The one where they get married.

After "a lot of fucking therapy," Bucky settles into rhythms and routines of life in modern Red Hook. With the love(s) of his life by his side and a new penchant for beekeeping, along with a little medical tourism in Wakanda, he discovers that there is a life after being the world's deadliest assassin.

Oh, and Steve and Bucky (finally) get married.

And, as always, come for the romance, stay for the hipster tapas and hamburger buckets.

... 

Sequel to both Project Regenesis and Waffle House Jogs and Memory Walks, but you can go in cold, too.
Now with Chapter 1 art by yawpkatsi!
Bucky nudged into him. “Is nature irritating your sense of justice today?”

“Yes.” Steve practically huffed. “Well, doesn’t it seem a little unfair to you? I mean, they’ll still go out looking for pollen and nectar and… whatever else bees look for. How’s that a drain on resources?”

Bucky rolled his eyes. “Take it up with the queen bee, Steve.”

Aaaaand this series is back... five months later than I had intended to start posting, but back all the same. As it turns out, I have enough material for two full stories, so there will be this one... and then another one. This one is completely written though, so posting should be pretty consistent.

Of course, *Infinity War* is going to come along and wreck me, but here we go anyway.

If you're one of my regular readers, I love you and welcome back. If you're new here, I love you too and enjoy the ride. Let's get started.
The sun beat down on Bucky’s back, the weather unseasonably warm for October.

A baseball cap sat parked on his head - the better to hide his still-bristly hair - and under the relative shade of the brim, he studied the wooden boxes and supplies spread out on the roof before him. He clutched a book in his right hand - *Natural Beekeeping for Beginners*.

“So the Warre hive,” he gestured with the book to the wooden boxes, “lets us keep a small, reasonable amount of bees to start.”

Steve finished screwing together the last parts of the wooden frame of the hive and laid down the drill. He wiped a bead of sweat off his forehead with the back of his gloved hand and looked over Bucky’s shoulder at the book.

“I don’t know, Buck,” he said with a slight frown. “Since when does ten thousand bees count as small and reasonable?”

Off to the side, a screened, wooden box buzzed with the energy of ten thousand bees waiting to be let into their new home.

Bucky returned the small frown. “Ten thousand bees is considered a starter package, Steve. That’s three pounds of bees right there.”

Steve chuckled and shook his head, looking over at the box. “I still think it’s hilarious that you can order bees by the pound. ‘Yeah, I’ll take a quarter pound of sugar, a half pound of flour, and three pounds of bees, if you don’t mind.’”

Bucky’s frown melted into a tiny smile. “And have it all delivered by UPS.”

He had signed for the package of bees only an hour ago, in fact, and then he and Steve had gone up to the roof to assemble the hive. Or rather, Steve assembled the hive while Bucky kept him company and read aloud passages from *Natural Beekeeping for Beginners*.

It would be a few more weeks until his new arm was ready.

“So the bees are supposed to what, just go into the hive and then immediately settle in for hibernation?” Steve peeled off his gloves and set them down beside him. “Won’t they be disoriented when they wake up in the springtime?”

“Well, we’re going to feed them sugar syrup to keep them from starving.” Bucky glanced at a page in the book. “And they’ll occasionally leave the hive for cleansing rituals. And,” he read directly off the page, “*the drone bees might become a drain on the hive’s resources and be expelled.* So I guess they’d better pull their weight in the next few months.”

“Expelled?” Steve’s eyes widened and an incredulous look came over his face. “How are they supposed to pull their own weight when all any of them are going to be doing over the winter is sleeping?”

Bucky shrugged and continued to read aloud. “*The drone bees’ sole purpose is to spread the genetics of the colony by mating with virgin queens from other colonies. Once they mate, they die successful bees.*” He smirked in response to the look on Steve’s face. “*Unsuccessful bees return to the hive to eat honey and pollen, draining the hive of its valuable resources while contributing nothing.*”
“Bees have a very different definition of success than I do,” Steve said, shaking his head and looking morally offended. “So what about in the springtime? How far are they supposed to fly looking for flowers? Or -” He scowled. “Other beehives with virgin queens?” He snorted. “They sound like Vikings or something.”

Bucky nudged into him. “Is nature irritating your sense of justice today?”

“Yes.” Steve practically huffed. “Well, doesn’t it seem a little unfair to you? I mean, they’ll still go out looking for pollen and nectar and… whatever else bees look for. How’s that a drain on resources?”

Bucky rolled his eyes. “Take it up with the queen bee, Steve.”

Shaking his head again, Steve put his gloves back on and picked up the buzzing box. It took some effort, and there was more than a little awkward fumbling, but eventually the bees made it into the hive. A stray few buzzed aimlessly around the outside for a while, but the book said that they’d find their way in eventually.

“Well, Buck, what do you say?” Steve shucked his gloves again and slung an arm around Bucky’s shoulders. “Is that a job well done or what?”

Bucky looked appreciatively at the hive. He doubted very much that he would have been able to put the thing together with one arm, but he hadn’t even needed to ask Steve for assistance either. The packages came in the mail, and Steve had simply assumed he’d be the one putting the hive together.

He leaned his head against Steve’s, a smile drifting across his face. “I knew there was a reason I agreed to marry you.”

“Aw, Buck.” Steve turned his head to kiss Bucky on the temple and gave his shoulders an affectionate squeeze. “You know I love you.”

“I mean,” Bucky continued, “what’s the point of having a super-soldier fella if you don’t put him to work?”

Steve scowled and knocked his head against Bucky’s. “Yeah, speaking of which, we’d better get you your normal amount of limbs back. That way I can start putting you to work again.”

Before Bucky could reply, his phone vibrated in his pocket. He pushed Natural Beekeeping for Beginners into Steve’s hands and pulled out the phone. A text from Natasha read:

//Ribs are almost ready :)//

Bucky shoved the phone back into his pocket. “We’d better get down there before they eat all the good stuff.”

“I wouldn’t blame them if they got started before letting us know.” Steve tucked the book under his arm and started towards the door. “They know us well enough by now to know there won’t be any leftovers.”

Downstairs in their apartment, Natasha and Sharon sat at the table, working their way through a bottle of red wine, while Sam and Wanda put the finishing touches on dinner. Sam apparently had been keeping up a running narration of the food preparation.

“So we have beef ribs, also called monster ribs or even dinosaur ribs, depending on how quirky you’re feeling.” He gestured with a wooden spoon. “We have baked mac n’ cheese. We have
jalapeño cornbread. We have fancy potato salad dressed with shallot and Dijon vinaigrette.”

Wanda gestured to a plate of sauteed mixed vegetables in stewed tomatoes. “And we also have sataraš for those of you who would like to consume more than carbohydrates tonight.”

Sam snorted good-naturedly.

“-and an actual green salad,” Wanda finished.

“With croutons,” Sam added.


Natasha smiled at Bucky and Steve over the rim of her wineglass. “How’d the hive building go, boys?”

“Great.” Steve grinned and leaned against the doorframe with his arms loosely folded. “Hive’s built, bees are settling in as we speak, and when winter’s over, apparently there’s going to be a lot of pollen-searching and queen-impregnating.”

“And honey,” chimed Sharon as she refilled Natasha’s wineglass and her own. “Let’s not forget the honey.”

“Most important part,” Natasha agreed, and they clinked their glasses together and knocked back a mouthful of wine each.

Steve and Sam brought the food out from the kitchen and arrayed it at the table, and before long all of them had full plates. Bucky resisted dumping the entire platter of beef ribs onto his plate, but it was a very near thing.

“How do you not have a cooking show by now?” Steve licked rib sauce off his fingers and turned to Sam. “This food is amazing.”

“Don’t I know it.” Sharon smiled and ate another forkful of baked macaroni and cheese.

“Practice, my dude.” Sam drained off his wine. “Practice.”

“Well, I’d like you to feel free to come over and practice in this kitchen anytime.” Steve picked up another rib. “It’ll do us as much good as it does you.”

“Because we can’t cook worth a damn,” Bucky said between mouthfuls of rib. “Except breakfast. Steve makes breakfast.”

Bucky hadn’t tried cooking again since his attempt at making borscht a few months back had been interrupted by low-rent assassins. Life had gotten pretty busy. Also, trying to learn to cook with only one arm seemed like a lot of trouble when he had ten good takeout places programmed into his fancy StarkTech phone.

Sam topped up everyone’s wine glasses and then held up his own. “Let’s have a toast,” he grinned, “to you finally figuring out when and where the wedding is.”

Bucky smiled into his potato salad.

They had received dozens of offers from people willing and eager to perform the ceremony, but they had finally settled on the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn Heights. The society had a very nice looking church - which Steve had mentioned wanting to draw once or twice or five
times - but more importantly, they prided themselves on being a welcoming and inclusive community.

“That means they welcome the LGBTQ crowd,” Natasha had pointed out.

That was good enough for Bucky, and he knew it was a point of weird pride to Steve that they got married in Brooklyn. (Even if it wasn’t Red Hook specifically.)

“It’s in January.” Steve helped himself to another portion of Wanda’s sauteed vegetables. “Not because there’s anything special about January, but because I didn’t feel like waiting any longer than absolutely necessary to get married.”

“Just rushing him down the aisle.” Sam cut off a piece of rib. “Where’s the honeymoon?”

“Goa,” Bucky, Steve, and Natasha said at once.

“Dear God, they’re speaking as one.” Sharon drained off her wine and held the empty glass out to Sam. “Fill me up. I’m going to need it.”

“Why Goa?” Wanda asked.

“Steve’s never been to India.” Bucky ate a heaping mouthful of salad. “And there’s palm trees.”

Steve munched on another piece of cornbread. “And beautiful beaches, from everything I’ve read.”

“And the boys love their Indian food,” Natasha said over a forkful of mac n’ cheese.

“And we all figured that southern India was a pretty unlikely place for Hydra or anybody else to cause any trouble when we’re on our honeymoon,” Steve finished, settling back in his chair.

Bucky glowered at him. “He figures. I don’t figure.”

“Well, less likely than Siberia at any rate.” Natasha speared a forkful of salad with a light crunch. “Or most of Europe, Asia, and the Americas. And Goa has better beaches than any place I can think of in Africa, so it seemed like a good idea.”

Wanda broke off a piece of cornbread. “Bring sunblock.” She gestured to Steve. “Especially you, unless you want to look like a blonde lobster.”

Bucky snorted into his wineglass.

“Hey.” Steve gave them both a look. “I am not that pale.”

“Aren’t you Irish, Rogers?” Natasha raised an eyebrow.

“Yes.” Steve looked somewhat ruffled. “So?”

“I think what she’s saying is, the Irish aren’t exactly known for their ability to tan.” Sam raised an eyebrow. “And yeah, super-soldier or not, the sun in India’s gonna burn you redder than a chili pepper.”

Bucky snorted and helped himself to a third serving (or fourth?) of the potato salad. “So… sunblock. Add it to the list.”

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Bucky sat in the cramped, puke green office of his social worker, Darien Nash. A small window overlooked the parking lot and the vomit-colored cinder block walls were covered in crayon drawings (done by Nash’s kids) and photographs of Nash’s time in the army when he had been deployed to Iraq (and where his right leg had been blown off by a faulty antipersonnel mine).

The overhead light reflected off of Nash’s bald scalp and his bright pink button-down shirt stood out in contrast against his very dark skin. A Jenga block tower stood tall on his desk, and it was currently his turn.

“I’ve been making lists,” Bucky said casually.

Nash glanced up at him. “You distracting me on purpose?”

Bucky continued as if he hadn’t heard him. “Sunblock is on the ‘Honeymoon in Goa’ list now.”

It was an odd and interesting feeling, making a list of things he didn’t want to forget to bring with him on his honeymoon. He was very bad at keeping track of dates, but if anyone had asked him probably six months ago if he ever thought he’d need to do such a thing…

Well, the answer would have obviously been no. Followed by a scowl.

“You never said you were honeymooning in Goa.” Nash smiled as he carefully tapped a block out from the lower part of the tower and set it down beside him. “What else have you got on that list?”

Bucky studied the block tower thoughtfully. “Sandals?” he finally said. “Towels, maybe?”

His short-term memory was shit. Both Jean Grey and Bucky’s therapist, Dr. Isaac Levitt, thought it was likely due to the brain damage he had sustained in the fall. Oh, and the seventy years of repeated trips to the mental recalibration chair.

There was no real cure for brain damage, Ms. Grey had explained, and so Darien Nash was helping Bucky learn to compensate. And a few ways they were doing that was by making lists and extensively using the calendar function on his StarkTech phone.

“Can’t forget a birthday if your calendar reminds you two weeks beforehand, then a week beforehand, then the day before, and then the day of,” Nash had explained cheerfully.

Carefully Bucky eased a block out from the bottom of the tower. “We just decided a few days ago to honeymoon in Goa. Steve’s never been there.”

“I haven’t either.” Nash reached out for the tower, hesitated, frowned, and leaned in to peer at it. “Have you? That you remember, I mean.”

Bucky was silent for a moment, then, “I don’t know. I’ve been to a lot of places. It blends together after a while.”

Now that he had finished psychic therapy and Jean Grey had uncovered everything that both the Soviets and Hydra had done to him, memories of his previous life were beginning to return to him in dribs and drabs. Sometimes he wrote the fragments down so he wouldn’t forget about them again.

Sometimes he just liked to sit or lay in place and let the memories drift across his mind.
“Doubt I’ve been there in my previous life.” He watched as Nash tried to unsuccessfully stabilize the Jenga tower. “If I had, Steve would’ve known about it.”

The tower crashed, scattering blocks across the desk and floor.

Bucky cracked a small smile. “Guess that means I win.”

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Red Hook, Brooklyn
that evening

Bucky had stood in the shower for a long time, letting the hot water wash over his body. With his hair still bristly and short and his metal arm still missing (which meant he didn’t need to wash between the plates with a wire brush), he could be in and out of the shower in minutes.

But he remembered: the beach on a cold, crisp night in winter. A cardboard container of beer in glass bottles. Steve as he was supposed to be - scrawny and short and pale - shivering in a well-worn jacket that was a few sizes too big and patched at the elbows.

And himself - Bucky, because he had always been Bucky back then - beer warm on his breath. He had definitely drunk too much - the empty bottles were mostly his, Steve still nursing his one bottle - and he was feeling loose and daring.

“You’re all right, Stevie.” He slung an arm around Steve’s thin shoulders and pulled him close. “You know that?”

He was feeling stupid and dangerous.

“You’re all right.” He looked at Steve for a long moment, then closed the gap between them and pressed his lips to Steve’s.

What had happened after that?

Bucky came out of the bathroom in a cloud of steam, towel wrapped around his waist. Steve sat in their bed, back propped against pillows, tablet in hand. Natasha was spending one of her rare nights at the Tower, so it was just the two of them.

“We kissed once,” Bucky said without preamble. He wanted to see what Steve’s reaction would be. “Didn’t we?”

Steve looked up from the tablet with a momentarily blank expression on his face, but a smile spread across it a moment later.

“Well, we did.” Steve switched off the screen of the tablet and set it down on the nightstand. “We couldn’t have been more than nineteen or so. You were drunk.” He smiled at the memory, his eyes going distant. “I sometimes wonder what you were thinking.”

Bucky studied his expression before replying. “I think I was feeling brave.” He dropped the towel to the floor and pulled on his rocketship-patterned pajamas pants (courtesy of Dr. Hank McCoy). “Or idiotic. Probably both.”

“Did you ever think of me like that back then?” Steve’s smile grew more questioning, but it didn’t leave his face. “Was I really the only one who was completely clueless?”
“Did I think of you ‘like that’?” Bucky scowled and climbed into bed, shifting around so he could lay his head in Steve’s lap and look up at him. “Like what?”

“Like the way you think of me now.” Steve looked down at him with what was probably supposed to have been a glare, but which was still more than half a smile. “Like the way you’d have to think of another guy in order to put your head in his lap like you’re doing right now.”

Bucky’s scowl deepened. “Your lap is comfortable. That’s all.”

“That’s all?” Steve dropped a pillow neatly on his head. “We’re getting married in a few months and that’s all?”

Bucky swatted the pillow aside. “Yep. That’s all. That’s definitely all.”

“I’m serious, though.” Steve picked the pillow back up and tucked it behind his shoulders. “Do you remember what was going through your head at the time? Did you think of me as a potential fella even way back then, and it just took me this long to catch up?”

Bucky looked up at him thoughtfully. He licked his lips. “I don’t know,” he finally said. “I know that at the time, I wanted to do it. But I don’t remember what happened after that night.”

Steve chuckled. “I brought you home and put you to bed. You were so drunk you could hardly walk a straight line.” He smiled warmly and ran a hand over Bucky’s hair. “But I remember when I’d put you in bed and I was getting up to go, you looked up at me all sappily and said ‘You’re all right, Stevie.’ I remember that made me smile.”

“And then next day?”

“I didn’t bring it up.” Steve shrugged and stroked Bucky’s hair again. “Like I said, I didn’t have much of a clue back then. I just put it down to you being drunk and let it go.” He sighed. “In hindsight, I kind of wish I hadn’t.”

Bucky leaned his head into Steve’s palm and closed his eyes. “I wonder what that would have changed?”

“Who knows?” Steve let out a long, slow breath. “Everything, probably.” He snorted once, briefly. “It certainly would’ve taken a bit of the pressure off of all those blind dates.”

Bucky hummed in response to that. Steve continued to stroke his hair and it would have been very easy to drift off just like that.

“That being said, I’m happy things worked out as well as they did.” Steve bent down to kiss Bucky on the forehead, his lips lingering there before trailing down to Bucky’s mouth. “You’re here, and you’re getting better, and we’re getting married in a few months.”

A small smile drifted across Bucky’s mouth just as their lips met.

“Yeah,” he murmured when they parted. He traced a finger down Steve’s cheek. “It’s nice, isn’t it?”

He would have never believed it a few months ago, but it was.

Nice.
As always, comments are a writer’s crack, so deal me up some good ones. Kudos are like a quick hit and also quite welcome.
He heaved a satisfied sigh. "But yeah, I’m getting married. To Bucky, actually."

Peggy didn’t look even slightly surprised. “It’s about time.”

“Aw, come on, Peg.” He threw up his hands and sighed. “Am I seriously the only one who didn’t see this coming three-quarters of a century ago?’”

I’ve been wanting to write Peggy for several stories now. So here she is. As well as Miles Morales. So here he is. And away we go!

Red Hook, Brooklyn
a few days later

The apartment was quiet, and Bucky was beginning to doze off on the couch.

A rerun of one of the Food Network serials played on the television - the spiky haired guy in the flames shirt drove around the country, checking out grab joints and diners and sampling the local cuisine. Bucky only half-watched, eyelids beginning to droop.

The front door buzzed, startling him awake. Despite Stark’s fancy, high tech upgrade of Steve’s security system, they still had the obnoxiously loud door buzzer. (Or maybe Stark had kept it that way on purpose? From what Bucky had seen of the man so far, that seemed likely enough.)

A neighborhood kid - Miles - stood in front of the security camera, dark skin glistening in the unseasonable heat. He waved at the camera with one hand, his other clutching a heavy plastic bag. He had brought the goods.

Bucky buzzed him in, and a minute later, he heard Miles’ footsteps down the hallway right before the kid breezed through the front door.

“Hey, Sarge.” He grinned and held up the plastic bag. “I got everything. Even grabbed the last two boxes of Ring Dings.”

Bucky frowned. “What, they were out?”

“They were almost out.” Miles drifted past him, heading toward the couch. “Now they’re just out.”

Bucky settled back onto the couch and watched Miles lay out the goods. Next to the two boxes of Ring Dings, he set a few tubes of Pringles, some Hostess pies, a couple of Little Debbie Honey
Buns, a bag of powdered Donettes, and two bananas.

“For our health,” Miles explained. “We don’t even need to eat ‘em if we’re not feeling it, but they’re there for us to look at.”

Bucky raised an eyebrow at that.

Miles shrugged. “Health by osmosis.”

So that’s what they learned in tenth grade science these days.

Bucky had run into Miles at the neighborhood bodega back in August while on… medical leave? Rest? Vacation? He didn’t really know what to call waiting around for his new arm to be completed while Steve and Natasha continued to go to work every day, but that’s what he was doing. Waiting, going through his Netflix queue, and taking walks around the neighborhood.

(Steve called it “being out on disability,” and that’s what his official SHIELD paperwork said too, but whatever. He still got paid, which was weird. Being paid for doing nothing but sitting around and eating snacks.)

(Getting paid for his work at all was still something of a novelty to him.)

Anyway, Miles had quite literally run into him in the snack food aisle and instead of recoiling (or muttering an apology and dashing away), his whole face had lit up with recognition and he offered to help Bucky carry his snacks and drinks home.

“’Cause you don’t have that sweet robot arm anymore,” he explained.

For some reason, Bucky had agreed. Miles followed him home lugging three boxes of LaCroix in assorted flavors, and they ended up watching several episodes of *Chopped* while going through two boxes of Twinkies.

Somehow that had become a routine, even once school started back up for Miles. Every few days, he came around to see if Bucky needed a snack run, Bucky would hand over some money, and Miles would return loaded down with as many snacks as twenty-five dollars (fifty if he were especially peckish) could buy. And then they would watch *Chopped* while eating at least half of the haul.

“How the hell did you even bring something like that up?” Bucky had asked once (through a mouthful of Twinkie).

Miles snorted. “Course she knows. She’s good. She thinks Captain America’s house is the safest place for me to be.”

Bucky had wanted to ask if Miles’ mother was really okay with her son eating snacks and watching television with the so-called ‘world’s deadliest assassin’ but the words stuck in his throat.

How the hell did you even bring something like that up?

