa, glancing up curiously from his sketchbook as Bucky instructed her, “that goes for you too, punk.”

He’d made she and Stevie practice throwing a punch over and over, but his favorite for a knockout was the left hook.

“It’s the best for the knockout—ya got the full body rotation going into it and they don’t see it comin’,” Bucky advised.

She passes a console table with a mirror hung over it not far from the alcove and pauses to note the way her lipstick is smeared, her hair is messed up, and the rapidly fading bruise on her shoulder.

Mr. Good won’t be doing this to anyone else tonight.

She sets her purse lightly on the table and quickly traverses the last couple of yards to the alcove just as the man is emerging.

His blandly handsome face twists into a sneer at her approach and she notes with satisfaction that the hallway is deserted, most of the guests having retreated into the ballroom as it is nearly midnight.

“What d’ya want—” he snarls but is cut off when she shoves him back into shadows of the alcove.

“It’s apparent you are the type of man who doesn’t learn his lessons,” she says coolly, though her hands are clenched into fists.

He straightens, glaring and growling, “I don’t need lessons from you, bitch,” before lashing out.

Time slows—she sees him winding up to hit her and dances back just out of reach before stepping closer and hitting him with a perfect left hook to his jaw.
He goes down like a sack of potatoes.

It’s almost anticlimactic.

*Bucky would be so proud.*

She shakes out her hand, her heart thundering with adrenaline, and steps closer to Good, gripping him under his arms and dragging him into a sitting position against the wall.

The scent of booze rises from him in waves but his heartbeat and breathing sound just fine, so she’s content to leave him there.

She silently steps out of the alcove and moves away, pausing to pat her hair into place and fix her lipstick at the console table down the hall.

She recaps her lipstick and drops it into her clutch, stroking one finger wistfully over the envelope resting within before closing the bag with a snap.

She doesn’t care if she has to walk home.

She’s done with this party.

Gabe Jones and Peggy Carter

Who is Howard Hughes?

The gorgeous Ava Gardner

Example of 40’s evening gown

Darcy’s dress is something like this, with added beading

Chapter End Notes
What did you think? Hopefully you weren’t bored.

Anyway, interesting tidbits:

Edwin and Ana Jarvis info taken from MCU wiki.

It is comic canon that Peggy Carter and Gabe Jones had a relationship—which Marvel introduced in the 1970’s. There’s an interesting link about that above—I intend it as a brief relationship I will not detail, one of a few Peggy will have before eventually settling down. More power to her.

Also, links above for info on Howard Hughes and Ava Gardner if you’re interested. I always felt Howard Stark was modeled on Hughes, myself.

Also, sharp eyed readers may have noticed the mention that Darcy’s bank account was set up by Will. Did you know women couldn’t open their own bank accounts in the United States until the 1960’s? A male relative or husband had to do it for them. Grrrr.

P.S. I still haven’t seen Endgame. Pretty certain I prefer my vision of Steve and Bucky’s future, but anyway...
Chapter 62

Chapter Summary

Darcy reminisces a little too much and tries to drink it away—unintended consequences result. Howard, Peggy, and Tony find out a secret. Howard announces plans to move. Darcy says goodbye.

Chapter Notes

And here we are gentle readers, at the end of this story, finally. Never fear, a sequel is on its way.

No beta, all mistakes are mine. Marvel’s characters, I just play in their sandbox.

Trigger warning: character accidental overdose

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

January 1, 1946

Stark Mansion

2:00am

*Memory is a funny thing*, Darcy thinks as she drops the empty whiskey bottle on the floor, uncaps another one, and stretches out in her underwear on the bed.

Her bare feet rustle against the flurry of photographs that surround her and one pokes the bare skin of her lower back as she listlessly takes a sip from the bottle and blindly lets her fingers crawl across the chenille bedspread—touching the corner of a photo and snagging it to hold up to view.

Her bleary eyes track over the image.

