Summary

If only the cute teacher would stop pestering you for a pen.

[Library/Teacher AU! Reader/Bucky Barnes]

Notes

This is for @sighodinson writing challenge. New challenge, I know that the prompt reads a little differently, but I will tie everything together well. I am looking forward to this story, so please enjoy! I am also using my state’s educational state stuff, so it might seems a little different for some people depending on where you are from.

Prompt: you’re always asking me for a pencil because for some damn reason you don’t know that there is a whole store for stationery—happy birthday here’s a gift card to that store. wait, you work there? what the hell?
It isn’t supposed to be a day and time you should be dreading so early in the school year as the librarian. It usually meant the kids would be let out early and you had a little free time to yourself before closing the school library. All the teachers would have to stay an extra two hours for their developmental meeting, in accordance with state law. You weren’t needed in that aspect of the school, you weren’t part of the creation of the curriculum between all the teachers, the principals, and guidance counselors. You usually just received what books needed to be ordered and took in those “delinquent” students during lunch and after school. After nearly 3 years of being in the dark, the new Principal, Mrs. Potts-Stark, had decided to change that for you in the beginning of July.

“Since I am going to be taking over this new school year, I would like to get to better know the staff and their roles within the school,” she gives you a steady, business-like smile from behind the desk and she’s seemed to pop out of the beige walls that surround her soft blue business blazer and skirt. You nod and fidget a little. The room is humid due to the air conditioner being fixed and upgraded during the months school is out. From a moment, you wonder If she is related to the man the funds most of the school before answering her question.

“I became Head Librarian a year ago after Mr. Philips retired,” you answer while playing with the hem of your short-sleeved blouse, “Outside of maintaining the library, I help with detention every once and awhile.”

“Is that all?” she frowns with her question, as you shrug, “No interactions with any of the teachers? Book fairs?”

“Some teachers bring in students for end of the year projects,” you do your best to explain, “But most of them go to the computer lab and get help from Ms. Romanoff. We hadn’t had a book fair in some time.”

She gets an excited flicker in her eye, and you wonder if you have stepped into a spider’s trap. Mrs. Potts-Stark gets up from her seat and you follow suit, as she puts her hand in the middle in the sign of a handshake.

“Well, we’re going to change that.”

That’s how you got into the plan of the complete redevelopment of the library with new books and updated literature and technology. While, it was never going to be the computer lab, it could be a place where the students could go and research through both methods, as one way to prepare them for university. You would be preparing classes to teach basic research methods as an optional course and planning different ways to integrate library usage through some way in most of the classes.

Thus, your summer had been filled with taking computer classes and familiarizing yourself with the latest academia regarding Library Studies (Finally putting that degree to use again, Wanda – your roommate- laughed at you). There was even going to be a book fair. Now, on the first Wednesday of the new development meetings you were supposed to present yourself and the library to the
teachers that had only been told to add more library trips to their development plans back in the summer.

Now, you were sitting in the back of the room, waiting for the principal to tell you when you would come up front. You took a deep breath and glanced at the table where all the teachers were listening to the changes of Mr. Fury’s history curriculum when it came to WWII, but it only seemed like Mr. Rogers was paying attention. *Maybe, the art teacher was a secret history buff?* Nevertheless, the talk caught your attention, but as you proceeded to look for a pen to make some quick notes in your journal. The thing is you can’t find the one you sure you had brought along. You try to rummage into your bag as quietly as possible, and you have to question where your head was this morning if you forgot your pencil case – *because you always carried it everywhere*.

So, on shaky knees you go to the person closest to you, who seems to be holding their hand underneath their chin in order to stay awake. Dark brown hair and a white dress shirt that is rolled up to their elbows. You gain a little the courage to tap their shoulders, and you bite your bottom lip as blue eyes turn to look your way.

“I’m sorry, but do you have an extra pen I could borrow?”

Chapter End Notes

catch me on the flip side: [writing tumblr](https://example.com/writing)
more meetings.

"Sure. Here ya go."

Blue Eyes gives you a smile while handing you a pen and you smile back before heading back to your seat, hoping that you hadn't disturbed the meeting. However, when you start taking notes the pen runs out of ink and you're too mortified to ask again, instead opting to sit in silence and trying your best to remember what everyone was talking about. God, it was embarrassing.

"...And that concludes our upcoming proposal for the library. If anyone has any questions."

Mrs. Potts-Stark watches proudly from the side and everyone seems to have their own set of questions and concerns, which you took the time to answer all of them -- well, all except one person, Blue Eyes. You frowned as he kept playing with his other (working) pen, clearly not interested in what you had to show. You let out a huff of air, quite unsure of why this was bothering you, before taking Mr. Fury's question.

The first month of school passed without incident, and just how Mrs. Potts-Stark had instructed, most of the teachers had reached out to you to plan what they wanted to do with the library throughout the school year. Mr. Coulson wanted a dramatization of certain revolutions for his AP History class, Mr. Fury had similar sentiments when it came to his Government and Economics class, even Ms. Hill -- the dreaded the English teacher-- was planning on something for poetry month. It was exciting to see the library so busy with work and collecting things, but it was obvious who was spending the most time with you here and now.

"So these are the books you were talking about?" a certain redhead remarks from the other side of the table, as you look up to see a small smile on Ms. Romanoff's face, or as she made you call her Natasha. Since the principal wanted the computer lab and library on par with each other, she started to spend more time here than usual with you, pretty much anytime she didn't have class or the occasional after school hours.

"Yes, directly from my old Russian professor," you nod and push them forward, as she grabs the first book lightly and skims over it. The both of you had learned early on that you shared a fondness for Russian literature (she was rereading Doctor Zhivago and you were slowly making your way though Turgenev's Fathers and Sons), but she also knew the language and was still deeply interested in Cold War era books.

"Thanks," is all she says before sitting down and starting to check all the others in the pile you have brought her. It was the thing the two of you did most often now that the proposal for tech updates for both the library and computer lab were being looked over for approval by the board of trustees after Mrs. Potts-Stark's presentation to them some days ago. You and Ms. Romanoff make a good team, she had said proudly and you wanted to believe so since you weren't the most social person -- the people you interacted most were Wanda and Pietro (when he was in town) and your cat-- it would be nice to know more people, to get to know Natasha better.

"So, how are all the meetings going?" she ask after some time, putting the last book back in the stack. You shake your head a little, thinking about all the different personalities of the various teachers you had meet in the past month -- it was exciting and stressful all at the same time.

"I just need to met with Mr. Rogers and Mr. Barnes," you explain as she let's out a light whistle while crossing her arms and leaning into the chair, "I'm suppose to meet with them after school."
"Steve and James," she says in a rather strained tone that causes you to raise an eyebrow.

