The Originals
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Summary

Steve Rogers crashes the Valkyrie in 1945.

He wakes up in 3017.

Waking up in the future is a shock for Steve - he's chased by a man with wings and someone that looks suspiciously like his long dead best friend, a glacial age has wiped out most of the Earth's population, and worst of all, he has to learn that HYDRA never actually disappeared. But with the help of some new friends, he learns how to make a home in this new age...and discovers he's not the only person left in the world who's a thousand years old.

Notes

This story contains various alternate (future/clone) versions of Marvel characters as well as canon versions. The relationship between "Bucky Barnes/Sam Wilson" is between the alternate versions of these characters, whereas the relationship between "Steve Rogers/Bucky Barnes" refers to the original canon characters. This takes place in a dystopian version of Canada/United States that has been transformed by an ice age, where technology, relationships, and beliefs are vastly different from modern day.
I have been so blessed to work with KJ on another big bang! Her art gives me (and my writing) life. Expect even more art to be added to this story because she is an overachiever. :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
"Steve. Steve? Steve?"

He hears the voices still, though the Valkyrie's radio was shot to hell the second the nose of the plane hit the ice. It didn't even spark or static - just stopped. A lackluster climax to an over-dramatic act of heroism.

Steve has his shield but no enemies to fight but the flood of water. Resigned to his fate, he pulls the shield to his chest like a blanket and lies on the floor of the driest area of the plane. There's nothing to do now but wait for the end.

That's what this is, isn't it? Steve thinks. The end. The icy water rises over his body, up to his eyes, filling his ears, crushing his lungs. In hindsight, crashing a plane into the Arctic Ocean...not the best way to go.

There's structural damage to the aircraft, a giant hole in the front panel of windows. He can hold his breath for three minutes now, he knows, but that's not accounting for how cold the goddamn water is. Swimming to the surface, saving himself, is not out of the realm of possibility.

But he doesn't move. He's counting in his head to drown out the voices out that keep calling his name. Peggy. His mother. Bucky.

He stops counting at ninety-nine.
The last thing Steve Rogers remembers is being lulled into a deep sleep by steady silence and relentless cold. He doesn't remember being able to breathe, that's for damn sure, but now he's sucking in air harder than a newborn baby.

One hundred, he thinks.

Pulling in a deep breath hurts more than he expects. He tries to curse the pain but no sound escapes his lips. A few more shallow breaths and the sway of the ice cold ocean as he treads water helps to even out his panic enough that he can assess the situation. His body screams in agony at the exertion, but he's just going have to walk - swim - it off. He'd obviously blacked out momentarily. Now there's air in the cabin. He's not going to die. Well, not yet anyway.

That's...not as big of a relief as it should be.

Steve's pretty sure the plane sunk after hitting the water. Sure felt like it did. Is he dreaming? Is he dead? Unfortunately doesn't have time to figure any of that out. Because the plane's moving, following the current of the water, and he needs to get the hell out of there.

Gulping in a deep breath, he forces his head back under the water to search for his shield. Somehow it's stuck to the floor. Frozen, he realizes, by the crackling of ice he sees after dislodging it. The shield is heavy in his hands. He's sluggish and weak.

Something is really, seriously wrong here.

It's a struggle but Steve floats back to the surface for air and immediately swims to the busted window. He kicks and punches it with the shield, pounding glass and metal away until there's a gap wide enough for him to swim through.

A luckier man would be in shallow water, close enough to land that he could trudge through the waves and collapse on dry land. As it turns out, Steve's luck ran out about ten days ago and doesn't look to be getting any better.

"Help!" His voice is a sad croak. A dying frog instead of a war hero. He screams until the croaks at least turn into sad whines. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuuuuuuck!"

At least some sort of land mass is visible, standing out in the distance against a backdrop of the sun setting. Steve grumbles one more "fuck," slips the shield onto his back, and begins to swim.

And swim. And swim, and swim, until the water gets murkier and traces of sand scrape his fingertips. His head is such a goddamn disaster that the only thing that makes sense is surviving. This is a sign. He was meant to live and keep fighting. Peggy and Howard, they'll find him and save him.
Steve drags himself the last few feet onto the beach and collapses face first, his muscles unable to trek any further. Before passing out, he reflects even further on his piss-poor luck.

The land's not even dry.

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A loud voice - Dugan? - is screaming in Steve's head. He's really getting tired of all the voices. He's completely and utterly alone, so anything other than silence feels like insanity. Dugan screams "watch change!" over and over, until Steve opens his eyes and stares at the sand in his face.

He's freezing, teeth chattering and body shaking in the dirt. His back is dry, his front is wet, and he feels like he spent a night in the trenches. Or, he assumes that's what it'd be like. Unlike the men under his command, he's never actually had to spend a night in the trenches.

Steve mumbles incoherently and rolls onto his back, sputtering and coughing the sand and grime out of his throat. The sun is up, brighter than he's ever seen it, practically blinding him. He squints, grumbling, "It's brighter'n a bitch outside."

A light flashes to his left, the sun's ridiculously sharp rays catching something reflective. That's good, Steve thinks. Maybe there's, ya know, civilization on whatever freezing cold island he's swept up onto. Food, shelter, and hopefully no Nazis.

Pulling himself upright, he takes in his surroundings. Sadly, there's not much to see. The area looks like it could have been a fishing community at one point, but now few signs of life remain on the coast. A couple of abandoned shacks. Some odd looking boats that could have resembled canoes. The goddamn Valkyrie, stuck in the shallow water further out to sea.

And two men - one light and one dark - maybe half a mile away, staring in his direction. Steve's heart skips a beat. Maybe they're allies?

The two men share a look with each other, then stare back at him. They take off running towards him, and one of them sprouts goddamn wings from his uniform.

So yeah, probably not friendly.

"Christ!" Steve spits out a curse along with some more sand and clams to his feet, taking off in what should have been a sprint. But his body aches, his joints feeling like they've been stuck in an uncomfortable position for hours. Still, he runs. Even at his worst he can outrun a normal person.

Normal person being a relative term here. It makes no sense but they're gaining on him, bridging the gap faster than Steve can formulate a plan of action. There's only one logical choice, really - stand, and fight.
Steve grabs his shield and spins, hurling it as hard as he can towards his pursuers. Then he stands, stunned, as one of the men snatches the shield in mid-air with ease. The sun catches again, and Steve barely has time to process that the shiny object is a metal hand before his shield is slamming into his gut.

Wings leaps into the air, soaring feet first at his head. Steve deflects but leaves his legs unguarded for Metal to tackle. He lands on the icy ground with a gross squick, his legs pinned by Wings and shoulders by Metal. After all he’s been through, he's gonna meet his maker by the hands of two strangers that appear to have been victimized by science even more so than himself.

"Please," Steve begins to beg. His plea falls silent as he takes in his assailant face to face. It's like a cruel trick his mind is playing on him, seeing what he wants to see instead of reality. The nose, the jaw, those fucking eyes. He knows this face. "Bucky?"

The Bucky lookalike squints, tightening his grip on Steve. "Who the hell is Bucky?" he asks defensively.

The voice, though. It's different. The more Steve stares in awe, the more slight differences he can see. This man's hair is shaved on the sides and long on top. His Bucky would never wear his hair like that. Thick-rimmed glasses cover his striking eyes. A snarl reveals strange teeth, squared off with no visible canines. And then there's the whole "hand made of metal" thing.

But. He just looks so much like Bucky. The man grimaces, and Steve realizes it's because Wings is laughing. "Shut up, Sam," Not-Bucky snarls, pushing on Steve's shoulder. "What's a bucky?"

"You're a bucky," the winged man - Sam - says, choking on a laugh. "Bucky bucky bucky."

"I fucking hate you sometimes," Not-Bucky spits out at his friend. "That's not even a word, you feather farting fucker."

Steve has no idea what the hell is going on, but Sam is laughing hard enough that he's released his grip on his legs. Now his attention is drawn to the winged man - literally. His eyes are so dark they're nearly black, matching the halo of curls around his head. And his flight suit - it's not a flight suit. His wings are made of feathers. "Are you a...bird?"

This is definitely a dream.

Not-Bucky laughs this time. "Yes, he’s a bird."

"Are those coming out of you?" Steve asks incredulously, then looks at Not-Bucky’s hand on his shoulder. "Is your hand made of metal?"

"Lotta questions from a trespasser in a bodysuit," Sam jokes.

Steve bucks his hips and forces Not-Bucky off his chest, rolling them over. But as soon as he gains the upper hand, something that looks like a toy gun is shoved in his face.

Sam's not laughing anymore. "Who are you?"

"I'm..." Steve pauses. No one knows Steve Rogers. "Captain America," he answers.

Not-Bucky shoves him off, scrambling to stand next to Sam. "Where did you come from?"

Turning to the water, Steve points to the Valkyrie. His teeth are chattering so hard he's worried they may crack. "I crashed my plane."
"You didn't answer his question." Sam's hand is steady as he aims his pistol-looking thing. "Where did you come from?"

Even though he was literally just there, it takes Steve a minute to remember what happened before he crashed the plane. Neither his brain nor body are as sharp as they should be. "The Swiss Alps," he says tiredly. Godforsaken place.

Not-Bucky's gaze turns cold as ice. "He's lying."

"Shoot him?"

"No!" Steve holds his hands up defensively. "I'm not here to hurt you. I was in...the war. It's not my plane, I crashed it on purpose."

"The war?" Sam tilts his head, musing, "This motherfucker's really not helping himself. At all."

"That's uncalled for, I can guarantee I've never fucked your mother," Steve argues. Sam and Bucky share a very confused look. "I'm an ally," he continues. "Can we just talk? Without shooting anyone?"

"You attacked us first," Not-Bucky says, "with your weird turtle shell."

"You were chasing me, I was defending myself."

Sam quirks an eyebrow, but finally holsters his weapon. "We were defending our home. You don't belong here."

"My apologies." Steve shivers. "Where is 'here' exactly?"

"He's got a head injury," Sam says. "Or read one too many ancient tales."

"No fucking doubt." Not-Bucky crosses his arms. His heavy winter coat rustles, and Steve sees that the metal goes above his wrist. "You're in Newfoundland. Canada."

"Oh." Steve could have sworn he was more in the area of Greenland. His shivering worsens. He's not sure it's entirely from the cold. "What day...what's today? The date?"

"Ten of June," Sam answers slowly.

"June?" But it's so cold. "Not March?"

They both shake their heads in unison.

"Year?" Steve whispers.

Not-Bucky has a stare just as intense as the real one did, but Steve watches it soften just a hair when he answers, "3017."

3017 - Oh, he thinks, before face-planting on the sand again.

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"What if he's a time traveler?"

"You know there's no such thing as time travel anymore, Jamie."
Steve's being dragged, his toes leaving a shallow trail behind him. He regrets waking up. It's not really 3017. Humans don't have wings or metal appendages, either.

"So what then, is he some sort of mythical sea creature? If he's a siren, do not let him blow you."

Silence, then, "I just can't with you."

Steve can't, either. Whatever that means.

"What should I call him," Not-Bucky asks. Or is he Jamie?

"Adaro," the winged man answers dryly.

Steve forces his head up. They're at the door of one of the shacks. This is their home? It makes his old place in Brooklyn look like the Upper West Side. He mumbles, "Who?"

"Mr. America's awake again," Sam announces dryly.

Steve's too...everything to correct him.

He has an arm slung over each of their shoulders. As heavy as he knows he is, they don't seem to struggle with his weight at all. "You're enhanced?" Steve asks.

They ignore his question. Sam opens the door to the shack and leads him down a staircase directly past the door, their three wide bodies barely squeezing down the width of it. A feathered wing keeps brushing against his back. It should feel strange but it's oddly comforting. Delerium must be setting in.

Their home starts to make sense to him the further they descend - they live underground. The stairway widens at the base, opening to a large living area with a small kitchen tucked in the corner. There's almost no furniture, just massive piles of blankets and pillows scattered throughout the room. Amidst one of the piles is two women.

Kissing.