*Her beautiful boys.*

She looks at the picture of little Steve and Bucky so handsome in his uniform caught laughing, their arms slung around each other’s shoulders as they sat on the sagging sofa in their old apartment.
Memory is a funny thing.

_Especially hers._

In the dark days after Bucky fell from the train, she and Steve often discussed how to forget painful things, given the peculiar ability they both shared, but she never really talked to him about the dangers of happy memories.

Happy memories had never been so dangerous to her before.

She can look at these photographs, these moments of frozen time and her mind goes back. She closes her eyes and she’s _there_, in that moment, as if she’s been dropped into the past.

She can hear their voices, the bright sound of their laughter and smell the scent of the soup she’d been stirring on the stove just before she snapped the picture. She remembers how Steve’s shirt was blue and his eyes were bluer, she remembers the way Bucky rested the cap from his uniform on the arm of the sofa and the way his hair was cut so short the wave had nearly disappeared.

She watches in her mind’s eye as Bucky’s lips curl into a mischievous grin, winking at her before he leans in to kiss Steve soundly, his hands spearing through the blond’s hair and tilting his head to the side to deepen the kiss til Steve groans, his hands gripping Bucky’s shoulders.

She remembers _everything_ and she wants to _stay._

She slowly exhales and opens her bloodshot eyes to stare sightlessly at the ceiling, the photo fluttering to the bed beside her, her mind reorienting to the present. She frowns slightly and her knuckles whiten as she grips the neck of the bottle in her hand and presses her lips to it to drink deeply.

She’s so tired.

The urge to retreat into memory has been strong lately—overwhelming in her moments of inactivity so she usually keeps herself in motion. She barely sleeps.
Perhaps if she drinks enough she’ll sleep without dreams.

She sits up, swaying slightly as her head spins and gets to her feet, the bottle dangling from her fingertips and photographs sliding to the floor with a whisper as she crosses to her vanity and carelessly shrugs into her bathrobe.

Five minutes later she’s rummaging through the medicine cabinet in search of the lavender bath salts, knocking several pill bottles onto the counter in the process. She glances down vaguely at the rattle of one rolling off the counter and across the floor to settle next to the tub.

She bends to pick it up, recognizing the painkillers Tony used to take. They are sedating, maybe they’ll help her relax—lord knows her metabolism doesn’t let anything last for long.

She shrugs and pops the cap, taking four before setting the bottle on the counter and returning to her search for bath salts.

A few seconds later she mutters a quietly triumphant, “Ah-ha!” upon finally locating the jar.

She turns the taps and dumps a generous amount into the churning water and sits on the closed lid of the toilet, taking occasional sips from the whiskey bottle gripped in her hand as the tub fills.

She rests her elbows on her knees, her dark hair shrouding her face as she stares blindly at the small octagonal white tiles of the floor, steam filling the room with the scent of lavender.

Her mind wanders back to Steve taking baths when his lungs were bad, sometimes she’d get in with him and he’d lean his head against her chest as she ran her fingers through his wet hair. She remembers the pressure of his back against her breasts, the way his vertebrae stood out along his spine in sharp relief, the terrible sound of his labored breathing, and the hoarse murmur of his voice as he’d apologize over and over for being such a burden.

Tears drop from her eyes onto the tile and she sighs heavily, tipping the bottle to her lips again.

She hears the distant sound of an engine alongside the house and realizes Jarvis must be returning with everyone from the party.
She doesn’t feel like talking to anyone.

She stands, swaying slightly, and sets the bottle on the counter to loosen the tie on her robe, shrugging out of it before unhooking her bra and wiggling out of her panties to kick them aside.

She grabs the bottle and finishes it off, blindly setting it on the edge of the counter where it wobbles before falling off, shards of glass spraying across the floor. She avoids most of the fragments, ignoring the sharp sting of those that slice into her bare feet.