"Should I know something about them ahead of time?" you question as she leans closer to you, as if she is going to tell you a secret even if it's just the two of you in the building during this class period.

"Steve's all right. Kinda of shy and really into art and history from what I've seen," she explains as you nod, remembering him from the meeting and the brief exchanges you had shared in the hallways, "James is more of a control freak. Sometimes, it feels like he's teaching my own class. He knows a lot, I'll give him that, but he knows how to get his way."

From that brief meeting, you had an inkling that Mr. Barnes had a manner of doing things his own way and he didn't really care about whatever new things were being pushed his way. However, he -- along with Mr. Rogers -- had a great connection with the students of the school, kids talked to them like friends and their classrooms were always filled with students either seeking advice or wanting to stare at them, not to mention they were also advisers to several clubs as well -- they were the heartthrob teachers of the school. You really weren't sure how to coincide those two images together.

"Just stand your ground," green eyes look directly into yours as she grabs your hand for a brief moment,"You've got some great ideas, don't let yourself get pushed around."

Natasha reminds you of Mrs. Potts for a moment and you smile and nod your head. The bell rings to announce the beginning of 5th period and Natasha gets up with her pile of books and a small smile.

"Good luck."

It's the start of sixth period when you hear the door open again, as you look up from your book and towards the direction of the the front desk to see a smiling blond man dressed in beige khakis and light blue button-up -- Mr. Steve Rogers. It way before the start time of your meeting, but he explains that this is his free period and wanted to get started, if that was all right with you. After a small greeting, the two of you set yourselves up on one of the large desks near the entrance. He's carrying a stake of papers and a notebook, you don't pay attention to him as much as you set up your journal filled with notes and pencil case next to. For a brief moment, he can see color coded lines and highlights, and he smiles.

"Just like..." he murmurs off and it catches your attention quickly in the complete stillness of the library.

"Like who?" you question as he sits down, but all he does is shake his head never bothering to answer your question. He goes straight into business mode after that, as he explains what he wants to do for his Art History class -- not only does he want to have the students research it but experience it as well using Stark tech to either VR or hologram certain paintings from each time period (depending on what they were studying) and the library would be a perfect place for that.

"That's very ambitious, Mr. Rogers," you say rather awestruck and he smiles.

"Yeah, Bucky and I were thinking--" he starts off and you want him to pause and clarify who the hell is Bucky?, but the crashing of the door and the laughter of kids of the outside, signifying that school was done with, something that has completely passed your head when talking to the blond man. You both turn to see a flustered man dressed in dark slacks, a white button-up, and a black leather jacket to complete the outfit holding some folders as he rushes towards the two of you.

You frown a little at the sudden interference to your meeting until you see blue eyes looking your
way -- Mr. Barnes. He sets his stuff on his desk as the blond lets out of quite laugh, which only causes your frown to deepen since he is both late and disorganized. What happened to the control freak Natasha warned you about?

He seems to be looking into his pockets for something, but doesn’t retrieve anything from them. All his movements are rushed and frantic as he pushes a hand through his brown hair in frustration. He looks at the desk before finally looking at up you, as he bites his bottom lip between his pearly white teeth.

"I'm sorry, but could I borrow a pen?"
"Ahh...sure here."

He smiles as you slide over your pencil case, all the pens that you personally needs are neatly placed next to your journal ready to be read through once again after the meeting was done with. He looks at the design of casing (stars and little swirls of galaxies with a bee in the corner, the logo of your favorite stationery shop) for a moment and while it doesn’t bother you, it does seem a little strange. Nevertheless, he gives you small smile before grabbing a felt time pen before starting his own part of the meeting. He goes on about having a massive science fair, not just for the students but for members of Stark Industries to be there as well, he also wants the VR system to use during certain classes. However, he doesn’t stop there because he thinks it should be used for any science related objective, and he seems to have the Astronomy Club especially in mind as their main advisor. Everything is neat and straight forward in his presentation and you are at awe at his dedication and knowledge.

“That sounds great, Mr. Barnes! It sounds just like something the library could be used for,’” you reply excitedly after he finishes. You take a few more notes, as he nods, “I look forward to seeing its instillation, there’s just no way they wouldn’t wanna see this.”

“I would also like to be part of the installation process if possible,” he adds as an afterthought as you look up at him with a questioning look on your face because none of the other teachers had requested that.

“I mean...sure you could, but isn’t your plate full with all your classes and clubs?” you question as he frowns. The blond simply watching the interaction between the two of you with slight caution.

“I just think it would be in much safer hands with someone that knew what they were doing,” he explains and now it’s your turn to frown, feeling offend at the implications of his wording.

“What is that supposed to mean?” you ask in a slightly higher tone than before.

“I’m sorry, it’s just that Bucky is really into all this,” Steve explains as he gives you a sympathetic smile, like he has gone through all this before, “He ain’t saying anything bad about your managing style, he’s just a bit of a nerd about these things.”

“I see…” is all you can say, looking at Mr. Rogers’ apologetic smile more than the burning of those blue eyes, “Well, I am sure that Mrs. Potts-Stark would understand if he placed a personal proposal.”

It’s all you say on the subject as the two men nod in agreement before picking up their things and shaking your hand before leaving, though you don’t have the same kindness in your face that you had when it started, and while you were excited for their plans, you weren’t too keen on seeing them anytime soon. The entrance door echoes loudly, making sure that you are aware of their departure, as you fall back onto your chair again with annoyed sigh leaving your mouth.

“Natasha sure was right about him.”

And that’s when you notice it, that bastard took your pen.

Wednesday, 1:30 P.M

Two weeks since your last teacher meeting it is a time you fear a little more than before, as you
clutch your pencil case a bit closer than before. It wasn’t that you felt outcasted by the rest of the teachers, they were all nice and welcomed you with their own versions of professional kindness, it was something else -- something more personal since your pens were getting taken away by one particular person and it was bothering the heck out of you. And while some people might think it was weird to take the pen stealing so serious, these were things that you deeply cares and that kept you a little bit more secure throughout the day.

It had started in the meeting after becoming aware of the existence of Mr. Barnes:

There’s an easy smile on his face as he comes in few minutes before the meeting begins, and thus the only seat left is next to yours. You feel goosebumps running across your arms as you notice his figure followed by his voice greeting Mr. Barton, the gym teacher teacher, on his right side. You twirl the mechanical pencil in your hand in anxiety as he turns to great, but his smile seems to drop at the sight of your uneasy face.