No, more than kissing. The one with fire red hair has her hand up the skirt of the other, twisting her wrist as the girl with long brown hair moans in her mouth.

This is just a lot for him to take in at once.

"Quit fucking for five minutes, will ya?" Not-Bucky barks. "Got company."

These guys say things like this in front of ladies? How crude.
"I got fucking company too, asshole," the one with the dark hair yells back. Still, she crawls out from under her friend and straightens her skirt. Her eyes flash red when she glares at them. "Who's this? The inhumans still trying to start up a circus?"

"We found him shoreside," Sam explains, shooting a wary look at the Bucky lookalike. "He might be a sea creature."

The redhead crosses her arms. That small act draws everyone's eyes to her. With her short curly hair, pouty lips, and face that's beautiful without a hint of makeup, it seems she commands attention wherever she goes. "He's not a sea creature," she says in a raspy voice. "No tentacles, no scales, no tail. He's just a boring old human."

"He says he's Miss America, that sounds really unboring," Not-Bucky says.

"Steve." He finally speaks to the entire group of strangers. "My name is Steve."

The two women size him up, then nod as if to say, okay, he can stay. "I'm Wanda," the brunette says.

"Nat," adds the redhead.

"Sam," says the human angel.

Not-Bucky speaks last. "Jamie."

So that is his name. Jamie could be short for James. Steve tries not to think too hard about that, or how he is just a boring human, or how he can't seem to warm up despite just witnessing possibly the hottest thing in his life. He shrugs away from Sam and Jamie, crossing his arms over his stomach. "I think I need to sit down."

"Dry clothes first, huh?" Jamie grabs Steve's bicep with his metal fist, steering him to a small room by the kitchen. "Can't have you dyin' like all the rest of them."

"The rest of who?"

"Ya know..." Jamie points to Steve, but gets no reaction. "You really don't know. Forget I said anything."

If only.

Jamie rifles through a bin of clothing and blankets, occasionally glancing back and forth between Steve and the clothes. Once satisfied with his choices, he begins removing Steve's uniform in the most clinical way possible. Modesty here is just...not a thing, but they're helping him, so who is he to judge?

"Sam's shirts have holes in them, obviously, so you gotta settle for my clothes and long johns," Jamie says once he has Steve stripped. "You got no ass but tits for days, hopefully these fit."

Steve realizes then that the reason he's not being trusted to dress himself is because he's literally blue. No wonder they thought he was a sea creature. His skin is clammy and cool to the touch, but he's not shivering anymore. That might not be a good thing.

As Jamie helps him dress, Steve pointedly keeps his focus on his handler. Nothing about him is soft or tender like Bucky could be, but the way he moves is so familiar. He remembers falling ill, or getting his rear kicked, and Bucky tending to him in a similar way. This is doing nothing to help
the longing he feels for his dead best friend. At all.

"You're staring at me, Steve." Jamie buttons up his shirt, looking him pointedly in the eye.

Steve shivers again. "You look like someone I know."

Jamie chuckles without a trace of humor. "That's funny."

"Why," Steve stammers. "Why is that funny?"

"Because." Wrapping a heavy blanket over Steve's shoulders, Jamie forces a weak smile on his face. "I probably am somebody you know."

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The floors in this underground shack are heated, Steve soon finds out.

Curling up on top of a pillow and under two blankets, Steve sips at the hot liquid Wanda made for him. He wants to call it tea, but it's not like any tea he's ever drank. His stomach growls but it'd seem rude to ask for food on top of everything else.

His stomach is very loud, though.

Nat watches him intently while the other three argue in hushed tones, most likely about him. Either she doesn't care about their goings on or she's the babysitter. Whatever she is, her stare is intimidating as hell. He should engage her in conversation but the only thing he can think to do is nod his head and murmur, "Ma'am."

A perfectly groomed eyebrow arches in response. "Don't call me ma'am," Nat warns.

"I'm-" At a loss. Jesus. Steve doesn't speak again until spoken to, even though the hot tea is pounding at his bladder like a drum.

After a few more minutes, it appears that Sam and Jamie win their argument with Wanda, as she sighs and gives him a tight smile before the trio walks over to see him. Sam crouches in front of him. "Well well, looks like our siren is a nice shade of pink now."

Steve gulps the last of his drink and sets the mug on the floor. "Thank you, uh. Sam, is it?"

"You can call me anything you want, handsome," Sam says with a wink.

Steve almost pisses on himself. What the hell is going on in this house, Jesus H. Christ. "Do you guys have a honeypot?" he squeaks out.

"We do now," Jamie says, slapping Sam on the shoulder. "Honeypot."

"Okay, Bucky," Sam snaps back.

"I mean, a john," Steve says, face flushing.

"Make up your mind, is he Honeypot or John?" Jamie jokes.

Dear God. Steve sighs. "I have to piss."

"Oh." Jamie smiles. "Honeypot'll show you the hole."
And see, this is why Steve isn't convinced it's actually one thousand years from when he crashed the Valkyrie. Because Jamie wasn't joking. He has to piss in a goddamn hole. There’s no way somebody in the future decided that indoor plumbing was a bad idea.

"Better?" Wanda asks when he returns to his blanket fort.

They think he's crazy, he can tell by the way they're looking at him. Maybe he really does have a head injury. He pulls the blankets tighter around himself. "Much better, thank you."

Sam hands him a bag of some sort of pellets. "Eat."

"Eat?" Pellets? Is he a rat?

"Eat," Sam repeats. Steve rips open the bag and pours the contents into his mouth, expecting the worst. But actually, it's not that bad. Tastes sorta like soft serve ice cream.

Wanda kneels in front of him, grasping his free hand to cradle in her palms. "Tell me something about yourself, Steve."

How does one even decide what of themselves is worthy of sharing?

"I'm a Captain. In the Army," Steve says, because that's something he's proud of.

Wanda strokes his hand. "Whose Army?"

Steve glances back and forth between all four of them. "The United States Army."

"Hmm." Then Wanda gazes into his eyes, her stare so intense he feels like she's scouring his soul, and says, "Hail Hydra."

He recoils like he's been slapped across the face, scrambling away until his back is against the wall. "Fuck you," he spits out.

Wanda smirks and asks the room. "Pass?"

Nat says, as if she's bored, "Pass." Jamie and Sam agree.

Steve grits his teeth. "Is this a test?"

"We had to know," Sam apologizes.


Jamie sighs, unbuttoning his flannel and pushing his long johns down past his shoulder. His metal arm extends all the way to the shoulder, clean and seamless. Like it's supposed to be a part of him. Painted on the bicep of his arm is a red skull with four octopus arms. "Cut off one head, two more will take its place."
"No." Steve shakes his head. "No."

"I'm sorry," Nat says. He thinks she actually means it. "We should take him to Doc."

"Not yet." Wanda pats the floor in front of her, coaxing Steve from the wall. "Look, we can tell you about the world right now or I can show you. The showing is a hell of a lot faster."

As per usual, Steve is confused. There's no projector or even a photo album in sight. "We goin' to the library?"

Sam purses his lips. "Going to a what?"

"Library," Steve explains slowly. "Where they keep...books."

Nat clicks her tongue. "Has anyone considered the possibility that this guy's actually, like, a thousand years old? I mean, there are others that are."

"Myths," Sam says. "Legends."

"Like men from the sea?" Jamie asks sarcastically. Clearly he still thinks Steve is some sort of Merman.

Steve pulls his knees to his chest, burying his face in his arms. It's too much. All of this is just too much for him to handle at this very moment in time. He wants to go home - to Brooklyn, to his sorry excuse of a job before the war, to Bucky and their old apartment on Montague.

A hand rests on top of his head, stroking his hair. Steve's first thought is Jamie but when he looks up, he sees that it's Sam, looking down on him like an angel. It's a shame, though, that Sam's not a real angel. If what they say is true, everyone he's ever known has had the chance to encounter one, to get called home to their final resting place. Everyone but him.

Sam coaxes him, "We're gonna take you to see Doc, alright?"

Steve rests his chin on his knees. "I just want to go home."
The doctor lives close by, in another underground shack thing. Apparently Nat lives there too because she walks right in like she owns the damn place. Meanwhile, Steve still has a tiny glimmer of hope that this is all part of the longest dream known to man.

The layout of the doctor's home is different, Steve notes. It looks like it has sub-levels, and more rooms. Probably for whatever sorcery he practices.

A man with thick glasses and wavy charcoal hair stands in the corner, oblivious to their entrance. He's tinkering with some sort of bucket. Steve's never known a reason to tinker with a bucket, but he understands there are a lot of things he doesn't know now.

"What's up, Doc?" Nat asks loudly, startling the man so much that he jumps two feet in the air and yelps, "Jesus."

"I got that," Steve says with a surprised smile. He turns to Jamie and Sam. "I got that reference!"

Jamie claps him on the shoulder. "M'happy for ya, guy."

"Saw it at the pictures," Steve murmurs, to himself basically.

The doctor runs a nervous hand through his unruly hair, scowling at them. "Seriously, you haven't learned by now that surprising me is a bad idea?"

Nat shrugs nonchalantly.

The doctor opens his mouth to further chastise but catches sight of Steve and freezes. What little color he had in his face drains away. Like he's seen a ghost. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," he whispers.

Jamie frowns and points to Steve. "No, Steve," he says, like it should be obvious.

"Ah, forgive me." The doctor wipes his hands on his trousers, composing himself. Then he does something none of the others did in their introductions - extends his hand. "Bruce Banner."

"Steve Rogers." He shakes Bruce's hand and is surprised by the strength in it. "Nice to meet you, doctor."

"Don't call...the kids just - please, call me Bruce." Bruce crosses his arms, resting his chin on his thumb. "Holy shit."

Wanda moves to stand next to Bruce. “Steve thinks he’s a Captain in the United States Army.”

“Yeah,” Bruce says in awe. “Yeah. Did you do the, uh,” he wiggles his fingers, “thing?”
Wanda shakes her head. “However he got here, it must have been traumatic enough to give him some alternative memories. I didn’t want to accidentally make it worse.”

“They’re not fake memories,” Steve argues. And he’s cautiously curious about what finger wiggles mean.

“I think he’s telling the truth.” Bruce squints. “What’s your birthday, Captain?”

Steve straightens his shoulders. “July fourth, nineteen-eighteen.”

“Get the fuck out,” Sam exclaims. His feathers even ruffle.

“Captain America, born on Independence Day,” Bruce muses.

“Ironic, isn’t it?” Steve smiles. “How did you know who I was, doctor? I mean. Bruce.”

Without a word, Bruce turns and wanders into one of his rooms, muttering to himself as he rifles through God knows what.

“I’ll be goddamned.” Jamie blinks in disbelief. “You are prime as fuck for your age, Steve.”

Sam thwacks him on the head with a wing. “Slow your boner, Bucko. Or whatever he called you.”

“Handsome,” Jamie reminds Sam. “You called him handsome earlier. Who even says that?”

“Someone classy, that’s who.”

“Um,” Steve interrupts. He has every right because they’re talking about him and he just really needs…clarification. “Is everyone in Canada queer?”

Nat snorts.

“Queer?” Jamie and Sam ask in unison.

“An umbrella term for those who aren’t hetero-sexual or cisgender. But he probably just means homosexual. It’s a rather antiquated label. Relationships are...different now,” Bruce mumbles as he returns with a stack of books, then leaves again after he gently places them on the floor.

Jamie speaks under his breath to Sam. “We could share?”

“Goddamn right we’d share,” Sam whispers back.

And, ya know. Steve might be starting to get used to these shenanigans already. Maybe.

“Why is everyone still standing?” Bruce bustles back in the room with a tray in his hands. “This is gonna take a while, so. Sit.”

Bruce sets the tray next to the books and gingerly eases his body down on a fluffy pillow. If asked, Steve couldn’t even begin to place how old the man is. But this he knows - Bruce looks different from the others. Sharp teeth, but soft features. Tired eyes. Thinner bones.

Something else Steve knows - Bruce is serving beer and bread, and is now his favorite person on this goddamn island.
It turns out that Bruce has something called a hydroponic garden in his home, and also a lab where he grows Baker’s Yeast for bread and Saccharomyces for beer, plus a library with books almost as old as Steve himself.

