The Universe has Moved for Us
by Kittycombs

Summary

Captain James Barnes, better known as Captain America, heroically sacrificed his own life on March 27th, 1945. This was shortly after the death of his wife, Sergeant Stephanie Rogers.

Or, at least, that had been the plan.

Now he’s a 21st century man, and he has to balance being a living legend and trying to reconcile to loss of everything he’s ever known.

Notes

me??? starting a new wip when i havent finished the old one???????????? its more likely than you think

also i have read all the posts about how her name should historically be Stella but i hate that name and it's my fic so i recognize that the council has made a decision, but given that it's not actually all that important, i've elected to ignore it
also this idea has been my for so long that im nervous about letting my baby free in the world. please be kind

chapter titles from Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen, fic title from a translation of BTS's Serendipity
The first thing Bucky does after there’s a fucking alien attack is ask Stark to set him up with the internet, and gets it after the first ten minutes of explanation. He lets Stark keep talking anyway; his voice cancels out any of the noise in Bucky’s head.

Stark also goes over credit cards - even though Bucky knows full well what a death trap those are - and the like, setting Bucky up with one off his own account - “after everything you've been through, you deserve it, Barnes and I trust Great Depression boy not to spend it all in one place” - Bucky buys a motorcycle, some essentials, packs some clothes, and drives down to Washington DC.

He rents a hotel room, tries not to pass out thinking about the price, and dumps his meager luggage onto the bed.

He swallows down his pain - PTSD, shell shock, survivor’s guilt, whatever the hell else people are calling it these days - and takes the metro to his final destination.

Arlington National Cemetery. It's a nice day, which is good. It's sunny, so he can wear a hat and glasses and not get any weird looks. He hadn't taken the stupid helmet off for the whole time they were fighting the Chitauri, so people mostly think that ‘Captain America’ is a different guy, so Bucky Barnes being alive is still technically privileged information.

He grabs a map, and decides that, since it's right by the entrance, he'll visit the Women's Memorial first.

_You're just too chicken to go straight to why you came here_, his mind whispers. “Shut the hell up,” he whispers back.

So, yeah. He doesn't think he's ready to go straight to the World War Two memorial, or the section for its vets in the cemetery, so he'll start with the Women’s Memorial. Probably won't have anything about Peggy, cause she was British, so he should be alright.

He's not.

Right at the entrance, there's a small set of statues in a V formation, labeled, “The Firsts of Many.”

It's a lot of ladies Bucky doesn't recognize, but standing at their head, her rifle in her hands, recognizable only by her uniform - Bucky knew there were pictures of their faces somewhere, why had no one making this statue looked at them? - staring blankly ahead, eyes locked on some impossible distance away - just like she'd looked when they got her back from that fuckin’ Hydra scumbag - is Stephanie.

He tells himself that the statue doesn't even look anything like her. He wants to keeps staring at it forever. Stevie. His girl.

“Mommy!” A young girl calls from the door. “Mommy, look! It's her! It's Steph’nie Rogers! Like in my book!”

A girl with curly black hair runs up next to him at the railing, clutching at it and looking at it
adoringly. She barely passes his knee.

“Oh, sorry mister!” She says once she notices she's jostled his knee.

“Zoey, careful.” A woman, presumably her mother, walks to her other side, picking Zoey up and settling her against her hip. “Sorry, sir. She's just really excited.”

Bucky nods, mutely.

“She's the bestest! E’erybody told her she couldn' and she did anyways!” She bounces in her mother's arms. “Imma be like her! Nobody stops me! Imma superhero!”

Bucky smiles. The sunglasses hide his watery eyes. “I'm sure she'd be happy to hear that more girls want to be superheroes.”

“Course!” Zoey says. “She's the bestest.”

Bucky waves a quick goodbye, moving through the exhibit numbly. It's weird, seeing everyday things from his life closed up behind glass for preservation.

He exits the building, foregoing the visitor’s center, looks at his map again. He shoves it in his back pocket, and screws his courage to the sticking plate. He's gotta do this. He's gotta.

He's a coward, so he pauses in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There's a guy marching back and forth in front of it. Bucky watches numbly for a while, trying to just swallow down any feelings he has.

He moves on.

In the middle of the World War Two section, there is a small garden surrounding a pair of life sized statues.

It's terrible and gaudy and he hates it.

It's him. Standing to the side with the shield on his arm, head bare. Bucky guess they were trying to make him look noble or some shit, but Stevie would laugh herself dumb if she were here, because that's the expression he would make when he burnt dinner.

Stephanie is next to him, here, her statue showing significantly less time damage than his. It's...more lifelike than the first one he saw was. Some of her hair is hanging in her face, just small pieces, and her eyebrows are scrunched slightly. She's got her left hand clutching the strap of her rifle where it's slung across her body, the other shoved into the pocket of her coat. Her weight rests on her right leg, which means she's angled towards Bucky, the shield almost covering her, but not quite. That thought hits like a punch in the throat. Almost protecting her, but not quite.

Bucky moves passed the statues, along the little path that leads to the empty grave markers for him and his girl.

*Captain James Buchanan “Bucky” Barnes*

*March 18, 1920 - March 27th, 1945*

*His bravery inspires us all*

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord*
He snorts. Becca probably picked that part out; it's the song he always sang when he would grab one of his sisters in his arms and swing them around to make them laugh. He sobered near immediately. Becca’s probably dead now. They all probably are. He tells himself, like he has every day since he woke up, that he will look at the files tomorrow, and find out for sure.

To his right, where she always, always, was, is Stevie.

Sergeant Stephanie Anne Grace Marie Rogers

Rogers Barnes, he wants to scream. It's Rogers Barnes. They were married. Signed every damn paper they had given to them. She wore her Ma’s ring and called it his. Curled up next to each other on the bed that was a wedding present from Mrs. O’Leary down the hall. They lived together. He adored her. He died for her. It's Rogers Barnes.

July 4, 1921 - January 3rd, 1945

We will never forget the lives she saved

John 15:13

Bucky crouches in front of the tombstone, brushing his hand over her name, and the space after it where his name should be. He hangs his head, resting it against the stone.

“She save someone you know too?” A voice asks behind him.

Bucky stands quickly, reflexes never having calmed from the War. “Huh?”

It's a man in his mid fifties, if Bucky had to guess. His hair is starting to turn grey. “Sergeant Rogers. Back when she was Nurse Rogers. She saved a lot of people, not just when she went to get those guys from Azzano. My dad included. Granted, I wasn't born yet, but he's still my dad.” The man takes off his sunglasses. “I'm Stephen Masters. Yeah, named me after her.”

“I'm James Howl,” Bucky lies quickly. “She was, she was good friends with my grandmother.”

They shake hands. “She was a real good lady,” Steven says. “I'm glad that her story finally got out in full. My girls were young when the documents got declassified, so they adored her. Mia still wears blue coats, says it gives her courage.”

Bucky has no idea what he's talking about, figures he can look it up when he gets back to the hotel.

“My dad would take a trip here every year to say thanks, but he couldn't make it this year, so here I am.” Steven looks at Bucky like he's expecting an answer.

“Well, I'll leave you to that, then.” Bucky raises a hand as a goodbye, and makes a hasty tactical retreat.

He collapses on the nearest bench, pulls his sunglasses off, presses his palms to his eyes, and lets himself do what he's wanted to since they told him the truth about waking up.

He cries.

It's gross and ugly with great hiccupsing gasping sobs and it doesn't make him feel any better but now that he's started he can't stop. She's screaming in his head, never fading like it had in real life.

“Hey,” a high voice says near him. The bench creaks as they sit down. “You okay?”
Bucky lets out a harsh laugh. “Does it look like I'm okay?”

“Who did you lose?” The voice asks gently.

“My wife,” Bucky sobs, breaking down and shaking again. “Oh, lord. She was my wife.”

“Oh, I'm so sorry. I...I lost my dad a few years ago. I wish I could tell you it gets better, but…”

“But it doesn't,” Bucky finishes. He wipes his face on his sleeve, and looks up at this new person.

“I'm Samira.” She's dressed for the opposite of the weather, in a long black dress with long sleeves, her head wrapped in a scarf.

“James.” He nods his head at her.

“How long ago?”

*About 70 years for you all.* “About four months. KIA.”

“My dad, too. KIA.”

They sit there in silence for a long while, watching people pass by. Bucky is still sniffling, tears rolling down his face, but he's not openly sobbing anymore.

“Would you want to tell me about her?” Samira asks, offering him a small pack of tissues.

He takes one, smiling at her. “She was twenty-two. Long blonde hair, and the most beautiful laugh. Eyes bluer than the sea, but with a ring of green around the iris. She'd always dance with me, even though she wasn't a huge fan. Knew how to cuss in sixteen languages. Everybody thought she wouldn't make it past ten, but she kept going by just being too stubborn to quit. Her Ma died before we got married. She didn't have anyone else, and my family loved her.”

“And your family?” Samira prompts.

“Died after we got married.”

“So, I guess you're alone now.”

“Yeah. I'm...I'm not used to there being an empty bed.” It's the truth. He wakes up cold, and reaches over to the empty space to grab her, and feels even colder.

“I understand what you mean. My sister, Rida, was too young to understand what had happened. She'd always ask when Papa was coming home. The day she stopped asking almost hurt more than the day we heard.”

“I keep expecting her to just be there, but she never is.” He makes his own coffee in the morning, now. He's not used to it. It had been part of their deal; he cooks, she makes the coffee. She washes, he dries. Give and take.

“You turn to ask them for something, but they aren't there. I'm really sorry this happened to you, James.”

“It's not your fault, Samira,” he says, genuinely. “Thank you for stopping to talk with me.”

She smiles. Her teeth aren't even and it's adorable. “If you're looking for a pick me up, they've got some ridiculous Captain America exhibit in the American History museum.”
“Where’s that? I’ve never been to DC before.”

Samira laughs, and helps him click through on his phone to a map of DC that includes the metro. “It’s right there,” she says, pointing. “I think the Captain America exhibit is on the second floor. They’ve got a bunch of memorabilia from his family and stuff. I think that there’s also some video from the Howling Commandos.”

“I’ll,” Bucky swallows. “I’ll have to check that out, then.”

“Did you hear about the Captain America in New York? Hearing about aliens was weird enough, but they got some poor guy to put on a suit and pretend to be James Barnes. He could have died.”

Bucky glances to make sure no one else is around, before pulling his baseball cap off. “What makes you think the guy was pretending?”

“Oh my gosh!” Samira yells. “You're...you're…”

“Some poor guy who put on a suit.” He gives her a smile, the type they used to print on posters. “Serum wasn't a lie. Apparently it'll take more than crashing a plane with explosives into the ocean to stop me.”

Samira’s eyes are flitting across his face. “Holy cow. You're him. You're Captain Ameri-” She stops abruptly, glancing down at Bucky's hands where they're clasped in front of him. He's wearing a ring he bought as a wedding ring, cause leaving it bare felt too off, and his real one was around the chain with his dog tags on Stevie’s neck. He still has hers, hanging around his neck. “Your wife. Sergeant Rogers, right.”

“So people knew we were married?”

“Yeah. But that's only in the more recent books. Didn't even know she existed for real as a Commando until the 90’s when all the documents were declassified.”

Bucky sits up. “Wait, what? How did - she was the one really running - I mean I was the captain but everyone knew who was actually - how the fuck, sorry, how in the world did people not-?”

“Her form said Stevie Rogers, for the army anyway. People thought that meant she was a boy for a while, but then Stephanie Rogers has all the same information on her sign up for the Nurse’s Corps, and, well, two and two make four.”

“Shit.” Bucky says. “So people just…? But she was….”

“Yeah, I know. First official combat approved female sergeant in the US army. One of only two women to ever receive the Medal of Honor. Once it got out that she was a girl, suddenly there were all these books about her. I wrote a paper about her in high school.”

Bucky hunches back over. He's crying again. “She did so fucking much, and people didn't even know she was real? For all those years?”

“A lot of people were angry about it, on both sides.”

“Both sides?”

“The ‘we had a woman in the army this whole time and we didn’t get to know’ crowd, versus the ‘hi, I’m just a huge misogynist, women don't belong on the battlefield’ crowd.”
"Oh."

"Yeah."

The silence is a little awkward, but he doesn't care.

"I should probably head out," he says, standing. "Am a little interested in that exhibit. Wanna know what those bastards had to say about me when they thought I was dead."

"They're all still alive," Samira says, standing with him. She's quite short. "If you, you know. Didn't know."

Relief and guilt wash over him in equal measure. "I...I didn't. Thanks. They, uh, they gave me their files, but I, I couldn't-"

"Schrodinger's Cat," Samira says seriously.

"What?"

"He put a cat in a box for a few days, and said that until he opened the box the cat was both dead and alive. If you didn't open the files, you could pretend whatever you wanted. If they were dead, you could pretend they were alive because you didn't have proof towards the contrary."

Bucky puts his sunglasses and cap back on, scratching at his chin. He hasn't shaved in awhile, and his stubble grows quick. He just can't summon the will to do it. Maybe he'll just grow it out. "I can walk you out, if you'd like."

"Actually," Samira starts, cautiously. "I'm supposed to be meeting some of my friends at the entrance, and I was going to show them the American History museum. I totally understand if you don't, but if you wanted, I don't know, moral support, or company, or just a tour guide, we're going there anyway, and they're really nonjudgmental. You could come with us."

Bucky smiles. "That's real nice of you, Samira. If it's okay with your friends, I'd love to accompany you."

Samira snorts. "You sound like my grandfather."

"Probably the same age as your grandfather." Bucky shrugs.

"No, if you don't count the years in the ice, you're closer to my age. We'll have you figuring out memes in no time."

"Memes?"

Samira laughs. "Don't worry, James. I'll do my level best to keep Allie from eating you alive."

"It's Bucky, actually. Nobody calls me James unless they're pissed at me or my mother or both, and my mother is dead, so."

"Bucky," Samira says, smiling. "That's certainly a unique name."

"Stephanie had a terrible lisp for the longest time and couldn't get James out of her mouth in anyway that sounded even remotely similar," Bucky explains, keeping a respectful distance as they walk towards the exit, "and Buchanan is a dumb thing to call a six year old, so she called me Bucky, and it, well. It kinda snowballed from there."
Samira laughs. “That's not in any history books.”

“Yes, cause I threatened to kick anyone's ass if they brought it up. Rule one: yes, I'm called Bucky, no you can't question it.”

“You know,” Samira says. “For a national icon, you're really likeable.”

“You shoulda seen me back in the day,” he jokes. “Charmed the pants of half the SSR. Figuratively. I'm not some asshole who cheats on his wife.”

“So you and Peggy Carter weren't ever-”

“Hell no. Peggy was my type, absolutely. But it was never me she was interested in, if you catch my drift.”

“So she and…”

“Yeah, not that Steph noticed. She was notoriously bad at noticing when people were in love with her.” He tries not to let the guilt, regret, and bitterness seep into his voice, but it's there.

“Holy cow,” Samira says, her voice soft. “She...Stephanie never knew? That you?”

“That I'm so deeply in love with her it feels like I've lost all my limbs with her gone? That I've wanted to kiss her since I was nine? That knowing I could go home to her got me through a lot of bad days? That calling her Mrs. Barnes made me smile even when I was so tired I could barely move?” Bucky can feel the tears welling back up. He lets out a bitter laugh. “That everyday I wake up and think it should have been me? Yeah. Stevie never knew any of that.”

He glances over at Samira, and she looks so concerned, like she's gonna cry.

“I'm so sorry, Bucky. No one should have to go through that.”

“Yeah,” Bucky agrees. “It fucking sucks.”

“Samira!” A loud voice calls. “There you are, girl!”

Samira’s cheeks flush. “Allie.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow. “I take it you're familiar with the ‘being in love with my best friend’ schtick?”

Samira swallows, nodding a little.

A pretty ginger girl jogs over, ahead of the other two girls with her.

“Who's this?” She asks after squealing Samira’s name excitedly and hugging her tightly.

“Someone I was hoping could accompany us on our adventure today. He's never been to DC before, and he could use a hand.”

“Oh. Okay. I'm Allie,” she says, moving slightly between Bucky and Samira.

Bucky smiles, pulling off his sunglasses. “James Barnes, ma’am.”

“Holy shit!” Allie yells. “No fucking way.”
“Yeah. Turns out that an ice coma is a thing that can happen if you're a super soldier.”


“I know!”

“You met James fucking Barnes. You're talking about hanging out with James fucking Barnes.”

“Middle name’s Buchanan actually,” Bucky adds. “Not fucking.”

“I'm meeting James Barnes and he's fucking teasing me.” She grabs Samira by the shoulders. “I'm dead. I've died. Are we in heaven right now?”

“No, Allie. Still on earth.”

“Couldn't possibly be,” Allie says, bopping Samira’s nose. “You're way too cute for this world.”

Samira turns bright red, and Bucky smiles.

The other two girls come over, similarly freak out, insist on pulling up an image of him from the war on the internet, and then, finally, introduce themselves.

Takisha has kinky black hair, half of it pulled into a bun at the top of her head, a sprinkle of freckles across her nose, and deep, deep brown eyes. She's dressed what Bucky guesses is fashionably these days.

Hanna looks like her complete opposite, with stick straight brown hair and pale grey eyes. She's wearing a floor length blue dress.

They look real nice. Bucky tells them so.

Hanna levels a hard look at him. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that you look nice, is all. The blue is a good color on you.”

“Hanna,” Samira says, “he's not trying to flirt or be an asshole. I think he just actually thinks you look nice.”

“It is a nice color on you, Han,” Takisha says.

“Plus,” Bucky adds, because he figures he might as well get all his cards on the table at once, “I’m still pretty deeply in love with my wife.”

“Your wife?” Takisha asks. “Stephanie! Right.”

“Yeah.” Bucky puts his sunglasses back on and shoves his hands into his pockets. “Stephanie. She died about four months ago. To me, anyway.”

“I'm sorry,” Allie says.

“Thanks.”

“That's so cute! I mean we knew you were married, but you guys were married!”

“Not that it meant that much to her. I think she only ever saw her as her friend, but that was enough for me.”
“No!” Allie says. “No no no no! I was obsessed with you two in ninth grade! You guys were in love!”

“Well,” Bucky offers. “You were half right.”

Takisha puts her hand gently on his arm. “I'm so sorry that happened, James.”

Bucky gives her a smile. “Thanks. And I go by Bucky, actually.” He turns to the other girls. “Now, I believe that you ladies were offered a tour of the American History museum. And it was mentioned to me that there's a Captain America exhibit there. As it happens, I'm a bit of an expert on the guy, so I think I'm the most qualified person alive to make snide commentary on it, if any of you are interested.”

“I don't know,” Takisha says, playing along with his game. “Are you funny?”

“That depends on who you ask.”

“I'm asking you.”

“Then hell yeah, I'm fuckin’ hilarious.”

******

...cold.

Chapter End Notes

Also John 15:13 is "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends."
Not a victory march

Chapter Summary

A trip the the museum isn't as much fun as some people might like.

Chapter Notes

did somebody ask for EXPOSITIONS and BACKSTORY????

They take the subway again.

Hanna and Samira take seats, but the train is crowded, so Bucky, Allie, and Takisha stand. Hanging on to a bar on the ceiling, surrounded by people, feels eerily familiar.

Some tourist - if the ‘I heart DC’ shirt and camera around his neck are any clue - starts talking to Allie, asking stupid questions.

She's obviously uncomfortable. “Seriously, dude. Literally any guidebook will serve you better.”

“But no guidebook has tits like yours.”

“Okay that's it. Leave me alone.”

“But-”

“Didn't you hear the lady?” Bucky says, his voice still low and gravely from crying. “She said to leave her alone.”

The guy scoffs. “Well when she's dressed like that-”

“You’re not wearing a helmet, it okay if I bash your head into a wall? Cause lemme just say, pal, it's tempting.”

“Or I'll just do it myself,” Allie says.

“Ugh, fine. Bitch.”

“Asshole.”

The guy gets off at the next stop, and Allie sits down on Hanna’s lap. “Thanks, Bucky.”

“I know you can take care of yourself, but-”

“No, it's okay. Thanks.”

Bucky smiles at her, and she blushes. Hanna wraps her arms around Allie’s waist. Samira carefully takes her hand.
Takisha bumps her elbow against Bucky's. “You know, I'm still kind of expecting you to be an asshole by our standards. You know, being from the thirties and forties and all.”

“No, I understand. I'm probably going to get some stuff wrong, and I wanna apologize in advance. If you feel the need to correct me, go right ahead.”

Takisha smiles at him. “You're not so bad, Barnes. Here, give me your phone.” He hands it over and she types for a moment before handing it back to him. “In case you get lost. I put all our numbers in and started a group chat.”

“What’d you call it, Kisha?” Hanna asks.

“Average-ers Assemble.”

Bucky laughs, feeling lighter than he has in a while. He'd missed this type of easy, friendly banter.

Allie pulls her phone out of her back pocket. “I'm totally putting you in as Captain Nerdface, Bucky.”

Bucky snorts. “I'll come up with an equally scathing nickname in time, I'm sure.”

Samira drops her phone back in her purse. “You’re just Bucky in mine.”

“You see?” Bucky says, bracing his feet as the car pulls into the next station. “This is why Samira is my favorite.”

Samira smiles at him as they all file off the train and then up the stairs.

“So this is the National Mall,” Hanna explains. “Not sure why it's called that, but it's a lot of grass, and there's food trucks if you're hungry.”

“Are any of you?”

The girls shake their heads. “We always eat before we meet up,” Samira explains.

“So, American History Museum?” Bucky offers, putting his sunglasses back on.

“Bucky, can I ask a weird question?” Allie says, falling into step next to him.

“Yeah, sure.”

“Did anyone ever teach you how to dress in this century? Because you are pulling this look off very well, but you do look a little Grandpa-Chic.”

“Uh...no? I kinda just...went with what I knew. I'm open to more options.”

“Girls, hear that? We get to teach this man how to dress himself!”

Hanna snorts. “Don't worry, Bucky. Samira and I will make sure that Allie and Takisha don't go too crazy runway on you. They're very fashion forward.”

“Hell yeah we are,” Takisha says, high-fiving Allie.

They stand in line at the entrance of the museum, the sun not too oppressively hot. “Thanks for letting me tag along with you guys today,” Bucky says, looking up at them from his lower step. “I...don't really want to be alone right now.”
“No problem,” Hanna says quickly.

“Samira was the same way when her father died,” Takisha whispers in him ear.

He drops the contents of his pockets, sunglasses, and hat into the little box, ducking his head as he walks through the metal detector. It turns green, and he gathers his belongings as he waits for the girls.

They don't bother with a museum map - Hanna apparently has this place memorized - and they herd him towards the Captain America exhibit.

The very first thing that he sees is a wall covered in his own face, superimposed over an American flag. He's saluting and wearing that damn helmet.

“You know I've always fucking hated that thing,” he tells the girls in an undertone. Allie giggles.

There's a little introductory film, and they crowd in to the back of the room to watch. The exhibit is fairly new, so it's a little crowded.

“A symbol to the nation. A hero to the world. The story of Captain America is one of honor, bravery and sacrifice. Born March eighteenth, 1920, James Buchanan Barnes became an American beacon of hope, a representation of light shining in the darkness,” a voiceover starts, talking over a picture of him saluting.

Bucky snorts.

“At age four, his family moved from Romania through Ellis Island to live in Brooklyn, New York, where he met his future wife, Stephanie Rogers. Best friends since childhood, Barnes and Rogers were inseparable on both the schoolyard and battlefield, marrying shortly after the death of Rogers’s mother, when the pair were both just 18.”

Bucky clenches his teeth when the few pictures of Stephanie they have fade in and out of the screen. His jaw creaks and his vision blurs when their wedding photo shows up. Black and white, both of them in their Sunday best, Bucky has his arm around her waist. She's holding a small bouquet of flowers. The Bucky in the photograph is smiling widely, one corner of Stephanie's mouth pulled up to match.

He feels a hand on his - he hadn't realized that he had made them into fists - and Takisha squeezes his forearm.

“We can move on if you want.”

He shakes his head, but hesitantly takes her hand. She squeezes it again.

“After Pearl Harbor, Barnes enlisted in the United States Army-”

“Bullshit,” Bucky spits. “I was drafted.”

Takisha, who is closest to him, gasps. “What?!”

“Yeah.”

“- and selected for the Super Soldier program with Doctor Erskine. While he was in basic training, his wife Stephanie enlisted in the Nurses Corps, and after passing her exams, shipped off the the Western Front.”
“After she fucking lied on her form and to me,” Bucky interrupts again, rolling his eyes.

“After being selected for the Super Soldier Serum, Barnes spent time helping raise money for war bonds, before being shipped off to Europe to help fight against the Axis Powers.”

“After I wiggled myself out of being a dancing monkey,” Bucky whispers into Takisha’s ear. She snorts.

“When Barnes bravely sacrificed himself along with a large portion of the 107th division, Stephanie disobeyed direct orders and went behind enemy lines to save them, with the help of Peggy Carter and Howard Stark.”

“Well they got that part right. Not the bravely, the disobedience part.”

“-Saved over 1,000 captive men. After Rogers was discharged from the Nurses Corps and offered a position in the US army, several of these men would go on to join Barnes and Rogers in forming the elite group known as the Howling Commandos.”

“Elite group of fucking morons. We all had more nerve than sense.”

“-completed over 107 missions for the SSR, before Rogers tragically fell to her death off of a train car in the Alps on January 3rd, 1945. Three months later, on March 27th, 1945, Captain Barnes joined her, crashing a plane filled with bombs into the Arctic Ocean, sacrificing himself to save thousands of lives. Sadly, neither of them ever lived to see the end of the war, but it is doubtless that without their efforts, it would not have ended so soon.”

The credits roll. Bucky swallows back his tears and he and the girls walk out of the room.

“You okay, Barnes?” Allie asks, placing a hand on his shoulder. “Do you need a hug?”

“I'm alright,” Bucky replies. “A little overwhelmed.”

Takisha hasn't let go of his arm, and he turns to smile at her, a solid grounding point keeping him in the present.

“Let's keep moving,” he insists, moving his arm so that Takisha can hold it more comfortably.

Samira levels him with a worried look. “You'll tell us if it gets too much, right?”

“Captain’s honor,” he jokes.

“So,” Hanna starts, “I find that with exhibits like this - where you already know the history and all - it’s best to work backwards when they're crowded. Does that work?”

When the rest of the group agrees, Hanna smiles and leads them forward.

The last exhibit is a transcript of his and Peggy’s last call. A video accompanies it, of Peggy talking about both himself and Stephanie.

“Pegs,” he breathes.

“Sergeant Rogers was the greatest woman I have ever had the privilege of knowing. She had a way of endearing herself to almost everyone she ever met. She was brilliant, truly. James would have been the first to tell you that she was the brains behind the operation. A strategic genius. When she died…” on the video, Peggy looks down at her twisted hands. “When she died, it destroyed him. I… I found him in a bombed-out pub, drinking everything he could get his hands on. Of course,
because of the Serum, he could not become intoxicated.” She swallows hard. “He said something, and I don't think I'll ever forget it. He said, ‘I read once that without the moon the earth would go out of orbit and plummet into the sun. Who knows if that's true though. Not me, but that's about how it feels right now. I'm about to plummet into the sun.’ I'm about to plummet into the sun.” The video cuts as the interviewer asks a question. “No, no. I don't think he believed her life revolved around him. I think he meant more that she had been with him for as long as he could remember, and that she was his beacon in the darkness. A love like that...it doesn't happen very often. I tried to tell him that she wouldn't want him moping around, but…” Peggy wipes delicately under her eye and clears her throat. “I'm sorry, it's just. They were my dearest friends. It's still hard to think that they're gone. That so much light in the world can extinguish so quickly. I think that is the closest I ever came to giving up hope; during that last conversation with James. Not that I did, mind. But it was close.”

The video cuts again.

“I've never understood those rumors. If people had seen them together they would know. It's like she was the only thing that mattered in whatever room she was in to him. No, there was never any romance between me and Captain Barnes.”

Takisha wraps her arms tightly around his waist, and Bucky notices he's shaking. Samira presses her pack of tissues into his hands.

“Peggy was...is. Peggy Carter is one of the best people I’ve ever known.”

Around the rest of the last part of the exhibit, there are various shots of pictures of the Valkyrie, as well as a picture of Schmidt. Bucky swallows back the bile that rises in his throat.

They move on.

The next section of the exhibit is focused on the Commandos. What catches his eye first is the display of all their ‘uniforms,’ though they are that in only the loosest form of the word.

“You know, I still love that damn coat,” Hanna says.

“It was hard for her to put on when it was cold,” Bucky says. “With all the buttons and everything. I had to help her sometimes. I was the only person she ever let help her.”

He remembers hot summers and cold winters and hacking coughs and scraped knees and bleeding knuckles and sprained ankles and back alley fights and not enough blankets and greasy hair and burnt dinners and he longs.

“Best friends since childhood, Bucky Barnes and Stephanie Rogers were inseparable on both schoolyard and battlefield. Rogers is the only Howling Commando to give her life in service of her country.”

Bucky gasps, feeling like he's been punched in the gut, as a voiceover cuts into his ears. He turns.

A glass memorial dominates the center of the room. Stephanie's face is embossed into it, squinting off to something in the distance, while the wind plays with the wisps of hair that have escaped her braid. There are words over it but Bucky's vision is too blurry to read them.

On the memorial there is a small screen playing a silent video on loop.

Steph and Bucky are standing together, looking intently at something ahead of them, before Stephanie turns ever so slightly towards him and mutters something out of the corner of her mouth.
Bucky snorts, stomach tensing as he tries not to laugh. She says something else. Bucky laughs this time, throwing his head back and putting a hand on his stomach. Stephanie smirks, before catching his eye and smiling brighter than the sun.

“I love you,” he whispers to the video.

Takisha gives him another squeeze.

Samira gestures towards a side room. “You said you wanted to know what they thought when you were dead. Now’s your chance!”

He lets the girls heard him into another room, set off from the rest.

It's more like a tunnel really, with one room, and then another off of it, and then another, and so on. On the outside of the first room there is a sign that reads “Selections from the Howling Commando testimonies; approximately 37 minutes.”

Dugan is first. There's hardly anyone else here, so he sits down, and the girls crowd around him on both sides.

A title card proclaiming “Corporal Timothy ‘Dum Dum’ Dugan, Transportation Specialist” fills the screen. “Warning: discussions of graphic content” follows.

He looks older than Bucky remembers, of course. His hair is greying around the temples, though his mustache is still bright orange. He has wrinkles around his eyes.

“I was already in the army when the war started. I'm big and strong, so they let me join, and it was a mostly easy paycheck. When I first met Cap, I thought he was some stupid schmuck with a shield. I hold to that assessment. I love the guy, but that getup was one of the stupidest things I've ever seen. When we got captured, I thought that was the end. All I can remember of those first few days was trying to remember the contents of the last set of letters I had sent. Then one day, we heard a sound like a body crumpling to the floor. Cause it was. One of the guards above us was dead, and I remember cause his blood was dripping into our cell. Looked up, and here's some tiny little lady in a mismatched uniform that was too big for her by far. I asked her, ‘Who the hell are you?’ And she goes, ‘Stephanie Rogers, Nurse’s Corps. I'm here to save your asses.’”

Dugan laughs. “One of the other guys in my cell, name of Gibbons, said, ‘you're seeing this too, right?’ Then she was down with us and letting us out. Barely came up to my chest, but she had blood on her clothes and face and hands. Now, I'm Irish. Like recognizes like. The scowl she had. Part of me liked her right away. ‘So when's the battalion coming in?’ I asked. ‘I am the battalion,’ she says. ‘No one else was gonna come so we're getting ourselves out.’ Tossed me the keys. ‘I'm looking for Captain James Barnes,’ she says. I asked whether she meant Mr. America, and told her that Zola had gotten him. I asked her if she had any idea what she was doing. She said, ‘mostly.’ She clenched her jaw, directed us to the exit, and went to find him.”

Dugan smiles, a little fondly. “After, she pulls us all off to a specific tree, pulls out a medpack big as she is, and works straight through the night patching guys up while we took turns keeping watch. Now, Mortia had a bit of medical know-how, so he helped with the more basic stuff. Me? I zonked out. Or I tried too. I was nearby, and I heard Barnes walk up in between patients. I...his voice. He'd talked once or twice, with us, when we would let him - we thought he was a bit of a muscled brainless moron and avoided him - anyway, he told us about his girl at home. Stevie, he called her. Said she had a filthier mouth than all of us combined, her hair would never sit how she wanted, and that at some point her face had frozen into a determined scowl. That his girl would fight damn near anyone if she thought it was the right thing to do. Now I know he wasn't lying.”
Dugan shifts in his seat. “So he walks over to her, and he says, ‘Stevie, girl, whaddaya think you're doin’ here, doll?’ And she goes, ‘like I said, I knew you took all the stupid with you. You honestly think you could survive without me for more than five damn days, Barnes? Please. Savin’ your ass is what I'm doing here. Told you. End of the line.’ I didn't see, but I think he kissed her. Anyway, so we get back to camp. She marches right up to Phillips and says, ‘I’d like to submit myself for disciplinary actions.’ At this point the whole damn unit is ready to deify her. He takes her into a tent, and she walks out with a stunned expression. Barnes rushes right over. Next thing we know, we got us a new Sergeant. Then we're in this bar, and she comes over and says Cap is forming a squad. We all knew it was her. Not to discount all that Buck did, cause it was a helluva lot. Damn good man he was, and I woulda followed him anyway. But part of us always knew that Rogers was the one who formed us up. Rogers was always watching, you know? Impossible to slip a damn thing past her. She tricked some guy into playing chess with her once and she wiped the floor with him. Anyway, there we are, only condition is that Cap opened a tab. She and Barnes sat at the bar for a while, and talked with Carter, and then we were a team.”

Bucky inhales through his nose as the screen fades to black, an advertisement to get the full interview at the gift shop. He'd forgotten about that conversation in the woods.

He hadn't kissed her, actually. He'd just buried his head in her neck and sobbed as lightly as he could - fear, relief, grief, even now he wasn't sure. Or well, he had kissed her, just pressed his lips to the skin he could reach on her neck and cheek.

She had looked like an angel when she pulled him up from that table. Small and fierce and unfucking-stoppable.

“She's the reason I kept that fucking outfit,” he tells the girls as they move to the next room, his arms around them. “She said it was growing on her.”

“She sounds fun,” Hanna says.

“Yeah,” he responds lamely.

They sit back down.

“Corporal Jacques ‘Frenchie’ Denier, Demolitions Specialist.”

“Bonjour,” Denier starts. “I did what I told that BLEEP that I would never do and I learned some BLEEP English.”

Bucky snorts. French hadn't come easy to him, and he'd asked Denier to try and meet him halfway, if only to stop him, Gabe, and Stevie from snickering behind his back.

He looks good, for having been the oldest Commando. Apparently these were filmed by them all in the 50s, just so that they would have them forever, even though Stephanie’s existence had been classified.

“She, that son of a BLEEP. So, the Commandos? Oui, after we were rescued by la meilleure femme and she wrangled us into a team, we started going on our missions. Barnes and Rogers together, now there was one BLEEP of a team. Those two BLEEP could have taken Schmidt - that BEEP - down themselves if they had been allowed. Barnes planned preliminary, Rogers handled field planning. A little insulting to some I suppose it would be, to listen to a person ranked below themself, but we knew better. No better person for the job. Barnes would have been the first person to say that she was as much Captain America as he was.”
“Damn right,” Bucky says.

“She was more accurate with that frisbee of his than he was sometimes. Not as strong, of course. Back on base, one could see how it ate at her, that everyone lauded Barnes and gave her not one look. Not that I think she wanted any fame, she wanted to do what was right. But - what was it she said, Jones? - but she disliked the, ‘implication that she was there to look pretty.’ As if she would distract the Nazis with her girlish figure.” Denier snorted. “Between her and Agent Carter I think they could have ruled the world. But she and Barnes were a BEEP of a good team. He inspired loyalty, and she inspired bravery. More nerve than sense, that girl had.”

Someone says something off camera.

Denier lets out a string of French, but Bucky recognizes his cussing face.

“Of course not! I would have followed that woman into hell! Our girl,” he said fondly. “In any event, she and Barnes were, how you say, a…dream team! I knew hanging around Dugan would rub off eventually. It took a few missions to convince the higher ups that we were a good team - BEEP, took ourselves a few missions to be convinced we were a good team. But we got on. Vivent les Commandos, mother BEEP!”

He laughs as the screen goes dark, the same advertisement from before showing.

Bucky scrubs his sleeve under his eye discreetly.

They sit down in the next room and Allie squishes herself next to him, wrapping her arms tightly around him.

“We're here for you, Bucky.”

He feels his throat tighten a little. He misses his sisters. He lets Allie rest her head on his shoulder and the video begins.

“Lieutenant James Montgomery ‘Monty’ Falsworth, Tactics Specialist.”

“So. We're supposed to more or less be doing these chronologically. They asked me to do this one because stiff upper lip and all that.” His accent is just as strong as ever, and he looks very distinguished, his hair only showing the slightest signs of age around the temples.

“So. The capture.”

Bucky stiffens. The room goes a bit fuzzy around the edges as his lungs won't fill and his eyes lock on Falsworth.

“We were helping some refugees, as it happened. Hydra goons were right on our tail, and we're not sure we're making it this time. I look over at Rogers, and she's got her jaw set, and I could almost smell trouble. She barked something to Jones and Denier in French and that's when I knew that she was about to do something absolutely bloody insane. She turns to Barnes, says, 'get everyone somewhere safe, I'll catch up,' and turns tail, running off east - we were going north - and firing her gun at things, making a lot of noise, causing a real ruckus. A distraction. Bloody moron. In her mind she was the least valuable member of the team - I'm not making this up, mind you, she said this to me once - and she had no one to go home to, so if anyone was to make the sacrifice play, it might as well be her.”

“She had me,” Bucky all but sobs. Hanna takes his hand in hers, and Allie rubs a hand up and down his back. His own body feels a thousand degrees removed from his mind.
“So we all but drag Cap back to base, and we all wait on pins and needles waiting for Sarge to come back. Should be a few hours. We waited three days. No sign of her. At this point, Barnes is getting antsy. Tells Philips that if he doesn't let him lead a rescue mission, Barnes is deserting. Every single one of us said we’d follow him. Of course, they can't have Captain America deserting the US army in war time. So we - a group of men who liked nothing more than a quick and simple blow up and burn job - had to go through a series of stealth missions through other known Hydra bases to try and find Rogers. Took us a month and three different bases, but we got the right one eventually. Good thing too. Cap wouldn’t sleep, barely ate. He was a right mess. That's when I knew. It didn't matter if he survived this war, there was no going home for him without her. That's why when he - well, that's someone else's job to tell you. In any event, we reach the base and sneak inside. We split off, three and three; Cap, Jones, and myself and then Dugan, Denier, and Mortia. My group found her. She was...I suppose this will be displayed in a museum or some such, so I will try to keep this as...non-graphic as possible. There was a table. She was strapped to it. There were medical utensils on a table nearby, I didn't look too closely. Her coat - that wonderful blue coat we had all chipped in together and gotten her, she was always cold, poor thing - her coat was tossed in the corner, and I grabbed it for her. And I remembered...she had teared up when we gave it to her. Said it was the best damn thing she'd ever been given. Expected Barnes to be pissed with that but he just thanked us. I don't think she ever had a nice, sturdy coat before. And there it was, crumpled on the floor. Her shirt was in tatters, her veins standing out starkly against her skin. To...put it shortly, she looked like fresh hell.”

Bucky can’t remember all of that. The only thing he could focus on at the time was Stevie. She'd looked even worse than Falsworth had described. For one terrible moment, Bucky had been sure she was dead.

Falsy was right though. She'd never had a nice coat.

“She must have heard the door open, because she didn't even open her eyes, but she said, ‘back so soon? And here I thought you had a strict schedule.’ Barnes walked right up and caressed her face. Said, ‘nah, doll, we're here to save your ass.’ Rather certain she started crying. We got her up and she couldn't walk, so Barnes sweeps her right up in his arms bridal style and we burned the damn place right down. Got back to base, and she felt better. We stalled any and all missions for a month, because no way in hell were the Commandos going out if we didn't have our fearless leader. Barnes’s words, actually. But there's that. Capture, saved. Done.”

The screen goes black. The advertisement plays.

Bucky remembers most vividly the things Falsworth left out. How, after a few days of getting enough food in her system - and it had been a lot of food, more than Bucky could ever remember her eating before in a day, let alone one sitting - she had shot right up, so there height difference was what it had been before Bucky himself had shot up. She'd filled out too, not curves, but solid muscle. She flung the shield once and it had stuck in a tree. No one had said anything. No one wanted to think about what that might mean. Stephanie certainly hadn't been forthcoming when discussing it.

Bucky’s brain returned to him just in time to catch the words, “the boxed set includes Gabriel Jones’s continued version of this story.”

He is aware of himself that he knows to ask the girls for a minute.

After all, it's only going to get worse from here.

*****
....dark.
Cold and broken

“We don't have to go back in if you don't want to, Bucky,” Samira insists. “We can go catch a movie or something. Or visit the Natural History Museum.”

“I'm okay,” Bucky insists.

“Really?” Hanna says. “You're crying.”

Is he? He is. He scrubs a hand under his eyes. “I do want to see it. It's just hard.”

The girls share a look.

“If you guys want to go I understand,” he says. “I've kind of ruined your day.”

Allie rolls her eyes, Hanna scoffs, Takisha snorts, and Samira quirks an eyebrow.

“You can't get rid of us that easily, Barnes,” Hanna says.

“We're friends now,” Allie agrees. “If you want to watch it, we'll watch it with you.”

“And you didn't ruin our day. Day's not over yet.” Samira puts the tissues back in her purse.

“Then, I guess let's get back.” Bucky awkwardly lets his hands hang at his sides. Takisha smirks, and pulls one into her own.

“Private Gabriel Jones, Communications Specialist.”

He barely looks like he'd aged a day.

Allie nudges him. “Hanna had a huge crush on him in middle school.”

“ Fuck off,” Hanna hisses in reply.

“I'm the only one who can talk about this one because I was the only one there. Sorry to say it only gets worse from here, personally. War-wise, things had never been better. Taking down Hydra intel, killing some Nazis. Then we get news; Arnim Zola, Schmidt’s right hand man, was on a train going through the Alps. If we could capture him and get him to talk, this damn thing could end sooner rather than later. So we get on the train - Sarge, Cap, and I - and Barnes goes, ‘Stevie, if we get out of this, remind me to ask you to marry me.’”

Gabe smiles sadly. “And she shoots back, ‘you already have, jerk, and I already said yes.’ And he says, ‘for real this time though.’ She unholsters her gun and says, ‘let me think it over.’ Then we were in the train. The plan was that they would take out the guards in the back cars of the train, and I would grab Zola in the front. I did that, and then worked my way back to them.”

Gabe inhales shakily, then swallows. “Well, I found Cap. He was hanging out the side of the train car. Clutching the thing. Didn't respond when I called to him. Had to drag him back in myself.” He sniffs loudly, swiping a hand under his nose.

“They've got a name for it. The thousand-yard stare. Like he was so caught in his own brain he couldn't come out. I saw the broken bar. I...I could guess what he kept seeing.”

Bucky isn't aware he's shaking until Takisha stands behind him and places her hands firmly on his
shoulders. “Steady, Captain.”

He swallows and nods, placing a hand on top of hers.

“I, well, I slapped him straight across the face, actually. When he came too, more or less, he grabbed me by the collar and said, ‘I couldn't catch her. I didn't catch her.’ He kept saying that. I had to get the train into the station, so I frog-marched him into the headcar with me. I had Zola tied down in there. Barnes kept mumbling to himself. Once I got the train where it was supposed to be, and stood him up and held him as hard as I could. That's...that's when he started crying. Didn't say a word when they grabbed Zola, didn't say anything until the Howlies came in. When they saw the state Barnes was in, and the conspicuous absence of our Sergeant, they figured it out pretty quick. Group hug on Barnes. We got him composed enough to leave, eventually. Carter...she was the next one we saw. She grabbed him away from us and into a tent. Philips was in there. Told us he should get it over with as soon as he could. When he left, he just looked at us and walked away. We figured he wanted to be alone for a bit. So we had our own little memorial. Just sat there, talking about or favorite memories of her. Poured a glass for her. No one drank it. They went to try and find Barnes. Shared a drink. He couldn't get drunk, but we were able to get him to tell some stories about the two of them. Turns out she always wanted to protect the little guy. Wish I could leave you with some hopeful message. But sometimes life is just a BEEP. Once all this bull gets declassified, I’m personally starting a campaign to get Rogers her own Medal of Honor, and any other BEEP medal or ribbon that applies. She deserves them just as much as Cap or any of us. I can’t wait till the world knows about her. They’ll fall in love with our Sarge just as much as we did.”

The advertisement fills the screen. Bucky puts his head between his knees.

“I didn't remember that he had slapped me. Or them hugging me.”

Samira nods. “That's alright. Your brain doesn't want to remember it. Don't feel like you have too.”

“Trust her on this,” Allie says. “She's transferring to NYU to study psychology.”

Samira blushes. “Just take some deep breaths. In and out with me.”

Bucky matches her breathing until he feels more clear headed. “You know, I used to do that with Stevie. Asthma, ya know.”

“Me too,” Hanna adds. “Mine’s not that bad. Medicine and all that.”

“Yeah, an inhaler. Learned about those,” Bucky says. “Mrs. Rogers would have murdered a man in cold blood to get her hands on one of those.”

He stands. “Almost done. There's only Jim left.”

Allie grabs them a bench all to themselves. “So is his name actually James and he just went by Jim to avoid confusion, or was it just Jim?”

“Actually just Jim,” Bucky confirms. “Wouldn't have mattered anyway. James Falsworth went by Monty and I go by Bucky.”

“Private Jim Mortia, Medical Specialist.”

The biggest difference is that he shaved. He looks pretty fucking different.

“So Rogers is dead, Barnes doesn't give a single flying BEEP anymore, and now he's basically
leading suicide missions because of it. Can't protest on me now, Cap. Man had a death wish. Anyway, Zola sings like a bird and we find Schmidt’s evil villain lair, Cap goes in, gets himself captured on purpose, everything is going according to plan. We go in, kick their asses, and then we get news that this BEEP is on a god BEEP plane flying straight towards BEEP New York City. Did I mention that the plane was full of bombs? Cause it was. Cap, tactical genius that he was, figured out that the only way to keep it from killing millions of people was to nosedive into the ocean. All of this is I got second hand from Carter, she's the one who was on the radio with him.”

Jim grunts, shifting in the chair. “Like I told you, mother BEEP had a death wish. We could have - well, we've decided that blaming ourselves won't get us anywhere, right you bunch of BEEP? Anyway. Our Sarge dies, our Captain dies, now we're technically left under orders of Monty over there, and there's no way I'm listening to him.” He smirks, clearly joking on some level.

“Carter was at the Stork Club on Sunday. We could all guess why. A promise to a dead man. So we all went and danced with her. Even Philips, that old son of a BEEP. Damn shame Barnes couldn't have waited on the heroics a few months, otherwise he may have been able to really punch Hitler in the face.”

Jim’s eyes dart off camera. “You guys had to leave me to close. You realize I've talked the shortest? I'll tell my own story then. When we got out of Azzano, people gave me weird looks because I'm Japanese-American,” he fake coughs, “Dugan.”

“I said I was sorry!” Dugan’s voice comes from off screen.

Jim smirks. “C’mon guys, I’m from Fresno. The only one of us who's a walking parody of his country is Denier!”

A French expletive comes from behind camera.

“So she hands me half her medkit and asks kindly if I wouldn't mind helping her out. Some guys were crying, some outright whimpering. But no one wants a dame to see them cry. So she starts singing, softly, under her breath. Makes pretend like she's barely paying attention to them. All sorts of songs. Big band, jazz, swing, even some lullabies. I don't think she knew any marching songs. But something about it - the quiet lull of her voice in that clearing after being confined to each other for so long - something about it calmed you right down. We helped out a lot of refugees, and the kids loved her. She was the only one who spoke anything resembling anything they did - she was conversational in thirteen languages, cause she grew up in the immigrant part of New York, where everyone was all piled in on each other and maybe four of them spoke English - so they would all stumble along together. Barnes was fluent in Romanian, because that's where he was born, apparently. So for laughs we called him Captain Romania, and Rogers Sergeant America. Of course, once Barnes told us our girl was born on Independence Day, that sealed it. Barnes joked that they should trade jobs in front of some congress type once, and he just about choked.”

“That was the other thing,” Jim continued. “When they briefly considered letting her be in the propaganda shots, the insisted she needed to wear makeup. She said - and these are her exact words, mind you - 'I came here to kick some BEEP Nazi ass, not look pretty.’ So she didn't get to be in any of the war reels; instead she'd double back around to the rear of the camp.”

Jim looks very thoughtful. “I asked her once, why she went to all this trouble to kill Nazis. What she's said will always stick with me. ‘I don't want to kill anyone. I don't like bullies, I don't care where their from.’ According to Barnes, she used to pick fights all the time back home. No idea if she won or not, but she had a pretty mean right hook. I'd...I'd like to imagine that when she reached those pearly gates - she was Catholic, so hopefully it was heaven - St. Peter looked at his list and said welcome aboard. I think she and Joan of Arc would be friends.”
“Oui!” Denier shouts from behind camera. He was always calling Stevie that.

“I guess that makes Barnes St. George? I think he'd slay dragons. Not sure if I believe in any of that, but I hope wherever they are they can dance together. Barnes loved dancing, and Rogers pretended to hate it, but nothing made her smile like Barnes spinning her around the floor. I hope that's their heaven.”

The advertisement plays one last time. Tacked on to the end is, “includes exclusive interviews with Howard Stark, Peggy Carter, and Col. Chester Phillips.”

Bucky sighs deeply. That would have been a nice Heaven. Hopefully she won't be too mad at-

He can't think like that. He has a purpose.

He doesn't like bullies, either. Apparently they even come from fucking space now.

Bucky looks up at the screen as it plays a countdown to when it will restart. He'd meant what he said to Tony, even angry and insulted as he was.

“I know guys with none of that worth ten of you.”

Samira had said that they were all still around. He'd have to see about calling them, or something. Otherwise they might collectively track him down and kick his ass once they heard the news from anyone but him.

They all shuffle towards the exit, Bucky shoving his hands in his pockets, telegraphing that he wants to be left alone.

*******

...there's a group of men floating around in thoughts and snatches.

No idea who they are.
My best, wasn't much

Chapter Summary

This museum visit finally fucking ends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next section of the exhibit is dedicated to Stephanie and Bucky’s early life. There's a few pictures, and one of Stephanie's sketchbooks. It's opened to a drawing of Bucky smoking. On the opposite page is a sketch of her mother, smiling.

He moves through the exhibit without seeing, only talking when prompted by one of his girls. And how quickly they've endeared themselves. His girls.

He points out this or that inaccuracy, and tries to pull his mouth into a smile when they crack jokes.

That stupid fucking song plays, and all he can hear is Stephanie and the Commandos singing it to piss him off.

He wants to pay attention to the rest of the museum, he really does. They have exhibits on stuff he needs to know, let alone the cooler stuff like the sunk ship (which still smells so heavily of saltwater Bucky can taste it on his tongue), or the remains of that old flag.

His brain just won't let him come back to the present moment. All his brain is playing for him is every time Stevie smiled at him, over and over, like a movie reel. It's better than alternatives, though, so he'll take it.

Allie pulls them all into the gift shop, and after a few minutes in an environment where he is under no obligation to pay attention to anything, he starts to feel better.

There's a display dedicated to the exhibit that fucked him up so much. Because he hates himself, he buys the damn testimonials. Since it's Stark’s money, he also grabs one each of the various movies made of them, and most of the books and magazines, too. (He wants to know how awful they were.) As he waits in line, he sees the girls peel off to look at something else. He shrugs. They'll find him, and he has their numbers.

He walks up to the register, cap pulled down low.

“Hi, how are you today?” a cheerful young man says.

“I'm...okay,” Bucky replies.