“Look, I’m sorry about out last meeting, I didn’t mean for it to come off so rudely,” he explains with a small smile, as he rubs the back of his neck and voice softer towards the end as more people begin to speak, “I just tend to get excited about all this. Space, physics, science just drive me mad, is all. I hope you don’t think badly of me.”

You blink, as his apology catches you off guard that you don’t catch his next question, “So...could I borrow a pen for the meeting?”

You didn’t see that black gel pen after the meeting either. It miffed you a little, but as long as the pen wasn’t part of a set, it wouldn’t bother you, then last week happened.

Your old journal had filled up, so after a weekend of going to your favorite stationery store you had picked a new moleskin art journal and a pair of pens with erasable ink. They were going to be your system to take notes for the development meetings you were now actively taking part. You sit next to Natasha this time around, though Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rogers are both across from you. Like you, the blond man likes to writes notes but on a legal pad, Barnes does the same though he seems to be having trouble with his current pen since it can’t seem write. He gives up until he sees you.

The meeting is about to start when he makes a writing motion, as if asking you for a pen. Mr. Rogers just shakes his head and Natasha murmurs something about “it happening again.” Mrs. Potts-Stark walks in and in a quick reaction to getting caught and fear, you roll the blue pen at his direction. He gives you a smile before turning his attention to the meeting.

You have lost another pen to Mr. Barnes.

It is the third meeting and while you know you shouldn’t be bringing your pencil case, you are also aware that the principal would be coming in with the proposal results from the Board of Directions to be implemented during the 2nd semester, you was something you knew you would have to go through with a fine-tooth comb. And maybe, some mysterious unknown force are on your side today because Mr. Barnes is sitting in the completely opposite side of where you find a seat between Mr. Fury and Mr. Coulson. If he’s asking for something you don’t notice and you go about your own business for most of the meeting.

“Now, I just wanted to let you know that all proposal have been approved by the Board,” the principal began to explain towards the end of the meeting, to the excited murmurs of everyone in the room, “But, there is just one that really stood out and the Director and the Board members really want to be the highlight for the end of the year.”

Everyone seems to immediately grow silent at the prospect of being the crowning jewel for the end
of the semester, you look around wondering who you will be working with the most since it would all be taking place in the library.

“Mr. Stark is looking forward to what the Science Fair will show of our students,” the redhead states proudly and you can already hear people congratulating Mr. Barnes behind you, “And I look forward to seeing our library shine. So good luck to our Head Librarian and Mr. Barnes!”

You hear a familiar deep voice give his thanks, but all you can do is nod and try not to smash your head onto the table in front of most of the staff.

Oh god, you’re gonna be penniless by the end of the year.
i finally get to introduce the fav stationery place and where this story is going, i really love this chapter so enjoy!

Saturday.

“Becca, do you have any more erasable ink pens?” you question coming up the aisle as the young women behind the countertop thinks for a moment. The skin around her blue eyes crinkling for a moment in though, as her pixie blue hair sways back and forth for a moment.

“In pairs no, but singles should be a little ways back,” she answers pointing to the other side of the story, as you turn and give her a grateful smile.

B’s Stationery had been your go-to place for pens and other such things since you had moved to New York City 5 years ago, and while it was a trip away from your current studio apartment, you always made the trip to Brooklyn on the weekends. The owner, Rebecca Protractor, picked up the shop after her parents retired down to Florida and she continued it as a little extra side income for her and her husband, William, who worked as sous-chef. She considered you one of her prized customers and even a friend who had unusual attachment to pens and others writing utensils.

“Didn’t you buy pair just last week?” She questions, as you stand next to the counter, eyeing the letter sets and flash drives on display. Neither you nor Wanda had sent a care package to Pietro in awhile, as he roamed throughout Australia as part of his job’s current project.

“The man I told you about last week,” you pause and place a blue and white tropical floral set next to the rest of the items you were going to buy, “He took the black pen and it just feels…”

“...Incomplete,” Rebecca finishes since she already knows what you are going to say. You give her a timid smile, knowing that she doesn’t mean any harm, though you are still a little weary of people knowing too much about you, it usually didn’t end well and all this collecting of stationery was your own coping mechanism but only Rebecca, Wanda, and Pietro knew that.

“No harm, my older brother is kinda like that too,” you quirked an eyebrow at the sudden mention of Rebecca’s older brother. You didn’t know if they were close or not and she didn’t mention him very often as her younger sisters, though when she did it was usually in either pride (he was an accomplished physicist that was once in the NASA program) or anger (he had dropped out of said program and moved back home after his fiancee broke up the engagement).

“He collects pens too?” you ask, as you pick up your bag as she laughs, before suddenly lighting up with a bright smile on her face like she just had the world’s greatest idea. You try to take few steps back, but she’s already grabbing your wrist stopping your escape.

“I know it’s been awhile, but maybe I can set you guys up,” she smiles at the idea as you frown, “He’s a bit of a nerd, but I’m sure you’d hit it off great!”

“I don’t know…” you murmur, “That teacher wants to meet during weekends since we are both free at that time rather than school hours when he’s busy.”
“Just think about it, ‘kay?’ she gives you that smile that you just can’t say no to, and nod your head slightly.

“I’ll think about it, promise.” is all you say as you wave goodbye until next weekend, though you are bit more unsure of coming back now that Rebecca had a certain idea in mind because she was stubborn as a mule when she did.

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**Sunday.**

“So, it’s not a date?” Wanda questions you with Matcha at her side, as you look at the outfit in her full-length mirror. The weather was calling for more fall clothing, so you had decides to wear a long blue knitted sweater with a long-sleeve and jeans. Your friend had given you her approval and so had the true owner of your apartment with a long meow. Though, all your nerves seems to give your old friend the wrong idea.

“No, Wan. It’s not a date, it’s a meeting about the project,” you explain as you grab your bag and double check that you have all your papers, planner, and pencil case once more. She shakes her head as she give the black and white cat a few tummy rubs, Matcha had clearly always liked Wanda more than you.

“I mean..you never know,”she raises her eyebrows in that not-so subtle way, as you let out a groan and hit her with the nearest pillow, clearly not thinking of Mr. Barnes that way.

“I think the guy has to like you first,” you explain, clearly remembering your latest meeting with him, “I think Mr. Barnes thinks I’m pretty incompetent.”

“What the hell do you mean?” Wanda exclaims, causing Matcha to jump out of the bed with an annoyed sound coming out of her mouth. You shake your head, and go about explaining what had happened after the last meeting.

You’re getting ready to leave after all the teachers are done talking with each other when you see Mr. Barnes take the sit right next to you. There’s a frown on his face, as he start drumming one of your pens on desk like a drum. You look at him for a moment, unsure of what he was to say or if he’s here to steal another one of your precious items. He shakes his head slightly before speaking.