Oh yeah, and he’s one thousand and forty-seven years old. So much for myths.

“World War II, World War II,” Bruce says, carefully looking through the pages of an old book.

Steve notices that the pages are handwritten and inquires about it. “Who wrote this?”

“Well, Prentice Hall originally.” Bruce chuckles. “This book was published in 2012. I’ve rewritten it myself more times than I can count over the years so I won’t lose it.”

“Why that edition?”

“Because this,” Bruce holds up another equally old book, “replaced it. And if I can’t die, I gotta at least hold on to some semblance of real history.”

Steve feels uneasy, so he takes another bite of bread. “There’s fake history?”

Bruce strokes a handwritten page. “Even this isn’t completely real, but only because it doesn’t tell the whole story. It’s forgivable. But governments indoctrinate, and what’s the best way to do that? You start with children. If your teachers taught you that two plus two equals five, what would you say? That obviously it’s four, right? So you fail your test, because that’s not what they’ve taught you. Eventually your desire to succeed overrides your desire for the truth. Two plus two is five.”

Steve grits his teeth. “It’s four,” he says stubbornly.

Bruce holds up the other book. “Not according to this.”

Jamie tilts his head. “I thought this was a lesson on history, not math.”

“It’s a damn metaphor, Jamie,” Wanda hisses.

Sam ruffles the mop of hair on top of Jamie’s head, like - it’s okay, pal.

“Okay, here it is.” Bruce reads from the text, “Denied enlistment due to poor health, Steven Rogers was chosen for Project Rebirth, a program unique in the annals of American warfare, one that would transform him into the world’s first super soldier. It was Rogers who would later cross enemy lines on a solo mission to rescue Allied troops in Azzano, Italy. Rogers, along with several of these men, would later go on to form the Howling Commandos, a special forces unit within the Strategic Scientific Reserve tasked with eliminating HYDRA, a rogue Nazi science division.”
Howling Commandos? Who the hell came up with that?

“Blah, blah, blah…okay. Here.” Bruce squints at his own handwriting. “March 4, 1945: After breaching a central HYDRA hub in Switzerland, Captain Rogers intercepted a bomber set to attack several major US cities, including New York and Chicago. It is believed Rogers crashed the plane into the Arctic Ocean. The wreckage has never been found to this day.”

“Makes it seem anticlimactic when they put it that way,” Steve bristles. To him, this just happened yesterday. And now, his death is so insignificant that it’s just a question mark in a history book. “What does it say about the rest of my team?”

“Not much, really. History tends to just hit the highs and lows,” Bruce says, then reads, “Captain Rogers and Sergeant James Barnes are the only two Howling Commandos to give their lives in service of their country. The others continued their work with the SSR until peacetime.”

“Okay,” Steve sighs. He and Bucky, they were in history books together. They should’ve died together but instead - this. “Peggy Carter…is she mentioned anywhere?”

“Not here, if anywhere most likely it’s in the federal law enforcement area. She helped found SHIELD, ya know?”

“Obviously not,” Steve answers dryly. He thinks of his shield, propped against a wall back at the other underground shack. “What is SHIELD?”

“Right, uh. I don’t remember what the acronym stands for anymore.” Bruce scratches his head. “Think something along the lines of the FBI but more, just…more. When aliens attacked New York, SHIELD sent several teams in to fight them.”

Steve sighs. Again. “Aliens?”

“Yeah,” Bruce laughs. “That’s not the only time, either. I was there for most of them.”

The four “kids”, as Bruce had called them, listen in rapt fascination. So does Steve for that matter, as Bruce explains the Battle of New York, of how he found a kinship with others with advanced intelligence or physical capabilities. And how they worked together for the greater good until they had the wool pulled from over their eyes.

“They were there all along. HYDRA, Nazis, whatever you wanna call them.” Bruce closes his book gently. “They waited till the time was right, and then they struck. Hard. No one saw it coming but we fought it when it happened. Well. We tried.”

“What happened?” Steve asked.

“Those with free will were targeted, killed. The ones who fought for the people were captured. Experimented on. They were my friends, and they were used and discarded just to create what people like Wanda, Jamie, Nat, and Sam are today. A new species.”

The image of Bucky strapped to a table in Zola’s lab flashes before Steve’s eyes and he shudders. “You guys, you’re not human?”

“We’re human,” Wanda says. “Just not ‘you’ human.”

Bruce interjects, “Homo evolutis versus your and my homo sapien. Procreation is different, nutritional needs, strength. Though they’re far more like us than your run of the mill homo sapien. The only ones like us that remain are those enhanced by serum or some other factor, like mutants.
“And the rest?” Steve asks worriedly.

“The rest are all on New Earth or died in the Ice Age.”

Steve’s brain just kinda...stops. For a minute or two. He sees Jamie waving a hand in front of his face but this is a complete shutdown.

Nat asks with a smirk that he’s coming to recognize as a constant on her face. “Was it the New Earth or the Ice Age that fucked you up?”

Steve blinks. Finally. “Both.”

Bruce stands and stretches, the sound of his joints popping echoing through the room. He steps away and returns with another beer for Steve.

“You know I can’t get drunk,” Steve says. He drinks anyway.

“Give it a few more minutes, might be surprised.” Bruce smiles. “It’s a special recipe from one of my alien friends.”

Of course it is.

Steve takes a big gulp of beer. “Okay. So if we’re in an ice age-“

“Glacial period, I should say,” Bruce corrects. “Technically we’ve been in an ice age for millions of years.”

“What you said. Then how did I end up in Canada?” Steve finishes.

“The glacial period has been short. We’re warming again. Slowly,” Bruce says.

That...somewhat explains things.

“Scientists have said for hundreds of years that the Earth was unstable. HYDRA invested heavily in research to find other habitable planets to live on when this one gets fucked to hell or the sun explodes, whichever comes first. It would take years to travel there, but they found a planet in another solar system that they decided would become New Earth. So most with money and means left, and abandoned everyone else to freeze to death.”

Sam shakes his head. “Like, I am way too familiar with this story, but it’s still fucked up.”

Bruce nods his agreement. “I take solace in knowing there is probably some sort of civilization there that will take personal offense to those bastards thinking they can just steal a planet.”

“That’s been the human mentality forever,” Steve mutters. “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is mine.”

Jamie turns to Sam. “We must not be human then, we invited a mythical sea creature into our home.”

Sam squeezes Jamie’s metal hand. “We’re better, then.”

Sipping at his beer, Steve glances between Sam and Jamie. He has a lot of questions. Not just about them. Everything. “Bruce, during the coup…you were captured?”
Bruce shakes his head. “They tried, but I’m quite adept at hiding myself. Plus, you’ve never seen me when backed in a corner. I may look like this now, but the Other Guy isn’t pretty.”

“He’s not so bad,” Nat chimes in.

“It’s pretty fucking bad,” Sam disagrees.

Steve quirks an eyebrow. “Like Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?”

“Sure, if Mr Hyde was a giant green rage monster,” Bruce says. “You were the only one to receive the perfect supersoldier serum. The original superhero. I’m just, well. The Other Guy.”

“The OG,” Jamie says with respect.

Sam sighs. “That’s definitely not what that means.”

Bruce ignores them. He seems pretty good at that. “People tried for years to recreate it. I was one of them, testing a theory using Gamma rays instead of Vita rays. I wasn’t successful.”

“But something happened to you when you were making it? That’s why you’re…” Steve hesitates to say immortal. He doesn’t like the implications.

“Yes, and the serum is why you’re here today. If you crashed the plane into ice and it froze you inside of it, that would have just slowed your vitals enough to keep you alive and preserved anyway. HYDRA’s Winter Soldiers were cryogenically frozen for years at a time. Probably how they got their name.” Bruce laughs at his own play on words.

More beer. He does feel a little heady, actually. “Winter Soldiers?”

“HYDRA’s version of a human weapon,” Nat says. “Well, the first versions. As far as I know, they’re still wandering around, looking for a mission and someone to give it.”

“We are all weapons, Nat,” Wanda adds softly.

“Were weapons,” Nat argues.

Bruce smiles at Nat, but he looks sad. “I’ll never forgive myself for not rescuing my friends from HYDRA. I couldn’t risk being captured and there ever being more than one of me. And I see them everyday, no matter where I go, haunting me. But in some sick way, their faces comfort me as well.”

“I knew you only loved me for my face,” Nat huffs.

Bruce rolls his eyes. “Your namesake was as deadly as they come, you’re lucky I like you at all.” He points to Wanda. “Hers was a good kid, created by HYDRA but she defected. Troubled, but one of the most magically powerful beings I’ve ever met. And Sam, just such a good guy. The way he could fly with a jet pack was unlike anything I’ve ever seen. So the bastards gave him wings.”

Sam spreads his wings, showing off his feathers. Hazel, black, and gold, blending beautifully against his brown skin. Breathtaking, until you hear their origin.

Jamie clenches his jaw as Bruce continues, and it’s so terrifyingly Bucky that Steve gulps down the rest of his drink in one swig. “Good people, all of them. That’s why their stories are even more tragic. I wish I’d had the chance, but Jamie’s is the only one I didn’t get to know.”

Steve stares into his empty glass and thinks - I did .
Aliens. Wow. They make some serious beer.

Somewhere between the telling of the moon landing and a fourth refill, Steve passes out on Bruce’s floor. He dreams vividly - a stretched out hand just within his grasp, nameless faces dead simply because of the country in which they were born, and dirty pavement and bloody knuckles. His body hibernated for a thousand years but his brain just stored all of this shit, waiting to haunt him over and over again.

At least he didn’t dream in the ice.

He wakes up to the sweet smell of coffee, surrounded by gobs of pillows and blankets. He’s still not sure what the general aversion to furniture here is.

A now familiar raspy voice asks, “Do you drink coffee?”

Steve untangles himself from the blankets. “Is the Pope Catholic?”

Nat blinks.


“What’s on your mind, soldier?”

“Everything.” Steve sniffs the coffee and takes a sip. Not bad. “Like growing coffee beans in this climate. Why no one has furniture. Where are the flying cars? And how I lost everything, my entire life, for nothing. Ya know, the usual.”

Nat smiles. “You’re handling all of this very well.”

Outwardly, maybe. On the inside he’s dangling by a thread, but he won’t break. He never does. “Don’t have any other choice, do I?”

Her smile turns to a frown as Bruce stumbles in, hair and glasses in disarray. “He’s about to say that he misses his StarkPad and StarkPhone and advanced technology and that he can’t wait until the sun blows up and this godforsaken planet implodes on itself.”

“A morning person, then.”

Bruce grumbles nonsense until he acquires his own cup of coffee and can speak in complete sentences. “Listen, we had Artificial Intelligence that talked to us like friends. Any information you could ever want could be found in seconds on your phone. I miss the internet, goddammit.”

Steve shrugs a weak apology. “You said StarkPhone. As in, Howard Stark?”


Howard had a son? Shocking.

“I’m just irritable because for hundreds of years we relied so heavily on technology and now we’re existing in this minimalist bullshit. I miss reading the news and blogs while drinking my morning joe. But access was a service, and everything had a price. With few left to provide services, we’re just SOL.”
“Shit out of luck,” Nat says.

Steve narrows his eyes. “I know what it means.”

They sit and drink their underground-grown coffee in companionable silence, save for the occasional muttering from Bruce, until the corral of noisy neighbors come barging in to look for their new plaything. That would be him - he finds it hard to believe they could view him as a friend already.

“Good morning, Stevie,” Jamie says cheerfully.

Steve’s gut twists into knots. *He won’t break.* “Good morning, Jamie. Sam, Wanda.”

“So I was thinking,” Jamie starts, only to get interrupted by Sam and Wanda clearing their throats loudly. “We were thinking. You should go home.”

Steve forces a weak smile. “Um. Thanks?”

“Home to you, he means,” Wanda says.

“It won’t be the same as you remember,” Sam adds. “But maybe just being in a more familiar environment will help you find your place in our world.”

I just want to go home, he’d said yesterday. He meant 1941, but that’s damn near impossible.