“Wow, you a Cap fan? I was always a bit more of a Falsworth fan growing up.” He quickly scans all the items. His name tag says “Joey.”

“My, uh, my wife is. Big fan. Her birthday is soon,” Bucky lies. “Figured I would be husband of the year.”
He tries to force a smile to his face, but it probably doesn't look right.

Joey laughs politely, bagging everything up. “I'm sure she'll love it.”

Bucky swipes the card Tony gave him. He signs as illegibly as he can.

“Thanks. Have a nice day.”

Joey smiles. “You too, sir. Next!”

Bucky loiters outside the gift shop for a few moments before pulling out his phone.

**Bucky:** hey, I'm outside the gift shop

**Samira:** wait right there! We'll be right out!

**Bucky:** 10-4

He people watches while he waits the girls, his mind years away.

Allie walks up in front of him, a bag clutched in her right hand.

“I hope we didn't overstep.” She thrusts the bag towards him. “They were having a special, buy four get one free.”

Bucky scrunches his eyebrows, peering into the bag.

It's a set of dog tags. Modern ones.

*Stephanie G Rogers*

98765430 T42 O

*Winifred Barnes*

*C

Bucky doesn't know what to say, just stares dumbly at them.

“We googled the stuff,” Hanna explains, “so it may not be right.”

Bucky stares at her.

“If this is too much, I'm sorry.” Allie places a hand on his arm. “It was my idea.”

Bucky pulls the chain he wears from around his neck to show them.

“I appreciate it girls, but I already got a pair.”

Takisha’s jaw drops. “Shit, Barnes.”

“At some point they got mixed up and we never traded them back. I...I like having her near me.”

“And,” Allie hesitates. “The rings?”

“Her Ma’s, then hers. She had mine. They said they didn't like the idea of Captain America being married, but that was probably just because they couldn't market out his wife as a perfect American
housewife. So I couldn't wear it. I...after every mission we switched them back. Mine was something I got off a guy at my job for two dollars. Hers were her Ma’s. So we needed to keep them safe.”

“Well,” Samira says, “guess we needed to get you a pair that had your name.”

“Guys!” Hanna insists. “Those! Those are real dog tags!!! From actual World War Two!!”

Takisha places a hand on his shoulder. “She’s a bit of a history nut. I’m so sorry.”

Bucky smiles, and it feels much easier to do than it did for the cashier.

“Yeah, Hanna, they are. And no goddamn museum is getting them.”

Hanna’s eyes are shining. “Can I just...can I touch them?”

Bucky shrugs, pulling them over his head.

She holds them reverently. “This is so awesome. I'm gonna scream.”

Bucky waves his hands. “No reason to scream!”

Allie sighs. “Hyperbole is the name of the game now, Barnes. Don't worry, we'll get you on the internet eventually.”

Samira gazes over Hanna’s shoulder at the tags. “I know why, but these things almost look brand new.”

“Not for lack of trying, on Stevie’s part.” He slides them back over his head once Hanna hands them back over. “Now, why were you getting four sets in the first place?”

Hanna smiles. “My idea. We've all been friends since kindergarten, and we were going to get friendship tattoos, but Allie doesn't like needles. Friendship bracelets feel a little juvenile, but something about the tags feels kinda badass. Here,” she pulls hers out of a bag. “Take a look.”

_Hanna S Koval_

_Remember we love you STA_

_Courage, dear heart_

“Koval,” Bucky says, handing it back to her. “Mind if I-”

“It's Hebrew, yeah.”

“I thought it might be. Everyone’s say the same?”

“Yes!” Allie says, pulling her own out.

_Allison B Clover_

_Remember we love you HST_

_Courage, dear heart_

“How?” Bucky asks.
Allie slips them over her head. “Beatrice.”

Samira drops hers into Bucky’s hand.

Samira M Cham

Remember we love you AHT

Courage, dear heart

“You let us see yours,” Takisha says, handing them over.

Takisha R Jones

Remember we love you HSA

Courage, dear heart


He slips the new pair over his neck, and it falls right next to the old ones. It's an odd feeling both on and in his chest. His old life, and his new life, right next to each other, and Stephanie Rogers stamped on both.

Allie smiles widely at him. “I'm starved. Let’s get food.”

Bucky smiles at her, allowing her to lead him outside.

He offers to cover their lunches in a show of thankfulness for letting him invade their outing, and they take him up on that. Food trucks have a large variety, so Bucky goes with Takisha’s suggestion for something. Thai food, apparently. From Thailand, presumably.

They sit down on the Mall to eat. There's a group of kids playing around near them and a young couple, presumably on a date, going off how they both blush slightly when their eyes meet. Bucky smiles.

Using chopsticks is an entirely new experience, and it doesn't go well until Hanna snorts and has pity on him.

“It's like this, Bucky.” She arranges them correctly into his hand, and he thanks her.

Allie finishes her meal first, hopping up to drop her things in the trash.

She sits back down and pulls out her phone. “Selfie?”

“What's a selfie?” Bucky asks.

Allie’s eyes light up. “Ladies, we get to teach Captain America how to take selfies.”

Takisha throws her head back and laughs. It's a nice sound, and Bucky tells her so.

“Thanks, Barnes,” she says, smirking. “Now get in here.”

They all crowd together, and Allie holds her phone at arms length, before snapping a photo. She passes her phone to Bucky, letting him see.

“Holy shit, Allie. That's incredible! They made cameras that small!”
“I know!” Takisha says. “No one appreciates tech anymore! I mean they do, but not like that!”

Bucky smiles at her.

He hears the sound of a shutter snapping closed. He turns his head and sees Hanna trying to hide a smile.

“So you're a science nerd too, Barnes?” She asks. “You and Kisha are going to get along great.”

Takisha nods. “I got a full ride to Columbia University for biomechanical engineering. My mom cried when I told her. She’s so proud.”

“She's got every right to be!” Bucky exclaims. “That's really impressive. I bet you worked super hard.”

“I did,” Takisha says proudly. “Still am, honestly. I know it's going to be a lot of work, but I think it's going to be worth it.”

“So Samira is psychology, you're biomechanical engineering, what about the other two?”


Hanna brushes a lock of hair over her shoulder. “History. I wanna teach. I'm going to Queen’s College.”

“Why on god’s green earth would you voluntarily go to Queens?” Bucky says.

That sets the girls off laughing.

“It's a good school!” Hanna insists. “Plus, that way we can all be together. We found an apartment for us to all live in, two in a room.”

Bucky smiles. “Well, if you need any help moving heavy things, I'm pretty good at that.”

“Where are you living at now, Bucky?” Samira asks, adjusting the way her headscarf - a hijab, she had told him - falls over her shoulder.

“Got a small apartment in Brooklyn. It feels enormous. Right now I'm staying in a hotel that Tony recommended.”

Takisha’s eyebrows raise. “Tony Stark?”

“Yeah,” Bucky says. “I can introduce you, if you want.”

Takisha makes a face. “I don't know. On the one hand, war profiteer, on the other hand, seems to have see the error of his ways. On the second hand, one of the most famous engineers of our time.”

“Maybe I should introduce you to Pepper instead?” Bucky suggests. “She's the one running Stark Industries.”

Takisha snorts. “Maybe you should offer that to Allie.”

Allie whines, cheeks turning bright pink.

“Huh?” Bucky asks.
“I’ve got a big gay crush on Pepper Potts,” Allie says. “What a woman.”

“Is that hyperbole again?” Bucky asks, confused.

“No. I am, in fact, very into girls,” Allie says, quite imperiously.

Bucky steals a glance towards Samira.

“Anyway!” She cuts in. “It’s getting late, my mom probably wants me home soon. Walk me back to the metro?”

The group nods, wadding up their trash to throw it away.

Bucky, being a gentleman, offers to walk them all back to their respective stations, as they’re all close by but different lines.

He and Hanna are the last left together.

“Bucky…” she starts quietly. “Why...can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure. What?”

“Why, and you don't need to answer if you don't want to, but...” she looks up at him. “Why do you think Stephanie didn't love you even though she married you?”

Bucky swallows, squeezing his eyes closed. “Cause I sold it to her as a business deal. Her Ma had just died. If we got married, we could live together, and pool our resources. My family was a bit better off than she and her Ma were, anyhow, and everyone had been asking when we were getting married for ages, so it felt like the thing to do.” He snorts a little. “We had an arrangement. She’d make the coffee and do the dishes, as long as I cooked. She’d do the mending and I’d do the laundry. It's how we worked. When she was in the hospital, my folks and I could go in to see her cause she was family. We each had somebody to keep the bed warm when it got cold. I,” he stops talking for a moment as they reach the metro entrance.

He stares at his shoes.

“It's not that I don't think she loved me. She did. She didn't smile like that for just anyone, and she wouldn't have married me if she didn't at least like me. But. She didn't love me the way I love her, ya know?”

Hanna nods. “I'm sorry.”

Bucky shrugs. “Hey, nothing you could have done. And it was never her fault anyway. We did love each other, just different ways. And that's okay, we were committed to each other. People have made a marriage out of less.”

Hanna shuffles her feet. “Do you need a hug? You kinda look like you need a hug.”

“I don't want you to feel like you need to. Would you mind texting me-”

“When I get home?” She smiles as she repeats what he had asked all the other girls. “Sure, Buck. Thanks for hanging out with us today. You're pretty cool.”

“Thank you for letting me. This is...honestly, this is the most fun I've had in awhile.”

Hanna waves at him as she walks through the entrance.
Bucky walks back to his hotel alone.

********

_Takisha changed the group name to “Prettier Howling Commandos”_

_Hanna:_ I’m sorry have you seen Gabe Jones? That man was a god

_Allie:_ Marlon Brando who XD

_Bucky:_ Firstly, I agree with Hanna. You ladies are quite beautiful, but Gabriel Jones had the face of an angel. Secondly, literally Marlon Brando, who? Thirdly, Allie I thought you liked girls?

_Samira:_ Marlon Brando’s an actor. He was in Julius Caesar and The Godfather series. I think

_Allie:_ first im bi second even if I don't like boys I'm gay not blind

_Takisha changed the group name to “the almost as pretty as Gabe Jones club”

_Bucky:_ XD XD XD

_Takisha:_ who taught you emojis???

_Bucky:_ Literally the only other person I text is Tony.

_Allie changed the group name to “XD XD XD”

Chapter End Notes

can you tell that im in love with the guy who plays gabe jones (Derek Luke) also can you tell that i love my city (washington dc) with all my heart (even though driving there is a fucking nightmare and a half seriously if you ever come here just take the fucking metro it's way easier than trying to use all the damn roundabouts and the crazy angle streets and you have to pay for parking fucking everywhere and its always cramped and good lord seriously just take the damn metro) and that the unrealistic portrayal of it in CA:WS killed me a little inside ALSO also, like the girls i googled the stuff on Steve's "captain" dog tags. the only changes i made were adding Winifred Barnes as the next of kin (but i didnt give an address bc i dont know NYC well and didnt fell like making it up; there would normally be an address line for the NOK) and changing the "p" for protestant to a "C" for catholic bc of the time when her mother came over + there was a slight stigma against catholics at the time and i need to make the chip on Stephanie's shoulder as huge as i can

LAST NOTE i love all the smithsonians with my entire being, (last i check they DO make dog tags in the american history one, but i think they're expensive and it's an order and wait a while thing idk i havent checked in a while) and they are all free entry!! okay my unpaid dc tourism campaign will end for now
Faith was strong

Chapter Summary

Let's go to the mall today

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky wakes up early the next morning. He hasn't been able to shake the feeling that he has been alert at all times. His heart is racing, his fingers feel freezing cold, and his lungs feel carved open.

He stands shakily, opening his backpack and pulling out running clothes.

He shoves his hotel key into a zippered pocket and takes the stairs down two at a time.

The light spring breeze hits him in the face, and the pollen-filled air is the best breath he can remember taking.

He sets a quick, punishing pace. Doesn't let himself focus on anything other than the in-out of his breathing, the left-right of his legs, and the remembering which turns he has taken so that he can make his way back.

He makes it all the way back to the National Mall again almost without realizing. He almost runs into a teenage boy, their shoulders colliding.

“Oh, shit, sorry!” Bucky exclaims. “I wasn't looking where I was going.”

“No worries, man,” the guy says. “Me neither.”

Bucky almost moves along, but he catches the guy’s face. “Hey...are you alright?”

“I'm fine.”

“That doesn't feel like it's true, pal.”

“I, uh. Realized some not great stuff today.”

“Wanna talk?” Bucky asks, nodding toward an empty bench along the trail.

The guy hesitates. “I don't want, like, pity, or anything.”

“Well I'm a heartless asshole,” Bucky jokes, “so you won't get any.”

The guy almost smiles and starts walking towards the bench. “I'm Damien, by the way.”

“Bucky,” he says, extending his hand. “Yeah, I know. Weird name.”

Damien takes his hand.
Bucky sits down next to him, pretending he needs to catch his breath. He could have kept up that pace for another few miles before he felt anything. “So what’s wrong?”

Damien glances down at Bucky's hands. “You married?”

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.” Bucky sighs. “I don't want pity either. My wife died about four months ago.”

“Aw shit, man. Certainly makes my day seem not as bad.”

“Pain is relative,” Bucky shrugs. “I'm dealing. What about you?”

“Well, my parents were getting divorced because it turned out they were both cheating on each other, but now my mom found out that she's pregnant. To make matters worse, she's not sure who the father is; it could be my dad, or it could be the guy she's been banging. So now they're debating if they're going to stay together. This is after their marriage was falling apart because they both wanted more kids but didn't have any after me. So...everyone is pretending that everything is fine, and it's not fine.”

“That's...fuck, that's a lot.”

“Yeah.”

“How old are you?” Bucky asks.

“Seventeen and a half. I could just move out soon but...they're my parents, and separately they're great. It's just when they're together. It's awful. I feel like if this goes south, I'll have to choose between them and I don't want to.” Damien runs a hand through his long brown hair. “And my boyfriend dumped me cause I was, ‘being a downer all the time.’”

Bucky scoffs. “First of all, if he wasn't gonna be there for you, you're better off without him.”

“Yeah, but it still sucks.”

“Be that as it may, this part at least is probably temporary. Now, as to the parents thing, I've never been in that situation myself. My parents were happy together. But you're almost an adult, Damien. Have you tried having an adult conversation with them, together or apart? Cause that's how you're feeling, and this is just my opinion, but I think you should let them know that.”

“That's...that's a good point,” Damien says, seeming to deflate a little.

“If you want to talk more, I can give you my number and then you can text me if you want.”

Damien gives him an odd look. “You are oddly kind for a random running hipster that I banged into.”

“Hipster?”

“It's the hair,” Damien says. “Where’d you get that haircut, 1943?”

Pal, you got no idea.

Bucky laughs. “Maybe I did. I've been thinking of growing it out, though. The beard too.”

Damien pulls his phone out. “If you send me any weird or inappropriate pictures, I'm blocking you.”
“Inappropriate…?”

“Of you dick, Bucky. Not that you aren't hot, but you're a bit old for me right now.”

“Oh! Yeah, none of that. Don't worry.”

Damien snorted. “Still.”

Bucky puts his phone number in. “I don't have my phone on me right now, but I promise that's it.”

“Okay. I think I'll head home. Talk to my parents. Thank you, Bucky.”

“No problem. Was having a bit of a bad morning, but talking to someone helped me too. So thank you.”

“Oh?”

“I'm a soldier,” Bucky says, because that's one thing in his life that hasn't changed.

“Ahhh. Hey, maybe you should, I don't know. Check out the VA for counseling? I'm not great at this.”

“It's alright, I'm feeling better now. I'm gonna head back to my hotel.”

“You don't live here?”

“Nope, Brooklyn.”

“Oh, okay. You know, I feel like I've seen you somewhere before. Can't put my finger on it.”

Bucky shrugs, lying smoothly. “I jog around here a lot.”

“Oh, okay. I'll talk to you later, Bucky. If you need to talk, you can text me too.”

Bucky smiles and waves at Damien as he starts to run off. He hopes that kid will be okay.

He lets himself back into his hotel room and stands under the shower just long enough to get the smell of sweat off. He shoves the rough hotel towel against his skin to dry off, and dresses.

He checks his phone.

*Unknown Number:* hey Bucky, it's Damien the sad boy from the Mall

Bucky inputs him as a contact.

*Bucky:* hey Damien it's Bucky the runner with unintentional hipster hair

He scrubs a hand through his hair, mentally telling himself to get a can of pomade so he can sweep it back like he used too. He opens the group chat with the girls.

*Bucky:* is there a place around here where a guy can get some pomade?

*Allie:* like for your hair? Like, any drug store

*Takisha:* OR he could let us take him to the mall and get some clothes that people this century wear
**Bucky:** I'm in this century and I'm wearing them so there XP

**Samira:** please stop with the emojis, Bucky….im begging you

**Allie:** I'm free today if you all are

**Takisha:** I'm free

**Samira:** work, sorry :

**Hanna:** I'm having a BMHD and don't feel like going out

**Bucky:** BMHD?

**Allie:** bad mental health day. It happens. You got this Hanna!! <3

**Takisha:** soooo Allie, Bucky??? Shopping??

**Bucky:** yeah sure

Allie texts him the address of a mall, so he glances quickly at the map instructions.

It's a bit colder today, so he throws on his leather jacket, pulling a hat on his head and sliding on his sunglasses.

It starts to rain a little bit as he ducks into the mall. He's about to text the girls when he hears one of them call his name.

Allie gives him a hug, and tells him the jacket is a nice look. He, in turn, says that the color of her own jacket brings out her eyes.

“I should see you more often, Bucky. You give off some strong positive Auntie energy.”

“No idea what that means, but I think it was a compliment, so thanks.”

Takisha snorts, her nose scrunching adorably. “So, I know you want to get your hair thing, so we figure we’ll do that one first.”

“I rode down here on my bike, so I can't get much,” he tells them.

“You rode a bike down to D.C. from New York?” Takisha asks.

“Motorcycle,” Bucky clarifies. “That was the first thing I bought this century; ‘87 Harley Davidson. Tony keeps asking me to let him poke around with it, to ‘sup it up,’ whatever that means, but the idea of that man going anywhere near my bike with his tools makes me anxious.”

Allie launches into a debate with him about motorcycle types as she and Takisha guide him into a drug store. He doesn't recognize the name, but he doesn't recognize many these days.

“Eight fucking dollars?” Bucky all but yells.

Takisha smiles at the salesperson that gives them an odd look. “Bucky, inflation. Eight dollars isn't that much anymore.”

Bucky huffs out a breath. “I mean, I knew that but…” he trails off. Eight dollars could be a month of food for Stevie and him if they were careful.
He grabs it off the shelf anyway. “Just don't let me see anymore of the prices. I might have a heart attack.”

Takisha snorts again. “What's the pettiest thing that you're mad about this century?”


“The Mets?” Allie suggests.

“I'll have to check them out,” Bucky says before he walks up to the counter. “Anyone’s better than the damn Yankees.”

Allie cackles.

He exchanges polite, perfunctory words with the clerk, and he and the girls walk out of the store.

“You could always convert to D.C. and root for the Nationals!” Allie says. “They've got a lot of good guys on the team. Jayson Werth is a strong hitter, and Bryce Harper is a bit of a legend. Unfortunately, you would then be subject to the D.C. team slumps.”

“The what?” Bucky asks.

Takisha smiles. “It's this theory she has. Hockey season ends as baseball is starting, and vice versa. Both teams - the hockey team is called the Capitals, because we're the nation’s capital, see, isn't it funny? - start off real good, but they end real bad.”

“So just as one is getting bad, the other is getting good!” Allie finishes. “And it's a proven theory!”

Takisha shrugs. “Team sports don't interest me that much.”

Bucky nods. “Baseball’s really the only one I care about.”

“You sure?” Takisha teases. “Would have thought you'd be a fan of ultimate frisbee.”

Bucky barks a laugh as the girls lead him into another store.

*  

“Why are these pants so tight?” He whines, looking at the black “skinny jeans” that hug every curve of his lower body.

“Fashion, Bucky,” Allie insists.

*  

“This shirt may be the most comfortable thing I have ever put on my body. I want, like, nine.”

“Flannel is everyone’s best friend,” Takisha says wisely. “Nothing will ever love you more than a good flannel.”

*  

“So do I actually look good in red and blue, or are you two yankin’ my chain?”

Takisha and Allie glance at each other, a little guilty.
Bucky groans.

* 

“Have a nice day!”

“You too,” Bucky says to the clerk of the fourth store the girls have taken him too.

He has to admit, after they stopped trying to pull a fast one on him with the color scheme, Takisha and Allie really do know their stuff. He likes all the things they had him try. Loves the stuff he bought. It felt nice, to go back to the simple comfort of making sure he looked good.

Something his Ma and Mrs. Rogers had always agreed on; best foot forward, all the time. Give people the benefit of the doubt before you sock ‘em in the jaw. And that meant that you always looked your best.

That’s why he had gone through the trouble of doing his hair every morning. Why he stood behind Stephanie in the bathroom and pinned her hair in place while she rubbed her tired eyes and complained about him doing it too tight. Why he brushed away the loose piece of mascara that would fall on her face sometimes. Why she rolled her stockings on straight and made sure her slip was flat before she pulled on her dress. Why they both made sure to carefully resew buttons and seams. ‘Look your best’ was something that had been ingrained in him since childhood.

“Do you gals think I have hipster hair?” Bucky asks as they loiter in the food court.

“Who told you what a hipster is?” Allie demands at the same time Takisha asks, “what gave you that idea?”

“Went out for a run this morning, and I literally ran into a guy out on the Mall. He looked kinda down, so I talked to him for a bit.”

Allie scoffs. “You are unreal.”

“Huh?”

“Oh look at me, I’m Bucky Barnes,” she starts, a little tauntingly, but not rudely, “I have a ridiculous shoulder-to-waist ratio, ride a motorcycle, and help random strangers on the street. Just me, normal guy from Brooklyn. I probably carry groceries home for old ladies just as soon as I finish getting kittens out of trees.”

Bucky blushes. “I don’t...do all that.”

Takisha muffles a snicker into her coffee. “So this guy called you a hipster?”

“He said it looks like I got my haircut in 1943.”

Allie laughs so hard a bit of her soda comes out of her nose. “Did you tell him?”

“No! Don’t even know why I told you all.”

Takisha pretends to toss her hair over her shoulder - her hair does not brush her shoulders, so nothing happens - and say, “our siren powers still work.”

Bucky smiles at them fondly. “You know, from what I can tell, Odysseus is one greek hero is have not been compared too.”
“Well, he took awhile to get home,” Allie says. “So did you.”

“Doesn’t feel like home.” Bucky shrugs.

“You can make it feel like home. Carve out your own piece of the world, Barnes!” Allie encourages. “I know you can do it.”

Bucky smiles at her. “I get Achilles a lot. Super strength and all that.”

Allie shifts uncomfortably. “And took out the enemy in a rage after your Patroclus died.”

Bucky swallows a mouthful of his burning hot black coffee. “Nah, you see, Patroclus didn’t really wanna fight, and neither did I. He did it cause he felt he had too.”

“Well,” Allie says, tossing her empty cup into the trash can near them. “If you want to keep talking about this I’m game, but this current comparison of you two to Greek heroes is just going to bring out my inner ninth grader and make me ugly cry and I am definitely willing to change the subject. So, preferences?”

Bucky smiles at her gratefully. “Subject change please.”

“Basketball!” She exclaims. “D.C.’s basketball team isn't anything to write home about but if you enjoy fancy trick shots check out the Harlem Globetrotters. They are incredible.”

“From my experience with Harlem guys,” Bucky says, “I’ll believe that.”

“Oh?” Takisha asked. “My dad’s from Harlem.”

“The 369th Infantry Regiment. People called ‘em the Harlem Hellfighters. Look them up when you get home, damn good group of men. Had the honor of serving with them once. Gabe and Dum Dum tried to start a snowball fight.” He snorts at the memory. “Stevie turned traitor and started pelting me with ice. Stole my shield too.”

“There's no fucking around when it comes to snowball fights,” Takisha agrees sagely.

Bucky is about to respond when his phone buzzes.

Tony Stark: so uhhhhhh someone leaked the whole ‘James Barnes is alive’ thing so that's not great I guess

Tony Stark: btw they got super fired

Tony Stark: if you want I could technically sue them because of shields Nda agreement

Bucky sighs.

Bucky Barnes: it's alright. People were going to find out eventually. Do I need to make a statement or something?

Tony Stark: Nope I've got that covered

Tony Stark: I have someone who I pay to do that stuff for me. Great dude. Public relations and media management major from King’s College. He doesn't have fun if he doesn't have a challenge.

Tony Stark: remind me to introduce you to Horatio at some point
Tony Stark: if we're going to keep doing this ‘save the world’ thing than you'll probably need to utilize his awesome abilities more often

Bucky sighs again, turning his phone towards Allie and Takisha.

Allie pulls out her own phone after, pulling up the news. “Oh shit. Sorry Bucky.”

Bucky shrugs, pulling his hat down further on his head. “It was gonna happen sooner or later.”

Takisha lays a hand on his arm. “Wanna come back to my place? We can watch Netflix and I'll make cookies.”

Bucky places his hand on top of hers. “I'm really glad that I know you all. It's nice to know that some people are just...kind.”

Takisha smiles warmly at him.

They take the subway nearer to Takisha’s house. After they get off the train, Bucky's phone buzzes.

Damien: holy fucking shit you're captain fucking America

Bucky sighs deeply.

Bucky: yep

Damien: I just needed to get that off my chest. Now I promise I won't make it weird. You're just a dude. Who helped me with some stuff

Damien: if anyone has any negative stuff to say about you I'll fight them

Bucky’s brows scrunch together. He flips his phone around to the girls. “Is this a good thing?”

“Bucky met a boy?” Allie jokes.

“You have friends besides us?” Takisha teases.

Bucky rolls his eyes.

Takisha smiles at him. He wants to know how Stevie would draw the lines of her smile, the way she has a dimple on both cheeks. “It's a good thing. Send him a smile back.”

Bucky: :)

*******

The hissing of the machine wakes the soldier up. Tubes are shoved into the good arm. The soldier is made to stand, and sit in something that stirs fear deep inside, even without the memory functioning to know what it is.

Brace yourself, a Voice in the soldier’s head says. This is always the worst part.

A device is shoved in the soldier's mouth. Twin pieces of a machine clamp down on the soldier’s head.

Crackles, whiteness, a hollow feeling deep inside being filled up with - something.
Empty.

“Soldier. Status report.”

The soldier swallows. Assess. Does not open eyes.

“Mission ready.”


“Missions ready.” The soldier’s jaw hurts. Everything hurts, but the soldier can't remember - well, anything.

*You have got to remember something. What's your name?*

The soldier doesn't have a name. The soldier doesn't need one.

“Your target is one Bartrov Yanko.”

The soldier lets the eyes open wide. The soldier takes in the information as the people around the room prep her body for - something.

*Run. Run now. Run away. Run far and fast and never come back.*

That doesn't make sense. What else is there?

“She'll be ready in an hour, Sir,” a technician says nearby the soldier.

Blood is rushing back into extremities, and it burns, but the pain is bearable. The arm aches, but the pain is bearable and familiar somehow. But the soldier can not remember a moment before this moment.

“The asset,” the man bites out. “You kids keep getting stupider and stupider, don't you? She isn't a person. She's a weapon.”

The technician mumbles something like, “you just called her she,” and the soldier feels like that deserves some sort of response.

*That was funny. You should laugh.*

The soldier wishes the Voice would leave. The Voice just complicates things.

Chapter End Notes

Some notes:
Hey, maybe don't talk to strange people you meet on the National Mall, and probably don't actually get their phone number. I'm claiming suspension of disbelief on this one. Secondly, I don't know anything about motorcycles. Thirdly, I googled prices for hair pomade and it was about $8, which, according to the cpi inflation calculator is about $141 in 1941. Fourthly, my theory about DC sports teams is valid and proven basically every year.
(My favorite Caps player is number 19, Nicklas Backstrom and my favorite Nats player is number 3, Michael A. Taylor and I have shirts for both that I wear all the time).

Fifthly, I know nothing about basketball but the Globetrotters are great.
Sixthly, PLEASE actually look up the 369th division. The Harlem Hellfighters are real and badass, but I have no idea is stationing them in Europe is correct, and the snowball fight I mentioned probably didn't happen.
Seventhly, Damien is an awkward boy who isn't sure what he's doing and we need to support him. Bucky is ready to older-sibling to fuck out of anyone and everyone and any moment.
Lastly, Winter Soldier is back in action my pals.
Every breath we drew

Chapter Summary

Back to NYC...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky has to go back up to New York the following day, as it turns out. A press conference is actually a good idea.

Allie wake up early on a Sunday to go help him buy a suit. She looks as tired as Bucky feels. She offers to accompany Bucky to the airport, but he just tells her that Tony is sending down a private jet, and Bucky needs to bring his Harley back to the city with him.

Allie sighs. “Well, bye, I guess.”

Bucky tries to smile for her. “Give my love to the girls.”

“How?” Allie offers, arms open.

She’s tall, her bright red hair brushing against his chin as he pulls her close.

“Send me pictures of your hair, if you decide to grow it out,” she says, swallowing. “It’s stupid, but I’m gonna miss you.”

Bucky smooths a hand over her hair. “I’m gonna miss you too, Al. But we have phones now.”

She snorts, and smiles.

“But really, it’s nice to have someone who miss me.” He smiles back at her.

“Don’t do anything stupid.”

Bucky almost chokes, remembering himself saying those exact words to Stephanie 70 years ago.

“Don’t worry, I have no plans to crash any more planes into any more oceans.”

“Good.” Allie nods. “Peace out, Captain Nerdface.”

“Fuck off, Allie Cat.”

“How has it barely been a week? I hope this isn’t weird or anything,” Allie says, swallowing again. “But I...I don’t have a lot of family-”

“You remind me of my baby sister,” Bucky admits, so she doesn’t have too.

Allie smiles, a mutual understanding settling between the two of them.

“You have to have us all on call when you make a Twitter or whatever.”
“Trust your girls way more than I trust Tony on this.”

“Bye.”

Bucky gives her a mock salute before he revs up his bike, driving to the airport.

The pilot greets him with a polite, “Captain Barnes.” Bucky nods at him, rolling his bike up the ramp as directed. When he sits down, he puts his earbuds in, letting the music play mindlessly on shuffle, clicking through songs until he finds one he likes.

Ella Fitzgerald is singing in his ears, asking him to dream of her as the plane lifts off, and Bucky tilts his head back against the seat and tries to find that trance-like state between sleeping and wakefulness, the place where no dreams find him.

Tony's a nice guy, actually, even though he's not good at showing it. Cap...he's not a bad guy, certainly, and Tony can admit that his hang ups are all his own.

Mostly, Tony feels bad when he looks at him, because this guy thought he was dying to save the world from the Tesseract, just to wake up in a world 70 years removed from his own, and having to fight over the thing again.

Barnes is about half an hour out by plane, so Tony sends out a car to get him, figuring that with the traffic the car should be on time.

“Sir,” Jarvis says, “Agent Coulson is here to see you.”

Tony makes a face that can be accurately described as grumpy cat. That hadn't been a fun reveal; hey remember how sad you were that this guy died, and how that's what motivated you to team up? Yeah so he's not dead. Deal.

And Tony thought that he'd had trust issues before.

“There's no way to stop him?”

“No, there is not,” Coulson says, already in the room.

“Fuck, you gotta stop doing that, Agent.” Tony stands, and walks to shake his hand. “You have to remember my heart condition.”

“I'm sorry, Mr. Stark. I'm here to discuss Captain Barnes’s situation.” Coulson is handing a binder, and Tony takes it from him, dropping it open on his desk. He doesn't have the energy to be a huge asshole today.

“If you wait an hour, you can discuss it with the man himself,” Tony says, glancing at his watch. “Just try not to blow your wad all over any of my stuff.”

Coulson doesn't glare at him, because the guy is a robot to something, and sits on the couch. “So you know who leaked the information?”

“I'm aware. They're super fired, and if Cap wants, we have grounds for a lawsuit.”

Coulson nods.

“So that it, then? I set up the press conference for tomorrow. You get the questions yet?” Tony sits,
and begins to flip through the file. “You know, you could actually but interesting, relevant stuff in these.”

Coulson gives him a bland smile.

“So how’s the cellist?”

Coulson’s smile warms. “Doing good.”

“Say the word and I can have a plane ready. Keep love alive.”

Coulson nods again, because apparently being silent and irritating is Shield procedure.

“Sir, Miss Potts is headed up.”

“Good,” Tony says. “I’ll need her help dealing with Captain SadBoi.”

Pepper walks out of the elevator, and Tony goes over to wrap his arms around.

“Will Stark Industries survive for another day?”

Pepper kisses him. “Stark Industries could run for another year without me touching it, the way I have it set up.”

“Hell yeah, break that glass ceiling,” Tony says.

Pepper gives him a small, secretive smile, walking over to the bar and pouring a small glass of wine, stepping out of her heels.

Pepper makes small talk with Coulson for a while, before they both get down to business. Tony would feel bad about doing this to her, but he knows she thrives in this environment, and going by the way she’s glowing right now, she’s okay.

“Sir,” Jarvis says during a lull in the conversation, “Captain Barnes has arrived in the parking lot.”

“Awesome, tell him to come on up.”

Barnes walks out of the elevator a few moments later, looking like some kind of wet dream (Tony’s not embarrassed to admit the guy is hot; were he not strictly monogamous right now, he might try to tap that), in dark skinny jeans, a deep green flannel, and a black leather jacket, pulling off fingerless leather gloves. Black motorcycle boots and messy hair complete this confusing - for a guy from the 40s, at least - look, as well as the sad puppy eyes.

“Thanks for the car, but I didn't need it. I parked my Harley in the garage, hope that's okay.”

“Your what?” Pepper asks, bewildered.

“My Harley,” Barnes says, shoving his gloves in his pockets. “You know, the motorcycle brand.”

“You have a motorcycle?” Tony asks, going to grab the guy some water.

“How do you think I got to D.C.?” Barnes downs half the water in one go. He looks a little pale. “Not a huge fan of flying anymore.”

“We could have gotten you a train ticket,” Pepper insists.
“Nah, I'm a big boy, I can handle feeling jumpy on a plane.” Barnes offers her a charming smile, running a hand through his hair.

Tony catches the way Pepper turns a little pink. *Maybe not so strictly monogamous.* Unfortunately, any hypothetical threesome propositions should not be made when Agent is present, so Tony heads for a safer topic.

“So, what the hell’s up with the outfit?”

Barnes looks down at himself as though seeing his clothes for the first time. “Oh, this? Takisha picked it out.”

“Takisha?” Coulson asks, probably jealous that somebody else is dressing his favorite man crush.

“I made some friends in Washington. Samira, Takisha, Allie, and Hanna. Allie and Takisha took me shopping for clothes that didn't remind them of their grandfathers.” Barnes shrugs, like that's not a big deal.

As if on cue, Barnes’s phone goes off. “Ah, shit, one sec.” He pulls his phone out of his pocket and checks the caller ID. “I gotta take this, be right back.”

He walks away a little, but not enough that he can't be heard.

“Hey, Damien, what's up? I told you, call me Bucky…woah, Damien, deep breaths. What's up? Just, breathe for me real quick. In...and out...and in...and out. Do that a few more times...yeah, I'll stay right here.” A few quiet moments pass. “Yeah, Stevie had asthma, among other things, had to do that sometimes. Now, what's up? Why'd you call? Yeah, I got to New York okay. You're stalling, Damien….shit. Do you have anywhere you can go? A friend’s house? Relative close by? You...Michelle? Okay. Hang up and call Michelle. If you want to call me back, you can. Let me know you're okay, Damien.”

Bucky hangs up the phone and walks back over to the rest of them.

“Sorry, that was my friend Damien. His parents are going through a rough divorce, maybe. It's complicated. He needed to get out of the house for a bit.”

“So,” Coulson says casually. “You made friends?”

“Yep. I met Samira at the National Cemetery, and she introduced me to her friends, ‘cause they were going to this Captain America exhibit in one of the Smithsonians. Damien, I ran into during a jog around the National Mall. Literally.” Barnes shrugs. “We talked.”

“Gramps, you do know that you can't just blindly trust people anymore, right?” Tony asks.

“Pal,” Barnes says, giving Tony what could be called a bitch face, “you couldn't trust people back in the old days either. I barely told them anything about myself, Damien didn't even know where he thought he recognized me from; he told me I looked like a hipster. The girls...they're good people. You'll meet them soon enough, if they want. They're all moving to the city, going to college.” Barnes looks a little proud. “Takisha is going to Columbia on a full scholarship for biomechanical engineering. Samira is studying psychology at NYU, Allie’s going to Juilliard, and Hanna is studying history at Queen’s College.” He record this like he filed it away as important information.

He turns to Coulson, a little defensive. “They certainly did more to integrate me to this century than Shield did. They showed me Parks and Recreation, and didn't get frustrated when they had to
explain the jokes. They took me shopping.”

Tony snorts. Didn't know Barnes was a bit of a spitfire.

“Well, I gave Mr. Stark the files. They should help you prepare for the press conference tomorrow.” Coulson stands, and inclined his head. “Captain Barnes.”

He exits through the elevator doors.

“It just me, or does that guy have a stick up his ass?”

Tony feels a laugh burst out of him. “Not just you, Cap.”

“Call me Bucky,” he insists. “It's weird not hearing my own name anymore.”

Bucky shucks his jacket, draping it over the back of the couch before he sits down.

“So, how's New York been?” He asks, trying for casual, but there's an edge to his voice.

His phone buzzes and he glances at it, then cackles. He types a quick reply, then turns back to Tony.

“Care to share with the class?” Tony asks.

Bucky rolls his eyes, and flips his phone towards Tony.

*Damien:* holy shit it just hit me that in my first conversation with Captain fucking America I asked him not to send me dick pics I'm ready to Die

*Damien:* I'm starting this whole thing over

*Damien:* hi Bucky I'm Damien, a damn fool who's always putting his foot in his mouth

*Bucky:* hi Damien I'm bucky, the guy who you told had hipster hair. For the record, I actually got this haircut in 1944. It has grown out a little since then, though.

Tony hands Bucky his phone back with a confused look on his face. “How do you know what a dick pic is?”

Bucky shrugs. “It's pretty self-explanatory.”

Tony stares at him. “Fair enough. Got any plans until tomorrow?”

“No really,” Bucky runs a hand through his hair again, and Tony starts to notice it as a nervous tick. “I got a lot of the movies they made of me. Was gonna watch some of those. Wanna join?”

Tony snorts. “Which ones?”

Bucky looks straight ahead, fingers flicking out to count. “Uh, *Captain America* from 1946, *Captain America: Fields of Glory* from 1954, *The Star-Spangled Man* from 1968, which, just based on the title, I am already not looking forward too. Then there was *One Man for His Country* from 1972, *Captain America: Total War* from 1988, *A Captain and His Sergeant* from 1995, which is the year the everything got declassified, I guess. There's also *An American Marriage* from 1996, *Captain America: Fist of Justice* from 1997, *Fear No Evil* from 1999, which had ‘Mel Gibson’ on the front in huge letters. *À Travers la Mort au Nom de la Vie* from 1992, which is a French thing. So was *Les Amoureux Brisés* and *De Vraies Personnes, de Vraies Histoires*. Then there’s *My
Heaven from 2004, and The Young and Brave from 2006. Oh! And At Death’s Feet from 2001. A bunch of documentaries, too.” Bucky looks down at his hands, where he's been signing out the various numbers. “That's a lot.”

“Bud, there's more than that. Those are just the not-totally-terrible ones. And that's not even counting the tv shows.” Tony claps a hand on his shoulder. “I haven't seen the French ones, though. Kinda surprised they would make them about an American hero.”

Bucky smiles. “We spent some time in France.”

“I'll warn you, most of the ones that came out in the 90s and early 2000s are weird attempts at romantic war movies. Some of them are almost bad as Pearl Harbor.”

“Uh, pal, I feel like that's an odd comparison to make for some movies.”

“Oh, they made a movie called Pearl Harbor about the event, but it's garbage so don't watch it.” Tony looks around for Pepper, but she's wandered off. “I will say, The Young and Brave is really good. It started off as a college production, but it got released at some indie film festival and a big company snatched up the rights, and got all the same people to do a remake with an actual budget this time. It's considered the ‘good one’ as far as Stephanie goes.”

“Mind if we start with that, then?” Bucky swings up his left ankle to rest on his right knee.

“I'll grab the tissues,” Tony says, mentally starting the pizza order. “This movie used to make me cry.”

Chapter End Notes

I have complicated feelings about Tony. I liked him in his first two movies and in Avengers, but after that he became completely insufferable to me. So I'm going to write him the way I like him, and if he seems OOC, sorry.
Tony and Bucky make a weird truce as the movie unfolds on screen.

The tissue box sits between them on the couch, and they both unspeakingly agree that there will be no judgment for grabbing one.

The movie opens on Stephanie’s mother, Sarah, going into labor on Ellis Island, getting her way through immigration, and giving birth in the hospital. It then jumps forward to Bucky’s family moving in, four years later, and then to Stephanie and Bucky’s first meeting, though they are significantly aged up, being seven or eight instead of four.

*Stephanie had pulled a cat out from under the boot of some bullies. A tussle ensues, which she wins when Bucky shows up and decks one of them clumsily.*

“I had ‘em,” she insists.

Bucky shrugs. “Hi.”

“Name’s Steph’n’ie Rogers, but my Ma calls me Stevie.”

“That’s a pretty weird name for a girl.”

She glares at him. “And you?”

“Yasha, but my parents say my name is James now.”

“So you’re like my Ma? You weren’t born here like I was?”

“Nah. You say it as Romania over here, that’s where I’m from.”

“How come you speak English so good?”
“My Mother learned during the War.”

Their little conversation goes on, until Stephanie’s mother calls her.

“See you tomorrow, Jamie.”

Bucky clears his throat, trying to hold it together as he turns to Tony.

“I told her my name was James Buchanan cause I was still getting used to it, and she couldn't say James or Buchanan do she called me Bucky.”

Tony nods. “Pizza should be here soon.”

The movie makes another time skip; now Stephanie and Bucky are in their mid-teens. They're walking home from school, Stephanie hacking a cough, and Bucky carrying her books for her.

“So,” a woman says as the walk to the Roger's apartment. “You two will be tying it up soon then, right?”

Both of them blush.

“Stephanie would have scoffed and said no,” Bucky says, remembering those times, trying to shove back the heartache that stays even now.

Soon, Stephanie and Bucky are fully eighteen, and Sarah Rogers is tasking Bucky with the care of her daughter with her final breaths.

“She never actually told me to do that,” Bucky tells no one in particular now. “Told me to have her back, not take care of her. Knew that Stephanie can take care of herself.”

He notices Tony looking at him funny. “Could,” he says.

Bucky realizes his mistake. “Oops.”

Bucky drops to one knee outside of her apartment after the funeral, and asks her to let him spend the rest of his life loving her. She sneers.

“Don't try to play me, Barnes, I know what this is. Poor little Stevie Rogers can't take care of herself.” She pulls him up by his collar. “Don't throw a pity party just cause my Ma is dead, I'll make it work. I can get by on my own.”

Bucky places his hands gently on her bare wrists. “I know. I just don't know if I can.”

She starts crying angry tears, and pulls him inside. She shoves him back up against the closed door and they kiss. They strip each other out of their jackets, and Stephanie starts on his tie as he fumbles with the zipper of her dress. The screen fades to black, letting the audience fill in the blanks.

Bucky flushes. “She said something similar, but I said ‘thing is, you don't have too.’ Also, we definitely didn't screw each other or nothin’.”

Tony nods, standing up to get the pizza from the delivery elevator. He returns with four boxes stacked on top of each other, and drops three of them next to Bucky.

As small box of text at the bottom of the screen proclaims it to be 1942. Bucky comes home in a uniform talking about how he’s enlisted.
Bucky scoffs. “I'm just going to have to outright tell the whole damn world that I was drafted, aren't I?”

“You were what?” Tony asks, astonished.

“I mean Project Rebirth was volunteer only, but the army? Hell no. I needed to stay and take care of my family.”

“Holy shit.” A wide, scary grin spreads across Tony’s face. “If you do say that, it'll piss off a lot of people.”

“Good thing I'm done giving one single fuck about anything ever anymore,” Bucky says, only half joking, swallowing down half the cup of water and shrugging.

Tony snorts. “Stop this,” he says, waving a hand at Bucky. “Stop being funny and cool, it makes it hard to hate you.”

Bucky lets his head fall back, and pulls out his most charming smile, and drops his voice down, speaking his most syrupy voice. “Oh, me? No idea what you're talkin’ about, sugar.”

Tony chokes. “Yeah, that. Stop that. Especially when Pepper’s around. None of that.”

Bucky keep his eyes on the screen, careful not to break. “You know, Pepper’s a lady who'll get stuff done. She don't take no shit from nobody, and I bet she's got a mean punch. She is my type….”

“No! Captain America is not allowed to be a homewrecker!”

Bucky cackles. “Sorry, Tone. I was just being a spiv.”

“A what?”

Bucky sighs. “It's - it’s slang. It means, like, ya know, a con man? Somebody who's tryina pull a fast one on ya?”

“Where is this accent coming from, Barnes? You sound like the south side took up residence.”

Bucky clears his throat and downs his glass of water. “Sorry, I let myself get too comfortable.”

“That what you sound like all the time?”

Bucky feels his cheeks burn. “If I'm not trying to sound different, yeah.”

“So you can just switch back and forth?’

Bucky nods. “Should’ve heard Stephanie; she could pull about seven accents out of her back pocket.”

“This one though, what do you call this?” Tony swipes Bucky’s glass and goes to refill it.

“I call it the 'please take me seriously' accent.” He swallows, and fits his mouth around the first syllables he ever learned. “No one wants to listen when it's this you sound like.”

Tony sets his glass back down. “Romanian? That's where you were born, right?”

Bucky nods. “Yeah. Steph had this ridiculous conglomeration of accents when she let loose with it,
cause the place she grew up. Spoke a slew of languages fluent by age nine, but as a consequence she would speak certain sounds about twelve different ways.” He snorts and rubs his chin with his hand, feeling out the growth of his stubble. “There were phrases that she’d say that sounded like Ireland itself was gonna come kick your ass. Don't think I can say it right, but it was like ‘didna feusss.’ Means ‘don't fuss.’ Her Ma used to say it all the time.”

Tony nods. “Pay attention and tell me how accurate this Project Rebirth part is.”

Bucky sits back and watches the movie with Tony, pointing out inaccuracies, but slowly going silent as the film goes on.

When his screen counterpart starts destroying a bar after Stephanie’s death, he looks away. Tony doesn't say anything, and Bucky thanks him for it.

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Why Stephanie Rogers had to wait for a student film to get the representation she deserves ft. a quick (lol) review of every Captain America film: an unnecessarily long dissertation by tumblr user historycats

So, Captain America. Everybody loves Captain America, it's in the constitution (Side note: loving Captain America is not actually in the United States constitution). As a consequence of this, there are too many movies about the man to count (for the purposes of this word dump, I’m only going over the ones listed on the Smithsonian website, because those are supposed to be the ‘good ones’ which is giving some of them too much credit). Today, I'll be going over these movies both in relation to their portrayal of James Barnes/the Howling Commandos and the extent to which the women are represented (which will only include Peggy Carter for the majority of them, because, for reasons that will never be clear to me, Stephanie Roger’s entire existence was classified). Here we go.

Read more

The very first Cap film came out in 1944, as a propaganda piece, but doesn't actually star Barnes. It was called “America’s Man,” and according to Howard Stark,. Cap and his crew just about laughed themselves stupid watching it. It's basically some muscle guy in a bad Cap suit finding Hitler and punching him in the face. No Peggy, no Commandos. 2/10, only for the imagine of the actual Love of My Life™ laughing at her silly husband. (Side note: they don't sell this at the museum apparently - thank you colormurple for telling me this - but it is listed on the Smithsonian website, where you can watch it for free.)

Next we have “Captain America” from 1946, which premiered a year after he died. This movie features the Howling Commandos, but they are never called that, and are never given names. Cap does fly into the ocean at the end though. Peggy Carter does not appear. 2/10, it tried its best, but it's not good.

“Captain America: Fields of Glory” is the sort of crazy patriotism wagon that one might expect of a movie that came out in 1954. Cap sexually harasses Peggy, but it's played off as her being cold and him being the Charming Good Guy. (I hope that James would be disgusted by this.) All the Commandos are Good White Americans (Hollywood is cancelled, bye). The Red Skull goes down like a wimp, and Cap is, for some reason, shot at the end, and one of the Commandos - it is near impossible to distinguish them - lets out a Single Manly Tear and makes some hokey statement about self-sacrifice. -40/10, they made Gabe Jones and Jim Mortia white (!!!!!!NO!!!!!), had the main romantic subplot start with an inappropriate comment about Peggy’s boobs, and managed to fuck up the one thing everyone can agree on about the guy, which is the plane thing. Don't watch
it. If you must, stream it illegally. It's terrible, don't give them your money. If you have to watch it, do it when you're completely plastered. It's hot garbage.

“The Star-Spangled Man” is...okay. It came out in ‘68, since every decade has to have some sort of obligatory ‘America did the war with the guy and he was cool! America!’ It's a big nothing movie. It feels like the sort of movie that people made as an ambitious summer project because they had written, like, a really good report on it and just getting a 99% wasn't enough for them. Peggy is only there to be the Girl in the action movie, and tbh I think the actress was stoned the whole time. 5/10, it's average, a good intro to Cap if you were born before ‘95 and didn't know Stephanie existed, which is it's only redeeming quality. It isn't the most awful, and the film studio that made it decided for the film’s 25th anniversary that all the proceeds would go to Veterans Affairs, so do pay to watch it please.

“One Man for His Country” from ‘72 is interesting in that, at the time, people were mad about how progressive it was. This one is notable for giving the Commandos not only names, but personalities (though that can be stretching it, as it was mostly stereotypes - Dugan talks about his wife a lot, even though he was at the time unmarried, Jacques is French, Falsworth is not amused, Gabe talks about jazz, and Jim has seven lines). For a movie supposedly about one man, this was the first time the Commandos were not entirely interchangeable. Peggy Carter flirts back with Cap for the first time, and they do actually bang once before he goes off to battle Red Skull. His death isn't shown, the last shot of the movie is someone coming in to talk to Peggy, saying they have bad news, before the screen fades to black. 7/10, it hasn't aged great - I doubt James and Peggy banged considering the man was married, but who knows - but looking at it as a product of its time, it's good. Watch it if you want to know what Captain America would be like if he was a PTA dad.

“Captain America: Total War” from 1988 is the worst movie made about him. It may be the worst movie ever made. Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger of all fucking people, this movie is the sort of ridiculous 80’s camp that I live for. The Commandos are here, but they're all speaking in weird slang; similar to how “Grease” is the 70’s trying to be the 50’s, “Total War” is the 80’s trying to be the 40’s. Cap has a shield that he never uses, instead opting for a red, white, and blue machine gun. Geena Davis is Peggy, but she appears to have been co-opted into what we would later find to be Stephanie’s roll. She follows along with the Commandos and shoots people. She and Cap can't keep their hands off each other. 8/10, even though I love this movie (it's garbage, I know, but it's hysterical garbage), I know it's not great. The highlight is Peggy slapping Red Skull straight across the face. Points off for having James and Peggy sitting in the sunset at the end because no true Cap movie should have a happy ending.

In ‘92, a French film with the (translated) title of, “Through Death in the Name of Life,” premiered to little fanfare. 5/10, it's perfectly average. Denier is a main character, because he's French. It's little more than an attempt at a low budget documentary.

Now, imagine: it’s January of 1995. The news comes out. James Barnes was married. Her name was Stephanie. We never knew this before because she caught Nazis with him in Europe. The collective consciousness of the universe expands. Hollywood explodes.

The time: December, 1995. The movie: “A Captain and His Sergeant.” The reaction: “a miracle of filmmaking.” Now, imagine, it’s 2006, you're a young girl, all set to watch the first film the features your historical bae - nay, one of the main ways you realized you were into girls, a goddess incarnate, who is known for kicking ass and taking names - in your Captain America footed pajamas, holding the bear you have named in honor of this woman and…..