“Look, since we’re working as a team now. Maybe we should meet up, so we’re on the same page about all this. So no mistakes are made,” he sighs out the last part like he’s speaking to a child, and you can’t help but feel a little angry. From the corner of your eyes, you can see Natasha watching one as well.

“Sure, what do you have in mind?” you give him your most professional smile, as he goes on about meeting during the weekend since the rest of his week is filled with after school tutoring and Astronomy Club activities, so that you can hash out the finer details of what you both have in mind moving forward.

You are agree, but you not going to be thought of so lowly of if this is a partnership.

“Well, clearly that ass doesn’t know what he’s missing,” Wanda shakes her head as she gives you a small smile,”Just you wait, you’ll be driving him crazy in no time.”

“Wan, stop. You’re embarrassing me.”

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It’s close to 3 in the afternoon when you get off the train and set off to a small cafe not that far from
the school to meet him. He’s sitting outside with a cup and sandwich on his right and a stake of books on his left, he’s too engrossed in whatever he’s reading to notice you coming up to him. He runs a hand through his brown locks in what seems like agitation, though you can help but notice that he looks nice brown leather jacket and green shirt. You place your bag down on the table, which causes him to jolt from his seat just a little.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Barnes,” blue eyes look at you for a moment, as if trying to process that you are standing right in front of him, as you give him a tight-lipped smile. When he finally gets it, he starts moving some of his books away, and giving you a bit more space to finally seat down.

“James is fine,” he replies while putting a set of books down onto the floor, most people don’t seemed bothered by it and you wonder if he does it often in this particular cafe. You’re get caught up looking at the decor of the outside, a semi-shaded area with mostly wooden tables and chairs that gave it that cottage in the city feel, while through the large window you could see at least three bookshelves, which definitely caught your attention. You feel like going inside, but maybe for another time

“I’m sorry. W-What?” you ask for clarification on the statement you certainly missed.

“You can call me James. Mr. Barnes seems a little strange outside of school,” he explains, as you nod before saying the same about your own name. He gets something from his bag and hands it you, saying that’s it’s his proposal, if you wanted to look over it before talking about and future goals. You nod and smile, taking out a plastic bag full of highlighters before taking about a folder and handing it to him.

“What's this?” he looks at the folder before opening and you wiggle in your seat with a smile on your face hoping that the last three days of researching with Natasha and skyping with Pietro over his own field of study were worth it for the confused look on Mr. Barnes, -- no James’ face.

“It’s my own original proposal to Mrs. Potts-Stark and my notes on your own,” you declare, but instead of confusion like you expected, there is an excited smile on his face as he puts on his glasses and takes out one of those multi-colored pens. You glare a bit at the unknowing object, briefly wondering where your own missing pens could be.

It takes the both of you a good hour to go through both documents and throughout you found yourself glancing at the physics teacher’s face wondering what he was thinking as he changed from black to red and then blue ink. However, once or twice you caught an excited smile on his face and you felt your chest flutter with pride, you didn’t know why you wanted to impress him so badly, but you hoped that it was working. By the time, you were both done you had ordered a sandwich with a latte and Mr. Barnes was going through his 3rd couple of coffee.

“You really did your research,” James lets out in breathless excitement over everything he had read, while taking off his glasses, “Some of these are great ideas! It’s just really exciting, ya know?”

“I know,” you smile back behind your floral pattern cup, as he starts explaining what he wants to do with his classes and clubs, integrating the library after winter break at least once a week once the VR tech has been setup. You nod and suggest background research to be integrated into some of the latter courses after testing, so that they can get used to working with the tech and know of its history for a deeper appreciation of the whole experience. Once you’re done taking notes on the discussion, you finds yourself talking his Astronomy Club and how he got into physics, and you quickly learn that James has been a nerd -quite the handsome one- his whole life.

“So, why did you choose Library Studies as your field?” he questions with curious blue eyes that seems to sparkle gray for a moment under the fairylights surrounding the cafe.
“Mmm...as long as I can remember I’ve always been stuck in the library,” you reply and play with your pen, “The library was like free daycare for my mom, I just couldn’t separate myself from it, still can’t I guess.”

James hums at your answer but say nothing about the loneliness he seems to pick up behind your explanation, instead steering it into another direction, “Then, why don’t you make it more fun? It’s your place, make a Library or Literature Club.”

“I’ve never really thought of it that way,” you remark, remembering that there was really a club beforehand because Mr. Philips’ enjoyed the solitude of the library more than the children towards the end of his career, without a proper say in you didn’t really have a choice but to follow what he said. You sort of continued that after he left, it was only now that it seemed like a good idea.

“I’m sure Mrs. P would approve, she sort of loves you,” he explains with a light grin on his face at the mention of the new principal, and even though you want to correct him on that train of thought, because you saw Mrs. Potts-Stark as nothing but a fair and honest person, you knew that her excitement over the library sort went above everything else if need be.

“Hmm...I’ll think about it,” you admit softly and all James does is nod eagerly like he’s already won. He seems to be ready to say something else when the familiar sound of David Bowie’s *Space Oddity* rings between the both of you. You look around for a moment because that isn’t your cell phone melody, but it’s his and you can’t help but laugh as he gives you an embarrassed smile and shakes his head. **God, he really was a space nerd!** James goes to answering the message he had received, though there is a serious look on his face before he goes back to paying attention to looking at you.

“I have to go,” he sighs, though Barnes seems unwilling to get up. It causes you to look at him for a moment as he rubs the back of his neck, “I have a double date with Steve and his girlfriend, Peggy.”

“Oh,” is all you can say, as he gives you a disappointed smile, “I guessing you don’t want to go.”

“No, it’s been awhile,” he explains and he looks at you with expectant blue eyes, as if you’re going to ask something else, but you just nod your head since you understand a little of where he’s coming from. He grips and releases his right hand in anxiety, as you slightly tap his palm with your pen. He’s looking at you, but you’re too engrossed with tapping his palm.

“You shouldn’t worried. You seem all right,” you explain without noticing how your words are affecting him, “I am sure you can show anyone a nice time... *I mean this was fun.*”

“Yeah?” his breathe hitches for a bit, though you don’t seem to catch it.

“Of course, James. I wouldn’t lie.”

It’s another ten minutes of silence before James decides to leave, so that he doesn’t run late and you say goodbye with a small wave before going your own way, completely unsure of the warm feeling building in your heart at the sight of his nervous smile is, but with a familiar black pen in your hand you hope his date goes well.
real date talks

Chapter Notes

thank you to @Isavuu for betaing this chapter, she's a real sweetheart.