But Miles must have caught a look on his face. “Hey, you’re marrying the dude, right? That’s like a character reference right there. Besides,” he had shrugged a bit too casually, “my dad died over in Afghanistan. Mom knows what it’s like for soldiers.”

Bucky didn’t know what to say to that either, but he passed Miles a Twinkie and they continued to watch television.

And so they had their routine.
Today on *Chopped*, they watched as the remaining contestants made increasingly creative dishes using Gummi Bears and chia seeds.

“This is pretty hipster.” Miles polished off a Ring Ding. “Put it on a cutting board and it would look good in any gentrified Brooklyn restaurant.”

Bucky kept his eyes trained on the screen; he had never seen anyone make mason jar cream cake topped with fruit gum candy and unprocessed whole grains.

“So how are the bees?” Miles asked through a mouthful of Pringles.

They had gone up to the roof the other day and gazed through the window on one side of the Warre hive, watching the bees set up shop.

Bucky bit off half of a Honey Bun. “Buzzing.”

The security system beeped suddenly, the front door briefly rattled, and in walked Steve. He unslung the shield from his back and set it down by the door in its usual place, though he was dressed in civvies, not his uniform.

“Sup, Cap?” Miles crunched a potato chip, his eyes glued to the screen where an improbable dessert pizza was being prepared by a hassled-looking woman.

“Hi, Miles.” Steve took off his shoes and came in, sitting on the other side of Bucky and putting an arm around him. “How’s school?”

“We’re making laser beams in science class.” Miles grinned. “Hoping to hit the moon with them.”

Steve raised an eyebrow at that, then turned to Bucky. “Are you helping him with that?”

Bucky scowled. “I don’t know anything about tenth grade science. Or laser beams.”

“That’s Saint Joe’s for you.” Miles tossed Steve a package of Ring Dings, and for the next few minutes they watched the remainder of *Chopped* in silence.

The hassled-looking woman and her dessert pizza won, and Miles pushed himself off the couch with a sigh.

“I got homework. Gotta make those laser beams.” He stopped at the door and grinned. “Another snack run in a few days, Sarge?”

Bucky nodded. “It’s on my calendar.”

And it was, too.

Once Miles had shut the door behind him, Bucky resettled onto the couch so that he was flat on his back with his head in Steve’s lap.

“So,” he said after a moment, “how did it go?”

“Good.” Steve reclined against the armrest and blew out a long sigh. “She was having a good day.”

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He’d gotten the call from Sharon early that morning.
The doctors down in Virginia had said Peggy was having a rare period of extended lucidity, and Sharon had offered to bring Steve down for the visit she was planning. And naturally, he’d been only too eager to agree. After all, he’d been wanting to tell Peggy the news ever since it had become news in the first place.

The trip down would normally have taken around four hours, but Sharon’s flying Porsche had gotten them there in about an hour and a half. Which had still given them plenty of time to talk, and they’d had a pleasant enough chat. She and Sam had apparently taken up a search for the world’s best burger, and they’d come up with some pretty stringent criteria.

Mostly, though, he’d been preoccupied with what he was going to say when he saw Peggy again.

Sharon had gone in to see Peggy first, and he’d sat there in the parlor of her small suite of rooms, lost in reminiscence.

How long had it been since he’d seen her? How many times had he thought about heading down for a visit, only to let his fear of whether or not she’d remember him freeze his feet to the floor? And for that matter, how did he know whether she’d even be able to go this entire visit without suddenly recoiling in shock to find him there, still believing he’d died more than seven decades ago?

How could anyone know?

But a voice in his head - or maybe in his heart - had told him that there was something more important than that. Something else no one could know for sure, but something everyone could guess at fairly well. Every day that Peggy was still here on Earth was a gift, and it was a gift that wouldn’t last for nearly as long as he wanted it to.

And if he let too many more opportunities to see her go by, he’d regret every last one of them bitterly for the rest of his days.

Sharon came out of the bedroom after about a half hour. “She’s having a good day,” she murmured, placing a hand on Steve’s arm. “When you’re finished, if she’s still having a good day, let’s order lunch and eat with her.”

“Yeah.” Steve smiled up at her a bit nervously. “Yeah, I’d like that.”

She’d been sitting up in bed when he’d walked in the door with the bouquet of wildflowers he’d picked up at a local florist, and she gave him a warm smile as he held them out for her to see.

“Hi, Peggy.” He couldn’t manage to keep his smile from being as bashful as it had ever been around her. “How’ve you been?”

“You brought me flowers.” A twinkle came into Peggy’s eyes. “You must have some news you’re simply bursting to tell me.”

“You brought me flowers.” A twinkle came into Peggy’s eyes. “You must have some news you’re simply bursting to tell me.”

“Can’t put anything past you.” He smiled even more broadly and looked around the room for something to put the flowers in. The decorative vase on the corner table seemed likely enough. “Have you been reading the news lately?”

Peggy snorted. “Oh, who has time for the news?” She watched as Steve unwrapped the flowers and set them up in the vase. “I play bridge, and you should know that I’m very good. Why just the other day, I won a hundred dollars from a septuagenarian who thinks he’s, I believe the term is, a ‘player.’”

Steve snorted, his smile never diminishing. “And did you set the poor kid straight?”
“Well, I certainly cleaned him out.” She smiled. “And we’re going to use the money to buy all that Chinese food Sharon promised me for lunch.”

“This is why you’re my best girl.”

He pulled his chair closer and gently took her hand, bringing it to his lips for a kiss. Her skin was gauzy, thin, and spotted here and there, but her grip was steady. Her eyes were shining and focused. She was there, and he was reminded of all the reasons he’d fallen in love with her so long ago.

Her fingers brushed gently over his cheek. “God, you still look so young. Just like you did all those years ago.”

“It really never feels like ‘all those years ago’.” He shook his head, his smile turning wistful. “I still find myself sometimes thinking it’s not even 1950 yet.”

A flicker of sadness crossed Peggy’s eyes. “It’s been a long time. A very long time.” She shook her head, and the moment passed. “Are you happy these days?”

“I’m doing all right.”

Steve felt a shadow of melancholy pass over his face in response to Peggy’s momentary sadness. He wished for the hundredth time that she hadn’t had to live with the thought of him being dead for such a long time. But the melancholy quickly passed as his mind settled on the reason he was doing as well as he was lately.

“Better than all right, actually. I’ve got some big news for you.”

She studied his face for a moment. “Should I guess? Or would you like to try to surprise me?”

“Guess.” He grinned, knowing she’d never guess it in a million years. “It’ll be fun to see what you come up with.”

“Very well.” She tapped her fingers against her lap. “You’re getting married?”

His face fell.

“You’ve always been quite sweet,” she said calmly. “Utterly guileless, but sweet.”

“I’ve been hearing that a lot lately,” he muttered, shaking his head and smiling. “I should’ve known you’d figure it out.” He heaved a satisfied sigh. “But yeah, I’m getting married. To Bucky, actually.”

Peggy didn’t look even slightly surprised. “It’s about time.”

“Aw, come on, Peg.” He threw up his hands and sighed. “Am I seriously the only one who didn’t see this coming three-quarters of a century ago?”

An amused smile cross Peggy’s face. “Well, you were never very perceptive.”

It occurred to him just then how similar Peggy’s sense of humor was to Natasha’s in some ways. And how, if they hadn’t been on opposite sides during the Cold War, they probably would have made pretty good friends.

“I guess not,” he shrugged, the smile creeping back slowly. “Everybody had me figured out before I did.”

“It was obvious to anyone who cared to look that you felt something for that boy.” Her smile
softened. “And he very obviously loved you.”

“Oh, I always knew that.” He looked down at his lap, smiling bashfully again. “I was just too dumb to take it to its natural conclusion, is all.”

It was true.

If anyone had ever asked him how he felt about Bucky, he would have answered immediately - and truthfully - that he loved him. Except he wouldn’t have meant it as romantic love, even when it was so stupidly obvious in hindsight. And if it hadn’t been for the two of them kissing when they had - without any planning or foresight on his part, naturally - he might still be clueless now.

“Good thing I’ve got people smarter than me looking out for me.”

Peggy patted his hand. “You’ve always managed to surround yourself with good people.”

“Isn’t that the truth.” He chuckled. “I’m marrying one of them and as good as marrying another. If that doesn’t keep me out of trouble, I don’t know what will.”

Peggy’s brow furrowed in obvious confusion. “Another? Oh good God, don’t tell me they’ve finally mastered cloning.”

“What? No.” Steve rolled his eyes. “God, I don’t even want to think about all the ribbing I’d be in for if there were two of Bucky instead of one.” He paused for a moment. “Though I’m probably in for it just as bad with Natasha as I would’ve been with another Bucky, come to think of it.”

He spent the next few minutes laying out the story for Peggy.

The sheer magnitude of it, the scope, still awed him when he spent any time at all thinking about it. Every single part of it was too big to be believed. Bucky had come back to him against all odds, he’d discovered that their love ran deeper than he could ever have imagined, they were living in a time when it was perfectly acceptable - and even legal - for two men to be together romantically, and Natasha was a part of it all as well. There were times he could barely wrap his mind around the whole thing.

“Somewhere out there, there’s got to be some poor sap who’s losing all his good luck to me.” Steve shook his head. “That’s the only way I can figure on getting as lucky as I have.”

“Oh no.” Peggy shook her head. “I think after all you’ve been through in your life, you’ve earned this little bit of happiness for yourself.” Her hand tightened over his. “Hold onto it with everything you have, Steve. Happiness is a precious commodity.”

“Don’t I know it,” he replied with a twinge of sadness, reaching out a finger to stroke her cheek.

As always, he felt that little bit of sadness for everything the two of them had missed together. Everything they might have been - everything they might have created and nurtured and built - if only they’d had the time.

“Don’t make that face,” she said sternly. “I’ve lived a rich, full life, and my only regret was that you didn’t have the chance to live yours. And now you do. It’s your turn, Steve. It’s finally your turn.”

He smiled at her past the sudden lump in his throat. She’d said almost the exact same thing to him a little over a year ago, and forgotten it only a moment later. But she hadn’t lost herself this time. She knew him, and she’d given him her blessing to move on with his life. And while he hadn’t known how to do so a year ago, he believed he had a pretty good idea of how to do it now.
“You still owe me that dance, though.” He squeezed her hand and tried not to let his lip wobble too much as he smiled. “What would you say to me collecting at the wedding?”

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“Don’t stir it so much.” Laura took a sip of her wine and gestured with the glass at the bubbling pot on the stove. “Let the water do the work.”

“You might have mentioned that earlier.”

Natasha high-stepped over little Nate as she’d done a dozen times already and got clear of the stove before she could damage the pasta any more than she’d already done. She picked up her own wineglass and turned her attention to the salad. There was only so much damage she could do to raw vegetables, after all.

“When’s dinner, Mom?” Cooper piped up from somewhere in the family room.

Laura had banished him there to keep Clint busy, a few minutes after banishing Clint there to keep him from trying to help too much. The lively sounds of a video game drifted into the kitchen now and then.

“Aunt Nat, is dinner gonna be soon?” he added.

“That’s up to the pasta, Coop.” Natasha set about cutting up the cucumbers into more or less even slices. “I’m letting it fend for itself on your mom’s orders.”

“I can help, Aunt Nat.” Lilah wrapped her arms around Natasha’s thigh and looked up at her pleadingly. “I’m good at mixing salad. We can be salad buddies.”

“Don’t fall for it,” Clint called from the family room. “You become salad buddies with Lilah, you turn your back, the cucumbers are gone.”

Lilah smiled up at Natasha.

“Like a shark,” Clint continued. “A cucumber shark.”

“A cucumber shark, huh?” Natasha dangled a cucumber slice between her thumb and forefinger, and Lilah immediately began to make exaggerated biting movements and sounds towards it.

So of course, Nate toddled over and did the same thing, then smiled a big, goofy smile up at Natasha.

This was why she loved it here. She smiled, took a sip of her wine, and leaned back against the counter to watch the kids. This was why the farm was home. This was why the Bartons were family.

“He’s almost big enough for me to start teaching him how to climb.” She looked sideways at Laura and cocked an eyebrow. “He seems like he’ll show interest. What do you think?”

“Oh, please.” Laura turned away from the counter, where she had been examining three different jars of Ragu sauce. “He’ll show interest in whatever you want to teach him, because it’s you.”

Lilah hugged Natasha’s leg again. “I want to learn how to climb. Then we can be climbing buddies and salad buddies.”

“Now you’re in for it,” Clint warned from the living room. “Climbing buddies and salad buddies?”

Cooper snorted. “Why? If she turns her back, will her climbing gear be gone as well?”
Natasha grinned down at Lilah and picked her up. “I’ll start teaching you tomorrow morning.”

“All right.” Laura held up a jar of sauce in each hand. “Do we want to go cheesy-?”

“Too late,” Clint called.

Laura rolled her eyes and continued. “With alfredo sauce? Or more traditional? As traditional as you can get with jarred sauce anyway, with your standard tomato, garlic, and basil?”

“Both!” squealed Lilah. “Mix them!”

“How about we just do a bowl of one and a bowl of the other?” Natasha smiled and bounced Lilah on her hip. “That sounds a lot less…”

“Gross?” offered Cooper over the sounds of whatever video game he was probably winning at.

“You’re gross!” Lilah shot back, sticking her tongue out in the general direction of the living room.

“One bowl of each. Done.” Laura picked the pot up off the burner and started draining the pasta. “And yes, Lilah, mixing alfredo sauce and tomato sauce is a little gross.”

“Alfredo tomato?” Lilah burst into giggles. “That’s the best name.”

Dinner was the lively affair it generally was at the Bartons’, with a pleasantly chaotic atmosphere and a lot of conversation. The kids were all smiles, and Natasha promised each of them a bedtime story after dinner. That was one of her favorite parts about coming here - getting to interact with the kids. Getting to play with them and talk to them and read to them and tuck them in at night.

Getting to immerse herself in a real family.

After dinner, Laura and Clint cleared the table while she put the kids to bed. Nate was asleep in her arms even before his head hit the pillow. Lilah got a short story, Cooper a chapter of one of his kids’ novels, and before she knew it, she was shutting their bedroom doors and padding downstairs into the living room for a glass of wine and some time with Clint and Laura.

“So,” Clint said without preamble from the couch, half a glass of wine in one hand and Laura’s feet on his lap. “January wedding?”

“January wedding.” She nodded, smiling and looking into the empty fireplace. There would have been a good fire going in it, if the weather hadn’t been so ridiculously warm. “I suppose I really ought to start looking for a dress.”

Laura sipped her wine. “When should we go shopping?”

Natasha laughed easily and swirled the wine around in her glass. “I don’t know. Do you think I’m likely to find something that suits me at one of those big wedding retailers?”

“Go to one of those trendy, hipster boutiques that are probably scattered all around Brooklyn.” Clint drained off his wine and reached down to the floor for the bottle. “I don’t know any of them, but I know they exist. Right next to the coffee shops that charge like eight dollars for a small cold brew.”

Laura raised an eyebrow.

Clint shrugged. “It’s Brooklyn.”

“I don’t really know what I’m looking for in a dress.” Natasha took a sip of wine, found it pleasantly
sharp and fruity. “Honestly, I never gave it much thought. I never thought I was going to get married at all.”

Laura hummed in approval. “Well, you are. And you seem a lot happier than you’ve been in a long time.” She wriggled her neck and shoulders into the armrest of the couch and sighed in contentment. “And seeing you so happy makes us happy.”

“‘Us’ as in Laura and me.” Clint pointed back and forth between himself and his wife. “Not ‘us’ as in the royal us.”

Natasha snorted and gave Clint one of her microscopic smiles. “I am happy.” She sipped her wine, still smiling, and shook her head. “I still catch myself being cynical about it, though. Sometimes I have to talk myself out of the ‘enjoy it while you can, because you know it won’t last’ mindset.”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Clint tipped his head back and relaxed further into the couch. “I don’t know Barnes very well, but Steve certainly isn’t the type to let go of anything ever. He’ll make it last on sheer willpower and stubbornness alone.”

Natasha snorted again, this time smiling into her wineglass as she thought about how well Clint had Steve pegged. “You’re right about that.”

Steve was the sort of man who’d stand in front of a train and push with all of his might to stop it from leaving the station rather than let it carry someone he loved away from him. He’d certainly fight as hard as he knew how to in order to hold onto her and James. He was sweet that way.

And James? He’d sacrifice himself without a moment’s hesitation to keep any harm from coming to her or Steve. Which brought an amused smile to her face, because both she and Steve would do the same for him.

She had a sudden image of Steve heroically throwing himself between James and an assailant, only for James to scramble around and put himself between Steve and that very same assailant. And they’d go back and forth until she managed to leap in and put herself in the path of danger, and on it would go.

The image made her laugh abruptly. However, the laugh dissolved just as abruptly when the realization crashed right into the middle of her brain that -

“I want to move in with them.”

Clint and Laura exchanged an amused glance, though Laura spoke first:

“You’ve been saying for a few months that you like having your own space.”

“So…” Clint glanced into his wineglass with an exaggerated look of suspicion. “What’s in the wine?”

Natasha lowered her eyebrows a fraction at Clint (which was all the glare she ever needed to give him in order to set him straight) and then turned to Laura.

“I don’t think my own space is what I need anymore.”

She looked down into her own wineglass for a moment, thinking of how much Steve’s apartment had begun to feel like home. How pleasant the nights she spent there were, and how unremarkable the nights she spent at the Tower were by comparison.
She looked back up at Laura. “Tell you the truth, my own space is starting to feel a little lonely.”

And, tossing back the last of her wine and smiling as she realized just how happy that decision was going to wind up making her, she resolved to tell the boys as soon as she got back.

Chapter End Notes

As always, comments and kudos are a writer's sushi!
Born During a Quarrel

Chapter Summary

“You look…” She paused for a moment, then smiled enigmatically. “Suitably impressed. Thank you for that.” She took a few unhurried steps forward and held out her hand regally. “I am Shuri.”

Bucky hesitated. How did one properly respond to a princess? Bow? Kiss her hand? Some other custom he hadn’t even thought of?

Luckily Natasha seemed to know what to do.

Chapter Notes

As the MCU has taught us, stay for the end notes. Oh, and if they're ["speaking like this"], they're speaking Russian.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Red Hook, Brooklyn
Late October 2015

“I don’t know about you, but I’m starting to want that bigger bed we talked about.”

Steve smiled as he curled around Bucky, stretching out his arm to rest a hand on Natasha’s shoulder. He was only partially joking. The events of the past couple of weeks had made him happier than he’d been before - and that was saying something - but even the king-size bed was beginning to feel a bit small.

Both he and Bucky had been over the moon when Natasha had called one day out of the blue to ask for their help in moving her things out of her suite of rooms in the Tower and into the apartment in Red Hook. The two of them had exchanged a huge grin and headed right over, and it hadn’t taken very long at all to move Natasha in.

For his part, Steve wished she’d done it sooner, but a late start was better than no start at all.

Natasha had immediately set about making her presence known - well, more known, anyway. The room that had once been Bucky’s - a lifetime ago, it felt like - it felt like - had now become Natasha’s room.

“For the nights I need a break from you boys,” she’d said with that miniscule smile of hers while looping her arms around each of their waists.

Steve had a suspicion that she mainly wanted the room for a separate place to store her clothes, but he didn’t mind giving her the space. Especially since she had yet to spend a night there.

He stretched and smiled, hugging Bucky close while caressing Natasha’s shoulder, and felt for what
must have been the millionth time that he was the luckiest guy in the world.

“Maybe for Christmas.” He kissed Bucky’s shoulder. “What do you think?”

“You’d have to custom order it,” Bucky murmured, snuggled tightly between Steve and Natasha. “But I like this.”

“Oh, I like sleeping in the same bed,” Steve replied, his voice slightly muffled by Bucky’s shoulder. “But this bed’s just about big enough to fit you and me comfortably. I don’t want to wake up one morning to find out we pushed poor Nat onto the floor while we were asleep.”

“You’d wake up long before that happened, Rogers,” came a sleep-thick mumble from Natasha, filtered through her pillow. “I’d make sure of that.”

A lazy smile drifted across Bucky’s face. “I’m perfectly happy to be stuffed between my peeps.”

“Your what?” Steve snorted with laughter. “Did you pick that up from Miles? It sounds like something he’d say.”

“You’re getting exceedingly cute, James.” Natasha stirred, smiling sleepily at Bucky with half-lidded eyes, and shifted her arm so that it lay over Bucky’s body while her hand rested on Steve’s ribs. “I think I like it.”

Of course Bucky scowled in response. But Steve was spared having to poke at him further by the chirping of the telephone. Steve frowned at the screen, which told him the number was unlisted, but he picked up the call just the same.

“Hello?”

“Captain Rogers?” an unfamiliar female voice said. She had an accent that Steve couldn’t quite place, though he was certain he had heard it before.

“Yes, ma’am. Speaking.” Steve frowned again. “May I ask who’s calling?”

“Hold,” she commanded, and before Steve could respond, the line clicked, hummed, and then a new voice - much more familiar - said:

“Captain Rogers? I do hope I’m not disturbing your morning.”

“T’Challa?” Steve’s face immediately brightened. “No, not at all. I just didn’t know who was calling.” He sat up in bed, the covers settling around his waist, and ran a hand through his hair. “What can I do for you?”

Natasha raised an eyebrow and Steve quickly turned on the phone’s speaker function.

“Sergeant Barnes’ new arm is ready,” T’Challa explained. “And while we considered coming to New York to perform the procedure, we realized it would prove somewhat difficult to bring our medical team along with all of our equipment.”

Quietly Bucky said, “But Stark-”

“Does not have half of what we possess, in either technology or personnel,” T’Challa said evenly.