Sam and Jamie share a Look.

Steve frowns. “What?”

“Nothing.” Sam claps his hands together. “So we need, ah, a plane? Something with wheels? Weapons. And currency.”

Sam and Jamie share another Look, and transfer it to Bruce’s direction. “Wait, why’re you looking at me?” he asks.

There’s a slight delay in his brain, but Steve eventually processes what Sam said. “And did you say ‘we’?”

“Great!” Jamie grins. “I’ve never been on a road trip where no one was actively trying to kill me.”

Sam casts his eyes at Steve’s concerned face. “Maybe give it some time before you get your hopes up on that one, J.”
Steve sits with his shield and “his” duffel, anxiously toying with both like a kid on the first day of school. He’s somewhat clean, dressed in Jamie’s clothes but a coat belonging to Sam. Sure, it’s missing most of the back of it, but with the harness for his shield on, it actually works out pretty well.

He’s about to head on a journey to find someplace to call home. And he still can’t decide whether he wants to do that or run back to the water and swim until his body gives out, sinking like he should have years ago. Somehow, he thinks he’d still end up right where he is again.

So. Might as well see what New York in the future looks like. Not like he has plans, or a date anymore.

“Have you always frowned this much?” Wanda asks from literally out of nowhere. She’s tiny and is quiet as a mouse.

Steve purposely deepens his frown. “Yes,” he deadpans.

Wanda crosses her arms, stifling a smile. “Well, what makes you happy, then?”

Nothing here, he thinks. Everything that makes him happy is long gone.

“Well, how about a memory?” Wanda asks, like she just read his mind. Maybe she did. “May I?”

Steve shrugs, mostly because he doesn’t know what she’s asking permission for and frankly, he needs a short respite from all the explanations. He’s tired and dejected, dammit.

A fight, that could possibly motivate him. Or just a punching bag.

Wanda raises a delicate hand to Steve’s face, smoothing the frown lines on his forehead. Then a strange sensation takes over his mind, like he’s being tickled but…in his brain. He can feel some of the noise and frustration in his mind dissipating. She’s manipulating his psyche, he realizes. Before he can panic, she finds what she’d been looking for.

Clear as a sunny day, he sees himself - his smaller self. His face is green and he smells popcorn. Bucky’s laughing - laughing at him - because he lost his lunch on the Cyclone. His younger self wipes his mouth and says, “We gonna ride it again or what?”

Present day Steve laughs. It seems like he and Bucky were just reminiscing about this a few weeks ago. In his mind that’s how long it’s been. The memory should ache but it doesn’t. Seeing Bucky and feeling him wrap his arms around his shoulders helps to reinforce who he really is, and where
he’s from. He’s a man out of time but at least he has this. Then Bucky’s gone, and he sees Wanda again. “Vomiting is a good memory?” she asks wryly.

“Yeah. That time it was.” Steve smiles. “How did you do that?”

Wanda smiles coyly. “Magic.”

“Thank you. I don’t know what the hell you did, but thank you.”

“I hope you find a place to call home, Steve Rogers of America.” Wanda squeezes his cheeks between her hands and kisses him on the forehead. “Watch the asses of my idiots on your travels, please?”

“Of course.” He hears Sam and Jamie bickering up the stairs and he rolls his eyes. He likes them, he really does. But this is going to be a long trip.

“Cap!” Sam shouts.

Steve’s shocked. One of his actual nicknames. “Yeah?”

“Huh?” Sam hops off the bottom stair and hands Steve a hat. No, a cap. “Gotta keep that pretty head warm.”

Wanda sighs. “You’re insufferable.”

“I’m sure as hell suffering,” Jamie adds. His hop is even heavier than Sam’s. “Hey Steve, Doc wanted me to give you this, said you’d appreciate it.”

Jamie hands over a clean roll of bound paper, two pencils, and a pen to Steve. And yes, Bruce was absolutely right. Steve rubs his thumb over the paper before stuffing it in his duffel. “So. We have a plan?”

“We got a plan. Mostly. Can you ride a bike?” Sam asks.

Steve groans. “Your plan is to bicycle to Brooklyn?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Sam scoffs. “We drive the bikes down to Starkvegas, catch a mini-plane to the mainland because we’re on a fucking island, Steve, and then…”

“Then?”

“Then we go to New York and try not to die,” Jamie says.

Steve’s just not gonna ask about plans. Anymore. Even if it kills him before whatever is in New York does. “Why are we trying not to die? I mean, besides the obvious reasons.”

Sam and Jamie share that Look again. Luckily, Wanda has the ability to use actual words. “Rumor has it that there are Winter Soldiers in New York City.”

Oh. Okay. “I thought you said this was your first road trip where no one was trying to kill you?”

“Actively trying to kill me,” Jamie corrects. “Besides, they usually don’t try to kill anybody who’s not a part of their mission. Or defectors.”

“So we’re good.”
Sam forces a smile that looks more like a grimace, with the gap in his front teeth on full display. “Well. We might - might - be fugitives from HYDRA.”

Steve pulls himself to his feet, grabbing his shield and bag. “Fantastic. Let’s go then.”

“Seriously?”

Steve pulls his cap over his hair. “I’m itching for a fight anyway.”

Something Steve has learned in the future - while two (three, four, so on and so forth) people may speak the same language, essentially, they also might not understand each other at all.

Take the bikes - not bicycles, thankfully. More like scooter-type contraptions. They definitely make Steve miss his Harley.

Another thing to consider - “just down the road” to Steve is a few blocks, or miles. But no. They have to cross practically the entire island of Newfoundland. On scooters.

By the time they arrive at Starkvegas - not a town, it turns out, but a shop of some sort - Steve is wishing he’d had an actual bicycle. He would have gotten here faster, and maybe not have frozen snot stuck to his face.

It’s raining, just a freezing cold mist, but it’s miserable. As Sam climbs off his bike, he ruffles his feathers like a bird that just got splashed by a puddle. Jamie helps him smooth out his wings, which is sweet, but gives Steve a perplexing thought.

“Couldn’t you have just flown down here?” he asks.

Sam frowns, shimmying away from Jamie’s hands. Then he spreads his wings to their full span, pointing to his left side. It’s considerably smaller than the other. Steve doesn’t know he he didn’t notice that before. Probably because he’s still in shock over a man with actual wings. “Broken wing,” Sam states. “I can get up but I can’t stay there.”

Steve nods his understanding. “That sounds like a personal problem.”

Sam frowns, shimmying away from Jamie’s hands. Then he spreads his wings to their full span, pointing to his left side. It’s considerably smaller than the other. Steve doesn’t know he he didn’t notice that before. Probably because he’s still in shock over a man with actual wings. “Broken wing,” Sam states. “I can get up but I can’t stay there.”

Steve nods his understanding. “That sounds like a personal problem.”

Sam’s eyes widen and Jamie starts howling with laughter. “Sammy, Sammy, he’s talking about-“

“Yeah, I got that,” Sam snaps at Jamie, but then winks at Steve. “I can give you a demonstration of my…flying any time you’d like, Captain USA.”

Steve sighs. “So, what is this place?”

“Tech heaven,” Jamie answers. “These guys are cutting edge. Bruce says the technology is a few centuries old, but it’s still better than anyone else can offer.”

Speaking of centuries old - when they walk through the door of tech heaven, a bell jingles. Makes Steve feel like he’s back home for a second. That is, until an Irish woman’s voice from heaven beckons them. “How may I assist you?”

“The big ugly green guy sent us,” Sam says.

“I’m sorry, you’ll have to be more specific.”

Sam rolls his eyes. “Hulk smash.”
“Permission granted,” the voice says, and a wall opens to reveal - shocking - a staircase leading underground.

“Where did that voice come from?” Steve whispers as they walk down the stairs.


“Then how is she talking?”

They reach the bottom of the stairs, and Sam says, “Don’t ask me. Ask them.”

And that’s how Steve gets a twenty minute lecture on artificial intelligence from two eccentric twins with weird facial hair named TJ and T-Bone, full of lingo he’s never even heard of. They might as well have been speaking Russian.

“So you see-” TJ starts.

“...it’s really quite simple,” T-Bone finishes. He’s tapping his fingers anxiously on top of a clear display case, but the sound is unusual. Like metal on glass.

Steve nods with a forced smile. These guys are definitely some relation to Howard Stark.

TJ claps his hands together. “So what can we do you for?”

Jamie’s been noticeably quiet the entire time they’ve been in the shop but he speaks up then. “A plane.”

“Ah yes, Brucey said he was sending some kids that might be in need of Jarvis’ service.”

“We don’t need a pilot, I can fly...” Steve pauses as Sam and Jamie level glares in his direction.

Clapping his hand on Steve’s shoulder, Sam says, “Guys, have you been properly introduced to our friend here? This is Steve. He’s here because he crashed his plane.”

“On purpose,” Jamie adds.

T-Bone raises a shaped eyebrow. “Yes, well. Steve. Pleasure to meet you, but if you touch Jarvis inappropriately, I will kill you.”

It takes a while for Steve to...process that.

It makes a lot more sense after Sam pays the T-boys and they board the small aircraft. It’s the size of a single engine plane but is apparently powered off of some sort of battery. The only locations it can travel to are other Starkvegas branches. Smart.

“Welcome. James, Samuel, Captain Rogers,” a voice, much like the woman before, speaks as they strap themselves into their seats. This guy has a British accent. It most definitely doesn’t make Steve want to talk to Peggy one more time. Nope nope nope.

“How’d you know my name?” Steve asks the AI. This must be Jarvis. The plane has a name.

He’s talking to a machine. What the hell?

“Do not ask questions to which you don’t wish to know the answer,” Jarvis says. “Please find your seat and relax. I have been made aware of your previous encounters with aircrafts, so please. Hands to yourself.”
Steve holds his hands up innocently, but quickly grips his seat as the aircraft begins to move. The lurch and pull as the plane taxis and lifts into the air makes him a tad queasy. Not motion sick necessarily, just…not well.

At least he’s not alone in his feeling of being off - Jamie still looks uneasy himself. “You seemed kinda tense back there,” Steve says to him.

“I’m fine. Just don’t really care for people that act like they’re smarter than everyone else.”

“They are smarter than everyone else,” Sam says. “It’s kinda their thing.”

Steve asks, “Their thing?”

“Everybody’s got a thing,” Jamie grumbles.

“That’s my point,” Sam says. “The T’s are smarter than everybody, Wanda’s more powerful than everybody, Nat is more cunning than anybody ever, I’m the ultimate badass, Jamie is…”

Sam pauses.

Jamie rolls his eyes. “Exactly.”

“Braver,” Steve says. He thinks of Bucky being the only prisoner to survive Zola’s experimentation - and that must be where all of this madness started, with Bucky. Needles, so many needles, Bucky’d said once, and never mentioned it again. But he was even stronger and more determined than ever before after that trial. “Jamie’s braver than everyone else.”

Jamie beams, and Sam nods his agreement. “Yeah. Yeah, that’s definitely his thing.”

——-

The flight is short, just barely long enough to pull out his new paper and a pencil to start a sketch that’s fresh on his mind. He writes 1935 in the top left corner and outlines two boys, walking together amongst a faceless crowd with a beat-up roller coaster in the background. Instead of the boy’s faces, Steve focuses on their posture, clothes, hair, and body type.

The scene is unidentifiable, but instantly recognizable to him. He’s so lost in it that he barely notices when the plane lands at another Starkvegas branch office.

“Welcome to Nova Scotia. I do hope you have enjoyed your flight,” Jarvis says, their cue to get the hell out of, errr…him.

This branch isn’t identical to the other but has the same bell, the same Irish lady AI speaking, and the same password. The lower level has more toys and trinkets to shop for, less like a physics laboratory than the other store. And the owner, while bearing a strong resemblance to TJ and T-Bone, looks a little different. More like some of the fellas that used to play dress-up in the secret bars in Brooklyn than the hyper twins from Newfoundland.

Steve almost says ma’am, but remembers Nat’s admonishment and holds his tongue. He doesn’t want to ask Sam and Jamie about gender in 3017, but it’s clear he has no idea what the hell is going on.