Monday.

You look up in confusion to see Mr. Barnes standing in front of the closed library doors after you return from getting a quick lunch with Natasha. He is leaning against the door as he waves whenever any of the teenagers greet him, though some of the girls seem to ogle at his choice of clothing for the day: a short-sleeved blue polo shirt that almost seems a little too small for him and black slacks. You nod your head in his general direction, as Barnes straightens himself up. You’re confused as to why he’s here when he explicitly stated that you were only going to meet every two weeks. You really didn’t think he wanted to see you anymore than necessary.

“Umm… how are you today?” you question timidly as you open the door to the library, but he doesn’t seem to want to give you a response at the moment. However, he does follow you into the empty building. It’s a little annoying, but he should have a reason for being here, aside from potentially stealing more pens.

“Is there a reason for your visit, Mr. Barnes?” you ask with an irritated tone of voice that he seems to catch this time around, as blue eyes look at you with a slightly pleading expression. He runs a hand through his brown hair in agitation.

“I needed… to talk to someone about my date,” he explains as you take a seat behind the familiar information desk you love, “I can’t really talk to Steve about it and you’re the only other person that knows. I just need a little penny for my thoughts, ‘kay?”

James leans a little onto the right side of the table and gives you a pouting look that you respond to with bewilderment. But, you also understood and could even sympathized with the need to talk things out with someone in order to better process the information, you had been taught something similar when you were younger. You give him a commiserating look before taking out a loose piece of paper and the blue erasable ink pen that you carried in your pocket.

“Are you going to write everything I say?” he asks, as he gets back up and walks until he’s standing in front of the desk.

“It helps,” is all you say and he takes it as his cue to start talking.

James proceeds to give you the play-by-play of his date at a nice vegetarian Indian restaurant near Midtown, which is supposedly a favorite spot for Peggy and this woman since they are close friends. Lorraine is an emergency trauma surgeon in a prestigious hospital with blonde hair and bright blue eyes. They talked about her work and even flirted a little while ordering, James almost thought they had something. You know that spark.

“Then, I started talking about my work in physics and she seemed alright with it,” Mr. Barnes rubs the back of his neck awkwardly as if going back to that moment, “But once I started talking about astronomy… I lost her. She’s more of a hard facts sort of woman, I guess, not really into Orion’s Belt
stories.”

He shrugs as you take a couple of more notes and absentlymindedly ask a question, though you aren’t looking at his face for a response, “Like Orion and Diane?”

“Exactly!” you jump a little at the sound of his excited voice. As he places his hands on top of the desk, you look up from your paper to see him grinning at your remark. All you do is shake your head at his excitement, and you wish he would stop looking at you with those blue eyes, it was really unnerving. You just happened to know the story because you remember borrowing the book sometime ago from the Central Library. It wasn’t that big of a deal to you, but apparently it was to Mr. Barnes. Thus, a little thought forms in your head for a brief moment as you recall the ending of the story.

_Are you a romantic, Mr. Barnes?_

“So no second date?” you ask, staring back at the paper and not catching how James’ face falls at the mention of said date.

“I don’t think so,” he heaves out in exhaustion as you stare at his hands on your desk, inching closer to the small vase of pens that you have. You mentally prepare yourself in case he thinks of taking one again, though this time you might actually cry or yell at him if he does.

“Well, where would you wanna go for a date, doll?” he shuffles a little, and you sigh when his hands move to be in front yours. You twirl the pen in your hand for a moment out of anxiety, not sure how to answer his question, since you haven’t dated in a very long time, and even less sure on why he used such a strange pet name.

“I don’t really know. Maybe Central Park, or a museum would be nice,” you answer, finally looking up to his face as you give him a tight-lipped smile, “simple and easy.”

James leans a little bit more onto the table, his chin perched on top of his hand and there’s a strange smile on his face in response to your answer. However, when you were just about to move back and make a comment about personal space, the bell signifying the end of lunch rings loudly in the empty library. He straightens himself up before nodding in your direction, though he doesn’t say anything. As he closes the door behind himself, you find yourself dwelling on the conversation for the rest of the day, and you can’t help but think.

_Was he mocking me?

You only mention it briefly, but Mrs. Potts-Stark is already on board with creating a Library Club. You didn’t even have to do much since there were already guidelines set up by a previous incarnation of the club that existed before you were even born. All you need to do is make some upgrades, create some flyers (thank god for Natasha), and the hard part -- get some students to actually join. In that brief moment, you aren’t sure if you want to thank or curse James Barnes. It doesn’t help that you don’t know a lot of the students outside of those who spend time in the library during detention, and a certain student that just likes hiding out there -- so, you go to her first.

“Michelle,” you question softly during 5th period as she enters the library. She told you once before that she doesn’t have much else to do. You almost think she doesn’t hear you, but when she turns around with that serious look on her face, you can't help but smile a little more.

“What can I do for ya, Lib?” she sets her bag down, calling you by the shorter version of ‘Librarian’ that she seems so fond of. While, you two didn’t talk much you knew she had a love of books that
rivaled your own, so you doted on her a bit when it came to hall passes. You soothed out the flyers that Natasha had made for you and push them to her side of the table.

“We’re trying to add some things here and there in the Library,” you try your hardest to explain and while normally you may have faltered, you know the young girl’s serious gaze means no harm, “One of them is a club, so if you know anyone or would like to join yourself, I’d love to see you there.”

“I’ll think about it and talk to some kids I know,” she grabs a handful of flyers and puts them in her bag as you let out a small sigh of relief. Michelle grins, and she gets a twinkle in her eye that you aren’t familiar with.

“So, who’s the gorgeous guy that has opened up your heart?” she lets out with a light sarcastic tone and you can only shake your head in response.

“More like stuck-up jerk with the best ideas,” you reply without missing a beat, which causes her smile to turn into a full-on grin. The teenager enjoys this side of you, though she only saw it when you were both talking about certain genres that you didn’t enjoy.

“Ah, Mr. Barnes then,” she lets out a quiet chuckle. You follow suit and nod, but for a moment she looks at you a bit closer than before, and Michelle knows that she will have to keep a closer eye on you and a certain physics teacher.

Friday.

It can be considered an odd Friday evening because there isn’t much to do after school, and most students have left early to forget what they have to do until next Monday. Thus during such an event, James finds himself drinking at The Lone Star with Steve and their close friend Sam. Usually, there are more to their group, but both Clint and Scott have ‘family duty,’ and Thor is away on business in Australia. Nowadays it is also surprising whenever they hear from Tony, who is so busy with his business, the school, and maybe even starting a family. Hell, Steve is only here because Peggy will be coming home late due to a new case. If not, it would just be James and Sam, and nobody needs that annoyance.