She's fucking relegated to a second string love interest. Instead of volunteering for the Nurses Corps by herself, she inexplicably got over to Europe, snuck into an army camp during fucking
Michelle Pfeiffer’s Stephanie Rogers spends roughly 90% of her screen time crying, talking about “all the ladies back home,” and needing to be rescued from Nazis every other scene, which only happened the once, and that was because she sacrificed herself to help the others escape. (I went to bed screaming and crying at this injustice, and to this day I am still personally furious with the director, Joel Schumacher.)

Besides that, Peggy Carter, an extremely important part of the Captain America narrative, has been given even less of a role now that Stephanie is here; she's now just Col. Phillips’s secretary (which the actual Peggy Carter had something to say about). The Howling Commandos constantly belittle Stephanie, and I would say that they underestimate her, but she lives up (down?) to their expectations. It is generally agreed by the irl Commandos that she was a master tactician, as well as having an actual medal for expert marksmanship. 94% of James and Stephanie’s conversations are about him wanting her to go home. She and Peggy never interact. She never gets a proper ending. She's there, and then she isn't, and Cap is flying a plane into the ocean, asking Peggy for a dance. (They did, apparently film a death scene for her but getting shot because she went in too soon to a Nazis base is somehow worse in my book.) This film gets a -30/10 and the only reason it’s not worse than “Fields of Glory” is because all of the Commandos are accurately cast.

“An American Marriage” from ‘96 made the ludicrous decision to try to make it a rom com. It focuses mainly on their lives before the war, but this was before anything was known about that. Mostly, it's an awkward nothing movie that consists of a 12 year old actor trying to convince us that he doesn’t still think girls have cooties, and a girl who was actually related to the producer who has four facial expressions. The last twenty minutes are devoted to Sarah Rogers’s death, the pair’s marriage, and it ends with James coming home in uniform saying that he enlisted, and Stephanie crying about it. 4/10, if you pretend it isn't about Stephanie and James, it's not technically a bad film, it can just go in the basket with the rest of the other nonsense 90’s rom coms.

Another French film came out that same year, (translated) title of “The Broken Lovers.” Think a cliched tragic romance. They meet, they fall in love, they get married, the war happens (she doesn't rescue the men at Azzano, which doesn't make sense if she becomes a sergeant but fine, I guess), that make profound commentary about the nature of mankind and war (Stephanie gets to say, “homo homini lupus” which means “man is a wolf to man” and it's cool, cause she extinguishes a cigarette after and it looks badass), then they die. 8/10, Stephanie has character, it compliments James’s without being totally in service to his, this is the first one where it shows them have an argument, the first one to have the historically accurate smoking (don't smoke), the Commandos are present, and there are implied interpersonal relationships between them all. It shows Stephanie, Gabe Jones, and Jim Mortia separating from the group and kind of doing there own thing (also accurate, Jim described Stephanie as “a damn good woman” and said of her that “I wouldn't call her a soldier, because soldiers always follow orders, instead I’d call her a fighter, a warrior; she did what was right because that's what it was, damn her COs,” and Gabe described her as “ someone who didn't mind letting you sit and talk at her, or sit and not talk,” and “the type of woman you write stories about.” These feelings were mutual, if we go off of how often they feature in her sketchbook compared to the other Commandos, links to digital scans can be found here and here ), and Peggy and Stephanie look at each other and share a Knowing Look when the boys misbehave. It is also the first film in which Barnes and Rogers explicitly reference having sex with each other (Stephanie, at one point, has an absolutely vicious love bite that she got her co-star to give her as a joke .)This movie makes me ugly cry every time, I know several French phrases just because I have watched this movie so many damn times.

“Captain America: Fist of Justice” from ‘97 is like if you smashed together the Transformer
movies with the History channel. Please don't watch it. I hate myself for even acknowledging its existence. It's all overly masculine guys running about in tank tops, and Stephanie has what may as well be a Leg Avenue Captain America Halloween Costume (here's the actual movie costume for comparison). Peggy is similarly cast as a busty woman with an open blouse. She flirts with James, even though she knows he's married, and she and Stephanie have a weird cat fight relationship with each other where they passive aggressively fight over him (because apparently no person who writes scripts in Hollywood has ever seen two women interact). 2/10, only because it's the only film about Cap that I can get my dudebro brother to watch.

"Fear No Evil" from 1999 is exactly what you would expect from a Mel Gibson movie. Heavy on the Catholic imagery (there is a historical reference for Rogers having a special cross she always wore, but it significant to her because it was her mother’s, and there is none for Barnes), that includes he and Stephanie praying the rosary, lamenting not being able to go to church on sundays, an actual shot where James puts his hand on the side of a mountain and his shadow becomes a cross, and a scene where James and Stephanie renew their marriage vows in a bombed out church with a Polish priest. Interestingly, the movie leaves out that Barnes and Rogers were not the only Catholic Commandos; Timothy Dugan is Catholic as well, and he is the one that, to this day, carries around the same rosary that he had while traveling across Europe. Stephanie’s costume in this was, at the time, the most bearable; this is the first Hollywood movie where she wears pants. (She wore pants in both French productions to this date.) It is still irritatingly inaccurate, being form fitted to her body and only like her historical uniform, which is not baggy, but certainly not perfectly tailored, in regards to the color scheme. This movie also, of course, cuts out any reference to Stephanie fighting or being violent; she stays back at camp and tries to help over radio. The Commandos are mostly there to show what a Good Leader that Barnes is, and Stephanie is supposed to be the paragon of American Womanhood, blindly following her husband, never disagreeing or arguing with him (false, very very false), and when she does offer a differing opinion, he slaps her (Again, here's hoping the actual James Barnes would be appalled), but this is supposed to be a 'look at how bad it used to be for women' moment. Mel Gibson is much too old to be playing Barnes, but he did anyway, making it even weirder when the woman playing Stephanie was 20 (too young, but it's passable) at the time, yet the movie tries to keep the 'childhood friends' angle. Further complicating matters, this is, and it kills me to say anything positive about this movie, the first Captain America film to pass the Bechdel test. 3/10, just on the merit of Stephanie and Peggy talking strategy instead of boys. It's crappy, and not even in an enjoyable way like "Total War." All of the Commandos, Peggy Carter, and all three of James’s sisters were invited, but out of all of them, only the oldest of the Barnes sisters, Rebecca Barnes-Proctor, actually attended. Her scathing review of the film is basically the definition of a roast. This movie tanked, and it tanked hard, mostly because she got her review published in the New York Times. Please read it in full, but tl;dr, "They weren't angels. They fought, smoked, swore, drank underage, made their own booze, and cheated at cards something awful. Stephanie was all sharp elbows, smart mouth, and stern expressions. James broke more noses and knocked out more teeth than I can remember. They weren't the saints that Mr. Gibson wants them to have been. The fact of the matter is this: they had flaws, but they were good people, fighting a good fight, for a good reason. That don't make them gods. Don't deify my brother and sister just to try and make a point about the superb qualities of your perceived 'America.'” *fans self* what a badass.

In 2000, another French film was released, the first one to get a theatrical release in America, which is based on Jacques Denier’s memoir, The Real Histories of the Howling Commandos, which is where the movie gets its title (again, translated), “Real People, Real Stories.” The entire movie is from Denier’s perspective, and it follows his childhood in France, the Nazi occupation, his time with the French Resistance, his capture at Azzano, and continues from there. Because of this, this movie shows no private interactions between Barnes and Rogers, but does give Stephanie an important character trait; compassion. This version includes one of Stephanie's most iconic real
life quotes: “doesn't matter if it's not a lot, if it's making a difference, it's important. I'm helping everyone I can, because I can, that's all. If you can help people and you don't, what kind of person does that make you?” (Don't mind me, I'm just sobbing, I had that written on a post-it on my locker wall for all of my school days.) This movie also shows James’s adorable attempts to learn French. The movie ends on a bittersweet note, the Commandos are in a bar on V-Day, morosely knocking back whiskey and gin - which Denier claims to have been James’s and Stephanie’s favorite drinks, respectively - as everyone parties around them. The camera pans down to the table, and focuses on the two full glasses before the screen goes dark. 8/10, it is very much a Commandos movie, not a Cap movie, and it doesn't shy away from that. Watch it if you feel like having tears roll down your face as you contemplate the bitter realities of mortality.

2001 gave us “At Death’s Feet,” the ‘feminist’ Cap movie. Yeah, no. It's basically trying to be a remake of “Star-Spangled Man,” but we also get Stephanie making comments about how she's “not like other girls.” Excuse me whilst I vomit. 4/10, it's so similar to the other that it barely warrants existing, but it gets a point off for bad characterization.

“My Heaven” from 2004 is a mom movie, that's the only way I can describe it. It's like if your mom tried to romanticize the story of Captain America, heavy on the romance. The marriage angle is played WAY up. 6/10, extra points for being the first Hollywood movie where James is allowed to actually cry over the death of his wife. Jensen Ackles is actually a pretty good Cap, but he's not as pretty as James Barnes.

Now that I've gone on for 3000+ words, on to the one we actually come here for.

“The Young and the Brave” came out in 2006. It started out as a student film, and was only an hour long - it was just a series of conversations between the ‘Commandos’ - but it won an award at its school, and then premiered at an indie film festival, at which time someone from Paramount approached the original team to discuss a full-budget remake. (You can watch that original movie here, it's not the masterpiece that the remake is, but by golly is it good.)

I won't get into the filmmaking history part, I won't tell you about how awesome the actors are, and I won't go on about anything that is not the actual movie itself. (If you wanna read that, I got drunk a few months ago and did that here.) The one thing I will mention is that it is almost spooky how similar the actors look to their characters. Olivia Holiday was actually 23 at the time of filming, and Francis Jeffries was 24. They had been best friends for seven years. It is also an interesting effect that neither of the leads have gone on to be in any other movies; Holiday wanted to and now does work in film editing, and Jeffries is a screenwriter, so their only movie personas are Stephanie and James. They only ended up in the student film in the first place because their two leads dropped out.

The movie opens with Sarah Rogers going into labor on Ellis Island. It then moves on the the Barnes family moving in from Romania - just George, Winifred, and their son James at this point. This is the only movie that mentions that James’s birth name is Yasha (the actual Romanian form of James is Iacob, but it is presumed he was named Yasha after his Russian grandfather), and right off the bat this movie doesn't pull its punches as far as the immigration angle goes. Sixteen language experts worked on this film, and it shows. Over the course of the movie, James and Stephanie switch languages constantly. It's one of the most accurate depictions of multilingual people I've seen in Hollywood (being trilingual myself).

This movie also shows the darker sides of war. When Stephanie is infiltrating Azzano, she is seen using scalpels from her nursing kit, stabbing men in the arteries and leaving them to bleed out. It is brutally effective. The Commandos are shown doing actually morally grey things, but with the understanding that they are all kind of uncomfortable with it, and would not be doing it any other
way. Stephanie, at one point, threatens one of their captives with having his skin peeled off layer
by layer, and the unwavering tone of her voice leaves no room for argument. After that scene, she
exits the abandoned farmhouse they've set up in, vomits into a bush, and leans against the house,
shaking. All of the Commandos are shown sleeping restlessly, waking up at odd times, and
jumping at loud noises. One of the most effective parts of this movie - and something that my
fiancée, who was in the army, says the most realistic part - is seeing the evolution of James and
Stephanie (and, to a slightly lesser extent, all of the Commandos) go from easy-going young adults
to cagey, hardened soldiers. The scene where Stephanie falls off the train is taken verbatim from
Gabe Jones’s discussion of it, right down to James’s thousand yard stare. Lights are on, but
nobody's home.

Okay I know I said I wasn't going to talk about the actors, but Olivia Holiday was robbed of the
Oscar she deserved, so I'll go into it. Through the use of clever camera angles and positioning, they
were able to make her and James both appear to have grown after the Serum and Hydra
experiments, respectively (it is speculated that Hydra tried to give her their own version of the
Serum, though this is not confirmed). Olivia specifically, starts out the film as a mostly cheerful
young woman, then becomes a disillusioned nurse, then a woman desperate to be taken seriously in
a man’s world, then a hardened warrior. The difference in her walk and mannerisms in comparison
to her private discussions and her public interactions is stunning, and her closed off nature post-
capture definitely shows signs of PTSD. “The Young and the Brave” also shows a scene of
Stephanie alone in a bathroom, pulling her shirt up to stare at her own mutilated skin. It's horrific,
as it should be. (This movie is rated R for a reason.)

The theatrical cut of this movie is almost three hours long, and the director’s cut nears five. This is
because they went into excruciating detail with both making sure to develop the relationships
between the Commandos, including Stephanie’s friendship with Peggy, and showing something
that no other film has that actually happened; Operation FTN, a name coined by James
Montgomery Falsworth, which stands for “Fuck The Nazis.” It really earns its R rating here, by
showing the brutal liberation of a concentration camp. I'm not Jewish myself, so I won't get into
this one, but you can find articles and opinion pieces on it just by searching it on the internet.

This movie does the opposite of “Fear No Evil.” It shows James Barnes, Stephanie Rogers, Peggy
Carter, and the Howling Commandos as the were; flawed people, doing morally grey things, in the
name of a good cause. It offers no judgement on these actions (it does show the Nazis as bad
though, which is good, because they are). It shows them swearing and smoking and drinking and
fighting and, yes, sometimes, cheating. This movie shows the Commandos laughing around a fire
as Stephanie swindles them all at poker, but it also shows them shooting first. “The Young and the
Brave” gets its title from exactly that; these people were young, and these people were brave.
10/10, for everything that I have already mentioned, and also these costumes are spot on. Some
quick favorite scenes include: Bucky teaching Stephanie to drive a Jeep across Europe, James and
Stephanie facing each other as they lie down next to the campfire, not speaking, just
communicating with their eyes, Denier braiding Stephanie’s hair, Stephanie going undercover at a
German party in her iconic pink dress that she totally hated btw, each of the Commandos writing
letters back home, but Stephanie doesn't hand one in as she pointedly looks at James and says, “all
I got is right here,” Stephanie dancing with Clark Gable which did happen, and, the fave of the
faves, Stephanie absolutely tearing it up at a shooting range, where she picks up a handgun and
nails a bullseye on several targets, which did also happen (she got a medal for expert
marksmanship with with both a rifle and a pistol).

Thank you for coming to my TED talk, have some virtual cookies for reading 4000 words of this
drivel <3
Chapter End Notes

1 comment = 1 day made
Chapter Summary

A meeting with old friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After the movie finishes, Bucky excuses himself back to his room, unpacks, and does what he's told himself he would do for the entire month since he woke up.

He goes through the files.

Dugan had gotten married in ‘47, to a woman named Danielle. They had four children, Reyna, Maria, Douglas, and Ben. Reyna and Douglas both had gotten married, and each had three children, whose names were not given. Dugan currently lives with his wife in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He continued to work in the military, retiring with the rank of First Lieutenant. After that, he worked as an executive at a community outreach program.

Falsworth is living in Edinburgh, with his only son, James. His wife, Deborah, passed away in the 90s because of a heart condition. James’s wife is named Charlotte, their daughter’s name is Mary. After the war, Falsworth was honorably discharged from the military. He worked as a lawyer for several years.

Denier never married, though he took custody of his niece when her mother - Jacques’s sister Antoinette - and father died. Her name is Claudette. They are living in Nice, along with her husband Alceste, and their sons, Geoffrey and Lucas. Post-war, his book, “The Real Histories of the Howling Commandos,” became one of the best selling memoirs of all time.

Mortia lived in Fresno until the 80s, but he now lives in Stowe, Vermont, with his wife, Anna. They have three daughters and two sons; Angela, Gabriel, Stephen, Nina, and Michelle. They have 11 grandchildren, but from which children is not specified. He taught at a medical school for several years after moving on from a medical residency, but he now has retired and owns a small ski resort. In a side note, it says that Stephen is a principle at a public high school in Queens.

Jones is living in Staten Island with his wife, Andrea. They have the most children out of all the Commandos, with four sons and four daughters; Sarah, Mark, James, Elizabeth, Violet, Catherine, and twins, Gerard and Noah. They have 19 grandchildren, one of which, it is noted, works for Shield, though no name is provided. Jones became a literature professor after the war, and is still known to give guest lectures on occasion.

Peggy had married a man named Daniel Sousa, but, like Stephanie, decided against changing her last name. They had two children, but no names are given. She currently lives in a retirement facility in Washington, D.C.

Bucky closes Peggy’s file with a sigh, pinching his brow.

“Captain Barnes,” Jarvis says from the ceiling. Bucky jumps about half a foot in the air. “I
apologize for bothering you, but Ms. Potts asked that I send you the list of authorized questions for
tomorrow. Shall I send them to your phone, or perhaps your email?”

Bucky hesitates. “Uh, any chance I could get paper copies?”

“There is a printer in the office, next to your bedroom. I will fax them to you posthaste.”

“Thanks, Jarvis.”

“My pleasure, Captain Barnes.”

Bucky sighs, and grabs the papers as they feed out. When he's got them all, he walks back to the
dining room table, where is sets them down. He grabs himself another glass of water. “Jarvis? Uh,
are there any pens around here?”

“In the office, on the desk.”

“Thanks.”

Bucky eases himself back into the chair, pen in hand, to try and plan out his answers.

Is it true that you are the same James Barnes who was born in 1920?

Yes, that's me. Was born Yasha Nicolae Barnes, though. James Buchanan was a president my
father had read about, very American name. Yasha is a form of Yakov, which is basically the
Russian “James,” so it fit anyway.

Is it true that you flew a plane into the Arctic Ocean? How did you survive?

You can thank Dr. Abraham Erskine for that. Super Soldier Serum, pal. Nobody's given me any
specifics yet, but something to do with slowing my heartbeat?

Why did you fight in the Battle of New York?

Cause it was the right thing to do, you damn fool. I'm able to protect people, so I will. Can't have
Ma Rogers rolling over in her grave.

How are you acclimating to the 21st century?

Just fine. No polio’s good, food’s better cause there's more variety. Internet is helpful. Glad to
know the equal rights movement happened, though there's still some more work to be done there.

How long have you been awake?

Just over a month, now.

Have you reconnected with any of your former teammates?

Bucky pauses at this question. He swallows resolutely, and reaches for his phone. He's about to
dial before he impulsively stands up, shoving his phone in his pocket. He grabs his wallet and
keys, shoves his hat back on his head, grabs his gloves and sunglasses, and goes back to look at the
address on the file.

Staten Island.

*
He doesn’t hesitate until he's parked outside the building. It's a nice brownstone, a townhouse. He swallows, and takes his hat off long enough to run his fingers through his hair.

Is he really doing this? Yeah. He is.

He takes another deep breath.

He knocks on the door.

A middle aged man opens the door. “Hello?”

“Hi, uh,” Bucky clears his throat. “I'm here to see Gabe Jones?”

“Listen, if you're another reporter-”

“No, I'm not, really, I just wanna talk to him, I swear.”

“Well, I’m pretty he won't want to talk to you.”

“Noah, wait a second,” a deep voice calls from inside, cutting the younger man off. “Let him in.”

Noah creases his brows at Bucky, but steps aside. Bucky nods, wiping his palms on his jeans and pulling of his hat and glasses.

“Bucky Barnes,” Gabriel Jones says from the hallway. “As I live and breathe. I'd recognize that voice anywhere.”

Bucky chokes up. “Gabe.”

His hair is full white, cut close to his head, and he still has his goatee. He stands tall, unassisted, the same twinkle in his eye.

“Was wonderin’ if you were gonna show up, Cap. I told Andrea, if that man had the time to fight aliens, he's got time to visit an old friend.”

Bucky’s vision blurs with tears. “Gabe,” he says, again.

“Yeah, that's me, Barnes.” Gabe walks over to him and places a firm hand on his shoulder. His eyes are watery as well. “It's good to see you.”

Bucky’s knees buckle, and he pulls Gabe in for a hug.

“Noah, go tell them to set out another place; we've got a guest tonight for dinner.”

Gabe ushers Bucky into the large kitchen, where several people are sitting at the table. Gabe goes around and introduces Bucky to his children and - damn - grandchildren.

“Antonie couldn't be here tonight, he's the only other one who lives in the area.”

An older woman comes up and holds out her hand. “Captain Barnes, it's nice to meet you. I'm Andrea Jones.”

“Just Bucky, ma’am.”

Andrea jokingly turns to one of her grandchildren. “Would you look at that, a real gentleman!”

Bucky ducks his head and runs a hand through his hair again. He never put the pomade in it, so it's
fluffy and messy in between his fingers.

“Well, come on, sit down.”

*

When he gets back to the tower that night, Bucky grabs the pen again.

_Have you reconnected with any of your former teammates?_

Yeah, I had dinner with Gabe Jones and his family last night. It was good. Andrea made pasta, Noah brought garlic bread, and Katy, Violet’s daughter, brought Thin Mints. I bought a box of Samoas off her; she’ll have them for me next week, cause they're having me for dinner again.

********

**Bucky sent a photo to XD XD XD**

_Bucky:_ Hanna, Gabe appreciates the sentiment, but regrets to inform you that he's happily married.

_Hanna:_ I don't care that you're a super soldier who fought literal Nazis and survived a plane crash into the arctic for 70 years

_Hanna:_ I will find you, and I will kill you

_Takisha:_ literal aliens have shown up and yet Gabe Jones knowing Hanna had a crush on him is still the most surreal thing that has happened this year

_Allie:_ Bucky pls tell me you didn't tell Pepper Potts that I'm in love with her and want her to leave tony for me

_Bucky:_ I asked her if she would be open to meeting with you, but you'll have to propose all romantic endeavors yourself

_Bucky:_ Andrea also told me to ask you all to dinner once you move up here

_Samira:_ Thats so nice of her

_Allie:_ what does one wear while trying to woo a internationally known, highly influential, gorgeous and intelligent CEO?

_Bucky:_ More important question, what does one wear when about to reveal to the world that you're actually alive?

_Allie:_ I mean I helped you get a suit literally today but if you can get your hands on your old army uniform or anything similar wear that cause in it you look fly as hell

_Hanna:_ pleas never say that again

_Allie changed the group name to “Bucky Barnes Looks Fly As Hell”

_Hanna:_ smh *no*

*

_Allie:_ holy fuck did you hear the Bartov Yanko died
Takisha: you’ve gotta be fucking kidding me he was *just* about to give an interview

Bucky: wait who is he?

Samira: an old soviet spy who defected in the 90s

Samira: do you know what the Cold War is?

Bucky: i mean I watched the crash course episodes on it

Bucky: that john green guy sure knows his shit

Chapter End Notes

I know have an outline for the rest of this fic!
I was originally planning to separate it out into two fics, but im undecided if I want to keep it as just one long fic instead of two medium lenghth ones. Let me know what you think in the comments!
Bucky and Tony bond.

Chapter Notes

This one feels shorter, but that's because I'm trying to get somethings out of the way before we get into the Winter Soldier movie plot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky pulls his suit on nervously the next day. Twirled his cufflinks, straightens his tie, runs a comb through his hair again.

They'd had a uniform for him, but it didn't feel right. They'd asked for Bucky Barnes, not Captain America, so they were going to fucking get Bucky Barnes, and damn 'em if they had a problem with it.

He debates shaving - for the third time in as many hours - but ultimately decides against it. The beard looks pretty good, and it's distinctively not the Captain America that people would be expecting.

He'd never had a beard before. He could grow one, certainly, he just chose to shave. He'd tried to, once, but the stubble was rough against Stephanie’s skin, and he'd bury his face in her neck as they slept. She woke up itchy and annoyed, and he hadn't thought it had looked that good anyway, so he just shaved.

Now, though, with his hair just long enough that the curled texture was beginning to show, the short beard looked pretty good if he said so himself.

He pulled out his phone and sent a picture to the girls.

_Bucky_: so, how do I look?

_Allie_: you clean up real nice, Barnes, but your beard is a little messy

_Hanna_: I've seen Tony’s beard, ask him if he's got anything for it. But yeah you look great Bucky

_Bucky_: :)

Bucky tucks his phone into his interior jacket pocket, tugs at the lapels one more time, and heads up to the main floor to see Tony.

“Tony, question. Opinion on the beard.”

“Bucky, answer,” Tony says, turning around. He's wearing a suit himself, albeit in a deep burgundy
instead of Bucky’s daft blue. “It's decently enough grown out, just need something to smooth it
down a bit. How long have you been growing it out?”

“I, uh, don't think I've shaved since I woke up.”

“Not bad for a month’s growth. That a Serum thing, you think?”

“Nah, it's always been like this. Used to drive my wife crazy.”

“That's cute,” Tony says, walking with him to the elevator. “That'll definitely get you some
sympathy headlines, talking about your ol’ ball and chain.”

“My what?”

“Ya know.”

“Tony, radical idea, but I married her cause I liked her,” Bucky says. He's always been confused
with this line of thought. “I liked hanging out with her. Getting to hang out with her for my whole
life was the idea there when we got married.”

Tony blushes a bit.

“You sayin’ you don't like to hang out with Pepper?”

“No, it's just guy talk.”

“It's bullshit,” Bucky says. “If you feel like you won't like being married, maybe, and just hear me
out on this one, don't get married.”

Tony smiles. “You know, you're not what most people will expect.”

Bucky sighs, smoothing a hand over his hair instead of running his fingers through it. He'd taken
the time to slick it back, and he doesn't want to mess it up. “That's what I'm worried about.”

Tony claps a hand on Bucky’s shoulder. “I'm sure you'll be fine, Gramps.”

“Tony, I'm younger than your father,” Bucky responds, deadpan. “Physically, I'm younger than
you. I just turned 25.”

“Now there's a mindfuck I didn't need today. You were down in the trenches at 25?”

“I mean, no. Not really. I had just turned 25 a few days before the ice. And even then, the Howlies
and I were never really a ‘trenches’ bunch,” Bucky says, holding his fingers up for air quotes.

Tony has, shockingly, nothing to say to that.

Bucky nervously rubs his hand over his chin. “Actually-”

“No,” Tony says, cutting him off before he can finish. “You've committed to the beard. No going
back now.”

“I could literally just shave it off my face, Tony.”

“Don't have time, I'm helping you smooth it down, and then we're getting our rears in gear.”

Bucky sighs. “I hate doing this in an official, on the record capacity.”
“What?”

“Talking to people.”

“But you're supposed to be charming!”

Bucky puts his face in his hands. “Yeah, but I don't have the energy to be charming. Plus all those cameras in my face, no thank you. I've been ogled enough for my entire life. I miss my wife. If people were bothering me, she'd just tell ‘em to fuck off.”

Tony snorts. “I think I'd have liked her.”

Bucky smiles. “Nah, she would've gotten on your nerves.”

“How so?”

“Well, she wouldn't put up with any of your bullshit.”

“Neither does Pepper.”

“Further proof that I should charm Pepper.”

Tony pretends to look hurt. “But the bro code!”

“Tony,” Bucky starts, unable to keep a smirk off his face, “you seem to have gotten the impression at some point that you and I are friends.”

“Hey, it's a new century. You need friends.”

“Firstly, all my old friends are still alive. Secondly, I think I did just fine on my own in DC. But for real, Tony, I don't mind hangin’ round with you.”

“Nah, you're too young for me. You don't even know what Star Wars is.”

Bucky glances at Tony as the doors open.

“I'll put it on the list.”

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Excerpt interview with Captain America

Tiffany Walters, TIME Magazine

Due to my past interactions with Stark Industries, after the initial press conference, I was given the privilege of getting to speak with Captain Barnes relatively alone. Accompanied by Miss Potts and my photographer, he asked if I would be comfortable heading back up to his floor in the newly rebuilt Stark Tower. What else can you say to that but yes?

TW: So, Captain Barnes, nice to meet you.

James Barnes: Please, call me Bucky. Only time anyone called me James, it's cause I was in trouble. Or, well, Peggy calls me James.

TW: Oh? What's the story there?

JB: My wife, Steph, when we first met, we were four. I'd just come on over from Romania, and
when we got here, my parents and I all Americanized our names. My birth name is actually Yasha Nicolae. Yasha is a diminutive of Yackov, which is the Russian form of James, so I'm named after my grandfather. *He pauses here to slip off his blazer.* The Romanian form of James would actually be Iacob, which was my Pa’s middle name before he changed it to George.

TW: And your mother?

JB: She went from Willa to Winifred.

TW: Did they know at the time that they were naming you after a president?

JB: Yeah, they did. *He offers us all something to drink, bring back a round of water glasses.* My Ma read about it in some history book. She learned English during the Great War - s’what we called it back then, cause there’d only been the one - and she’d read to try to keep it fresh. Anyway, when I met Stevie, she couldn't say James quite right, and my Pa had given me a big speech about how we were Americans now, so we had to use our American names. And a’course she couldn't say ‘Buchanan’ because that's a mouthful even for someone who isn't a four year old with a lisp, so she shortened it to Bucky. Soon enough, everybody was callin’ me that.

TW: How come there was no record of this before?

JB: *He smiles at me.* Cause no one wanted the guy who supposedly was going to kill Hitler to be called Bucky. James, now, there's an Everyman name. Some Senator type explained it to me once that ‘James Barnes’ is a truly American name. The Howlies laughed at that one. No one had the heart to break it to him that I wasn't born in America.

TW: How are you adjusting? You said that you had contacted Gabriel Jones. Have you spoken with any of your other former teammates?

JB: Not yet. I was gonna call ‘em tonight. I asked Stark to see if he could find anything on my sisters.

TW: How is your relationship with Tony Stark going, considering his own complicated relationship with his father and the fact that you and his father were close friends?

JB: I don't know how close you could ever say Howard and I were. Friends, sure. Shared a drink with the guy once or twice. Mostly we just talked shop.

TW: And you and Tony?

JB: Our relationship? Well, I think it's going rather well. I know it's early, but when I proposed last night, he said yes.

*We all sit in shocked silence for a moment before Captain Barnes shakes with laughter.*

JB: Nah, I'm just joshin’ ya. Kiddin’ ‘round, ya know? Tony’s a great guy. All we did yesterday was watch a movie together.

TW: What movie?

JB: One of the ones they made about me. ‘The Young and the Brave.’ It was pretty good.

TW: Was it hard to relive your wife’s death by watching it on screen?

JB: *He gives me a sad smile [see reverse].* Ma’am, I've been reliving her death inside my own head
every damn day since it happened.

{image description: James Barnes sits on a chair, tie loose and sleeves rolled up, legs crossed, with one hand on a glass that rests on the table. He has a particularly melancholic expression, but there is a smile on his lips.}

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Chapter End Notes

I'm going to see Infinity War tonight and i'm panicking a little. It's not going to effect this story at all, and I'm not going to post any spoilers, so don't worry about that. Do wish me luck though, I'm super nervous. I hate watching new movies with high stakes, and this one is part 1 of 2. Hopefully I survive lol.
The thing about time is that when you're counting it happen it passes so slowly that you might as well not be moving through it at all. Assuming a linear time stream.

When you're not waiting on it, it glides right past.

Needless to say, Bucky been thinking a lot about the concept of time. Especially since he would have sworn that yesterday was late May, even as the calendar tells him differently.

Fourth of July. *Happy birthday, Stevie.*

Tony has some big soirée planned for the evening, involving fireworks, meat, and copious amounts of alcohol. Bucky seriously considers bunkering down in his room for the duration and asking Jarvis to soundproof it. But Tony and Pepper have been good to him these past few months - Tony, especially was growing on Bucky like a weed, they talked science together (Tony was working on hypothetical flying cars after Bucky had mentioned seeing one at the first ever Stark Expo), and Tony had even gone along with his joke about a proposal - and the event was technically a charity event.

Charity events were something Bucky went to a lot these days. And he had learned that more oft than not, a charity event meant several uncomfortable conversations with snobby rich people who thought that since they knew a lot about him, he was their best friend. (The number of times he's heard, ‘I wanted to marry you when I was a kid,’ should not even be mentioned.)

One such event - which had almost made him swear off them all together - was a charity auction that the Maria Stark Foundation, a charity Tony founded in memory of his mother, had put on. The night had been going fine - Bucky had thought he had fulfilled his obligations by signing a few things, and volunteering for photo ops - until Tony took the stage to start the bachelor auction.

Bucky likes to think of himself as a reasonable fella, so, reasonably, at that moment he'd started to make a mental list of ways he could kill Tony fucking Stark.

Some lady paid almost half a million dollars (once they had passed the two thousand mark, Bucky had steadfastly stood on stage and *not thrown up* at the idea of spending that much money on *literally anything* although he rationalized that it was for a good cause) to go on a date with him. Rachel had been nice, hadn't tried to feel him up or be inappropriate, but she had taken him to some
fancy ass restaurant where he had felt painfully out of place. (And Bucky ain't blind; he knows when somebody's giving him bedroom eyes.) She’d slipped him her number and said he could call her.

He'd felt guilty about throwing it out, but not enough to save it. His wife wasn't even one year in the ground, for goodness’s sake. (Tony had reminded him, during one of their worse disagreements, that Stephanie had probably literally become the ground at this point, she'd been in it so long; Bucky hadn't talked to him for a good three days.)

Anyway, the event tonight was a glorified barbecue on the roof of the Tower. He'd initially made the excuse that he was going to spend it with the Jones family or his own (his sisters all lived within a block of one another, with their own families), but Pepper, bless her heart, had offered them all free invitations. That, coupled with the fact that she didn't mind when he got tired of being charming and reverted to his slightly-dickish self, makes it so that Bucky is pulling on a white button down and sliding on sunglasses.

He feels off, what with his longer hair, growing beard, and lack of tie. Some days he looks in the mirror and he barely recognized himself.

“Captain Barnes,” Jarvis says, “the party will be starting soon.”

“Thanks, Jarvis. I'll be right up.”

He stuffs his phone in his pocket and heads up.

Nobody else had arrived yet, so Bucky walks over to the edge of the balcony, taking in the city below, the wind blowing through his hair. It's already pretty hot, so he grabs a bottle of water from a cooler nearby.

He's nervous.

He hadn't been able to find a good time to meet with his sisters until today.

Becca and her husband David and their two kids and three grandchildren. Imogen and her husband Jacob and their daughter and two grandchildren. Rose and her husband Michael and their two sons and four grandchildren.

Time to meet his nieces and nephews and brothers-in-law. No big deal. He's got this.

He stands up straight as he hears the elevator doors open, but it's only Tony. He's oddly quiet, not teasing Bucky about his fashion choices for once.

“They're gonna be here soon,” Tony says.

“They?”

“Your family,” Tony clarifies. “They're just finishing up at security.”

Bucky lets his head fall backwards, squinting at the purple-orange sky. “I...I don't even know what to say.”

“Well don't look at me. I never know what I'm going to say ahead of time anyway. I just open my mouth and let the words happen.”

Bucky snorts, smiling despite himself. “You know, that actually explains so much.”
“I’m sure you’ll be fine, Barnes. Everybody loves you.”

Bucky sighs. “Thanks for the reminder.”

“No, I mean it. And besides, it’s your sisters. Your family. From what I understand, barring any colossal betrayals, you’re obligated to love each other. Hell, given Thor and his whack job brother, some times even with them.”

Bucky knocks his elbow into Tony’s. “Thanks. I just need to not throw up before or after they get here.”

“That an issue for you?”

“It was, before the Serum. Delicate stomach, Stevie used to call it. Becca called it being a wimp. Mostly just happens with nerves. Only reason I held it together for my wedding day is because I promised myself I wasn’t gonna kiss my wife with a gross mouth.”

“Huh.”

The elevator doors ding open, and Bucky feels his entire stomach go tight as he turns around.

There’s a girl who looks almost exactly like Becca did at age eight, and it hits Bucky like a punch in the throat.

Three elderly women - those must be his sisters. He swallows, trying not to cry. Little Rosie and Tiny Gennie, only 7 when he went to Europe, with wrinkles and white hair. Not to mention husbands and kids and grandkids.

“Hi,” he says, for lack of any better ideas.

One of the woman walks towards him, her dress a pale green. She reaches up one hand to his face.

“Get a haircut, you look like a bum,” she says. “What would Mama say, to see her baby like this?” Bucky clenches his jaw and tries not to cry. “She'd shove me in a chair and cut it herself.”

“Hell yeah she would.” She moves her hand to his shoulder. “You got big. You weren't supposed to get any bigger, I was gonna be taller than you.”

Bucky lets out a watery laugh. “There was no way you were ever gonna be taller than me, Becks.”

“Yasha,” she says, simply, a tear sliding down her cheek, smiling. “Thought I'd never see you again.”

He pulls her into his arms. She comes up to the middle of his chest, and he cradled her head there, just like old times. “Me neither, Becks. Me neither.”

The other two women walk up, placing their hands on either of Becca’s shoulders.

Bucky scans their faces quickly. There’s a mole under the left eye of the one on his right. “Rosie,” he says, addressing her. She smiles. He turns to the other. “Gennie.”

“Thought that I’d finally shaken that one for good,” she says, the Barnes smirk right across her face.

“It's…” he starts.
“Yeah,” Rosie finishes. “Yeah, it sure is.”

“I hear you all went off and got married,” Bucky says, releasing Becca.

“Only following your example,” Rose jokes.

“Well, why don't you introduce your big brother to these beaus of yours?”

Imogen snorts, the same endearing sound as it was when she was smaller.

“Bucky, meet my husband, David Proctor,” Becca starts. David is a relatively average looking man, with thin, wire framed glasses.

Bucky reaches out to shake his hand. “You been treatin’ my sister right? I'm not above hittin’ a guy with glasses.”

David hesitates.

“I'm kiddin’ ya,” Bucky quickly amends. “I trust my girls to take care of themselves.”

David smiles. “Nice to meet you, Bucky. I've heard a lot about you.”

“If it's from these silly doves than it's all slanderous over exaggerations.”

David laughs.

“These are my son and daughter,” Becca continues, waving forward a middle aged man and woman. “James and Sylvia.”

James is about the height Bucky had been before. He's got David’s nose, but Bucky’s (or, really, Winifred Barnes's) cheekbones. His dark brown hair has flecks of silver running through it. He has his Ma’s eyes.

Sylvia takes after her father, but she has the same twinkle in her eye as Becca.

“My wife couldn't make it out here tonight,” James says, shaking his hand. “Susan was busy with making sure some merger goes through. These two are mine,” he gestures towards a pair of teenagers. “Forest and Mary.”

The kids wave.

Forest whispers to his sister, “holy shit, our dad’s uncle is Captain fucking America.”

“That's always been true,” she hisses back.

“Yeah but...Captain America.”

Bucky winks at him, and Forest blushes.

Sylvia puts her arm around an older boy, probably sixteen or seventeen. “This is Marcus.”

“Nice to meet you, Sir,” Marcus says, extending his hand.

“No need to call me Sir. Just Bucky is fine.”

“Uncle Bucky?” Mary asks.
Bucky smiles at her, “Uncle Bucky sounds great.”

********

The worst thing about moving, Allie decides, is the actual physical act of moving things.

She wipes her brow - August in Washington DC is a fucking nightmare - as she loads the last of her own box into the van.

She pulls out her phone and dials as she walks back into her house, making sure that she didn't forget anything.

“Hey, Al, what’s up?” Bucky’s voice greets her.

“We’re driving up today, should take about six hours. I'll text you the address for when we're ten minutes out. I beg you, Bucky, if you love me at all, be there. I'm very weak and I'm dying.”

Bucky laughs, a warm, soothing sound. “I'll be there. Captain America to the rescue.”

“You sure you can squeeze us into your busy schedule?”

“Yeah, I'll jot you down between ‘get cat out of tree’ and ‘help old lady across the street,’” Bucky jokes.

“Good,” Allie responds. “Now wish me luck, Hanna picked the music and she had an eclectic taste.”

“Nothing could ever be worse than Denier’s singing. Keep your friends close, but your headphones closer.”

Allie laughed, wishing him a nice day and hanging up her phone.

“You sure you've got everything, sweetie?” Mom walks into Allie’s old room.

“Yeah, Mom. We already did the mushy goodbyes last night, remember?”

“You'll call?”

“Duh.”

“You sure you'll be okay? You won't get lonely?”

“Mom, I'm gonna be with the girls. It's more likely that I'll want to be alone than otherwise. And you forget, I've already got a friend in New York.”

“Yes, James. I'm not sure you knowing some boy up in New York makes me feel any better.”

Ah, right. Allie hadn't told her mom that James was Captain America. Now...might be a good time.

“So, uh, Mom,” she starts.

“If you are having sex with that boy, at least tell me you're being safe.”

“Mom, no!” Allie yells. “No, not at all. I don't like him like that, and even if I did, he lost his wife like, half a year ago. And that's beside the point because even though he's hot, I'm into someone else!”
“Good. It's about time you got your head out of your ass and told that nice girl you like her.”

“Mom!”

“Safe sex is still a thing between two women, honey.”

“Ugh, Mom! I will. I'll tell her. Okay?”

“Promise?”

Allie drops her face into her hands. “Yes. I promise that I will tell Samira that I like her. But what I was trying to is that, James, he’s,” she sighs. “James Barnes. Captain America. My friend James is Captain America.”

“Honey?”

“I've got proof!” Allie says, opening up her photos and scrolling until she finds the selfie that they took. “We've got a group chat. He's a great guy, actually!”

“I don't doubt that, I just doubt that you know him.”

Allie huffs, shooting off a quick text.

Allie: Bucky can you say hi to my mom? With like a video?

Bucky: got ya

Bucky Barnes sent an attachment.

Allie opens the video.

“Hey there, Allie’s mom! I'm Bucky Barnes, nice to meet you. Don't worry, I can keep an eye on the girls for you. Not that they need it. Okay, I gotta go before Tony finds me talking to my phone; he's still under the impression that I have no idea what I'm doing with it, it's hysterical. Bye!”

Her Mom still cries when Allie leaves, slightly mollified by the idea that Captain America will be on call to protect her baby girl. Hanna pulls Allie with her into the middle set of seats, and Takisha turns the music back on. Samira smiles at Allie, whose heart feels like it could beat as fast as the wheels turning on the highway.

Chapter End Notes

So, we have reached the end of the chapters that I currently have finished. I'm still hoping to get chapters out every Friday at least.
August, September, October, and November all pass in the same too-fast way that June did. He helps the girls move in, he brings them snacks during midterms and finals, he holds Samira’s hand as she convinces herself to just tell Allie already, he smirks at his phone as Allie complains to him (a little tipsy) one night just how beautiful Samira is. He tells them both about a diner he used to take Stevie too; still owned by the family and still standing, it's technically an Italian place, but it serves all types, including breakfast. Bucky knows this because he's up every day with the sun, unable to sleep, and his runs take him by the place.

The Tower has been lonely ever since Tony and Pepper went back to Malibu. Late December doesn't feel the same in New York City if one isn't freezing a little, but the temperature control of the Tower doesn't allow anything like that. Bucky does drop the temperature minutely at night, just so that it's cold enough to bury himself under blankets.

The girls help him set up a Twitter, as promised. @CaptainBarnes gets verified thanks to Tony, and he's gets over 10,000 followers overnight.

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: How do you use this thing I don't have grandkids to explain it I gotta outsource

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: If @tonystark calls me old again I'm falling down the stairs and suing him

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: For the last time Dolores, I don't know if there's bingo tonight

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: Why are there so many types of apples what to heck???????

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: OKAY WHAT DID YA ALL DO TO BANANAS???

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: To every runner NYC: I'm sorry if I make ya feel bad

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: I adjusted to American once, just need to do it again

@CaptainBarnes tweeted: NO I WILL NOT SAY Y'ALL INSTEAD OF YA ALL. IT'S DIFFERENT. I HAVE STANDARDS.
Needless to say, he's having an alright time adjusting to the future. Not the easiest transition, but he can do it.

He feels a little bored and useless. SHIELD hasn't called him in again for anything, and with Tony in Malibu, there's not really anyone to tell him if he has any responsibilities he's supposed to be taking care of.

He walks into his kitchen one day and sees Codename: Black Widow standing there.

“Natasha, right?” He asks, as though reformed Russian spies regularly are waiting in his kitchen at 6:07am on a Thursday.

“Barnes.”

“Bucky, actually. You can call me Bucky. Want some coffee?”

“That’d be great, actually.”

Bucky smiles at her as he hands her the mug. She smiles shyly in return and glances away.

“So,” Bucky says, sitting down at the table. “Fury wants you to try and honey pot me, huh?”

One of her red eyebrows raises minutely which is as much as he going to get from her by way of genuine surprise. “Oh?”

“People we’re having sex in the 40’s, Nat. Believe it or not, but I’ve tried that technique quite a few times on people. It even worked most of the time.”

She smirks, sitting with him at the table, shoulders loose, the act dropped. “Really?”

“Have you seen me?” He asks. “I’m fuckin’ gorgeous.”

The smirk widens. “Glad to know you think that.”

“So. What brings you here to Tony’s not at all humble abode?”

“Fury wants me to get into your good graces, thought playing the helpless female might be a good way.”

Bucky scoffs, disgusted. “Why?”

“You know, damsel in distress. Typical early 20th century stuff. Plus, you lost your wife not even a year ago.”

“Okay firstly,” Bucky says, draining his mug. “I’ve seen you rip the head of an alien. You’re as helpless as Tony is dumb. Secondly, helpless female has never been my type.” He gives her a wistful smile, eyed focused on nothing. “I met Steph when she was trying to beat the shit out of a guy twice her size.”

Natasha smiles. “Sounds like a hell of a woman.”

“Yeah,” Bucky sighs. “The girls showed me this movie, Hercules. It was Disney. ‘I’m a damsel. I’m in distress. I can handle it.’ That was Stevie.”

“How are they?”
“I’m sure you know exactly how they are. I know you all think I’m some hulking strong man who only has testosterone between his ears, but I did actually notice you following me.”

“Oh?”

“How quick you all are to forget. Being a Romanian immigrant wasn’t fun in the 30s. Especially when you were best friends with an Irish Catholic girl. It wasn’t as bad as it had been, but that don’t mean it was good.” Bucky stands, empty mug in hand. “I didn’t always look like this, remember? Number of times I’ve been mugged, you wouldn’t even believe.”

He washes his mug, and dries it with the towel hanging over a cupboard handle.

“So you would have had sex with me if that’s what you thought it would take?” Bucky asks, just to see what her reaction is.

“It wouldn’t have been a chore. I mean; I’ve seen you, you’re fucking gorgeous.”

They both snicker.

“Yes,” she continues, easily. “You’ve done stuff like that before. You know it works.”

“Oh people who don’t see it coming.” He sits back down. “No offense, Nat, but you’re not my type.”

“What’s your type?”

“Why?”

“Who do you want me to be?”

Bucky’s heart clenches. “You. I want you to be you, Natasha.”

“You wouldn’t like me,” Natasha says.

“You know, once I non-fatally shot a man four times, just to get information. Stevie carved up a guy’s hand. We did scary shit over there.”

“You were at war.”

“Yeah, we were.”

The silence becomes uncomfortable, but Bucky grew up with three sisters who loved the quiet game, so he can take just about anything.

“You didn’t answer my question. What’s your type?”

“Not sure, honestly,” Bucky says, shrugging and glancing out the window. “I saw Stephanie and that was it for me. Never had to worry about it again.”

“Peggy—”

Bucky drops his head to the table. “No. Never. We didn’t ever- ugh.”

Natasha snorts.

“Natasha,” Bucky says, honestly. “The easiest way to get to know me would be to try and be my
friend.”

“Captain Barnes?” Jarvis interrupts. “Sir is waiting for you in the sitting room.”

Bucky stands up. “Didn’t know he was in the area.”

“If I may make a recommendation?” Jarvis says. “Perhaps you should begin to keep up with the news.”

*******

Natasha rides in the elevator with Barnes, mulling over his words.

He knew she wanted to get to know him because Fury told her to.

He wanted to be her friend anyway.

He didn’t have some misogynistic complex about saving women.

She may have to adjust her evaluation of him.

Stark is in the sitting room, holding Pepper tightly.

“What’s up, Tone?” Barnes says. “You look like shit.”

Tony sighs, and stands up.

He details the events of the last few days.

Killian is a name Natasha is familiar with - he’s on Shield’s watchlist. They hadn’t realized he’d gotten so powerful.

“So then I whipped up this awesome set up with stuff from a Home Depot, and I broke into this place like a badass, and it was a good thing I’d been working on that armor, cause it showed up right one time.”

Barnes’s eyebrows inch farther and farther up his face almost comically, his mouth dropping open when they can’t go any farther.

“And then Rhody and I kicked ass and saved the day, and then I blew up all my suits. That’s all.”

Barnes stands up and pulls Stark to him.

“If you ever do anything so fucking stupid again I’m going to strangle you to death with your collection of awful ties.”

Stark pats him on the back, and Barnes hugs him tighter. “I’m serious, Tony. If something like that happens again, you call me. I don’t care what I may be doing. Don’t pull that shit, Stark. I’m kind of an expert in not getting blown up by people who want to blow me up.”

“Sure thing, Spangles.”

“I’m serious. Tony. You and the girls? You’re all I got here.”

“Oh, your family? The Commandos?”

Barnes sighs. “Tony. I’m 25. They’re all in their 70s or older. I...I love them all. But when I died,
they kept going. All my sisters got married and I wasn’t there for their wedding days. The Howlies fought over who got to name their kid after me. They got married. They had kids, and grandkids. They had jobs and struggles and joys and lives, and I wasn’t there for any of that. And I wouldn’t want them to have done anything different. But they aren’t the same them that I knew. My Ma died forty years ago. Sometimes I catch Becca looking at me funny, cause everyone would always say how much I looked like Ma. I love them all, but I may as well be a relic to them. You...you and the girls know me now. You all are my family too. And you don’t pull that ‘I’ll go it alone’ shit with family.”

“Dammit Barnes,” Stark says. “You’re good at that.”

Barnes smiles. “That goes for you too, Pepper.”

Pepper stands up and places a hand on his shoulder. “Thank you, Bucky.”

“Have you two eaten? If you have, go nap. You both look like you haven’t slept in a month.”

Pepper kisses his cheek and hugs him before she and Tony get in the elevator, holding hands.

Barnes goes behind the bar. “Want a drink? I can’t get drunk but something about the taste of whiskey makes me feel better. Although this stuff is way more top shelf than I’m used to.”

He pours himself a large glass, pulling out one for Natasha. “I’m not really a whiskey person.”

He nods, and downs the glass in one go.

“Why does Fury want you to get in with me?”

“He’s got a job for you in Washington,” she answers, as close to the truth as she can manage.

“Oh,” Barnes says sarcastically, smirking and pouring himself another glass. “Do tell.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter we start the Winter Soldier movie plot equivalent!
You don't really care

Chapter Summary

Bucky goes for a jog, then he and Nat get down to business

Chapter Notes

Okay now we have OFFICIALLY reached the winter soldier plot. this particular chapter is kinda short, but that's because I didn't want to cut halfway through the action and if I made these the same chapter it would have been loooong. (The next chapter is already long)
I should post another one tomorrow or saturday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky ‘jogs’ along the root he’d found a few weeks ago (his jog is a semi-fast run for most people). He sees the man he’s come across a few times, and he always gives Bucky a polite nod when Bucky says ‘excuse me,’ even though he can’t see Bucky’s face. They have a bit of a bond between them.

He’s wearing a sweatshirt today that declares him to be Air Force.

It’s like the universe is telling Bucky to mess with the guy.

“On your left,” he says the first time.

He quickly loops back around, stomach tensing as he tries not to cackle loudly.

“On your left.”

“Uh-huh. On my left, got it.”

A few muffled snorts escape him and he doubles back again.

“Don’t say, don’t you say it!”

“On your left.”

“Come ON!”

Bucky made sure he was well out of earshot of the man before he started to cackle.

*

The man had collapsed against a tree, panting.

“Need a medic?” Bucky asks, somewhat sarcastically.
He lets out a very breathy yet earnest laugh. “Need a new set of lungs. You just ran 13 miles in like 30 minutes.”

Bucky shrugs. “I got a late start.”

“You should be ashamed of yourself. Take another lap,” he wipes his forehead with the back of his hand. “Did you just take it? I assume you just took it.”

Bucky laughs and helps him up. “What unit?” He says, gesturing at his sweatshirt.