Steve chuckled. “Good thing Tony’s not around to hear you say that.”

He could hear the smile in T’Challa’s voice. “I would like to extend an invitation to Sergeant Barnes
and one companion to join us in Wakanda for the next few weeks.”

“You can’t keep taking time away from SHIELD, Steve.” Natasha had propped herself up on one elbow and was looking at him with one eyebrow arched. “Especially for a few weeks at a time.”

Steve was on the point of protesting when he realized how completely futile it would be. Though he wanted to be the one to stand by Bucky during his surgery and recovery, he’d shifted too many of his responsibilities onto Maria lately. And he couldn’t in good conscience keep calling himself the Director of SHIELD if he left the bulk of the actual directing to someone else, no matter how qualified she might have been.

“You’re right,” he said with a moody sigh. “As usual.”

T’Challa continued as if he hadn’t heard the exchange at all. “If everyone is amenable, a member of my staff will arrive to collect you within, shall we estimate, the next six hours?”

Bucky raised both his eyebrows, but said nothing, offering only a small nod.

“That soon?” Steve felt suddenly flustered.

He hadn’t planned on saying goodbye to Bucky so quickly, and on such short notice. Six hours would pass in the blink of an eye, and then he wouldn’t see Bucky - or Natasha, for that matter - face-to-face for nearly a month. The thought of spending that long a stretch of time alone…

He pulled himself together somehow. T’Challa was doing Bucky an enormous favor, and Steve wasn’t about to be rude enough to impose upon him further by asking for a custom schedule. And so he nodded.

“Thank you so much, T’Challa. I’ll have him ready to go by then. Natasha’ll be going with him.”

The call disconnected a moment later, and Steve set the phone down before flopping back down and wrapping his arms around Bucky. He put the palm of one hand on Natasha’s shoulder as well, wishing stupidly that his arms were long enough to get around them both.

“So.” Bucky looked at him. “Six hours.”

“Yeah.”

Steve blew out a deep sigh and burrowed his face into Bucky’s shoulder. He tried hard to push his selfish disappointment aside. After all, he reminded himself, Bucky deserved to be physically whole again. He’d seen the trouble Bucky had been having over the past weeks with tasks as simple as getting dressed, not to mention trying to drive or do much of anything else. And his own desires really had to take a back seat to Bucky’s needs.

Still, he’d miss him. He’d miss them both.

“Six hours doesn’t seem like much, does it?”

“It’s enough time to have breakfast,” Bucky murmured, breath warm against Steve’s skin. “We’ve been enjoying that waffle iron.”

“Yes, we have.” Natasha’s voice was still tinged with drowsiness, but the smile in it was clear. “Go make us some waffles, Steve.” She ran her fingertips through his hair. “And then come back to bed.”

“With the waffles,” Bucky added.
Steve smiled in spite of himself.

At least Bucky’s appetite was something that had never changed, he thought as he reluctantly hauled himself out of bed and into the kitchen to start breakfast.

He didn’t limit himself to waffles, of course. The last breakfast he’d have with Bucky and Natasha for a month wasn’t going to be a half-hearted affair. So he made coffee, scrambled the rest of the carton of eggs, and fried a couple of packages of bacon while the waffles were cooking. And, as Bucky had requested, he brought the whole thing into the bedroom on a tray.

Bucky and Natasha were naked and waiting for him.

Six hours passed quickly, but not at all unpleasantly.

At six hours precisely, the doorbell chimed and a dark-skinned man in a neatly pressed black uniform presented himself. He identified himself as Hamisi, declined Steve’s offer of any refreshments, and pleasantly inquired if Sergeant Barnes and Ms. Romanoff were ready to depart.

He only had a moment left with them.

“You take care of him, Nat.” Steve hugged her tightly and kissed her once on the cheek. Almost immediately, he thought better of it and, smiling, gave her a longer kiss on the lips. And then he had to turn and say goodbye to Bucky.

“Call me when you touch down, all right?” He wrapped his arms around Bucky and hugged him with everything he had. “I’m going to miss you, Buck. Make sure you call me while you’re there.” He buried his face in Bucky’s neck. “I miss you already.”

“I haven’t even left yet.” Bucky’s voice was soft in Steve’s ear. “And when I come back, we’ll get married.”

“And while we’re gone,” Natasha said, “don’t hole up in the apartment, staring out the window while sketching moodily and avoiding the world.”

“I…” Steve trailed off as he realized that he’d probably end up doing exactly that. He shook his head, smiling. “It’s scary how well you know me, Nat.”

A small smile flitted across Natasha’s mouth. “And just in case you were thinking of trying it, I’ve already texted Sam and Sharon. They’ll be checking up on you.”

As if on cue, Steve’s phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out to see a text from Sam:

//Hey man. Burgers tonight? Sharon knows a place//

He smiled down at the phone, then stuffed it back into his pocket and reached out with one arm to pull Natasha into the hug.

“I’m going to miss you both.” He held the both of them tight. “Just call me, will you? Every day, if you can?”

“Every day if we can,” Bucky promised, and after another quick round of hugs, they were gone.

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Bucky and Natasha boarded a small craft that looked like a sleeker version of a Quinjet. Hamisi disappeared into the cockpit and they were in the air over New York within minutes.
After about an hour, Hamisi came out of the cockpit. They were joined by a dark-skinned woman in a colorful dress, a series of elaborate, beaded braids coiled around her head. She identified herself as Haoniyao.

“It means ‘born during a quarrel’,” she explained with a smile. “And, as my mother tells it, that’s exactly how it happened. Which is perhaps why I am an only child.”

Right as Bucky was beginning to think he really should’ve eaten a second breakfast, Haoniyao announced that she would be serving lunch.

“Oh, good.” Natasha smiled. “Because I think James was about to start gnawing on the seatbelts.”

Bucky didn’t even bother glaring at her. She wasn’t far off.

Lunch was a hearty beef stew, coconut rice, and tea, and Bucky couldn’t eat enough of it. He easily polished off a second portion, and Haoniyao seemed delighted when he agreed to a third.

“I think you will eat very well during your time with us,” she remarked.

“I can’t think of a time James hasn’t eaten well.” Natasha’s smile turned into an impish smirk.

Hamisi explained that a commercial jet could make it to Birnin Zana - Wakanda’s capital - in about sixteen hours.

“But,” he said over a spoonful of beef stew, “we will make it there in five.”

Perhaps you would like to rest?” Haoniyao suggested. “I imagine our princess will want to meet you right away. She is eager to get started, and I would think you are, too.”

“Princess?” Bucky echoed.

Natasha raised a questioning eyebrow. Clearly this was news to her as well.

“Her Highness, Princess Shuri,” Haoniyao said. “She is the one who designed your new arm, Sergeant Barnes. I know she is looking forward to meeting you.”

Bucky hadn’t even been aware that there was a Princess Shuri, but he licked his lips and said, “Okay.”

“She’s only sixteen.” The arch in Natasha’s eyebrow grew more pronounced. “And she designed a fully cybernetic limb on her own?”

Haoniyao sipped her tea. “Well, she is only sixteen,” she agreed. “She hasn’t achieved fully cybernetic bodies just yet.”

Hamisi and Haoniyao returned to the cockpit after lunch, though Haoniyao once again encouraged them to get some rest and even folded their seats down and made them into comfortable looking beds.

Bucky didn’t end up sleeping though. This wouldn’t be his first time meeting a brilliant young scientist who was eager to work on him.

Natasha rolled over in her own bed and looked at him. [“She’s not Rodchenko, James.”]

He glanced at her. [“You always know what I’m thinking.”]
“Well, you don’t bother to hide it.” She gave him the hint of a smile, but it only lasted a moment before her expression turned serious again. “No one’s going to be fiddling around with your mind anymore. You know that, don’t you?”

He didn’t reply right away. Finally he said, “I guess.”

There was no point in trying to offer her a more convincing answer. He had never lied to her, and anyway, she wouldn’t have bought it.

“You guess?” She arched an eyebrow at him, frowning slightly. “James, every time someone’s tried to do that within the past year, either Steve or I or both of us have stopped it.” She reached over and laid a hand on his cheek. “If you know anything about me, you know I won’t let anyone hurt you while I’m there to prevent it.”

He closed his eyes against the touch of her hand. “I know.”

“I’ll be right here with you the whole time.” She brushed her thumb over his cheekbone. “I’ll be watching everything they do. You don’t have a thing to worry about.” A gentle smile crept into her voice. “I love you, James.”

He didn’t reply to that, but he didn’t have to.

She knew.

She always knew.

After a moment, he said, “What do you think Steve’ll get up to while we’re gone?”

“Steve?” A gentle snort. “He’ll either work until he drops from exhaustion, or he’ll sit in the apartment morosely sketching until someone comes by to snap him out of it.”

“Yeah.” Bucky frowned. “That sounds about right.”

The rest of the flight to Birnin Zana was uneventful, which was exactly how Bucky wanted it. Before long, they were flying low over a glittering, technological marvel of a city, and right as Bucky opened his mouth to remark on it, a memory drifted across his mind and slotted neatly into place.

“This reminds me of the Flash Gordon serials I used to watch as a kid,” he murmured. “I was obsessed with them.”

Natasha paused. It was hard to know how to interpret the look on her face, but it seemed as if it might have been… confusion, maybe?

“What was it like?” she finally asked. “Your childhood?” A wry twist came to her lips, and her face was hers again. “Rogers talks about it all the time, but those are his memories. Not yours.”

Bucky licked his lips, savoring the memory for a moment. He could see the flickering black and white images on the screen and hear the tinny, dramatic music. He could taste the popcorn, hot and salty and a little bit stale.

“You could get into the pictures for a quarter,” he murmured. “And stay all day if you liked, though that meant watching the same newsreel a few times. But in the summer, it was cooler in the picture houses than it was outside, so…”
He wanted more, but wanting wouldn’t make the memories come any faster. It was a process, Jean Grey had explained, and it had to happen slowly and organically.

[“James?”] Natasha laid a hand on his face. She was very gentle - hesitant, almost, as if he were made of glass. And there was something in her eyes. A hint of the confusion that had been there before, but almost tinged with unease.

[“You stopped,”] she finally finished.

“We are here,” Haoniyao announced, entering from the cockpit. “And as I thought, our princess would like to meet with you at the Royal Medical College as soon as you’ve had the opportunity to freshen up.”

Bucky exchanged a glance with Natasha and then nodded.

It was time.

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The Royal Medical College was a gleaming, multi-domed building made of glass and plants and waterfalls. Bucky had never seen anything like it, and so the walk to their suite took much longer than it should have.

The suite itself was large and well-appointed, and food was waiting for them under several silver cloches, but for once he was hardly interested in that. He went right to the floor-to-ceiling window that made up one entire wall of the suite and stared out at the city beyond.

[“It’s pretty amazing.”] Natasha came up behind him and slipped an arm around his waist. There was real surprise in her voice. Surprise and admiration. [“I’ve never seen it before either.”]

[“As far as I know, I’ve never been here.”] Bucky hesitated. [“Which is good, because if I had…”]

He had no idea how to even complete that sentence.

[“Think they’ll give us the grand tour?”]

[“Probably not.”] Natasha smiled wryly. [“Wakanda’s famous for its secrecy. But they’ll show us pretty much everything that’s not proprietary, I’d imagine.”]

[“So…”] Bucky looked at her. [“The bathrooms?”]

Natasha laughed, and it was good to hear it after the strange discomfort she’d shown earlier.

They showered together, changed their clothes, and ate the food that had been left for them. Bucky didn’t have names for what they had eaten, but it had been delicious and he would have gladly eaten a third or fourth helping, had the opportunity presented itself.

After about an hour, Haoniyao collected them, and once again, the walk took longer than it should have.

“Will you be our personal guide as long as we’re here?” Bucky asked, while peering out the window at a large, golden building that might have been a bank or possibly a library. Impressive either way.

Haoniyao nodded. “Indeed.”

Bucky looked at her. “Are the bathrooms proprietary?”
Haoniyao blinked. “I’m sorry?”

Natasha snorted with sudden laughter, but her face was impassive again a second later. The laugh hadn’t left her eyes, though, and Bucky could see it plainly when he looked at her.

A moment later, they were led into what appeared to be a comfortable lounge area. A tea service sat on a table surrounded by squishy looking chairs, but the first thing Bucky noticed was that the far wall was actually a waterfall.

Words failed him.

A beautiful, dark-skinned young woman, her hair done up in microbraids that twisted into more complicated braids atop her head, stood by the waterfall.

“Welcome.”

She looked at them as if she were surveying them, her posture one of absolute self-assurance. Her dark eyes crackled with intelligence, and yet her face was perfectly composed.

“You look…” She paused for a moment, then smiled enigmatically. “Suitably impressed. Thank you for that.” She took a few unhurried steps forward and held out her hand regally. “I am Shuri.”

Bucky hesitated. How did one properly respond to a princess? Bow? Kiss her hand? Some other custom he hadn’t even thought of?

Luckily Natasha seemed to know what to do.

“Your Highness.” She inclined her upper body slightly, her head more so, and took Shuri’s hand briefly before straightening up again. “We should begin by thanking you and your brother, Prince T’Challa, for your generosity.” She smiled politely. “And your hospitality.”

“It is our pleasure,” Shuri responded with a subtle shake of her head. Then she smiled a bit mischievously. “And my personal pleasure, I must admit.” She turned to Bucky. “It was a welcome challenge to design your replacement limb. I am looking forward to seeing it work under real conditions.”

Bucky felt suddenly, stupidly tongue-tied. He knew, of course, that he was the ‘real conditions’ that Shuri looked forward to seeing. More importantly, he knew that Shuri and her brother were freely offering a hugely generous gift for no other reason than they chose to do so.

He managed to say “Thank you,” before again lapsing into stupid silence.

“No,” she replied, shaking her head slowly and deliberately. “Thank you.” Again that smile. “It is not every day that such a wonderful opportunity to remind my brother that he is not the only multi-genius in the family presents itself.” She gestured towards the table and the tea service. “But sit. Please. Make yourself comfortable, for you are my personal guests.”

Bucky sank right into one of the squishy chairs, though Shuri and Natasha managed to look somewhat graceful about it. Haoniyao poured everyone a cup of tea while Shuri laid out the plan for the next few weeks.

It was going to be long, involved, and complicated. And he’d have to spend a good deal of it in bed - either sedated or just recuperating. The remainder of the shoulder assembly of his old arm would have to be surgically removed, and a new mount grafted in its place.
The old neural uplink, Shuri explained, had been irreparably damaged when his arm had been destroyed, and so a new one would have to be painstakingly attached to his nerve cluster. That process alone would take at least a week, possibly two - and that was even before the new arm could be attached.

“And, of course, you will need time to adjust to the limb once it is in place.” Shuri stirred her tea. “There will need to be fine-tuning, and there will almost certainly be pain as your body acclimates itself to a new part.”

Bucky mentally shrugged. He had dealt with plenty of pain.

Shuri smiled. “But your new arm will be stronger and more durable than the previous one. We will be using vibranium rather than carbonadium, of course. It’s the strongest metal in the world.” She took a sip of her tea. “Would you care to see the designs? Aesthetically, I find them rather pleasing.”

Bucky licked his lips. Glanced at Natasha and once again reminded himself that Shuri wasn’t Rodchenko. She wasn’t the General or the old man, linked to either Hydra or the Soviets. She was doing this because she wanted to. Because she wanted the challenge and because she was kind and generous.

“Okay.” He cleared his throat, dry despite the tea. “Okay, yes. Let’s see the designs.”

Chapter End Notes

NOTE THE FIRST
So this chapter was written a few months before Black Panther came out and I knew just how incredible my amazing daughter Shuri would be. I went back and changed her age (I originally had her pegged as 19), but otherwise left what I had written as is. Hopefully I’ve done her justice.

NOTE THE SECOND
Comment and kudos and interacting with y'all are a huge part of what makes this worthwhile. So hit me with your best shot.
“Two in the morning,” Sam finished. He sipped at the coffee and made a face. “Decaf. They say you can’t taste the difference, but that’s bullshit.”

“Two in the…” Steve looked around for a clock, found one on the far wall, and lifted his chin. “No, it’s only 0150.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “It’s your pedantry that Natasha and Bucky are attracted to, isn’t it?”

Chapter Notes

If they’re ["speaking like this,"], they’re speaking Russian.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

U.N.N Alpha - Helicarrier
Mid-November 2015

“Thank you, Ambassador,” Steve gave a tight smile to the man on the big screen in front of him. “You can expect to have SHIELD personnel on-site within two hours.”

The past couple of weeks had been a flurry of activity. Steve had thrown himself wholeheartedly into his work, to the point where he’d probably done more actual directing since Bucky and Natasha had left for Wakanda than he had in most of the year beforehand. He’d been in near-constant communication with the Russians, and HYDRA was definitely on the run in that part of the world. And he was hopeful that their collaboration would lead to vastly improved relations between the two countries. Enough so, maybe, that the rising tide of military tension could fall away again.

“And by SHIELD personnel, you mean yourself, don’t you?”

Steve paused, his hand in the middle of reaching for his shield where he’d propped it up against the control console, and turned to see Sam standing there, a steaming cup of coffee in one hand.


“Two in the morning,” Sam finished. He sipped at the coffee and made a face. “Decaf. They say you can’t taste the difference, but that’s bullshit.”

“Two in the…” Steve looked around for a clock, found one on the far wall, and lifted his chin. “No, it’s only 0150.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “It’s your pedantry that Natasha and Bucky are attracted to, isn’t it?”

Steve gave him a glower. “I’m not tired.” He gestured to the now-dark screen. “And this is
important.”

“The last mission was important too.” Another sip of coffee. “And the one before that. And the one before that as well.”

“Saving the world from HYDRA is about the most important thing I can think of.” Steve ran a hand through his hair, thinking that he could probably use a shower and pushing it off for after he returned from the mission. “We can’t give them any room to recover. We need to stamp them out forever, every last one of them, or they’ll just come back again.”

Sam raised an eyebrow.

“You’re giving me the ‘hurry up and admit I’m right’ look.” Steve scowled at him. “I hate that look.”

“When’s the last time you showered?” Sam swirled the coffee cup around in his hand. “You’re smelling a bit ripe, and I’m three feet away from you.”

“I do not -” Steve frowned and took a whiff of himself.

Sam was right. In fact, he’d been being polite.

“Fine,” he grumbled. “I’ll grab a shower when I get back from… where is it?” He frowned again and looked down at the nav panel. “Omsk.” He looked back up at Sam. “No point in my taking one now, not when I’m just going to need another one in a couple of hours.”

Sam grunted in response and took what seemed like a deliberately obnoxious slurp of his coffee. “How about the last time you slept in your own bed? Or ate a real meal?”

Steve’s stomach chose that moment to let out a particularly loud rumble. And he wasn’t going to lie to himself and say that the thought of toppling off into a nice satisfying sleep didn’t sound enticing. But going back to the apartment alone would just remind him of how much he missed Bucky and Natasha, and he wouldn’t be able to sleep anyway if he followed that train of thought.

“I’m fine,” he mumbled unconvincingly, and shook himself. All he needed to do was wear himself out enough that he could fall asleep without thinking. And when he woke up the next morning, he could start it all over again.

“I doubt they’re doing that much canoodling without you. What with Bucky recovering from surgery and all.”

“That’s not the issue.” Steve sighed and sagged back against the console. “I wouldn’t mind if they were all over each other every minute of the day. What matters is that neither of them has been here for the past three weeks.” His shoulders drooped. “I don’t much like going back home to an empty house.”

Sam looked at him for a long moment. “Yeah, Natasha warned me that either you’d work fifteen hour days and never go home or you’d hole up in your apartment, drawing morosely while staring out the window, and never come out. Looks like you went with door number one.”

“Maybe I ought to be drawing instead.” Steve blew out a long sigh and stared moodily at the floor. “If I can’t even go out and be useful in the field.”

He could practically hear the eyeroll in Sam’s reply. “Go take a shower. I know a new 24-hour burger place.”
An hour later, showered and in fresh civilian clothes, Steve followed Sam into a chrome and glass diner in Hackensack, New Jersey. According to the glowing neon sign out front, the diner was called ‘Supreme Sacrificies - Home of the One Gallon Bucket Meal!’

“Now that’s what I call a good old-fashioned grab joint.” Steve smiled as they sat down. “I wonder how often they change the oil in the deep fryers.”

“Trade secret.” The college-aged waitress, who appeared at the front of their table, smirked. Her dark hair puffed out in glorious corkscrew curls. The name tag pinned to her shirt pronounced her to be Danaya. “But if you two take a selfie with me, I might let you in on it.”

“Does the meal actually come in a bucket?” Steve looked up at her, chuckling as she took out her phone. “If not, it should.”

“Oh, it does,” both Sam and Danaya said at the same time. The three of them huddled together and she quickly snapped the photo and tucked the phone back into her apron pocket.

“You can get a bucket of disco fries and a bacon double cheeseburger,” Sam explained, once Danaya disappeared to fill their drink orders. “And you should know that this place made Sharon’s list of contenders for world’s best burger.”

“Well then, it must be good.”

Steve smiled briefly, then looked out the window at the rainbow of neon that lit up the highway. It was the kind of thing he’d have loved to draw, but that he knew he couldn’t do justice with a pencil. And he’d never been much of a painter, despite what six months of art school had tried to do for him.

“I’m glad the two of you hit it off so well,” he found himself saying as he turned back to Sam. “Sharon and I tried for a while, but we wound up agreeing that we work better as friends than as a couple.”

“I know. She told me.” Sam smiled. “Worked out better for me this way, too.”

Danaya reappeared with their drinks, setting them down on the table and putting a hand on her hip. “What’ll it be, Cap? ‘Count of Monte Queso’ or ‘To Kill a Mockingburger’ are your best bets.”