This Stark - Tonya - doesn’t give them a science lesson, and for that they’re all grateful. In fact, this version hooks them up with some new tech prototypes, for a nominal fee of course. Tonya even has a long-limbed robot called Dummy to search the warehouse for certain supplies.
“Are those lenses specific to your vision inadequacies or just for enhancement?” Tonya asks Jamie, pointing to his glasses.

Jamie pushes his spectacles further up his nose. “Uh. Specific. They’re really old, though.”

Tonya shrugs. “Can you see out of them?”

Jamie nods.

“Well, okay then. May I?”

Then Tonya runs off with Jamie’s glasses, coming back in only ten minutes with what now looks like dual frames and places them on his face. “Here.” Tonya points to a button on the corner of the frames. “Can you see that?”

“Whoa.” Jamie grins, his eyes rolling back and forth. “It’s a map, and compass.”

“And a heat sensor setting. That’s new, don’t tell the Newfie idiots I added that, alright?”

“Your secret’s safe with us,” Sam says. “So what do I get?”

Sam gets a pair of boots with some form of jet propulsion in the soles and a pair of warm wool socks with no special powers at all.

They all look at Steve like - look at this cool shit, don’t you want something? But he has his shield, what else could he need? Well, according to Tonya, he needs magnets on his wrists and shield that he can activate to help summon the shield back if it leaves him (he senses an eye roll here that never comes). And also, a pair of the socks because they are soft and warm.

Then Sam hands out even more cash to Tonya than he did to the T-boys. Steve doesn’t know where they got the money from and he’s not gonna ask. He will ask why the vehicle they procured looks more like a Ford Model T on supersoldier serum than his idea of a car from the future.

“Why doesn’t it fly?” Steve crosses his arms. “They had a prototype for a flying car in 1943, ya know.”

“Planes fly,” Sam says, pushing the seat forward so Steve can climb in the back. “Cars drive.”

“No, I drive,” Jamie says, scooting into the driver’s seat excitedly.

“Under strict supervision,” the British AI warns, and a series of lights flash on the vehicle’s dash. This Jarvis character is everywhere it seems.

“Jarvis is my co-pilot,” Jamie jokes. Steve swears he hears the AI grunt his displeasure.

Jamie’s not really that bad of a driver, Steve supposes. It only seems bad because there’s large portions of land where there are no roads. And the fact that he’s sitting behind a man with wings in an already very tight backseat.

“Can you move your seat up?” Steve asks gently, after one too many knee-feather collisions.

“No,” Sam answers dully.

Oh. Steve frowns.

“It’s as far up as it can go,” Sam explains.
Well. Alright.

They drive from New Glasgow to Moncton to Fredericton. Apparently there was an island off the shore - Prince Edward - but it’s now about 20 meters below sea level. Steve feels an odd sort of kindred bond with the island.

“Are we stopping for the night in Canada or the US?” Jamie asks, long after it’s dark and in between small cities.

“Well.” Sam weighs their options. “Canada is safer. The US is fancier, and will probably have more food options.”

It’s nice for Steve to know that travel debates haven’t changed… that much in a millennium. Food plus his home country makes this an easy choice. “The United States,” Steve answers for them. “Where are we crossing the border, Maine? How dangerous can Maine possibly be?”

“Maine’s not the problem, Patriotic Daddy,” Jamie says. He taps his new glasses and veers off the road heading west. “It’s crossing the border that’s got my balls crawling up inside me.”

“Did you just call him,” Sam blanches, “Patriotic Daddy?”

“He has a very Daddy quality.”

“How do you know, you don’t even have a daddy!”

“Capital D,” Jamie clarifies with a wink.

“Hey, uh,” Steve interrupts. “I don’t know what that means.”

“You don’t wanna know,” they reply in unison.

“Jarvis,” Steve says. He can’t believe he’s talking to a car. “What’s a daddy with a capital D?”

There’s a long, silent pause.

“I must agree that that you most likely do not want to know, Captain,” Jarvis answers. “But I believe that James’ assessment is correct.”

Jamie grins. “Told you.”

If even an AI thinks he doesn’t want to know, then he should probably drop it. Something Sam said sticks with him though, enough that he wants to bring up a sore subject to try to bond with his travel mates. “I never, um, knew my father either, Jamie.”

A quick look is shared between the front passengers. Jamie asks, “What happened?”

“Died in the first World War. Mom raised me on her own but she died too, later. When I was a teenager.”

Sam frowns. “That’s really sad.”

“But I had Bu-“ Steve starts but the name catches in his throat, “my best friend. Even when I had nothing I had him.”
“Sounds familiar,” Sam murmurs.

Jamie sighs. “Steve, I feel like you need to understand something about us. Since you shared such a personal part of your life.”

“You mean that you two,” Steve points between them, “are friends of Dorothy? ’Cause I kinda already figured that out.”

Sam crinkles his nose. “Who is Dorothy?”

“Ya know,” Steve says. “I’m saying you make whoopee together.”

“Is that food?” Jamie asks. “I know you’re hungry, but-“

“That you fuck,” Steve groans. As of right now he’s going to give up trying to use slang.

“Ohhhhh,” Sam laughs. “Sometimes I don’t even think you’re speaking English, man.”

“Likewise.” Their vehicle is all-terrain, but riding in the backseat over multiple bumps and hills are making Steve’s teeth chatter when he speaks. “So, your situation, is that not what you were going to tell me about?”

“It had more to do with our parental situation than the fucking situation, I believe,” Sam jokes.

“As in, we don’t have them,” Jamie confirms.

“You’re both orphans?”

Jamie frowns. “We never had parents to start with.”

Before Steve can say, “Please further explain modern medicine to me,” an explosion sounds just behind their vehicle, vibrating his bones and spraying mud across the back window.

Sam twists in his seat, a wing smacking Steve in the face as he does. “Land mines. Humans couldn’t survive the freeze but their fucking bombs could? What in the hell.”

Another explosion sends a second spray of mud, landing on the roof with a nasty splat. Jamie grips the steering unit and smiles maniacally as he accelerates. “Whoo!”

“James,” Jarvis warns.

“Jamie,” Sam warns.

“Jesus,” Steve prays.

“I was booooooorn, in the USA!” Jamie sings, as mines pop around them like muddy fireworks.

This is it, Steve thinks. He survived a thousand years of ice only to die at the hands of a Bucky lookalike trying to sneak him into the very country that draped their flag across his ass.

The windows of the vehicle pop and crack under the pressure of flying debris, the rear taking the brunt of it. Sure enough, one more mine sprays hard enough to bust out the back window. Steve does his best to cover the hole with his shield, shouting above the chaos, “How much longer we got of this?”

“Looks like maybe a mile to the next road?” Jamie turns and grins, earning a scowl from Sam.
“Then we should be in the clear. Maybe. Unless there are some Kree lurking about.”

It’s too loud for another long explanation. “So, uh, why would the Kree things be a problem?”

“They think we’re delicious!” Sam shouts.

Great. That’s just…great.

Jamie taps his glasses after traveling a few uneventful minutes to reach a paved road. “No heat signatures. Are Kree hot?”

“Not to me,” Sam says with a mock shudder. “The teeth.”

“Asshole,” Jamie grumbles without anger.

Maine isn’t what Steve imagined. Sure, it’s night, but he can see well enough to know what’s out there. The landscape doesn’t change from cold and desolate to warm and green just by entering the land of the free and home of the brave. The population doesn’t appear much denser. Maybe they just haven’t traveled far enough past the border yet.

“Is there anywhere that’s not like…this?” Steve asks. The cold wind from the broken window twists and tangles his hair as he speaks. “I mean. Not cold and gray?”

Sam gets a lovesick look on his face, sighing, “Mexico.”

“Mexico?”

“It’s way south of here.”

“Yes, I have a basic knowledge of geography.” Steve rolls his eyes. “Just kinda figured with all the stuff Bruce talked about that it’d be underwater.”

“Well, there’s supposed to be a lot of sunny beaches…” Jamie trails off.

“And Jamie needs to work on his tan, I’m tired of everyone thinking he’s a vampire,” Sam jokes. “Not that there’s anything wrong with vampires, it’s just not my thing.”

Steve’s pretty sure there actually is something inherently wrong with vampires.

“It’s where we’re headed,” Jamie says softly. “After we take you to New York.”

The car clears its throat. “That is not on my itinerary.”

“Well, maybe you’re not going, Jarvis,” Sam snaps.

“Unfortunate.” A small hmph follows.

Steve frowns. “Does Wanda know?”

“We couldn’t - wouldn’t - hide anything from her,” Sam answers. “She gave her blessing and some advice.”
Steve’s stomach growls loudly and Jamie grins, pointing to a lighted sign up ahead. “Did she say not to stop at strange hangouts in the middle of nowhere?”

“Yes,” Sam says sternly.

Jamie shrugs, pulling into a muddy field next with a few other vehicles and bikes. “Oops?”

Steve looks up at the sign, his gut warring inside him. It growls again as he makes out the dimly lit name of the establishment. “Frostbite,” he mutters.

Oh, the irony.

Chapter End Notes

The coordinates for this chapter are actually for Prince Edward island, RIP little blob of Earth.
The first thing that shocks Steve about the inside of Frostbite is the volume. There’s no music, just voices talking and yelling over each other. After a couple of days of seclusion and relative quiet - save for Sam and Jamie bickering - the noise is overwhelming. But. In a good way.

New York was loud. The height of battle was loud. Bars and dance halls were loud. He feels more at home already.

“Here.” Sam pulls a few metal strips out of his pocket. It’s currency, but Steve has no idea what it’s worth. “Go see if they have food and get yourself a beer.”

Steve glances around the room and the wide variety of characters in the place. The blue sparkly theme of the club suits the name well. “What are you guys gonna do?”

Jamie grins, wide and mischievous, and points to a back corner where people are lined up to play darts. “Missiles.”

“Missiles?” Steve frowns, “It’s called darts.”

“Not the way I throw ‘em,” Jamie responds smugly.

Shaking his head, Steve turns his back to them and heads to the bar. The space is packed, with no empty seats, so he squeezes in between a very hairy man with glasses and a bald guy with scars all over his body. “Excuse me,” he says awkwardly.

The hairy man raises an eyebrow. “Well, you’re not from around here.”

“Way too pretty to be from around here,” the guy with scars says. “I used to be pretty, too.”

“I’m sure.” Steve forces a smile. “I’m not from around here, actually. What’s good to eat?”

“Wade,” the hairy guy warns. “Don’t say it.”

“I was absolutely going to say lobster,” Wade says. “But seeing as how there’s no lobster, I’m the second best thing to eat here.”

Steve blanches. He’s still not used to this millennium.

Furry guy grunts, “Why are we friends?”

“Because we can’t die, Logan,” Wade says. “Plus, we’re soulmates.”
“I am not your soulmate.”

“That hurts. Truly.”

“You can’t die?” Steve asks cautiously.

“Well, I can die,” Logan says. He pops a toothpick in the side of his mouth. “I just haven’t yet.”

“Pretty sure I can’t. Not for lack of trying, of course. Shit just regenerates, good as new. Except the whole skin thing,” Wade circles his face with his finger, “That’s just my aesthetic.”

“Oh,” is all Steve can say.

In his current state of “what the fuck,” he doesn’t notice a bartender approach him. “What can I get for you?”

“I…” Steve meets the icy gray eyes of the bartender. He has a buzzed head of chestnut hair, a strong jaw, and those same fucking eyes. “Bucky?”

The bartender wipes his hands - one flesh, one metal - on a towel, like he’s processing what Steve said. Then he shrugs, answering, “Gimme five minutes, meet me out back?”

Steve squints. “What?”

The bartender squints back. “What did you say?”

“I said ‘Bucky.’” Though Steve has quickly figured out, yet again, that this is not him.

“Oh.” The bartender frowns. “Is that French?”

“No, it’s-“ Steve makes a face. “What did you think I said?”

“I thought you said ‘fuck me,’ actually.” He grins.

“This is fascinating,” Wade chimes in, resting his chin in his palm.