“58th, but I work at the VA now. Sam Wilson.”

Bucky shakes his hand.

“Bucky Barnes.”

“Kinda figured that one out on my own. Must have freaked you out coming home after the whole defrosting thing.”

Bucky grits his teeth and turns to leave. “It takes some getting used to.” He doesn’t want to talk about this with a stranger. “It's good to meet you, Sam.”

“It's your bed, right?” Sam says.

“Huh?”

“Your bed, it's too soft. When I was over there I'd sleep on the ground and use rock for pillows, like a caveman. Now I'm home, lying in my bed, and it's like…”

“Like lying down in a marshmallow. I’m afraid I’m gonna sink right in. Even back before the war my bed wasn’t that great.”

Sam nods, understanding.

“How long?” Bucky asks.

“Two tours.”

Right, nowadays service wasn’t counted in months and years. It was ‘tours,’ whatever that means.

“You must miss the good old days.”

Bucky scoffs. “Like hell I do. Wish I coulda got here the normal way...but it’s not so bad. Internet is great. I’ve been trying to catch up, I’ve got some friends helping me.”

“If I can make a recommendation? Marvin Gaye, 1972, ‘Trouble Man’ soundtrack. Everything you've missed jammed into one album.”

Bucky pulls out his phone and types it out one handed into his notes. “It’s on the list.” While he’s holding it, it buzzes.

_Natasha: Mission alert. Extraction imminent. Meet at the curb. :)

Bucky sighs. “Duty calls.”

“I understand.”
“Thanks for the run, Sam. If that’s what you wanna call running?”

“Oh, so that’s how it is?”

“That’s how it is,” Bucky says, shaking Sam’s hand again and winking.

“Okay. Any time you wanna stop by the VA, make me look awesome in front of the girl at the front desk, just let me know.”

“I’ll think about it. The one on 7th west?”

“Nah, the one on 28th and G street.”

Bucky hears the crunch of tires slowing on concrete and knows Nat is here.

“Hey, fellas. Either one of you know where the Smithsonian is? I’m here to pick up a fossil.” She pops her bubble gum.

“Hysterical. I’ve only heard that one seven hundred times before from Tony.”

He climbs into the black car - it’s fancy, probably - and sees Sam taking a appreciative look at it.

“Can’t run everywhere,” Bucky says as he clicks his seatbelt.

“No, you can’t.”

********

“Did you do anything fun on Saturday night?” Natasha asks Bucky once their channel is secure.

“Allie called. Her and Samira’s six-month anniversary is coming up and she wants to know if I have any recommendations. Then once Hanna found out she was talking to me, she needed to tell me about her Ethics class, and then Takisha wanted to tell me about how she’s top of her organic chemistry class. Samira was talking to her mom at the time, otherwise she woulda had news too.”

“So you just talked to some barely legal girls about college?” She teased.

“Well when you put it that way it sounds weird.”

“You know, if you asked Karen out, from Statistics, she’d probably say yes.”

“S’why I don’t ask,” Barnes says, signature grin on his face.

“Too shy or too scared?”

Barnes laughs as he walks out of the jet. “Too busy!”

Behind her, Natasha hears someone ask if Barnes was wearing a parachute.

“No. No, he wasn’t,” Rumlow replies.

The op goes well, really. Barnes finds her downloading files and throws his hands up, exasperated.

“You gotta at least tell me when you’ve got a different mission, Natasha. That way when you disappear on me I’ll know why.”

Fury calls her into his office after Barnes leaves, and his face is just as indecipherable as always.
She stands on the other side of his desk, not giving him the satisfaction of her speaking first. It’s a game between them.

“Barnes...he’s-”

“He’s not what you expected,” Natasha cuts him off. “He’s not what any of us expected.”

“How’s he adjusting?”

“Well, I think. Those girls up in New York, there’s some boy he keeps visiting here in D.C. and he’s still got his family.”

“You know what he just said to me? ‘Soldiers trust each other, that’s what makes it an army. Not a bunch of guys running around and shooting guns.’”

Natasha smirks. “If he wanted trust, he’s in the wrong line of work.”

“You’re the one that brought him in, Romanov.”

“On your orders.”

“He didn’t take your bait, any idea if he’s taken anyone else’s?”

“No. From what I can tell he’s got a pretty strict routine when he’s not on missions. He runs a lot. He keeps visiting the Smithsonian. When I picked him up today, he was talking to someone.”

“You think it’s time to tell him more? It’s your call, Natasha.”

Natasha hesitates. “No. He’d probably say we’re lying to him, but really we’re just keeping him from the harsher realities. We have to ease him into it, otherwise he’ll spook and run.”

“I showed him Project Insight today.”

“Oh? And what did he think of that?“

“He didn’t like it.” Fury lifts one side of his lips slightly, the sort-of-smile he gives only her. “I suppose I should have asked you first.”

“You’re in charge here, Nick.”

“You’re dismissed, Agent Romanov.”

Natasha nods her head.

* 

Barnes does, oddly enough, go visit Sam Wilson at the VA. Natasha waits outside on a park bench across from the building, inconspicuous. She texts Clint.

After that, Barnes visits the museum again, and he’s moping. He spends a lot of time leaning against a wall and staring at the display of the Howling Commandos, which means Natasha has to spend a lot of time looking at the display.

She stands in front of the display case showing copies of the awards won by the Commandos. A picture of each Commando is next to each display.
Natasha smirks to herself. Posthumous promotions. Brigadier General America just doesn’t have the same ring to it.

*

List of awards and special commendations awarded to the group known as the Howling Commandos (Note: While not in the United States Armed Forces, Jacques Denier and James Montgomery Falsworth were part of an American-led task force, and therefore were awarded American military medals) (Note: James Barnes and Stephanie Rogers have both been posthumously promoted) (Note: Barnes received several awards from other governments as a show of solidarity between themselves and the United States. Rogers later received many of the same awards for her well known sacrifice, as a way of showing appreciation to the unsung female heroes of the war effort)

The Distinguished Service Medal, United States - All members: Individuals who have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service to the Government in a duty of great responsibility.

WWII Medal of Victory, United States - All members: Individuals who served between the dates of 7 December 1941 and 31 December 1946

European, African, and Middle Eastern Medal, United States - All members: For military service in geographical theater areas of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East between the dates of 7 December 1941 and 31 December 1946

Croix de Guerre, France - All members: A French military decoration, a version of the Croix de guerre created on September 26, 1939, to honour people who fought with the Allies against the Axis forces at any time during World War II

Croix de Guerre, Belgium - All members: Military decoration of the Kingdom of Belgium established by royal decree on 25 October 1915. It was primarily awarded for bravery or other military virtue on the battlefield. The award was reestablished on 20 July 1940 by the Belgian government in exile for recognition of bravery and military virtue during World War II.

The Meritorious Unit Citation, United States - All members: Valorous or meritorious achievement or service, or exceptionally meritorious conduct and outstanding achievement or service, in combat or non-combat.

Presidential Unit Citation, United States - All members: Gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing the unit’s mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions

Military Medal, Luxembourg - All members: Awarded for exceptionally distinguished military achievement

Order of Liberation, France - All members: Awarded for outstanding contribution to the liberation of occupied France

The Medal of Honor, United States - Brigadier General James Barnes and Sergeant Major of the US Army Stephanie Rogers: Awarded for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty. Rogers is the second woman to ever be awarded this medal.

The Army Commendation Medal, United States - Barnes: Officers who have performed noteworthy service in any capacity with the United States Army. Qualifying service for the award of the medal can be for distinctive meritorious achievement and service, acts of courage involving no voluntary risk of life, or sustained meritorious performance of duty.
The Defence Superior Service Medal, United States - Barnes: Awarded by the Secretary of Defense to members of the United States Armed Forces who have rendered superior meritorious service while serving in a position of great responsibility. This service must be as part of a joint activity.


French National Order of Merit/French Legion of Honor, France - All members save for Corporal Denier/Corporal Denier: Distinguished civil or military achievements, the only difference being that Denier, as a French citizen, could be inducted into the Legion of Honor with the rank of, “Officier.” All other Howling Commandos were inducted into the National Order of Merit.

Prisoner of War Medal, United States - Barnes, Rogers, Dugan, Mortia, Jones: Individuals taken prisoner and held captive while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict against an opposing foreign force; while serving with friendly forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force to which the United States is not a belligerent; or under circumstances not covered by the 1985 statute but which the Secretary concerned finds were comparable to those circumstances under which persons have generally been held captive by enemy armed forces during periods of armed conflict

Order of St. Gregory the Great, Vatican City - Barnes, Rogers, Dugan: The honor is bestowed upon Roman Catholic men and women in recognition of their personal service to the Holy See and to the Roman Catholic Church, through their unusual labors, their support of the Holy See, and their excellent examples set forth in their communities and their countries

The St. George’s Cross, United Kingdom - Falsworth: Awarded to Commonwealth subject who performed acts of the greatest heroism or of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme danger

The Order of Patriotic War, Soviet Union - Barnes, Rogers: Awarded to Soviet armed forces, security troops, partisans, and allied personnel or heroic deeds during the Great Patriotic War (WWII)

Order of the Star of Romania, Romania - Barnes: Awarded for exceptional civil and military services to the Romanian State and the Romanian people or for special acts in time of peace or for heroic acts in time of war or for contributing to the development of the friendship relations with Romania, or for other exceptional services to the Romanian State and the Romanian People.

Natasha glances around to see Barnes again. She feels oddly protective of him. A child catches his eye, and he taps one finger to his lips and winks.

He’s a sweet guy, really.

It might honestly get him killed one day.

Chapter End Notes

I added all that stuff about the awards at the end to make the chapter just a bit longer,
and because i had all that information and nothing to do with it.
Those are all real awards, btw! Not sure if our squad would have gotten them, but it's
my fic so I say they can!
The minor fall

Chapter Summary

Start the ominous music, the winter soldier plot is fully here.

Chapter Notes

this chapter is real fuckin long
cause it's the first 2/3 of the movie
i literally took some of the dialogue from a transcript of the movie, so i dont own that stuff. I changed A LOT of Bucky's reactions from Steve's. bless you for sitting through this
This chapter alone is like 4000+ words and 10 pages fml

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky lets his motorcycle ease into its parking spot outside his apartment building.

He unlocks the front door and takes the stairs. Sure, they had elevators back in his day, but he doesn’t like all that enclosed space.

“It’s like I was up there just to watch.”

Bucky gives his head a shake. He had barely been able to meet the eyes of anyone at the VA. His war was supposed to be the last one.

His next door neighbor is coming out of her apartment with a basket of laundry, ending a conversation on the phone.

“My aunt, she's kind of an insomniac,” she says as she drops her phone in the basket.

Bucky smiles at her and thinks about what Nat had said over their last movie night. Maybe he should try to ‘get back out there,’ as it were.

“Hey, if you want...if you want, you're welcome to use my machine. Might be cheaper than the one in the basement.”

She smiles back at him. “Oh, yeah? What’s it cost? He tried to strikes his famous Barnes grin, but it comes out much shyer than intended. “A cup of coffee?”

She looks down. “Thank you, but um...I already have a load in downstairs, and, uh...you really don't want my scrubs in your machine. I'm just finished orientation in the infectious diseases ward, so.”

Bucky laughs softly, and puts his hands up in fake surrender. “Ah, well, I'll keep my distance.”
“Well hopefully not too far,” she says, smiling. “Oh, and I think you left your stereo on.”

Bucky’s spine stiffens. “Oh. Thanks.”

He pretends to fumble with his keys as she walks down the stairs.

Once he’s inside, he silently picks his shield up from where it’s propped against a wall, inching closer to the main living area where the record player is. All the lights are out.

It’s a record he never listens to, is the weird thing. It’s not something he would have left in there. Hell, he can remember only ever opening the package once.

It’s Harry James and his Orchestra, a band that had been popular at his time. The song hadn’t been familiar, but the sound of it had been. Big band, slow, lots of trumpet and brass. The sort of thing he and Stevie would sway to in a dance hall, not pulling out anything fancy, just holding each other close and enjoying being in the world, being alive for another day. Even hearing it now brings back the memory of her clothes and skin stinking both stale with sweat and metallic with blood, and her soft hair smelling like dirt. Not that he’d smelled much better, not in those little European pubs of his memory.

‘Kiss me once, then kiss me twice
Then kiss me once again
It’s been a long, long time
Haven’t felt like this, my dear
Since I can’t remember when….’

He shakes the memory off. It’s not helpful now.

Fury is sitting in his armchair, the one right next to the record player.

Bucky lets out a breath, some of his tension relieved. “Don’t remember giving you a key.”

“You really think I need one? Wife kicked me out.”

“Didn’t know you were married,” he says.

“A lot of things you don’t know about me.”

“Yeah,” Bucky scoffs. “That’s kinda the problem.”

Bucky turns on the light. Fury’s beat to shit, blood down the side of his face.

Fury turns the lamp off.

Ears everywhere, his phone reads.

Bucky scowls, looking around his apartment. Of fucking course.

“I’m sorry to have to do this, but I had no place else to crash.”

S.H.I.E.L.D. compromised.

Well, fuck. “Who else knows about your wife?”

You and me. “Just my friends.”
‘You'll never know how many dreams
I've dreamed about you
Or just how empty they all seemed without you
So kiss me once, then kiss me twice
Then kiss me once again
It's been a long, long time….’

“That what we are?” Bucky asks. “Friends?”

“That’s up to you, Barnes,” Fury says as he stands up. Bucky goes to help him out when he staggers.

Bang.

Bang.

Bang.

Through his windowless wall, Fury is shot three times through the back.

Bucky reacts on instinct, pulling Nick behind the corner. He catches a glimpse of the shooter before Nick pressed a flash drive into his hand.

“Don’t,” he heaves, “trust...anyone.”

The door bursts open, and Bucky drops into a fighting position on muscle memory alone.

“Kate?” He asks when he sees his neighbor carrying a gun with practiced ease.

“Captain Barnes, I’m Agent 13, SHIELD Special Services. I’ve been assigned to protect you.”

“By who?”

Kate looks down at Nick’s lifeless body. “Him. Foxtrot is down, I need EMTs, STAT.” She turns back to Bucky. “You have a twenty on the shooter?”

Finally, a chance to be useful. He sees a glint on the roof of the building next to his.

“Tell then I’m in pursuit.”

It’s not easy. His body feels the most unwieldy it has since he first got the serum; he’s smashing into walls, banging right through locked doors, and smashing a window before finally catching up to them.

All in black. Heavy combat gear. Guns on each side. The sniper rifle looked over their back. A messy, ratted braid.

Bucky flings his shield as hard as he can; knocking this person off the building to their death wouldn’t be ideal, but it’s certainly an option. If the shield hits their head, they might die just because of that.

A sharp, metallic clang fills the air. Bucky's brow furrows as his brain tries to process what he just saw.

The shooter - this person - had caught it.
They caught a vibranium shield, tossed by a literal super soldier, just as easy as somebody might catch a frisbee.

The second part of that hits him right after.

Their arm - their entire left arm, from what Bucky can see - is made of shiny, silver metal.

They’re muzzled, black grease paint smeared over their eyes and brows, blocking out everything on their face. Even in the low light, fierce blue eyes glare at him.

The shield comes right back at him, and he braces himself to catch it. Even so, he skids back several feet, the wind knocked out of him. By the time he recovers, the person has disappeared.

* 

He stands outside the operation room window as they try to revive a corpse. Bucky swallows. They’re too late, he’d known it even before they’d wheeled Fury in with the doctors. Bucky’s seen the life fading from a man’s body before.

“Is he gonna make it?” Natasha asks, voice shaky and vulnerable.

Bucky puts a comforting hand on her shoulder and lies, “I don’t know.”

She swallows, placing her hand on top of his. “Tell me about the shooter.”

“Female, I’m pretty sure. Was wearing heavy tac gear. She’s fast and she’s strong. Had a metal arm.”

Bucky feels her hand tighten around his, her breath skipping.

Hill walks in to join them, placing her hand on Natasha’s other shoulder.

“Ballistics?” Natasha asks as they hit Nick with an AED.


A light shudder runs through Natasha. If he hadn’t been touching her, Bucky wouldn’t have noticed.

“Soviet-made,” she says, with complete surety.

The doctors are yelling orders beyond the window.

Natasha is shaking. “Don’t do this to me, Nick.”

Another shock.

And another.

“Pulse?” One doctor asks.

“Negative,” another replies.

“Don't do this to me, Nick. Don't do this to me.”

Bucky takes a deep breath, and takes a chance.

He wraps his arms around Natasha, lightly, a barely three touch, ready to become heavier should
she wish it.

Her shoulders cave in, and Bucky pulls her in tightly.

Nick Fury flatlines.

“What’s the time?”

“1:03am.”

Bucky can feel the flash drive like a heavy, burning weight in his pocket.

*

Hill sighs. “I’m so sorry, Natasha, but I need to take him.”

“Nat,” Bucky says, softly.

She touches Nick’s forehead once, hesitantly, like if she touched too hard he’ll crumble into dust.

She swallows, and storms out of the room.

“Natasha!” Bucky calls.

She turns and grabs his arm. “Why was Fury in your apartment?” She demands.

“He never said,” Bucky tells her, not lying but certainly not being honest.

“Cap,” Rumlow interrupts. “They want you back at SHIELD.”

“Yeah, yeah, gimme a sec.”

“They want you now.”

“Okay!” Bucky says, waving Rumlow off.

He turns back to Natasha. “Fury never told me why he came to my apartment.”

Natasha gives him a look that is somewhere between respect and disgust. “When did you start getting good at the game?”

*

“Neighbor,” he says in reply as he sees Agent 13 leaving Pierce’s office. Maybe it’s petty. He doesn’t care.

“Ah, Captain,” the man says. “I’m Alexander Pierce.”

Bucky shakes his hand, forcing his hot anger to ice in his stomach, just like his Ma taught him. “Honor to meet you,” he says, and to his surprise it actually sounds genuine.

“The honor is mine, Captain. My father served in the 101st. Come on in.” It used to be Fury’s office.

Pierce placed a photograph in Bucky’s hands. “That photo was taken five years after Nick and I met. When I was at State Department in Bogota. ELN rebels took the embassy, and security got me out, but the rebels took hostages. Nick was deputy chief for the SHIELD station there. And he
comes to me with a plan. He wants to storm the building through the sewers. I said, ‘No, we'll negotiate.’ Turned out the ELN didn't negotiate, so they put out a kill order. They stormed the basement, and what did they find? They find it empty. Nick had ignored my direct order and carried out an unauthorized military operation on foreign soil. He saved the lives of a dozen political officers, including my daughter.”

“So you gave him a promotion.”

“I've never had any cause to regret it. Captain, why was Nick in your apartment last night?”

Bucky sticks to his guns, same not-truth he told Natasha earlier. *Don’t trust anyone.* “He never said.”

“You know it was bugged?”
Bucky curls his toes in his boots, his one tell, and lies again. “I suspected. Didn’t know for sure until Nick told me.”

“Did he tell you he was the one who bugged it?”

“Well, Sir, I’m sure you could check the recordings for yourself and find out.”

Pierce laughs. “They never told me you have a sense of humor.”

“Just stating the facts, Sir.”

“I want you to see something,” Pierce says, pulling up a live video stream. It’s Batroc.

“They picked him up last night in a not-so-safe house in Algiers.”

“Are you saying he's a suspect?” Bucky asks. “Assassination isn't Batroc's line.”

Pierce sighs. “No, it's more complicated than that. Batroc was hired anonymously to attack the Lemurian Star and he was contacted by e-mail and paid by wire transfer. And then the money was run through seventeen fictitious accounts, the last one going to a holding company that was registered to a Jacob Veech.”

“Am I supposed to know who that is?”

“Not likely. Veech died six years ago. His last address was 14-35 Elmhurst Drive. When I first met Nick his mother lived at 14-37.”

Bucky's anger flares again, but he’s had enough experience not engaging it, so his breathing stays even. “Are you saying Fury hired the pirates? Why?”

“The prevailing theory was that the hijacking was a cover for the acquisition and sale of classified intelligence. The sale went sour and that led to Nick's death.”

Bucky’s bullshit sense goes off. “If you really knew Nick Fury you'd know that's not true.”

“Why do you think we're talking?” Pierce walks over and leans an arm against the window, looking out. “See, I took a seat on the Council not because I wanted to but because Nick asked me to, because we were both realists. We knew that despite all the diplomacy and the handshaking and the rhetoric, that to build a really better world sometimes means having to tear the old one down.”

Bucky swallows. Something about that line sounds familiar, but he can’t quite place it.

“And that makes enemies,” Pierce continues. “Those people that call you dirty because you got the
guts to stick your hands in the mud and try to build something better. And the idea that those people could be happy today, makes me really, really angry.”

Pierce turns back to Bucky. “Captain, you were the last one to see Nick alive. I don't think that's an accident, and I don't think you do either. So I'm gonna ask again, why was he there?”

Bucky draws himself up to full height and looks Pierce right in the eyes. “Last thing he said was, ‘don’t trust anyone.’ Repeating himself, really. He’d said as much earlier that day when we were speaking.”

“Wonder if that included him?” Pierce asks in a contemplative manner, but Bucky can feel the dig underneath it.

“Couldn’t say,” Bucky says, picking up his shield and moving to go. “Sir.”

“Captain,” Pierce says. “Somebody murdered my friend and I'm gonna find out why. Anyone gets in my way, they're gonna regret it. Anyone.”

“Believe me, Sir,” Bucky says, steely glare matching the other man’s. “I understand completely.”

He gets in the elevator, still keyed up.

It gets crowded, and fast. STRIKE team and a bunch of guys Bucky’s never seen before.

It ain’t like Rumlow to walk around base in full tac gear, but he was now. Like he’s walking right into -

“Evidence Response found some fibres on the roof they want us to see,” Rumlow interrupts. “You want me to get the tac-team ready?”

“No,” Bucky says, glancing over to where one man is fiddling with the safety strap on his gun holster. “Let’s wait and see what it is first..”

The same agent wipes his hand on his pants. He’s nervous.

Another load of agents comes in.

One of them is sweating.

Something bad starts to build in Bucky’s gut.

“I'm sorry about what happened with Fury,” Rumlow speaks again. “Messed up, what happened to him.”

“Thank you,” Bucky says, the need to get out this elevator now fully formed.

Another batch of agents comes in.

Shit. He’s surrounded.

Bucky sets his jaw and rolls on to the balls of his feet. “Before we get started,” he asks, “would anyone like to get out?”

A moment’s pause and then -

Chaos.
Magnetized handcuffs. Who even comes up with this shit anymore?

He gets most of the guys down with minimum effort. He doesn’t mean to brag, but Bucky knows that he’s good at sneaking himself out of bad situations. He’s made an art of it, really

“Whoa, big guy,” Rumlow says, last one standing. Bucky glares at him, waiting for him to strike first so that Bucky can get at his blind spot. “I just want you to know, Cap, this ain't personal.”

Bucky blocks as best he can - he gets hit once or twice, but he’s mostly okay - and then gets so frustrated that he says to hell with finesse and just fucking tosses Rumlow into the ceiling.

“Sure it ain’t, pal.”

He presses the door open button, and sees rows of agents in full SWAT gear and he curses.

“Drop the shield! Put your hands in the air!” One agent yells.

Yeah, like hell Bucky’s gonna do that.

He uses the shield to slice the elevator wires instead.

When he forces the doors open again, there are more agents.

“Give it up, Barnes! Get that door open! You have nowhere to go!”

Bucky lets out a filthy string of words in his mother tongue that woulda got him boxed ‘round the ears if he’d said them back when. He looks out the all glass elevator side, out the all glass elevator tunnel.

“Shit,” he bites out. He flexes his shoulders, tries to pump himself up a bit.

Is he really doing this?

He’s really doing this.

He braces his feet, then shoves himself forward as hard as he can, all of his body weight behind the shield.

As soon as he’s in the wind, he goes spread eagle, hoping that it will at least slow him down a little.

By the way the landing feels - jarring and teeth rattling, even though he does his damndest to land only on the shield - it doesn’t do much.

He darts down to the garage as quick as he can. Starts his motorcycle while chanting, ‘shit,’ under his breath.

Because the entire fucking universe hates him, they send a fucking quinjet to stop him.

Well fuck you, universe. He’s Captain fucking America. He can take down a quinjet.

********

Natasha has been slammed into harder walks by worse men. Honestly, Barnes is pretty polite about it. He doesn’t try and get handsy.
“Where is it?” He demands, voice low and deadly.

“Safe.”

Barnes scoffs. “Do better!”

“Where did you get it?” She counters.

“Why would I tell you?” He shoots back.

“Fury gave it to you. Why?”

“What’s on it?”

“I don’t know.”

Barnes snarls. “Stop lying!”

Natasha suppresses the urge to flinch. “I only act like I know everything, Barnes.”

Barnes leans in close. “I bet you knew Fury hired the pirates, didn’t you?”

“Well, it makes sense. The ship was dirty, Fury needed a way in, so do you.”

“I’m not gonna ask you again.”

Deceit didn’t work, so now it’s time to try misdirection. “I know who killed Fury.”

“Not what I asked, Natasha.”

“Most of the intelligence community doesn’t believe she exists, the ones who do call her the Winter Soldier. She's credited with over two dozen assassinations in the last fifty years.”

Barnes rolls his eyes. “So she’s a ghost story. Thanks for insight into creepy child spy bedtime.”

“Five years ago I was escorting a nuclear engineer out of Iran, somebody shot out my tires near Odessa. We lost control, went straight over a cliff, I pulled us out, but the Winter Soldier was there. I was covering my engineer, so she shot him straight through me.” She pulls up her shirt to show him the scar on the side of her stomach. “Soviet slug, no rifling. Bye-bye bikinis.”

Barnes doesn’t respond, just rolls his eyes.

“Going after her is a dead end. I know, I've tried. Like you said, she's a ghost story.” Natasha has conflicted feelings about the Soldier, which is why she does her damndest not to think about her at all.

“Well,” Barnes says, plucking to flash drive from her. “She killed Fury for this. So let's find out what the ghost wants.”

“First rule of being on the run—”

“Don’t run,” Barnes finishes for her. “Walk. I know I look like a walking tank, but we actually did a lot of infiltrations. I know how to stay outta sight.”


Barnes nods. “I’m a soldier, you’re a spy. I know we’re in your jurisdiction here, Nat, but I don’t
need ‘don’t get caught by the bad guys 101.’ Contrary to popular opinion, my brain *does* work.”

Natasha smirks. She forgot that the guy gets testy when you question his intelligence.

“I’ll follow your lead here, you’re better at this than I am, but Nat, really. We’re a team, equals.”

Natasha nods. “I’ll keep that in mind, Cap.”

“Bucky. Please for the love of all that is holy, call me Bucky.”

“You spot the hostiles?” She asks, stepping in closer to him.

“Well. Ten and seven. Plan?”

“Put your arm around me and laugh at something I said.”

Barnes does, pulling her next to him and leaning in close, his deep, throaty chuckle against her ear just loud enough to be heard by them.

“A plus, Barnes.”

“Apple store?” He recommends, not releasing her. “And can I please tie these damn shoes? I’m about to walk straight out of them.”

*

“How long?” He asks.

“9 minutes, probably.”

He huffs, placing a hand down on the table, half guarding her and half watching her back. She notes it, but doesn’t comment.

“Need any help?” An employee asks.

“Nah,” Barnes says easily, his other hand going back around her waist. “We’re just planning our honeymoon.”

Natasha quirks an eyebrow. Another a plus, Barnes.

“Oh? Where you thinking of going?”

“Jersey,” Natasha replies.

“You know,” the employee says again, “you seem really familiar.”

Natasha slides her hand up the side of the computer, ready to pull the flash drive and run if necessary.

“Oh?” She feels Barnes shift his weight to his toes, ready to push into a run.
“I have those exact same glasses!”

“You’re practically twins,” Natasha quips.

“I wish,” the employee scoffs. He gestured at Barnes’s body. “Specimen. Well, let me know if you need anything.”

“Why the glasses, Nat? I hate glasses.”

“Oh, right. You had them before.”

“Yeah, and I’d rather we forget those dark times.”

“Wheaton, New Jersey? You know it?”

Barnes lets out a shaky breath. “I used to.”

*

The escalator poses another issue. Rumlow is going up as they’re going down.

“Kiss me,” she says, turning to him.

“You could at least buy me dinner first.”

“Public displays of affection make people very uncomfortable.”

“Yes, they do.”

“Just, ugh.” She grabs Barnes’s face and lays one on him.

His lips are soft, and his beard tickles. He certainly knows what he’s doing.

“You uncomfortable?” She asks.

“Nah. I’ve had worse.”

That almost startled a laugh out of her.

“You are one strange man, Barnes.”

“You shoved your mouth on mine, if that won’t get you to call me Bucky I guess nothing will.”

“Bucky.”

*

“Where did Captain America learn to steal a car?”

“Nazi Germany. Or maybe it was Poland. Might have been Austria. At one point they all blur together. There were Nazis. They were shooting at us. And we’re not stealing, we’re borrowing, get your feet of the dash.”

“Alright, I have a question for you, oh, which you do not have to answer,” she says, teasing. “I feel like if you don't answer it though, you're kind of answering it, you know?”

Bucky grunts.
“Was that your first kiss since 1945?”

“How quick you all are to forget. Tony and I are engaged, remember?”

Nat laughs. “But really.”

“That bad, huh? You know, I never had any complaints before.”

“I didn't say that.” She lets the silence simmer for a bit. “Nobody special, though?”

“Believe it or not, it's kind of hard to find someone with shared life experience.”

“Well, that's alright, you just make something up.”

“Nat, we’ve been over this. No lying about who you are. Not to me.”

“The truth is a matter of circumstances, it's not all things to all people all the time.”

Bucky’s hands tighten on the wheel.

“And neither am I.”

“Tough way to live.”

“It's a good way not to die, though.”

“Well, I’ll keep your secrets. You know who I want you to be, Nat. A friend.”

“Well, there's a chance you might be in the wrong business, Bucky.”

“This is it.”

“The file came from these coordinates.”

“Me too,” Bucky says. “This, this is kinda where it started. I trained here.”

“Changed much?”

“Kinda,” Bucky responds blankly, thousand yard stare firmly in place.

Natasha sighs. She’ll give him a moment; she can search herself.

“This is a dead end. Zero heat signature, zero waves, not even radio. Whoever wrote the file must have used a router to throw people off.”

At her words, Bucky shakes it off. His eyebrows furrow as his eyes catch something. “What is it?”

“Army regulations forbid storing ammunition within five hundred yards of the barracks. This building is in the wrong place.”

“How do you remember that?”

“Photographic memory.”

Bucky smashes the edge of his shield into the padlock. The doors swing open.

The room is filled with dust covered desks, papers still strewn in cubby holes, and a large symbol on the wall.
“This is SHIELD?”

Bucky looks at the framed pictures on the walls. “This is probably where it started. That’s Peggy Carter, Howard Stark, and Colonel Phillips, my CO.”

Bucky walks further into the room and stops in front of a bookcase. He holds a hand up and blows a stream of wind between the two separate cases.

No air blows back at him.

“If you’re working in a secret office, why do you need a secret room?” He asks, prying the bookcases apart.

They silently wait as the elevator descends.

“What I wouldn’t give to have a gun right now,” Natasha sighs to break the silence.

“Like you need a gun to kill someone.”

“Range weapons, Bucky. Why do you think I have Barton?”

“How is he, by the way?”

The elevator doors open before she can answer.

“This can't be the data-point, this technology is ancient,” she says, taking in the obsolete computers. Except for the USB drive connected to the one in the middle.

Almost definitely a trap, but oh well.

INITIATE SYSTEM?

“Y-E-S spells ‘yes,’” she types. The computers heir to life.

“Shall we play a game?” She turns her head to talk to Bucky. “That’s from a movie that—”

“I’ve seen WarGames, Natasha,” he says tiredly.


Barnes freezes. “I know that voice.”

“It’s obviously a recording of some kind,” she responds, soothingly.

A camera perched on the monitor turns. “am not a recording, Fräulein. I may not be the man I was when the Captain took me prisoner in 1945, but I am.”

“Zola,” Bucky breathes out, voice shaky.

“Who?”

“Arnim Zola was a German scientist who worked for the Red Skull. He's been dead for years. One of the first things I checked.

“First correction,” the computer drones. “I am Swiss. Second, look around you. I have never been more alive. In 1972 I received a terminal diagnosis. Science could not save my body, my mind, however, that was worth saving on two hundred thousand feet of data banks. You are standing in
“Gross,” Natasha says, trying to get the tension out of Bucky’s shoulders.

“How the hell did you get here? This is SHIELD.”

“It was Operation Paperclip after World War II. SHIELD recruited German scientists with strategic value,” Natasha explains.

“They thought I could help their cause. I also helped my own.”

Bucky’s muscles are so tense he’s starting to shake. “HYDRA died with the Red Skull.”

“Cut off one head, two more shall take its place.”

“Bullshit.”

“Accessing archive.” The computer lights up with pictures. “HYDRA was founded on the belief that humanity could not be trusted with its own freedom. What we did not realize, was that if you try to take that freedom, they resist. The war taught us much. Humanity needed to surrender its freedom willingly. After the war, SHIELD was founded and I was recruited. The new HYDRA grew. A beautiful parasite inside SHIELD. For seventy years HYDRA has been secretly feeding crisis, reaping war. And when history did not cooperate, history was changed.”

Natasha grabs Bucky’s arm, trying to ground him in the moment. “That impossible. SHIELD would have stopped you.”

“Accidents will happen,” Zola says with whatever sort of laugh a computer can provide. “HYDRA created a world so chaotic that humanity is finally ready to sacrifice its freedom to gain its security. Once the purification process is complete, HYDRA’s new world order will arise. We won, Captain. Your death amounts to the same as your Life; a zero sum.”

Bucky tosses his shield clean through the screen of the monitor when newspaper articles are shown, mentioning the deaths of Howard and Maria Stark. Nick Fury pops up after them.

“As I was saying…”

“What’s on this drive?” Bucky demands, yanking his shield back.

“Project Insight requires insight. So I wrote an algorithm.”

Natasha huffs. “What kind of algorithm? What does it do?”

“The answer to your question is fascinating. Unfortunately, you shall be too dead to hear it.” Another computer laugh.

The elevator doors slam closed before Bucky or Natasha can do anything to stop them.

Her phone bings. “Bucky, we got a bogey. Short range ballistic. 30 seconds tops.”

“Who fired it?”

“SHIELD.”

“Not SHIELD, Hydra.”

“I am afraid I have been stalling, Captain. Admit it, it’s better this way. We’re both of us...out of time.”
Bucky yanks her into an opening under a grate on the floor, bracing the shield over his head.

Natasha isn’t religious, but if she was, she’d be praying.

Chapter End Notes

that was so much. *sigh*
my hands literally hurt from typing (i have fibromyalgia so that's not hard)
Thank you for reading! Hopefully the next friday chapter will be up soon, but I'm going to be at the beach next friday and i dont know if ill have my computer so maybe it won't be?
Bucky knocks on the door, arm still around Natasha. She’s more shaken up then she says she is.

“Sorry to do this, Sam. I couldn’t think of anywhere else to go.”

“Everyone we know is trying to kill us,” Natasha says.

Same pauses, looking over their dust covered clothes. “Not everyone.”

*Bucky washes the dirt off of his hands once Nat is done rinsing out her hair.

He stares at her as he dries off.

“What?”

“You okay, Nat? No lies, please.”

“Well. When I first joined SHIELD, I thought I was going straight. But I guess I just traded in the KGB for HYDRA. I thought I knew whose lies I was telling, but...I guess I can't tell the difference anymore.”

“Have you considered a career change?” Bucky jokes.

She smiles just a little. “Maybe I’m in the wrong business. I owe you.”

“No, you don’t, Nat. We’ve got each other’s backs.”

“If it was the other way around, and it was down to me to save your life, and you be honest with me, would you trust me to do it? I know you keep saying we’re friends, but really, Bucky.”

“Of course I would, Natasha. You may be a spy, a liar, and a cheat, but you have good intentions. You watch out for the people you care for. Don’t think I didn’t notice you following me for months. I don’t appreciate the action, but I appreciate the sentiment.” Bucky smiles at her. “I hope
I’m not assuming too much when I say that you care about me.”

Natasha stares at him for a long moment. “I do care about you, Bucky. Somehow you’ve worked your way into my cold, dead heart.”

Bucky places a hand on her shoulder. “Good, cause I care about you too.”

“I’ll never have your heart though,” she teases. “You and Tony, remember?”

Bucky laughs. “Not romantically, Nat. Platonically.”

“Have I received an invitation to the Barnes Family as well?”

“Hell yeah you did. When this thing blows over I’m throwing a dinner party. I don’t even know how to throw a dinner party.”

“I look forward to it. Now we just need to not die.”

Bucky sighs.

“Speaking of...nevermind.”

“What is it, Natasha?”

“You don’t seem upset that you basically gave up your life for nothing.”

Bucky shrugs. “At least now I know where everything stands. Who would’ve fucking thought that I might die fighting Nazis twice.”

“No dying, Barnes. That violates the terms of our agreement.”

“I don’t remember agreeing to anything, Nat.”

Before she can respond, Sam knocks lightly on the door.

“I made breakfast, if you guys...eat that sort of thing.”

*  

“So,” Natasha opens, “Who at SHIELD has the authority to fire a domestic missile?”

“Pierce,” Bucky growls. “And he’s not acting alone. The Insight data was on the Lumerian Star with Jasper fucking Sitwell, that rat bastard.”

“So, what’s the plan, Cap?” Natasha asks. “You’re the plan guy.”

“So basically we need a plan for two of the most wanted people in Washington kidnap a SHIELD officer in broad daylight? How do we do that, is the question.”

“The answer is,” Sam says, dropping a file on the table. “You don’t.”

Bucky picks it up. “The hell is this?”

“Call it a resume.”

Bucky flicks through it. Mission details, some of it classified. “Pararescue?” He asks Sam, who nods. Bucky holds up the picture at the back. “Riley?”
“What’s your gear like?” Bucky asks. “Have any?”

“Nope, but I know where we can get one.”

“One what?” Natasha asks.

“One of these,” Sam says with a smile, dropping another file on the table, open this time.

Bucky laughs. “Thought you were a pilot.”

“I never said pilot.”

Bucky soberes and stands. “Sam, you just got out. I gotta ask if you’re sure about this.”

“Dude, Captain America needs my help. There’s no better reason to get back in.”

“No, Captain America isn’t asking your help, Bucky Barnes is. I don’t think I’m Captain America anymore, considering I’m on SHIELD’s most wanted.”

“Barnes, you’re not great because you were Cap. Cap was great because he’s you.”

Bucky flushes pink. “Thank you, Sam. You said you know where to get one?”

“The last one is at Fort Meade, behind three guarded gates and a twelve-inch steel wall.”

“Not a problem,” Natasha says, shrugging. “Give me two hours.”

*Bucky and Natasha wait across the street with the laser pointer as the Senator and Sitwell separate.

“I should have it,” Bucky argues.

“What?”

“Because you’re the one with the phone to know the signal!”

“Have you ever heard of multitasking?” She asks, but hands it to him anyway.

Sitwell’s phone rings. Bucky lets a smile creep on his face. This should be easy.

Sitwell’s demeanor changes. He looks up, around, looking for something, and Bucky looks over at Natasha, who nods.

Bucky points the laser pointer right at Sitwell’s heart.

*“Is this display supposed to insinuate that you would throw me off the roof? That’s not your style, Captain.”

Bucky rolls his eyes. “You sure about that?”

Bucky shoves Sitwell right over the side.
“Asshole.”
“I woulda done it, you know,” Natasha offers.
“Yeah but I hate his stupid face.”
“What?”
“Sorry, Allie nannies part time and the kid she watches is in third grade.”
“So Captain America is talking like a third grader?”
“Yeah.”
*
“Hydra doesn’t like leaks.”
“Tough shit,” Bucky says, leaning his head back against the headrest.
“16 hours till Insight launch. Barnes,” Natasha asks. “What’s the plan?”
“We’ll use him to bypass the DNA scans and access the Helicarriers directly.”
“What?! Are you crazy? That is a terrible, terrible idea.”
Several things happen in quick succession.
Something heavy lands on the roof.
A metal arm crashes through the window and pulls Sitwell into traffic, killing him.
Bullet holes begin to appear in the roof.
Bucky reacts on instinct, yanking the break.
The Winter Soldier flies in front to them into the street. She drags her metal arm through the concrete, breaking it down as it slows her to a stop.
She jumps back on the car and pulls the steering wheel clean out before jumping on to the car behind them.
Bucky grabs Sam and Nat in his arms and shoved against the door, using it to slide across the street as the car gets shoved against the side of the highway.
*
The Soldier is terrifying, honestly. Merciless, brutal, and quick. She seems to know Bucky’s moves even before he makes them, and she’s got countless little knives hidden on her person.
And she’s strong. Bucky can’t remember the last time he needed to really brace his arms to block a punch. He can’t just roll hers off. She gets him good straight across the face with her right hand.
They both try and trade blows, and Bucky doesn’t seem to be winning. He feels one of her knives slice against his side, but he just uses that as an opportunity to grab her and try to throw her off him, but she just goes limp, making herself a dead weight.
Thankfully, that’s a tactic Stephanie used all the time when she and Bucky used to tussle, so he’s well prepared for that. He counters, and uses her loose state to toss her over his shoulder and away from him, having to go to his knee in the process.

He looks up slightly, and sees her mask - a muzzle, really - has fallen off.

* 

He counts three fast heartbeats before the Soldier turns around.

Two more heartbeats for her hair to be out of her face enough to be recognizable.

One heartbeat as his eyes take it in.

No heartbeats as his body seizes up.

How had he not recognized those eyes before?

“Stephanie?”

Her brow quirks together like they always have when she’s confused.

“Who the fuck is Stephanie?” She asks.

“You-” Bucky starts, but Sam swoops down and kicks her in the head. “Wait-!” He yells.

“She was gonna shoot you!” Sam yells back.

Natasha is leaning heavily against a van, and she fired Stephanie’s - it’s Stephanie, she’s alive, what the fuck - abandoned grenade launcher.

STRIKE moves in, but Bucky’s whole body feels numb.

* 

“She looked right at me but she didn’t know me,” Bucky mumbles to himself in the van.

“Barnes,” Same says, “she died like, 70 years ago. It’s not possible.”

“Zola.”

“Shit. When she - shit.”

“That covers it, yeah. We all thought she looked different after. Taller, less skinny. Whatever he did must have helped her survive the fall. They must have found her. I should have-”

“Don’t go there, Barnes,” Sam warns. “That’s how you end up staring down your own gun.”

“Even when I had nothing, I had Stephanie. We had each other. That was the deal.”

“We need to get a doctor here,” Sam says, and Bucky curses at himself for not noticing himself. He’s such and idiot. “We don’t put pressure on that wound she’s gonna bleed out here in the truck.”

One agent pulls out a stun wand and Sam flinches back.

The agent shoves the wand at the other agent, and tosses her helmet off
“That thing was squeezing my brain,” Maria Hill complains. She nods at Sam. “Who’s this guy?”

*******

Pierce mood at his forehead with an handkerchief before he walks into the vault.

Sitwell is dead, which is good.

There’s footage of the Soldier, but there has been before and it’s easy enough to take care of.

Barnes knows the truth about his little wife, and Pierce might be able to use that. After all, everyone has a weak spot, and the Captain’s for Rogers is a mile wide.

“Sir,” a tech greets him at the gate. “She’s...she’s unstable. Erratic.”

The Asset is sitting at the edge of the machine’s chair, eyes unfocused and muscles all locked. The motors in her arm are whirring, and she’s shaking slightly.

“Mission report,” he demands.

She doesn’t respond, doesn’t show indication of having heard him.


“The man…” she says, voice shaky, raspy, cracked, and broken. “On the bridge. Who was he?”

“You met him earlier this week on another assignment.”

“No,” she responds. “I know him.”

Pierce grits his teeth. “Your work has been a gift to mankind. You shaped the century, and I need you to do it one more time,” he walks over to her and places a finger under her chin, tilting her face up. “Society is at a tipping point between order and chaos. Tomorrow morning we're gonna give it a push. But, if you don't do your part,” he continues, brushing a piece of disgusting hair away as tenderly as he can bear, “I can't do mine, and HYDRA can't give the world the freedom it deserves.”

“But…” She takes a deep breath, her eyes filling with conviction. “I know him. I’m sure I do. What’s his name? I...I can’t remember.”

Pierce sighs and rolls his eyes. He backhands her, hard, across her face. In the beginning, according to the files, they’d wanted to keep her face intact, in case that could become useful in later missions. Too late now; the machine has left burn marks across her face, and the low maintenance that she’s been kept in has only made it worse. Every wound had been allowed to crudely stitch itself back together into lumpy new flesh. So there’s no need to worry about the face.

“I don’t need you talking back. I need you to obey.”

Her body locks into that position, shaky breaths in and out, her whole demeanor reading fear.

Good.

“Prep her.”

“She’s been out of cryo for too long.”

Pierce glares at the tech. “Then wipe her and start over.”
She starts whimpering at those words, and Pierce turns back.

“Don’t worry, Soldier,” he says with fake sweetness. “It’ll only hurt a lot.”

He chuckles a little to himself as they strap her down.

He turns to leave, determined to find somewhere to wash his hands. They hadn’t washed out her hair in at least 50 years, and it shows.

Her screaming is audible even after the heavy vault doors close.
“We aren’t salvaging a damn thing, Fury. SHIELD, Hydra. It’s all the same thing now. I know you want it not to be but that’s the damn truth. I’m burning it all down. You gave me this mission, this is how it ends. SHIELD’s been compromised, you said so yourself. HYDRA grew right under your nose and nobody noticed.”

“Hey, look where we are. I noticed.”

“And how many people paid the price before you did?”

“Listen, if this is about Rogers-”

“Oh,” Bucky says, advancing on Nick. “So you knew. Because none of us said a damn thing. Tell me Nick.” Bucky drops his hands down on the table with a loud clang. “Were you ever going to tell me that my wife has been alive this whole time? That’s she’s been tortured by Hydra for almost 70 years? Or were you going to wait until you could use it as leverage against me? Because honestly, Nick? Pierce just as good as told me you were Hydra and for a few minutes I was ready to believe him.”

“I didn’t know, actually.”

“If you had, would you have told me? Or would that have been compartmentalized too?” Bucky seethes. “Who would you have made keep the secret that she’s been history’s longest serving POW? I’ll say it again, Nick: it all goes.”

“He’s right,” Natasha says, much to Bucky’s surprise. He shoots her a smile.

“Don’t look at me,” Sam adds. “I do what he does, just slower.”

Bucky wants to hug him.

“Well, looks like you’re giving the orders now, Captain.”

* 

“She’s gonna be there, you know.”

“I know. Pierce wouldn’t have such a big game piece and not use it.”
“Look, whoever she used to be, the person she is now, I don't think she's the kind you save. She's the kind you stop.”

“You know, the first time I asked her to marry me, she punched me in the face and broke my nose.”

“What?”

“Yeah, it was right after her Ma’s funeral; I know, good timing. I walked her back to the place she’d been sharing with her Ma, and when we got to the door I told her that maybe she oughta stay with my family. She said, ‘thanks Buck, but I can get by on my own.’ And I told her, ‘thing is, you don’t have to.’”

Bucky looks over at Sam who looks confused.

“‘I’m with you till the end of the line, pal.’”

“What?”

“We took the bus to school together, and her stop was the last one, but she was scared to ride the bus alone, so even though my stop was before hers, I’d stay with her.”

“Okay…” Sam says, not quite getting it.

Anyway, she smiled at me, and said thanks and hugged me. Then I said, ‘which is why I think you oughta marry me.’ Then she socked me in the nose.” Bucky smiles sadly. “She felt awful about it, and fixed me up as good as she could. It was a good thing she hadn’t broken my glasses, otherwise I woulda been a dead man, cause my Da. She invited me inside and I asked her again out on the fire escape, all serious-like. Didn’t have a ring or nothin’, but I did get down on one knee. Damn near toppled over the side when I stood back up.”

“And she said yes?” Sam asks, ready for the story to be over.

“Nah. She gave me a list of conditions and then said if I was so dead-set on it, she might as well let me stay around.”

“Romantic,” Sam says sarcastically.

Bucky leans against the side barrier of the bridge. “Yeah, that was Steph. Always the romantic, especially when she wasn’t in love with you in the slightest.”

Sam leans next to him. “What do you mean?”

“I hate washing dishes. She doesn't mind it, but she despises cooking. I’m a great cook, but I hate waking up early. She loves to, and she makes great coffee. It was that sort of thing. I’d wash, she’d fold. She never kissed me unless it was to prove somethin’ to someone.”

“Marriages have been built on less.”

“I know. That’s why I’m not gonna stop her your way. I’m gonna stop her mine.”

“And what is your way?”

“Stop Hydra. Raze the earth they stand on, and pull her out of the ashes.”

“She may go down with them. You don’t know where her head's at. She doesn’t even know you.”
“She will,” Bucky says confidently, pushing away from the wall. “Gear up, it's time.”

“You wearing that?”

“Course not. If you’re gonna fight a war, you gotta wear a uniform.”

In his head, as Sam walks away, Bucky is in a hazy bar in London, opening a tab. ‘Neat costume. Lose a bet?’

And finally, ‘you’re gonna keep it, right? Cause that would to loads for my own personal morale. The make fun of Bucky Barnes show finally goes on the road.’

*

As he and Natasha wait for the museum to close (she’d rolled her eyes, but agreed to come along as Sam and Maria worked out logistics, which meant stealing a helicopter), Bucky pulls out his phone. It’s still off from when he originally got to the hospital, not even three days ago.

“What are you doing?”

“They’d probably track my phone, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Calling Tony would be a bad idea, then.”

“Talking to Tony Stark is always a bad idea,” Natasha jokes. “You know I used to be his secretary?”

“You mean you used to pretend to be his secretary?” Bucky says, putting his phone away and the security guards move back to their desks and rooms. “You ready?”

“Do you even need to ask?”

********

Hazy light filters through her eyelashes. It hurts.

Well, everything hurts.

Hands grasp her and pull her from her chair.

She looks down at her body; she’s wearing cargo pants and a tight garment that covers part of her upper half.

Something about having the pants feels good. A part of her says that having these pants, this specific pair, is good.

There’s something in one of the pockets, she thinks. Right thigh, small, round.

The shock of seeing metal where an arm should be isn’t there, but it should be. Something is missing, she just can’t figure out what.

Her head itches.

“Don’t cover her face,” a man says, and something inside says that he’s scary.
Twelve ways she could kill him with the equipment to her left, seventeen with the equipment to her right, four with his own tie, and nine with her bare hands. Not scary.

The man walks up to her, and she stares at him, eyebrows furrowed.

“We wouldn’t want the Captain to not see her pretty face.”

“Ge’ yer filthy mitts off’a me,” she grumbles, moving away from the touch of his hand on instinct.

He slaps her. “Where is this personality coming from?”

She wants to say something back - wants to cut off his hand and shove it down his throat - but her body locks.

“That’s what I thought.” He puts one hand on her throat and pulls her back to face him, back straight. “No muzzle, no anything. Make sure you can see exactly who she is.”

As he leaves - a chorus of, ‘yes, Director Pierce’ following him out - she catches the eye of a very old man across the room. He looks like he’s about to cry.

People shove her body this way and that, pulling clothes on her. They don’t change her pants, which is good. Whatever it is in her pocket feels important to have.

“I will finish it,” the old man says.

One of the techs behind her laughs. “If she kills you, old man, it’s your own fault.”

They leave her alone with this man. Her body tenses, ready to fight if she needs too.

“Do not worry, Soldier. I will not hurt you now. I have done too much of that already.”

He gently pushed her shoulder to make her sit down, but that chair is BAD to her, so she just stares at where he’s pushed.

He sighs. “I have one thing I can give you, and one thing only, in an effort to atone for my sins. By the time I realized the wrong I had done it was too late. I do not expect forgiveness, only that perhaps whatever god sees this will send me to a slightly less severe hell.”

He pulls something out of the interior pocket of his coat.