Sam took a pull on his Coke. “‘Catcher on Swiss and Rye’ is pretty good, too.”

Steve nearly snorted his birch beer out of his nose. “Is everybody doing puns now? Is that just the latest restaurant craze?” He chuckled and wiped his face with a napkin. “Sam, which one’s the best burger?”

‘Monte Queso’ will give you that bacon double cheeseburger and disco fries,” Sam said. “So I’d say that’s a win.” He looked at Danaya. “In fact, I’ll have that.”

Sounds good.” Steve gave the girl a smile as she headed off to put in their orders, then turned back to Sam. “Bucky’s got a thing for these little pancake and waffle places with funny names. I take him out for breakfast sometimes when we jog.” He sighed. “I’ve been missing that lately.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “Sounds like you got it bad for the guy. Maybe you should marry him.”

“Maybe he ought to come back from Wakanda so I can,” Steve groused as he stirred his birch beer with his straw. “And maybe he ought to bring back our best girl while he’s at it.”
“Were you always this maudlin?” Sam settled back into the booth, draping an arm across the top of the seat. “Did Bucky put up with it then too, or is that why he went into the army?”

“I’m not being maudlin.” Steve tried his best not to sound as petulant and sulky as he knew he’d sound anyway. “And anyway, Bucky was drafted. So whether or not he would’ve put up with it, it wasn’t really his choice one way or the other.”

Sam shook his head. “Every so often, you remind me of just how old the two of you are really supposed to be.” A beat, then, “Which means you need to dance to some seriously old school music at your wedding. Don’t want to confuse people, after all.”

Steve chuckled abruptly. Sam had a knack for bringing him back down to earth at the most appropriate times. Which struck him as amusing if only because Sam spent so much of his time in the air.

“You and Bucky ought to spend more time together,” he said as he picked up his birch beer. He’d spent most of his life relying on Bucky to snap him back to reality when it was needed. Having Sam around to do that when Bucky was gone meant more to him than he’d ever be able to properly express. “You’ve got a lot in common.”

Sam looked at him over the top of his soda glass. “The ability to put up with you and keep coming back for more, you mean?”

Steve managed to stop himself from snorting the soda through his nose, but it was a close thing. “That’s twice now you’ve made me do that.” He shook his head. “Am I really that much of a handful?”

A smirk landed on Sam’s face. “Well, if you have to ask…”

They went back and forth like that for a while until Danaya returned. She hefted two white buckets onto the table, each filled to the brim with an obscenely large bacon double cheeseburger and an unhealthy amount of crisp-looking steak fries covered in gooey mozzarella cheese and thick gravy.

“All right.” She grinned. “Eat up. And remember, Cap, if you manage to eat all of it, you get your picture on the wall.” She gestured to Sam. “Like this guy here.” She pointed to to the wall near the register, which was covered in a smattering of photographs.

Including one of Sam and Sharon, triumphantly grinning and holding up two large, very empty buckets.

“How I hear the sound of a gauntlet being thrown down?” Steve’s mood brightened at once. He’d never been one to back down from a challenge, and tackling an eating-related challenge with his super-soldier appetite to help him out seemed almost unfair. “Time me.”

“On it.” Danaya pulled out her phone. “Yum yum. You’re on the clock.” She winked and then moved to check on another table.

The burger was mouthful after mouthful of greasy, cheesy, supremely unhealthy deliciousness. The fries were more of the same. And fourteen minutes and twelve seconds later, Steve was posing for his second picture of the evening.

Maybe things weren’t so bad after all.
Natasha had gotten her tour of the capital city.

Actually, she’d gotten several. James had either been in surgery or recovering from it for the entire first week they’d been there. He’d been sedated the entire time, and she’d had more time on her hands than she’d known what to do with. Though she’d been pleasantly surprised by the pace of things. She remembered reading in James’ file that the original surgery to replace his damaged organic arm with the first prosthetic had taken over two weeks. Shuri and her team seemed to be on track to cut that time in half.

But, at any rate, James had spent the first week soundly asleep under heavy sedation. And since it had quickly become apparent to her that she wouldn’t be doing either herself or James any good by keeping vigil by his bedside, she’d taken Haoniyao up on her offer to guide her around to see the sights.

“Did I not tell you that Paradise Forest was aptly named?” Haoniyao asked her with a smile of deep satisfaction as they re-entered the college that day.

The two of them had spent the morning carefully negotiating the limestone karsts that surrounded the place in order to enjoy the breathtaking views offered by a rainforest atop a mountain. And Natasha had to agree that Haoniyao - and the Wakandans who’d given the place its name - had not been mistaken.

“I wasn’t expecting a tropical bird to actually perch on my finger like that.” Natasha had tied a colorful scarf around her hair in imitation of several Wakandan women she’d seen, and it had kept the sweat out of her eyes and off of her neck, but she desperately wanted a shower. And she was on the point of excusing herself to go and wash up when a nurse came bustling up.

“Good afternoon, Ms. Romanova. Her Highness would like you to know that Mr. Barnes is awake.”

A brief smile. “And he asked for you before his eyes were even open.”

Natasha actually felt her heart leap at that, and wondered why she’d never given much credit to the phrase. Writers and poets seemed to use it all the time, and she’d dismissed it as trite and cliched. Until she’d actually felt it.

She thanked Haoniyao, pushed the shower to the back of her mind, and allowed the nurse to lead her away. And a few minutes later, she opened the door of James’ hospital room to find Shuri standing by his bedside.

“Oh, good afternoon.” Shuri smiled. “I thought this would bring you running.”

James turned and looked at Natasha with unfocused eyes. “Hey, Nat,” he slurred. “Hey…”

She couldn’t help the laugh that bubbled out of her at those words. And as she sat down on the edge of the bed to run a hand over his still-short hair, she also couldn’t help but remember that he’d greeted Steve in exactly the same way when he’d first woken up in the hospital in Seoul.

God, she loved him.

“The surgery was a success.” Shuri was practically beaming. “Tomorrow we will make any necessary adjustments, and then after that, physical therapy.”

“Therapy.” James tried to snort, but it was a drawn out, airy exhalation instead. “My favorite thing.”
Natasha smiled. “Like it or not, you’re still going.” She stroked his hair again, feeling the bristles give way beneath her touch. “You should know better than to think I’d let you off the hook.”

Shuri’s eyes sparkled at that. “Excellent. I like your style. Now,” she headed toward the door, “I’ll take my leave. I look forward to tomorrow.”

James murmured a very slurred goodbye, then shifted his unfocused gaze back to Natasha. “Gonna climb in?”

Natasha was in bed beside him practically before the door closed behind Shuri.

[“You don’t look so bad.”] She smiled as she took in the sight of his gleaming new arm. It looked slightly more streamlined than the previous one, with a sleeker-looking plate design. And her eyes were immediately drawn to the emblem on his shoulder.

[“What do you think?”] James’ voice was quiet. Almost hesitant, or maybe that was just the sedatives.

She looked down for a long moment at the area where the red Soviet star had once been, tracing the lines of the new pattern with the tip of one finger. Thinking about just how far he’d come in such a short time, and thinking about just how lucky he was to have done it. How lucky they all were, in fact, to have him.

[“I think it’s very appropriate.”] She looked him in the eyes, her own twinkling with the hint of a smile. [“And I think Steve’s going to think so too.”]

A wobbly smile slid across James’ face. [“You think so?”]

[“I do.”] She returned the smile and curled around him, nestling her head against his chest. [“What do you want to bet his lip starts quivering and his eyes well up?”]

James’ smile turned into a smirk. [“Would that be before or after the ‘welcome home’ sex?”]

[“During.”] She smirked right back at him.

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The following few days (for James, at any rate) turned out to mostly be spent trying to overcome the phantom limb pain that went along with his new artificial nerve structure. Which mainly consisted of Shuri and her team of technicians making repeated adjustments to his arm and then telling him to move it through its range of motion. The problem had mostly been dealt with by the end of the week, though not entirely. Shuri had told them that the last of the twinges would go away in time.

“How does it really count as phantom limb pain,” he had muttered from his bed, “if I have a limb?”

“When it’s a limb that shouldn’t be feeling pain unless it’s damaged?” Natasha had smirked at him. “Probably.”

Of course, Shuri had also been only too willing to talk to her during the long stretches of time when there was nothing to do but wait for James’ body to adjust to the changes to its new grafts. And she’d gotten to learn more about metallurgy than she’d known before.

“Vibranium is a key component of Adamantium,” Shuri had said one afternoon over a cup of hibiscus tea and a soup that tasted strongly of lemongrass and coconut milk. “Wakanda was responsible for the original alloying method, and we have only managed to improve upon it over the
years.” She smiled. “Enough to have become the world’s leading producer of the metal, as well as the only source of the vibranium necessary to create it.”

James had needed to go through physical therapy as well, and that had taken another handful of days. The therapy had consisted of James being made to put his new limb through its paces, and Shuri had been quite eager to watch it.

“The Adamantium jacketing is at least 22% stronger than the carbonadium jacketing from his previous arm,” she had boasted while watching James dig his fingertips into a sheet of rolled steel as though it were cookie dough. “Nearly as indestructible as your fiance’s shield, in fact.”

“Which would still rank it below his head on a list of the hardest things in the universe.” Natasha’s wry smile spread across her face as James tossed the steel into the far wall.

“My head?” James turned and looked at her. “Or Steve’s?”

She shrugged, still smiling. “Tomato, tomahto.”

James scowled.

Shuri simply looked delighted.

That evening, Natasha briefly considered joining James in the shower and making things a bit more interesting, but decided against it. Better for him to be fully adjusted to his new arm before she tried to distract him with sexy fun times.

James, however, wasted no time cuddling up next to her in bed. They situated themselves so they could gaze out through the floor-to-ceiling window wall at the glittering city beyond.

[“I think I’m going to miss this view,”] James murmured.

They were cleared to leave in the next few days. Steve had been quite happy (which was an understatement) when they had told him.

[“It’s a lot greener than the view in Red Hook,”] she agreed, wriggling back against him and burrowing into the pillow. [“And much more majestic, though we shouldn’t say so around Steve.”]

James snorted. [“He’d never agree to leave Red Hook or even his stupid condo.”]

[“Who do you think you’re kidding, James?”] She swiveled her head around, looking back at him out of the corner of her eye. [“You love that place.”]

He grunted in response.

[“And he’d get on your case for calling it stupid,”] she grinned, and pulled his arm tighter around her. [“He’s awfully possessive of it.”]

[“Yeah, because it’s in Red Hook.”] She could feel his breath, warm against her neck. [“No other reason. He’d live in a tent if it meant staying in Red Hook.”]

Natasha wondered briefly how likely James would be to say things like that after more of his memories had returned. Steve, she knew, loved Brooklyn - and Red Hook in particular - because they were so inextricably entwined with his younger years. How much more so was it likely to be for James, whose whole world had been ripped to pieces when he’d been sent off to war? His most pleasant memories were from his childhood, or at least the vast majority of them were.
What sort of meaning was Brooklyn likely to hold for him once he fully remembered his past?

[“I think it’s sweet,”] she murmured, and hunched herself closer against him. [“To him, it means
home. He wanted to be home again.”]

James hummed into her neck in response, sending a pleasurable shiver down her spine.

[“And now that I think of it, I’m looking forward to being home again.”]

She smiled contentedly. For as reluctant as she’d been to make the transition from living on her own
to living with the boys, she knew she’d made the right decision. Because when she called it ‘home’,
she wasn’t doing so for James’ benefit or for Steve’s. She felt more at home in the apartment in Red
Hook than she ever had in her sterile suite at the Tower. And while it would never be the kind of
home to her that the Barton farm was, the truth was that it never needed to be.

It was home. The place she longed to go back to when she was away for too long. And she found
she liked having a place like that.

Chapter End Notes

All the chapters are written, and I’m determined to get them out before Infinity War
drops and destroys me. BUT IN THE MEANTIME, let me know what you think!
“I missed you so much, Buck.” He kissed Bucky’s earlobe, then sat back on his heels to take in the sight of him once again - and got his first good look at Bucky’s new arm.

“Oh.” His face went slack, and something hot began to prickle at the insides of his eyelids. “Oh, Bucky…”

The arm was a work of art, sure. It looked more streamlined than the old one, and there was a different design to the ribbed plates that made up its surface. But what drew his wonderstruck eyes wasn’t the high technology or the fluid way the limb moved.

Red Hook, Brooklyn
Late November 2015

Steve had been waiting all afternoon, and his mood grew more anxious with each passing minute.

He’d gotten a call from Natasha that morning, saying that Bucky had been cleared to come home and that they’d be back before dinner. So he’d told Maria he’d be taking the rest of the day off - which seemed to please her, since he’d been a near-constant fixture around the Tower for the past few weeks - and headed back home to get things ready.

The prospect of having Bucky and Natasha back home almost made him giddy with happiness, and he practically scampered around the house trying to get it ready. He’d let things get a bit out of hand; he’d been the only one in the place for a while and he’d spent the majority of his time at work anyway, so there was tidying and dusting and such to be done.

And since he hadn’t miraculously learned how to cook while Bucky and Natasha had been in Wakanda, he also needed to order dinner.

It was Thanksgiving, after all.

He found himself standing by the door at a quarter to five, tapping his fingertips against his thigh anxiously and looking back over his shoulder at the dining room table. A veritable feast was laid out there, courtesy of a local restaurant called ‘The Stove of Legends.’ He’d run down there earlier today and hurriedly explained the situation to the hassled-looking kids behind the counter.

And even though it was such short notice - and maybe because of who he was, or the amount of money he’d offered to pay for what he wanted - they’d agreed to help him out.

The front door opened and in walked Natasha and Bucky.

Bucky - whose hair had grown at least another inch since Steve had last seen him and, more importantly, definitely had a new arm underneath his dark jacket.
Steve flung his arms around Bucky, burying his face almost desperately in his shoulder and hugging him for all he was worth.

“Happy Thanksgiving, Buck.” He took a deep breath, breathing in Bucky’s scent for the first time in a very long month. “I missed you so much.”

“Thanksgiving?” Bucky murmured into Steve’s neck.

“It is, isn’t it?” Natasha said. “I hadn’t thought of it.”

Steve gave her a look as if to chastise her for forgetting such an important holiday, but the smirk she offered him in return said very clearly that she’d been pulling his chain. And, smiling in response, he reached out a hand and pulled her into the hug as well.

“I missed you both,” he said as he squeezed them tight. “But I’ve got-”

“Dinner.” Bucky still hadn’t lifted his head from Steve’s neck, and so his words were muffled against skin. “You ordered food.”

Natasha stepped back, eyebrow going up. “You ordered a feast.” She made a show of counting out the dishes, a smirk skittering across her lips. “Which should tide you boys over for at least two meals. Maybe a two and a half if you’re careful.”

“I planned on leftovers,” Steve smiled as he gave Bucky a couple of firm claps on the back before letting go of the hug. “Turkey-and-stuffing sandwiches covered in gravy.” He licked his lips exaggeratedly and bent down to pick up Bucky and Natasha’s bags. “Now that’s my idea of a good lunch.”

Before long, they were situated around the table, each with a giant helping of food on their plates. (Well, Steve and Bucky had giant plates of food. Natasha’s looked reasonable by any standard metric of Thanksgiving portion sizes).

“So which restaurant did you have to beg at to get them to do this last minute?” Natasha said over a forkful of cornbread stuffing and cranberry sauce.

Steve stopped in the middle of chewing, his mouth full of turkey and his eyes bulging in disbelief.

“You knew.” He turned to Bucky in disbelief. “How does she always know?”

Bucky didn’t even look up from his plate. “She’s the brains of the operation,” he muttered around a mouthful of mashed potatoes.

“It wasn’t that hard, Rogers.” Natasha neatly speared a few string beans. “You’ve said yourself that you don’t know how to cook anything non-breakfast-related. And I happen to know that Sam and Sharon have been way too busy with their own Thanksgiving to come over here and cook a feast for you.”

“It’s like you’re Sherlock Holmes.” Steve shook his head in wonder.

“Is there pie?” Bucky loaded up his fork with a mixture of stuffing and potatoes and turkey. “My sister used to make this… she called it ‘apple candy pie’... and she’d only make it around Thanksgiving, because the ingredients…”

He trailed off, his expression a mixture of both confusion and wonder, as if amazed that he had remembered that much at all and uncertain if the memory were even real.
Natasha looked at him, saying nothing.

“They were expensive,” Steve finished with a lump in his throat, remembering those Thanksgivings more than eighty years ago.

Remembering Becca carefully measuring out the sugar and cinnamon, melting the butter and whisking the crumbly topping together with a fork. Remembering that he and Bucky had been roped into helping more than once.

“I remember spending what had to have been an hour cutting up the apples for her.” He smiled over at Bucky, who still looked lost in thought. “Thinner, she kept telling me, like she wanted me to shave the apples instead of slicing them.”

“It was labor intensive,” Bucky murmured. “Which was the other reason she only made it for Thanksgiving. She wouldn’t have had the time otherwise.”

A strange expression flitted across Natasha’s face for a split second, but she said, “What else did she make?”

Bucky didn’t answer right away, instead pushing turkey around the plate with his fork. “Chicken soup with carrots and potatoes,” he finally said. “Not for Thanksgiving though. She’d cook the whole chicken down, use every bit of it. The soup would last us a few days.”

Very quietly he added, “I think her name was Becca.”

*He remembered.*

The lump in Steve’s throat doubled in size as he recalled the last time Bucky had spoken that name. The file had laid it out, and he’d seen the flashbacks through Bucky’s eyes in the memory walks: Karpov and Pushkin had scrubbed Bucky’s mind clean of any memories of his sister after he’d gone berserk and murdered his team during a mission. A mission whose goal had been to kill dissidents, one of whom was named Rebecca.

He looked over at Natasha, locking eyes with her long enough to see the recognition in her eyes as well. Except the look on her face was oddly strained. There wasn’t the same pleasure that he felt in seeing Bucky remember. Instead, Steve saw a sort of struggle.

But for what?

“Go on, Buck.” He reached out and gently touched Natasha’s hand. “Keep going.”

Bucky sucked in his breath. Stabbed a forkful of turkey. “I don’t know,” he said suddenly. “Can we just eat now?”

“Sure.” Steve felt slightly disappointed, but only slightly.

The fact that Bucky had remembered his sister’s name when the bastard Soviets had tried so hard to completely erase it from his memory forever was an absolute victory. There would be more of them to come; Steve was sure of it. They didn’t all have to happen today.

Bucky’s mood lightened a bit as the meal went on, and by the time they’d polished off the last of the honey-butter biscuits, he was actually smiling. Natasha and Bucky had both pushed their chairs back from the table and were looking fairly well-stuffed, and Steve had to smile at the sight.

“You’ve both had a long day,” he said with a smile. “Why don’t you guys unpack and jump in the
shower? By the time you’re done, who knows? You might be ready for the pie.”

Bucky snorted. “I’m ready for the pie now.”

Natasha rolled her eyes. “Of course you are.” She rose from the table and put a hand on his shoulder. “Come on. You can wait a half hour for pie.”

Bucky followed her down the hall. “I can wait,” he grumbled. “Doesn’t mean I want to.”

Steve watched them go with a smile, then turned to clear the dinner plates. The shower was running at full blast in the bathroom down the hall as he boxed up the leftovers and loaded the plates into the dishwasher, and he reflected that he had plenty to be thankful for on this Thanksgiving.

He opened the icebox and stood there for a moment looking at the four pies he’d bought. He hadn’t been able to decide between pecan, cherry, coconut custard, or good old-fashioned apple, so he’d gotten one of each.

Had he overdone it? Probably. But it was Thanksgiving.

He heard the water shut off just as he finished putting together a tray of slices from each pie. He came into the bedroom with the tray, grinning at the thought of eating pie in bed with Bucky and Natasha, and found Bucky coming out of the ensuite bathroom in a cloud of steam, faintly damp and wearing nothing but pajama pants patterned in cartoonish rocketships.

“Natasha’s in the other shower,” Bucky said, though his eyes predictably strayed right to the pie tray. “Good thing you have a strong hot water heater.”

“You’ve got that right.” Steve set down the tray and smiled. “I can remember when taking a hot bath meant boiling pots of water at the stove. And now I can have a hot shower whenever I want, for as long as I want.”

“And the bathtub was in the kitchen,” Bucky murmured. “We kept a board on top of it during the day for counter space.”

He settled himself on the bed and Steve joined him a moment later, sliding an arm around his shoulders and hugging him tightly.

“So,” Bucky gestured to the pie, “I count eight slices. That feels ambitious, even for the three of us.”

“Oh, that’s just your tray.” Steve felt a grin coming on. “I left Natasha’s and mine in the kitchen. I figured if I brought it all in at once, there’d be nothing left by the time Nat got out of the shower.”

Bucky didn’t even hesitate, placing the tray on his lap and picking up a fork. “Thanks, pal. I’ll just get started then.” He poked at one of the slices. “This one’s cherry? Perfect.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but didn’t bother to stop Bucky from digging in. There was more pie in the kitchen, after all. He could go back.

“So how was the food in Wakanda?” He sat back to watch Bucky eat, in the way he’d done all of his life. The thought brought a satisfied smile to his face. “You didn’t feel the need to talk about it in any of our phone chats.”

“Good,” Bucky said through a mouthful of pie. “Lots of curries. Stews.” He forked another bite of pie into his mouth. “And this iced hibiscus drink. I had a lot of that.”
He looked at Steve, then set the tray back on the nightstand and leaned against him without hesitation. “And what about you? Is this your first night home since we’ve been away?”