“To another week down the drain, boys!” Sam yells as the other two agree over the sounds of the game and music playing in the background. James chugs down the shot of whiskey he ordered, because once they get settled, he knows the first thing Sam will ask about. It takes 15 minutes of comfortable chatting about each other’s week before Sam begins his questioning.

“So, how was the date on Sunday, Buckaroo?” Sam asks in genuine curiosity as he pats James’ back in encouragement.

“Don’t mention it ever again,” Bucky groans out, trying to forget a certain blonds as Steve shakes his head in sympathy.

“That bad, huh?” Sam asks, though a bit confused since the Bucky he knew back in college had always been a ladies’ man. One smooth word and a suave look and they were all over him. It wasn’t until his engagement had ended in a disaster that Sam had playfully dubbed him, ‘No Luck Buck,’ though it seems he had grown used to it by now.

“Well, it doesn’t help that Buck’s already in love with someone else,” Steve puts in his two cents, and Sam slams down his drink in shock.

“Wait, are you still hung up on the ex? Hasn’t it been like 3 years now?” Sam questions in confusion
and indignation, but like always, Bucky doesn’t give them a response to whether he is still in love with Dot, or whether he is in love with someone else. Though it seems like Steve has already put two and two together. Instead, he orders a beer and keeps the secret close to his heart.

“WANDA, CALM DOWN!” a yell from the back of the bar catches everyone’s attention, and the trio looks behind them to see a young, red-haired woman being dragged back to her table by her friend, as a third companion seems to be taking pictures of the whole ordeal.

“Vis... just wanna...” the redhead known as Wanda exclaims once more before following her friend back to their booth. Bucky can only keep watching with wide, blue eyes as a familiar face tries their hardest to calm down the rowdy drunk.

“Hey, isn’t that the Head Librarian?” Steve asks the question that Bucky already knows the answer to, and he nods. He glances back to see you calling someone for a brief moment, but outside of that you were laughing without a care in the world with your other friend. James has to look away.

“Yeah,” James murmurs before taking another swig of his beer.

“She’s one cute librarian,” Sam remarks, as he gets up from his chair to get a slightly closer look and Bucky can’t help but roll his eyes, “Wait, the frigid one working with Barnes?”

“The same one,” Steve answers this time, though a little worried about the twinkle in Sam’s eye as he watches you laugh once more at something the redhead says.

“Well, I’ve gotta meet the person killing Barnes’ ego,” Sam declares in an excited tone. Anything hilarious he can use against Bucky is something he wants to get in on. However, something stops Sam from moving forward.

“Just leave ‘em alone,” Bucky pleads softly, which causes Sam to gape like a fish for a moment. Blue eyes look at you, laughing while asking for another drink, and he can’t help but smile, “She’s having fun.”

Sam gives Bucky a suspicious look before turning to Steve, who just shrugs. Bucky lets go of his arm. Neither of them notice that he keeps a close eye on your smiling face for the entire night.
library and computer classes.

Chapter Notes

thank you so much to the ppl that have read this story so far, we have reached 100 kudos ;A; your support means a lot. special thanks to @isavuu for beta reading it. also, i have decided to add more chapters because there is some cute shit i wanna do.

“Are you going to grace the world with your presence today, drunkie?” you call from the entrance of the door as Wanda groans and places a pillow over her head, the trademark signs that she has a hangover. You smile at the sight because it wasn’t often that either of you let loose. Pietro was usually the one to drag you places when you were younger, but Wanda couldn’t help but celebrate that her boyfriend, Vision, was coming back home early from teaching abroad.

“I left some medicine on the kitchen countertop and I’ll bring back some soup from your favorite place,” you murmur softly as she waves her hand, signifying that she heard you. It is a normal recurrence that you would eat breakfast together every other Saturday after you come back from the library, but it didn’t seem likely this time around.

You weren’t lying when you told Mr. Barnes that you spend most of your time in a library. It is always either that or some type of stationery store. They are quiet places where you can lose yourself for hours, looking at anything and everything. With the library, you have the pleasure of either reading inside, or going a few blocks away to Central Park. However, with Wanda obviously out of commission, it is looking more like you are going to return your current set of borrowed books then head to the bistro you eat at from time to time. But, you end up staying at the library for a good two hours looking in the historical fiction and space section for whatever reason (that you deny internally), before checking out four new books. It is mid-morning when you finally start to leave, but the new art of constellations in the hallway catches your attention on the way out. You pause to stare at the ones you are familiar with, then turn your head when you hear a familiar voice not too far away.

“That one, Andromeda, was said to be so beautiful by her parents, that the gods punished her for it,” you turn to see Mr. Barnes with two children, a boy and a girl. Only the smaller girl seems interested in the little story James was telling, as the older boy reads a comic, tuning the man out.

“What happened to her?” the brown haired girl questions with worry, as James holds her shoulder with a small shake, like he’s getting into the story. You can’t help but smile a little.

“Well, well, I don’t remember,” James murmurs awkwardly as the girl stomps her left foot in disbelief and the physics teacher ends up rubbing the back of his neck. You step up a little and the empty hall echoes with your footsteps louder than usual.

“Andromeda gets tied up to a horrible sea creature, but a young hero named Perseus,” her bright eyes are looking up at you in excitement and you’re too into telling the story to notice James staring at you in disbelief, “turned invisible and slayed the monster. They got married and traveled all over the world.”

The little girl comes up to you, introducing herself as Lila, and asks you more questions about the couple. As you try to answer them to the best to your abilities, James and the young boy come a bit
closer. You give Mr. Barnes a small nod, but all he can seem to do is stare at you with those unnerving blue-grey eyes, so you avert your eyes to the large, dark painting on the wall.

“Do you come here often?” James questions, which makes you smile, chuckling softly. Lila stands next to you and you briefly wonder how she is related to him.

“That’s a horrible pick-up line, Mr. Barnes,” you answer as he smiles as well, “But, I’m a librarian at heart, I live here on the weekends.”

He lets out a laugh that has you staring at him for a long moment as he moves his head back and closes his eyes, like it’s the funniest thing in the world. Lila asks who you are and you explain that you’re a friend from work, while James also explains that Cooper and Lila are children of a close friend of his. He promised to look after them for the day since their baby brother is sick. He even asks what books you got, but you shake your head and keep it a secret in order to save yourself the embarrassment. It’s a rather easy going conversation until someone reminds you that you are not alone.

“Uncle James, we’re hungry,” Cooper finally speaks, with Lila nodding in agreement as the both of you look down at the boy. James seems ready to say something, but you beat him to it.