It’s a necklace. Silver chain. Dog tag. Another tag on a smaller chain, looped around the first. A band of gold. There’s something stamped on the tags, something inscribed on the band.

“You name, Soldier,” the old man says, putting the necklace on her neck, tucking it under her hair and jacket, tucking it into her upper garment (a brassiere, her mind supplies from the inky blackness of things that aren’t happening now), zipping her jacket up over it, and tightening the fastenings. “Your name is Stephanie. The man they are sending you to kill is your husband. His name is James. Your mission is to kill him.”

She nods. ‘Mission’ she understands. ‘Kill’ she understands. ‘Husband’ is unfamiliar and therefore irrelevant.

“You must not do this, Stephanie. Save him, and when you do this, save yourself, and in saving yourself, save us all. You have been the fist of Hydra for too long. It is time for you to be you again. Take your husband dancing.” He smiles a little. “You always used to dance in your cell. You said you were practicing for when he came for you. Well now it is time for you to go for him.”
The old man is crying in earnest now. He looks towards the ceiling. “Do you hear me, god? Do you hear my penitence? Do you hear the regret of an old man?”

He smooths her hair away from her face. “That is all I can give you, I’m afraid. Only a name.”

“My...name,” she repeats. “Yours?”

“Yoseph. I am Yoseph. My granddaughter is named Angelia. Perhaps, one day, you might tell her how I tried to help. I have done bad things, too many to number. But I atone them. I cannot stall any longer. Keep that necklace. It is important. If you ever forget...” He points at where they lie beneath her clothes. “The tags with remind you.”

“Thank you,” her voice says. Something about both those words and his feel important, but she isn’t sure why.

By the time the crew arrives to transport her to her target drop, she’s forgotten the conversation.
All the Howlies are a little drunk. More than tipsy, but not bad off enough that they’re making reckless decisions. More than usual, anyway.

Bucky of course, isn’t drunk. He can’t get drunk.

It’s Dugan’s idea to get the tattoos. They give Steph an old map and a charcoal pencil to sketch out the design on.

It’s an imitation of a patch, with a howling wolf, of course, the nose just peaking out of the arched oval enclosing it. The ring around the oval reads ‘The Howling Commandos, est. 1942. Et reversus est ad inferos.’

To hell and back.

In the background, in the place of the moon, is the shield.

The guy they get to do it doesn’t speak English, only Polish, so Steph translates for him.

They all get it on their left shoulder. All except Bucky: as soon as the ink goes in his arm, his body rejects it. He sighs. Stephanie explains to the artist that Bucky’s body won’t take it.

Falsworth gets another tattoo high up on his chest, right under his collar bone on the left side. A sparrow. “And when I get home, I’ll get the other side.”

Dugan gets ‘Though I walk through the valley of death, I shall fear no evil’ on his inner right forearm.

Denier writes out the words ‘Vive la France’ for the artist to copy onto his left thigh.

Gabe and Jim both decide against another piece.

Stephanie sits back down in the chair and holds Bucky’s hand as the artist writes out, letter by letter, ‘till the end of the line’ on her inner left arm.
I'm sitting at a bus stop, thinking about how I'll write my article. A young gentleman with dark brown hair in a worn-out coat walks up to me. “You alright?” He asks. “You don't look like you're from around here. You lost?”

I tell him about my predicament - I have to write a compelling article about someone affected by the current situation. He laughs, and tells me he doesn't know anyone who isn't. He asks to sit down next to me; he has a few minutes to kill before he meets his wife when she gets off work.

That's how I met James Barnes.

He's young, just turned nineteen a few days ago. He works down on the docks ever since the company he was working at - a funeral home, his father still works there - downsized. It explains his rough hands, the dark gold band on his left ring finger slightly dulled. He has three younger sisters, two of whom are twins. His family moved here from Romania when he was four years old. He tells me all this at my own prompting. I apologize for accidentally starting an interview without his permission. James has a deep laugh that fills up the space around us and makes me smile. He tells me it isn't a problem. When I ask, he agrees to be the subject of my article. I stand, and get a picture of him sitting at the bus stop.

That done, he says that it's time to meet his wife. She works at the grocery store down the block. As we walk, he tells me about her.

She was born on the Fourth of July - “eyes even bluer than the flag, I'll tell you that,” James says. Her mother had recently been widowed in the process of immigrating from Ireland when she had been born. She has the personality of a drowned cat, James tells me with a large, fond smile on his face. “A real firecracker.” They met three weeks after his family arrived.

We walk into the store, and James loudly says, “I swear, I saw the most beautiful dame in the whole world in here to other day.”

A voice that shares James’s strong Brooklyn accent shouts from the back of the store, “ah, shove it, Buck. Only one who thinks you're funny is you.”

James explains that she had a lisp as a child and couldn't pronounce his first name, and shortened
his middle name - Buchanan - into 'Bucky,' “and for some damn reason she shortens that into Buck.”

Mrs. James Barnes’s name is Stephanie Rogers. She told James when he proposed that a condition of her agreement was that she would not change her last name. She is very petite, with golden blonde hair drifting in small whisps out of where it has been neatly pinned up, and James had not lied about the eyes. Her coat has also seen better days, but the smile she gives James when she sees him is as bright as the sun.

He greets her with a kiss to the top of her head, which is just below his chin. She thrusts her hand to me, and she has a much firmer handshake than I had expected from one of her size.

They married shortly after her mother’s death, they explain as they walk me to their apartment. Not because she disapproved, but because they had only just turned 18 when she did. They have only been married around seven months.

Their apartment is very modest, but very homey. The sketches that hang on the walls - one, of a middle aged woman, presumably of Stephanie’s mother, is framed - are done by Stephanie, and there are small camera strips from one of the booths on Coney Island.

[Pictured: the young man from before, coat off, his left arm around a young woman who is looking slightly to the right of the camera, her left hand reaching across them both to grab his right suspender. They are standing in front of the kitchen table, the walls littered with pieces of paper, which are covered in pencil drawings. It is captioned:  “Mr. Barnes and his wife, Stephanie, age 18.”]

I ask them for a more casual picture. Stephanie seems a little camera shy, until her husband says, “Snow White was a garbage picture.”

She scoffs, shaking him slightly with her hand on his suspender. “Snow White was the best damn piece of cinema you ever saw, and you know it, Barnes! Think of how many hours those artists spent drawing all that! Drawing the animals and the trees and all!”

James smirks. “Too bad it's all garbage.”

Stephanie opens her mouth to speak again, but she catches his eye, and they both burst out laughing. Hers is just as loud as his, starting out with little snorts, and escalating into full body shaking.

“Shut your sinner’s mouth, Barnes,” she says.

[Pictured: the couple from before, clutching at each other and laughing. They look gleeful. It is captioned: “An old argument.”]

James presses another kiss to her temple. “You know I'm fooling, doll.”

“You are a jerk.”

“A jerk who's making you dinner, punk. Turn the radio on, would ya?”

I ask them to forget that I'm even here.

As James rolls up his sleeves to prepare dinner, Stephanie turns on the radio and explains their agreement. She doesn't like to cook, and he doesn't like to do dishes, so they share. All of the household chores are like this.
She moves from the small sitting area to the kitchen and helps make dinner, explaining to James that she is only doing it because they have company. As she works, she pulls pins out of her hair one at a time, until it tumbles over her shoulders in loose curls.

“I wish you'd stop leaving your hair pins all over the house,” James laments.

“Maybe you shouldn't pin it back so tight in the mornings,” Stephanie quips back.

“If I don't, it falls out in an hour.”

“Not my fault my hair is so fine.”

James wraps his arms around her from behind and kisses her temple, saying, “not as fine as you are, doll.”

She snorts, and flicks his arm. “Shut the fuck up.”

“You kiss your mother with that mouth?”

Stephanie’s face goes very serious. “No, she's dead.”

James stifles his laughter in her shoulder, and she flashes her dimples. She puts down the knife from cutting up potatoes, dumping them into the boiling water. James swings her around as the song on the radio picks up, and he loudly sings along to a Cole Porter song as he twirls her around the apartment.

[Dinner is quite simple, but there is an undeniable warmth to the affair. Stephanie toes off her shoes before sitting at the table, and she sits cross-legged in her chair, her light blue dotted dress falling around her.

James says grace.

I ask Stephanie about her family.

“I don’t know a whole lot. My father died on the boat over. At least, that’s what my Ma always told me. I haven’t been able to find any records of his death, or of a Joseph Rogers anywhere. She needed to work, of course, and she started working days at St. Bernard’s, the Catholic hospital about a block over. She worked nights in Harrison’s as a singer, and a picture girl - rich men would pay her to wear a nice dress and go to parties and listen to people talk. She made nice money, ‘cause people all invited her back ‘cause she was real beautiful. I stayed with a rotation of people in our building. Just about everyone loves babies, it’s why I know how’ta speak so many languages. Couldn’t read most of ‘em to save my life, but I can speak ‘em. As I got older, she worked her way through the ranks of the hospital. We weren’t too well off, but we didn’t go hungry that much, and we had enough to help make sure other people didn’t either. My Ma was the best damn woman the world ever saw.”

Sarah Rogers died of tuberculosis, which she contracted while working at the hospital. She was 38 at the time.

I was correct in my original assumption, the framed drawing on the wall is Sarah.
Stephanie stands up quickly and pulls her shoes back on. She promised Mrs. F- that she would help with the children tonight.

“Her oldest is sick, so I take care of the baby.”

After she leaves, James does the dishes.

I ask him if that was Stephanie’s job, as per their agreement.

James shrugs. “She helped with dinner tonight, and she’s always tired after helping Mrs. F- out. Plus we don’t need her overextending herself; her body don’t like her.”

Stephanie was born premature. According to what the doctors said, her heart and lungs hadn’t fully formed; she couldn’t run very far, and both the over-damp summer air and the too-dry winter breeze were hard on her body.

“The list of things I wouldn’t give to get her healthy is a blank piece of paper,” James tells me as he dries the dishes.

[Pictured: James Barnes, facing the camera, towel in one hand, placing a plate in a cupboard. It is captioned: “After a long day.”]

In return for his exposure of his own life, as we wait for Stephanie to return, I tell him about my own background.

He offers me a cigarette.

Stephanie walks in later at night, looking exhausted, but a large smile on her face.

“I remembered somethin’ Ma used to make. Can’t believe I forgot peppermint existed.” She laughs tiredly and wraps her arms around James’s waist.

[Pictured: Stephanie and James Barnes embracing, both with contented smiles on their faces. It is captioned: “Solace.”]

It’s late. I thank them for their stories, shake their hands, and promise to bring them a copy of the paper when it’s published.

I could make a profound statement about perseverance, courage in the face of adversity, or how strong they are. Instead, I will only say this: Stephanie is a woman who gives her all because she can, James loves with his whole being, and they make some damn good potatoes. They’re people, not just a sob story. I feel that too many forget the humanity behind the statistics.
How to shoot somebody who outdrew you

Chapter Summary

Helicarrier fight.

Chapter Notes

We're finally here! I hope I did it justice!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Everyone got their part down?” Bucky asks, sweating inside this dumb helmet. His stomach is doing loops, and he really wants to throw up.

Natasha nods.

Maria nods.

Fury nods.

Sam nods.

Bucky swallows, and nods.

“Then let’s go. Hydra, unfortunately, isn’t gonna stop itself.”

“Imagine how much easier life would be,” Sam says, trying to joke, but it falls flat to Bucky’s ears.

Sam grabs Bucky by the arm once the others disperse. “No sacrifice play, Barnes,” he says.

Bucky swallows. “You know I can’t promise you that, Sam.”

Sam sighs. “I know. But promise to try.”

“I promise to try.”

“When did you find time to shave?” Sam asks, gesturing at Bucky’s now bare chin.

“I made time.”

*Bucky takes over to intercom, takes a deep breath, and channels Stephanie. She was a real talker once you got her started.

“Attention, all SHIELD agents. This is Bucky Barnes. You’ve heard a lot about me over the last few days, some of you were even ordered to hunt me down. But I think it’s time you know the truth. SHIELD is not what we thought it was, it’s been taken over by HYDRA. Alexander Pierce is
their leader. The STRIKE and Insight crew are HYDRA as well. I don't know how many more, but I know they're in the building. They could be standing right next to you. They almost have what they want: absolute control. They shot Nick Fury and it won't end there. If you launch those Helicarriers today, HYDRA will be able to kill anyone that stands in their way, unless we stop them. I know I'm asking a lot, but the price of freedom is high, it always has been, and it's a price I'm willing to pay. And if I'm the only one, then so be it. But I'm willing to bet I'm not.”

He takes his hand off the call button.

“Did you write that down first,” Sam asks, “or was it off the top of your head?”

Bucky claps a hand to his chest dramatically. “The heart, Sam. From the heart.”

* 

“How do we know which are the good guys and which are the bad?”

“If they’re shooting at you, it’s safe to assume they’re bad.”

Gunfire sounds to their right.

“Found those bad guys you were talking about.”

* 

Over the com, he faintly hears, “she’s dumping all the secrets to the internet.”

“Including Hydra’s.”

“And Shield’s. Are you sure you’re ready for people to see what you are?”

A long pause, and Bucky strains to hear over the sounds of gunfire and fighting grunts.

“Are you?”

A damn good woman.

* 

“You’re a dumbass, you know that right?” Sam asks after he gives Bucky the ride he’d asked for from one Helicarrier to another.

“I’ve been told that before, ye-”

Bucky doesn’t get to finish his sentence. He’s kicked off the side of the Helicarrier. He grips the side tightly and pulls himself.

“Cap?” Sam asks.

“I’m good! You?”

“Grounded. Suit’s down, Cap, I’m sorry.”

“Not your fault, Sam.”

*
He works his way into the right corridor. He says a quick prayer before he ducks in, but it goes unanswered.

*

“People are gonna die, Steph. I can’t let that happen.”

She stares at him. She looks the same as before, but her face is bare. There are pink puffy marks on her cheekbones and temples, like she’s been burned.

“Please, Stevie. Please don’t make me do this. I don’t want to. It’s the last thing I want to do.”

She doesn’t say anything.

Bucky feels one tear glide down his face as he throws his shield.

*

She’d be mad at him for not fighting her, if she were herself. Fate of the free world, and all that.

*

He fights his way through her, shutting down the part of his mind screaming at him to stop.

Yes, it’s Stephanie. No, he can’t stop fighting her, he can’t go easy on her, he can’t let her win.

He’s not fighting Stevie, he’s fighting Hydra. When he puts it that way, it isn’t so bad.

Once he’s done with Hydra, he can take care of his girl.

*

Well, one thing hasn’t change. She still likes to have all her little knives.

She’s got the chip clenched in her hand, and she’s trying to wriggle out of his grasp, but he has experience with a wiggly Rogers. He’s just glad she’s not trying to tickle him.

“Drop it!” He yells. “Drop it!”

She growls back.

Bucky grunts, and wraps an arm around her neck, pressing down until she passes out. He only allows himself a glance at her while she’s passed out; she’s restless, a crease still between her brows.

He grabs the chip and scrambles.

*

She shoots him.

For fuck’s sake, Stevie.

He almost gets it in the slot, has the other one out, when she shoots him again.
“One minute, Cap!” Maria says desperately in his ear.

He forces himself up enough the shove the chip into the empty slot.

“Charlie locked,” he heaves. He slumps against the column. “Fire now.”

“But Bucky,” Maria starts.

“Maria. Do it.”

He hears the first shot go off. He sighs, and smiles.

*

There’s a support beam stuck over her, pinning her arm down. Her face is that of a scared animal.

He’s aching from the stab holes and bullet wounds.

He uses all his strength to heave it off of her.

“You know me,” he says, dodging a fist.

“No! I don’t!” She screams. Her voice is scratchy and torn, like all she’s ever done is scream.

A sob works its way out of Bucky’s throat.

“Stevie, you’ve known me your whole life.”

She swings at him again.

“Your name,” he says, catching the next punch and pulling her in close to him, “is Stephanie Anne Grace Marie Rogers. It’s a long ass name and it’s yours.”

She screams, thrashing in his arms. “Shut up!” There are tears in her eyes. “Shut up shut up shut up!!”

Bucky pulls his helmet off. “Stephanie, babydoll, sweetheart, babe, sugar, honey, sweetie, doll, Stevie-girl. It’s me. It’s your Buck.”

She claws at his now bare face, shoving him backwards.

“I’m not gonna fight you,” Bucky says, his body slackening. The Helicarriers are burning around them. He drops the shield. “You’re my friend.”

“You’re my mission!” She screams, lashing out and knocking him over.

Bucky pulls a happier moment from his memory. They’re sitting, kind of like this, on their bed back home. He’s lying down, she’s crouched over him, sort of on his lap. She’s laughing as he digs his fingers against her ribs, retaliating by putting her boney elbows down hard on his soft stomach.

He can feel tears rolling down his face.

“You’re,” she says, trying to convince herself. “My - mission!”

Bucky has one last ace up his sleeve, and if this doesn’t work, they’re going out together.

“Then finish it,” he says, face numb. “Cause I’m with you till the end of the line.”
The Soldier had to break into a safe once.

They taught her about how the different compartments all slide into different places, and it only opens up with the right combination is put in. About how the little notches all had to fit together. This is a little bit like that.

Her heart is thrumming. Her hands shake, she can’t seem to make her body move. Images and colors and smells and sounds assault her senses and make her dizzy.

‘Stephanie?’ She’s sitting on a curb somewhere, young, knees scraped. A boy sits next to her and holds her while she sobs brokenly and tells her about the mean man who wouldn’t stop trying to talk to her Ma.

‘Your husband. James.’ She’s in a nice dress, standing across from this man. He takes her face gently in his hands and pressed his lips softly to hers.

‘It’s a long ass name and it’s yours.’ She’s in an alley and a boy says, “That’s a pretty weird name for a girl.”

‘Sweetie...doll.’ Her brain is buzzing, but not in the bad way that means pain, this is more pleasant, like she’s floating. The man rubs his thumbs along her shoulder blades, then fits his fingers into the splits between her ribs. “I love you so much, sweetie, ya don’t even know, doll. Oh, honey, Stevie-girl, I love ya.” He’s kissing her again, tender, warm, loving, lips a little cracked and damp, but so tender her heart might shatter, and gentle, always, always so gentle. His hair is a little greasy between her fingers. This, she thinks, is what happiness is. He doesn’t remember in the morning. A piece of her mind tells her it’s for the best.

‘It’s me. It’s your Bucky.’ “Ma,” she says, “this is my Bucky. I mean, my friend Bucky.” “Nah,” the boy says, “you can call my your Bucky.”

‘I’m not gonna fight you.’ Her face is hot and they’re in a small room and she’s shouting about something. “I know! I messed up!” The man yells. “On that, I’m not gonna fight you! Okay? I’m sorry!”

‘I’m with you till the end of the line.’ She’s in a bus. She’s outside her apartment. She's sitting on a bed, one leg on either side of his, fully clothed and safer in his arms than she’d ever felt anywhere else. She’s standing with all the other wives, waving goodbye to husbands they pray to see again. She’s pulling him off a table. She’s in a tent, huddling against the rain. She’s lying on a cot, pressed right up against him. He’s pulling her off the table this time. They’re standing on the side of some mountain.

Something in her mind falls into place. Very anticlimactic, actually. Like the final piece of a puzzle.

Bucky’s face is bloody. Her fist - her metal fist - is bloody. So, obviously, she made Bucky’s face bloody.

(She’d done this before, when he’d asked her to marry him.)
Something is burning around her.

Bucky is hurt, it’s her fault, and she’s surrounded by fire.

Logic dictates that this is hell.

*

Instead of coming down with a punch, her hand comes down in a soft caress. She brushes the backs of her fingers over his face.

“Buck?” She starts to say, but it’s barely an exhale before the Helicarrier gives a lurch beneath her and he falls.

Her arm catches her.

She has two routes ahead of her.

One, she can dive in the water and swim to safety.

Two, she can dive in the water and look for him, and drag him to the shore.

Option one has a higher probability of survival; he might drag her down to the bottom.

She pulls him to the shore anyway.

She cradles her arm against her torso; it hurts, a shooting, burning, constant pain.

She flips him on his side - recovery position, her mind supplies - so that he doesn’t choke on his own tongue. Or his vomit, if it comes to that.

She stays just long enough to make sure he’s breathing.

Stay, a part of her says. You’re tired. Just lie down next to him like you have a hundred thousand times. Curl up. Listen to his heart. Sleep.

Go, another part insists. They’ll just take you back. You need to make sure they’re gone before you come back. Or else they’ll come for him.

Every part of her burns with fury at the idea of any of their filthy Hydra hands touching him.

She compromises.

She lifts up one of his arms and lies down under it, her ear pressed to his chest, just for a little while.

Her heartbeat slows to match his. Her breathing evens. Her muscles loosen. She really, truly could sleep here, on this uncomfortable riverbank, so long as she has him pressed to her.

She counts to sixty ten times.

She gets up, takes one more look at him.

She leaves.

Chapter End Notes
Two more chapters until the end of 'part one.' Part two will be in this same fic, i’m just going to change how I title the chapters (haven't decided how yet but we'll get there). As always, I'd love to know your thoughts on things!
A time you let me know

Chapter Summary

Hospital waiting game.

@twitterpatted tweeted:

Holy shit Captain America is fighting some fuckin blonde lady in bondage gear with a metal arm
*attached video*

@bobbimarshall tweeted:

To any of my D.C. followers: pls be safe!!!!

@capamericafans tweeted:

Sorry for the poor quality I was running for my life *attached video*

*

“Hey, it’s me, Bucky. I’m not answering my phone right now because I’m either saving the universe or napping, but leave a message and I’ll try to get back to you. Or just fucking text me, it's the future; I shouldn't have to talk to people anymore.”

“At the tone, please record your message. When you're finished recording, you can hang up, or press one for more options.”

“Bucky? Bucky, it's me, Allie. Please pick up your phone or text us or something. I'm watching the news and I'm really worried about you. Just...be careful. Please, Bucky. I'm frightened. I'll call again later.”

*

“Hey, it’s me, Bucky. I’m not answering my phone right now because I’m either saving the universe or napping, but leave a message and I’ll try to get back to you....”

“At the tone, please record your message. When you're finished recording, you can hang up....”

“Bucky, it’s Hanna. Answer your damn phone, Barnes. You're scaring the shit out of everyone....Bucky, c'mon, please just...call me back.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone right now because I'm either saving the universe or napping, but leave a message....”

“At the tone, please record your message, when your finished recording....”

“Barnes, it's Jones. Andrea tuned on the news and...well. The video isn't good, but I think you know as well as I do that we could all recognize her anywhere. Are you alright? The whole family
is threatening to go kick ass down there if you don't reply. Don't think they won't. Just….Cap, listen. I know that you...just don't do anything reckless.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone right now because I'm either saving the universe or napping....”

“At the tone, please record your message. When you're finished....”

“Barnes? It's Jim. I know you're about to do something stupid. Don't. At least get some damn back up. For fuck’s sake, Barnes. I thought I was done worrying about your ass.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone right now because I'm either saving the universe....”

“At the tone, please record your message....”

“Bucky? Bucky, please just answer your phone. Bucky, Samira is about to have a full on anxiety attack right now. She already lost her dad, don't make her lose you too. Dammit Bucky. You can't make us care about you and then leave us like this.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone right now because I'm....”

“At the tone, please record....”

“Bucky, it's Damien. I'm...I can see the Shield building from my internship. Bucky, please tell me you aren't on those fucking helicarriers. Bucky, please.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone right now....”

“At the tone, please....”

“Now listen here you Romanian fucker, you're only allowed to do that disappearing act once. My damn heart can't take it if you do it again. If you die I'm burning the fucking hat you gave me. Yeah, the nice one. Dugan out.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not answering my phone....”

“At the tone....”

“James Yasha Buchanan Nicolae Barnes, don't think I won't come down there and kick your ass. I'm still your baby sister, I'm allowed to be scared out of my brains about you. I know you're going after her. I know it's her. Nobody on the news seems to have figured it out, but I know. I know I can't stop you, hell, I don't think I want too. Bring my sister home, Jamie. But don't do anything stupid. Love you.”

*
“Hey, it's me, Bucky. I'm not….”

“At the….”

“James? It's Peggy. I...I'm so sorry. Please, take care.”

*

“Hey, it's me, Bucky….”

“At….”

“Capsicle, if you need backup just send out the SOS and I'll be down there with a couple of suits in an hour, tops. Please don't die; I'm the default leader after you and being in charge isn't nearly as fun as making snarky commentary from the ranks.”

*

“Hey, it's me….”

“Bucky. I'm the first normal person you talked to in this century. You remember? We were visiting graves at Arlington. Please don't make me visit yours there.”

*

“Hey….”

“Captain Barnes, it's Agent Phil Coulson. if you need a back up team, I have some people I can recommend. People I trust. Let me know.”

*

Voicemail inbox full.

*

Breaking news: International intelligence agency, SHIELD, was secretly a HYDRA cell all along. For those who don't know, HYDRA was the Nazi deep science division, which Captain Barnes fought against in…..


*

Trending right now:

#SaveSergeantRogers

#AVictimNotAVillain

#SHIELDcollapse

#hydra

#shieldsishydra
Sam pulls Barnes’s phone from the pocket of the jacket that he had left behind at Fury’s safe house. When he turns it on, there are a shit-billion notifications on it.


He places it on the table next to Cap for when he wakes up - because he will. Bucky Barnes isn't a quitter.

Natasha walks into the room, looking significantly worse for wear. She sits down heavily, cross-legged on the foot of Bucky’s bed.

“I can stay with him if you want.”

Sam just shakes his head. He's a little too rattled currently to try to think of what he's doing next. The door provides a comfortable barrier from the outside world.

“Change of clothes? A toothbrush?”

“Phone charger, some food,” Sam replies, understanding that her way of coping is action. “A book, if you can find one; don't care which. Coffee.”

“I'll be back in an hour.”

“Course.”

She stands, wincing slightly. Her eye catches the phone on the table. She picks it up, scrolls through the notifications.

“Jarvis.”

“Yes, Agent Romanov?” The phone replies. Sam is too tired to think about it too hard.

“Emergency Avenger override. Someone needs to call all these people back to let them know Barnes is okay.”

“I can take care of that if you would like.”

Natasha glances at Sam. He nods, holding out his hand. “Actually, I've got someone on it. Add to override-”

She holds the phone in his direction.
“Staff Sergeant Samuel Wilson.”

“Hello, Sergeant Wilson. Welcome to the Avengers. I am Jarvis, Mr. Stark’s personal assistant. I am here to serve.”

Sam looks up at Natasha, eyebrows raised. She shrugs.

“Jarvis,” he says to the phone. “Can you add me in a code name?”

“Of course, Sergeant Wilson.”

“Codename: Falcon.”

Sam smiles at Natasha. She leans down to kiss his cheek.

“One hour,” she says as she leaves.

Sam sighs, scrolling to see who had called first. He swallows some water, and presses the call button. At least telling people their loved one is alive is better than telling them they died.


“Allie?”

“Yeah, that's me, strange man with Bucky’s phone. Why do you have Bucky’s phone?”

“I'm a friend. Sam Wilson. Saw you called and I wanted to let you know that Cap is okay. I'm sitting next to him right now; he's unconscious, but stable. He'll be alright.”

Allie breathes a large sigh of relief. “Thank the Lord. Praise be. I'm not even religious and I was praying. I'll tell the girls. Don't bother calling back Hanna, Takisha, or Samira. We all live together. I'll tell them.”

“Got it.”

“Sam, was it?”

“Yeah.”

“Thank you so much. You...you have no idea how worried we were.”

“I think I got some idea. I'll let Cap know you called once he wakes up.”

“Let him know that as soon as he's better he's in for an ass kicking of biblical proportions.”

Sam chuckles. “That too.”

* 

“Barnes, that you, you damn fool?”

“Uh, no, sir. I'm a friend of Bucky's. Name's Sam Wilson.”

“Sam Wilson. I'm Gabe Jones.”

“Yeah. Listen, he's okay. Knocked out bad, but okay. I found him on the banks of the Potomac.”
“You pull him out?”

“No.”

Gabe hums. “Thank you for calling, Sam.”

“Of course, sir.”

“I get the feeling I'll be hearing more from you. Call me Gabe.”

“Sure thing.”

“Thanks again.”

“Bye.”

*

“Jim Mortia. Hell ya want?”

“Hey, I'm Sam Wilson. I'm a friend of Bucky’s-”

“That bastard make it out in one piece?”

“Yeah.”

“Good.”

The man hangs up.

*

“Hello, Bucky?”

“Hey, Damien?”

“Yeah, that's me. Where's Bucky? I - I saw the carriers go down.”

“He's alright. I'm with him I'm a hospital. Give him a week and he'll be fine.”

“Thank fucking God. Which hospital? Can I come see him?”

“Uh, I think that's classified?”

“Oh, okay. Tell him I'm glad he's okay, but this doesn't get him out of watching Star Trek with me.”

Sam laughs. “I'll pass it on.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Sam Wilson.”

“Damien Cardew.”

“Talk to you later.”
“Bye.”

* 

“Dugan residence, what can I do ya for?”

“Who’s this? I’m calling for, uh, Dum Dum?”

“Grandpa! Somebody’s on the phone for you!”

“Hello?”

“Hey, I’m Sam Wilson. I’m a friend of Bucky’s.”

“You the wings guy?”

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“Glad to know someone’s watching his back. He okay?”

“He will be.”

“Well, thank Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I was watching the news. That was some fancy shit.”

Sam snorts. “Thank you. I try.”

“Have that bastard call me when he wakes up.”

“I will, sir.”

“Tim. Or Dum Dum, if you’re a friend of Cap’s.”

“Alright then.”

“Alright.”

* 

“What?”

“Hello, Becca? My name is Sam Wilson.”

“If you’re about to tell me my brother is dead, spare the pleasantries and just get it over with.”

“Actually, he’s okay. Shot to shit, but okay.”

She huffs. “Of course he is, lucky bastard. Somehow, I knew she wouldn’t do nothin’ to him.”

Sam glances at the heart monitor and IV that are attached to Cap. “I wouldn’t say she did nothing.”

“If he’s still breathing he’s fine. We Barneses are resilient that way. She’ll be back.”

That doesn't leave Sam feeling as good as it seems to do for Becca.

“Alright.”

“Tell him I'm still going to kick his ass.”
“Yeah, you and everyone else.”
“I get priority. I’m his sister.”

*

“Hello? Who is this?”
“Sam Wilson, ma’am.”

“Are you a friend of James’s? The one with the flying device? Neat trick, that.”
“Yeah, that’s me. I was calling to tell you that he’s alright. Roughed up, but he’ll recover.”

She sighs. “Do you have any real news?”

“Are you alright?”

“Well, I just found out that the organization I dedicated my life to was a Nazi sleeper cell all along and I never realized it, and in addition that they had one of my dearest friends in captivity from the beginning and I knew nothing about it.” She huffs. “So I’m doing just peachy keen. Call me Peggy.”

“I will.”

“And tell James that he’s an incorrigible fool, and that I am so, so proud of him.”
Sam smiles. “Yes, ma’am.”

*

“Let me guess: you’re the new guy Romanov put into my servers. I’m looking at your service records, Staff Sergeant Samuel Wilson. This is some impressive stuff. I asked Rhodey about you, said he’d heard of your program. Of course, you wouldn’t have anything to do with the recent bit of theft. Upstanding guy like you. Course, we can’t have any Avenger using stolen property, so text me your suggestions for the updated prototype and we can start working on it ASAP.”

“Yeah, Sam Wilson, that’s me. Cap’s fine if you, you know, care.”

“I figured. If Captain America was dead it would be all over the news. Plus, Nat already told the group chat.”

“Well then-”

“Think about it. Special features, maybe some artillery. You need some better body armor. Landing jets, maybe. Ooh! What if they could fold into a back shield! That could be fun. Everyone likes a cool shield. Cap’s brought them back in style. Oh, b-t-dubs, Clint’s pissed that you’re encroaching on his bird territory.”

“Well, I actually have wings, so you can tell Clint to stop whining.”

“Oh, feisty. I like you Wilson. Think you’ll fit right in.”

*

“How did you get this number?”
“You called Cap first, I'm just calling you back to let you know he's alright.”

“Thank you. You are?”

“A friend.”

“The wings? I saw footage.”

“Yeah.”

“Cool.”
Tony tells (asks) Wilson he can take a break, sitting down in his vacated chair.

Sam had said that Bucky was awake earlier, and had been sentient enough to tease him, so that’s a good sign.

A few minutes pass before Bucky blinks awake again.

“You look like fresh hell, Buckaroo.”

“Well, not everyone looks as pretty as you do all the time, babe.”

Tony smiles at him. “About that, I’m afraid I need to call off our engagement on account of bigamy being illegal.” He smiles shyly at Bucky, barely able to believe what he’s about to say. “Pepper and I are getting hitched.”

“Tony!” Bucky exclaims. “That’s great!”

“Yeah, and you better fix up, cause no groomsman of mine is walking down the aisle with a fucked up face.”

“Only a groomsman? I’m your former fiancé!”

“Rhodey’s had best man dibs for about twelve years.”

Bucky shrugs, but winces. “Fair enough.”

Tony sighs, hating to do this, but knowing he had too. “She really did a number on you, didn’t she.”

He can tell that Bucky knows it’s not a question.

“She saved my life, Tony. She pulled me out of the river. I would have drowned.”

“Yeah, but according to medical reports, she also shot you, stabbed you, and gave you blunt force
trauma to the head.”

Bucky stares down at his hands, dark hair falling over his face. “Once the job was done...I just couldn’t fight her, Tony. I couldn’t. If it were Pepper, would you have been able to?”

Tony sits back in his chair and thinks about that one. “I don’t know.”

“Tony, I’ve got no proof of this, and also a literal mad scientist told me this while he was trying to stall for time and play mind games, so don’t take it as gospel or anything, but-”

“Hydra had the Winter Soldier kill my parents,” Tony cuts him off. “Nat dumped all files, Bucky. Everything Hydra ever did is on the internet now. There’s video and everything.”

Bucky swallows. “If you don’t wanna help me, I understand.”

“Bucky, why do you think I donate half my revenue every single year to charity? Specifically charities in the Middle East?” Tony looks down at his own hands now that Bucky looks up at him. “I know what can happen, when someone else is calling the shots. But I got no excuse other than being careless and kind of an asshole. No one was brainwashing me.”

Tony stands and puts a hand on Bucky’s shoulder. “I’ll help you find your girl, Barnes. Anything else you need?”

“Actually, Tony?” Bucky says, sitting up more. “It’s been a long week, and I could really just use a hug.”

Tony wraps his arms around Bucky softly; trying not to aggravate any of his injuries.

“Thanks, Tone.”

*******

“No, she’ll stay around here for a while,” Bucky says as they exit the hospital.

“Yeah,” Natasha says. “With all the drugs they pumped through her all the time she’ll need at least a few weeks to recover from the withdrawals.”

Natasha feels Bucky stiffen beside her. “What?”

“Muscle relaxers, artificial rehydration, intravenous nutrition, enough pain medication so that she can actually function, neural inhibitors to stop her brain firing on all cylinders, antibiotics for her shot immune system, probiotics so her stomach doesn’t eat itself, anticonvulsants, and who know what else,” Natasha lists.

“You sure know a lot about this, Nat,” Bucky says.

“I haven’t been sleeping well these past few days. Decided to do some light reading.”

“You read seventy years of Hydra files for fun?” Sam asks.

“I didn’t read all of them,” she responds. “I skipped all the parts I was in.”

Bucky and Sam both stop in their tracks.

“What?” They both say.
“Hydra and the Red Room weren’t the same thing, but they had common interests,” Natasha sighs, crossing her arms in front of herself and holding her opposite elbows; this is the stance Clint lies to call ‘defensive.’ “Hydra didn’t mind lending the Room an asset so long as they got something in return.”

Bucky stands in front of her, palms up, arms open.

She nods, and Bucky wraps her into a hug.

“You could have told me you-”

“I didn’t know it was her. Most of the photos they have of her, she’s tiny and smiling and there’s a light in her eyes. The Soldier…” she trails off. “The Soldier is none of that. Her eyes are dead. Or they’re angry.”

“Angry is an emotion, at least,” Bucky says.

“Yeah it is.”

“Do you mind if I-?”

“Let’s get back to somewhere with seating first. Preferably private.”

*

One of the men - Sergei? Antonio? They’re all the same, gross, big, sweaty, and always staring - has all seven of them, the bests - from big Alonya, who is 14, to little Marta, who is 5, to Natalia herself, just 9 - in one of the ballet rooms.

Natalia’s eyes flick across all of their reflections. Seven girls, all in tights and leotards, hair tied back.

One big man, all in black. One big man, one of the ones where disobedience means death.

Seven little girls and one big man.

He has them stand all in a line, oldest to youngest. He smiles at them, but it’s a bad smile. And he’s not looking at them, he’s looking at their leotards.

He starts with Alonya, pulling her sleeve down.

Natalia bounces on her toes, debating.

The door slams open, the lock flying off in splintered bits across the room.

“GET YER FILTHY FUCKIN’ PAWS OFF M’ GIRLS, YA BASTARD!!” An unrecognized, heavily accented voice yells from the doorway.

It’s Stava who enters the room, but she’s never spoken like that before.

Her eyes are fire and promise death.

She grabs the man by his tac vest, yanking his left arm up and back, until a hollow ‘pop’ sounds that signals delocation. She then grabs his other arm and does the same, kicking the hollows of his knees one at a time to force him down.
“Girls,” she says once he’s down, walking around in front of him and trusting her knee into his throat.

She stands between them and the man, a shield.

“Today’s lesson: if a man ever tries to do that to you and you do not want him too, simply follow what I have done,” she continues in English, placing her hands on his face. “One hand here, the other, there. Now, twist.”

She flexes her arms, a sickening *crunch* infects the air, and the man flops to the floor, eyes staring open and gasping.

“He’s not dead, not yet. Breaking the neck is not extremely effective on its own, not with your hands. But now,” she places one booted foot on his throat, and presses down, “it’s much easier to crush his windpipe.”

Natalia grabs Marta and shoves the little girl behind her.

The older girls have no thought of rescue, they know nothing but this life. Marta is different. Marta is little. Marta is small enough to slip through the vents before they get to her.

Stava’s face is nothing but cold-blooded fury. Natalia can almost imagine heavy, black feathered wings behind her. The angel of death.

Four burly handlers infiltrate the room just as the first man stops gurgling.

One of them shoots Stava in the thigh. She screeches, launching herself at him, her nails tearing across his face, finger catching an eye and pulling it out. The man screams.

Another grabs her by the shining arm and jabs a rod in between the plates. Stava lets out a wounded keen, getting him back by kicking with the flat of her boot between his legs, shoving him into the wall.

The third shoots a taser at her, catching her exposed neck.

But Stava is used to electricity in her veins. She grabs the cables, yanking them back as she whirls and tossing them back at him, catching him on the thigh.

The fourth is smart enough to have run for backup the moment she rebelled.

Marta is crying, and Natalia tries to soothe her as quietly as she can.

Stava walks over, hands bloody but ruined face soft.

“No need to cry, sunshine girl,” she says, crouching down, accent changed. “Didnna feusss. Bad man won’t be hurtin’ ya t’day.”

She starts to sing softly, a language Natalia doesn’t recognize.

She’s still trying to calm Marta as the men drag her away.

Natalia stares into the dead man’s eyes. Vindictively, she smiles.

* 

“She saved us. Any time she could. Let us get hits in to make it seem like we’d made progress.”
Natasha takes a long drink of Sam’s whiskey. She’s not shaking, but she feels like she could.

Bucky had put a hand on her knee near the beginning of her tale, clearly resisting the urge to wrap his arms around her.

“It’s thanks to her that I am what I am today. Who I am.”

“What do you mean by that?” Sam asks, seated in an armchair across from the couch.

“They let her say goodbye to us when the assignment ended.” Natasha pulls her shirt up as she shoves the waistband of her leggings down over her left hip bone.

Imprinted on her skin in black ink are Russian letters of the one phrase she remade herself around.

“That’s what she said when she left. ‘You are not what they make you. You are more.’ One of them shot her in the side for that. Rubber bullets still hurt.” Natasha finishes of the whiskey in her glass, grabbing the bottle by the neck and taking a long, burning swig.

“I got that the day after…” she hesitates. “After Clint got me to flip. That’s what I kept in my head any time someone told me I wasn’t able to do something. Anytime someone called me any insult with the word ‘commie’ in it. I’m not that. I’m more. The only one who can make me is me.”

Natasha locks eyes with Bucky. She leans into his chest so that he doesn’t have to reach for her.

“That’s similar to something her Ma used to say whenever someone put them down for being Irish or Catholic or poor. ‘He’s right, you are Irish and Catholic and poor, but you are also so much more than that.’”

“Sounds like a hell of a woman,” Natasha says, deflecting a little.

“You are more, Natasha. You are.”

“She saved me, Bucky. Now I’m gonna help save her.”

Chapter End Notes

A male Hydra agent attempts to undress a girl, and Stephanie kills him, then begins to comfort a young girl.
On shaking limbs, she walks back to the SHIELD compound. She doesn’t want to go back, but practicality dictates that having weapons is preferable to the alternative.

The compound is all but abandoned. It’s all too easy to slip through and around and up. Weapons are either on the top floor or the bottom, in her experience. Going up is harder than coming down, so she goes up first.

Elevator shafts are actually quite easy to climb if you have super strength, know what you’re doing, and have a metal arm.


Alexander Pierce dead on the floor.

She crouches, hesitating next to him. A hand reaches out to touch him, but she draws it back before it can.

She feels herself shaking, feels her arm creaking with how hard she is clenching her fist.

She stands again, and smashes her boot into his face.

Down to the basement, grab some supplies, and leave.

She stomach is rolling and her head pounds.

*  

It’s about two weeks of hell.

The first week is spent heaving up the contents of her empty stomach. It’s bile, mostly, that burns
her throat and mouth and leaves an uncomfortable filmy feeling around her teeth.

At the start of the second week - she keeps up with the date by grabbing the papers left behind next to the garbage can she’s been cowering against - blood beings come up.

She may not remember much, certainly less of her medical knowledge - (and that’s the thing, she knows that there are things she should know, can even kind of feel the empty spots, but she can’t do anything about it) - than would be helpful at this time, but even an idiot could tell that throwing up blood is very very bad.

She sneaks into a nearby bodega in the middle of the night, and leaves two twenties on the table. That should cover everything she takes. Energy bars, sports drinks, several waters, a reusable bottle, baseball cap, a blanket.

She paces herself. One energy bar, followed by water. Waits an hour. When it stays down she eats another, follows it up with a sports drink. She keeps that up for a few days.

*

A man drops down by her one day. By the look and smell of him, he is likely also homeless.

“Hi, I’m Joey. I thought I knew everyone around here, but you’re new.”

Actually, a part of her thinks, I’m much older.

“You got a name?” He asks, not unkindly.

The man on the bridge called her Stevie. “Stevie.”

“That’s a cool name. Where you from, Stevie?”

“Uh...Brooklyn, I think.”

“You think?”

“My memory...it ain’t so good no more.”

“Oh, were you in an accident or something?”

“You could say that, yeah.”

Joey gives her a once over. “You military?”

She considers. “Was.”

“VA fuck you over?”

“Someone.”

“Sorry.”

She shrugs.

“I guess since you're out here you don’t have anybody you could stay with?”

She thinks.
She thinks about the nebulous happy smiles without the faces that they belong on that float through her mind. She thinks about how it’s been 70 years since she talked to anyone she knew. She thinks about dark-skinned hands and soft brown hair and a bristly red mustache and a voice that speaks in lilts and dips and scratchy stubble and shaggy black fringe.

She thinks of hot summer days and cold winter evenings and lukewarm dinners after a long day. She thinks of dresses that swish over her knees and of twirls that make her dizzy and warm lips against her skin. She thinks of running as fast as she can (not very) and booming fireworks and tart oranges and sweet grapes. She thinks of church music and a woman’s smile and the word ‘Christmas.’ She thinks of a large bed and heavy blankets and a warm body next to her, holding her.

She thinks of loud booms and wet mud and breath she can see and bleeding men and blood everywhere, oh god, so much blood.

She thinks of electricity in her veins and pain in her head and she spine twisting to the left and her shoulders aching and something small and sharp digging against the sides of her spine.

She thinks of little girls and ballet slippers and red hair and half-baked escape plans and pretending these girls can take her down.

She thinks of hot spicy wine in a mug given by an older man who looks familiar and of ‘welcome to the family’ and of ‘I always thought of you as a sister.’

She thinks of sleepless nights and so much pain she can’t breathe and not wanting to stand and thinking through what would happen if she missed work. She thinks of gasping breaths and a racing heart and a ‘nothing to be done’ and ‘you’re not worth living’ and words that sounds like ‘eugenics’ and ‘survival of the fittest.’ She thinks of snarling at people and a woman’s hand on her chin when she is young, showing her how to hold her head high and teaching her how to say ‘no’ and kissing her forehead.

She thinks of hands twisting her hair up and hands on her slight back doing buttons and hands on her thighs rolling down stockings. She thinks of warm skin against her fingers as she pulls fabric away from shoulders and she thinks of sewing buttons and of blood on cloth. She thinks of bleeding knuckles and sore noses and wearing men’s shirts with torn cuffs to sleep.

She think of snapping a man’s neck and shooting a mother and stabbing a child and burning a building and blood against metal and the far away target of her rifle. She thinks of orders and punishments and masks.

She thinks of the press of a gun in her hands, of the shock of the kickback in her arms. She thinks of not remembering if that was before or during because now she’s in after and she hasn’t done that yet in the after.

“Not ready to see them, I think.”

Joey nods. “I can respect that.”

*  

Another week of sports drink and food bars and water. It isn’t enough to feel full, but the gnawing of hunger in her stomach is familiar and ignorable.

She steals clothes from lost and founds, none of them fit right, hanging off her body too loose. There’s an empty backpack in one of the places, and she swipes it, shoves all her tac gear inside
except her boots.

She uses more of Hydra’s money to walk into a department store and buy small things like socks and underwear and a belt and travel soap and another brassiere. Her shoulders are hunched the whole time and the baseball hat stays pulled low over her head.

She spots another hat, dark blue with a circular shield on the front, and she snorts for unknown reasons and buys it.

She doesn’t feel more human, per say, but she feels less machine.

* 

On the beginning of week four, she decides it’s probably a good idea to figure out what the world has done since the ‘during.’

Memories come and go when they please. Sometimes she can recall something exactly (Bucky, that’s the name, he liked those penny candies, but only the peppermint flavor, he liked to press his face into the bend of her neck with his arms around her ribs after a long day), only for it to be gone the next day (yesterday had something to do with birds, she thinks).

On good days, she can remember a lot. Or, well, not so much ‘remember’ but more ‘not completely forget.’ Bucky’s eyes are grayish blue. Her own are blueish green. Bucky has three younger sisters. One of her girls’ name was Marta. Simple things.

On bad days, her mind feels like an empty screen blinking. A computer waiting for information, and emptier than she ever has before.

She swipes a permanent marker and scribbles on her skin “Stevie Rogers.”

When it starts to come off, she writes it again.

“That’s you,” she adds sometimes.

* 

She visits the museum on a bad day.

Everything feels closed off and fuzzy, like she’s experiencing everything with a blanket wrapped around her head.

Only one face (besides Bucky’s) leaves a very solid impact, makes a dent in the armor around her brain, pokes a hole through the darkness in her eyes.

*******

Peggy isn’t nearly as old as everyone seems to think she is.

She is old, obviously. But she’s not dying any time soon.

Erskine had to do preliminary trials, after all.

She is old, her hearing and sight aren’t what they were, her hands shake sometimes, and her joints creak.

But her reflexes and awareness are still top notch.
She *knows* as soon as someone is in her room.

She pretends to stretch in her sleep, hand sliding to the concealed pistol in her headboard.

There isn’t a sound.

“Well, one of us has to move first,” she says, a bit sarcastically.

There still isn’t anything, but Peggy can *feel* that someone is there. She sits up, pistol in hand, and turns on the lamp by her bed.

A figure *is* there. Dark colored clothes that aren’t her size, cap pulled low, hood up, scuffed boots, a backpack. She’s flinching away from the light.

Peggy swallows, and sets the gun down (still in reach, she isn’t a fool).

“Howdy, dearest? Is that you?”

Blue eyes flash from under the brim of the - is she wearing a Captain America hat? Really?

Peggy stifles a snort, clearing her throat instead. “Dearest. Are you alright?”

“I know you,” she says, in a crackling, raspy voice, like a metal rake on concrete. “I know you.”

“What’s my name?”

“Pegs. I call ya Pegs.”

This time when she swallows, she swallows back tears.

“Not that I’m not glad to see you, dearest, but why are you here?”

“I...not sure.”

“Would you like to take a quick rest?” Peggy moves over on her bed. “You could lay down right here.” Peggy knows it’s a gamble, knows she could wake up dying at this woman’s hands, and finds she doesn’t care all that much. “I can keep watch, I’ve slept enough.”

“No...Hydra?” Stephanie asks, taking a hesitant step forward.

“I should sure hope not.”

“Sure?”

“Of course, dearest. Now come here.”

Stephanie stands at the edge of Peggy’s bed, hovering a little.

“Shoes off, if you please. Take off anything you like, I want you to be comfortable.”

Cautiously, Stephanie drops her hat beside the bed, and then slides her backpack over her shoulders. Her jacket follows, then she bends down to take off her heavy boots.

Peggy thinks back to the days when Stephanie was a bit of a graceless disaster when not on task, and sighs. What had they done to her sweet girl to make her so….

Not lethal, she’d always been that. Not stealthy, because she could be that when she pleased.
No, the word Peggy is looking for here is *trained*.

The word mocks her, smirking with a face that looks like Zola’s, dragging all her failures back into the light.

Stephanie stands and Peggy draws back the sheets, opening her arms.

Stephanie crawls into the bed, and curls up, her head on Peggy’s chest.

Peggy smiles and tells her to sleep.

Once her breathing has shifted to a more definitive sleeping one, Peggy took a deep breath and sighed.

And coughed.

In the dim lamp light, Peggy can see the abhorrent state of Stephanie’s hair.

It’s still in the French plait that Peggy herself had wound it into before they had left on that last, fateful mission.

Years of oil from Stephanie’s scalp combined with years of dirt and years of sweat and even, if she looked closely, years of blood. Peggy ran her fingers over it. Disgusting, cakey. Matted together.

Bumpy ridges are above her eyebrows and on her cheekbones. Peggy, for the sake of her own heart, had not gone in to look at the files.

It makes so much sense now; SAGMR hadn’t stood for Strategy And Guidance, Missile Research. It stood for Stephanie Anne Grace Marie Rogers.

Peggy felt a tear trickle down her cheek.

She lays there, multigenerational assassin on her chest, smoothing back sweaty hair, until the sun rises.

*  

Once it’s an acceptable hour to make phone calls, Peggy calls her niece.

“The best shampoo and conditioner you can find. Some basic, effective hardware, you know the type. Go buy some clothes, nondescript as possible. I’ll text you the sizes. Not too many, just a pair or two of everything. Hair dye. Just imagine you’re going on the run and you don’t want to be found.”

“Aunt Peggy?” Sharon says. “Everything okay?”

“I’ll explain when you get here, dearest. Oh! And bring some of the bank cards.”

“Aunt Peggy….”

“Don’t ask questions, just get here.” Peggy hangs up the phone.

Stephanie is awake when she looks back at the bed, curled into a ball and just looking at her, arms around her legs, chin resting on her knees.

“Someone coming for me?”
“Someone is coming to help you.”

“Help me what?”

She seems more coherent today, though that may change. Peggy can’t be certain what ‘normal’ is, so she has to play this very carefully.

“Well, I imagine you don’t want to go back to Hydra.” Stephanie nods. “And if you’re here, I’m assuming you don’t want to see Bucky?”

Stephanie hesitates. “Not now.”

“What do you want to do?”

“Want them to not hurt no one no more. Gotta take ‘em down.”

“Good, dearest. I’m going to help make it easier on you. I need to go get a few things, but until then, you wait here? I’ll be back in just a tick, I promise.”

“No one’ll see me, I swear.”