She steps into the half filled tub, hissing as her feet sting and pink clouds of her blood color the water. Her pale skin reddens from the heat as she sits down and leans back, sliding down the smooth curved end of the tub.

She doesn’t spare her feet much thought, they’ll heal quickly anyway.

The only sounds are the flow from the faucet and the distant murmur of voices downstairs as she slides deeper into the tub until only her face is above the water, her dark hair fanning around her and every sound muffled by the churning of the water and the sound of her heart.

She breathes slowly and stares at the blurry swirls of steam near the ceiling, wishing for oblivion.

She closes her eyes.

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2:45am

Will sits in the big kitchen with Tony and Peggy eating a sandwich made from the spread Ana left for them before wandering off to bed with Jarvis.

They’d better make their way upstairs soon because his fella is flagging.
He watches Tony sag further in his chair, his head propped on his hand as he takes desultory bites of his sandwich.

Too much drinking for all of them tonight—they were going to feel it for sure tomorrow.

Peggy is dipping gingerbread cookies into a cup of chamomile tea having vetoed eating anything heavier and Howard had immediately retreated to his suite of rooms upon their arrival, an anonymous blonde giggling on his arm.

Tony says, “Did Darcy make it home alright?”

“Yes,” Peggy says.

Will smiles fondly at his love and murmurs, “Remember when I asked Jarvis in the car?”

Tony really had too much to drink tonight.

“Ah, yeah. Sorry—forgot,” Tony groans, dropping his sandwich on his plate and shoving it away to lay his head on the cool surface of the table grumbling, “Ugh—tired.”

Peggy says to Will, “Did you hear they found Mr. Good passed out just outside the ballroom? Too bad Darcy left early—pretty sure she was just tired of avoiding that cretin.”

Will nods in agreement but says, “She told me she was not feeling well so she was leaving early and if anyone asked she’d left at 11:30.”

“Hmmmm,” Peggy hums thoughtfully, drumming her nails against the side of her cup.

A soft snore interrupts them as Tony succumbs to sleep and Will can’t help but run his hand through his love’s dark hair and down his neck, rubbing gentle circles between his shoulder blades.

He lets his hand rest there, using the other one to reach for his nearly finished sandwich.
Peggy sips her tea without comment. He’s never told her what Tony means to him, never felt the need to really, and he knows Darcy has never breathed a word of it to anyone either. However, Peggy is sharply observant and he deemed her trustworthy long ago, so he’s let down his guard.

They sit in companionable silence and she pushes the open tin of cookies his way after he finishes his sandwich.

He selects a gingerbread man and thinks he should wake Tony and hustle him upstairs when there’s a clatter outside the kitchen and Howard stumbles through the door, his hair rumpled and collar hanging askew.

The giggly blonde is nowhere to be seen.

Peggy straightens in her chair and they both snap out of their stupor.

“Say, Will? Have ya checked on Darcy since we got home?” The inventor asks, his brow furrowed with concern.

“No—Jarvis said she arrived home safely and I assume she’s in bed. Why?” he says.

“Well, there’s water leakin’ through the ceiling in my bedroom, and as I recall, the bathroom in your apartment is directly above it.”

Will rises from his seat and asks Peggy, “Would you mind walking with Tony to the elevator and helping him up? He’s too in the bag to go it alone.”

“Of course,” Peggy says.

“Thanks,” he says, “it’s probably nothing—we’ll see ya up there.”

Nevertheless, he quickly follows Howard out of the kitchen and they rush up the stairs to the second floor.
As they briskly walk down the hallway Will says, “Where’s the blonde?”

A chagrined grin curls the inventor’s mouth, “Passed out on my sofa. I gotta say I’m disappointed. Not how I thought the evening would end.”

Will rolls his eyes in response, pushing open the unlocked door to their apartment and entering the darkened foyer. He flicks on the lights, noting Darcy’s wet shoes next to the door and her coat flung over the sofa as they cross the living room to the short hallway that leads to the bedrooms and bathroom.