“Do you guys like hot sandwiches?” you let out, as three pairs of eyes turn to look at you and you lose your momentary courage, “I-I’m going to a place a few blocks down to pick some up, if you want to join me.”

Cooper and Lila nod excitedly while James simply follows their decision. The four of you leave the library and walk down the busy street. You talk with Lila about the different stories she remembers off the top of her head as she holds on to James’ hand, though you do lose her attention from time to time. James seems to juggle both kids well, as he talks to Cooper between his reading and shares giggles with Lila over their own private jokes.

“You’re good with kids,” you remark while waiting for the street crossing to turn green. He makes a comment to Cooper that he should watch where he’s going before turning to answer and look at you.

“I should be, I’m the oldest of four,” he explains casually and your eyes can’t help but widen a bit at the information, “And you?”

“Only child,” you quip, unable to imagine sharing your things and life events if it hadn’t just been you and your mother, especially since her time was so limited to begin with. You have seen a glimpse of it with the Maximoff twins, but double that seems overwhelming.

“Lucky,” he remarks in mock disdain, but with the smile on his face, you doubt he would have it any other way. You were slowly starting to learn that James Barnes was a family man.

“Maybe,” you concede slightly.

You pause and point to a storefront that says **Elle’s Bistro** before you head in front of them to open the door. James rushes to open it before you, and he smiles as you cock an eyebrow. The elderly woman behind the cash register greets you like an old friend before moving her eyes to look at the trio behind you. She is used to seeing you with Wanda, and she laughs at your new accompaniment. You shake your head before ordering some double decker sandwiches and the soup of the day. You start to take out your wallet, but James moves to stand in front of the cash register and starts giving the woman his own order. You’re still struggling to fish out your wallet when James quickly takes out his.
“Please don’t,” you plead softly, already knowing what he is about to do. James shakes his head as he explains himself.

“Let me pay, as thanks. If you hadn’t come along they would still be fighting over what to eat,” he explains while motioning at the two children who are excitedly watching the sandwiches being made for them.

“I-I…” you pause, and blue eyes dance in amusement. The elderly woman just keeps smiling, patiently waiting for payment before you sigh, “Fine, just this once.”

“Good,” he grins as he pays for everything. Your group pushes around the crowded area for a moment before the kids find some seating near the back. As they sit down at the claimed table, your order is suddenly called for pick-up. James turns to look at you with a confused stare, and you explain that your roommate is sick and waiting back home. He lets out a disappointed sigh before nodding. He isn’t sure what to do, but you place a hand on top of his shoulder and give him a small smile.

“Thank you, James. I’ll see you Monday,” your smile is softer than usual, and he bites his bottom lip in what seems to be frustration. Before he can say anything, Cooper and Lila are yelling for his attention.

“See you on Monday, doll,” is all he says before turning to walk away.

You wave at the kids and they do the same while you pick up your food and head out the door. You are completely unaware of someone watching through the large glass windows, while your are hoping that Wanda is still alive.

This morning, you’re shadowing Natasha’s class to get a better understanding as to how you might run your own class next semester. You sit behind her computer as she goes around helping some of the students that don’t understand the current program they are learning. While she might have a serious look on her face, she takes her time teaching in methodical steps on the screen, is quite understanding of those who are having a hard time, and laughing with some of the students as well. It’s like seeing a completely different side to her.

“Think you’re ready?” she asks after the morning classes end and she’s about to head off for lunch with Mr. Barton.

“I-I’m getting there,” you give her a shaky response, but all she does is grin like she knows something that you don’t. And with that, you excuse yourself back to the library, more lost in your head than usual.

You turn the corner and are surprised to see Mr. Barnes with a group of teenagers, Michelle among them, waiting in front of the library. Michelle is leaning on a pillar as two boys are busy talking to the dark-haired teacher about something science related, and the girl rolls her eyes at a certain remark. It is because of this that she is the first one to notice you standing there as the rest of the group chats to themselves.

“Hey Lib, I found some fresh meat for you,” she exclaims as you shake your head and laugh. This seems to catch the boys’ attention as they turn and introduce themselves as Peter Parker and Ned Leeds, Michelle’s sort-of-friends that she might have threatened to check out the club. There are a few others behind them that you vaguely recall as Cindy, Charles, Abe, and Sally. You thank them for coming either way, and make sure that they have had lunch before opening the library doors. It isn’t until you start heading inside that you remember something.
“You followed my advice?” a raspy voice questions and you turn around, remembering that Mr. Barnes was still standing there with a smug smile on his face. You let out a small huff of air before answering.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mr. Barnes,” you look away, leaning slightly against the open door as he keeps smiling, “Was there something that you needed?”

“Yeah, but you’re busy. Maybe later?” there is a hopeful sound in his voice that you almost don’t catch, and you can’t help but laugh a little.

“Later is fine.”

“Ok, good luck, doll.”

“Thanks,” you give him a full blown grin and Mr. Barnes stops for a moment and gazes at your face as you look away. He catches the slight movement by accident and a quick plan forms in his head. He moves a little closer into your personal space, which causes you to look back directly in his eyes. His breathing seems to slow and you can’t stop staring.

“I’m just gonna borrow this,” he quickly grabs the pen in your hand with a shit-eating grin on his lips, as you start to glare at him. He goes off running down the hall like a little kid, only to turn and give you a small wave. It’s in that moment that you realize it.

*That asshole knows that it bothers you when he takes your pens.*
thank you to everyone that has supported and read this story so far, i didn't think it would get so much love and attention! thanks again to @isavuu for taking the time to beta read this <3. please enjoy this fall chapter in spring, especially since everything is gonna go down for awhile after this >>;;

Bucky Barnes is grinning when he leaves work early on Friday. The kids he tutors were understanding the classwork, everything was going well with his various projects within the classroom and club activities, especially since the VR had been approved to be installed over winter break, and he had gotten to see her. He found himself spending lunchtime more often with her and the little group of misfits known as the Library Club. While it was hard to get her to open up on his own, she seemed to shine with those kids. She loved talking to them about the books they were reading, listening to Peter and Ned’s ‘science talk,’ and her little quips with Michelle made him laugh. Overall, his heart always beat a little faster during lunch.

The problem was with him, because while she smiled and they had their own little talks, there was still a gap between them and he didn’t know how to move beyond it. Bucky knew she was a bit closed off and he didn’t want to rush anything. But, he was at the impasse of being her friend versus his feelings of wanting something more. Did she even consider him a friend? Was he just an annoyance that she put up with?

He groans in frustration as he opens his apartment door. Sam is already sitting on his couch, eating his chips, and Bucky throws his stuff on top of the table before letting out a long sigh.