Peggy walks back over to the bed and presses a kiss to her forehead. “I won’t leave you alone for long.”

*

It’s almost too easy to slip a pair of hair shears into her sleeve when she goes to get her hair done, just a quick trim and then she’s off again.

It’s not stealing, it’s borrowing. She’ll bring them back tomorrow.

*

Sharon is waiting outside her room when she gets back.

“Aunt Peggy, if the person behind that door is who I think it is,” she starts.

“You’re perfectly within your rights to drop what you’ve brought now and leave.”

“She killed Nick Fury.”

“If you truly think he’s dead then you haven’t been paying attention.”

Sharon sighs, but smiles.

They enter the room together.

*

Stephanie is still sitting on the bed, staring out the window.

She stiffens when the door creaks, but doesn’t move.

“Dearest, this is my niece, Sharon. She’s brought us some things to help you feel better.”

“Like what?”
“We’re going to take care of your hair, if that’s quite alright.”

Stephanie ducks her chin. “Yeah.”

*

Stephanie towers over both of them. She must be almost six feet tall at this point. Getting her into
the bathroom is no problem. Asking her to strip out of her clothes is easy enough, but Stephanie
stares at the floor with her jaw set, and Peggy’s heart rends.

“Would you prefer that Sharon leave, dearest?”

Stephanie doesn’t say anything.

Peggy leans over and begins to fill up the tub. She lets the water get warm, but not unbearable.

When guided to it, Stephanie sinks into the water wordlessly.

Sharon closes the door behind her as she leaves.

“I’m going to start with your back, if that’s alright.”

Stephanie grunts.

From what Peggy can tell, Stephanie can move her metal arm easily enough (how much she can
feel is unknown), but the transition from organic to bionical is anything but seamless.

Peggy very carefully runs the washcloth over it. It is likely either very sensitive or entirely dead.

From the steady, purposefully measured way Stephanie inhales, it’s the former.

Together, they get all her skin cleaned off of blood and dirt and river water (Bucky has called two
days after it had happened, told her everything).

Peggy drains the tub, and grabs the shower head. Thankfully, it is not set in one spot.

Stephanie is still sitting on the floor, so Peggy sits on the (damp) shower stool behind her.

Peggy evaluates the state of Stephanie’s hair. With work, most can probably be saved, but the
bottom all has to go.

Peggy smiles mournfully. Stephanie had loved her long, blonde hair. It reminded her of her mother.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to cut most of this off, dearest,” Peggy says. “There’s no way to save
it.”

“Just hair,” Stephanie shrugs.

Peggy takes up the shears she had borrowed, and hacks her way through the end of the braid as
gently as she can.

She ends up with a thick plait of hair, about seven inches long, in her hand. Stephanie hair had
grown in the time since Peggy had done it; the plait had been firmly to her head that morning, and
now it hangs back from her scalp a good few inches.

“I’m going to turn on the shower on, is that alright?”
Stephanie grunts again.

Peggy lays down the shears (tossing the plait in the bin), and takes up a wide comb.

Working slowly as she can, with copious amounts of shampoo and conditioner, Peggy is able to undo most of the braid. She rubs her fingers gently over Stephanie’s scalp more than an hour after they had begun, before gently toweling it off.

Peggy helps her dress in some of the new clothes Sharon had brought, trying not to stare too hard at the scars littering her body; up and down the sides of her spine, congregated around major muscle groups, the mangled mess of where metal meets her left breast.

Hanging on her sternum is a set of dog tags with a tarnished gold ring hanging on the chain. Peggy catches enough of a glimpse to see that it does not say ‘Rogers’ anywhere on them.

Sharon had likely figured out who she was shopping for early on; the clothes fit well.

“Sit now, dearest, I’m going to clean up that cut job.”

Shears again, Peggy evens out the ends of Stephanie’s hair, making it all even instead of the long-and-short mess that it had been before thanks to the handling of the braid.

Once she’s done, Stephanie’s hair brushes just below her shoulders, already curling a little as it starts to dry.

“If you want to be less recognizable, Sharon’s also brought something to color it.”

Stephanie shrugs.

Peggy brings Sharon back into the bathroom. “Can you color it? I’m not familiar with using that stuff.”

“Sure. I helped my roommate with it in college.”

* 

There are no noises from the bathroom for another hour until the blow dryer starts.

Peggy waits.

Sharon emerges first, Stephanie following behind her.

Sharon had managed to make her hair black, fading into a deep blue at the tips.

Peggy had packed everything back up in the backpack and she hands it to Stephanie.

“What you want to stay longer?”

Stephanie shakes her head.

“Then Godspeed. There is an untraceable phone in there, should you ever want to call.”

She wraps her arms around Stephanie once she’s pulled her hair into a ponytail and put her jacket, cap, and backpack on again.

“Give them hell, dear.”
Once I have time to get on my computer, I’ll be updating some of the tags on this story.
Also, now that Stephanie is here, there will be a significant uptick in the amount of cussing.
Restitution: recompense for injury or loss

Chapter Summary

Welcome to the first ever Fuck Hydra World Tour

Chapter Notes

Sorry this was late! I had a job interview and then a trial day at that job on Friday and Saturday, and it didn’t help that this chapter was hard for me to write. Warnings for semi graphic descriptions of violence/torture, and for mentions an attempted suicide. This is getting into some heavy stuff, pals. If that seems like the sort of thing you don’t wanna read, then skip the rest of the chapter after Natasha shows up with pizza.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She stops to think, after visiting Peggy.

Being able to run her fingers through her hair makes her feel infinitely more human.

She needs a computer, she realizes.

And more money, probably.

*

She enters the bank vault, looks around, and violently throws up in the corner.

There’s a crowbar in the corner.

She makes sure to leave that chair a mangled mess.

*

After a few days, she figures that it’s probably a good idea to write things down as she remembers them. She gets two notebooks - brown leather, nice ones, not lined - and a set of pens.

She gets one space pen too, which she thinks Bucky would like, the fucking nerd.

*

Her backpack is getting full.

*

She doesn’t like the idea of twitter, but it’s necessary for her plan.
The first Hydra base she breaks into, she shoots in the shoulders, in the knees, in the feet. Nonlethal. She’s not going to kill anyone if she can help it.

She gets a bullet to the side, but she’s but some of her gear back on, so the dull impact of it is just irritating rather than bloody.

She drags all of them into one room, and begins restraining them all. Once that’s done, she rigs up the door to only open from the outside, and pulls out the phone Peggy had given her.

It says ‘Stark Industries’ on the back.

She opens the camera, makes sure her hair is all tucked into her hat, and presses record.

“Hello,” she says in a flat voice, face blank, “and welcome to the grand Fuck Hydra World Tour. I’m your host, Stephanie Rogers, and I’ll be taking down Hydra one by one until every single one of you bastards is rotting in a jail cell. Some ground rules: I’m not killing anyone if I can help it. I’m tired of it, and you don’t deserve a swift exit. I’ll be taking them down before calling the authorities because I’m equipped to handle them. Yes, I’m turning them over to the authorities. Anyone you’ve hurt? I’m helping them. I’m also gonna take anything I damn well please from your vaults.”

She gives the camera a sarcastic thumbs and a smile that doesn’t reach her eyes.

“Tune in next week to see which Hydra base is going down next. Now, DCPD….”

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Bucky has wanted to go to that base as soon as the video blew up, but Natasha convinced him that she would be long gone by now.

So instead, he visits Peggy.

“It was awful,” he tells her. “She looked right st me, and she didn’t even know me. But then,” he runs his fingers through his hair. “But then she did. She saved me, Pegs.”

“You’ve told me this before, James. You look well, by the way.”

“Yeah, face is all healed up now.”

“And how are you feeling besides that?”

Bucky stares out the window, considering.

“Betrayed. I...I know she doesn’t remember me fully, but,” he sighs. “But I thought that she would, you know, come back to me.”

“I’m sure she just wants to figure herself out first,” Peggy says, laying a hand on his arm. “I can’t imagine what she’s going through right now. No one can.”

“I know,” Bucky says, surly.

They sit in silence for a long time, drinking their tea. Bucky wants to say more, but he can’t think of what. Eventually, they finish their tea, and Bucky really should be leaving.

“I’ve got a long drive back up to New York, so I should probably get going.”
Peggy stands and hugs him. Bucky lets himself nuzzle a little into her white hair.

“Don’t be a stranger,” she tells him.

Bucky hesitates at the door.

“Do you...never mind.”

“What is it, James? You know you can ask me anything.”

“Do you think she hates me?” Bucky asks, in a very quiet voice, throat suddenly closed as if he’s been crying. “For not finding her, for not coming after her? Do you think she’ll never want to see me again?”

“Absolutely not, James. You forget, you did come for her, when you thought she was alive. You had no reason to think she could have survived that fall, serum or no. You didn’t think you could survive that plane crash. No, I don’t think she hates you, I just think she isn’t ready to see you yet. She’s processing a lot. Let her think, and she’ll be back in your arms in no time.”

“I just...I’m imagining her out there in the world by herself.” Bucky sighs. “I know she can take care of herself, but most of my life my main job was looking after her. And now she’s, you know,” Bucky waves his hand, gesturing at the world at large. “Taking out Hydra all by herself. Wish I could at least have her back.”

“James.”

“She doesn’t want me there anymore, Pegs. I just gotta accept it.”

“If she hates anyone she hates me, James. I was the one who founded S.H.I.E.L.D., I was the one who started this whole mess, I was the one who asked Zola to join, and I was the one who had reports on an asset sitting on my desk for several years. The way they talked about her...I honestly thought they were discussing a malfunctioning machine.”

Bucky sighs again. He feels like a days old balloon with the air coming out. “I wish I had answers for us both. I don’t blame you, Peggy, if that means anything.”

Peggy smiles and hugs him again. “I don’t think she does. Be safe.”

Bucky gives her a mock salute, and departs.

* * *

Allie, Hanna, Takisha, and Samira are already waiting for him at the Tower when he gets back. They all hug him, and Allie takes a deep breath, ready to lay into him.

He sighs. “Can I at least sit down before you start the lecture?”

He flops on the couch, leaning his head back.

Allie flops next to him. “You can’t ever understand how worried about you we were.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t want you guys too, but I had to stop them.”

Takisha sits next to him, leaning her head on his shoulder. He hadn’t known she’d gotten box braids. “Yeah, we know. Still sucks though.”
Bucky snorts. “Yeah.”

Samira sits on Allie’s other side, taking her hand.

Hanna sits on the floor next to Bucky’s leg and puts her cheek to his knee.

“So what’s the plan now?” Takisha asks. “What can we do to help?”

“Considering I’m not even sure what I’m going to do, I’ll have to get back to you on that one.” He reaches down and starts scratching his nails against Hanna’s hair.

They sit in silence for a long while as rain begins to pour down outside the large windows, the room tinting grey.

“I was gonna watch the video,” Bucky confesses.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Hanna asks, rubbing circles into his knee.

“I gotta know what I’m working with here.”

“It’s gonna eat you alive,” Samira argues. “To see what she went through. All you’re going to be able to do is think about how you could have stopped it and feel guilty.” Samira turned to him. “To be clear, I’m not saying you could have, I’m just saying that your brain thinks that. Don’t try to deny it Barnes. I have your number.”

Bucky sighs and puts his head in his hands, leaning forward. Hanna runs her fingers through his shaggy hair.

“It’s gonna eat me alive either way.”

“Before any of this starts,” Takisha says, pulling out her phone. “I’m calling Natasha.”

“When did you get her number?”

Takisha just winks.

*

Nat arrives with pizza and soda. She makes popcorn too.

“What about watching someone be tortured for multiple years makes you think movie night?” Bucky asks, baffled.

“My fatalistic sense of humor.”

*

In the earliest video (the quality is shit; as the kids would say, it looks like it was filmed on a potato), she has both her own arms. She’s in much the same position as Bucky had found her in when he’d come for her.

“Sergeant Rogers,” Zola says. “How are you feeling today?”

“Sargeant. Rogers. Stephanie.”

“Well enough to still be stubborn, I see. I think we’ll try the serum again today, don’t you?”
Stephanie grimaces.

“You’ll get tired of your reticent nature at some point.”

Natasha picks up the remote and fasts forward. “It’s just screaming for a good ten minutes. You don’t need to see that.”

Bucky looks at her, across the room in an armchair.

“I’ve already watched most of these. I’m trying to spare you where I can.” She keeps fasting forward. “It’s more of the same for the next week or so. You don’t need to see that.”

Bucky huffs.

The door bursts open, Falsworth walking in first, gun raised. Stephanie is passed out on the table, deliriously rattling off her name, rank, serial number.

Bucky comes in after Falsworth, shield raised. He walks over to the table and undoes the cuffs binding Stephanie down.

“Bask so soon?” She asks tiredly, sarcastically. “And here I thought you had a strict schedule.”

Bucky walks right up and caresses her face. “Nah, doll, we’re here to save your ass.”

Stephanie opens her eyes, sees Bucky’s face, and starts crying.

Bucky pulls her up into his arms, swings her body around so that he can stand between her legs, cradling her head in the crook of his neck.

“I got ya, doll. I got ya.”

“Knew ya would,” she hicups. “Just had to wait ‘em out.”

Bucky pulls pack enough to place tender kisses on her cheeks and forehead.

Jones picks up her blue coat off the floor and drapes it over her shoulders, smoothing a hand down her back. “You know we’d never leave you behind, Rogers.”

“Captain, hate to break up the happy moment, but we really should get going,” Falsworth says.

“Can you walk?” Bucky says, tilting Stephanie’s face up.

“Yeah-”

Bucky levels her with a stern look.

“No.”

“You guys go check the hall, let the others know we got her. We’ll be right out.”

Stephanie grabs Bucky’s jaw. “Kiss me.”

“What?”

“Kiss me. Please.”

“Why?”
“Good.”

“I’m confused.”

“They made me see things, fake things. You, the boys. I figured out it was fake because you were always kissing me.”

“Ah, dead giveaway. Now c’mere.”

_Bucky sweeps her into his arms bridal style and carries her away._

*

Natasha tries to skip over what Bucky can only dub ‘the operation,’ trying to spare Bucky and the girls having to see them cut away at Stephanie’s body with surgical tools, having to see them slot the metal against bone, having to see them weld her skin shut, having to hear her scream and thrash and sob.

As soon as she’s free, she chokes one of the scientists until he goes limp.

*

“Never thought that you would be, standing here so close to me.” Stephanie sings, loud and off-key on purpose, swaying around in her cell with her arms held in a dancing pose.

_She twirls herself around like she’s being spun, catches an hand around one of the bars, and leans backwards in a dip._

“What are you doing that for?” A guard asks.

“Bored. It’s something to do. Wanna make sure I don’t get to rusty for when they get me outta this dump. My husband’s gonna wanna take me dancin’. He loves dancin’, an’ I love being close to him.”

“Soldier-”

“Name’s Stephanie. Call me Steph.”

“Steph-”

“Commander, I don’t remember you having permission to speak to the asset.”

*

When they try to make her choose between shooting the guard and shooting his daughter, she puts the gun to her own chest instead.

Bucky’s spine chills when it doesn’t seem to do anything.

*

_She slumps to the floor after the chair, bleeding, boneless._

_She throws up nothing, heaving and sobbing as her body tries to be alright. There are a lot of nosebleeds._
She looks them in the eye as it happens. If nothing else, she will be defiant.

* 

The main video seems to come from a five year stretch from 1945 to 1950. Stephanie barely changes, save for the growing number of scars on her body and her ever-lengthening hair.

* 

“You really must give up this pointless hope, Soldier,” Zola says. “What makes you think he’s coming for you?”

Stephanie is crouched on the floor, spitting blood out of her mouth and swearing. She pinches the bridge of her nose to set it.

She glares up at him with a smirk, all defiance. “What makes you think he’s not?”

* 

When they tell her that Bucky’s dead, she screams and thrashes and throws things and kills people for two days.

After that it’s like someone flicked an off switch in her brain.

Bucky doesn’t notice that the girls have left until Natasha burrows on the couch next to him.

She wraps her arms around him, swiping his cheeks with her free thumb.

Oh. He’s crying.

* 

It only gets worse from there. Bucky does have to smile though, at one thing.

Her first solo mission. Orders: burn the orphanage to the ground.

She does.

After she made sure everyone was out.

‘That’s my girl.’

Chapter End Notes

Comments Literally make my day/week. It means a lot to me that so many of you are still here reading this hella niche fan fix and commenting on it. Bless you all.
Hey friends, sorry this chapter took so long! I got a job! And it’s tech week! My life is a lot right now! (Also my friend sucked me into a void of binge watching all of Crazy Ex Girlfriend and Queer Eye....)
Anyway, I hope you all enjoy this chapter!! I probably won’t have one for you next week, but I may have one for you the week after that! And then a few weeks later, classes start again! Weirdly enough, I’ve always found that I have more time for writing during the school year. Idk, I can’t even think of a reason why. Thank you for bearing with me on this!! I hope you all enjoy this next chapter! It’s one of my personal favorites I’ve written.

@CNN tweeted:

*Stephanie Rogers is alive - and she’s here to take back her story*

@voxdotcom tweeted:

*The ethical and moral argument of Stephanie Rogers’ f*ck Hydra world tour*

@NYTimes tweeted:

*Felicity Kyle, missing for seven months, has been found. She’s chronicled her rescue on Twitter.*

@Felicitationskyle tweeted a picture

Okay so, I’m going to gloss over what happened in the Hydra base because GOD I’LL NEED SO MUCH THERAPY but here’s what’s happened when Stephanie Rogers showed up.

First, I heard gunshots, so I started banging on the door. The lock turned and lo and behold. My savior. She looked like a badass, and I’ve got a bit of a girl crush. Anyway, so she helps me out, she’s real nice about it, easing me into the light, and gives me her jacket. She insists on bandaging me up before we leave (the base was very remote, we’re in the car right now; she gave me her phone which is how I’m doing his). She loaded up all these Hydra agents into the back of this huge van, and now she’s absolutely BLASTING Taylor Swift, which is great for me, but she’s played Better Than Revenge on loop about seven times now, and she’s got this little smirk on her face.

I love this girl. I would die for her.

(Update: she changed the song to Should Have Said No, God, What a queen)

This isn’t the Winter Soldier. This is Stephanie Rogers, cheeky shit and professional troll. She’s taken what they made her and thrown it away.

All the Hydra goons are alive, btw. Some of them will never walk again, but sucks to suck my dude.
Update: now we’re waiting at a bus station for the police to come get me and the Hydra dickbags, and she’s sitting with me. She’s cold, her body is more muscle than anything else, but she’s holding me, petting my hair, and humming. For the first time in seven months, I feel safe, and it’s all thanks to her.

*******

Of course the base was already neutralized before they got there. Rogers is damn good at what she does.

“I’m going to check the security tapes, see if they give us anything,” Natasha says as Sam leads the last of the Hydra agents into the police wagon.

Bucky follows her without a word.

Natasha sighs and sits in front of the security monitors. “You sure you wanna watch this?”

“Course I am.”

Natasha thinks that might be a bad idea, but to hell with it. It’s Buck’s choice.

*

_The speakers crackle to life, ‘Bad Reputation’ blasting through them._

_Stephanie Rogers kicks a door in, shoots the two guards in the knees, makes eye contact with the security camera, and flips it off._

_In another room, a few minutes later, she drops down from the ceiling and a scientist screams out. “It’s the Soldier!” The others in the room try to scramble away, but she’s blocking the door._

_“It’s Britney, bitch.”_ 

_In short order, all the inhabitants of the room - save, of course, one - are tied up._

_Stephanie walks over to one of the workbenches, drops some tools on it, and sits, stripping off her jacket as she goes._

_She places her left arm in a clamp and locks it, holding her arm in place, before pressing on some panel that causes different sections of her arm to flip open. She grabs a screwdriver and sets to work, grimacing._

_“You know,” one scientist starts._

_“Shut the fuck up,” Stephanie says through gritted teeth._

_“I could do that for you. Might be easier with two hands.” _

_“If you think I’m going to trust you, you’re even stupider than you look.” _

_“I mean you could have killed me and you didn’t.”_ 

_“I’m tired of killing and you deserve to rot in jail for the rest of your life.”_ 

_“I’m just a scientist.”_
“Yeah, and the nazis were just following orders when they led thousands of people to their deaths. I’ve seen this before, buddy. You aren’t the good guys.”

“And you are?”

Stephanie huffs, setting the screwdriver down and picking up small pliers. “Maybe I’m not good, but I’m better than you now.”

“Why’s that?”

“Would you shut the fuck up?”

“No, I’m bored and you’ve tied me up.”

“Because now that I have a choice I’m choosing to be as good as possible under the circumstances.”

“Why do you get to decide what’s good?”

Stephanie grits her teeth and yanks something out of her arm. “I don’t know, maybe the fact that I don’t want to take over the world?”

“You used to be one of us.”

“Thought you said you were just a scientist. Make up your mind, do you think you’re Hydra or not?”

The scientist blushes and looks away. “I’m just trying to get on your good side so you don’t kill me.”

“I got news for ya, pal; I don’t got one’na those.”

The scientist falls silent.

*

Natasha looks up at Bucky once the video is done showing her picking up and leaving.

He’s smiling.

He pulls his phone out and opens twitter.

“Hey a-holes,” Stephanie’s voice says from the phone. “I did you a favor again.”

Before she can stop it, Natasha’s lips quirk up.

“She’s coming back,” Bucky says, quietly, like it’s just for him, like he doesn’t realize he’s said it. “She’s coming back.”

“How so?” Natasha asks him.

Bucky blinks, taken aback. “Huh?”

“How’s she coming back?”

“Oh. Uh. Her voice. That accent.” He blushes. “That voice could wake me from the dead.”
Natasha scowls at the ground. “Bucky, I wouldn’t get your hopes up.”

“Nat, at this point I don’t care if she never talks to me again. I don’t want to force her back to me. I just want her to be...her. Whatever that means. As long as she’s choosing to do it.” Bucky lets the video loop once more.

“Hey a-holes. I did you a favor again.”

“That’s my girl,” Bucky says, for himself again.

“After all these years you still love her.”

“Nat, it’s not all these years. For me it’s barely been two, maybe three. I thought she was dead.”

“The girl you knew in Brooklyn, the girl you knew during the war, she may be dead, Bucky. I think you should prepare yourself for that possibility.”

Bucky locks his phone and shoves it back into a pocket of his suit. “Yeah well, I’m not the same guy I was either, Nat. And besides,” he says as he tries to exit the room with his signature Barnes smirk, “I didn’t promise her, ‘til death do us part.’ I promised her, ‘as long as we both shall live.’ And James Barnes always keeps his promises.”

“I watched the tapes from the triskelion. What does that mean, what you said to her?”

“Just somethin’ we use’ta say,” Bucky says, accent stronger than Natasha has ever heard it.

“Because you didn’t say, ‘I love you’?”

Bucky blushes. “Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.”

Chapter End Notes

Questions? Comments? I’m a fan of those.
Tony is a little more drunk than is probably good for him to be when he walks into his workshop, so he doesn’t clue in immediately to the fact that someone is already there.

It’s the quiet, restrained whimpers that make him aware.

“Jarvis?” He asks, trying to sound casual, trying to make sure that he appears collected, not wanting to have the intruder know that Tony knows he isn’t alone.

No response.

“Okay, so you disabled Jarvis,” Tony states, grabbing one of the tiny screwdrivers that are littered around his workshop. They’re enough to pierce the skin; he knows this from experience doing it to himself. “And I’m not dead yet. What do you want?”

From the darkness, a tall figure appeared, limping a little and clutching its left arm. The light caught her face.

Rogers.

“I can’t fix it,” she says, finishing on a violent hiss and her arm sparked and fizzed. “Maintenance required,” she says.

“Yeah, I figured that.”

“Maintenance required,” she bites out again, jaw clenched, eyes watering.

“Okay, okay,” Tony says, clearing off his workbench. “Sit down.”

Rogers walks stiffly toward the bench, listing heavily to the left, as if the arm was physically dragging her down. She sits down like her legs are giving out.

Tony reboots Jarvis, and the little blue dot on his monitor lights up again.
She stares straight forward, and Tony straddles the bench next to her.

“Jarv, do we have any schematics on the arm from the Hydra archives?”

“Pulling up available data now.”

A 3D projection of the arm illuminated the workshop.

“Can I get a scan of it now side by side?”

The scan appeared.

There was a bullet imbedded between two plates, as well as what looked like a screwdriver head and a nail.

“Damn, Rogers. What the hell were you up to?”

She doesn’t seem to hear him, and Tony finally recognizes the look in her eyes. The woman is disassociating out of her damn mind.

Tony remembers what little he had watched of the tapes, and he can’t say he blames her.

He keeps up an endless stream of chatter at her, trying to make this as different from any other of her precious experiences as he can.

Jarvis keeps an active scan on her arm, lighting areas up in red where the connections to her nervous system arm most pronounce, and Tony tries to avoid those, but sometimes he can’t. The display flashes red, a real life game of Operation, but Rogers doesn’t move. Her jaw just gets tighter.

“You’re gonna shatter your teeth at that rate,” Tony comments to no one.

Tony finally gets the nail out, and that area of her arm lights up red, and her fingers tighten into a fist. Her flesh hand clenches down on the wood of the bench and it crumbles.

Tony tries to smooth a hand down her back comfortingly, like calming a spooked animal, but a high keen escapes her throat and Tony remembers something from his own captivity: gentleness just means worse pain is coming.

Considering that the levels of pain she must already be feeling from her arm, anymore and she might pass out.

Tony removes his hand, and gets back to work, trying to work twice as fast.

*

He gets the screwdriver head out.

Rogers may as well be a statue, barely even moving to breathe.

*

He gets the bullet out.

He doesn't really want to feel sympathy for her (back of his mind still looks at her face and says 'she killed mom,' even though Tony knows that isn’t quite all true), but when she goes from ghostly
white to a pale green he feels the need to wrap her in a blanket and...he doesn’t know, make her soup, or something?

Tony isn’t really sure on the protocol for taking care of your best friend’s ex assassin amnesiac not-romantic-even-though-he-loves-her wife.

“Sir?” Jarvis says, “Captain Barnes and Agent Romanoff are on their way down. Ms. Potts expressed concern over your sobriety.”

Rogers is on her feet so fast she almost seems to blur. She’s across the room in another second, and gone the next, tossing something at the main module.

“A thank you would be nice,” Tony grumbles as the lights go out.

********

Natasha insists on joining Bucky in getting Tony. With the mood Bucky’s fallen into lately - no recent updates from Rogers, and the last known encounter hadn’t been pretty, she’d gotten pretty banged up - he’s more likely to mope than anything else.

Mopey Bucky was Natasha’s least favorite Bucky.

Tony was frantically pulling at wires on the wall with the lights off.

When they come back on, he turns to them, spitting out the screwdriver in his mouth.

“I know this looks bad, but I swear I’m not wasted.”

Bucky gives him a skeptical look.

“Power went out. I was fixing it.”

“The power went out?” Natasha asks.

“The power went out.”

“Why?” Bucky asks, poking around the main monitor.

It lights up, two blueprints of a metal arm, one in perfect condition and the other mangled with debris.

“Tony…” Bucky starts slowly.

“I was just playing around!” Tony yells. “You know, hypothetically! So that when your - when Stephanie comes back I’ll be ready to help out!”

Natasha nods, pretends that makes total sense.

She doesn’t like lying to Bucky, but in this instance it may be for the best.

“You go to bed, Bucky,” she says. “You’re tired. I’ll take care of wrangling this one upstairs.”

Bucky nods slowly, yawning.

Natasha waits for the elevator doors are closed before she turns on Tony. “Playing around, huh?”

Tony looks ashamed. “Honestly, I’m surprised I fooled him with that one.”
“She’s good at leaving quick, isn’t she,” Natasha says, not a question.

“Yeah. She even turned off my monitors and killed the lights. How did she do that?”

Tony is obviously still a little drunk - though not totally plastered, probably a little buzzed - or just not that observant (Natasha suspects the latter, Stark is a big picture guy), or he would have noticed the tiny discs on most of his tech.

She yanks one off, and it crackles in her palm, little electric shocks against her skin, tickling.

“Here’s how.”

It’s a crude recreation of one of her Widow Bites.

A crude recreation of the disc Natasha had disabled the Soldier’s arm with that day one the highway, before Nat had known that the Soldier was Rogers, before she’d had to reconcile the idea that the wife Bucky mourned got and the only person who had helped make her better were one and the same, before everything got more complicated.

Natasha hadn’t realized that Stephanie had kept it. From a strategic point of view, it's a useful tool. From an emotional point of view, the weapon is ubiquitous of Natasha herself. The child in Natasha is fiercely glad that Stava had kept this piece of her, that she was using something of Natalia’s to protect herself. A voice in her memory saying, “маленький паук,” whispering it proudly.

Natasha swallows.

Tony was peering over her shoulder now. “Holy shiiiiiiiit.” (okay, more drunk that Nat had thought), “that’s insane! She made some of your throwy things!! Dope!”

Natasha sighs. “How bad was it?”


“How did she look otherwise?”

“Traumatized.”

“Yeah.”

They stand in silence, staring at the small disc in Natasha’s hand.

“They made us watch, sometimes,” Natasha whispers. “When she got too- when she was more-” Natasha stutters, trying to find words for the first time she can remember. “They would- and they would make us watch. A warning. That it could be us next.”

Tony wraps his arms around her. Her shoulders drop.

“That sucks ass, Nat.”

Natasha snorts. “Yeah,” she agreed, placing her empty hand over one of his arms. “It does.”
every time you leave a comment, no matter how simple, it brightens my day.

_google translate says that маленький паук, means little spider so fr lack of better options we're gonna go with that_
Refuge: a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger, or trouble

Chapter Summary

Inadvertent reunions and a glance at public opinion

Chapter Notes

this whole story is probably my favorite thing i have ever written and im glad yall like it
another 'social media' chapter bc i love that shit

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ethan sighs, and shoves more snow off the front porch of the old lodge that Gramps lives in when he decides that he that main resort is too loud.

The lodge is so far removed from everything that Ethan had needed to borrow one of the snowmobiles to get out here to deliver groceries to Gramps, but he has to admit that it was awfully peaceful.

Of course, as soon as he thinks that, three quick shots sound off the mountain.

Ethan freezes, breath gone. He quietly backs into the lodge, and shuts the door.

“Gramps?” He calls quietly.

Ethan’s grandfather walks into the front hall, vintage pistol in his hands. “Go upstairs, Ethan.”

Another shot rings out.

“Upstairs, kid,” his grandfather stresses. “Now.”

Ethan dashes up the first set of stairs, crouching behind the railing on the slight balcony.

Gramps has his back against the wall on the corner, ready to turn and shoot if he needs to.

Slowly, he walks his way to the window, and, thinking fast, Ethan runs up the second flight of stairs to the front bedroom, and peaks through the curtains.

A woman runs out from the tree line, one hand clutched to her stomach, and blood drips down onto the snow. Quickly after, two men run out after her, and another shot rings out as one of them levels his gun at her. The woman stops when she sees the house, and turns around instead, rushing the two men.

Ethan winces away from the window, scared to watch anymore.

His curiosity gets the better of him anyway.
When he’s looked back, the woman has the gun now. She manages to shoot one of the men in the neck before the other tackles her to the ground, the gun flying.

She rolls over, getting on top of the man, and raises-

Raises a **gleaming fist** into the air before striking it down on the man’s head.

Ethan can almost make out the moment of impact, the way her metal hand breaks through his skull.

Ethan swallows.

Seeing the man stop moving, the woman collapses back onto the snow.

Ethan’s eyes are drawn to the porch when he hears the door close.

He sprints back down the stairs and grabs the shovel he had dropped. He darts towards the door.

“Gramps, what the hell are you doing?” Ethan hisses.

Gramps doesn’t seem to hear him.

He’s got one hand extended out towards the woman (she can only be the Winter Soldier, how many other people in the world have a metal arm?), and he treads lightly.

“You okay there, Sarge?” Gramps asks, ancient voice cracking in a hoarse whisper. “I’ve got a medkit in the house. You copy?”

The woman raised her arm from where she had dropped it over her eyes. “Jim?” She says, voice raw like the scratch of metal against metal.

“Yeah, Steph, it’s me. I got old. Why don’t you come on inside?”

“I’side?” She asks as the snow turns pink around her.

“Yeah, inside. That bullet hole isn’t gonna patch itself up.”

The woman’s head drops back down. “S’what you think. Don’t wanna get up.”

“Ah, so you wanna lay down in the snow next to the dead bodies?” Gramps asks, voice now familiar in its sarcasm.

The woman’s nose wrinkles.

“Help me up?”

“Stephanie Rogers, asking for help? Well, now I’ve seen everything.” Gramps waves Ethan over. Ethan clutches the shovel.

“You heard the lady, help her up.”

Ethan glances at his grandfather before lightly placing the shovel down.

Ethan swallows hard. One of the men must have had a high caliber something or other, cause it ripped one hell of a hole through the woman’s side. He feels something seep through the fabric of his jeans, and swallows back bile as he realizes it must be blood.
“Uh, hi?” He says, somewhat awkwardly.

“Grandkid?” She asks, toneless.

“Yep.” Ethan holds out his hand.

She heaves herself to her feet alone anyway, but catches herself heavily with her hands on Ethan’s shoulders. Her eyes are blurry and unfocused, face a pallid grey, like a corpse on a tv show.

Gramps comes up beside her and slings her right arm over his shoulders. Ethan follows his lead and takes her left arm.

They stumble clumsily towards the house, Ethan, his aging grandfather, and the young, ancient woman. On the porch, a cough racks through her, horrible and wet. Ethan grimaces and looks away.

Inside, Gramps and Ethan help her collapse in a chair. Gramps sends Ethan off the grab the first aid kit.

After he grabs it, he lingers outside the doorway a bit when he hears voices.

“...Jim. Really. Thanks.” Her accent is heavy, though Ethan can’t quite place it.

“Least I could do for the woman who took a bullet for me.”

The woman grunts. “That guy musta been blind.”

Gramps chuckles, but the sound is hollow. “Oh, I think he could see just fine.”

The woman sighs, sounding defeated. “Is the world any better, Jim?”

“I would say so. At least most people recognize things are wrong now.”

They both make a sound that’s half laugh, half sigh.

“Better than nothing.”

Ethan walks back into the room and gives Gramps the kit.

“You wanna lift this shirt up for me, Rogers?”

“Excuse you, I’ll have you know I’m a married woman,” she says as she drags her ruined shirt up her body, revealing the mangled, bloodied flesh underneath.

“Gramps?” Ethan asks, feebly. “Is it okay if I go?”

Gramps gives him a soft smile. “Why don’t you go make some coffee?”

Ethan walks out of the room with all the dignity he can muster, starts the coffee maker, and goes back to lurking by the door.

“You come up this way on purpose?” Gramps asks.

“Nah. Coincidence. Happy one, though.”

“Yeah, you’d be pretty fucked with this all by yourself.”
The woman exhales tightly, like her teeth are clenched. “Had worse.”

The silence is deafening.

“Steph-” Gramps starts.

“You didn’t know. None of you. You didn’t know and you couldn’t have known,” the woman insists, voice tight, biting the words out. “I wouldn’t have gone back for me either.”

“Still. It’s garbage you went through that.”

“Lots of stuff is garbage, Jim.”

A choked off yell. “Warn a girl!”

“Warning, more rubbing alcohol is imminent.”

“Fuck.” A hiss. “You don’t need to do that, you know. I can’t get sick.”

“Better safe than sorry.”

Gramps whistles, low and impressed. “It’s already clotting up. I’m impressed, Rogers.”

“Nazi science, can’t say I recommend it. It’s not as good as-” The woman cuts herself off before she finishes, but even if his grandfather wasn’t a Howling Commando, Ethan has had American History often enough that he knows the connection she’s not saying.

“You gonna see him?” Gramps asks after a very pregnant pause.


“Ah yeah,” Gramps says, an edge of mischief in his voice now. “The grand Fuck Hydra World Tour. If I were thirty to forty years younger, I’d pack up and insist on joining you.”

“I considered calling it Fuck The Nazis: Extended Edition, but that felt a bit on the nose.”

Gramps snorts a laugh. “There’s the Rogers I know.”

“It’s good to see you, Jim. Really.”

“You too, Rogers. Would’ve preferred you got old with the rest of us, though.”

“You and me both, Jim. You and me both.”

“What’s taking that kid so long with the coffee?”

Ethan pushes away from the wall, and hurries back into the kitchen.

*******

@maybebaby tweeted:

Sometimes I can’t help but think how fucked up it is that @grandFHWT was tortured for decades by Nazis, broke free, started fighting them again, only to have people question if its alright for her to beat up Nazis smh
BuzzfeedNews posted an article

Tony Stark releases never before seen images from Howard Stark’s archives

Of course Howard Stark was experimenting with quick-exposure photography on top of everything else during WWII.

I just have to say, from the bottom of my heart, thank you, sir. You’ve done the Lord’s work.

Stark Industries just released the official versions of the images captured on what Howard called his ‘instafilm camera.’ Essentially a portable photo booth, it seems to have gotten lost in the tornado of his other, more pertinent experiments of the time.

Thankfully, though, the Howling Commandos seemed to get their hands on some of his prototypes.

Keep scrolling to feast your eyes on some of the most tooth-rotting content I’ve ever seen.

* 

historycats:

Oh god I can’t decide what I like more: ‘Stephanie Rogers looking annoyed at her teammates and flipping them off’ or ‘Stephanie letting her teammates fall asleep on her’

colormurple:

I think I’m gonna have to go with ‘Stephanie glaring aggressively at Bucky while he looks very sheepish’

buckysbuns:

Tbh I’ve got a special place in my heart for ‘Bucky looking like he’s about to piss himself laughing’

winter-shoulder:

I’d like to submit a vote for ‘Gabe Jones aggressively mugging the camera while Jim loses it in the background’

blackwidows:

Idk fam for me it’s a little hard to top ‘Stephanie completely ignoring the world in favor of drawing’

fuckhydra:

No one is mentioning ‘Bucky looking adoringly at his wife????’ Blasphemy???

thunderdad:

This is ‘Dum Dum looking for his hat as another teammate wears it’ erasure and I won’t stand for it

64,275 notes
* 

**nocapes:**

God all of these pictures are so Soft I’m gonna Die

12 notes

**buckysbuns:**

Pencil sketch of this photo of Stephanie sitting on Bucky’s lap while the two of them are in their own world

3,482 notes

**steph-barnes:**

God, y’all are sleepin on that picture of their hands next to each other on the map where you can clearly see their wedding rings like,,,,,high art

31 notes

**winter-shoulder:**

Friendly reminder that even though she’s Big and Thicc now, Stephanie Rogers is still at her core an Angry Smol

7,309 notes

* 

@grandFHWT tweeted:

Another one bites the dust………..

Chapter End Notes

For anyone who may be confused, Ethan is Jim Motria's grandson and @grandFHWT is the twitter account Stephanie made to chronicle her defeat of Hydra bases your comments make my day and fill me with determination
Return: to come or go back to a place or person

Chapter Summary

New friends in old places.

Chapter Notes

warning for intense vernacular use and the abuse of apostrophes. im sorry (no im not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There aren’t many Hydra bases left that she can remember.

She snorts derisively at her own thought. Memory.

Memory, right now, is itching at the forefront of her mind.

Standing at a Brooklyn, New York City, New York intersection gives the same mental sensation as putting a freezing cold hand in boiling hot water.

She knows that she should feel something, but it still feels a bit too numb for anything to register.

She stares up at a street sign, trying to visualize what should be around it. Her memories - the little she has - aren’t in sepia tones like most photographs from her time are. They’re in bright, hazy colors; blurred together and too neon to look straight at.

But she can remember some things.

There was a dime store on the corner. Grocery on the left. Walk down to the wharf, go left, walk a block, and she’d be at the dock Bucky worked at those few years before the war after he worked with Pa Barnes at the…somewhere. She can’t remember where. They had a fancy black car though.

The strongest memories are the smells. Bucky, sweaty and salty and smokey. Bucky, the peppermint smell of the soap they used. Bucky, the sent of his sticky hair pomade.

The whiff of graphite and pencil lead on her two flesh hands. The way the bed smelled when they went to bed; soap and them and the Brooklyn breeze. Ma’s cooking. Bucky’s cooking. A baby from the building, soft and sweet and light, the smell that all babies had. The rotting smell of old blood, either crusted on her back knuckles or on his, or the time he broke his nose. The back room of the store she worked at, where the food had started to go just a bit off (she remembers walking home in her too-big, too-worn coat, barely bad food hidden inside to give to the widow a floor above them or the struggling family two below). Wet wool, as scratchy to the nose as to the skin. Garbage day and snowy slush. Smells, smells, smells.

The cold November air smells the same as it did, more or less. Maybe a little more gasoline, but it still cuts at her nostrils the same way. The grocery stores are brighter, but the bodegas - the really
old ones, like Finnigan’s, which had been there as long as Stephanie had been - still have surly,
grumpy cats that live in them and sell suspiciously low-price sandwiches. It’s a little bit louder, a
little bit fuller, but in the bones of the city, it feels the same.

Stephanie Rogers opens her eyes on a street corner in Brooklyn, New York City, New York, and
for the first time in 70 years, she can almost remember what home feels like. Mostly, she doesn’t
feel quite so hollow as before.

*

She’s living in a tiny shoe box of an apartment in one of those buildings where everyone is on top
of each other, but that’s good. She gets lost in the flow of so many people. She’s no one. It’s great.

Since she’s no one, she can be anyone. For now, she’s Sergeant Gracie Barnes, recently discharged
army vet (all of the papers she forged for herself feel like they shouldn’t be that easy to fake, but,
hey, for now she isn’t complaining), living on welfare (welfare being the money she took from
Hydra). She has an aunt - Peggy, who she calls every now and again - but otherwise no family. No
more people left in her unit, either. Blew up. She makes up a sob story about how her arm looks all
FUBAR from having to be sewn back together after ‘the accident’ so no one questions her long
sleeves and glove.

The building reminds her of where she grew up. The longer she sits in the window sill, letting the
voices drift through the thin walls, the more words she finds on her lips in languages she didn’t
remember she knew.

She makes a lot of friends, even though the Soldier says it’s dangerous; more people to recognize
you. But she does. Whole families that live in the hodgepodge apartments. There’s a little girl,
Maya, who just started first grade, and her mother can’t always come pick her up, so Gracie does,
sometimes. The six-year-old reminds Stephanie of someone (some ones?) in the way that she runs
to greet her and grabs her hand and chatters about her classmates all the way home. Sometimes
Gracie carries Maya, and for the first time Stephanie sees something good in her unnatural
strength: she wouldn’t have been able to carry a kid this size before, and Maya loves piggyback
rides.

One day, when she hears a woman singing in Polish, her hands weave into her hair and she braids it
back the way her mother used to, and a song is in her head. It’s scratchy, fragment, and parts of it
skip like an old record, but with it comes the feeling of sitting on the couch older than either of
them with her mother, the two Rogers girls against the big bad world, swaying back and forth.

When she talks now, the words come out with the brassy little lilt that identifies her speech's origin.

She’s not the woman she was, doesn’t even feel like the woman she wants to be - she still barely
sleeps, barely eats, doesn’t know what to do with herself if she isn’t fighting Hydra - but the
woman she is now is closer to what she thinks ‘herself’ to be than she has been before, and, for
what it’s worth, Stephanie Rogers quite likes Gracie Barnes.

********

Peter collapses back against the roof of some building. The old church clock chimes three, and he
sighs. At least tomorrow is Saturday.

The hair on the back of his neck stands up suddenly, a few seconds before an alarm starts beeping
a few streets away, much too quiet for normal humans to hear. He could just let the police handle
it. But they wouldn’t get there in time, Peter thinks, already mostly there.
It’s a jewelry store. Peter yawns. Diamonds don’t have any value anyway. He *could* just go. But he won’t. Someone who’s just some store person will get blamed and fired. Can’t let that happen.

The door is open. What kind of criminals-?

Before he can finish that question, a body is tossed outside the door, someone walking quickly out after it.

“Couldn’ta jus’ lemme ‘ave a nice lil’ depression walk ‘n peace, couldja? Ha’ ta go an’ do *crime.*” The woman says, in the weirdest amalgamation of accents Peter has ever heard. She grabs the thief and shoves him up against the wall. “Han-estly, I ain’ e’en mad; jus’ dis’ppoint’d.”

Peter just sort of...stands there for a moment, confused.

The woman turns. She looks him up and down, and sighs. “Hell you doin’, Union-Suit?”

“Oh, Just your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man?”

“An’ tha’ makes anym’re sense tha’ wha’ I jus’ said *how*?”

“I stop crime.”

“Doin’ a piss-poor job’a tha’ then.”

The thief starts struggling.

“Ah, *la naiba,* jus’ a mo’ there,” she says, lowering the man and whacking her elbow into his temple. He goes down like a bag of rocks. She turns back to him, whipping her gloves hands on her jacket.

“I’m Spider-Man.”

“Caught that.”

“Where on earth did you learn to talk?” Peter asks before he can stop himself.

The woman groans. “Brooklyn.”

“Uh, no offense, but I know people from Brooklyn.”

“The immigrant part. In the 20s,” she says, rolling her eyes as she steps into the streetlight’s view and pulls off her hat, stuffing it in her pocket before she shoves her left sleeve up.

Peter’s jaw drops.

She smirks. “No one’ll believe ya.”

“I couldn’t tell anyone anyway. Secret identity.”

“*Gawhd,* I wish that were me,” Stephanie Rogers says.

*Hold on,” Stephanie says as they wait on the roof for the police to come, “run that by me again?” Her voice is clearer now, closer to what Peter expects for ‘Brooklyn-ese.”

“Radioactive spider bite. I have spider powers.”
“S’fucked up, kid.”

Peter shrugs.

“La naiba,” she breathes. “Wish I could go back to a time where the weirdest thing science ever made was me.”

“What’s that you said? You said it before.”

“Oh, fuck.” She runs a hand through her hair. “Means ‘dammit,’ I think. Romanian. Buck - my hus - my - a, my, he’s...aw, hell.”

“Got it,” Peter says.

*

“So, wait. This guy hates ya. You, as yourself, sell him pictures of Spider-Man? And you’re Spider-Man?” Stephanie asks.

Peter nods.

Stephanie howls with laughter. “That’s the funniest damn thing I’ve heard this century! Talk about cheatin’ the system!”

*

“Wait, how old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

“Fuck, kid, can you even drive?”

“Not yet,” Peter admits, sheepish.

She sighs and mutters something about ‘karma’ and ‘dumb fuckin kids.’ “Gimme your phone.”

Peter squawks. “Why!”

“Cause one of these damn days yer gonna get een ov’r yer ‘ead, and when tha’ happens, I’ma feel bad if I didna try an’ elp ya. So when tha’ ‘appens, yer gon’ne call me,” she demands, holding her hand out. Her accent gets more pronounced as she goes on.

Peter fumbles for his phone, opening it to a new contact. She hands her his in return.

When he gets his phone back, there’s a new contact: Gracie Barnes.

“S’what I’m goin’ by right now.”

There’s a snowflake emoji after the name, and Peter smiles to himself.

“Now, swear you’ll call me.”

“If I get in over my head, I hereby swear to call the scary assassin lady who’s number I now have in my phone.”

“Scary ex-assassin lady.”
“Hey, take a selfie with me!”

“Pardon?”

Peter grabs her phone and snaps a picture of the two of them, her scowling at him and himself making a peace sign.

“You can put that on Twitter!” He says cheerfully, handing it back to her.

She scowls at him. She types for a second before turning the screen towards him.

@grandFHWT tweeted a picture:

Fighting crime with your friendly neighborhood Spider-Punk #spiderman #youleavetheworldfor70yearsandnowthethereskidswithspideepowers????

Peter throws his head back and laughs and laughs and laughs.

Chapter End Notes

FUBAR: fucked up beyond all recognition
Google translate says that’s Romanian for ‘damn it’ so that’s what we’re going with. I'll learn a lot of things in the name of writing, but an entirely new language is not one of them.
I'm not above begging for comments: please give me nice comments. What did you like? Anything you'd like to see more of?
As per my outline, there are 7 more chapters left in 'part two!' Then we have part three! My outline has 45 chapters, but don't take that as gospel or an absolute promise. It might get shorter or longer depending on how stuff goes.
That being said, I switched how I titled the chapters from part one to part two, and I'd like to do that again for part three, however, I can't decide how to do it. My ideas so far include song lyrics/titles, poetry lines, and nature/weather patterns, but I'm not sold on any of those. Any ideas or input? I'd love to hear from you about anything.
Comment emails make my week.
Thank you for reading!!
**Chapter Summary**

Moving on means letting go.

**Chapter Notes**

So I see my Spider-Man as closer to the Andrew Garfield one, just FYI. nothing against Tom Holland, AG spidey just fits my purposes better. There may be spelling mistakes that I missed. I’m sorry, it’s 4am and I can’t sleep

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky isn’t sure how he feels about Spider-Man. He seems kinda young. He’s mentioned college a few times, but he doesn’t seem to go to class that often, what with saving the world and all.

(Bucky knows that Spider-Man is that intern of Tony’s, Peter Parker, but peter doesn’t seem to want people to know that, so out of a sense of politeness, Bucky hasn’t said anything.)

Bucky’s been spending a lot of time in Tony’s lab. He doesn’t really know what else to do. They’ve run out of Hydra bases, and so far there have been no other clues as to where Steph might be. Nat had stolen his phone and replaced it with a flip phone. He never like the StarkPad or his laptop, so he hasn’t really been on the internet in months. It’s actually helped with his mental health, to an extent. He has JARVIS tell him any important global news, but as for any minute-to-minute updates, it’s kinda nice to not worry about them.

One downside of this is that when his comm falls out of his ear during a fight in downtown Brooklyn (pretty close to where he lived ‘back when,’ actually), he only has a few numbers in his phone.

He calls Tony.

“Tone,” he yells into his phone, shoving one of these ridiculous fucking robots away with his foot. “Could use some backup!”

“Uh!” Tony yells in response. “Everyone is kinda busy!!”

“Do we not - one sec,” he grabs a robot by the neck and swings it into another one. “Anyone else we can call in?”

“Spidey might be free, let me check!!”

Bucky shoves the edge of his shield between the chest plate of the robot nearest him.

“He’s headed your way!”
“Tell the rest we need to corral in! Keep them away from the civvies!”

“I don’t understand your army talk but okay!”

Bucky shoves the phone back into his belt as he sees a red and blue blur drop next to him.

“Hi, Cap!”

“Hi! Got any other ideas for back up?!” He yells. “We’re getting swamped here!”

Spider-Man seems to hesitate for a moment. “Uh, maybe!”

“Is it a yes,” Bucky grunts, smashing a robot into the concrete, “or a no?”

“I’ll ask! I don’t know where she is though!!”

“Call her!”

Spider-Man webs his phone to the side of his mask (Bucky rolls his eyes).

“Hi! Gracie? Remember how you said to call if I was in over my head?” He laughs nervously, webbing two robots together and smashing them into another one. “Yeah, if you could help - your in the area? Awesome!” Spider-Man freezes. “Wait is it gonna be safe for you to - you know? Face? If you’re sure. Yeah, we really need the help. We? Oh, just some friends of mine! I can’t promise you won’t regret this! You’ll come to me? Thank you!!”

Spider-Man rips the phone away from his head and shoves it back - somewhere, Bucky doesn’t like to think of where he might be keeping the thing.

Bucky minds his own business for a bit, smashing up robots, until his whole body freezes when he hears that voice.

“Had ta be fuckin’ ROBOTS!” A thickly accent voice yells, tired and sarcastic. “Ain’t this just a real fuckin’ gasser?”

Bucky’s heart stutters, his lungs won’t work. His fingers are numb, his ribs are collapsing.

He turns.

Standing there in the awful November air, black and blue hair tied back in a messy ponytail, wearing beat up jeans, heavy combat boots, and a tank top, arm on full display, is the woman previously known as the Winter Soldier.

She grabs a robot by the shoulder with her flesh hand and punches straight through it with her metal one. “Gah-awd,” she says, chucking the hunk of metal in her hand at another robot, “I thought these damn things were supposed to be friendly.”