“Not the first.” Steve put his arm back around Bucky and pulled him close. “I spent a couple of nights on the Helicarrier, a couple in the Tower, but mostly I stayed here.” He sighed. “But I was so tired when I got back that I didn’t really have the chance to do much but sleep.” A frown. “Which was probably the point. I think I didn’t want to have to think about missing you too much.”

Bucky snorted. “You’ve been without me before.”

“Yeah, and I hated it.” Steve’s arm tightened around Bucky reflexively, and he brought his other arm up to enfold him without even thinking about it. “You ought to know by now, Buck. My life’s always better with you in it than not.”

“Yeah, because you actually take time off when I’m around.”

Bucky shifted so that his head was tucked neatly under Steve’s chin. He had a short crop of dark hair now. Not anything like the curls Steve remembered from when they were younger, but no longer the severe bristly look either.

“Your hair’s coming back,” he said, rubbing his chin against the top of Bucky’s head and enjoying the no-longer-scratchy feeling. And while he was on the subject of Bucky’s changing appearance…

“Hey, let’s have a look at that new arm.” He smiled and pulled back slightly. “I haven’t gotten a chance to see it properly yet.”

He could feel Bucky scowl against his chest. Or maybe he was just used to it and could anticipate it by now. “It’s an arm, Steve.”

“Yeah, but it’s a new arm.” Something about Bucky scowling at him made him want to grin even more. “Come on, Buck, show me. I want to see it. It probably looks miles better than the old one.”

He could feel the eyeroll too. “I thought you’d want to see my dick more than my arm. Natasha was certain you’d be raring to go all night long.”

“Well, I am.” Steve tried to scowl at Bucky, but it was no good. He couldn’t have kept the smile off his face if his life had depended on it. “So I guess we might as well get started.”

He rolled over, pushing Bucky onto his back and winding up on top of him. Of course he’d had wild fantasies all day long about welcoming Bucky and Natasha back home - who wouldn’t have, under the circumstances? - and now, here they were, back home and waiting to be welcomed.

“I missed you so much, Buck.” He kissed Bucky’s earlobe, then sat back on his heels to take in the sight of him once again - and got his first good look at Bucky’s new arm.

“Oh.” His face went slack, and something hot began to prickle at the insides of his eyelids. “Oh, Bucky…”

The arm was a work of art, sure. It looked more streamlined than the old one, and there was a different design to the ribbed plates that made up its surface. But what drew his wonderstruck eyes wasn’t the high technology or the fluid way the limb moved.

In place of the old red star high on Bucky’s left bicep - the one he’d painted glossy white during his time in prison - was a familiar circle of red and white rings, with a single white star in the innermost blue circle.
Bucky had chosen to emblazon himself with Steve’s own shield.

“Aw, Buck.” Steve felt his lower lip quiver as he reached down to touch the emblem tentatively. “I don’t… I don’t know what to say.”

The expression on Bucky’s face made clear that he didn’t know what to say either, but finally he managed a tentative, “You like it?”

The rings on the shield were slightly textured; Steve could feel them under his fingertips. Bucky had gone for so long without any say in what was done to him - whether physically or mentally - and now that he had the ability to make those sorts of decisions for himself, he’d chosen to replace the symbol his captors and torturers had branded on him with a symbol of freedom. The symbol of the man who’d never stopped fighting to free him, and who would die before ever allowing him to become a slave again.

“I love it.” Steve smiled a wobbly sort of smile. “I love you.”

“Yeah.” A smirk skittered across Bucky’s face. “You ain’t half bad yourself.”

Steve rolled his eyes in exasperation. “You’re terrible.” He leaned in to give Bucky another kiss and then found himself abruptly rolled onto his back, a very satisfied looking Bucky straddling his waist and peering down at him.

“I can’t be that terrible,” he said. “You’re the one who’s pretty eager to put a ring on it, after all.”

“Yeah, well.” Steve tried his hand at a grumpy expression, but probably fell short of the mark. “I’ve got to take what I can get.”

Natasha came into the room in her bathrobe. She was toweling her hair, which had gone very curly from the hot water.

“Are you boys arguing again?” She raised an eyebrow, her fractional smile bringing flickers of light to her eyes.

Steve couldn’t help himself. “He started it.”

Bucky snorted. “And I’ll finish it if I have to.”

Oh, look.” Natasha ignored them entirely. “Pie.”

“The cherry’s pretty good.” At Natasha’s arched eyebrow, Bucky added, “That accounts for the empty plate.”

Natasha’s expression didn’t waver. “Of course it does.”

Bucky shrugged. “I saved you seven other slices, and Steve said there’s more in the kitchen.”

“Well.” Steve looked over at Natasha with a smile, then back up at Bucky. “If I’d brought it all in here, there wouldn’t have been any left.”

“He told me to eat it.” Bucky gestured to the tray. “He said that this was my tray. All eight slices, and here I am, willing to share them.”

“You would give him an entire pie.” Natasha looked over at Steve, somehow shaking her head at him without actually moving it at all.
Then, as casually as though she’d been doing it her entire life, she took off her robe and hung it on
the door before sliding into bed beside them in her underwear.

“Are you just going to sit there all night?” she asked Bucky, propping herself up on her elbow and
giving the pair of them a smirk. “Or are we going to eat the rest of this pie and let Steve welcome us
home?”

Bucky, still straddling Steve’s lap, abruptly grabbed two plates of pie off the tray, shoved one into
Steve’s hands and handed Natasha the other.

“Eat.” He took another plate for himself and forked a bite into his mouth. “Apple. Very good.”

“Jeez, Buck,” Steve chuckled, feeling his heart lighten as he took a bite of the apple pie. He’d missed
them both so much, and now here they were, back home again and as happy to see him as he was to
see them. “You’ve been away so long you’ve forgotten how to speak in complete sentences.”

Bucky rolled his eyes. “‘Eat’ is a complete sentence, Steve.”

“It’s a word.” Steve spoke around the pie. “A one-syllable word. At least stick a couple other words
in there, Buck. Like ‘You should eat the pie, Steve.’ That’s a sentence.”

Bucky scowled down at him. “You should shut up and eat the pie, Steve.” He shoved another
forkful of pie into his mouth. “Better?”

“Barely.” Steve scowled right back up at Bucky and chewed his mouthful of pie. “You know what a
better sentence would be?”

“‘I wish we had some ice cream’?” Natasha raised an eyebrow, not bothering to cover her miniscule
smile.

“No.” Steve turned his glower on her for a moment before pausing to reconsider. “Well, yes, but
that’s not the one I was thinking of.”

“How about ‘Apple pie - it tastes like freedom.’?” Her smile didn’t broaden a millimeter, but the
mischievous twinkle in her eyes was obvious.

Steve scowled harder. “That’s not a sentence. It’s a slogan.”

“You mean like ‘Each one you buy is a bullet in the barrel of your best guy’s gun.’?” Natasha
speared a piece of pie on her fork and ate it.

Steve’s scowl finally broke, and he smiled in spite of himself. “You know, Romanoff…” he started,
shaking his head.

Bucky was silent for a moment, but an odd expression flickered across his face. “What’s that from?
That sounds…” He poked the remains of the pie with his fork. “Familiar. And stupid.” He scowled
down at Steve. “Which means it probably has something to do with you, doesn’t it?”

Natasha snorted loudly. Steve gave her a sidelong glower, but couldn’t keep the smile out of his
eyes. He rounded on Bucky; it was easier to scowl at him anyway. He’d had more than enough
practice.

“You’d know from stupid,” he shot back, shoveling in the last of his pie. He was eager to spend the
rest of the evening alternating between sex and pie, and not so much looking forward to watching his
cringeworthy USO performances on grainy old film stock. He knew he wouldn’t be able to escape it
forever - Natasha wouldn’t let him - but he wanted to put it off for tonight at least.

He set his plate aside and placed both hands on Bucky’s stomach, letting his fingertips explore the defined musculature. “But I love you anyway.”

Bucky raised an eyebrow and looked down at him, and Steve felt his heart soften a bit. Only a bit. “You can’t distract me with that, you know. I’m not falling for it.”

“Of course you are, James.” Natasha set aside her own pie plate - and Bucky’s as well, placing them both on the nightstand - and reclined next to them, propping herself up on her elbow with the corner of her mouth quirked upward in anticipation. “If there’s food or sex involved, you always do.”

“She’s got you there, Buck.” Steve let his hands wander lower, his fingertips slipping into Bucky’s waistband and starting to explore. “Between the two of us, I think we know you pretty well.”

Bucky closed his eyes. “Not falling for it,” he breathed, as Steve’s hands went to work on him. “At all…”

“Not at all,” Natasha purred, and she moved forward - suddenly, gloriously nude - to bring her lips to Steve’s. And Steve closed his eyes, surrendering to everything that promised to come.

It was so good to have them back.

Chapter End Notes

Questions, comments, and kudos are warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated.
Deconstructed Hipster Nonsense

Chapter Summary

Right as they were digging into the food, Bucky said, “Natasha sent us a ‘Captain America’s Greatest Hits’ DVD from the Smithsonian. It’s nearly an hour of him singing and dancing in wool tights.”

“Put that on right now,” Sharon said immediately. “You didn’t even have to ask.”

“Aw, come on, Buck.” Steve felt himself wilt. “Did you have to?”

“Yes, he had to.” Sam gestured impatiently to the TV. “Go on now.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Red Hook, Brooklyn
Mid-December 2015

Over the next few weeks, life settled back into a routine.

Bucky still had both therapy and social work appointments every week. Twice a week really was a lot of fucking therapy, but he and Dr. Levitt had been talking about the upcoming wedding and Bucky’s possible retirement and Darien Nash had been helping him develop strategies for living with not just Steve, but Natasha, too.

It was good, living with the both of them, but it was a new routine to adjust to.

He and Wanda went to the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan and spent a few hours looking at the Pablo Picasso installation. Apparently Picasso had been a very important artist, but Bucky couldn’t really see what the big deal was. Until he got home and told Steve about it, and Steve dragged him right back to the damn museum the next day and spent hours talking about the differences between analytical cubism and synthetic cubism until Bucky threatened to toss Steve directly into the ‘Woman in the Garden’ sculpture.

Which actually looked like a demented, skeletal horse, but what the fuck did Bucky know about art?

His hair had grown a bit more too, had even started to curl slightly, which Natasha seemed to find… well.. the only word Bucky could think of was delightful. She had petted him to sleep on the couch more than once, usually while they were in the middle of watching a picture.

The bee colony was doing fine as well.

Miles came over after school with his usual bag of snacks and the two of them went up to the roof and stared through the hive window for a bit.

“They don’t look active active,” Miles said. “Mostly they look like they’re just buzzing around to keep warm.”
Bucky glanced at his *Natural Beekeeping for Beginners* book, but he had already memorized this part. “That’s exactly what they’re doing. Only the queen bee hibernates.”

“Charmed life.”

Bucky shrugged. “During the rest of the year, she’s constantly producing more bees.”

“All right, fair enough.” Miles nodded. “Fair trade.”

They went downstairs and found a small package from the Smithsonian in Washington, DC waiting by the door. Bucky opened the package and dropped a single, slim DVD case into his hand.

*’Captain America! A Historical Retrospective of Films, Songs, Dances, and More!’*

The next forty-five minutes were golden.

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Steve rode the bike back to Red Hook alone.

He’d left the Tower at the same time as Natasha, but she’d gone off with Sharon for a quick girls-only dinner, promising to be home before long. Which he’d been absolutely fine with; he knew that Natasha liked to spend as much time with her best girlfriend as possible, and it wasn’t as though they’d made any special plans for the evening anyway.

Besides, he thought with a smile as he swung the bike into the garage, he and Bucky hadn’t gotten a whole lot of time to themselves since Wakanda.

He opened the door to the apartment, unslinging his duffle bag from his shoulder and propping the shield against the wall in its customary place, and called out “Hey Buck. I’m home.”

“Already?” Bucky called back. “I thought you’d be out a lot longer, saving the American way.”

“What?” Steve frowned, untying his boots.

“Be fair, Sarge,” a voice that Steve recognized as Miles said. “He can’t really be expected to fight like a man for what’s right night and day.”

“But he took a vow,” Bucky said.

“He did take a vow,” Miles agreed.

“Oh no.” Steve felt his heart sink. “Tell me you didn’t.”

He came into the living room, dragging his feet a bit, to see exactly what he’d been afraid of seeing. Bucky and Miles were sprawled out on the couch, a collection of junk food arrayed around them, watching his old USO show on the big TV screen on the far wall.

He looked at himself in the old grainy film, smiling sheepishly to cover the fact that he couldn’t remember his lines, trying not to look uncomfortable in his itchy knitted Captain America outfit, trying not to look down too often at the cue cards he’d Scotch-taped to the inside of his shield. Listened to the tinny voices of the chorus girls as they sang the song he’d never forget, listened to himself stumble over the words he’d also never forget, and listened to the soaring canned music that had been designed to be as patriotic and rousing as possible.

And for a moment, he was transported back to 1943 and the first time Bucky’d seen it. He’d ribbed
Steve for weeks on end about it. Months, even. And now he had an accomplice.

“Aw, come on, Buck,” he said with sagging shoulders. “Where’d you even get that?”

“Don’t know.” Bucky didn’t take his eyes off the screen. “Package was waiting at the door.”

Miles upended the remains of a can of Pringles into his mouth. “Someone thought we really needed to see this.”

“Swell.” Steve sighed and sat down in the easy chair.

On the screen, Captain America didn’t skip a beat in his monologue as he turned and stage-punched Wally, who crumpled spectacularly to the floor amid cheers from the audience. Playing Adolf Hitler had never gotten boring for Wally, Steve remembered, though he hadn’t much liked not being able to shave off the silly Charlie Chaplin mustache. The girls didn’t like it, he’d complained one night after a show.

“We watched one of your short films, too.” Miles offered Steve a can of Screamin’ Dill Pickle Pringles. “You were storming a beach.”

Bucky snorted. “He was storming a painted backdrop on a treadmill.”

“We had to film it in a tiny studio,” Steve replied, crunching at a pickle-flavored potato chip. “They used potted palm trees and just moved them close enough to the camera that the pots didn’t show on the film.”

“There were a couple of blooper reels even.” Miles grinned. “Director kept yelling at you not to look at the camera.”

Bucky smirked. “Because you were looking directly at the camera. Talking right into it.”

“You were cheesing pretty hard.” Miles unwrapped a package of Hostess Cupcakes. “Showing off those pearly whites.”

“It’s not like I had any experience.” Steve’s voice sounded pained even to his own ears. He crunched loudly on another mouthful of chips and tried not to wince as his younger self on the screen smiled an admittedly cheesy smile and exhorted the audience to buy more Series E Defense Bonds. “I wanted to be a soldier, not an actor. I never ended up being very good at the acting, anyway.”

Bucky and Miles exchanged a glance. Steve braced himself.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Bucky said. “Your scenes with Betsy Ross—”

“The First Lady,” Miles added helpfully.

“- were pretty convincing.” Bucky tore open a bag of Cool Ranch Doritos. “Especially the dramatic kiss right before you went off to war in your very own star-spangled submarine.”

Steve sank down lower in his seat and tried to hide his awkwardness behind his potato chips. It didn’t work.

“That was mostly her,” he mumbled. “Helen was a real actress. I think she went on to do a couple of studio films, actually.” He crunched loudly at another chip. “Anyway, I was too flummoxed to even get my lines right in the scenes with her until she took me aside and gave me a few pointers.” He sighed. “I kind of have the feeling she only did it so we could finish the reel and move on. It was
To Steve’s relief, the DVD ended a few minutes later. The three of them sat on the couch, crunching on snacks for a bit longer, before Miles finally stood up with a sigh.

“Calculus calls.” Right before he shut the front door, he added, “We should see if there’s a sequel.”

“It was a very educational sixty minutes,” Bucky agreed, and then Miles was gone and Bucky fixed Steve with an obnoxiously smug look. “So what’s your star-spangled plan for the rest of the evening?”

Steve rolled his eyes and gave Bucky a sour look. “Not to hear that anymore, for one thing.”

Bucky’s expression didn’t change. “But you’re so strong and brave and here to save the -”

“Aw, come on, Buck.” Steve could hear his voice getting more high-pitched, and he couldn’t do a thing to stop it. “This is like a repeat of seventy years ago.”

Bucky shrugged. “Well, we can’t ignore that there’s a threat and a war we must win.”

Steve threw up his hands. “You are such a jerk.”

“And yet, we booked a crocodile cruise in Goa just yesterday.” Bucky crunched on a handful of Doritos. “Which you were very excited about.”

“Well, yeah.” Steve gave Bucky a smirking sort of glower. “I wanted you to be in good company.”

Still, his sarcastic wit couldn’t put a damper on the happiness that bubbled up at the thought of the fact that the pair of them were booking honeymoon excursions.

The three of them, he corrected himself. While Natasha hadn’t seemed overly enthusiastic about the idea of looking at crocodiles through a glass-bottomed boat, she’d been very happy with the idea of long stretches of time on the beaches of Goa.

And, God, they were getting married. It still sometimes seemed too wonderful to be real.

Bucky nudged him. “You went away for a second there. Usually I’m the one who does that.”

“Not for a while now.” Steve smiled back at Bucky, all earlier sarcasm forgotten, and slid an arm around his shoulders. “You’ve gotten so much better lately. I don’t know if you’ve realized it, but I see it every day.”

Bucky grunted in response and shoved another handful of Doritos into his mouth, crunching them loudly.

“I mean it, Buck.” Steve pulled Bucky closer to him. Or pulled himself closer to Bucky; he wasn’t sure. Either way, Bucky’s body ended up pressed against Steve’s side with their heads resting against one another. “Every day I watch you get stronger. The therapy’s helping. You’re in a much better place now than you were even a few months ago, let alone last year. And I don’t even know how to tell you how happy that makes me.”

Another grunt.

“You’re also the most eloquent guy I know,” Steve said sourly, knocking his head gently against Bucky’s. “I mean, seriously. You ought to write some of these down and put them in a book.”
Bucky shoved another handful of Doritos into his mouth. “Punk.”

“Jerk,” Steve responded easily and leaned over to kiss Bucky on the lips. He grimaced a second later, tasting the Doritos on Bucky’s mouth. “Ugh.” He shook his head. “Those chips taste awful.”

“They’re pretty shitty,” Bucky agreed before crunching on another mouthful.

“Then why do you keep eating them? Oh, wait.” Steve rolled his eyes, mouth twisting into a sour pucker. “Because it’s you, and you’ll eat anything that gets close enough to your mouth.”

A smile flickered across Bucky’s lips. “Including your dick,” he said, right as the front door opened.

“Who’s eating whose dick?” Sharon called out cheerfully, walking into the living room with Natasha and Sam at her heels.

“Because we were going to order takeout,” Sam added.

Natasha leaned against the doorframe, a smirk playing over her mouth. “Hi, boys. The tapas bar was a bust.”

“Hey.” Steve got up from the couch to welcome Sam and Sharon with hugs and Natasha with a kiss. “Sorry to hear about the bar. What are tapas, anyway?”

“Small, usually delicious Spanish appetizers,” Sharon explained. “Only the place we went to in Astoria was unfortunately hipster central.”

“The cojonuda was deconstructed.” Natasha shook her head. “Sausage, quail egg, spicy red pepper, and bread served on four separate garden trowels.”

“I have no idea what any of that meant.” Steve shook his head, speaking to Sam. “No idea at all.”

Sam pulled out his phone and handed it to Steve. “They’re being literal. They sent a picture.”

Sharon shrugged. “You wouldn’t have believed us otherwise.”

“Huh.” Steve looked at the picture for a long time. At least now he knew what they were talking about. He still didn’t know why, though.

“Why trowels?” He handed the phone back to Sam with a quizzical look around the group. “What does gardening have to do with Spanish appetizers?”

“We tried one more dish.” Natasha blew out an amused sigh. “Something simple. Pickled vegetable and olive skewers.”

“Brought to us in little clay plant pots,” Sharon added. “Once again, deconstructed.”

“And that’s when they texted me and said they were heading this way for some real food,” Sam finished.

“Probably for the best.” Steve looked over at Sharon, shaking his head. “Next time just stick with the burger joints. Less chance of being disappointed.”

He wondered briefly how long Bucky would have lasted on an outing like that, where the presentation of the food seemed to be more important than the fact that there wasn’t much of it and you were expected to put it together yourself. Probably not all that long, he mused. In fact, he wasn’t sure it would have been possible to convince Bucky to go along unless he’d eaten pretty well
“So what are we ordering?” Bucky asked from his seat on the couch. Steve wasn’t at all surprised that he had decided to hang back when everyone came in, but he was pleased that he was attempting to be part of the conversation.

He was getting better whether or not he chose to acknowledge it.

“Whatever it is, there needs to be a lot of it.” Natasha nodded in the direction of the couch, her patented two-millimeter smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. “The boys need their leftovers, after all.”

“Bucky’s the one who gets the leftovers,” Steve chuckled. “His, mine, yours, I don’t think he cares at two in the morning.”

“And after their disappointing hipster tapas thing, the ladies are going to want something satisfying.” Sam raised an eyebrow. “Anyplace around here do good ribs?”

“I’ll eat anything but silly tapas.” Sharon pulled out her phone and tapped it a few times. “Okay, we’re not ordering from the place called NormCore.”

Natasha raised an eyebrow. “That sounds like more hipster nonsense.”

“Exactly.” Sharon frowned. “Definitely not ordering from the Greenery, which proudly offers health-conscious bites and blends.”

Sam snorted. “Health-conscious food isn’t actually food.” He folded his arms. “Hell, most of the time it doesn’t even look like food.”

Steve chuckled. “This from a man who cooks stuff I don’t even know how to pronounce.”