Steve sighs. “Do people just walk up to you and ask you to fuck them on a regular basis?”

“Yes,” Logan, Wade, and the Non-Bucky barkeep all say in unison.

“Wow.” Steve blinks. “Okay. Yeah, okay. I’ll have a beer and whatever you’ve got to eat.”

Wade spins on his stool. “So wait, you’re not gonna fuck him?”

“No!”

“Eh, Barney’s a nice guy. Troubled past, but good people,” Logan says.

“Barney,” Steve deadpans the bartender’s name. “Really.”
Barney brings him an ice cold beer, which is good, and a burger-type thing, which is not so good. It’s more like a thick cracker. With fake meat. But Steve tips him well and eats it quickly. He’s had worse.

When he just has a few sips of beer left - and has tired of Wade threatening to show off his cool body tricks - Steve wanders over to the dartboard in the back. Jamie is up next, but it doesn’t look like his opponent is swapping places. More like, he’s taking everyone out to claim his championship.

“No way you can take this guy,” Sam says, but Steve picks up on the exaggerated inflection in his voice - he’s taunting him for show.

“Come on, I got beginner's luck!” Jamie yells back. He catches Steve’s eye and winks. This can’t end well.

“Don’t think I know you,” the current winner says as Jamie steps up. “I’m Barton.”

“Steve,” Jamie introduces himself. Steve does a double-take at the fake name. What a little shit.

“Ready to lose, Steve?” Barton smiles. He looks worse for wear, like he could use a cup of coffee and a few stitches. His speech has an unique sound to it, like he’s heading impaired. The blond hair atop his head is a mess of curls and he’s dressed all in black except for a purple scarf.

Jamie looks sweet and innocent as he pushes his glasses up his nose. “Don’t wanna lose too much money. Heard you’re real good.”

Steve grips Sam’s arm and gets shooed away by a wing.

Barton shrugs. “That’s what they say.”

Steve and Sam watch as Jamie lays down some currency and proceeds to get his ass kicked by this Barton guy. Jamie is terrible, and his glasses clearly aren’t doing him any favors.

“Nice try, man,” Barton says.

“Hey, wait!” Jamie holds his hands. “Double or nothing. I think I got the hang of it now.”

Eyeing Jamie suspiciously, Barton nods. “Double or nothing if you lose the glasses.”

“Okay.” Jamie removes his glasses and wisely hands them to Sam, who loudly scolds him for losing all of their money.
It’s an act. Steve can’t believe he’s watching this. His travel mates are goddamn hustlers.

This board is smaller, and so are the “missiles,” but the concept is still the same as what Steve remembers from darts. Barton goes first, landing a double point twenty. Then Jamie goes, landing on a single twenty. He shrugs and smiles.

“Hey Sam.” Steve nudges him. “Does the bartender look a lot like Jamie to you?”

Sam diverts his eyes from Jamie for a second to glance at the bar. “Yeah. Don’t let him see, though, he’ll try to hit on him.”

“Uh. Why?”

“I dunno, some sort of weird thing of his. He wants to know if he’s a good kisser or something.”

Steve clears his throat. “Couldn’t you just tell him he is?”

“This is Jamie, nothing about him makes sense.” Sam mumbles a few numbers to himself then coughs, “Double nineteen.”

Jamie throws a missile, landing on double nineteen. “Wow, that was good, right?”

Barton glares. By Steve’s calculation, Jamie is only a few points behind now.

Steve stares at Barney, then at Jamie, before bringing up a subject that’s been on his mind for a while now. The only reason he even knows this word is because of Bucky and his cheesy science fiction stories. “So. You guys are clones, right?”

“Something like that.” Sam’s wings curl tighter against his back. “It’s complicated.”

“Who made you?” Steve asks.

Jamie lands a triple ten. Barton is seething.

Sam side-eyes Steve. “Who do you think?”

He remembers the conversation at Bruce’s shack. The captured heroes, experimentation, the creation of a new species. He’d thought all that was in the distant past, but apparently not. Wanda said they were all weapons once. Sam and Jamie are fugitives from HYDRA. The pieces of the puzzles start shifting into place in his head.


Sam sighs. Clearly Steve is dead set on having this tense conversation in an already tense environment and there’s no point in arguing. “We’re all defective, okay? Broken wing,” he holds up Jamie’s glasses, “nearsighted. He was made to be a marksman and can’t see shit if it’s further than ten feet away. They boasted that his original never missed unless-“

“He intended to miss,” Steve finishes. He’s heard that before. The phrase makes his gut tighten.

“Yeah.” Sam narrows his eyes. “Defectives, once determined not to serve their purpose, were set
for termination. Wanda had other plans. Destroyed the whole base and set us all free, defectives and weapons alike. Shortly after, the last few remaining HYDRA camps left Earth. And here we are.”

Before Steve can ask any more questions, Jamie howls happily. He’s beaten the champion, and the champ is pissed. To make matters worse, he casually tosses a fallen dart, hitting dead on the bullseye. Barton lightly shoves Jamie’s shoulder. “Did you play me, man?”

“Yeah, I mean,” Jamie says, “I just beat you.”

And shit, Jamie always thinks in the most literal sense. Steve blames HYDRA for this, of course.

“You cheated,” Barton says. “Nobody beats me.”

Jamie scowls. “So you just play to boost your ego? Or fill your pockets?”

“That’s rich coming from a swindling little shit like you.”

“Speaking of rich.” Jamie grabs the money and bolts, nearly barreling over the onlookers and knocking Barton’s beer over in the process.

“Shit!” Sam stomps his foot and grabs Steve by the collar, yanking him towards the door.

“Aww, no!” Shockingly, Barton tries to catch his beer before chasing after Jamie.

Steve has a decision to make - they can run and risk Barton and his friends catching them. Or, they can get a safe lead on them. Easy peasy. He shrugs Sam off of him and pushes him towards the door. “Meet me out front with the car.”

“What?” Sam asks.

“If I’m not out in five minutes, have fun in Mexico.” Steve shoves him again, and he goes this time.

Spinning on his heel, Steve holds his palms up peacefully. “Alright, fellas. Surely we can figure out a way to-“

Barton’s already throwing a punch-kick combination, with no intention of working things out. Steve deflects but Barton is fast, like, Jamie and Sam fast. This won’t be so easy. He hurls himself bodily into the air, using his weight to knock Barton and another guy to the ground with his feet. Then he grabs a plate - yay, metal - from a table and flings it into another man’s head. It ricochets and knocks a fourth out. For good measure, he punches all four in the face and runs to the exit.

He’s pretty sure he hears Wade and Logan slowly clapping and catcalling for him.

The big off-road tires of their borrowed Starkmobile kick up gravel and dust as Sam skids to a stop by the door. Steve jumps in the front seat and they’re off, headed west. Jamie has been relegated to the back, presumably for showing off too much and blowing their little game.

“What the hell was that back there?” Steve asks sharply.

“That was us ensuring we have a good place to sleep tonight,” Jamie snaps back. “You’re
Steve keeps his mouth shut. This isn’t his world and he has no right to judge it.

“Did you do what I think you did?” Sam asks.

Steve bites down a smirk. “Maybe.”

Sam thumps his leg. “You really beat up all those guys by yourself just so we could get away?”

“There weren’t that many…”

“Still pretty badass.” Jamie kicks the back of his seat. “You sure you don’t have tentacles, Steve?”

Steve sighs. “Just the one, Jamie.”

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Jamie rests his chin on Steve’s shoulder after about thirty minutes of silence, with the exception of wind and road noise. “You mean your dick, right?”

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Jamie’s map-glasses help Sam find a road that leads to a highway, where they actually pass a few vehicles similar to their own. Civilization, at last. The highway leads them to Bangor, a shell of itself but still a sight better than rural emptiness. The moon is high and bright in the sky when they pull into the Mar-Vell Motel, a brightly painted but clearly ancient building.

The owner, a tall woman with a shock of spiky blonde hair, glares at them tiredly when they walk into her establishment. “You’re late,” she says.

“We’re…late? We didn’t even know we were coming here,” Sam responds suspiciously.

She looks bored. “I am fully in tune with all seven of my senses. Now, one room for one night?”

Jamie nods, mute, and hands her some of the money he hustled at the bar.

Steve walks around the small lobby, staring at the antique furnishings, the paintings on the walls, the ceilings. There’s overhead light. “You have electricity?!”

“Only while I’m physically on the premises.” She slides what Steve assumes is a key to Jamie. “Enjoy it while you can.”

The lights go out just as they enter room 616. There’s no bed, but the massive sleep set-up on the floor is suddenly very inviting. So is the actual toilet in the restroom. Not too shabby.

The three of them are asleep in a snoring pile on the floor within minutes.

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The thing about Dr. Erskine’s serum is, in order for Steve to heal he needs to sleep and sleep hard. His body will mold and mend itself from pieces but not while he can feel it. He sleeps his hardest
when he’s hurt.

For some cosmic reason, he falls into the deep abyss that night in the Mar-Vell Motel. Maybe his body identifies emotional turmoil on the same level as the physical, if that’s possible. Steve sleeps so hard that he dreams and it’s like he’s watching it in third person, fully aware that the events aren’t real but that his subconscious has the power to manipulate what will happen.

He’s watching himself in the Tavern in London, before the bombs ruined it. Drinking whiskey, not beer, because that’s what Bucky has. Peggy has an ale that she nurses slowly. They did this from time to time, usually to discuss work and then break for the night. Something about just the three of them together was suffocating in a thrilling sort of way. And that’s why he always ended their meetings early.

Tonight he orders another round, two whiskeys and a single-malt that Peggy rolls her eyes at but secretly loves. Then a third. Peggy’s flushed. Bucky’s smoldering like a jerk. Steve knows that look, so he panics.

“Maybe we should,” he gulps, “retire. For the evening.”

“The night’s still young,” Bucky whines. “Gotta enjoy the company when we can, pal.”

Steve feels bile rising in his throat. He can’t speak.

“Or we could compromise,” Peggy says, her lilting voice weaving its way through his bones. “If it suits you both.”

“Whatever pleases the lady,” Bucky drawls. Curling his fingers in her hand, he slowly brings her knuckles to his lips without breaking eye contact.

Is it so wrong that this is what his subconscious wants to see, the two most important people in his adult life flirting shamelessly beside him?

Peggy quirks an eyebrow, reaching for Steve’s hand. Bucky smirks and grabs Steve’s other hand, raising it to his lips also. All Steve can say is a quiet, “Oh.”

Either Steve’s growing light-headed or the room is filling with smoke. His vision is impeded. Bucky and Peggy are slipping further away, into the smoke and dust. He jolts forward to grab them. The table hits his chest as he gasps in the darkness, waking with a jolt.

Steve holds his knees to his chest, folding himself in half in order to feel as small as possible. It’s not the first time he’s dreamt of a situation similar to this one, but this time it’s him that’s different. Waking at camp, he’d felt a sense of shame. Now, he wants. And he hates himself for spending his whole life being so outspoken, with the exception of things like…that.

God, he was stupid. And there is nothing he can do about it now.

The sun’s rising between dusty curtains, an orange-pink sliver of light against the pale blue sky. Steve rifles through his duffel to find a pen and paper, scribbling 1944 atop this sheet. He outlines, just faces, thinking about nothing else but those intricacies. Bucky’s nose wrinkles when he would laugh, the smelly pomade he wore in his hair. Peggy’s sticky red lipstick, her perfume that he never bothered to ask the name of.
He’s perfecting the depth of Bucky’s eyes when he hears a yawn. “Why’re you drawing me, Steve?”

Steve doesn’t look up as Jamie rolls onto his side, propping his head on his hand. “I’m not.”

Jamie’s gray eyes are soft. “Did you think I hadn’t figured it out?”

He stills his hand. “Figured what out?”

“I know I don’t always think like everyone else does, but that doesn’t mean I’m stupid.” Jamie smiles, a sad little crooked thing. “Your eyes laugh when you talk to Sam but all that looks at me is sadness. You call me Jamie like it’s a dirty word. When I said I didn’t know much about my original, you nearly buried yourself into a hole in the floor to try to hide the fact that you did.”