Bucky’s vision blurs, his eyes won’t focus. The wind cuts through his eyes like a knife. She can’t be real. She can’t be here.

With the last bit of breath in his lungs he breathes out one word, the only word he can think: “Stevie.”

It can’t have been more than a whisper, logic dictates that it should have gotten lost in the wind, but her head whips around as if he’d shouted it.
Their eyes lock, grey to blue-green. Her mouth falls open a little.

Her eyes widen as they focus on something behind him. “Buck, 11 o’clock!” She yells, not close enough to help.

Bucky has enough time to turn that he sees the behemoth reaching its arm back to hit him, but not enough to react before he’s thrown against a brick wall.

Bucky wakes up to a quieter world. No more metallic screams, no more frantic civilian yelling. Just the quiet ambiance of New York City, and the muted, rhythmic shuffling and clacking of bricks being moved.

“Ah, so the glorious hero finally decides to return, huh? Took your gah-awd damn time.” Bucky flutters his eyes open. His ribs burn.

“Steph?” He croaks.

She drops from her crouched stance over him and falls gracelessly on her ass. “S’up?” Bucky struggles up frantically. She eyes him skeptically, posture avoidant.

He reaches a hand out anyway, years of habit pulling his body towards hers without a thought. She stares at his advancing hand, brow furrowed, eyes unsure. God, she must be freezing.

Just before his gloved hand can make contact with her right shoulder, she stands, glaring down at him.

“What in the actual hell were you think, Barnes?!” She yells. “You know better than to lose focus in the middle of a goddamn battlefield!” She kicks a brick with her heavy boot. Bucky recognizes them; they’re the same ones she’s worn on the helicarrier. “You wanna get your ass handed to you on a platter?!”

“I’m sorry,” he responds, scrambling to his feet. “I’m so so sorry, Stevie.” He hopes his desperate tone conveys that doesn’t just mean for that.

“Sorry don’t fix yer motha’ feckin’ rib cage.”

Bucky ears ring a bit. He opens his mouth, lips poised to say something, when he realizes they haven’t been speaking English. Her accent only sounds that awful when she speaks Romanian. It was the only language she didn’t grow up learning. Forming her lips around his mother tongue she just sounds so, so…

So Irish.

Bucky’s lips almost quirk up at the thought, but his mood drops when he more fully takes in her stance.

Angled away from him, arms crossed, left side facing him.

Bucky opens his mouth to say something more -
Her phone rings.

She glares at him as she pulls it out of her back pocket, taking a look at the number, biting out a curse, and sliding to answer.

“Hola?” She asks. “No, no. ¡Ya voy, ya voy! ¡Surgió algo! Estaré allí tan pronto como pueda. Por favor, dile a Maya que lo siento. ¡Estaré ahí!”

Bucky stares, dumbfoundead (his Spanish isn’t what it should be). She hangs up the phone and glares at him.

“Good job, asshole, you made me late.”

“Late for what?” Bucky asks. He can’t remember the last time he was so damn confused.

“That’s my damn business, not yours. Don’t even fuckin’ think about following me, or having Red follow me. Just.” She sighs, a heavy weight settling across her shoulders. “Leave me alone, okay? I wanna be left alone, for now.”

And he thought he’d had a hard time not crying before.

“Are you...is there...Stevie.”

She turns back to him, the same strong-sad look on her face as all those lifetimes ago when he still needed glasses and she was a wisp of a thing in a top-big coat, pressing her wedding ring into his hand before he got on a train to New Jersey. She’d kissed him, there on that platform, in front of all the other couples seeing each other off. Her lips had been cold and chapped, her fingers ice where they wrapped around his neck. She’d felt so brittle between his hands, his fingers able to touch behind her slim back even with his thumbs settled in place between her ribs.

She looks at him, and he isn’t Captain America anymore. He isn’t a man out of time. He isn’t 70 years from home. He’s less than 70 inches from home. He’s Yasha Barnes. Her Buck. She looks back at him with that same steel determination, and nothing else matters.

“I promise you, Barnes. I’ll come talk to you when I’m ready. Not a moment before. I’ll,” she swallows, “I’ll just run if you try to find me before.”

“Steph,” he breathes, mouth not wanting to form any word besides her name.

She sighs again, breath puffing out of her and forming a cloud in the air. “I’ll find you.”

“But you’re already right here,” he says before he can stop himself.

“I’m not,” she hesitates, shifting her weight from foot to foot. “I’m not ready yet. Don’t ask why. I’m just not.”

She turns her back to him, and he sees a chain resting on the back of her neck.

“One question!” He says hurriedly before she can go much further.

She turns.

“Those,” he says, pointing to her clavicle. “Are those mine?”

Her cheeks color, the tips of her ears too. That pale skin always gave her away. “What you gonna do if they are?”
He yanks at the collar of his suit until he can get his fingers hooked around his own chain. The tiny diamond glints in the hazy winter sunlight. She inhales sharply, too shaky to be a gasp.

“When you want these back, just know I’m keeping them safe for you.”

She steps closer to him, seemingly transfixed by the metal. She cautiously reaches out her right hand, finger lifting the metal.

Bucky doesn’t dare to breathe.

“That’s me,” she says, looking at the tags that bear her name, mostly to herself. Her lips rush over her serial number, and her eyes light up in recognition.

“That was the deal, remember?” He prompts gently. “I keep these safe for you, you keep those safe for me.”

Her hand goes to her own sternum. “The deal,” she repeats.

A strong gust of wind whistles down the street. She doesn’t shiver like she would have before, but her skin pinks at the chill.

“Our deal,” he says, brushing a few strands of ear out of her eye.

She steps back abruptly, shaking her head sharply as if to clear it.

Bucky swallows. “When you want them back. I’ll have them.”

“And I’ll,” she starts, shuddering and placing a hand on her heart, “I’ll have these.”

“And you’ll have those.”

She looks at him again. “Make sure somebody looks at those ribs.”

“I will,” Bucky says, using every ounce of restraint in his body not to crush her in his arms.

She nods. “Good.” She looks down the street. “Gotta hit the road,” she says, turning her back to him.

“Toodles,” he says for a lack of anything else.

She glances back one more time before she walks away.

*

Bucky’s still standing there, staring at the spot her body had faded into, when Natasha and Sam find him.


“Where’s she at, Barnes?” Sam asks.

“I let her go,” Bucky says simply. “I wasn’t gonna just, just make her stay when she didn’t want to.”


“She said she’d come back,” Bucky says, scrubbing at his damp eyes with the back of his sleeve.
“She said she’d come back.”

********

Once Maya is safely back with her mom, Gracie explains that she got a job far away and needs to leave. Maya cries, but Gracie leaves her with a picture that she’d drawn of the three of them, and Maya is soothed. Gracie promises to visit if she’s ever in the area.

Once she closes the door to her apartment, Stephanie’s heart kicks into high gear, the motors of her arm whirring at high speed.

*Trapped,* her mind and body say. *You’re trapped. They know where you are. You have to leave.*

That’s right. There’s no way that someone hadn’t caught it on video. Hydra will know, Hydra will come after her, she has to leave.

She grabs all her stuff, shoves it all into her two bags, and gets the hell outta dodge. The city is suffocating.

She runs on auto until she’s standing outside a bathroom, preparing to sneak past security (her arm might ring some alarms, and once she’s caused a scene and someone looks at her face-) that she takes a moment to glance down at the ticket she’d bought and her flight plan.

*Romania.* Apparently she’d picked Romania. She drops to the floor, head in her hands. She can work with Romania. She can. She speaks the language, although (if she remembers George Barnes’s remarks right) with a terribly heavy accent. There are some isolated towns there that should do well.

She tries to slow her breathing, but it won’t go.

“S’cuse me, ma’am,” a voice says to her left. “You alright?”

“M’good.”

“You army?”

She looks up. A man in a wheelchair is talking to her.

“Was, yeah.”

The man nods. “Me too. Figured you might need something to break through the noise.” He points at his head. “You wanna talk?”

“Can’t. I’ll miss my flight.”

The man nods. “Well, good luck.”

“Thanks,” she says, standing up and giving a mock salute.

The man laughs. “No need to do that. If you’re higher than Private you outrank me.”

Stephanie forced a laugh back. “Sergeant Major.”

“Well then!” The man salutes her. “Godspeed on your journey, Sarge.”

She gives him a thumbs up, and walks away.
Her notebooks hit against her spine, a comforting reminder of their presence, as she walks away, towards the next chapter.

Chapter End Notes

Was that too sappy? Maybe that was too sappy.
Comment pls. Short ones are loved, long ones adored. Especially nice ones are screeencapped for motivation revival.
According to google the Spanish Stephanie speaks says “No no. I'm coming I'm coming! Something came up! I will be there as soon as I can. Please, tell Maya that I'm sorry. I will be there!” If that’s not right I apologize. I took a year of Spanish as a high school freshman but even then I was very bad at it.
Stephanie lands at the airport in Bucharest and gets out of the airport as fast as possible.

She takes one look at the city around her - apartment buildings, buses, food stands - and falls in love.

Forget a small town. Stephanie Rogers has always been a city girl at heart.

She finds a busy coffee shop, and pulls out her laptop.

Who to be now?

She closes her eyes, lets the harsh smell of coffee scrub through her nose, lets the notes of a language not-so-familiar to her waft over her ears.

Someone places a hand gently on her shoulder, and by some miracle she doesn’t jump.

“Ma’am, are you alright?” A barista asks.

Stephanie looks around. How long had her eyes been closed. “I’m alright, thanks,” she responds in Romanian.

The barista smiles at her. The barista’s name tag says “Claire.”

“Can I please get a coffee?” Steph asks, pulling out her wallet...which only has American money in it. She sighs.

“It’s on the house. Look like you need it,” Claire says.

Steph isn’t sure how to respond to that.

She turns back to her laptop. A name is in mind, now.

Sorcha, she types into the birth certificate she’s making. Sorcha Rogers. No, Sorcha James.

Once her papers are in order (and her coffee drained), she glances out the window to see that snow has settled over the city. She glances at the calendar in her phone.

November 28th.

The date lingers in her mind for some reason. She can’t seem to shake it.

She sighs, and pulls her web browser back open.

*Stephanie Rogers November 28th*

The first result is-

It’s a wedding photo.

Stephanie - Sorcha now, she’s going by Sorcha now.

Sorcha swallows. Apparently, it’s Stephanie Rogers’s wedding anniversary.

She pulls the dog tags out of her shirt enough the clutch them in her flesh hand, feeling the metal warm from resting between her breasts.

She packs up. She needs to find somewhere to sleep.

There’s a hotel that’s secure enough for how cheap it is. It should work until she finds something more permanent.

As she sits on the bed, she stares at the phone in her hand.

Before she can think better of it, she sends a text to Peter.

*Tell Bucky happy anniversary from me. I’ll be back soon.*

It isn’t until she gets his response (several thumbs up emojis) that she realizes it’s true.

She’s almost ready. Almost. But still not quite.

She doesn’t realize she’s called Peggy until she picks up.

“Yes darling?”

“It’s my anniversary.”

“Beg pardon?”

“Bucky and I. We got married today in 1938. It’s my anniversary.”

Peggy laughs lightly. “Happy anniversary, dearest. Are you celebrating?”

“I take it you’ve seen the news recently?” Sorcha scoffs.

“Yes. I have. Several people seem to think you’re doing the right thing.”
Sorcha sighs. “I’m scared, Pegs.”

“Stephanie Rogers, admitting to fear?” Peggy says sarcastically. “Quick, Sharon, make sure the sky isn’t aflame.”

Sorcha laughs lightly at that. “I guess I deserve that.”

“What has you frightened, love?”

“What if they find me again?”

“Who?”

“You know who,” Sorcha whispers, voice hoarse and hollow.

“Then you’ll get away again,” Peggy says, like it’s the simplest thing in the world. “Your hair is growing out,” Peggy says, changing the subject. So someone *did* get video.

Sorcha jams her fingers through it. Her hair goes so quickly these days, it seems. Peggy has cut it to her shoulders in May. Seven months later and it’s down to her waist again. The blue and black have faded into the blonde of her hair.

“I’ve been thinking about cutting it. Getting rid of the colored part.”

Peggy hums. “I’m sure you’ll look incredible either way. You always do.”

Sorcha blushes, and she isn’t sure why.

“I don’t know what I want to do.”

“Are you in a city? Get a job. Or take some college classes.”

Sorcha hadn’t thought of that. “Yeah, I’ll look into that.”

“Maybe some history courses?” Peggy suggests, a lilt to her voice like she’s smiling.

“Goodbye, Peggy,” Sorcha says, smiling herself.

“All my love, of course. Happy anniversary.”

* 

She does sign herself up for college classes.

* 

She’s not quite...sure how to be a college student. She knows she never went to college back when. The nursing classes she had been given were mostly a formality; she already knew all the stuff.

Pencils, pens, notebooks. She buys more clothes. A nice, thick coat, that’s a nice blue color, with fake fur around the hood. A pair of gloves she can use her phone with.

Another pair of boots, because her old ones were falling apart. They stay in the back of the closet in her small studio apartment; she can’t bring herself to get rid of them. Those boots are part of who she is, or who she was, at least.

Her new boots are warmer, though, which is a plus.
She discovers she likes big sweaters that swallow her up, soft leggings that feel soft against her skin, and fuzzy socks.

*

There is Captain America memorabilia everywhere.

Makes sense, kind of. He did make a rather significant mark on the world, and this is where he was from.

It was odd, to think that she was here, without him. Bucky had made talk about visiting his old home when they had been in Europe, but that wasn’t practical.

It probably wasn’t at all like he remembered.

On a whim one day, she looks up ‘Bucky Barnes childhood home,” and finds that it’s a historical site. She packs up her stuff, and flashes Claire a smile as she exits, coffee clutched in her human hand.

A bus ticket all the way out to Constanța and back is a bit more money than she wants to spend, but part of her pushes her to do it. Something in her needs to go there.

*

It’s small, the house he was born in. She has to pay more money for a tour, and it’s odd.

To think, in some other world, where they never became anyone, where they moved back here, maybe they lived in this house. Maybe they grew old together in this house.

Maybe, in some alternate universe where her body worked the way a woman’s body was supposed to, maybe she and Bucky had children in this house.

She looks out at the lawn as she waits in line to go inside (it’s a Saturday, a heavy tourist day).

She can almost see that world, those children. A boy, with blonde curls and grey eyes, chasing two little girls with brown hair and blue eyes. A little baby, sitting in his mother’s lap, freckles covering his nose.

She locks eyes with this ghost of a woman that never was, and they’re her eyes, in a different face. A fuller face. A healthy face, a face that’s aged. Wrinkles beginning around the eyes. Smile lines. Her stomach is already starting to swell again. In the distance, a man walks down the road.

Stephanie Rogers blinks herself back into the real world, scrubs at her eyes and pretends that the tears are from the wind, shivering and shaking in her heavy down jacket.

That was never an option.

(She’s not sure if she wishes it had been.)

Stephanie breathes deeply through her nose and presses a hand between her hips.

(It will never be an option.)

*

It’s small, but it’s homely. Only a few rooms, one floor.
She’d never known the Barnes’s had had a small farm. There’s a tiny henhouse, the remains of the pen for the goats.

There had been a bad harvest in 1924, so they had left.

In 1925, Bucky Barnes has helped her set her broken nose in some back alley.

* 

(She knows their names. Sean, for the older boy. Sarah and Ana-Maria for the girls. Marcus for the baby in her lap and Caoimhe for the one in her belly.)

* 

Bucky - he’d had a different name, then, but she can’t recall it - had shared a room with his parents. They have the house set up about the same way they think it would have been.

She wonders what Bucky would have thought of it.

* 

(Sunshine boy, she wants to say to the ghost of a boy who never was. Her first never-baby. Sunshine boy.)

* 

She sits down on the front stoop, hugging her knees to her chest. She feels empty.

Her freshly shorn hair is giving her a headache, pulled back into a tight ponytail.

She buys herself a coffee back in town, and climbs back on the bus.

* 

Classes start in January.

History of World Civilization and Creative Writing on Mondays and Wednesdays. Introduction to Mechanical Engineering and Advanced Statistics on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

A drawing classes that meets for four hours on Fridays.

* 

February rolls around uneventfully.

* 

She thinks about going home.

* 

She draws Bucky a lot, in pieces and snatches. Nothing anyone would recognize unless they knew.

Because she’s drawing Bucky from before, hands all knuckles and face mostly sharp jaw. High cheekbones and eyes squinting behind thick glasses. Long, corded muscles from manual labor. Calluses on finger capable of unimaginable softness.
(She wakes up some mornings, toes frozen, and feels the memory of fingers drifting back and forth over her hipbone, moving her hair aside. Cold lips pressing to her neck.)

*

March passes, and she asks Peter to tell Bucky happy birthday from her.

*

Three days after Bucky’s birthday, she’s walking home from her Stats class when she hears a whimpering from the alleyway between her building and the grocer.

Before she can think better of it, she follows the sound.

Huddled under a trash can, there’s a ball of fluff.

She makes cooing noises at it until it comes out.

*

The malnourished dog growls at her at first.

She washes him in her bathtub, uses just water, not wanting to risk using her shampoo.

He’s grey. His nails are too long.

She mostly succeeds at getting herself very wet.

*

The veterinarian checks him out for a hours, the bill is ridiculous, but her little guy gets a clean bill of health the next day.

(He’d slept curled on the windowsill.)

*

She gets a dog bed, a leash, a collar, some toys, a bowl, and some food. A bottle of soap that’s safe for him.

“We can engrave it, if you want,” the clerk says as he rings up the collar. “Put his name on it.”

“Oh, he doesn’t have a name,” she says absently.

The clerk raises an eyebrow. “Dog needs a name.”

She feels her skin flush. “It’s…” she stutters, “it’s Yasha.” She isn’t sure where that name comes from, but it comes from the place in her brain where important things are stored. The place in her brain she could almost call her heart.

*

Yasha Rogers has a fancy new collar that he prances about in happily before dropping on her low bed. She sighs, and drops his bed next to her pillow. He climbs into it and falls asleep.

She puts the bowl down next to her small table for one, and feels less alone.
He grows quickly. By April, when her classes are winding down to finals, his head is already up to her knee. He’s going to be absolutely enormous, and she loves her big boy.

Bucky wakes up some days with a pressure against his chest, a harsh line pressing into his sternum. He doesn’t mention it to Natasha or Sam.

He tells Tony on one of their nights (where they both drink whole bottles, and Tony gets very drunk and Bucky stays sober) that sometimes he can feel her in his bed.

Tony climbs into his lap like a child and presses a kiss to his forehead before he falls asleep.

His body remembers her body. Remembers it like it was.

He wonders if her toes are still icy, or if her serum fixed that.

He has nothing better to do, so he decides to take a vacation.

“Want do you say, Sam? All expenses paid trip to Romania?”

“Why the hell would I ever want,” Sam stops abruptly. He swallows. “Sure thing, man.”

The plane ride is long.

The bus ride from Bucharest to Constanţa feels much longer.

Sam glances at him when they see the sign for the town, and takes hold of Bucky’s hand.

Bucky thinks he could live another hundred years and still never deserve a friend like Sam Wilson.

The house is smaller than he remembers.

The rooms are set up all wrong.

He and Sam sit on the front porch after their tour. It’s a Monday, there isn’t really anyone here.

“Sam,” Bucky says, breaking the silence as he looks at the lawn. “Have you ever thought about having kids?”
“Not really. There was a time when I thought I might want that but, well. Things happened. I changed.”

*(Bucky can almost see some kids playing on the lawn, getting grass stains on their clothes.)*

(They’re all - all three - little girls with blond hair that stands out brightly against the grey sky.)

(But who needs a blue sky when he’s got those eyes to looks at?)

* 

“What about you?” Same asks.

“There was a time. But things happened. I changed.”

* 

(One of them would have been Sarah. He knows that much. Maybe some nice Irish names for the other two. He thinks that Steph might have liked that.)

(He very much does not think about what it might have been like to have to lean further to kiss her, in order to compensate for her belly.)

* 

Back in Bucharest, he locks himself in the hotel bathroom, and finally, finally, lets himself cry.

“Mama,” tumbled out of his lips. He never got to see her smile again, after he shipped out.

There had been a gritty family photo, from when he was small enough to fit on his mother’s hip.

* 

They touch down back in New York, and Nat meets them at the airport.

She wordlessly pulls him into a hug.

* 

When they get back to the Tower, Tony is definitely panicking about *something*. Bruce too, which is a bit more concerning.

“Should we tell him?” Tony asks.

“I think we have too, Tony. He should know.”

“Tell who what?” Bucky asks, grabbing a sports drink and guzzling half of it down.

Tony jumps, before turn sympathetically to Bucky. His lips are pressed in a tight line.

“Follow me.”

* 

Tony turns on the TV, flips around until he gets to a Romanian news channel.
Bucky understand it, of course, but when his ears go numb with the news, there are subtitles at the bottom are helpful.

*

“The terrorist group that everyone thought was gone is back. HYDRA agents have captured and contained seventeen schoolchildren, along with their parents and twelve teachers.”

“Have they made any demands?”

“They want the Winter Soldier.”

*

Bucky’s knees buckle, and Nat catches him, leads him over to the couch.

*

“They say they will release the captives so long as she turns herself in voluntarily. Otherwise, they will begin shooting a hostage every five hours.”

“Of course, this matter is complicated due to the fact that the Winter Soldier has not been heard from since November of last year.”

The two hosts start talking about statistics and theories and other unhelpful things.

*

Bucky runs to the bathroom and heaves up whatever is in his stomach.

*

He sits numbly on the couch for hours.

Four hours later, there’s a commotion outside the doors to the school, in full view of the cameras.

She’s wearing a tank top, arm on full display.

She’s cut her hair.

“I’m here,” she says loudly in English. Her voice trembles slightly.

The doors to the school open.

Bucky can’t hear the excited chatter of the reporters.

Ten awful minutes tick by.

Seventeen schoolchildren, their parents, and twelve teachers rush out the doors.

Three minutes pass.

A rumble, a helicopter takes off.

One minute later, the school is up in flames
That town in Romania is (according to google) where SebStan is actually from! Fun times.
Again, too sappy?
Yes I know that ending is awful, I’m sorry but it’s necessary.
*usual begging for feedback and comments*
*apologies for mistakes, it’s 4:26am and I wrote more than half on my friends floor after an unplanned sleepover*
**Fog: something that obscures and confuses a situation or someone's thought processes**

Chapter Summary

Things that are happening, thing that have happened.

Chapter Notes

Yikes so like, there are some descriptions of torture in this chapter, as well as some abuse that is sexually suggestive in nature (derogatory terms used in reference of a woman). If that may bother you, I recommend skipping the first italicized section of the chapter. I felt it necessary for the impact of the story, but please know yourself and take care of yourself.

That being said, it isn’t much worse than you might see in a normal action movie where a villain captures the hero’s love interest.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sam is aware, as he repacks a bag with his tactical gear, that he’s probably one of the best friends ever. He’s also aware the Bucky Barnes is one of the best friends ever, so they’re rather equally matched.

Bucky is pale as a ghost. The ruddy color that usually settles low in his cheeks (obscured now by his scruffy beard) has vacated. His face is sweating. Even his eyes look dimmer.

Sam sits down next to him on the Quinjet and takes his hand. Natasha sits on Bucky’s other side and does the same, leaning her head lightly on his shoulder.

“You remember how to breathe, James?” She asks.

Bucky takes a deep breath in. Holds it. Breathes out.

* 

Sam’s hand can, unfortunately only withstand so much holding when the person holding it is a super soldier.

He stands up and walks to grab some water bottles. He sees Bruce and Tony standing close together, a tablet between them with earbuds plugged in.

He walks up behind them and coughs.

Bruce turns, unflappable as always, but Tony jumps.

“What is it?” Sam asks, handing off one of the waters to a sweating Tony.

Tony swallows half of it down.
“They’re broadcasting,” he explains.
Sam swallows, exhales, keeps himself calm. “They give any demands?”
“The usual. Money, power, total surrender of nuclear weapons.”
“In exchange for?”
Tony suddenly is interested in swallowing his water very slowly.
“If they don’t get it, there going to release her,” Bruce says gently.
Sam raises an eyebrow. “Thought she was more herself now. Don’t think she’d go along with that.”
“You’re right,” Tony says, turning the tablet to Sam. “She doesn’t plan on it.”
*

In some bunker somewhere, presumably still Romania, but who knows, a terrifying reconstruction
of the DC bank vault that Sam and Bucky had found has been recreated.

An older woman with glasses and a hawkish face steps away from the camera.

“All of the notes say the procedures must be recorded, so here it is.” She recites the date, reads off
a clipboard. “The Asset is being brought in for experiment number 3407. Trial method number
128.” She drops the clipboard on a small surgical table. “Basically, we’re doing maintenance.
Shouldn’t be hard to reprogram a machine when it has a virus. Easiest to wipe the hard drive and
start over,” she says, very matter-of-fact.

Her head turns towards the doorway, hearing something before it opens.

Heavy metal doors - like something out of a Cold War bunker - swing open with a screech of rusty
metal.

Heavy cuffs are clamped around her wrists. Her blonde hair is falling over her shoulders and
fanning in front of her face, but Sam can see her eyes darting around.

The moment she sees the chair is impossible to miss. Every muscle in her body goes rigid.

“You recording, Agnes?” One of the men asks around a cigar.

“Broadcasting. That was the plan.”

The woman in cuffs breathes in and out shaking breaths.


Stephanie swings into motion. She swings her arms up and drops the cuffs onto the head of one of
the men flanking her. He crumples, a puppet with cut strings.

Agnes has a syringe stuck in her neck before Stephanie can turn.

“You look,” cigar man says, before rattling off a list of commands that Sam honestly can’t pay
attention to.

He grabs Stephanie and pulls her up by the hair, placing his other hand lightly on her chin,
holding her in place.

“If we don’t have all that in the next thirty-six hours, then we’re gonna release this bombshell here out into the world with a mass-kill order.” He glares at the camera. “That’s still a win for me. I love it when a girl follows orders, and this one follows orders so pretty.” He winks lasciviously at the camera. There is no mistaking his meaning.

She spits on his hand. “Like hell I will.”

He slides his hand down and presses against her throat. “Oh yes you will, you hot piece of ass.” He bites into her ear, hard enough to draw blood.

She doesn’t even flinch.

“You’ll do anything I say, once we’re done with you.” He removes his hand from her hair, takes his cigar out of his mouth, and extinguishes it on her exposed clavicle.

“You do that,” he says to the camera, “you give us what we want, and we’ll do you all the favor of disposing of our little monster.”

“You mean you’ll lock me in a vault until you need me as a threat again,” Stephanie spits again.

“Nah, tootes. As unfortunate as it would be to make this nice, warm, pliant body go all cold forever,” the man says, pulling a knife from his belt, “I really would have to do you in this time.”

He drags the knife along her collarbone, drawing blood. He wipes a smear of it on her face before pushing the point of the blade into her neck enough to prick. “Can’t run the risk of you breaking protocol again. Of course, that could be avoided if we got rid of your little boy toy.”

For the first time, real fear flashes across Stephanie’s eyes.

“But you’re gonna be a good little girl for us now, aren’t you?” He manhandles her into the chair, her body still malleable due to whatever drug they had injected. “Gonna sit there, gonna let us work,” he clasps the restraints down along her arms, legs, and stomach. “Gonna scream real pretty.”

She spits on him again.

“Getting old, tootes. Agnes? You ready?”

The woman darts over to the control panel. “When you are, Galen.”

“Doesn’t matter if you get it all or not,” Stephanie says, voice ice cold, rock hard, stable. “They’ll stop you just the same.”

“Oh,” Galen says, placatingly, mockingly. “You really think your hubby could merc you? He already proved he couldn’t.”

“Other people on his team are more practical than he is.” Sam doesn’t think about Natasha. Doesn’t think about her having to clean her knives after, washing down the drain the blood of the first person to ever care for her.

“We’ll see.”

The first time, she doesn’t scream, just screws her jaw shut so hard her eyes hurt. Her body tries to thrash, but she locks it down.
Two minute break.

The second time, her body spasms.

One minute.

The third time, she screams.

*

Sam sets the tablet aside, sick to his stomach. “Any idea where they are?”

“I’ve got JARVIS running it now. There’s a few places.”

“What can I do?”

Natasha walks up behind Bruce, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder. “When. When we find her. It would probably be good to have some of her things. To remind her.”

“Barnes and I will find her apartment,” Sam says. Natasha nods. “Sounds like a plan.”

Tony talks for a few minutes, logistics, comms, the normal mission stuff.

Sam pulls the earbuds out of the tablet before he turns to go, and a voice crackles through the speakers before he can turn it off.

*

“Jokes on you, asshole,” she spits. “Nobody’s coming because nobody cares.”

*

He and Bucky hit the streets of Bucharest.

Bucky stops him right outside a grocery store, pulling his phone out.

“Peggy,” he says. “Please. Where was she living?”

Sam rests his hand between Bucky’s shoulder blades.

“Thank you, Pegs. You know I wouldn’t be asking if it wasn’t - yeah, that. Love ya.”

Bucky flips his phone closed and shoves it in his pocket.

“C’mon. I know the street.”

Sam raises an eyebrow as they start walking.

“My family moved into the city after we left our house. Tried to live here for a while. Didn’t work out.”

The apartment building where she’s been living is some hole in the wall place, a squat building shoved in between larger, modern ones.

Bucky walks through the front door, and Sam follows.

“Third floor,” Bucky says, referencing his conversation with Peggy.
Bucky stands in front of the door. He tries the doorknob, and the door swings open.

Sam closes it behind them.

There’s a growling, and then a barking. A huge white dog darts out of the bedroom, jumping at Bucky, who catches it in his arms.

Bucky talks softly at it in Romania, in English, and (when the dog still doesn’t calm) in halting Gaelic.

The dog calms.

Bucky pets the dog’s head as he checks the collar. Bucky swallows. “Yasha. That’s my name.”

“Oh?” Sam asks.

“Yeah. Before we, uh, went to America. Yasha Nicolae Barnes.”

Bucky walks into the kitchen, Yasha close at his side. The dog bumps his head against one of the cabinets. Bucky opens it, and grabs the bag of food, dumping it into the dog bowl by the table.

Sam and Bucky walk into the bedroom.

The bed is messy, unkempt. There’s an equally messy desk, a computer taking center, but at least seven notebooks that Sam can see, stacked on top of one another. He picks up the one on top.

* 

**Bucky - things about (likes, dislikes), reminders, memories, things for**

* 

Sam sits on the edge of the bed by the window.

The handwriting is as messy as the room, cursive, big loops, long dash crosses for the ‘t’s and swiping circles for ‘I’ dots. The lines are all in different colors, like they’d been written hastily at different times. Notes and scratches out in the margins. Erratic. Disorganized.

* 

**He is/was allergic to green peppers (or he didn’t like them and was lying)**

**Warm toes**

**Shakes his head to dry his hair (like Yasha)**

(Yasha?)

**Sister**

**George and Winifred**

**Two sisters**

**Snores (?)**
“Babydoll”

“Sweetheart”

March 18th

“Doubt thou the stars are fire”

Charcoal smoke smells like him

“The valiant never taste of death but once”

Three sisters, actually (twins?)

Cigarettes taste like him

“The fireworks are for you”

*

“The fireworks are for her?” Sam asks, closing the book without investigating further.

“Huh?” Bucky says, not looking up from the book in his own hands.

Sam peeks around his shoulder. It’s a sketch of Bucky from the front, a little to the side. Not Captain America, no, this Bucky has hair flopping over his forehead, his nose is wrinkled from laughing under thick glasses, lips stretched wide, teeth crooked, his jaw is sharper, slighter. His shirt is open, suspenders slid off his shoulders, shoes and socks off, pant legs rolled up. There’s a beer bottle at his feet, a cigarette between his fingers. His chest is a little boney, but there’s a smattering of hair on his stomach.

July 4th, 1939, the bottom of the page says.

Fireworks explode behind him.

A wet drop splashes in the paper.

Sam gently removes the book from Bucky’s hands before he gathers Bucky into his arms.

“We’re gonna get her back,” he says, with conviction. “You hear me, Barnes? We’re gonna get your girl back.”

Bucky clutched Sam close for a moment before he pulls away and puts on a face Sam recognizes.

“Of course we will, Sam,” Captain America says.

*******

Stephanie wakes up on her last morning as a single woman to a cold, empty apartment.

She sits there on her bed for a while; it had been dark out still when her eyes had opened, and she sits there, watching the sun rise hazy into her window. Monday was the only day Fr. Thomas could do it, and that almost felt right. No point having a big wedding for a marriage that didn’t mean nothing.

She’s...she’s kind of happy that Bucky had offered to move in here after the-
The wedding.

They’re getting married.

Stephanie swallows.

She stretches her boney hands out in front of her face, squinting into the pale light.

There’ll be a ring on that finger in less than three hours.

She almost stands up, walks the three blocks to the Barnes’s apartment, and calls it all off.

Stephanie shivers.

One upside to this should be that Bucky throws heat off like a furnace, so winters shouldn’t be so bad. Summers are disgusting anyway.

She uses her eyes to trace a long blue vein down her left arm. She can feel all her limbs this morning, which is good. Some days she can’t.

She hadn’t, exactly, ever told Bucky about that. Maybe she should. Man has a right to know what he’s getting into.

Stephanie really doesn’t want to be a burden. Hell, part of the reason they’re doing this is so that if she ever gets hospital-sick again the Barnes family can visit her.

‘Barnes family.’ She was already that in heart, she knows, but soon she’ll be that in law as well.

Stephanie rubs her feet harshly together to warm them before she stands up.

She focuses on her breathing - lets each breath rattle its way into her lungs and then hack its way out - as she goes through the motions of pulling on clothes. She doesn’t have a white dress, just a nice one, so she reaches into the closet to pull it out.

Her fingers brush against something. She grabs it.

Her Ma’s favorite singing outfit, from back when she performed at Harrison’s. White, silver sequins sewn all along it.

Before she can think of a good reason why not to, she maneuvers it on.

It doesn’t fit.

Ma’d been fuller when the dress had been made than Stephanie would ever be in her life, barring any miracles. Hips, breasts, bit of a tummy. She’d just had a baby, after all.

The few tears that slip out go cold on her face before she can wipe them off.

She’s not ever going to get that. And for all Ma’s efforts, Steph’s probably only got a few more years left before her body gives up.

Sorcha hadn’t let herself cry since the funeral, tried to keep her strength - Irish strength - up, tried to do Ma proud.

Sorcha, the little daughter of a widowed immigrant from some nowhere town in Ireland, wipes her face off, hangs the dress back up, and puts on the sort of thing that a good American girl would
wear for church.

Stephanie Rogers locks the door after her, says some words, hugs some people, signs her name a few times, kisses one pair of lips, and walks back into her house (legally) Stephanie Barnes.

Bucky makes coffee. Stephanie washes out the mugs.

They go to work.

Night falls, they come home. Bucky crawls into bed next to Stephanie and pulls her right up against her chest, like they used to, when they were too young for it to mean anything.

Stephanie exhales against his neck, digs her fingers into his sides, and finally, finally feels warm.

Chapter End Notes

*begs for comments* I have to suffer through thanksgiving with my extended family. Comments would be lovely.
Recovery: the action or process of regaining possession or control of something stolen or lost

Chapter Summary

Old friends, they meet again.

Chapter Notes

AHHHHHHH FINALS. I only have one left in approximately 8 hours of my posting this and my brain is done absorbing new things and so it decided that it would blurt our new things instead and this chapter happened. Sorry if it feels short! I actually had something else entirely planned for the second part, but then I changed it. But what happened in this chapter is what needed to happen, and then we’ll get to the next things that happen. Maybe this is too sappy at the end?? Bucky Barnes is a big ol’ softie romantic boy to me ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Through a complex process of hacking, Tony gets them into the flight computer of the helicopter the Hydra goons used and tracked it to their current location.

Natasha sits beside Bucky as he wears his brave face, backpack full of Stephanie’s things tucked between his feet to keep it from sliding.

The big white dog sits obediently at his side, large head flopped against Bucky’s thigh.

Natasha reaches over and pets it.

“What’s the dog’s name?” She asks, trying to get Bucky out of his head.

“Yasha,” he says, simply, making Natasha’s plan backfire.

* * *

Getting into the facility is almost laughably easy. Something deep and savage inside Natasha is glad to see the dwindling numbers, euphoric to knock them down. It’s the right thing to do, but this vindictive pleasure has another origin.

This is for Stava. Natalia is using the skills Stava taught her, using them to save Stava from the nasty men the way Stava had saved Natalia.

Bucky scratches at his jaw as they stand outside the door, and throws his helmet off.

Natasha rolls her eyes at him.

Bucky catches her eye and winks, feigning confidence. Natasha reaches over and squeezes his
hand.

“I’m okay, Nat. I can do this. Already did it once and they had her for seventy years that time.”

“Yeah,” Natasha agrees.

Clint bumps his shoulder into hers, a gentle show of support, a reminder that he’s here. She hip checks him in return.

Tony blows the hinges off the door.

* * *

Natasha prides herself on being in control of herself, in control of her emotions.

Seeing Stephanie standing there - an older version of the Soldier’s outfit keeping her prisoner, eyes blank and a thousand miles away, face placid and drawn, complexion pale and green, save for the angry red bumps on her face - makes Natasha’s heart catch in her throat.

Natasha swallows tightly. She shoots down three men before they can even react.

The rest of the team goes to work, while Bucky stands there, unmoving. He’s staring at Stephanie.

Galen - the asshole who started all of this - is wriggling under Natasha’s boot, planted firmly on his chest. Agnes - monster of a woman she is, refusing to see the humanity that Stephanie has crafted for herself with the broken pieces that Hydra had left behind - is being held by the neck against Thor. She tries biting his arm but Thor doesn’t even flinch.

Natasha notices the camera still on, broadcasting everything to the world, but she can’t turn it off from here, her gun only has the one bullet left and she’d much rather leave it for Galen.

Bucky takes a step forward.

“Steph?” He says, soft, tentative, gentle. “Steph, it’s me. It’s Bucky, your Bucky.”

He takes another step forward, treading lightly, moving slowly. His shield is abandoned on the floor.

“Stevie,” he says, voice hoarse. “Stevie-girl, it’s me.”

One more step forward, and his boot clangs against the metal floor. Stephanie’s eyes flick up, lock with his, and Bucky smiles. It’s the most open look Natasha has ever seen on his face.

“That’s right, doll, it’s me. Remember me? I know you do. Just,” he hesitates, raising his hand up, making a soft shhh sound when she moves back. “You just gotta come back to me. You just gotta - I know you got it in you, sugar. It’s me. You know me. Known me your whole goddamn life. Hell, honey, you are my life.”

Stephanie inhales deeply for the first time since they walked in. Bucky takes it for the crack in the walls that it is and starts digging.

“Ain’t dead yet, darling. Takes more than a few Hydra agents to do you in. And I promised. I promised ya,” his accent is thick now. He’s close enough to touch her, and she hasn’t moved back, but he doesn’t reach out again, not yet.

“I promised ya, before the Lord and my Ma and the whole congregation. In front of you. I
promised ya. As long as we both shall live, remember?"

He reaches his arm up, slow, telegraphing his movement. Somewhere between their entrance and now he’s lost his gloves.

He brushes the back of his hand softly against her hair, barely daring to touch. A soft *whine* escapes Stephanie’s throat.

“Well, as far as I can reckon, we’re both still alive. And I’m with ya till the end of the like, lover.”

Stephanie blinks, her eyes beginning to shine.

Bucky slides his hand into her hair, the other trailing up her arm, over her shoulder, and down her back. He steps closer to her and she leans into him, eyebrows scrunched together like she’s confused by her choice to do that.

“I married ya, sugar. I married ya. And you married me. I’ll never forget that long as I live. Ya married me. Angry little Steph Rogers married that lucky bastard James Barnes.”

He pulls back enough to look in her eyes again, hand moving from her hair to her cheek.

“’Cept you didn’t just marry James Barnes, didjyah? You married me. You married Yasha.”

“Yasha,” Stephanie breathes.

“And I didn’t marry Stephanie. I married Sorcha.”

“Yasha,” she says, voice louder but weaker, cracking in the middle.

“That’s me, doll. That’s me.”

She inhales, sharp, shocked. “Yasha.”

“Sorcha,” Bucky replies. He moves both hands to slot his fingers into the gaps of her ribs, and her right hand comes up. She digs her nails down into his shoulder.

“Yasha.”

Her left hand mirrors the right, bearing down on his shoulder. Her right hand comes up to his face. Her fingertips graze his cheekbone.

“Yasha. Yasha Yasha Yasha,” she repeats, as if saying it more often will make it more real.

Bucky nods, turning his head to press a kiss to her palm.

“You need to shave,” Stephanie says, voice rough and hoarse from screams, throat dry. “Hurts like hell. And ya look like a bum.”

Bucky gathers her into his arms as Stephanie pulls him close, arms a vice around his shoulders.

Right before he buries his face against her neck, Natasha can see that Bucky is crying.

*

They stand there, as Tony and Clint handle clean up. Sam waits outside for the authorities.

At one point, Stephanie’s knees give out, and Bucky slides softly to the ground with her, taking any
pressure off of her, kneeling down and cradling her next to him.

He’s whispering things to her, lips right against her temple, face reverent. In any other context, Natasha would suspect a prayer.

“Cap,” Tony says, softer than Natasha has ever heard him. “Cap, maybe you two should get out of here before anyone shows up.”

Bucky swallows. “Good idea, Tony.”

Stephanie’s body won’t move, so Bucky grabs her under the knees and hefts her up, carrying her.

Natasha notices that her eyes are shut, and she’s breathing deeply. Natasha’s lip quirks up. Asleep.

********

Allie sits on the couch, arms right around Samira’s shoulders, Samira’s legs in her lap. Takisha and Hanna sit on Samira’s other side, holding each other just as tightly.

“‘Cept you didn’t just marry James Barnes, didjyah? You married me. You married Yasha.”

Samira curls into herself, eyes wide.

“Yasha.”

Allie sniffs, swallows.

On her own corner of the couch, Takisha is sobbing.

*

Allie gives it ten minutes after Bucky leaves (carrying Stephanie out bridal style) before she decides she can’t take it anymore and she pulls out her phone.

The other girls crowd around her, so she video calls Bucky. She needs to see him.

“Fuck. I mean, hi.”

He’s whispering, fumbling with the phone one handed. Just off screen, Allie can see blonde hair pressed to his throat.


Bucky flinches.

“You done good,” she finishes, smiling.

Bucky looks bewildered.

“When she’s ready, you are introducing us,” Hanna interrupts. “No wriggling out of it.”

“Yes ma’am.”

“In return,” Takisha says, leaning across Allie, “we will call your sisters for you.”

Bucky sighs deeply. “Thanks, girls.”
“We’re gonna do that now,” Allie says, playfully shoving Takisha’s shoulder out of the way. “Bye, Bucky.”

“Bye, girls,” Bucky says, placing his phone down.

Allie goes to hang up herself but she hears him continuing to speak.

“Those were some friends’a mine, doll. Damn good group’a girls they are. ‘S four of ‘em. Hanna, Allie, Samira, and Takisha. You’ll love ‘em.”

The camera on Bucky’s phone is angled so that Allie can see him nuzzling his nose into Stephanie’s hair.

“And Pegs’ll be so happy to see ya. And Gabe. ‘N Jim, ‘n Dum Dum, ‘n all the rest.” He presses a kiss to her cheekbone. “So glad to have you back, sugar. Things I woulda done to get you back in my arms again.”

Bucky’s arms slide around her waist. She stirs slightly, huffing and adjusting herself in his lap, disgruntled. Her hands curls into the straps of his uniform.

Bucky inhales deeply. “Thought you died, doll. Thought I died. You died, and you took everythin’ good with ya when ya left. I just. I couldn’t be happy. There ain’t no Bucky Barnes if there ain’t no Steph Rogers. Whole world was dark and awful and grey.” He exhales sharply, caught between a laugh and a sob. “But then. Oh, then you were back. And sugar, you fought so hard to come back to me. When you walked away that day, after that fight? When you saved my ass, remember? When you walked away you opened up my chest and took my heart with ya.”

Allie swallows. This feels too, too, too intimate for her to keep watching. She can’t help but feel she’s intruding.

Right before the video cuts out, she can see Bucky pressing a kiss to the side of Stephanie’s neck.

Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays my friends. If you aren’t celebrating anything, then I just hope you have a nice day today.
(Blah blah blah regular beg for comments)
According to my outline, this is the fourth-to last chapter in part 2, then we get to part 3!
Natasha sits across from Bucky and Stephanie, leg bouncing up and down because she’s anxious.

Everyone in the world has to have figured out that they’re headed back to the Tower, and while public opinion has swayed largely in Stephanie’s favor, she’s still technically a wanted criminal.

Some type of government authority is probably waiting for them there.

She mentions as much to Tony, who sighs.

“I don’t know what to tell you, Nat. I’ve got the best lawyers in the world but really? I don’t think there’s much we can do to stop her being arrested. I think we can get her found not guilty by reason of insanity or mental defect, because being brainwashed for years by an evil Nazi terrorist cell should be like, a classic case of mental defect, but as far as preventing arrest? I don’t know.”

“So we’ve got a solid defense,” Natasha says, a little defeated. “But they’re going to take her into custody.”

Tony nods his head, mouth a firm line and looking much more serious than Natasha has seen him outside of world-ending level of bad situations.

“Or we could run,” Bucky says quietly, face partially hidden by his shaggy hair. “Just, run away. Leave. Never come back.”

“You could,” Natasha allows, curious where he’s going with this.

“We could.”

“Who’s we?” Nat asks.

“Me and Stevie. We could just...go back to what we were.”

“Hate to break it to you Buck, but I don’t think that’s possible,” Tony says, sincere and without a
trace of teasing. Natasha wraps her fingers around his wrist in a show of support.

“No, not like that,” Bucky sighs. “I meant more...a few years ago, we were just dead. Her and I, we were two sad kids who got in over our heads in a war and died for our country. A chapter in a history book, with a beginning, middle, and end. We weren’t people. We could run away, hide in plain sight, just be two people making our way in the world, together. We’re not who we used to be, we never will be again. Maybe in another life, nothing ever happened to us and we just lived in Brooklyn until we died. But, well, maybe it’s stupid and ridiculous and naive to think about chasing ghosts but. We could just be us. Steph and Buck. No one else telling us who we are, not needin’ to be anythin’ but ourselves. Not heroes, not villains, just us.” Bucky takes Stephanie’s hand in his own. “The new us.”

“You could do that,” Sam agrees. “And I don’t think any of us would blame you.”

“She would,” Bucky says. “Steph would hate the idea of running away; she’s not the type. She wouldn’t want to run away from the consequences when they get to her, even if it wasn’t her fault.”

The quinjet lands on the tower bay, and Stephanie stirs.

“Too late now,” Bucky says. “It’s too late now.”

*

There are people there, just like Natasha expected.

Stephanie swallows and walks over to them of her own volition, under her own power. She holds out her hands, a clear gesture of surrender. Natasha grabs both of Bucky’s hands. She’s not sure who’s squeezing harder, Bucky or herself.

*

They follow the FBI to the courthouse, of course. It’s almost funny to see the look on the judge’s face when she has to charge a 23 year old woman with 173 counts of murder, but mostly, it just makes Natasha want to throw up a little.

“She doesn’t deserve this,” she finds herself saying hoarsely, as if she already has thrown up. “She didn’t want to do any of that.”

Bucky hasn’t let go of her hand. “Yeah, Nat. Yeah.”

******

Breaking news: Winter Soldier Taken Into Custody

The woman once known as Stephanie Rogers has been peacefully apprehended and has been detained by law enforcement authorities. Click to read full article.

*

The Fist of Hydra: How Stephanie Rogers went from a tragic war hero and martyr to one of the most hated terrorists of all time.

Click to read full article.
The Reality of Victimhood

How one woman spent more than half a century in a Nazi cell and came out kicking.

Stephanie Rogers: Victim, not Villain

The story of the world’s longest held prisoner of war.

The Cultural Impact of the Winter Soldier

Over a hundred deaths have been positively associated with the Winter Soldier (also known as Stephanie Rogers), including well known names such as Howard and Maria Stark. When asked for comment, Stark Industries responded that they in no way hold Rogers accountable for her actions while she was held under the influence of Hydra.

A Comprehensive and Incomplete List of all the Human Lives Stephanie Rogers has Ended.

What 70 Years of Torture Does To the Human Mind: a Take from the Field of Psychology

When the Banality of Evil becomes the Reality of Abuse

Stephanie Rogers is a human being. That is undeniable fact and should never be forgotten. For years, Hydra actively and systematically erased this fact from both the minds of their workers and from the mind of Rogers herself. To read the files (labeled SAGMR in a nod to Rogers’s initials) is to read the chronicle of the dehumanization of a young woman. These files are a horror story. “Just following orders” was not a justifiable excuse for Nazis in the late 1940s, and it should not be an excuse now. All knowing participants in the destruction of Rogers’s sense of self and psyche should be held responsible for those actions taken by the Winter Soldier. They made her into a weapon that they wielded for their own purposes. There is no way in which anyone could call Rogers a willing participant; when someone is screaming and begging for people to stop, and those people do not stop, that cannot be defined as consent. The horror story of the files produced the reality we see in all pictures of the Soldier: lifeless, dead behind the eyes, lights on but no one’s home. In the few videos that exist of her in the field, she is seen struggling against her ‘programming’ (the word Hydra uses for the conditioning they put her through), as well as written records of when she broke from her programming in minor ways in order to decrease damage.

Stephanie Rogers, on a fundamental level, is a good person. The people who did this to her are not. Rogers fought and was ready to die for her country. She suffered wrongs so unspeakable that “horrors” is barely an adequate word. Are we, as a country, really going to repay her with more?
Comments give me motivation to come back to this
**Nadir: the lowest point**

Chapter Summary

The Winter Soldier goes on trial

Chapter Notes

Why am I only able to update at 4am....the world may never know

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Preamble:**

The United States v. Stephanie Rogers

Rogers is charged with 173 counts of murder in the first degree (that is, premeditated with malicious intent), 27 counts of arson, 13 counts for reckless endangerment, 10 counts of breaking and entering, and 1 count of manslaughter.

**Residing over the preceding:**

The honorable judge Sasha Langdon

**Prosecuting for the state:**

Michael Crawford

**The defense:**

Matt Murdock and Franklin Nelson

**The defendant:**

Sergeant of the United States Army Stephanie Anne Grace Marie Rogers

**

Tony sits still in his seat. He consciously doesn’t let his leg bounce.

Bucky is on his right, Pepper on his left. He holds both their hands tightly.

Natasha is on Bucky’s other side, clutching his hand just as tightly.

Bucky has big dark half-circles under his eyes, which should be impossible for a hyper-healing super soldier who doesn’t need to sleep, but Tony knows he hasn’t slept in the month and a half leading up to the trial, hasn’t slept since he was literally holding Stephanie in his arms and had to watch her walk away under lock and key.
Natasha probably also has visible signs of fatigue, though she hides them better; she’s been up all night with Barnes more often than not, as long as she can stand until her body drops to sleep from under her.

Sam is on Natasha’s other side, jaw clenched tightly.

None of them let go of each other’s hands as the stand for the ‘all rise.’

**

*Opening statements:*

*Michael Crawford:* Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I feel like this is the easiest trial in history. Look at what the defendant is charged with. There is, in some cases, video evidence of her committing the crimes. In the absence of video, we have years of Hydra records documenting her crimes. This should be the easiest trial in the history of the United States legal system. Guilty on all charges. Personally, I feel like we could make a singular argument for reinstatement of the death penalty.

*Matt Murdock:* There is no denying that crimes have been committed by the Winter Soldier. What I intend to argue instead is that the Winter Soldier is a separate entity from my client. Sergeant Rogers’s body was used to commit those crimes against her will or consent. It is violation in its worst form, to take someone’s body and commit acts with it which - were the person in control - the person would never consent to. I intend to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Stephanie Rogers is not guilty of the crimes charged against her, but instead that the blame lies solely on the shoulders of those involved with the organization known as Hydra and specifically those involved in the implementation of the Winter Soldier program. There is no record of Stephanie Rogers choosing to commit the crimes listed. Instead, Hydra chose who the targets were. And before any of you begin to think that she may be guilty of murder for hire, please remember that Stephanie Rogers received no compensation. Indeed, considering the years of electro-torture, physical torture, mental manipulation, forced substance abuse, solitary confinement, and forced medical procedures (to name only a few of the injustices and human rights violations which were forced upon my client), it is not at all a stretch to say that she received the opposite.