Sam raised an eyebrow back at Steve. “You can pronounce ‘ribs’, can’t you? ‘Chicken’? ‘Sausage’?”

“He knows all about the sausage.” Natasha’s smile didn’t budge, but her eyes twinkled mischievously at Steve.

“The places your mind goes, Nat, I swear.” Steve shook his head in mock exasperation, but he couldn’t keep the smile from forming on his face.

“How about the Chicken and Rib Crib?” Bucky announced, still in the same spot on the couch and eyes glued to his own phone. “Ribs. Protein. Nothing health-conscious.”

“Yeah, but nothing close to good chicken and ribs either.” Sam went over to sit down on the opposite end of the couch, grinning at Bucky. “You ought to come by my place sometime for some real barbecue. You’ll never want to eat fast-food ribs ever again.”

Bucky glanced at him. “I’ll hold you to that.”

“Just you though.” Sharon smirked at Steve. “If we invite your fiance too, we won’t have enough food for the rest of us.”

“Excuse me.” Steve folded his arms in mock indignation. “He eats way more than me. Weren’t you paying attention when we all went to that Brazilian place?”

Sharon snorted. “I was way too busy getting toasted and eating my own fill of meat.”
“Chicken and Rib Crib it is,” Bucky said, right as Natasha wandered over and sat on the arm of the couch.

“Let me see that.” She reached for his phone. “You can order all the chicken and ribs you want, but I insist on adding something green.”

Sam relaxed into the couch. “So ribs with chimichurri sauce?”

Natasha’s eyebrows went off in search of her hairline, and she fell uncharacteristically silent for a long moment.

“I… can’t think of any way to top that line, actually.”

She laughed, and Steve felt himself grinning. Hearing real laughter out of Natasha was a rarity, and he looked over at Bucky to make sure he was appreciating the sound just as much.

And of course, Bucky was looking at her with a stupid, sappy lovestruck expression. Steve’s grin broadened. Bucky’s love for Natasha was as obvious as it was immense. It seemed to border on worship, and it wasn’t hard to see why. She was a wonderful woman in more ways than he could count.

They were lucky to have her.

A little more than a half hour later, they were all seated around the coffee table, unpacking large bags of chicken and ribs. And a salad, at Natasha’s insistence.

Right as they were digging into the food, Bucky said, “Natasha sent us a ‘Captain America’s Greatest Hits’ DVD from the Smithsonian. It’s nearly an hour of him singing and dancing in wool tights.”

“Put that on right now,” Sharon said immediately. “You didn’t even have to ask.”

“Aw, come on, Buck.” Steve felt himself wilt. “Did you have to?”

“Yes, he had to.” Sam gestured impatiently to the TV. “Go on now.”

And so Steve found himself concentrating desperately on his food for the following three quarters of an hour while everyone else dissolved into gales of whooping laughter at his old films. Sam was laughing so hard at one point that tears actually began to roll down his face, and though Sharon had seen the films before, she wasn’t far off from Sam.

At the end of the night, Sharon hummed the opening bars of ‘Star Spangled Man’ as she packed up the few leftovers.

Right before they stepped out, Sam turned to Steve with a grin. “That was great, man. We should definitely find out if the Smithsonian put together a volume two.”

Steve cringed at the thought. He remembered some of the other films he’d made - the ones that hadn’t made it into the collection they’d just watched - and he knew what he was in for if there was a second volume.

“I’ll do my best not to find out,” he chuckled as he bundled Sam into a back-slapping hug. “Meanwhile, I’m going to hold you to that barbecue dinner you were talking about before.”

“After the honeymoon,” Sam agreed, “and when the weather warms up. Prime barbecuing season.”
Steve smiled, kissed Sharon on the cheek, and saw her and Sam out the door with a light warmth in his heart that he was beginning to enjoy getting used to. Things were all right, he thought with satisfaction as he activated the security system and headed down the hall with Bucky and Natasha.

A few minutes later, lying there in bed curled around Bucky, who was in turn curled around Natasha, he felt absolutely comfortable and at peace. Though he was reminded, as Bucky shifted and writhed and pushed Steve almost to the edge of the bed in an attempt to make himself comfortable, their king-size bed was honestly too small.

“We really ought to have a bigger bed,” he murmured into Bucky’s shoulder.

“You’ve said that before,” Bucky replied. “And I’ve said I don’t mind being stuffed into bed like this.”

“I wouldn’t mind a bigger bed.” There was a smile in Natasha’s voice. “A bigger bed wouldn’t stop us from sleeping wrapped around each other, anyway. It’d just make it comfier.”

“And,” Bucky continued, “if you get us a sequel DVD, we can watch it in the comfort of our bed.”

Natasha stretched, her head turning so Steve could catch a glimpse of her smile. “As much as I enjoyed tonight’s entertainment, I can’t take credit for it.” She chuckled. “Maybe somebody from James’ fan club decided he needed a laugh.”

Bucky was silent for a moment, then, “I don’t have a fan club.”

“Then who sent you all those cards and Edible Arrangements and stuffed bears?” Steve hugged Bucky around his midsection, smiling into the back of Bucky’s shoulder. “There are plenty of people out there who like you, Buck. Remember that waiter who wanted to take a picture with us?”

Another beat of silence before Bucky said, “You really didn’t send it?” He added something in Russian, ending with a word that sounded like ‘Natashenka.’

Natasha responded with a simple “Nyet”, though the smile on her face grew softer and warmer. Whatever Bucky had said must have been very touching to her.

Steve reminded himself to start listening to his Rosetta Stone recordings again.

“I probably should have, though.” Natasha shifted around so she could lay a hand on Bucky’s cheek. “It would have been worth it to see the looks on your faces.”

A smile drifted across Bucky’s face. “Well, you did get to see the looks on our faces.”

“This is true.” Natasha nestled her head against Bucky’s chest, her arm draping lazily across Bucky’s body to trail her fingertips against Steve. “But only Sam was seeing it for the first time. I’d have liked to see you boys watch it together for the first time too.”

“Oh well.” Steve hugged Bucky closer to him, making sure to reach out his fingertips to caress Natasha’s shoulder as he did. “Can’t have everything, I guess.”

“We’re pretty close,” she responded softly, that genuine smile drifting back onto her face, and Steve felt his heart swell.

“Yes we are,” he murmured as he felt sleep reach out for him.
Chapter End Notes

If you're reading and enjoying this, let me know what you think!
Not Your Grandma's Needlepoint

Chapter Summary

James was hiding something.

Oh, he wasn’t nearly as obvious about it as Rogers would have been - honestly, that man might as well have had a screen in the middle of his forehead displaying his innermost thoughts to the world, for as good as he was at concealing them - but it wasn’t at all difficult for her to pick up on the fact that he was hiding something.

After so many years, his tells were obvious to her.

Chapter Notes

If they're ["speaking like this,"], then they're speaking Russian.

Red Hook, Brooklyn
Late-December 2015

Of course Steve made a stupidly big deal out of Christmas.

“Aw, come on, Buck,” he said as he hung a fake pine garland over the front door, the huge red bow right over the middle of the doorway. “You missed last Christmas, and your birthday too. This year, I’m going to see to it that you get the merriest Christmas you’ve ever had.” He struggled a bit with his armload of decorations. “Hey, hand me up that mistletoe, would you?”

Bucky wasn’t entirely sure why he had expected anything less. And yeah, he supposed he had missed Christmas last year, what with his spending three months in prison. But then again, he had missed Christmas every year for the past seventy years, unless he had been on a mission.

He pushed that thought aside and helped Steve hang the garlands.

They got a tree, too. Went down to a local lot and picked one out, and when Natasha had commented that fake trees required less care and were certainly less messy, Steve had responded with typical, Steve-ish indignation.

“I never had a plastic tree when I was a kid.” He shook his head. “There’s no way to get that fresh pine tree smell from a plastic tree either, and that’s the smell of Christmas as far as I’m concerned.” He closed his eyes and smiled. “Pine needles and cookies baking and that smell the furnace always used to make when too many people turned up the steam heat. That’s Christmas.”

Bucky didn’t really remember any of that (yet), but it sounded nice.

They decorated the tree, and Steve put on Christmas music (“The good stuff. From when we were
and made hot chocolate, and the three of them ended up cuddled on the couch, drinking hot chocolate out of oversized mugs and listening to Bing Crosby dream of a white Christmas.

It was nice.

On Christmas morning, Bucky and Natasha woke up to an enormous breakfast. Much bigger than what Steve normally put together.

“Pancakes and waffles?” Bucky came up behind Steve, slid his arms around his waist and hooked his chin over Steve’s shoulder. “Now you’re just getting fancy.”

“It’s Christmas,” Steve smiled, leaning his head back to rub his cheek against Bucky’s. “Is Natasha up yet? It’ll be time for presents soon.”

“Coffee,” came Natasha’s sleepy mumble from the doorway. “Then presents.” She flopped into one of the chairs at the table, adding “Merry Christmas, boys,” as a sort of afterthought.

Bucky detached himself from Steve and went over to Natasha. “I think this is our first one together.” He dropped a kiss on top of her rumpled hair. “Isn’t it?”

“Probably?” She snuggled against him, her eyes half-closed and a contented, sleepy smile on her face. “It’s definitely the first one we’ve been able to celebrate together without worrying about being found out.”

“Coffee’s ready.” Steve headed over to the table with a tray piled high with food and sat down. “Merry Christmas, guys,” he said brightly, a huge smile on his face as he reached for the pancake syrup. “And hey, I just thought of something. Next year, it’ll be our first married Christmas.”

“Which means he’ll want a tree so big, it overtakes the living room,” Natasha said over the rim of her coffee cup.

“Not at all,” Steve replied, his chin lifting stubbornly. “Because then where would we fit all the presents?”

When they got to opening presents, Natasha couldn’t hide her amusement at the matching pair of dinosaur-patterned pajama pants she had gotten both Steve and Bucky.

“Perfect for a pair of fossils,” she offered with a smile as she looked over at Steve.

Steve merely rolled his eyes.

“And then I stripped off the pajama pants I was wearing right then and there and put my new ones on,” Bucky explained to Wanda two days later. “They were very comfy.”

They sat in a small, toasty bakery called ‘Raisin the Roof’, drinking fancy coffees and nibbling on delicate-looking pastries.

Well, Wanda nibbled. Bucky was content to plow through a plate of them and then go back and order more.

“It sounds like you’re enjoying your retirement.” Wanda stirred her macchiato with a rock-candy-encrusted wooden swizzle stick. “Do you spend most days in your pajamas? I would if I were retired.”

Bucky frowned. “I should. I don’t know why I haven’t.” He drummed the fingers of his left hand
against the table, but the sound was muffled by the black glove he wore. “Maybe because I like walking around the neighborhood.”

“So put your pajamas on when you get home.” Wanda nibbled at a macaron. “That’s what I plan on doing this afternoon when we’re finished.” She raised an eyebrow. “How long does it usually take to do a tattoo? I’ve never seen it done before.”

“I don’t know.” Bucky shrugged. “The one I made in prison took a few hours, but I guess that doesn’t count.”

He had painstakingly covered up the red star on his bicep with white paint, and that had served him well until Shuri had given him his new arm. (With a tattoo that Steve was very fond of.)

“It was only paint.” Wanda sipped her coffee, frowned, and stirred the candy stick around a bit more. “And you did it all yourself. So no, it doesn’t count.”

Bucky shoved a delicate-looking pastry into his mouth. He had decided on getting this new, second tattoo while recovering in Wakanda and had even programmed several reminders into his phone to do so.

Timing was important, and getting it a few weeks before the wedding seemed like good timing. He had sat with Wanda over ramen and drawn out several sketches of the tattoo, though the design was simplistic enough to begin with.

He washed the pastry down with a long gulp of coffee. “Well, I guess we’ll find out in an hour.”

A ten minute walk brought them to ‘Not Your Grandma’s Needlepoint’, a neon-bright shop playing loud music that Bucky couldn’t even begin to name. An orange-haired woman named Crystal - sporting two sleeves of colorful tattoos - greeted him with an excited “You’re really Bucky Barnes? Holy fuck, that’s awesome.”

Bucky didn’t really know how to respond to that, but Wanda said, “Indeed, it is awesome.”

“I’m so getting a picture with you once this is done.” Crystal grinned. “Speaking of which, what’s getting done?”

Bucky showed her his sketch and where he wanted it, and things moved very quickly after that. He peeled his shirt off and settled down onto a comfortably padded table, Crystal snapped on rubber gloves and dragged over a wheeled cart laden with tattoo equipment, and soon there was nothing but the whirring rattle of the electric needle and the occasional wipe with a sterile pad.

He barely felt a thing.

“It’ll take about a week and a half, two weeks, to heal,” Crystal had told him, but Bucky hadn’t even needed an entire two weeks to recover from getting his arm replaced. He’d have to wait a day on showering though.

He spent two days avoiding sex with either Steve or Natasha, but that was easy enough to explain away. They had several Star Trek pictures to work through, after all.

“Maybe we could set the next picture aside till the day after tomorrow,” Steve murmured into his ear in the middle of The Wrath of Khan. “We haven’t had any time lately to enjoy being in bed before we fall asleep in it.”

Bucky didn’t take his eyes off the screen. “Horndog.”
“You ought to be checked for satyriasis,” Natasha offered from Bucky’s other side. “Or whatever they call it these days.”

“I’m not compulsive about it.” Steve sounded ruffled. “I’ve got a high libido and two people to split it between.”

Bucky shoved a handful of popcorn into his mouth. “‘Horndog’ covers it.”

“If you want to call it that, fine.” Steve nuzzled into Bucky’s neck. “But only for you two. The two people I love like crazy, by the way, and who I’m getting married to in pretty short order.”

On screen, a mortally wounded Khan attempted to reorganize all matter in the nebula. It was very dramatic and required Bucky’s full attention.

“You’re talking through the climax, Steve,” he said, though it was hard to resist the nuzzling. He even leaned into it a little.

Patience.

“I had a different climax on my mind,” Steve muttered with what Bucky could tell was a salacious smile.

“You’re such a dork, Rogers.” Bucky didn’t have to look at Natasha to know she was rolling her eyes. “Remind me again why we put up with you?”

“Because Bucky loves me,” Steve shot back easily. “And because your life would be boring if you didn’t have me to make fun of, Romanoff.”

Natasha and Steve went back and forth like that for a while, Spock died dramatically at the climax of the picture, and despite Steve’s griping, Bucky started up *The Search for Spock*.

“He can’t be that dead,” Steve said with a frown, “if they’re going to search for him.”

Bucky scowled. “Just watch.”

By the next morning, the tattoo had healed up nicely.

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James was hiding something.

Oh, he wasn’t nearly as obvious about it as Rogers would have been - honestly, that man might as well have had a screen in the middle of his forehead displaying his innermost thoughts to the world, for as good as he was at concealing them - but it wasn’t at all difficult for her to pick up on the fact that he was hiding something.

After so many years, his tells were obvious to her.

She wasn’t worried, though. If it had been something serious, James wouldn’t have tried to hide it. He was smarter than that, and more importantly, he trusted her more than that. And - not inconsequentially - he also knew that if he tried to hide something of real importance from her or Rogers, the both of them would be mightily upset once they found out.

Once *she* found out. Better to be realistic.

So she waited. And when James wore a T-shirt to bed for the third night in a row, she thought she
might have guessed what he was trying to keep secret. But she wanted to know for certain, so she did what came naturally.

She launched herself at James as he came into the bedroom, intercepting him before he got halfway to the bed and locking her thighs around his neck. She was seated comfortably on his shoulders with his face pressed nicely against her groin - the perfect position.

“I’ve waited long enough, James,” she said as she rode him smoothly to the floor.

James’ hands came up on either side of her thighs. “You don’t even have to ask.” His words were muffled, but she could hear the grin on his face.

The thud his body made as it hit the floor was loud enough to bring Rogers in from the other room, but the panicked expression on his face was quickly replaced with one of amused half-annoyance. “Didn’t want to wait for me, huh, Natasha?”

“Nope.” She smirked and rocked lightly against James’ face, his breath warm against her core. “And I still don’t, so hurry up.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She loved how dependable he was.

James’ fingers scrabbled at the waistband of her pajama pants - patterned with dinosaur bones, for the two fossils she was involved with, ha ha - and pulled them down, though he didn’t get very far.

“Take them off,” he breathed. “Before I rip them off.”

“Don’t you dare,” she replied sternly. “These are the comfiest pair I have.”

She looked over at Rogers, who was busily skinning down his own pants, and smiled saucily. The smile remained on her face as she turned back to look down at James.

“You made me wait,” she purred. “Now it’s your turn to be patient. Take them off carefully.”

With a flick of his wrist, James tossed Natasha bodily onto the bed, following only a moment later.

“You like it when I rip your clothes off,” he said, though he did obey orders, carefully pulling her pants (and her panties) down and tossing them to the side somewhere. “It makes you frisky.”

“He’s not lying.” Steve appeared from behind James, pulling his shirt over his head and dropping it to the floor with one motion. He looked thoughtful for a moment. “On the other hand, Buck, she likes ordering us around too. And I think that makes her friskier.”

“Nail on the head, Steve.” She looked at his naked body, smiling appreciatively before looking back up into James’ eyes and lifting her hands up above her head. “Now the shirt. And you’re still wearing way too much.”

James obligingly pulled her shirt off and added it to the clothing scattered across the floor. “I’ll let you handle that.”

“Thank you.” She smiled sweetly. “I think I will.”

All she had to do was arch her right eyebrow imperiously at Rogers and he snapped into action like the disciplined soldier he was. He came up behind James and slid both hands under the hem of his T-shirt, his palms sliding up James’ well-muscled torso and taking the shirt with them until it was
bunched up under his arms.

But when James lifted his arms to let Steve peel his shirt the rest of the way off, Steve paused halfway through dropping the shirt to the floor. Paused and stared, and the look on his face was so much like the look he’d had when he’d first seen the shield inlay on James’ new arm…

“Aw, Buck,” he said in a slightly choked voice, his chin quivering. She sat up, anticipation building in her chest along with a wave of emotion she couldn’t immediately identify.

“James?” she asked, but didn’t go any further.

He looked back at her. “Natalia?”

She hesitated a moment, a nervous smile forming on her face - Nervous? She never got nervous - and reached out a hand, gesturing for him to come nearer. “Show me?”

He chewed on his lip - his turn to be nervous now - but then crawled forward on the bed and lay down on his stomach next to her.

“I hope you like it,” he murmured, voice thick with apprehension.

The number of times in her life when she’d been caught entirely unprepared - unable to even form a coherent thought, much less a coherent response - could have been counted on one hand. She’d survived precisely because she always had a defense against everything. But she’d never felt defenseless in quite the same way as she did now.

“Oh, James.”

Her voice quavered, and she felt tears prickling at her eyes. Her vision blurred, swam, but she couldn’t make her hand reach up to clear her eyes. Not when it was reaching out of its own accord to touch James’ right shoulderblade, where a simple design that somehow had the power to change everything about her world had been inked onto his skin.

A stylized red hourglass outlined in black.

Her fingers traced it, her mind trying to believe it was real. Her lungs struggling to bring in enough air. And her heart swelling in her chest until it felt too huge to be contained.

“Do you like it?” he breathed, unmoving under her touch.

She tried to speak, but her mouth and throat had somehow gone dry. She shook her head, swallowed, and tried again.

“I love it,” she said simply, a smile wobbling into existence on her face.

Not a smirk, not that tiny quirking of the corners of her mouth that passed for a smile most of the time, but an honest and heartfelt smile. Because right now, for James, nothing else would do.

He rolled over onto his back and looked up at her, his expression a mixture of adoration and longing, and her heart felt so full in that moment, she thought she might cry.

Before she had the chance to, he reached for her and pulled her down on top of him. [“I wanted to give you something,”] he murmured into her ear. [“Something just for you.”]

Her face crumpled then, the smile still there somehow but the tears no longer restrained.
“You already did, James,” she whispered into his shoulder, her voice hitching but her heart so wonderfully full. “You loved me when no one else did. And you showed me that I had it in me to love you too.”

She wrapped her arms around him and hugged as tightly as she could. “And I do. So very much.”

The mattress dipped beside her, and suddenly Steve was there, propped up on an elbow and still very naked. And she couldn’t help but turn her head to smile at him, her eyes still wet but the smile one of absolute happiness.

“Looks like I’m really going to have to start listening to those Rosetta Stone recordings again.” He gave her a small smile of his own, and she felt a laugh bubble up.

“If you want to stay in the loop, you bet you are.” She reached out a hand to drag him over, because she loved both of them - both her beautiful boys - and at that moment, she wanted nothing more than to be sandwiched between them for the entirety of the long night.

“Now where were we?”

Chapter End Notes

Like it? Love it? Something else? Let me know!
Wedding Day

Chapter Summary

*Here they were, in a church packed to the gills with friends and well-wishers and hundreds of others milling around the street outside.*

*Here they were. Together, after everything they’d all been through, both apart and together. Together again, after every hardship life had thrown at them. And Steve couldn’t have been happier.*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn Heights

January 2016

The lights weren’t overly bright, and yet Bucky felt warm under his collar.

When he and Steve had first toured the enormous stone church, their guide had eagerly pointed out the Tiffany stained glass windows and enormous Hutchings organ - “with over 2000 pipes!” - in the main sanctuary. The First Unitarians of Brooklyn Heights were very proud of their mid-nineteenth century Gothic Revival building, and it showed in every bit of the lovingly detailed tour.

None of that had meant much to Bucky at the time, but it had meant a lot to Steve, and so they stood at the altar of the sanctuary, a white-robed woman named Allison standing with them and reciting words that seemed to flow past Bucky in a hot blur.

He was getting married.