The hallway is dark, the only illumination coming from the open doorway to Darcy’s bedroom at the end of it and the sliver of light that seeps from around the bathroom door to their right.

He can hear the water running from here.

“Darcy?” He calls as he approaches the bathroom door, Howard shoulders past him and peeks into his sisters room, looking back at him and shaking his head.

The carpet in the hallway is damp under the bathroom door and the silence is beginning to frighten him.

He turns the knob, finds it locked, and calls for her again, “Darcy! Open the door!” He pounds on the door and rattles the knob, trying again to open it.

No answer from his sister—he draws back to kick at the door, trying in vain to open it.

Unnoticed by him Howard had slipped down the hallway and returned, a thin blade from the kitchen in hand.

“Stand back, pal,” the inventor says gravely and inserts the blade into the keyhole and twists until the lock clicks.
Howard opens the door and a cloud of lavender scented steam billows out into the hall.

Will’s pulse thrums in his ears as he scans the room.

All is silent except for the steady splash of water.

It washes in a translucent sheet over the edge of the deep claw foot tub, pooling on the floor and covering it in an inch of water. He distractedly notes the squish of his socks in his sodden shoes as he crosses the room.

He glances at the pill bottles on the counter, hears the crunch of broken glass underfoot and looks down at Darcy’s sodden underthings kicked into the corner.

When he’s close enough to the tub to see into it he’s pole-axed by that first horrifying glimpse of her pale skin and blue tinged lips as she lays beneath the water.

Everything else fades away as he processes the sight of his oldest friend, his sister, naked and utterly still.

Later—he will not recall in his panicked rush to pull her limp body from the water if he turned off the taps, or how Darcy ended up on the soaked bath mat, shards of glass cutting into her pale skin.

He won’t remember screaming at Howard to get Peggy as he turned her onto her side and desperately pounded her back in an attempt to push the water from her lungs, to get her to take a breath and reassure him she’s alright.

“Wake up Darcy!” He cries, tears pouring down his cheeks as he rocks her in his arms, clothing soaked and heedless of the glass cutting into his knees, “Dammit—stop foolin’ around now!”

The clatter of heels in the hallway announces Peggy’s presence and her eyes widen in horror at the sight that greets her in the bathroom.

She visibly gathers herself, her face rearranging itself into the capable mask he’d seen so often during the war as she strides forward, pulling a towel from the rack and draping it over Darcy.
She crouches beside him, pressing her fingers to the pulse point beneath his sister’s jaw, “There’s a pulse—it’s slow,” she says, “try sitting her up more.”

He does and shockingly his sister’s eyes open wide and she convulses in his arms, violently spewing a gout of water over his chest.

He clutches her tightly against his shoulder as she continues to cough, his eyes catch again on the broken whisky bottle and the pill bottles on the counter—belatedly realizing his sister would never have passed out in the tub from alcohol alone.

His relief slowly transforms to anger.

Darcy’s coughing subsides and she gingerly sits up, wincing at the myriad stinging cuts on her skin and her barely covered nakedness as she sits in Will’s lap.

Peggy crouches beside her, smoothing back her wet hair with a concerned frown on her face, behind her Howard and a wide eyed Tony peer in the doorway.

Her lucidity returns in a rush and she glances up at Will—his stormy eyes tell her all she needs to know.

“How could you?” He hisses.

“What?” She says.

“Were you trying to die? How much did you drink before getting in that tub? How many pills did you take?” Beneath the anger she can see a deep well of hurt in her brother’s green eyes and his hands tremble where they grip her shoulders.

Peggy interrupts, “Surely we can discuss this after we clean Darcy up?” Her friends dark eyes rove
over Darcy assessingly and narrow on Darcy’s shoulder.

Darcy turns her head to observe a thin shard of glass being pushed out of her skin to fall with a *plink* against the white tile floor.