Perceptive. That is an important quality of a marksman, he supposes. “I’m sorry,” Steve whispers. “I was going to tell you when…I dunno. But I was.”

Jamie nods to the picture. “Who are they?”


Biting his lip, Jamie stares at the drawing for a good minute before commenting, “You drew him first.”

It’s true. Steve went back and forth but there was more attention to detail on Bucky. “I can’t remember my life before him,” he says. “I loved them both, but I loved him first.”

Jamie blinks, like he’s waiting for Steve to continue.

“His nickname was Bucky. We were best friends. He went off to war. I followed. That’s how I met Peggy.” He taps the paper. “Bucky was captured by HYDRA in 1943. Experimented on. I guess that’s when…it started. He was the first for that, too.”

“But he was good?” Jamie asks, a touch of desperation in his voice. Like knowing that Bucky was a good guy made him one also.


Jamie’s face lights up. Steve was going to tell him the rest of Bucky’s story, but now he just doesn’t have the heart to do it. “I miss them,” he says instead. “To me it hasn’t even been that long. It just hurts worse because I know I’ll never see them again.”
“You three…” Jamie draws a circle in the air, his metal hand whirring. “Made the whoopee?”

At that, Steve laughs. “No. Not even once.”

Jamie raises his eyebrows and makes a kissy face.

Steve rolls his eyes. “I kissed Peggy, yes. And if I was blessed enough to see Bucky right now, I would plant the fattest kiss known to man on him.”

With an evil grin, Sam pops his head up from behind Jamie. “Then maybe you should kiss Jamie instead.”

These two little devils. Steve walked right into that one. And he’s too proud to not attempt to throw them off a little, even if it scares him shitless. “Only if I get to kiss you too, Sam.”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s right.” Sam crawls over Jamie to brush his lips against Steve’s. And even though he’s expecting it, somehow the kiss still shocks the hell out of him. His eyes widen and then squeeze shut. He stops breathing.

Actually, it’s really nice. Not urgent or even sexual. Sam’s lips are softer than Peggy’s, or any of the chorus girls he used to practice kissing with when they were all bored. He likes it.

When Sam pulls away, Steve immediately leans into kiss Jamie. Though he and Sam are inseparable, they’re perfectly distinguishable from each other. They smell different, taste different, kiss different. Jamie’s firmer, sweeter. Neither is Bucky, or Peggy, and that’s okay.

They’re both beautiful, and they’re his friends.

Steve feels his cheeks flush when they separate. And because he’s a little shit too, he clears his throat and pointedly shifts his gaze back and forth between Sam and Jamie.

“That’s how it is, huh?” Sam asks, shaking his head in disappointment.

“Just give him what he wants, Sammy.” Jamie smirks and twists his fingers in Sam’s shirt, yanking him down until their mouths crash together. They laugh with each other, like something Steve’s never seen before. Tender kisses and smiles that make Steve ache for that level of comfort.

Then Jamie tugs at his arm, urging him to lie back down. Steve licks his lips and curls into the warmth of Jamie’s side. “You’re a good kisser, Jamie,” he murmurs.

“Agreed.” Sam settles in also, spreading his wings like a blanket over them, as they watch the sunrise fill the room with light.
The Real OG

Chapter Summary

40° 42' 20.3436'' N
73° 59' 47.0256'' W

The Mar-Vell Motel is great. Wonderful. Amazing.

Steve gets to take a shower. With hot water. This is 20th century goodness here.

After thanking the owner, Carol, just a little too enthusiastically for the running water, Steve gets dragged to the backseat of the Starkmobile. They’re headed south, to New York. And Sam and Jamie are standing outside, arguing over who’s going to drive.

“You’re just. You drive slow, Sammy,” Jamie says in a way that’s supposed to sound apologetic but it’s really not at all.

Sam crosses his arms. Looks around. Points to a painted sign a block away. “What does that sign say?”

“It says fuck you. I wear glasses, Big Bird.”

“No, it says,” Sam squints, “It just says fuck you. No Big Bird.”

Steve’s in an odd state of bliss. It could be from the completely platonic cuddle and makeout session - with two guys, hell - or because he knows he’ll see the skyline of New York City at sunset that day. He doesn’t expect that sense of peace to last, so he just has to ride it while he can.

Jamie ends up driving while Sam complains about Jamie’s driving. It’s normal enough to him now that he tunes it out, focusing instead on his pens and paper. Bruce had preserved history through something as simple as these two items. It only makes sense that he try to do the same.

Not that a poor kid from Brooklyn knows everything about history, but he can draw what he’s seen. The shit that people remember but in reality, isn’t even that exciting once you’ve seen it. The Empire State Building, Liberty Bell, Brooklyn Bridge, Statue of Liberty. Westminster Abbey, the Eiffel Tower. These things possibly haven’t even existed for hundreds of years. The people on Earth now might have never seen them.

Steve never did get to see the Grand Canyon. Bucky didn’t either. And like that, he’s sad again.

Also, Maine is much bigger than it looks. This trip is taking forever.

Sam’s rifling noisily through either his or Jamie’s satchel. “I packed them. You probably ate them all already.”

“Not a single one.” Jamie glares. “You’re lucky you’re pretty.”
“I didn’t eat your sweets.”

“Of course not, you would never.”

“How long have you two been married?” Steve muses, signing his name at the bottom of the Liberty Bell drawing. Then he bolts upright. “Wait. Can you two get married?”

“Why would we want to get married?” Sam asks. “So a government that doesn’t exist can give us permission to love each other? Fuck that.”

“Technically we don’t exist either,” Jamie adds.

Has Steve thought about his own possible wedding and marriage a time or two? Hell yeah. But always through rose colored lenses. He knows it was never in the cards for him. With a one-shouldered shrug he says, “I dunno. Weddings are fun. A public declaration of love. It’s good to celebrate happy occasions.”

Slowly, Jamie and Sam turn to look at him with matching raised eyebrows.

Steve scowls. “What?”

“Unnecessary,” Sam says. “We know our story. We were made together-“

“And we’ll die together,” Jamie finishes.

“Beautiful.” Steve sighs dramatically. “I now pronounce you husband and husband.”

Jamie skids to a stop in the middle of the road. “Get out.”

Steve laughs and climbs out, expecting them to ask him to get back in. They’re joking, obviously. But instead, Jamie flies off and leaves him on the side of the road.

Luckily, Steve only has to run about a mile before he catches back up their vehicle, creeping along at a snail’s pace.

Thanks, Jarvis.

——

Hours of relative quiet pass. Jamie lets Sam drive for a while and they temporarily cease their bickering. Steve draws, cursing when they hit a bump and his pen pierces a hole in his paper.

The thought crosses his mind a couple of times, that maybe he shouldn’t go to Brooklyn. What if everything is different? That could ruin his lifelong memories of home. Maybe it would be better to forego the city altogether. Mexico sounds nice and warm…

Steve snaps out of his self-doubt in what used to be the west side of Boston - thanks to rising water levels it is just Boston now - when a familiar smell drifts in through the broken window. His stomach growls.

Sam groans. “Again? Are you ever not hungry?”

“I’ve heard of this before with his kind,” Jamie says worriedly. “I think he’s choking.”

“A stroke,” Steve corrects. “I’m not having a stroke. It’s traditional Jewish food. Growing up, my neighbor Ms. Shapiro used to feed me sometimes when Ma had to work late. Find the food.”

It hurts a little not to mention Mrs. Barnes in the same context, but would hurt worse to actually speak her name.

Steve holds his head out of the broken rear window, using his nose like a dog to track the smell. Most of the shops appear long abandoned on this street, but appearance isn’t everything. One building looks rather mundane, square with broken bricks and boarded up windows. The doorway is tall and arched. And vandalized. He suspects this is the place.

Though Sam and Jamie aren’t keen on parking on a street where a quick getaway would be tricky, they do it anyway. For him. Or maybe the macaroons.

“What is this place?” Sam asks as they pass the arched doorway, looking around the hall suspiciously.

There’s actually people inside. People, in the 31st century sense anyway. Mutants, mostly. It’s strange to think that before yesterday he’d never even heard that term before. And now he’s proud of them being here in a group, making no attempt to hide what makes them different. Steve smiles. “I think it used to be a synagogue.”

“No shit?” Jamie says. Sam glares. “What? It’s not like it’s a temple now.”

“This all feels very wrong, considering how a Nazi organization overthrew this country a millennium ago,” Sam points out. “Like we’re invading their safe space.”

A soft, accented voice seems to come from above them. Feminine but assertive, Eastern European if Steve had to guess. “May I impart some wisdom?”

And then, a very old woman just…floats into the hall and lands gently on her feet before them. Her hair is wavy and white, nearly as long as her flowing skirt. Wrinkles cover the olive skin of her face and her eyes flash red before dulling to a tired grayish-green. They might have been more vibrant in her younger years.

All three of them eye her suspiciously. “What kind of wisdom?” Sam asks.

“The boring kind.” The old woman smiles. She looks oddly familiar. “No one is ever truly safe, and this building was invaded so long ago that it’s ancient history. You are all welcome here.”

Then she hugs Sam with a soft look in her eyes. “You are a good and wise soul. I hope your wisdom was gained through education, not experience.”

Steve gets a whiff of pastry when she walks past him to address Jamie. He’s not usually this focused on food but he swears these guy are trying to starve him.

“You are a little shit,” she says fondly to Jamie. She’s not wrong, honestly.
If he’s offended, it doesn’t show. He looks pleased. “I know who you are,” he says.

She holds her fingers up to her lips, and moves to Steve. “What is a good Catholic boy like you doing in a place like this?”

“Babka,” he answers truthfully. “And I’m trying to find my way home.”

“Well, Jesus isn’t here if that’s what you’re trying to find,” she says. “But babka, we have.”

Steve follows her to a congregational area, with Jamie and Sam trailing behind. There’s a food spread like he didn’t think was possible in these current times. His stomach growls again. “How’d you manage all of this?”

“Magic,” she says, her eyes flashing.

That’s when he recognizes her. He sees what Jamie with his shit eyesight but spotless intuition saw. “Wanda?” he whispers.

“Eat,” is her answer. “Your metabolism is vastly different from theirs, you must be starving.”

Steve does as he’s told, and eats and eats and eats. He watches Sam take tiny tastes of the food while trying to convince Jamie to give the savory foods a try. After his belly is full, he tries to wrap his mind around what Bruce told him about the original heroes and how he might be face to face with one right now.

After excusing himself from where he’s sitting next to a vivid blue man, Steve seeks out the old woman again. Her presence seems to be everywhere even when she’s standing in place. “Are you the first?” he asks bluntly.

Wanda blinks. “Technically, you were the first.”

And how does she know who he is?

“The first Wanda, I mean.” She quirks an eyebrow and smirks, so he continues. “How does it feel to know there are other versions of yourself out there, that you may never meet or even know exist?”

“They are no more a part of me than you are,” Wanda says. “How does it feel to know your existence changed the scope of good and evil? That the desperation to recreate you consumed and ruined millions of lives?”

Steve scowls. “Like shit.”

“Then you understand.” She nods to Sam. “Your pretty angel is too young to know everything, though I’m impressed with what he’s learned on his own. But who could blame him for seeking information? Knowledge is power, and his race was oppressed for more years than even we’ve been alive, Captain. If those in power didn’t deem them, or me, to even be equals, then how did they see us as superior individuals? A basis for the ideal weapons?”

Steve picks up a macaroon. “Evil doesn’t always make sense.”
“I’d say it rarely does. The thing about HYDRA is that their prejudices changed over time. They had to learn to hate only those who threatened their goals. Otherwise they would eventually have no one on their side. And there was true anger in my heart when I joined their quest for ‘freedom.’ It was bullshit, of course. I only truly knew freedom when I left.”

“You volunteered?”

“Sadly, yes.”

“I don’t know much about the…experiments,” Steve says. “But I was under the impression all the originals died at HYDRA’s hand.”

Wanda glances in Sam’s direction with a forlorn expression. “Some did. Those of us with chemical or biological enhancements weren’t so lucky. We tend not to die.”