The guide had pointed out that the sanctuary’s dark oak pews could hold “up to five hundred people!” Bucky had privately thought that it might be an issue getting even twenty people to show up, but he had been proven very, very wrong.

The sanctuary was packed.

Bucky had never thought he’d get married at all.

A few weeks before the wedding, Steve had issued an open invitation to any living World War II veteran - Women’s Army Corps included - and so several of the pews were filled shoulder to shoulder with smiling seniors, many who looked like they had come directly from the convalescent home.

Steve had also invited members of the NYPD and NYFD who had been on-hand during the Chitauri invasion a few years back. (Bucky had more than likely been on ice then, but better not to think about that.)

He pushed the thought aside and looked at Steve instead, who was beaming back at him. If it had been possible for Steve’s eyes to be replaced with cartoon hearts, they probably would have been at that moment.
Bucky looked away and searched the front-row pews for Natasha.

She sat between Clint and Sharon, beautiful in a tea length dress of white lace and a sweetheart neckline that drew Bucky’s eyes exactly where she wanted them. Her hair was swept up and tucked neatly under a small fascinator, a few stray tendrils perfectly framing her face.

When Bucky’s eyes finally dragged themselves away from her decolletage, she met his gaze with a small, knowing smile and a wink.

God, he loved her.

And he loved the idiot standing in front of him too, even if he was still looking at him with the same ridiculous expression.

Bucky couldn’t help but smile his own stupid smile back.

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It felt as though Steve’s heart was going to pop right out of his chest and go capering around the room with sheer joy. In fact, he almost reached a hand preventatively up to his chest before he realized what he was doing and turned the movement into a straightening of his already perfectly straight vest.

Seeing Bucky there, looking like some sculptor’s magnum opus, made his breath catch in his chest. He stared at him with unabashed adoration, and his mind flashed back to where he’d been just twenty minutes ago.

Standing in front of the full-length mirror on the back of the door of one of the side rooms of the church, looking at the reflection of himself in his wedding tux with Sam peering anxiously over his shoulder, the full weight of it had suddenly come crashing down on him.

If it was ever going to feel real, he’d thought disjointedly as he tugged at the tight collar of his fancy dress shirt, it’d have to be right then.

Waking up that morning, he’d known on some level that he was going to be getting married later that day. Except he’d only known it in a detached, factual way. It hadn’t felt real. He still half expected to wake up suddenly, alone in bed, to find that the whole thing had been a fantastic dream. And he would have wept bitterly, of course, but it wouldn’t have been unexpected.

“I’m getting married.” He staggered, almost reeling, and caught Sam’s eyes in the mirror. “I’m actually getting married. Now.”

“Not till you go out there and say the words and sign the papers, you’re not.” Sam put both hands on Steve’s shoulders. “So how much longer are they all going to be waiting for you?”

“Just until I can catch my breath,” Steve replied, grateful in that moment that he had Sam to keep him from fraying. “I’m not going to miss this.”

Sam had ushered him out into the sanctuary a moment later, and now, here he was.

Here they were, with the woman in the white robe reading something that droned through his brain but didn’t really settle there. Here they were, with Natasha sitting in the front row wearing a beautiful dress and a contented, satisfied smile as she watched. Here they were, with Sam and Wanda beside them for a best man and a maid of honor, with Peggy bright-eyed and smiling from her wheelchair as Sharon sat beside her at the end of the pew.
Here they were, in a church packed to the gills with friends and well-wishers and hundreds of others milling around the street outside.

Here they were. Together, after everything they’d all been through, both apart and together. Together again, after every hardship life had thrown at them. And Steve couldn’t have been happier.

The vows he’d written were on a card in his breast pocket, but as he reached for them, he suddenly hesitated. In all his life, whenever something truly important had needed to be said, he’d never needed to write things down first. He’d just spoken from the heart, and the words that came out always managed to be the right ones.

He cleared his throat, cleared his mind, and let his eyes come to rest on Bucky’s face. And then he let the words come.

“I can’t remember a time in my life when you weren’t there. Even when you got drafted, even when I thought you were dead, you were always a part of me.” He took a deep and shaky breath. “I remember saying to Natasha and Sam, right after I found out that the Winter Soldier was you, ‘Even when I had nothing, I had Bucky.’ And it’s true.”

He felt his chin begin to quiver, but he kept his voice strong. “The worst parts of my life, by far, have been the ones I had to go through without you. But now, after today, I know those times are all behind me. You’re never going to be out of my life again, and however long the rest of my life might be, I’m going to spend every day of it with you.”

A soft murmur of approval rippled through the crowd.

A smile flitted across Bucky’s mouth and he stared down at his feet for a moment before pulling a card out of his pocket and unfolding it.

“So.” He cleared his throat. “Wanda helped me write these. She helps me write everything these days.”

Next to Bucky, resplendent in a red chiffon gown, Wanda smiled.

Bucky continued, reading from the card. “And I knew you were going to show me up a bit with your own vows, reciting them from the heart and all, but it’s always been that way and you got me to stand here anyway, so it must be working.”

Steve gave a small chuckle at that, as did a couple of people in the audience.

“But… uh…” Bucky hesitated a moment. Licked his lips. “I wouldn’t be standing here at all if it wasn’t for you. I never thought I’d get married at all. I never really thought I’d get to do much of anything, but here I am. So… I guess what I’m saying is…” He took a breath and looked at Steve. “I’m really glad I broke into your apartment that night and held you at gunpoint. You fed me tomato soup, and now look at us.”

“Did…” Steve smiled. It was a slightly confused smile, sure, but a happy one nevertheless. “Did you write that?”

“Yeah.” Bucky tucked the card back into his jacket. “Some improv though.”

“I love you so much,” was Steve’s only response, and he moved in to take Bucky into his arms for their first married kiss.

Allison held up a hand between them. “You’re not married yet.”
Bucky shrugged. “Close enough.”

Allison actually rolled her eyes at that, which was exactly why they had chosen her to officiate. “Not in my house. Now,” she looked at Steve, “this is the time to make the magic happen. Rings?”

Steve turned to Sam, who had produced the ring box from his pocket and was now holding it out before him. Since Bucky wouldn’t actually have been able to wear his ring on his metal hand, they’d come up with the idea of putting it on a chain so that he could wear it around his neck. And so when it was time for Steve to present the ring to Bucky, he leaned in to fasten the chain around Bucky’s neck.

It took a lot of willpower not to kiss him as he did.

“Keep it holy, kids,” Allison whispered as Bucky slid the ring onto Steve’s finger. “Just for another minute or two.”

She continued speaking, and then suddenly, they were there.

“Do you, Steven Grant Rogers-” she began, but Steve couldn’t hold back any longer.

“I do,” he blurted. “I do, I am, I will, I promise.”

“Jesus, Steve,” Bucky whispered, but he was smiling.

By now there was a steady murmur of laughter coming from the crowd, and Allison shook her head, but she was smiling too, so Steve figured they were doing something right.

“And do you, James Buchanan Barnes-”


“Okay then.” Allison’s smile broadened. “These kids are in a hurry. Best not to hold back any longer. By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you married. You may kiss each other.”

Steve gathered Bucky eagerly into his arms, and just as he was about to melt into what would have been the most satisfying kiss in the world, he heard a voice from the crowd shout “Slip him some tongue!”

It was Clint. Of course.

Steve paused, looked Bucky in the eyes, and shrugged. And then did just as Clint had suggested.

“We’re married,” he said breathily, when they finally pulled themselves apart. A dazed smile broke out across his face. “I can’t believe it, Buck. We’re married!”

“You’re stuck with me now,” Bucky whispered, a smirk crossing his mouth, arms still wrapped around Steve’s shoulders. “Sucker.”

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Looking around the room - the big open-plan room in the Tower which had once been Stark’s entertaining room - Natasha saw more familiar faces than she generally ever saw in one place when there wasn’t world-endangering trouble.

All the regulars from SHIELD were there, naturally. Maria and Carol, in matching cocktail dresses, were leaning against the bar. Rhodey and Pepper weren’t far off, doing their best to stay between the
alcohol and Stark. Sam and Sharon were just coming in, Sharon pushing Peggy Carter in a wheelchair. Clint was sitting on one of the sofas off to the side, deep in conversation about something or other with Bruce Banner. And knowing the pair of them, she thought with a smile, the conversation was likely to be as incomprehensible as it was ridiculous. Coulson was there, of course - as though he would have missed it for anything other than his own death.

But there were others, too. Wanda had dragged along her brother, who in turn had dragged along Jane Foster’s former intern. Jean Grey had brought Logan along as her plus-one, and he seemed as eager to get to the bar as Stark. Thor was there as well, a huge beer mug in one hand and his other arm around the waist of a striking dark-skinned woman.

Even Princess Shuri had come along - her brother sending his kind regards. She was flanked by shaven-headed Dora Milaje in stunning cocktail dresses, though their sole purpose that evening seemed to be keeping a firm distance between the princess and the open bar.

And in addition to the veritable Who’s Who of the superheroeing community, there were also a couple dozen or so elderly men and women, many of whom were wearing baseball caps or garrison caps that identified them as veterans of World War II. Steve was right in the middle of them, chatting up a storm and looking suitably pleased until Sharon came up and murmured something in his ear.

A few moments later, as a slow and brassy tune from the 1940s played, Steve was in the middle of the dance floor with Peggy in his arms, swaying back and forth gently as he made good on a seventy-five-year-old promise. And Natasha couldn’t help but feel the tiniest bit sentimental as she watched the pair of them.

[“He’s been planning this for months.”] James was beside her suddenly, murmuring into her ear. [“Or decades, I guess, to hear him tell it.”]

[“I know.”] She slipped an arm around James’ waist and leaned her head against his shoulder. [“It’s adorable, isn’t it?”]

[“Oh, yeah.”] James slid his arm around her waist as well and pulled her against him. [“He hasn’t even stepped on her feet once.”]

[“Which he’ll probably make up for in spades when he dances with you.”] She smirked, then winced. [“And with me.”]

James snorted. [“Should’ve worn steel toes.”]

She arched an eyebrow at him. [“Believe it or not, James, it’s not easy finding steel-toed high heels.”] She paused and considered a moment. [“Though now that I think about it, it might be a good idea for deep cover assignments.”]

[“Deep cover at weddings?”]

Natasha pinched his ass, the smirk returning. [“Depends on whose wedding, now doesn’t it?”]

[“Careful.”] James said without heat. [“I’m a married man now.”] A beat, then, [“Off limits.”]

[“Is that so?”] She arched her eyebrow and leaned in to whisper in his ear. [“Would you like to find out what I’m wearing under this dress?”]

[“My guess is at least one Glock and a couple of carefully concealed stinger discs.”] James replied promptly, without taking his eyes off Steve and Peggy.
She smiled delightedly and nipped his earlobe. [“If that’s all you think I brought, James, you must think I’m getting soft.”]

James shivered in response. [“I said ‘at least.’ I didn’t say ‘only’.”]

[“Well then.”] She reached out and hooked a finger through the chain around James’ neck - the one that held his brand-new wedding ring. She wore a similar ring, and the feel of it on her finger kept reminding her of just how monumental a thing she’d managed to entwine herself in. [“Let’s just find out, shall we?”]

James didn’t protest - not even slightly - as she led him out of the room and down a hall until she found a small room not much bigger than a closet.

Once inside, she wrapped her arms around him and pressed her lips hungrily against his. But her arms didn’t stay around him for more than a second before she was clutching at his rear end and then reaching around to his front to undo his trousers.

It would be quick, she knew, but that would be a big part of the thrill. And of the satisfaction.

James’ hands slid under her gown and tantalizingly up her thighs. “Natalia…” he breathed, then stopped suddenly, a smirk flitting across his face. [“What did I tell you? Glock.”]

[“All right, all right.”] she gasped, unable to keep from smiling at how well they knew and complemented each other. [“Don’t let it go to your head.”]

She reached down the front of his trousers and wrapped a hand around him to make sure the only thing that would go to his head was the thought of her.

Seven-and-a-half very frantic minutes later, James leaned against the shattered remains of the shelf and looked at her breathlessly.

[“You’re so good to me.”] He made a half-hearted attempt at straightening his tie and gave up almost immediately. [“You know me so well.”]

She laughed breathily, tucking herself back into the top of her dress and pulling the skirt back down from where it had bunched up around her waist. [“Well enough to find a room without any security cameras, but not well enough to find one without anything to break.”]

She straightened his tie for him as an afterthought, and she couldn’t help bringing a hand up to run her fingers through his beautifully mussed hair. The curls she remembered had come back, and she found her hands drawn to his hair like magnets to sheet metal.

[“I love you, James.”] she said almost unnecessarily.

James lovingly - and clumsily - attempted to readjust her fascinator, which had been knocked askew in their frantic few minutes of passion, but he paused and looked down at her, adoration clear on his face.

[“I’m pretty sure I’ve always loved you. It feels like it.”]

[“Well,”] she smiled, a hint of mischievous delight flickering in her eyes. [“I can’t help but notice it was me in here and not your husband.”]

[“I thought I made it pretty clear I was marrying him for the money.”] He shrugged. [“And his dick. The serum does enhance everything.”]
“At least you’ve got your priorities right.” She reached up to fix her fascinator, then swatted him on the rump. “Now let’s get back to the reception before anyone notices we’re gone.”

No one seemed to have noticed their absence when she and James walked back into the reception, a fact which only encouraged her to act on her mischievous impulses. And so, she walked right up to Steve, who was getting a drink at the bar and chatting with a couple of veterans, with a canary-eating smile on her lips.

“Evening, boys,” she said to the vets, before shifting attention back to her target. “Buy a girl a drink on your wedding day?”

“A beautiful dame like you?” Steve grinned, the vets joining right in. “Anything you like. What’s your pleasure?”

“Certainly nothing available at a bar.” She slid onto one of the barstools and crossed one leg over the other. “But I’ll take a cosmo, thanks.”

“Coming right up.” Steve signaled to the bartender, then leaned against the bar on his elbows. The vets moved along down the bar, giving her knowing - and approving - glances. Steve, naturally, seemed not to notice. “So what have you been keeping yourself busy with?”

“Oh, a little of this, a little of that.” She looked up and down the length of him and smiled. “And yourself? Been trading war stories with your buddies all night long?”

“It’s hard not to.” He shrugged, smiling expansively, as the bartender set down Natasha’s cosmo in front of her. “But I might see my way clear to getting out on the dance floor again if I happen to run into Bucky.” His brow furrowed. “Speaking of which, where is our fella?”

Natasha hummed and picked up her drink. “You’ve lost your husband on your wedding day.” She took a sip - it was delightfully tangy - and looked at Steve over the rim of the glass. “You’re terrible at keeping track of him.”

“Yeah, well, he’s always been good at hiding.” Steve frowned. “I always find him eventually, though, and then there’s a reckoning. I know where he lives, after all.”

“Well, if you had found him ten minutes ago, you would have been in for quite a shock.” Natasha took another sip of her drink, eyes never leaving Steve’s.

Steve’s eyes narrowed suspiciously, though he looked as if he was trying to suppress a smile. “And just what was he up to ten minutes ago?”

She clucked her tongue and shook her head. “Like I said, you’re terrible at keeping track of him. Or keeping him faithful, for that matter.”

Steve’s eyes shot open wide, then narrowed into an exaggerated glower. The smile he was trying to suppress fought harder.

“Why, you home-wrecking hussy,” he said in a tone that had no heat whatsoever. It honestly sounded like he was just barely stopping himself from laughing. “On his wedding day, no less? Where’s your shame?”

Delighted, Natasha took a long pull on her drink, eyes tracking the room until they landed on James. He was crowded around a small table with Sam, Wanda, Sharon, and even Peggy Carter, every last one of them knocking back a shot glass and laughing.
She gestured with a casual flick of the wrist. “He’s right there. Though I’m ashamed of nothing.”

Steve turned to look at the tableau, the sight of which apparently blew the last of his self-control to shreds. He burst out laughing, shaking his head as he turned back to her.

“You’re a terrible influence,” he managed. “And he’s worse.”

In response, Natasha tossed off the last of her drink, set the empty glass down on the bar, and then slid off the stool and walked away, tossing one lingering glance over her shoulder as she went.

Of course Steve followed.

Precisely ten-and-a-half minutes later (and only because she needed an extra minute to find a closet that hadn’t been destroyed), Natasha looked at Steve with a satisfied smile, legs still wrapped around his waist and fascinator once again knocked askew.

“James was right,” she purred. “The serum really does enhance everything.”

Steve laughed breathlessly and kissed the side of her neck, making no effort to move from where he was. “You’ve known this for a while.”

“Yes, but James did just tell me he married you for your dick.” A beat, then, “And your money.”

Steve snorted. “He’d’ve been better off marrying pretty much anybody else if he was after money.” A sly smile. “I can’t help but feel flattered by the other reason, though.”

Natasha rolled her eyes so hard she was surprised they didn’t fall out of her head, but she couldn’t keep the smile off her face either. After a moment, she disentangled herself from Steve and began smoothing and straightening herself out for the second time in a half hour.

“So.” She adjusted the pins holding her fascinator in place. “Couldn’t even make it through your wedding day without cheating on your husband.” She clucked her tongue. “For shame, Captain Rogers. Who would’ve thought?”

“He cheated on me first.” Steve chuckled as he tucked himself back into his trousers and straightened his shirt and vest. “After being married for all of, what, and hour and a half?” He shook his head, smiling. “I shouldn’t have expected anything else.”

Natasha pushed open the door of the closet and strolled into the hallway. “The press would have a field day with this.”

“They really would, wouldn’t they?” Steve followed her out, catching up in two strides and smiling salaciously at her. “But I’m thinking about the field day the three of us can have when we get home. Especially with our new bed.”

Their custom-made bed had come in only a few days ago. Steve had wanted it to arrive as a Christmas present, but the company they had ordered it from (located in Brooklyn, of course, home of the hipster furniture makers) had needed time to build it to their exacting specifications - which included extra reinforcements in the frame.

Natasha smiled, delicious images floating through her mind.

Oh yes, the wedding night would be so much fun.

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Steve was absolutely exhausted by the time they all made it home somewhere around three in the morning.

They had briefly entertained the thought of just spending the night in one of the suites in the Tower, but none of them had wanted to forgo spending their first night as a married trio in their own home and their own bed. So they’d doggedly trooped back to Brooklyn, only to find that they were too wrung-out to even consider any fun that evening.

Steve and Bucky helped Natasha out of her dress, which seemed to be a lot harder to take off than just rearrange in a closet. They helped her pull the fifteen million bobby pins out of her hair, and Bucky found a wet washcloth for her to scrub her makeup off with, and then she toppled into bed. Steve managed to stop Bucky from just flopping down alongside her while still wearing his tux, but it was a narrow thing.

“So much for that field day,” he found himself muttering as he collapsed into bed with them.

“What field day?” Bucky wrapped himself around Steve and murmured the words into his neck. “Today was a good day.”

On Bucky’s other side, Natasha just barely grunted a response.

The sunlight pried Steve’s eyelids open long before he was ready to be awake.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, hey. If you’ve been following along since the beginning, I did change the name from *The One Where They Get Married* to *Golden Oldies* because... why not? I think it suits the feel of the story better.

As always, let me know what you think.
Honeymooners

Chapter Summary

A smile flitted across Bucky’s mouth. “Can you believe we’re here?” He put his hand over Steve’s. “With Natasha? Married? In Goa?”

“I think I’m going to spend the rest of my life asking myself that question.” Steve paused. “Except for the Goa part.”

Bucky leaned his head back, cheek grazing against Steve’s. “The Goa part’s the most believable, huh?”

Chapter Notes

As we’ve all (hopefully) long since learned from the MCU, stay for the end credits.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Red Hook, Brooklyn
the following morning

Steve looked blearily around.

The clock said it was ten-thirty, but it felt as though he’d barely slept at all. Bucky and Natasha were still sprawled out alongside him, their limbs tangled together in the same position they’d fallen asleep in. Their wedding clothes were hung on the backs of chairs, over doors and doorknobs, or just left on the floor.

Steve squinted his eyes against the sun. He wanted desperately to shut the curtains, but that would involve getting up out of bed, and every part of his body rebelled against that.

At eleven-thirty, he still hadn’t moved to shut the curtains. He’d tried pulling the covers over his head, but it had gotten too stuffy. He’d thought about wrapping a shirt or something around his eyes, but he couldn’t find any. So he simply lay there with his hands over his eyes, trying to will himself back to sleep and failing.

At twelve-thirty, Bucky groaned next to him and rolled over, his metal arm flopping jarringly onto Steve’s chest.

He muttered something that sounded like “pizza,” but didn’t stir past that.

At one-thirty, Steve couldn’t ignore his bladder’s protests any longer.

With a Herculean effort, he wrenched himself into an upright position and staggered into the bathroom, where he stood for what felt like an hour before he was finally finished. He made it back to bed somehow, only ricocheting off the wall twice on his way, and flopped face first into the pillow.
with a groan.

It was only then that he realized he’d forgotten to shut the curtains while he was up.

The next time he woke up, it was because Bucky was prodding him in the side and muttering something about food. Waving ineffectually at Bucky’s hand, he rolled over and blearily opened one eye.

“Whazzit?”

Natasha’s face swam into view. She was draped bodily over Bucky and staring down at Steve, a sleepy expression on her face.

“It’s nearly four in the afternoon, boys.”

Bucky poked Steve in the side again. “We should eat something.”

“You always want to eat something.” Steve tried to mash his face into the pillow to block everything out. “That’s no surprise.”

In response, Bucky simply leaned over Steve and made a few half-hearted swipes for his phone. He finally picked it up and, after poking at the screen several times with a metal finger, grunted in frustration and shoved the phone into Steve’s hands.