The wound rapidly seals itself, a fading pink line left in its wake.

*Huh.*

*That’s new.*

Will’s incipient rant is cut short as he gazes at her back in wonder, slivers of glass being steadily pushed out of her skin to fall to the floor.

“Darce,” he says in a hushed voice, “that’s faster than usual, right? I mean—we haven’t tested it in a while but—“

Peggy interrupts, “What do you mean, tested?”

Footsteps crunch over the glass riddled floor and Howard casts a clinical look over Peggy’s shoulder at Darcy’s rapidly sealing skin. She squirms with discomfort.

“Yeah, What d’ya mean, tested?” The inventor says.

*Shit.*

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Later, after Darcy had pulled on a robe and assisted in cleaning up the mess in the bathroom, her brother and friends watched in astonishment while she polished off three sandwiches stacked high with ham and cheese and washed them down with a glass of milk.
She couldn’t remember the last time she’d been so hungry—healing burned a lot of energy she supposed.

Presently, she’s crouched in front of Will plucking glass slivers from his knees while he sits at their kitchen table sipping chamomile tea, describing the first time he’d realized Darcy was different.

“It was my 12th birthday, we went to the movies and got into a scrap afterwards. Hardly remember why, I seemed to always attract bullies as a kid. Darcy was a little thing—“

“That hasn’t changed,” Howard interjects, leaning back against the kitchen counter to puff on his cigar then tap ashes into the sink, “though I’m not sure how given the way she eats.”

“True,” Will says, meeting her eyes briefly.

She quickly looks down to focus on her work. She’s so ashamed of her carelessness and the damage she caused.

He continues, “We both got hit pretty hard, one of the boys socked her in the mouth and split her lip…”

She tunes out his voice as she plucks out the last of the slivers of glass and gently dabs her brother’s wounds with disinfectant, causing Will to hiss and shift uncomfortably in his chair.

“Sorry,” she murmurs as she cuts some gauze and begins bandaging his knees— all her fault— and he nods briefly at her before he continues the story.

“—and we spent that whole summer doing tests to figure out what she could do,” Will finishes.

Peggy sets her teacup on the table and opens the tin of cookies Darcy kept in the center of it. She fishes around and comes up with a chocolate chip cookie, gesturing with it towards Darcy, “So anything other than fast healing?” She says, taking a bite of the cookie and shoving the tin towards Tony when he makes a gimme motion with his hands.

“Yeah—some things, “ Darcy says shortly as she repacks the first aid kit and gets to her feet.
“Like what?” Tony mutters around a mouthful of gingerbread.

“Uh—“ she places the first aid kit back in the cabinet and turns to drop into the seat beside Will with a sigh. She rubs her eyes tiredly and reaches for the cookie tin, silently picking out a sugar cookie as she figures out what to say.

She looks around at her curious friends and hopes they won’t think she’s a freak after she tells them.

“I’m stronger than normal. A lot stronger than I look. My senses are much sharper—if I focus, I can hear Jarvis snoring in his quarters,” she tilts her head and frowns in concentration, “and your lady friend sleeping in your rooms, Howard—she doesn’t snore, by the way,” she smirks and Howard and Tony look vaguely alarmed at this information. She knows they’re wondering what she’s heard them doing, she and says, “Yeah—I can hear what you get up to with your lady friends Howard. If I focus. Which I don’t because it would drive me nuts to hear everything all the time and because I really don’t want to know.”

Peggy interrupts, “And you’ve always been this way,” she says, a contemplative look on her face.

Darcy knows Peggy is thinking about Steve’s enhancements but won’t bring it up in front of Tony. Most of that information is top secret and Tony wasn’t a part of the SSR. She continues quickly, “Pretty much. Fast healing, never get sick, fast metabolism, strong, agile, enhanced senses, and a very good memory.”

Her memory—now is not the time to go into that. It’s a lot.