Steve brushes the hair out of his eyes, frowning. “I’m worried. That I might be...immortal,” he says, like it’s a bad word.

“What ever would give you that idea?” Wanda asks sarcastically.

He stares at his hands, preserved in ice for a thousand years. They show no signs of age or wear. He looks younger now than ever before. Even his war injuries always healed within days. This is not what he signed up for with Dr. Erskine’s program.

Wanda wraps one of his hands in both of her tiny ones. Her hands don’t match her face - they’re smooth and unblemished. Magic, he supposes.

“You carry the weight of the world on your shoulders,” she muses. “Don’t. Good has always and will always exist. Do you know of the Panther King of Africa?”

Steve shakes his head, no.

“HYDRA wanted him and his country, the only source of vibranium in the world. Imagine the weapons they could have made with it. They tried and tried, but they couldn’t defeat him. Good prevailed. There were others, too. Saboteurs within HYDRA’s military, children who rebelled, scientists that skewed data.”

“But they still won,” Steve argues.

“And now they’re gone. We may be cold and barren now, but the world is a better place without them.”

Just like with Bruce, he feels like he has so many questions that he doesn’t know where to start. Or even if she’ll let him. Which, given her propensity for reading his mind, isn’t likely to happen.

“Go.” Wanda squeezes his hand. “Your home is waiting for you.”

——

“We stopped for this?” Sam asks. They’re standing on the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. “Your glasses considered this to be a sight we had to see?”

“Can you believe?” Jamie shakes his head, bewildered. “I mean, it survived.”
“The world’s largest ball of yarn...” Steve looks at the large pile of mush. “Some things never change.”

——

It surprises Steve, just how many detours off the main road they have to take. How many oceanside cities aren’t there anymore. Even so, he can feel the sense of familiarity growing in his gut.

“That was Greenwich,” he says when they bypass it entirely.

“New Rochelle.”

“The Bronx.” He thinks about the animals at the zoo. Where are all the animals?

Then, “Brooklyn.”

He’s not sure what he was expecting, but this isn’t it. Other major cities they’ve traveled through have been quieter than expected, but not abandoned. Brooklyn is empty. Not just empty, nearly demolished. “What happened?” he asks, horrified.

“A lot,” Jamie says.

The Great Depression quickly comes to mind, and the conditions people lived in. Bad things happen when crowds of people have nothing to eat. And they didn’t even have to worry about aliens.

The roads are rough and jarring, with scattered patches of ice and debris. I shouldn’t have come here, Steve thinks. Now when he pictures his home he will see nothing but desolation.

It’s times like this that he hates the future.

Their vehicle rumbles to a stop shortly before the Brooklyn Bridge. And it’s not that Steve has any interest in Manhattan, but he wants to cross the bridge one more time. See if Lady Liberty is still standing proud and tall or if she’s been reduced to a pile of shit like everything else. “Why’d we stop?” Steve asks. “This place is deserted, you can’t honestly still be afraid of the Winter Soldiers.”

“Yes, I can,” Jamie rebuts. “But I wasn’t the one who stopped.”

“Unfortunately I am forbidden to go any further into the city,” Jarvis chimes in.

Sam frowns. “Seriously?”

“Serious as a nuclear fallout, Samuel.”

“We could, just...” Steve sighs.

“Nope.” Sam shakes his head. “We’ll walk.”

“I’ll walk.”
“Captain America needs us. We’ll walk,” Jamie agrees.

They’re stubborn, but Steve appreciates it anyway. They give him space, following a few paces behind. Their presence is a comfort.

Quiet and New York typically aren’t synonymous with each other. At least, they weren’t in the 40s. But now it’s eerily quiet, just the sound of cold air battering across his face. His stomach gurgles as they make their way across the once famous landmark. Not from hunger this time, but nerves.

He sees the Statue of Liberty in the harbor. Skyscrapers that he doesn’t recognize in Manhattan. And a man, on the bridge.

“Uh, guys.”

“Shit shit motherfucking shit.” Jamie damn near throws a temper tantrum on the bridge at the sight of the man, staring in their direction with his arms resting on his knees.

“Could be nobody,” Steve offers weakly. Matching glares at leveled at him. It’s too late to turn around now - they’ve already been spotted.

Jamie stares at his hands as they approach slowly. “I don’t want to fight.”

“Then don’t,” Sam says.

As usual, Sam is wise.

Sam finishes his thought. “Just push him off the bridge.”

Steve sighs. Nobody is going to get into a fight, he thinks. Then he laughs aloud at his diehard positivity.

The closer they get, the tighter Steve’s stomach clenches. Like he’s listening to a ghost story, waiting for someone to jump out of the shadows and scare the piss out of him. The analogy is fitting - the man on the bridge looks like a ghost. Tall and thin, with wispy dark hair flowing past his shoulders. It’s not until he gets within earshot that he realizes he’s looking at an actual ghost.

Strong jaw, dimpled chin, crooked front teeth, gray eyes as pale as ice. Old, sorrowful eyes.

“Bucky,” Steve says. He doesn’t question it this time.

Unfortunately, as soon as Steve utters that name, the man on the bridge slides a sawed-off shotgun out of the sleeve of his coat and points it at the three of them.

Steve quickly pulls his shield, almost as fast as Sam and Jamie aim their weapons at his childhood friend. “Bucky,” he says again. “It’s me. Steve.”

Sam hums behind him. “Man, you really gotta stop thinking every pretty white boy is your Bucky.”

Maybe he just doesn’t recognize him? Steve pulls the cap off of his head, mussing up his blond hair. Bucky squints suspiciously so Steve offers a nervous smile. “See?”
Recognition and relief spreads across Bucky’s face. “Am I dead?”

“No.” Steve’s voice quivers. “You’re alive. We’re alive.”

The gun in Bucky’s arm shakes but he keeps it pointed at Steve, his eyes hardening again. “Cruel,” is all he says.

The voice is right this time, finally. Jamie is loud and brash, Barney was low and confident. But Bucky has always been soft-spoken, with a lazy drawl. The few times he actually raised his voice were truly terrifying. Silence though, that could be even worse.

“It’s me, Buck. You know me.” Steve wants nothing more than to grab Bucky and hold him forever. Still, he keeps his hands raised in a defensive position. “How can I prove it to you?”

Bucky stares, waiting.

“Your parents were Winifred and George Barnes,” Steve says. It’s hard for him to breathe or think. Bucky had that effect on him sometimes. “You had a sister, Rebecca. You—“

“I know who I am,” Bucky interrupts.

Right.

“I’m Steven Grant Rogers, born July 4, 1918,” Steve corrects. “My ma’s name was Sarah. She died when I was eighteen and you refused to leave my side for days. You were sad, too, but you covered it up so you could be there for me. Said you were with me to the end of the line, remember?”

The gun in Bucky’s hand droops an inch. Steve can feel Jamie and Sam nervously watching the scene unfold.

He takes another step forward. “Remember when you were six and you lost your top two teeth? And I got in a fight with Jimmy Raine the next day and he gave me a knuckle sandwich? We matched for a little while. I picked the fight on purpose so we would.”

Bucky blinks, like he’s trying to search for this memory. He doesn’t shoot Steve, a pretty good sign that he finds it.

“You were my hero,” Steve says earnestly. “Long before I was a hero to anyone else. I just wish—“

“Don’t,” Bucky interrupts.

“I could have been yours.”

Bucky’s lip trembles. “Why are you here?”

“I don’t know.” A brisk wind from the river below blows over, whipping Bucky’s long hair into the air. Steve is mesmerized. “Someone told me that my home was waiting for me.”

“There’s no home left,” Bucky says softly.

“Eh.” Steve shrugs. “Not from where I’m standing.”
Behind him, Steve senses Jamie lowering his weapon. He’s safe now. Bucky won’t hurt him.

The barrel of the shotgun hits the concrete first, steadying Bucky as he falls to his knees. His chest heaves rapidly. Steve can’t tell if he’s laughing or crying. “You were always such a fucking sap,” he chokes out.

Steve lunges to his knees, throwing his arms over Bucky’s shoulders. “You were always a jerk. Was it really necessary to point your gun at me for that long?”

Bucky sobs, loud and wet, into Steve’s chest. “I’ve been waiting for you for so long. Didn’t think you were real.”

He doesn’t know how or why Bucky is here or how he was able to find him. All that matters is that he is. He did. Steve squeezes his friend with all his strength, pressing his lips against the pounding pulse in his temple. “Sorry I took so long to get here.”
A gust of wind catches a stack of Steve’s papers, scattering them across the cool brown sand below his feet. With a huff he gathers them in a pile again, tapping them against his leg to straighten the stack before pulling a pencil from behind his ear.

3017, he writes in the top left corner. September.

He draws Jamie, splashing in the lukewarm water. He draws Sam scowling as he takes low, short flights and tries to avoid the spray. He draws the sun, the sand, the sea. The same scene as yesterday and the day before but he’s not tired of it. Not even close.

Beside him Bucky watches the two play in the water, amused. He looks cool as hell with his reflective sunglasses and windblown waves. After Steve finishes with the two idiots in the water, he’ll draw Bucky, too.

“Something on your mind, Buck?” Steve asks cautiously. Bucky’s lived a rough life. Sometimes it’s better not to ask.

“We were friends, too,” he answers softly.

Steve scowls. “That’s why we’re here, isn’t it?”

“*We’re* here because fate is a sadistic son of a bitch.” Bucky shakes his head. “The Falcon. *He and I* were friends.”

“You mean the first Sam?”

Bucky nods. “Wanted to strangle him a time or ten. Good guy.”

“And you were friends?” Steve asks skeptically.

“Not like,” Bucky waves his hand, “those two are friends. But yeah.”

Steve laughs. “Who else could possibly be friends like those two?”

“Lots of people nowadays,” Bucky says. “Best friends, soulmates maybe. If you still believe in that whole ‘soul’ thing.”

“You *don’t*?”

“Eh.” Bucky dismisses him. “Plus, if you feel like it in that sort of arrangement, there’s always somebody to fuck.”

This isn’t his world - he’s just living in it, Steve thinks. But the relationship compatibility thing, he’s finally starting to understand. “Simple as that?” he teases.
“Simple as that.”

“So if I were to just…” Steve stands and kicks one of his legs over Bucky’s, staring down at him.

Bucky squints. “What, get sand on me?”

“You’re no fun, you know that?”

“You make out with Sam and Jamie one time and all of a sudden you’re the captain of fun?”

Steve blushes. “You, uh, heard about that, huh?”

“I only hear about it every other day, ” Bucky says with a snort. “You made quite the impression.”

“I have a confession to make.” Steve watches Bucky’s face transition from amused to confused to stunned as he sits on Bucky’s thighs. He leans forward with a smirk. “I dream about kissing you, too.”

“Oh?” Bucky gulps. He’s still somewhat touch-starved and over eager to reciprocate affection at times. It’s sweet, the way he shoves his hands under his thighs to keep from overstepping his bounds.

Steve leans in close enough that their noses are touching. He murmurs, “This is about three months late.”

The kiss is somehow both chaste and the most overwhelming feeling Steve can ever remember experiencing. Like the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle sliding into place.

A warm flush spreads over Bucky’s cheeks as he flattens his flesh hand on Steve’s chest. “Hate to tell you, pal, but that’s actually about one thousand and seventy three years late.”

“Who’s counting?” Steve laughs and rolls to his side, nestling in next to his best friend to watch the waves.

He likes this. His life. Mexico. It’s not hot by Steve’s summer standards, but it’s a hell of a lot better than Canada. Warm enough for him to want to lie in the sun and soak it up for days on end, which he does. The food is decent. The view is good. The people are better. “I guess it’s not so bad,” he muses. “The future.”

“The future sucks.” Bucky smiles at Steve, beaming as bright as the Mexican sky at noon. He links his fingers in Steve’s hand, pressing a kiss to his knuckles. It damn near takes his breath away. “But the present is pretty fucking good.”

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Who knew an off-the-wall conversation on evolution could turn into an almost 20k fanfic?

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