*Witness for the defense: Harvey Walters, 90 years old. WWII veteran, honorably discharged for medical reasons (loss of lower limb).*

**

The guy is old, but he doesn’t look it, Tony thinks. He’s gotta be near 90, but he walks on his own two feet, supported by a cane. Although, when he walks, the telltale Clink of a fake leg sounds through the courtroom.

**

*Murdock: Private Walters - it is Private, isn’t it?*

*Walters: Yes, sir.*

*Murdock: Private Walters. Do you know why I’ve called you in today?*

*Walters: Yes. When I was serving during the war, I had interaction with Sergeant Rogers back when she was just Nurse Stephanie.*
Murdock: So not Nurse Rogers?

Walters: No, only the doctors got last names.

Murdock: Could you give me a detailed description of your impression of Nurse Stephanie?

Walters: Well, I was 18 at the time. She was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen, soft blonde hair and big blue eyes, quick to smile. She made a point of asking us all our first names, instead of calling us by rank. Not exactly regulation, but it. It made you feel more human somehow. And she was good at what she did. Better than some of the doctors, honestly. Nimble, quick fingers. Nothing seemed to faze her, honestly, not in the moment of helping someone. One time, though, a guy died - got a bullet right in the neck, bled out on the table, nothing that could have been done, everyone could tell - and in the moment, all he was doing was calling out weakly to his Ma. She smoothed his hair back and held his hand and said in this soft, gentle voice “I’m here. I’m here for you, you’re not alone.” Private Walters clears his throat. I was in the ward for about a month, a lot of guys died there. Some fast, some slow. And every time, if she wasn’t helping someone else, she’d hold their hand, pray with them if they were religious, write out final letters, to parents, lovers, wives, children. She’d sing sometimes. In the month I was there, I - with two exceptions - I never saw her let a guy leave this world alone. Even if they couldn’t leave comfortable, they never left alone. Honestly, some of us guys who were stuck there for a bit, we fancied ourselves half in love with her, cause she was the first person to treat us real decent, like we actually mattered as people and not soldiers, in months. A few guys actually asked her to go on a date with them after they got out, but she’d just smile and say she already had a beau waiting for her.

Murdock: So you’d say she didn’t like death?

Walters: She hated it. Always caught her wiping her eyes after she lost someone.

Murdock: Based on your experiences with her, would you say that Rogers took pleasure in death?

Walters: In no way, shape, or form.

Murdock: So you would say that she would only kill when absolutely necessary?

Walters: We all did, Mr. Murdock. War makes monsters of us all. I’m proud of what I did over there, killing Nazis. A gentler soul never lived, in my opinion. She didn’t take anyone’s shit, but she always had a smile for you.

Murdock: Thank you, Private Walters. No further questions.

*

Crawford: Private Walters, you said there were two exceptions where she didn’t, in your words, “let a guy leave the world alone.” Please describe these instances.

Walters: Both times it was because 30 or 40 or 100 guys all came in at once, dropping like flies, dying faster than you could get a name out of them. There was shouting, and blood, and crying. Everybody who could was running around, trying to help everyone.

Crawford: You said she didn’t take anyone’s shit, care to elaborate?

Walters: Let me tell you a story. One time, this French guy staggers in, uniform torn to high hell, bleeding out, but the slow kind. Nurse ‘Stevie’ as we called her, she lies the guy down on bed, goes to start dressing his wounds, rinse him off. Head doc comes over and tells her not to waste supplies. She set her jaw, cause the doc was right, this guy was a total lost cause by now, and asked if she
could at least give the poor guy some morphine for the pain. Doc said no, told her to make the rounds, even though it wasn’t on her schedule for that day. Doc said we didn’t have any duty to a frog - I’m saying that cause that’s what the doc said - and she said “our duty is to the wounded, to fix ‘em up, or help them go as easy as possible.” One of the other nurses said she’d take the rounds, and Rogers stayed by the guy’s side. Now, I don’t speak any French, never have, but she took his hand and spoke to him in his own language, simple as anything. Guy’s face lit up like he’d seen the face of god. Sat with him for a good two hours, just mopping at his forehead and speaking to him in his mother tongue. At one point, she started singing. She had the loveliest voice you ever heard, clear as a bell. She was singing the Ave Maria. Helped the guy hold his cross, and just prayed with him. He looked like hell when he came in, and he didn’t look any better, but in the end he wasn’t crying. He smiled. Like I said, I don’t speak any French, but I could recognize his last words. “Thank you, miss.” And then, something about an angel. You know I asked her about it, once, why she was so adamantly about everybody dying with a hand to hold. Her Ma died alone, apparently. Stephanie wasn’t at the hospital when her Ma passed on. She said that was her biggest regret. She technically wasn’t disobeying orders, but the head doc certainly didn’t like it. That’s the thing about Stephanie, in my experience. She had her morals and she stuck to them.

Crawford: Can you imagine what would push her to become such a heartless killer?

Walters: Only if they took all of the stuff that made her Stephanie out and stuffed rotten shit back in.

Crawford: No further questions.

**

Tony glances over at Bucky. Buck’s got his jaw locked up tight, eyes far away.

The judge announces a ten minute recess, and Bucky is up like a shot, eyes locked on where they’re leading Stephanie - still handcuffed, dressed in an ugly orange outfit - out through a side door.

She looks like hell, hair limp and greasy. The few seconds Tony has been able to see her face she’d looked gaunt and pale. Tony…

Tony wants to give her a hug and a bowl of ice cream and a mug of hot chocolate and-

He feels kinda paternal, alright?

*

Tony hands Bucky a bottle of water, and gives him a hard look until Bucky guzzles it down.

“How you feelin’, Buck?”

“My heart’s bout to beat outta my chest.”

Natasha rubs a hand over his back. “Murdock’s argument is solid. We’ve got the evidence on our side.”

Bucky hunches in on himself on the bench they’d taken over. “But that DA hates her. Like, really really hates her. And the jury won’t stop looking at her like it’s their family the Winter Soldier killed.”

“Not all of them,” Sam says. “Some of them look really sympathetic.”
“But is it gonna be enough?” Bucky asks.

Tony opens his mouth to answer, but Private Walters walks over, cane and leg clinking.

“Captain Barnes,” he says, with a bit of a smile on his face, giving a jaunty salute. “I don’t suppose you were the beau Nurse Stevie has waitin’ on her?”

Bucky looks the man in the face and smiles weakly. “Husband, actually. We got married in ‘38, way before either of us shipped out.”

Walters smiles. “I hope what I said was enough to convince that jury that she’s a good woman, wouldn’t have done any of that stuff on her own choosing.”

“Thanks, Private,” Bucky says.

“Bit of an awkward question maybe, but my granddaughter is a big fan of you, Ms. Romanov, was wondering if I could get an autograph for her?”

Natasha looks a little taken aback, but takes the pen and paper graciously.

Walters offers another jaunty salute and half now to them all.

Bucky salutes right back, not a hint of a joke or sarcasm present.

**

Witness for prosecution: Amélié Reginald, 67. Born in Prague, parents died shortly after. Raised in an orphanage all her life. Rogers burned her first one to the ground.

Crawford: Ms. Reginald, were you raised in the orphanage shown on the map here?

Reginald: Yes I was, until it burned down.

Crawford: And do you know how it burned down?

Reginald: Yes, I was there. I was about seven or eight, so this would have been sixty years ago, but I’ll never forget it. I was asleep - most of us slept in shared rooms - and suddenly there was a hand on my shoulder, waking me up. I’m not very clear on the details of what was happening, but eventually that woman Ms. Reginald points at Sargeant Rogers got us all herded outside. She drew a map in the dirt of where we should go - there was a police station a little down the road - and made it clear we were supposed to leave. Then there was the fire.

Crawford: So Rogers set the fire?

Reginald: After she got all of us out that is.

Crawford: Were you afraid of Rogers?

Reginald: No. Every time I’ve ever thought about it I’ve thought of her as the angel that saved us from burning alive.

Crawford: You are aware that she is the one that would have burned you alive.

Reginald: Looking back with the information I do now, she certainly could have and those were likely her orders, Mr. Crawford, but she chose to save us instead.
Crawford: No further questions.

*Murdock: Just to be clear, would you say that Rogers saved your life, and the lives of those also at the scene, with no immediate benefit to herself?

Reginald: Yes, I would say that.

Murdock: Your Honor, I would like to submit into evidence - and therefore to the jury - this section of the SAGMR files. For those unaware, these are the files detailing and chronicling the abuses my client suffered under Hydra. This particular section explains the parameters of the mission: to determine if they had, quote, “burned out all that was left of the woman and replaced it all with the machine.” We can glean from this that even Hydra themselves did not think of Stephanie Rogers as a person, but rather used her body for their own means. Functionally, my client and the Winter Soldier are two different entities.

**

Tony places his hand on Bucky’s knee.

“Breathe, Cap. You gotta breathe.”

**

Witness for the defense: Johan Svalov, age 51. Currently being held in a federal prison due to crimes committed as a member of Hydra. A scientist who worked on the winter soldier program.

*Murdock: Mr. Svalov, you worked with the program, did you not?

Svalov: I did.

Murdock: Mr. Svalov, do you have any remorse or regrets regarding your actions?

Svalov: Yes and no.

Murdock: What do you mean by that, if I may ask?

Svalov: I regret the pain I may have caused the subject, but I believe that the ways in which we have furthered medical science make it more than justifiable.

Murdock: Subject, that’s the word you just used to describe Sergeant Rogers. Was she not a person to any of you?

Svalov: Oh no, by the time I joined the program she was long gone.

Murdock: What do you mean by that?

Svalov: Well, the subject was a machine. A machine with human-like intelligence. You would input commands, and it would adapt to fit the end goal.

Murdock: So you never thought of her as a person? Would you say that the Winter Soldier is entirely different from Stephanie Rogers?
Svalov: Trust me, Mr. Murdock, up until her little rebellion we had burned away all that would have gotten in the way of our goals.

Murdock: But you said that you didn’t regret furthering medical science. How can torturing a woman to a state of insanity further medical science?

Svalov: Am I on trial, Mr. Murdock?

Murdock: No, you’ve already been sentenced. My question only pertained to the nature of your research and what you personally think was gained.

Svalov: Besides the wonder that is the arm, we also discovered exactly where the breaking point of the human brain is. We discovered the effects of the serum on a depleted human body. We discovered how much of a brain you can burn out while still have the basic bodily movements function. The Soldier was a modern miracle of medical science!

Murdock: So all this to say, the soldier and Stephanie Rogers are two functionally different things?

Svalov: Yes, I would say that that is correct.

Murdock: So Rogers was not in control of her actions as the Soldier?

Svalov: If she ever showed any signs of doing so, we wiped her and started over.

Murdock: What did “wiping her” entail?

Svalov: Physically restraining the subject, a mouth guard was added in the 1960s after some teeth were shattered, not to mention the screaming became a little unbearable. Then the subject was injected with anticonvulsants and muscle relaxers, and the electricity was administered.

Murdock: How much electricity?

Svalov: Anywhere between six volts and twelve volts.

Murdock: Can you tell me how many volts of electricity the normal human brain can receive before permanent damage occurs?

Svalov: About ten volts before it can become deadly.

Murdock: I’d like to restate for the jury our witness is not the one on trial, he is only here for his professional opinion. So, in that professional opinion, you saw no problem with subjecting the Soldier, as you call her, to deadly levels of electricity?

Svalov: The Soldier, by design, is an enhanced individual. The subject is still alive, therefore the levels were not deadly.

Murdock: But they were damaging. I’d like to submit into evidence another page from the SAGMR files, as well as a more current version or Sargeant Roger’s brain scans.

Crawford: Objection, how can Mr. Murdock know what these images mean if he can’t see them?

Nelson: I assure the court that the defense is well aware what these images mean.

Judge Langdon: Objection overruled.

Murdock: As you can see from Hydra’s final, there is significant scarring in the temporal lobe,
frontal lobe, amygdala, and limbic system, specifically the hippocampus. Put plainly, there was severe damage to all sections of the brain involving personality, reasoning, and long-term memory and they were, to use the colloquial, shot to hell. In the most recent scans, from exactly one week ago today, there are still lingering damages from our defendant’s most recent abduction by Hydra a month and a half ago, but incredibly there are signs of healing. If we could have scanned her brain before that run in, we likely could have seen even more development towards patching together the charred areas, due to Sergeant Rogers’s accelerated healing. However, the Soldier was never left for that long a time between ‘wiping’ session, was she, Svalov?

Svalov: The longest I can think of in the record between wipings is two weeks.

Murdock: The evidence - once again, the SAGMR files - show this statement to be correct. Therefore, though her brain was capable of healing, she was never given the time necessary to do so. No more questions.

*  

Crawford: The people have no questions for the witness.

*  

Judge Langdon: This court will reconvene tomorrow at 9am. Court dismissed.

**  

Tony and Natasha both hold Bucky’s hands as they sneak out a side door to avoid the media circus that waits outside.

Regardless of their attempted escape attempt, they still get chased down by a legal aid clutching three packets of paper.

“Mr. Stark, Captain Barnes, Ms. Romanoff, the people have been called to subpoena ad testificandum. On the next court meeting, you are required to testify before the grand jury on the matter of the United States versus-”

“I know what a testimony is, thanks,” Tony says, somewhat rudely, grabbing the papers from the aide’s hand. “We’ll be there.”

As the aide runs off, Tony squeezes Bucky’s hand. “We’re gonna be there, and we’re gonna tear that shitty DA a new one, Buck.”

“Yeah, sure,” Bucky says, voice hollow and eyes empty.

“But first you’re taking a nap. Even if I have to sit on you to make you do it. I’m sure Bruce has something that could knock even you out, Spangles.”

*******

The Winter Soldier on Trial: Day One

Written by Tiffany Walters

A courtroom sketch accompanies the article: Rogers, in an orange prison outfit, hands cuffed together, staring blankly at the table in front of her, face blank and shoulders slumped.
Matt Murdock is not a name I I suspect most of you know, but this up-and-coming lawyer from Hell’s Kitchen gave one hell of a show for the jury and the audience today at the trial of Stephanie Rogers. The first bombshell of the day came when Murdock stated his intended defense: That Stephanie Rogers is innocent of the crimes of the Winter Soldier because she and the Soldier are functionally different entities. Whether or not this will convince the jury remains to be seen.

Click to read full article.

Chapter End Notes

This was gonna be way longer with Stephanie taking the stand a bc stuff but I’m TIRED and this is like 3000 words.
Brain stuff from here https://mayfieldclinic.com/pe-anatbrain.htm
If you comment any questions about anything involving the chapter my writing process or my posting schedule I will do my best to answer. I’m too tired for justifications or explanations rn. I’m taking a sleep now. I hope you enjoyed.
Undaunted: not intimidated or discouraged by difficulty, danger, or disappointment

Chapter Summary

The Case against, and the case for.

Chapter Notes

*gestures at world, both personal and at large* AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
Warnings include:
- Mentions of tooth pulling (about the middle of the ‘article,’ after “her first mission was a failing success”)
- Non-graphic mention of menstruation (when Bucky takes the stand)
- Mentions of vomiting (last section)
- Hope this helps

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Trending number 1 worldwide

#myStephanieRogers

@Voxdotcom tweeted:

#myStephanieRogers is trending number one worldwide in the wake of the first day of the #wintersoldiertrial with people across the globe telling stories of the interactions they had with Stephanie Rogers (@grandFHWT) as she traveled under her various aliases

@FelicitationsKyle tweeted:

I literally will not hear one bad word against #mystephanierogers she could have left me for dead without a second thought, but she went out of her way to make sure I was taken care of. She held me as I bawled like a baby. She’s a good person.

The winter soldier is a criminal and I won’t deny it. But I fundamentally cannot believe that Stephanie Rogers is still the winter soldier. She grew past that, she fought against that. She’s different now.

Literally played ‘better than revenge’ for like, two hours.

She’s a fucking legend.
@christine_alverez tweeted:

For what it is worth, I knew her as Gracie Barnes, and she was reserved, and kind, and respectful. I trusted her enough to let her pick up my daughter from school.

Every few weeks Maya asks if Gracie is coming back. #MyStephanieRogers

@CaptainBarnes tweeted:

#MyStephanieRogers

https/youtu.be/kdkkHSJJjjdk

* 

Video description: A single take video of Bucky Barnes sitting in front of a camera. His hair is unkempt, his beard unruly, dark circles under his eyes, and wearing a black hoodie. He scrubs his hands over his face and into his hair, sighing.

“It’s kinda weird, that in order for a literal prisoner of war who was tortured on and off for almost a century, for her to have a chance at ever-”

Barnes cuts himself off, clearing his throat.

“Anyway, it’s batshit that people just want to see what they forced her body into and not like, her own human personality that fought every step of the way, that in order for that to happen we all have to prove that without Hydra in her head, she’s a good person.”

Barnes straightens in his chair.

“Anyway. This is...she’s her own person but, this is how I knew Stephanie Rogers. She...she’s bright. Could fill a room now matter the size of it or herself. She, she, she’s good for the sake of it. Feed the hungry, heal the sick, all that.”

Barnes almost huffs a laugh, eyes distant.

“Not that she didn’t have flaws. Mean streak a mile wide, hated listening to people or asking for help, sarcastic, brusque, temper. We smoked, we drank, we stole from grocery stores. But. We’re people. Before all of-” Barnes waves his hands in the air, gesturing at everything and nothing.

“Before all this, where we were both young and angry and tired. We were just people. Just anyone else you ran into on the street. Her fingers and toes always got icy cold, no matter the weather. She had this big duster coat that used to be her Ma’s. Her hair got really oily really quick, but also ratty at the ends because she hated brushing it. There was always mascara on her cheeks because she was so bad at applying it. She...holding her...it was the easiest thing in the world, sliding my arms around her waist. She hated dancing but never left me without a partner because I loved it so much. Her Ma worked in the hospital - that’s what killed her, caught something, couldn’t shake it - and she taught Stevie everything she knew. She was helping people out wherever she could. I met her
because these boys were kicking a cat around and she got so mad she socked one of them right in the stomach.” *Barnes pauses to laugh, scrubbing at his eyes with his palms,* “she couldn’t even reach his face.”

*Barnes sighs, shaking himself.*

“Anyway, that’s the Steph Rogers I knew, the one that I know. I watched all the videos, I read all the files. They tore everything that was her out and stuff all that bullshit into her. Stevie shouldn’t be on trial here, Hydra should be. And it’s batshit that they aren’t.”

*@

**@Prof_Neilson tweeted:**

I had the privilege of knowing #MyStephanieRogers as an art student. She was dedicated, critical of her art, and open to input from others. A model student. You could tell with every stroke and movement that she breathed art.

Her work is some of the most dynamic pieces I’ve ever seen, her classroom manner professional, yet kind and polite. When people asked for help she showed them.

*

**The Measure of a Woman by Tiffany Walters for the New York Times**

[image description: a courtroom illustration of Stephanie Rogers, handcuffed, wearing an orange jumpsuit. Her hair is falling in her face but her jaw is set and she stares at the floor. The artist had captured the blank look in her eyes.]

It seems like years ago that I interviewed James Barnes in his Stark Tower apartment. A man of infinite melancholy, just a few mental months removed from the loss of his wife, but still charming and kind, able to crack a joke and a smile.

The James Barnes of that apartment scene is nowhere to be seen in the James Barnes of the courtroom. His eyes are locked on the back of Sergeant Stephanie Rogers’ head, their breathing in sync. It is easy to tell he hasn’t been sleeping; his hands fiddle nervously and his leg bounces.

Stephanie Rogers barely moves, standing when she is tapped to, sitting in her defendant’s chair, breathing in and out shakily (when she seems to breathe at all) as the intimate details of her imprisonment are shown to all the world.

It is impossible to see the photographic and video evidence of her abuse, to hear the detailed notes of her suffering, and conclude that any part of her actions was voluntary.

I’ve been a journalist for many years. I have seen terrible things.

My heart has never broken as much as it did when I heard her brain had been healing itself until they took her again.
That was her only voluntary action in all of this; handing herself back into the hands of her abusers in order to save lives.

I’ve read biographies, I’ve seen documentaries, heard testimonies and interviews about the type of woman Stephanie Rogers was. At her core there can be an agreement: she helps people.

Her very first mission was a failing success; she burned down the building, but not before she evacuated it.

They extracted three of her teeth in punishment.

As a nurse, she sang to soldiers, she penned letters for the injured, she held the hands of the dying.

As a Commando, she sacrificed herself.

Stephanie Rogers is a national hero. Stephanie Rogers was a prisoner of war. Stephanie Rogers is a victim of violence, torture, and dehumanization.

The Winter Soldier is a brutal, dangerous machine.

Stephanie Rogers deprogrammed it. And she did it alone.

One can easily search Twitter and hear hundreds of voices ringing out in her favor. You can watch her own videos of eradicating Hydra based. Not once in that time did she kill anyone.

Stephanie Rogers took all of the pain and hurt and grief that haunts in her eyes, and turned it into art, into goodness, into hope.

The Stephanie Rogers who carried a girl home on her shoulders, buying her ice cream and singing, is the same Stephanie Rogers who wanted to save a dying man and held his hand when she was denied the means to do so.

The Winter Soldier is not Stephanie Rogers. And Stephanie Rogers is not the Winter Soldier.

It is impossible to view the evidence and conclude that the actions Hydra took unwillingly from her body are in any way her fault, were in any way her own desires.

One cannot look at the burn marks and scars on her iconic face - the face that graced book covers and monuments and statues - and think that the destruction of her brain was a wished for exercise.

The Winter Soldier was a monster. Hydra is a monster. Alexander Pierce was a monster.

Stephanie Rogers is no saint, but she certainly doesn’t deserve hell.

********

Tony feels weirdly calm as he takes his oath. He knows why the prosecutor had called him first; dead parents, tragic backstory, blah blah. If it were Tony, he’d have picked Buck first. Get the real sob story out of the way, get the next set of witnesses up to bury that in the jury’s mind, make them forget it. But Tony doesn’t mind. He knows, for once, what he’s going to say before he says it. He’s not gonna leave his friends out to dry.

**

Crawford: Mr. Stark, I’m sure we’re all familiar with the story of your parents’ death by now
Stark: I’m sure we are.

Crawford: How do you feel about your parents’ killer being in the room?

Stark: It’s infuriating. To think I’ve spent so long fighting for good and bastards like Svalov are still running around on their merry way.

Crawford: And what about Rogers, the woman who held the gun?

Stark: I feel sad for her. She didn’t deserve that. No one does.

Crawford: Can you elaborate?

Stark: I mean, I assume you’ve read the files, your conviction rate doesn’t seem to suggest you’re a good lawyer, but a big case like this, well, I mean you’ve got to show up. That shit they did to her? I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. You’ve got the proof right in front of you. They fried her brain out. Clearest case of diminished mental faculties I’ve ever seen, and I listen to a lot of true crime podcasts. I don’t blame her, I blame Hydra. Put them on trial. You’re just looking for a scapegoat, you whiny son of a bitch.

Judge Langdon: Mr. Stark, please refrain from personal insults or i’ll have to hold you in contempt.

Crawford: No further questions

**

Murdock: Mr. Stark has answered any questions I may have asked

**

Tony smirks at Crawford as he leaves the trial area. He’d look at Stephanie, but he knows he couldn’t bear the empty look in her eyes.

*

Tony couldn’t tell you what Nat said in her testimony if you staked his life on it. He was too busy leaning against Bucky as comfortably as he could possibly manage, swiping his thumb across the back of his hand so Bucky remembered to breathe. When he looks up, Crawford is fuming, so he considers it a win.

*

Bucky stands shakily when he’s called up. He’s dressed nice; a charcoal grey suit with navy blue piping, a black dress shirt, a matching black tie. The look on his face ruins it.

It’s the face of a broken man.

*

Crawford: Captain Barnes, you’re clearly compromised.

Barnes: You married, sir?

Crawford: I fail to see how that’s relevant.

Barnes: I promise, it is.
Crawford: I have a wife, yes.

Barnes: Then you’d be compromised too.

Crawford: Have you considered what your wife has done?

Barnes: Have you considered what Hydra did to her?

Crawford: That is all we’ve been considering. She voluntarily gave herself up to Hydra two times, Captain Barnes. You can’t deny that looks bad.

Barnes: Maybe if you look at just that, but text is meaningless without context. The first time was to protect innocent people. How could she have known that they’d made their own Serum, that’s they’d pump that shit into her veins.

Crawford: I’m sure it was quite the power trip for someone who had spent their whole life helpless.

Barnes: Steph Rogers has never been helpless a day in her life. She’d wanted to be healthy, sure. I wanted that for her too. But not like that. Never like that. She made her peace with her lot in life. We both had. Neither of us thought we’d get out of that war alive. Hell, we’ve always known our time is borrowed, limited. Every birthday she passed was the celebration of my year; another 365 that we’d managed to keep her around. They said she’d die at 10, at 11 when she caught scarlet fever. At 13 when she started going in the rag and it wracked its way through her body. At 15 when she spoke Gaelic to her Ma in public and someone beat her over the head. At 16 when she got whooping cough, at 17 with chicken pox. At 18, while her mother was dyin’a TB. At 19 when we could barely keep the heat on. At 20 when I got drafted and wouldn’t be there to keep her warm. And every goddamn day from the moment we showed up in Europe. Death has always been shadowing us, nipping at our heels. We made our peace with death young, Crawford. I know Steph and I know myself; death would have been welcome and preferable to what they did to her. But they didn’t let her die.

Crawford: She knew what would happen the second time, and she went back.

Barnes: She went back because she couldn’t bear to have the deaths of 15 kids on her mind. She gave herself up for that. She said on that fucking tape that she was sure we’d show up and kill her. And if it had come to that, I’m sure one of us would have. But it didn’t come to that. Because she’s Stephanie goddamn Rogers. Once she’s got the tools for the situation she’ll fix it right up. Even if that’s herself. You’re not gonna get me to say a damn thing against her. She’s the best person I ever knew.

Crawford: No further questions.

**

Tony sees Stephanie suddenly jerk alert, and whispers something in Murdock’s ear.

**

Murdock: Your Honor, if I may, I have a question from the defendant.

Judge Langdon: I’ll allow it.

Murdock: Captain Barnes, is Yasha okay?
Barnes: laughs Yasha’s doing just fine, Stevie. I’ve been feeding him twice a day and walking him morning and night, his water bowl is full and I gave him a bath. He sleeps at the foot of the bed every night. Taught him how to roll over.

Judge Langdon: If I may ask, who’s Yasha?

Barnes: He’s a dog Steph found on the streets of Romania. Took him in. Took care of him. Treated him right.

Murdock: No further questions.

Judge Langdon: Are you sure, Mr. Murdock?

Murdock: The prosecution has done an excellent job making my argument for me, Your Honor. I don’t feel the need to take up everyone’s time.

**

Bucky exits the courtroom after he’s dismissed, not even waiting for the announcement of a recess.

Tony high tails it after him, following into the bathroom where he hears the sound of retching and heaving.

“What’s wrong, Cap?”

“God, Tony. I’m so fucking scared.”

Fuck. Bucky didn’t get scared. Sure, he got nervous about interviews, he got antsy during battles, he got harried when he didn’t sleep enough.

But Tony’s never seen Bucky scared. Scared, apparently, involves shaking and crying and heaving more even though nothing’s coming up because Bucky hasn’t eaten in days, and tears running off his nose as he bends over the toilet (Tony think of the Fourth of July barbecue, a million, billion years ago, when Bucky joked about his weak stomach). Scared involves hugging his arms across his chest tightly and ruining his suit on the bathroom tile. Scared involves closing his eyes and shaking his head and inhaling, inhaling, inhaling.

“What, buddy, you’ve gotta breathe.”

Tony wishes Sam were here. Sam would know what to say.

“Exhale, with me, come on.”

Bucky does.

“I don’t know how to live without her, Tone. Now that I know she’s - that I could - Tony I don’t know what I’m gonna do if they - if they.”

“Bucky, we’ll figure it out. We can do it, together. You and me, we’re family.”

Bucky lurches forward into Tony’s arms.
Together, they empty a whole roll of toilet paper cleaning up Bucky’s face, and use more paper
towels to dry it again after he scrubs his eyes with cold water.

He looks almost human again when they leave.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was supposed to include Stephanie’s testimony, but the ending felt like
such a natural conclusion and this chapter was almost 3k, so I ended it where it was. I
promise that will be in the next chapter.
Please comment, kudos, and subscribe. It means the world to me that people are
following this story, and comments help keep the Beast that says no one does at bay.
Close: a short distance away or apart in space or time

Chapter Summary

The historic trial of Stephanie Rogers comes to a close.

Chapter Notes

Warnings
When Murdock begins to question Stephanie, slight medical horror. Skip to the line of asterisks if you do not wish the read that.
Mentions in Bucky’s POV of nausea and vomiting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Natasha clenches her hands into the hem of her skirt, urging her heart to stop racing. She, Tony, Sam, and Bucky had all sat down in the back row, quicker to make an escape if Bucky’s stomach got the best of him again.

Stephanie is being interrogated today.

Natasha doesn’t think anyone is going to handle it well.

Nat herself had felt pretty comfortable on the stand. All the records were already out there, already in evidence; all she’d had to do was express how vital Stephanie was to protecting the girls, and how awful the Red Room and Hydra were.

She’d stopped letting her grief and remorse drown her years ago in an act of survival.

Bucky is wearing a dark blue three piece suit today, hair swept back from his face into a neat ponytail, the front of it gelled back elegantly. His beard has been shaved.

He looks more like the thousands of drawings that were taken into police custody than Natasha has ever seen, more like the few photos of himself pre-serum, more like the Bucky Barnes of 1939 than Natasha had ever seen.

Ever since Nat has known him, Bucky’s looked pretty comfortable in the modern day; switching from khakis to skinny jeans, suspenders for flannels, dress shoes for doc martens.

He’s wearing his wedding ring.

Natasha has stayed up with him all night, has tried to stay up with him every night since they got back to New York, but she’s only human. Bucky hasn’t slept; he’s turned the lights off, laid in bed, shut his eyes, but she’s been right beside him every time, listening to him toss and turn, wrapping herself against his back when he’d let her. At some point he’s just going to collapse, and Natasha really hopes that they get the trial over with so at least they’ll know.

(Hopefully Bucky can collapse into bed with his wife, press their hands to each other’s faces and...
bodies and catalogue the differences. Nat knows Bucky insists they were never *like that* but Natasha had seen the drawings; she knows Stephanie is familiar with the bare shape of Bucky’s body, has drawn her own hands pressed against his stomach, has drawn him with his shirt open on his back, comfortable in the pillows, from the perspective of being on top of him, skirt billowed across her thighs where her knees bracket his hips. They might not have been *like that* but Clint and Nat have never been *like that* either, and every mission feels less like it’s chipped away their bodies when they’re pressed together.

**

**

Crawford: Soldier-

Rogers: It’s Stephanie. I have a name. It’s Stephanie. My Ma named me Stephanie. My name is Stephanie.

Crawford: Rogers, then. We’ve heard various testimonies. Thoughts?

Rogers: What?

Crawford: What do you think of the testimony? What conclusion do you think the jury should draw? What do you think the evidence is?

Rogers: I’m not sure I understand.

Crawford: We can circle back. What do you want out of this?

Rogers: I don’t understand.

Crawford: Ideally, how does this trial end for you?

Rogers: I wanna...I wanna finish my classes.

Crawford: Classes?

Rogers: I know the semester has probably ended but I was, I was taking classes. Engineering. History. Art.

Crawford: And what did you plan on using those classes for?

Rogers: I. I don’t know.

Crawford: During the interim of Hydra’s collapse and now, what have you been doing?

Rogers: Traveling. Trying to stop them from hurting anyone else.

Crawford: And do you think you finished that?

Rogers: I got all the bases I could remember; I was doing research on the side to see if there were any others. My memory isn’t so good.

Crawford: And in the meantime you took college classes?

Rogers: Yes.

Crawford: Engineering, history, and art. Did it ever occur to you to the people that you *killed* also may have been interested in all of that?
Rogers: Yes.

Crawford: And do you feel any remorse? For making it so they could never continue their learning? And you got to walk scot free to do yours?

Rogers: I never wanted to kill anyone.

Crawford: Even in Europe? In 1943? Did you want to kill anyone then?

Rogers: That was different.

Murdock: OBJECTION, your honor, is Mr. Crawford going to drag every World War II veteran before a jury?

Judge Langdon: Sustained. Mr. Crawford, I would advise you to stay on topic to the trial.

Crawford: Rogers, I’ve got something I’d like to read for you. Longing. Rusted. Furnace.

Rogers, visibly distressed: No. No, stop that. Don’t, please don’t do that.


Rogers, standing and covering her ears: STOP. STOP DOING THAT. STOP IT. NOW.


**

Natasha stands up like a shot as soon as Crawford starts reciting.

Nat knows this. She’s heard it before.

By ‘nine’ Stephanie is curled into herself on the floor of the witness stand, hands clenched over her ears and sobbing, screaming at him to stop.

He doesn’t.

“I’m sorry, did that need to be in Russian?” Crawford says venomously. “I’ll try again; желание, ржавый, семнадцать.”

Natasha pulls Bucky up by this arm. “You’ve gotta stop this.”

“What’s this? How?”

“They’re trigger words. A sequence. He’s trying to activate the Winter Soldier.”

“Fuck. Nat, how do I stop it.”

“How did you get her back on the helicarrier?”

Bucky looks at her for a moment before he scrambles out of their seats and runs towards the barrier, where he’s held back by a security guard.

“STEVIE,” he yells, “STEPH! DON’T LISTEN TO HIM OKAY LISTEN TO ME.”

Crawford keeps chanting, Stephanie keeps crying.
Bucky starts a chant of his own, loudly yelling, “Omnia vincit amor, et nos cedamus amori! Serva me, servabo te!”

Stephanie looks up at that, locks eyes on him.

Her gaze is the steely grimace of the Winter Soldier. Natasha doesn’t have any weapons, knows she can’t stop her without them. Maybe with Bucky helping, but-

“Ama me fideliter, fidem meam toto, decorde totaliter, et ex mente tota, sum presentialiter, absens in remota!” Bucky yells, looking ready to jump over the barrier.

Stephanie’s head quirks to the side, she shakes it as Bucky lights up, repeating himself.

“Ama me fideliter, fidem meam toto, decorde totaliter, et ex mente tota, sum presentialiter, absens in remota! Ama me fideliter, fidem meam toto, decorde totaliter, et ex mente tota, Sum presentialiter, absens in remota! Steph, you remember, come on!! I know you do!! Ama me fideliter-”

“Fidem meam toto,” Stephanie continues, standing up, “decorde totaliter, et ex mente tota, sum presentialiter, absens in remota.”

“What the HELL is going on?” Tony says, punched out of him.

“No idea,” Sam says, checking the exits, seeing how many people they’ll be able to get out each door if necessary. “We need to stop that guy from talking.”

Natasha is of the same mind, already down the aisle and grabbing Crawford by the back of his jacket. “SHUT THE HELL UP!” She screams in his face. “Don’t you see what you’re DOING!”

Things seem to quiet down after that, the whole room deadly still.

Stephanie and Bucky are still staring at each other, chanting, “Ama me fideliter, fidem meam toto, decorde totaliter, et ex mente tota, Sum presentialiter, absens in remota,” perfectly in rhythm, like a prayer they’ve always known.

“I’d like to know just what the hell is going on here, Mr. Crawford,” the judge demands.

“The Winter Soldier is a DANGER to society! I’m trying to prove that; this is the activation code Hydra left, with it she’s still usable to anyone who knows it,” Crawford says, struggling in Nat’s grip. She digs her nails into him tighter.

“She can be rehabilitated,” Natasha says, making sure she ‘accidentally’ spits on him. “I was.”

“Captain Barnes,” the judge starts, and Natasha realizes they’ve stopped their chanting. “Can I ask what you’ve been saying?”

Bucky looks sheepish. “Just. Something we used to say. It’s Latin.”

Crawford elbows her; Nat doesn’t move. “I feel it’s relevant to translate,” he sneers.

“Love conquers all things; let us yield to love,” Bucky recites, staring at his hands. “Save me and I will save you.” He swallows. “Love me faithfully, see how I am faithful, with all my heart and all my soul, I am with you, even though I am far away.”

A heavy silence settles over the room. Breathing feels inconsiderate.
Nat risks a glance at Stephanie; she’s shaking her head as if to clear it, the handcuffs left huge welts on her right wrist, the chain snapped in half.

“Crawford, you’re done with your questions. Murdock, finish this up so we can get this over with. Ms. Romanov, Captain Barnes, please return to your seats.”

**

Murdock: Sergeant Rogers?
Rogers: Yeah?

Murdock: I think it’s fair to say that, given what we’ve just seen, you did not want to become, what was it, the fist of Hydra?

Rogers: No. I didn’t. I would have rather they killed me. Or that I’d die when I fell down that ravine. And I think the record shows that.

Murdock: People who want to be held in captivity and suffer what you did wouldn’t generally put a gun to their own chest, no.

Rogers: Yeah, shame it didn’t work.

Murdock: Does your arm hurt?
Rogers: What?

Murdock: Your cybernetic arm. Does it hurt?
Rogers: God, so much that sometimes it’s all I can think about.

Murdock: Do you know the details of how it was attached?
Rogers: No. I was kinda out of it for that part.

Murdock: It’s grafted to your ribs. Screwed to your spine. Welded to your scapula. Based on the X-Rays we had done, it was also woven with steel threads into your musculature. Do you have feeling in it?

Rogers: Yeah. A lot.

Murdock: Can you give an example?
Rogers: I went shopping in Romania and I could feel a rotten spot on a plum.

Murdock: So I would say it’s safe to assume that they also played with your brain in order to make that happen?

Rogers: Pal, all they did with my brain was play.

Murdock: Did you consent to any of these medical procedures?

Rogers: I’d have rotted in hell first.

Murdock: I’d like it noted that Rogers said the same thing in answer on January 5th, 1945, two days after her supposed death, to a Hydra scientist. Your honor, no further questions.
Bucky isn’t there to listen to the closing statements; he’s too busy trying to puke his guts out in the bathroom. Sam is there this time, rubbing his back. The return to the courtroom to see the jury gone, but it doesn’t look like anyone else has been dismissed. Bucky isn’t sure what the normal protocol is. But before he can even think to ask, the jury is filing back in; the judge is asking for the verdict.

Bucky feels like he did the moment he figured out he wasn’t going to survive the plane crash. Free falling, can’t breathe, nothing to do but nosedive.

“We find the defendant, Stephanie Rogers, not guilty due to mental disease or defect.”

No one in the courtroom breathes either.

Bucky can’t believe it.

It’s too easy.

Bucky’s been alive too long to know that there’s got to be a catch.

“Mr. Murdock,” the judge asks, “are you and your client willing to go through with sentencing at this time?”

All eyes turn to Stephanie. Bucky can’t tell what her face is doing, but her shoulders are frozen mid breath.

“The jury decided she’s not guilty, your honor.”

“Yes, but due to the nature of her...mental defect, I find it more than reasonable that the defendant be held in custody until such time as she can be, what’s the word Ms. Romanov used? Deprogrammed. For the safety of society at large.”

No. No no no no no.

“Working together with the Shield team that helped Ms. Romanov, as well as several qualified mental health professionals, I believe that Sergeant Rogers could one day become a fully functional member of society.”

Bucky’s on the train again. He can’t do anything as she slips away one more time.

His stomach lurches, but there’s barely even bile left to come up so he ignores it.

And oh.

He’s crying.

“I feel Sergeant Rogers has proven that she is able to rehabilitate herself,” Murdock argues, standing.

“That is not your decision to make, Mr. Murdock. It’s mine. And I deem that Sergeant Rogers be held in custody until she is properly deprogrammed.”

“How long would that be?” Froggy Nelson asks, speaking in trial for the first time in days.

“Howver long it takes, Mr. Nelson.”
“Can he do that? Make an indefinite sentence?” Nelson asks Murdock.

“There’s no precedent for this, Mr. Nelson. We’re lacking in cases of generation-spanning assassins. Case dismissed.”

The police haul Stephanie off, face still frozen.

Bucky’s just there to watch.

Chapter End Notes

I know that several places are asking for money right now, but please consider donating to The Innocence Project. https://www.innocenceproject.org
https://www.curatedquotes.com/love-quotes/latin/
This is the end of part two, thank you for reading so far. The next chapter is the beginning of the third and final section (don’t worry it will still be SEVERAL chapters long, there’s still a lot of story left to cover). I had originally said that they would be titled after naturally occurring phenomena, and while that should still in part be true, I will also be using poetry quotes, poem titles, turns of phrase, and human made things/human experiences. These will be explained either in the chapter title or in the beginning notes.
Again, thank you so much for reading this much. It’s over 75k words, and your comments and kudos inspire me to continue to post this here. (So if you want to leave any comments, it would be greatly appreciated)
Sunrise: when the sun breaks over the horizon after a long night, signifying a new day

Chapter Summary

Now matter what else, time always passes

Chapter Notes

This chapter has three different POVs, this is not going to become the norm, I just really wanted to share the end now I hope you enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first month of Stephanie’s sentence was mostly sleeping, for Bucky.

There was hope now, basically. At some point, she’d be back. Hopefully. Probably. In theory.

But it was more than he’d had before, when they’d been talking about the death sentence. It was more than he had three years ago when he woke up. It’s more than he had in 1944 when he watched her fall.

So he came home from court and walked directly into his bedroom. Nat followed him, but he still didn’t think twice about stripping his suit off and tossing it on the ground.

He pulled his hair out of the ponytail. He probably needed a shower.

“Do you think I should shower?”

“Absolutely. It’ll give me time to grab snacks and pjs and queue up a movie.”

“Nat, I am one hundred percent gonna crash as soon as I get dressed.”

“Yeah, and I’m gonna lovingly rub your head and eat my body weight in Hot Cheetos and watch a romcom.”

“You like romcoms?”

“I have layers.”

The shower felt nice, as did laying his head on Nat’s lap in his massive bed, feeling her fingernails scratching his scalp.

* 

The second month was characterized by press conferences and PR events. The latter was mostly kids, which was easy, because Bucky just had to flash a smile and give some piggyback rides, tell the kids they could be superheroes too, and then head home.
The press events were awkward, stilted, and uncomfortable. All they wanted was to talk about Steph, about the trial, about the sentence.

But Steph wasn’t theirs to know about.

And the trial as already in the papers.

And Bucky wasn’t allowed to call Judge Langdon a dick or say the sentence was horseshit, so that was awkward, too.

So instead he talked about Hydra, he talked about his family, he talked about the charity events, he talked about criminal justice reform.

They didn’t really care what he had to say about any of that.

*

The third month was full of missions and raids and fighting, and the type of bone deep exhaustion Bucky hadn’t felt since the ‘30s.

He was pushing himself too hard, and he knew it, but he wasn’t sure how to stop.

*

The fourth month was just an itching, restless energy, festering under his skin and making him jumpy. Working out didn’t help, hanging out with his family didn’t help, working with Tony and Bruce in the lab didn’t help.

He wasn’t sure what to do with himself, really.

He walks Yasha a lot.

*

The fifth month was nothing but binge watching. He probably watched Star Wars all the way through four times, not even to mention the extended editions of Lord Of The Rings and The Hobbit.

Clint showed him a lot of musicals. Cats felt like a drunk fever dream and made his brain hurt but the music was weirdly good? So he fell into an ALW hole and found himself singing Jesus Christ Superstar, hating himself.

Takisha and Allie brought over their homework and did it at his kitchen table as he watched Phantom of the Opera and tried to recreate his Mama’s recipes.

*

Sixth month was when it finally felt like it might be normal again.

He reads a lot of poetry. Starts memorizing it so he can list it off to himself when the thoughts get too loud. The books are strewn all over his apartment, dog eared pages and flattened spines.

He gets the news at 3:27pm on a Tuesday.

*******
Prison isn’t what she expects. It’s a lot of meds, and talking about her feelings, and staring at the ceiling.

She loses track of the months; every day there’s only the fear of being put back in cryo. She can’t really help it; it’s happened too many times in the past.

Sometimes she snaps awake, convinced someone is coming to take her away, heart pounding.

It’s learned behavior, her psychiatrist says, she can’t help it.

She thinks about Bucky a lot.

She still can’t remember much, just snippets and darting, elusive ghosts. All she can remember are physical sensations; the weight of his hand on her neck, the feel of his hair between her fingers (human fingers, on a human hand, on a human arm - a real arm, not an arm that feels alien and outside of herself and wrong), the warmth of him between her thighs.

She’s not quite sure how she knows the last one, or to what extent his warmth traveled, but she lies in the cold emptiness of her cell, thinking about it, and longs and longs and longs.

*

It’s a lot of therapy, like, so much therapy. So much that it makes her head pound and her nose scrunch. None of her reactions feel like her own; she wishes Bucky were here to tell her about herself.

They gave all the possessions she acquired in her year and change on the run to Bucky. She’s sure there’s something in the sketchbooks she probably doesn’t want him to see, but she can’t remember what it was.

Her brain isn’t healing as fast as it was before. They do MRIs and CAT scans every day, and she does her best not to panic when put in that horrible tube.

She’s a science experiment all over again.

*

Around what she thinks is the four month mark she’s so fucking bored she almost wishes for the release of cryo because at least then she could SLEEP.

*

If she has to talk about her feelings one more time, she’s going to commit arson.

Her therapist really doesn’t like that.

But hey. It’s how she’s feeling.

*

She doesn’t get much better at remembering, but they make vague promises to her that those will come in time. She was free and out of cryo for over a year last time, and she’d only just gotten started with remembering most of her life on her own.

Her therapist insinuates that it’ll be easier to remember once she’s out of ‘her current situation’ (as Dr. Prud says) and can ask people who knew her (meaning Bucky, but Dr. Prud doesn’t like to say
that name because it still makes Steph freeze up inside sometimes). Steph’s starting to wish they’d stop lying about her chances of getting out of here.

*

She’s totally zoned out one day during her therapy session, more so than usual, and only looks up when Dr. P calls her name.

“Stephanie. I’m going to test something. I need you to remain calm.”

Steph contemplates smothering herself with a pillow. She hopes this test doesn’t involve her brain being poked again.

“I’m serious, Stephanie. Try not to even tense up. Remember that you are safe here, and I am only doing this with the best possible intentions.”

“Okay.”

Steph closes her eyes against the suffocating blank whiteness of the room, exhales as deeply as she can.

And then Dr. Prud says, “желание.”

Steph just breathes again, eyes squeezed shut. Her stomach clenches, but nothing else does.

“семнадцать.”

Another word, another breath. There’s no buzzing at the back of her head, the base of her spine, where the arm connects.

“ржавый.”

Another deep inhale. Another deep exhale. Her ribs ache with how much they have to move.

It keeps going. Dr. Prud continues the list, and Stephanie continues breathing, not a click in her brain telling her to release, to shift, to change, and she stays herself (herselfherselfherselfherselfherself).

It’s over as easy as it started.

If Stephanie didn’t know Russian, hadn’t lived what those words mean, didn’t have any idea what it felt like when they hurt, it’d sound almost like a song.

*

She didn’t have clothes when she came in here, and she wasn’t allowed any visitors.

So she’s wearing some sweats, a t shirt, and running shoes that had never been claimed as the gates open and the sun shines down on her again for the first time.

She waits for them to shutter closed behind her again. Then she tilts her head up to the sun, feels the warmth of it on her face, and cries.

And laughs.

And cries.
Bucky hasn’t stopped moving since they got the call yesterday afternoon.

Tony had sat by and watched as Bucky had cleaned his apartment in a manic-life frenzy, fluffing the pillows and spreading Stephanie’s belongings out in piles on the table. He’d washed Yasha and made a grocery list and vacuumed the floor, again.

“I don’t know if her dust allergy still exists,” he’d admitted when Tony had stepped in when he glanced at the duster for the fourth time that day.

“Serum fixes all your shit, huh? So it probably fixed hers.”

That got Bucky to sit down on the couch with him for a bit, leg bouncing all the whole.

Until he’d had the thought that Steph might want her own space, which had led to cleaning and furnishing the floor directly above Bucky’s. It’d been furnished already, but Bucky insisted on dragging up a rug and some pillows and more blankets than any single person should have. “She hates the cold,” he’d answered simply when Tony had prompted.

Tony couldn’t tell if it was a fact from before, or a wild guess based on her history, or an admission from Bucky himself.

*

They make quite the little procession on their way to the prison; Bucky, Nat, and Sam all in one car, with Jim Morris’s grandson sitting with Bruce and Tony in the back. Apparently Granddad wasn’t up to the trip, but he’d given Ethan specific instructions.

It’d all been Jim’s idea, but the other members of their party - every Jones descendant in the area, Bucky’s four college friends, and the aforementioned Avengers - had taken it easy as breathing. Damn, Bucky even looked excited. Nat had vetoed his driving ability; he was so excited he was practically vibrating.

The Avengers-centric car arrived first, barely two minutes after the assigned time, to see Stephanie Rogers standing with her arms wide open, face tilted towards the sun, palms upturned, and body shaking.

It’s pretty obvious she hasn’t seen them. She seems to be in some private world, and Tony’s inclined to let her enjoy it.

The other cars pull up, and she still hasn’t noticed them. Her arms finally fall to her sides and she spins around, laughing.

Everyone looks at each other and takes a communal deep breath.

“SHOULD OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT, AND NEVER BROUGHT TO MIND-”

(Bucky had told them, laughing, near hysterical, about how that was how they’d celebrate every New Year, from beside her Ma’s hospital bed, to their freezing apartment, to who knows where in Europe, pressed close together and singing the words into each other’s ears)

“SHOULD OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT, AND AULD LANG SYNE-”

(And it had become a thing the Commandos just did, every time they drank together, even after
Steph and Buck were long gone, even when the visits got less frequent, even when it was barely letters and emails, as the memories grew further away, they’d sign off everything ALS, for the captain and sergeant they’d lost)

“FOR AULD LANG SYNE, MY DEAR-”

(How Bucky had cried his first New Years without her, hugging his arms around his chest and sobbing his way through the words, because Bucky Barnes wasn’t a man afraid to admit when he cried)

“FOR AULD LANG SYNE, WE’LL TAKE A CUP OF KINDNESS YET, FOR AULD LANG SYNE.”

Stephanie had been startled by the first line, but now she just stands there, hands over her mouth and eyes flitting over all their faces. The sun shines down on her, and her face sparkles with tears.

“WE TWO HAVE RUN ABOUT THE HILLS, AND PICKED THE DAISIES FINE-”

Bucky begins slowly walking forward, like he had so many months ago when they’d first found her from that Hydra scum.

“BUT WE’VE WANDERED MANY A WEARY FOOT, SINCE AULD LANG SYNE-”

Something seems to break in both of them, at the same time, and they start running across the clearing towards each other.

Tony thinks they’ll slam into each other and onto the ground, but like something out of a movie, Steph launches herself up just as Bucky braces down, and she ends up with her arms in a vice around his shoulders, his arms just as strong across her back. Instead of leaving her feet dangling a few inches above the ground, Bucky takes a hand to guide her thighs around his waist, and sinks into the grass.

It almost feels to intimate to gaze on, but Tony can’t tear his eyes away from the way they stare into each other’s eyes for long silent moments.

When they start to laugh at the same time, hands grazing over faces and arms, fingers tangled in hair, the world finally feels like it can breathe.

Chapter End Notes

I needed to leave this on a semi-hopeful ending both because the last chapter was rough, but also because for personal reasons I need to remind myself there is hope in the world.
I have a deeply personal relationship with the song Auld Lang Syne, and always find myself in tears upon hearing it not for bad reasons, it just makes me emotional.
Please comment, and as with last time, I gently encourage you to donate to The Innocence Project https://www.innocenceproject.org/

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