Peggy taps her nails against her teacup, “I’d like to pick your brain about this—later.” She glances briefly at Tony and Darcy’s suspicion is confirmed.

“Sure,” Darcy says weakly.

Will interrupts, “Remember we noticed back in the war that you healed faster than before after you got shot and had the dislocated shoulder?”

“Yes—uh—I really have no explanation except it was the first serious injury I’d suffered since I was
a child. Maybe my ability grew with age,” she shrugs.

Howard clears his throat, “Soooo—Is this why you could outshoot nearly everyone whenever you tested weapons for me?”

Darcy nods, “I guess? I have excellent hand eye coordination and my vision is very keen, even at night. But Bucky was nearly as good as me and he was unenhanced. I think it’s just a talent which was enhanced by my abilities.”

“Hmmm,” Howard hummed, “how are your reflexes?

“Fast, I guess. It’s not as if I’ve been able to measure myself in a scientific setting—“ she’s interrupted by the inventor grabbing a butter knife from the sink and whipping it at her head.

She plucks it from the air without a thought, placing it on the table and raising an eyebrow at Howard.

“Howard!” Peggy shouts, “Don’t you think we’ve been through enough this evening without you potentially putting Darcy’s eye out?”

“Maybe she’d grow a new one,” Tony mutters as he massages the thigh muscle of his bad leg.

“Maybe she wouldn’t,” Peggy says waspishly.

Howard just grins and says, “Very fast—we’re going to explore this at a later date.”

Darcy leans back in her chair with a huff.

They’re all quiet for a few minutes, digesting the truth of her difference and she is beginning to get sincerely worried.

Will says, “I think it goes without saying that Darcy’s talents should remain between us. It’s her secret and her life.”
Everyone nods and Peggy says heavily, “I understand your fears about this getting out Darcy—given the war and everything we saw. It is your secret to tell however you choose.”

“Thank you,” Darcy says with relief.

Howard mutters, “I still wanna run tests though,” and Will rolls his eyes.

Will clears his throat and gives Darcy a hard look, “I haven’t forgotten, you know.”

“What?” Darcy says.

“What you did tonight. You nearly died, Darcy. If we hadn’t come in when we did you would have died,” he says, his voice wobbling and his eyes filling with tears that he angrily wipes away.

Tony takes Will’s hand in his and she sees her brothers knuckles whiten. She bows her head, drawing circles on the table with her finger.

“Maybe,” she whispers and pauses to wipe the tears that have sprung in her eyes with the heel of her hand, “I just—I just needed things to stop. You know I can’t really get drunk for long. I didn’t want to die. I—I just needed things to stop.”

She shudders, beginning to cry in earnest and Peggy leaps from her chair to wrap her arms around her.

“Oh, darling,” she murmurs, “it will be alright.”

She buries her face in her friends shoulder, soaking in the comfort of her embrace for long moments as she gets herself under control.

Will says gruffly, “Darce, I want to help you—I know you miss Steve and Bucky but—you still have us. You have me. And—and you don’t have to pretend everything is okay all the time.”
Darcy takes a shuddering breath and wipes at her face, Howard crosses the room and pulls out a chair at the table, handing her a white handkerchief before he sits down.

“Thanks,” she says, dabbing at her eyes and blowing her nose, exhaling slowly. “Things just got to me tonight—that jackass harassed me all evening until I had to knock him out—“

“Wait, wait, wait—“ Howard says, raising a hand to stop her, “knock him out?”

“Yeah—John Good—jerk dragged me into an alcove outside of the ballroom and tried to force himself on me. I grabbed him by the balls and hit him with a left cross. Boy was he surprised,” she smiles slightly then, remembering her satisfaction when he hit the floor.

Peggy says, “Ah ha ,” under her breath.

“Thatta girl,” Tony cheers and Will slings his arm around her neck and kisses her temple.

“That prick,” Howard mutters from across the table, teeth clamped viciously on the stub of cigar in his mouth and his dark eyes flashing, “won’t be working on any of my movies.”