“Aw, I’m sorry, Buck.” Steve took the phone and hit the first number that came up. Which, unsurprisingly, was the number for Turvino’s Pizzeria. Though when he got through to them, he was too exhausted to do more than mutter “Please send us food,” before hanging up and burying his face in the pillow again.

It must have worked, though, because an hour later, the doorbell rang. And when Steve finally answered it, the kid holding the stack of pizza boxes just grinned.

“On the house, Cap. Congratulations from all of us, and enjoy your honeymoon.”

They sat draped around the living room, eating pizza in various states of undress. Steve had pulled on a bathrobe to answer the door, Bucky had stumbled into the room wearing undershorts, and Natasha had scrounged up a pair of underwear and one of Bucky’s long sleeved Henley shirts.

“We’re going to Goa tomorrow,” she said through a mouthful of cheese and pepperoni, worlds away from how she had looked just the night before.

“That’s tomorrow,” Steve responded, eating half a slice in one bite. “Maybe by then, we’ll have recovered.”

Bucky grunted over a pizza slice and said nothing further.

They spent the rest of the afternoon waking up by degrees. At some point, Steve picked up his tablet to see what sort of coverage they were getting.

The first site he checked was *Out* magazine, with whom they’d worked out an arrangement for exclusive rights to their wedding photos. Steve had also agreed to do a series of interviews with them over the coming few months about everything from married life to his newfound place in the LGBTQ community to the differences between his actual history and the stories that had been told about him ever since the war.
He looked forward to those interviews. Especially since all the interactions he’d had with the people from *Out* had been professional as well as friendly.

The pictures had come out very nicely, and - according to a message on the site’s banner - so many people had tried to view them that the site had crashed multiple times in the previous twelve hours.

Next, he checked his news aggregator. Which, in retrospect, might not have been a good idea simply because the first headline that jumped out at him was “Captain America Is Officially In a Gay Marriage!” The rest of the article wasn’t much different from the dog-whistle headline, which was mostly condescending and even a bit disgusted on behalf of its obviously conservative readership.

The scowl Steve leveled at the tablet was interrupted by a sudden inspirational idea.

Natasha had taken it upon herself to set up and curate an extremely popular Instagram page for the three of them, and Steve couldn’t think of anything that belonged on that page more than an image of that headline with his own response to it below. So he took a screen capture of the headline and put it on the Instagram page.

Below it, he simply wrote ‘Or, as I like to call it, a marriage.’

Bucky, sprawled on the couch, looked at Steve from over the top of the Kindle Steve had gotten him for Christmas. “Are you shitposting again?”

“Absolutely not.” Steve scowled at Bucky before bringing the tablet up again. “If I were doing that, I’d be an awful lot busier. What with all the jerks who seem to have something against us being happy.”

Natasha barely raised an eyebrow from over the top of her own tablet. “Is it the ‘Gay Marriage’ headline that’s bothering you? Or the one about no one wanting to imagine Captain America taking it up the ass?”

Bucky frowned.

“What?” Steve was aghast. “That can’t possibly be a headline. You’re making that up.”

“Nope.” Natasha shook her head. “It was on *The Michael Savage Show* and then got tweeted by *Breitbart*.”

“Well then.” Steve’s eyes hardened. “I guess I know who I’ll be paying an unscheduled visit to once we get back from our honeymoon.”

Bucky rolled his eyes and muttered something that sounded a bit too much like, “Here we go again.”

“What?” Steve’s dander was up. “Tell me you’re all right with these jackasses spouting all this vileness on people who just want to live their lives without being threatened and insulted just for being who they are.”

Bucky didn’t lift his eyes from the Kindle. “Want me to go talk to them? I can do that.”

Steve hesitated for a long moment, then sighed. “As much fun as it might be to watch them soil themselves, I don’t think so.”

He scowled at the tablet, and at the thought of the things people would say just to get attention, or to inflame their moronic followers. “The best way to deal with bullies is to confront them. To call them out for exactly what they are and make sure everybody knows it.”
He paused for a moment, then grinned. “And besides. If there’s any punching that’s going to happen, I want to be the one doing it. You don’t get to have all the fun.”

Bucky sighed. “Listen, Steve—”

“Put it away, boys,” Natasha said mildly, without looking up from her tablet. “We’re all too tired to look at your dicks right now.”

“Speak for yourself.” Steve cocked an eyebrow at her. “I wouldn’t mind seeing his dick.” He scowled again. “Even if no one else apparently wants to imagine that.”

Natasha rolled her eyes. “Lots of people want to imagine that, Rogers. That’s why *Out* paid so much for exclusive wedding photos.”

Steve grumbled wordlessly in response, but he did have to concede Natasha’s point. For every foul-mouthed windbag with a microphone out there, there were several decent people who showed they cared using whatever limited means they had.

Which was one of the main reasons why they had decided to donate the money *Out* had paid for the photos. It wasn’t as though the three of them needed it, after all, and there were plenty of people who did. And so they were splitting it between the Brooklyn campus of the Veterans’ Affairs Harbor Health Care system - where Bucky went for his weekly social work appointment - and the Xavier School.

Bucky had specifically earmarked one hundred and fifty dollars so his social worker, Darien Nash, could repaint his puke green office.

“And anyway,” Natasha continued, “we’ll be in Goa for the next ten days, and that will give our fans some entirely new things to imagine.”

“Yeah,” Steve said, shutting off the tablet and looking up with a grin. “Like how much Indian food Bucky can eat before they throw him out of the country.”

Twenty hours later, they descended the stairs from one of Tony’s Learjets to the tarmac at the Dabolim Airport in Goa. Tony had given them the flight as a wedding present, mainly because they couldn’t have justified the use of a Quinjet for the travel and Tony had refused to allow them to fly coach. The air was warm and dry, like a late spring or early summer day back in Brooklyn, and the sky was absolutely cloudless.

“This is going to be the best vacation I’ve ever taken,” he said out loud as the three of them climbed into the airport limo that would bring them to their hotel.

Natasha glanced at him. “Wouldn’t this be the only vacation you’ve ever taken?”

The hotel itself was like something out of a moving picture. And the beach behind it, all snow-white sand and dazzling turquoise water, was even more so. Large tent-like structures were set up every few yards, and when Steve peered inside one, he saw comfortable-looking lounge chairs and a low table.

The whole setup seemed designed specifically for lounging around and sipping cocktails, occasionally taking a swim break.

There was a large pool as well, almost right on the beach, which made Steve wonder for a moment. What was the point of a pool when the ocean was only a few steps away?
As if reading his mind, Natasha said, “So that you can look at the ocean while lounging in the pool and feeling very, very decadent.”

A smile flitted across Bucky’s mouth. “Let’s do that.”

“Yeah.” Steve mirrored the smile. “Let’s do that right now.”

In their palatial suite, Steve hurried into his new swim trunks. Bucky had looked at Steve’s old pair with undisguised disdain and announced that he was going to buy them both new suits for the honeymoon. When the package arrived a few days later, Bucky had presented Steve with a pair of shorts so tight they looked as though they might’ve been painted on. And when Steve gave him a raised eyebrow, Bucky had simply pointed out that Natasha would like the way they looked.

Bucky’s were black. Steve’s had an Old Glory pattern.

Natasha emerged from the other room wearing a high-cut, black one-piece bathing suit, a wide-brimmed hat, a pair of large round sunglasses, and a loose, flowing shirt of translucent white.

“You look like a Hollywood actress,” Steve smiled. “From when Bucky and I were kids.”

Meanwhile Bucky had pulled on a hot pink rash guard with sleeves of eye-watering lime green, which he topped off with a single black surf glove.

He must’ve caught the expression on Steve’s face, because he scowled and said, “It was a last minute purchase and this was all they had left in my size.”

“I wonder if they sell earplugs at the front desk,” Steve quipped.

Bucky rolled his eyes. “You’re hilarious. I’ll bet you write all of your own material.”

“You can tell,” Natasha added.

“I don’t write any of it.” Steve grinned and folded his arms across his bare chest. It was only just beginning to sink in that he was on his honeymoon. A ten-day vacation on a gorgeous beach with just him and the two people he loved most in the whole world. “It just comes to me.”

“Again,” Natasha smirked, “you can tell.” She headed toward the door, swatting Steve lightly on the ass as she went. “Nice suit, by the way. I like it.”

Bucky looked over at Steve with what could only be described as an ‘I told you so’ expression. Steve rolled his eyes good-naturedly in response before scooping up an armload of towels and following Bucky and Natasha out the door towards the beach.

Several hours and many cocktails later, they stood at the edge of the water, watching as the setting sun streaked the Goan sky in brilliant shades of orange and purple.

“Come on, boys.” Natasha pulled out her phone. “Let’s take one that will make Fox News mad.”

Steve grinned at that. “So, lots of tongue?”

It was the perfect beginning to their honeymoon.

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The picture of Steve shoving his tongue down Bucky’s throat got a million likes on Instagram.
Well, maybe not a million, but a whole fuckload. Way more than seemed reasonable, but then again, Bucky found he was pretty consistently surprised at the level of interest people showed in their lives.

[“You’re a lot more interesting than you give yourself credit for, James,”] Natasha had murmured in his ear as they lay there in bed that first morning. [“People find your story inspiring.”]

He didn’t waste too much time thinking about it though, not when his honeymoon consisted of waking up late, having sex, eating breakfast in bed, having more sex, swimming, eating a ton of food, and having even more sex.

Even a year ago, if someone had told him he would be on his honeymoon with the two people he loved most in the world… well… he probably wouldn’t have laughed (he hadn’t done a lot of laughing back then), but he wouldn’t have believed them either.

“What’re you thinking about, Buck?” Steve asked that night as Bucky and Natasha were slathering him with aloe. He’d been burned lobster-red by the sun, the result of apparently forgetting how Irish he was and spending the whole day on the beach.

Bucky scooped another dollop of aloe from the jar. “How dumb you are.” He ran an aloe trail gently across Steve’s shoulders.

“Aw, come on, Buck.” Steve craned his neck around to try and look him in the eyes. “I was being serious.”

“So was I.” Bucky scowled. “You’re seriously dumb for going without a shirt all day.”

Natasha snorted.

“Don’t encourage him.” Steve gave Natasha a look that she brushed aside with a single perfectly arched eyebrow.

He let the matter drop right then, but Bucky was no fool. That would only buy him a few hours at most.

Predictably, Steve brought it up again that evening. While he was sitting in a chair with Bucky on his lap, Natasha sitting astride Bucky in a very nice chain of penetration.

“Seriously though, Buck,” he breathed into his ear. “You’ve been off in your own head a lot this evening. What’s on your mind?”

“Fuck, Steve,” Bucky just barely managed. “This isn’t the time for that.”

Natasha laughed breathily, not letting up in her gyrations even slightly.

“I care about you, Buck.” Steve somehow managed to keep up his own movements, which made it very hard to concentrate. On anything. “I just don’t want you to feel like you have to keep things to yourself anymore.” He smiled and arched upwards again. “We’re married, after all.”

Bucky finished right then and there.

Later that evening, Bucky lay there contentedly in bed between a curled-up Natasha and a freshly aloe-slicked Steve, moments from drifting off into a dreamy, post-sex sleep.

So Steve naturally picked that time to pipe up again.

“So what’s been keeping you so quiet all day, Buck?”
It was kind of hard to scowl when Steve was stroking Bucky’s face, but Bucky made an attempt anyway. “The fact that you’ve been doing all the talking for us.”

“You tell him, James,” Natasha murmured sleepily.

Steve rolled his eyes, but didn’t stop stroking Bucky’s face. Instead, he leaned in for a gentle kiss.

“I just want to know if I ought to be worried, is all,” he said softly. “If something’s bothering you, I wish you’d tell me so I can help.”

Bucky couldn’t really help it. He sighed, his whole body going slack under Steve’s constant ministrations.

“There’s nothing to worry about,” he whispered, and though he could tell Steve wasn’t convinced, at least he dropped it for the moment.

A few hours later, Bucky was wide awake and staring at the ceiling as Steve and Natasha dozed on either side of him.

Carefully he eased himself out of bed, fished around the floor for his pants and a t-shirt, and then slipped barefoot out of their suite.

Even at three in the morning, the warm Goan air was damp with humidity, though the gentle breeze kept it from being oppressive. The moon hung large and bright in the inky black sky, illuminating Bucky’s path past the pool and toward the beach.

Before long, he had rolled his pants up to his knees and wandered a few feet out into the warm low tide.

He didn’t know how long he’d been there before he sensed Steve’s approach from behind him.

“It’s three in the morning, Bucky.” Steve laid a gentle hand on his right shoulder. “What’s on your mind?”

“What makes you think I’ve been thinking anything at all?” he finally said.

Steve squeezed his shoulder gently. “Because I know you, Buck. I’ve known you all my life, and I ought to know by now when you’ve got something on your mind.”

Well, he probably had him there.

A smile flitted across Bucky’s mouth. “Can you believe we’re here?” He put his hand over Steve’s. “With Natasha? Married? In Goa?”

In response, Steve moved closer toward him and wrapped both arms around his shoulders, hooking his chin over Bucky’s right shoulder and pressing his front against Bucky’s back.

“I think I’m going to spend the rest of my life asking myself that question.” Steve paused. “Except for the Goa part.”

Bucky leaned his head back, cheek grazing against Steve’s. “The Goa part’s the most believable, huh?”

Steve laughed softly, nudging back against Bucky’s cheek with his own. “More like I won’t be in Goa for the rest of my life.” He sighed. “But I’ll be with you and Natasha, and I don’t know if I’ll ever really be able to believe it.” He shook his head slightly, his voice dropping to a low murmur. “I
don’t know how I got so lucky.”

Bucky was silent for a long moment. He closed his eyes, listening to the waves lapping gently at their feet and the breeze rustling the palm trees.

“If you had told me this even a year ago,” he whispered, clenching both hands over Steve’s, “I wouldn’t have believed it, but I wouldn’t have laughed about it either.” He hesitated. “I don’t think I knew how to laugh then.”

“Oh, Bucky.” Steve’s arms tightened around him convulsively. Even his chin dug sharply into Bucky’s shoulder.

There was a long moment when neither of them spoke. Then - abruptly - Steve spun him around and kissed him deeply. Passionately, almost desperately, as though his life depended on it.

“Maybe you’re right,” Steve said finally, drawing a shaky breath as he slowly pulled back from the kiss. “But look how far you’ve come since then. Look at everything you’ve remembered. Look at how much better you are.”

Bucky threaded his fingers with Steve’s and leaned forward, their foreheads bumping gently together. “You think?” he said, just as shakily. “You say that a lot. You always say that, actually.”

“I do not.” Steve squeezed Bucky’s hand and smiled gently. “If I always said it, I’d never say anything else. And you and Natasha are always telling me I say too much anyway.”

“You do talk a lot,” Bucky agreed instantly. “You never shut up.”

Steve shrugged. “I’ve got a lot to say. You, on the other hand…”

Another smile tugged at the corners of Bucky’s mouth. “I’m the strong, silent type.”

Steve rolled his eyes, but he smiled right back. “More like the stubborn, morose type.” He slid his arms around Bucky’s waist. “Who needs somebody to pester him for days before he finally admits what’s been on his mind.”

Bucky returned the gesture, enjoying Steve’s solid presence in his arms. “A lot of people liked our Instagram photo.” He blew out a breath. “It’s just a picture of two guys on a beach, but it got thousands of likes. And…”

Another sigh.

“We sold our wedding photos to that magazine you like for thousands of dollars.” He shook his head, eyes wide with amazement. “Pictures of the two of us doing something that people do every day, and there was actually a bidding war.”

They had donated every last penny - and Bucky hoped that Darien Nash would have his ugly ass office painted the next time he saw him - but the fact that they even had that much money to donate…?

“Yes,” Steve said softly, and smiled. He reached up and ran a hand through Bucky’s hair once, slowly. “And don’t forget the roomful of cards and stuff that was waiting for you when we got home from Korea.”

“It’s weird.” Bucky slid his hands under the hem of Steve’s shirt, fingers pressing against warm skin. “I don’t think I’ll ever be used to it.”
“What?” Steve asked, shifting his body closer to Bucky’s and raising an eyebrow. “People liking you?” He shook his head. “Buck, the whole reason they let you out of jail is because your story resonated with people. A lot about you resonates with people, and every time something good happens to you, it makes all those people happy.”

Bucky ran his hands up and down the length of Steve’s back while he searched for an answer. All he could come up with was, “Why?”

“Because it means there’s some real justice in the world.” Steve looked right into Bucky’s eyes. His gaze was filled with love, but there was something dark and unpleasant lurking in it as well. “That not everything works out for the worst. That there really are times when good wins out over evil, and that maybe a happy ending isn’t too much to hope for.”

Bucky looked at him for a long moment, moving his hands from under Steve’s shirt to cup his face. “I think you’re the only person in the world who could say that and mean it.” A small smile flitted across his mouth. “And make it sound believable.”

“Maybe it sounds believable because I believe it.” Steve mirrored Bucky’s posture, bringing a hand up to rest it gently on Bucky’s cheek. “But it’s not just about me, Buck. Every single one of those cards and gifts was sent to you by a person who believed it every bit as much as I do. And that’s what’s important. You’ve got hundreds of people pulling for you. Thousands. Maybe even more.”

Bucky grunted in response and slid his arms over Steve’s shoulders. “Well, you’re stuck with me now. You put on a ring on it and everything.” He smirked. “Let’s see what you believe in a few years.”

“Same thing I’ve believed in all the years I’ve known you so far.” Steve didn’t hesitate. “That you’re worth it.”

He cracked a smile, sliding an arm around Bucky’s waist and steering him back towards the room. “You’re worth every headache and every outrageous restaurant bill and every bruised rib from your stupid sleeping positions. You’re worth every trip to therapy and every argument and every second of every minute of every day, because I love you and I’m never going to stop.”

“Listen, you.” Bucky leveled a half-hearted glare at him. “I’ll cop to everything but the restaurant bills.”

They pushed open the door to their suite and stepped into the cool darkness of the room. Natasha still lay in bed, a peaceful expression on her sleeping face. Except that when Bucky and Steve crawled into bed, she spoke in a perfectly clear voice without moving or opening her eyes.

“Leave it to you boys to have an argument at three a.m.” She draped an arm over Bucky as he and Steve situated themselves in the bed. “On our honeymoon.”

Bucky exchanged a glance with Steve, who looked slightly sheepish in that way only he could manage.

“It wasn’t an argument.” Bucky snuggled in next to Natasha and planted a kiss on her cheek. “And I love you.”

“We both do,” Steve chimed in as he curled up next to Bucky and wrapped his arms around him. “In fact, that was one of the things we were talking about. That we couldn’t believe we were here on our honeymoon with you.”

“And that we somehow conned you into marrying us.” Bucky nipped at Natasha’s ear. “You, one of
the smartest women I know, was somehow conned into marrying us two mooks.”

“Mooks?” Natasha opened one eye halfway to fix Bucky with A Look. “God, James, you really are from Brooklyn, aren’t you?”

“Don’t know.” Bucky didn’t dare turn and look at Steve right then. He knew exactly the kind of shit-eating grin that idiot would have. “At this point, I’m probably from a few places.”

“Nope.” Steve’s voice definitely had that grin in it. “No getting away from it, Buck. You’re just as much of a Red Hook boy as I am.”

Bucky snorted and reached his hand out to mush Steve right in his grinning face. “All right. Go to sleep, would you?”

“Sleep?” Steve wriggled closer. “I don’t know about that. I’m feeling pretty wide awake, if you know what I mean.”

“We know what you mean, Rogers.” Natasha would probably have rolled her eyes if they’d been open. “And that can wait until we’ve had a few more hours’ sleep.”

“You’ll sleep better if you’re tired out,” Steve suggested with a salacious grin in his voice.

“Jesus, Steve.” Bucky was aiming for exasperation, but he couldn’t quite keep the happiness out of his voice. “Go to sleep. We have all day tomorrow to fuck and swim and eat.”

And they did.

They really did. Bucky still had trouble wrapping his mind around that fact, but it didn’t make it any less true. Any less real. He had gotten married. He was with the two people he loved most in the world, and he even had pretty cool tattoos to show for it. He had a ring to show for it.

Tomorrow they really would spend the day swimming and fucking and eating, and they would repeat that for a few more days until it was time to go back home to their comfy apartment in Red Hook.

And yeah, there’d still be all that fucking therapy and he did finally realize that unpacking his entire fucked up history would take years, but there’d also be trying new restaurants with Wanda and having big dinners with Sharon and Sam and watching *Chopped* with Miles. There’d be his bee colony in the springtime and the cookbooks and expensive kitchenware Sam and Sharon had gotten him for a wedding present and Steve making big breakfasts every morning while he and Natasha watched groggily from the table.

He had an entire life to look forward to.

And it felt really damn good.

Chapter End Notes

**NOTE THE FIRST**

Well, here we are at the end. They're married, they're happy, they're happily married superheroes. FINALLY! They've earned the ending that we know the MCU won't give them.
If you've followed along with me all this time, thank you so much. This story didn't quite get the audience the other two in the series did, but them's the breaks when you write a series for two years and a franchise-changing movie is about to come out. I value each and everyone of the readers I have, new and old, and your comments are what make this so much fun, so thank you, thank you!

NOTE THE SECOND
This was originally a much longer story. In fact, I have enough material for a fourth and final story in this series. Depending on how *Infinity War* wrecks me... well, we'll see how that goes. Post-IW I'm not sure what the fandom's going to be like.

Wow.

Seriously, we're at the part of the franchise where the fandom could really change from here on out. After three years in the fandom (and two posting fic), that's... that's a lot to wrap my head around.

And I'm seeing IW tonight, so... here we go!

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