Darcy sniffs, “and Doris gave me some photos she’d developed from before the war and I got to looking at them and it was Steve and Bucky and we were so—“ she presses her fingers to her mouth and bows her head, clenching her eyes shut for a moment as Peggy anxiously rubs circles on her back.

She finally exhales, “We were so happy,” and slumps back in her seat, suddenly exhausted. “It’s hard to give up on that dream,” she continues, “We’re back here and so much is the same and so much isn’t.”

Tony nods wearily and says, “Yeah—people are just so damn happy the war is over and I dunno—it doesn’t really feel over to me.”

“Yeah,” Darcy says in a small voice.

Howard drums his fingers on the table and clears his throat. They all look at him.
“I’ve been thinking about moving my base of operations,” he announces.

Peggy says, “Where?”

“California. I’ve got that defense contract out west and I want to work on making pictures.”

Will says, “What about Stark Industries?”

“We can keep offices here, but I’d move R&D and production near Los Angeles. Hell, the weather’s better, there’s nearby desert to test weapons in, and I think we all need a change of scene. I already bought a house, I’ve been looking into business locations. I think we can make the first phase of the move in as little as two months.”

“Two months!” Darcy cries.

 Damn, she’s going to be working round the clock.

Perhaps it’s for the best.

“ Yes—we can do it. I have that meeting with Peggy and Phillips next week in Washington and then I’m gonna focus on hammering out the details for the move. Jarvis and Ana are onboard—I’d really like you guys to come too,” the inventor says.

Darcy thinks about it.

California.

It’s far away—but not as far as England, France, or Germany and she’d gone there.

They’d no doubt come back to New York on occasion.
Will exhales, glancing at Tony, then Darcy.

Tony nods slowly and Darcy shrugs—there’s nothing keeping her here really. Bucky’s family is taken care of financially, she’s made sure of it. Becca is completely absorbed in married life and Mrs. Barnes has been seeing the owner of her favorite bakery—a lovely man whose wife passed away several years ago.

Things change, whether you want them to or not.

“Allright,” Will says, but shakes a warning finger at Darcy, “no working yourself into the ground. You need to ask for help if you need it.”

She takes his hand, “I promise I will,” she says quietly.

A fresh start will be good for all of them.

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March 10, 1946
Brooklyn, NY
3pm

Darcy steps out of the idling car, turning back to grab the bouquets of roses and to tell Jarvis, “I won’t be long.”

Jarvis solemnly says, “Take all the time you need, Miss.”

She nods and quickly crosses the street to the cemetery, pushing open the squeaky wrought iron gate to walk down the brick path past the larger and more grandiose monuments to a section of the cemetery with much humbler grave markers.
She walks until she comes to two smaller stones, one older and slightly worn, the other new white granite that shines under the pale spring sun. She pulls a single rose from the bouquet and lays it on the older headstone marking James Sr.’s grave before turning to gently place the tea roses in front of Bucky’s headstone.

She brushes her fingertips over his name and sweeps a few dried leaves that have settled near the base of the headstone away, then rests her hand over his name, and whispers, “Happy birthday, darling.”

He would have been 29.

She misses his smile, the way his eyes would crinkle and shine when he was truly happy. She misses his voice, the way he’d call her *doll* and *sweetheart*.

She misses his protective nature and loyalty, the way he’d accepted her just the way she was and didn’t try to change her.

After a few minutes she straightens, looking further down the row of white and gray markers to the end, where the headstones are even smaller.

Except for two.

When the SSR declared Steve dead, Darcy sent back enough money for Mrs. Barnes to pay for his headstone and later when Darcy had returned from Europe she’d replaced Sarah Rogers headstone with one that matched her son’s.

Darcy knew he had always regretted being too poor to buy his mother something beautiful to mark her grave so she made sure to do it for him.

He’d once told her his ma loved daisies, so she’d had a garland of them carved into the white stone, curving around her name.

A chilly breeze ruffles her hair as she approaches Steve’s gravesite and she turns up her collar with a shiver. The branches from a large tree near the path rattle and dead leaves blow across the ground but she can spot a few brave crocus blossoms that have popped up along the path. She glances up at the pale blue sky as thin white clouds scud across it, casting intermittent shadows over the faded grass.
She pulls a rose from the bouquet for Steve’s mother and lays the rest on the ground next to his headstone and exhales. Her eyes trace over his name, the dates marking the span of his short life. She crouches to place her hand over the date of his death, covering it to stare at the date of his birth instead.

She’s so glad he was in the world.

She’s so glad he’d survived his sickly childhood so she got to know him.

Bumping into him as she’d hurried home from the subway had changed her life. Even now, even missing him terribly, she cannot regret it.

She gets to her feet and slowly retraces her steps until she’s at the midpoint between Bucky and Steve’s graves. There, just off the path is a wrought iron bench under a tree—tall and winter bare, it’s branches dark against the sky.

She sits on the bench and folds her hands in her lap, slowly breathing in the scent of wet leaves and turned earth and says softly, “I’m going away in two days—to California if you can believe it. Howard is moving the company and if you’ve been keeping track you know I work for him, so—I’m going away. Don’t worry about your ma and Becca, Bucky—they’re fine. You’d like Becca’s husband, he’s a little serious but he adores your sister. Your ma has been seeing the baker—Mr. Carbone? He seems like a nice man and he’s been helping her to not be so sad about you being gone.”

She absently picks at a loose thread on her blue skirt—wrapping it around her finger and watching her fingertip turn purple before tugging it loose and dropping it to the ground.

“I know you aren’t here,” she whispers, “you aren’t anywhere I can visit except in my head—and in my heart. But I need to let you go a little bit—just enough that I can breathe again.”

She takes a deep shuddering breath and exhales slowly, and says quietly, “I read something the other day—a poem that reminded me of you. Remember when you were sick Stevie and I’d read you poems? Remember how—“

She swallows hard, the skyline beyond the cemetery growing blurry.
She wipes her knuckles under her eyes and sniffs before straightening her spine.

“As I was saying—the poem goes like this:

\[
\text{i carry your heart with me(i carry it in}
\text{my heart)i am never without it(anywhere}
\text{i go you go,my dear;and whatever is done}
\text{by only me is your doing,my darling)}
\]

\[
i \text{fear}
\]

\[
\text{no fate(for you are my fate,my sweet)i want}
\text{no world(for beautiful you are my world,my true)}
\text{and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant}
\text{and whatever a sun will always sing is you}
\]

\[
\text{here is the deepest secret nobody knows}
\]

\[
(\text{here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud}
\text{and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows}
\text{higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)}
\]

\[
\text{and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart}
\]

\[
\text{i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)}
\]

She’s silent for long moments, listening to the wind in the trees, the distant sound of traffic, and the beating of her heart.

Finally, she rises from the bench and walks down the path and through the gate.

She doesn’t look back.
What is HSAM

Chapter End Notes

Poem at the end by e.e.cummings—published in 1952 but we’ll pretend it came out earlier.

Some things: my head canon regarding Darcy’s healing ability is that the severe injury in her childhood activated her mutation, then the one in this chapter accelerated the ability.

Also, the struggle she’s having with her memory is somewhat like that of people who have HSAM. Basically, it’s like dipping your head in a pensieve (shout out Harry Potter!) and being able to only experience it all over again from your perspective and memory. Cool but also a curse in some regards. Check out the attached article above.

Thanks to all of you readers new and old who have left comments and kudos, it really means a lot to me. I’ll work on responding to comments, I am behind again.

There will be a hiatus while I try to get a few chapters into the sequel to this story. Please subscribe so you’ll be alerted when it’s up!

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