“Troubles with your mystery lady, Buck?” Sam asks as ESPN goes on a commercial break.

“Shut up, Sam,” Bucky groans, as he tries to stop his brain from over analyzing the situation, like always.

“Well, I got the remedy for that,” Sam gets up from the couch, declaring it like he’s found the cure for all of his single friends’ problems, “A date!”

“Sam, no. Not tonight,” Bucky grumbles, as he places his head into the palm of his hand in exasperation.

“Yeah, well too late for that,” Sam shrugs, clearly pushing away Bucky’s whiny behavior like always when it decides to rear its ugly head. Sam swore he has the two biggest drama queens as best friends.

“You already have it set up, don’t you?” Bucky asks, Sam’s grin already answering his question.

“Go get ‘em, Buck.”

“So, you’re in love with your best friend?”

“Yup, and you with a coworkers?”

“Yeah, we make quite the pair.”
You don’t want to admit it, but your next meeting with James is a bit more awkward than the last. Well, all of your meetings with Mr. Barnes have become awkward after the bistro lunch, since Elle had decided to tell Wanda that you had a secret family with a beautiful man. Your best friend wouldn’t let the conversation go until you explained how you went from disliking Mr. Barnes to taking him to your favorite place to eat. Aside from that, it was the thought that he enjoyed taking your pens that riled you up so much that you finally took Natasha’s advice and bought some pens from the 99 cent store. You brought them to this meeting, as much as it hurt your soul. You even grudgingly admit to yourself that you had Mr. Barnes in your head all this week, which wasn’t a good thing.

You’re casually waiting in the cafe that has become your sort of homebase, and can’t help but notice that the man is 15 minutes late, which is strange for someone that is always at least 10 minutes ahead of schedule. You perk up from looking at your planner when you hear the sound of the chair across from you scraping on the ground. James is wearing a wrinkled shirt with a bad case of bed hair and a glassy look in his eyes. It would almost be cute if he didn’t smell of something awful -- like some type of raccoon. He gives you a lazy smile, as he starts to explain himself the best he can.

“My friend, Sam, set me up on another date and wouldn’t take no for an answer,” He scratches the back of his head, and you give him slight credit for being able to talk without slurring and even remembering all the proper documents he wanted to show you.

“I’m guessing it went well… if you’re…” you stutter out, unsure why you are suddenly so miffed about the simple confirmation that James --no, Mr. Barnes-- was out and having a good time, like any other normal human being.

“No, no, it was a total bust from the beginning,’” is all he cares to explain and you can’t help but let out a small sigh of relief.

“If you want, we could postpone and get you back home,” you murmur softly, as he shakes his head, obviously not wanting to let you go, not this time around.

“I’ll be fine, just… just talk, please,” he pleads, as he gently puts his head on the table. Several other patrons are looking at the two of you, but you don’t seem to care, obviously more worried over the man falling asleep in front of you.

“Talk? As in what?” you question softer than before, trying not to bother him as much since it was such of point of contention with Pietro when these sorts of things happened.

“What are ya reading right now? Your favorite fo-od?” he hiccups for a moment before starting again, “Anything you could think of, sweetheart.”

You frown at the nickname before going on a tandem of anything you can really think of, as he quickly falls asleep to the sound of your voice. It isn’t long after that you get up to see if you can find his cell phone, which is conveniently in his pocket. You sigh in annoyance as the man giggles in his dreams, oblivious to your distress. You count to 3 and quickly grab it, thanking whatever mysterious force up above that has kept his phone unlocked for you, as you notice a familiar name and hope it’s who you think it is.

Stevie: Buck, where the hell are ya? Can’t find you anywhere, you idiot.

Bucky: Mr. Rogers, James and I had a meeting at a cafe for lunch, but he’s currently sleeping on top of the table. If you could please pick him up, I don’t have any idea where he lives.
Stevie: Is this the librarian? What’s the address?

Bucky: Yes, that’s me. The address is…

It takes 15 minutes for Mr. Rogers to arrive with someone else in a blue car and he can’t help but shake his head at the sight of his oldest friend, though he also quirks a smile at the sight of the knitted sweater placed on top of him, as you read the paperwork he brought you, continuing to ignore the persistent onlookers. The other man, who introduces himself as Sam, laughs and takes a picture of the incident on his phone before turning to smile at you, just as Steve begins to pick up James.

“We’re sorry if he caused you any trouble,” Sam explains as you nod, “He’s just pretty hung up over a lady right now.”

“Oh,” is all you can really say, as they move him to the back of the car. Your gaze softens as you wonder who could be hurting James so much that he went binge drinking while on a date. You pay for your meal and grab your stuff as they get ready to leave, Sam hands you the sweater but you just shake your head.

“He looks cold. S’okay, he can take it,” you give him a concerned look as his best friend places said item over the sleeping drunk. You smile softly one more time, as they offer you a ride but you decline saying that you don’t live that far away. You wave at them as they drive away before heading in the opposite direction. Sam looks at his sleeping friend through the car mirror and sighs.

“So, she’s the one he wouldn’t shut up about to Abby last night?” Sam questions, as Bucky falls down in the backseat, grasping to the sweater left to him like a lifeline.

“Yeah, I think he’s liked her for a while,” Steve explains from what he has put together so far, “This is also probably the closest he’s gotten to her. It might be making him a little stir crazy.”

“Puppy Barnes in love,” Sam shakes his head, bringing up the old college nickname, at the light snoring in the back, “Never thought I would see that again.”

“Me neither,” Steve can’t help but sigh, but also feels hopeful that this would end happily for his best friend due to how you were looking at Bucky before they left.

____________________

October passes in a breeze with meetings and club stuff along with helping Wanda with the party she is planning for Vision’s return. It’s a bit more hectic, but you try your hardest to keep going to the stationery store and library on the weekends, and maybe Rebecca sees you struggling a bit more since she hadn’t brought up the date again. It’s near the end of the month when your little group of students finish turning the library into a semi-haunted house. Your head is somewhere else because since the incident, Mr. Barnes hasn’t shown up longer than necessary and even then he won’t look at you in the eye. You wonder if you had done something wrong, or if he was still embarrassed over what had happened.

“Are you coming to the Halloween Dance next week?” Cindy asks, as she places some of the glow-in-the-dark materials back into the storage box and the rest of the kids gather around your desk.

“Oh, I don’t know,” you respond, glancing up at Michelle as she leans her right elbow on top of your desk.

“Mr. Barnes is gonna be there, Lib,” she smiles and it would almost scare you if the more overpowering thought of making amends with James didn’t hit you quite as bad, but you wouldn’t
give her the upper hand.

“Good for him, Michelle,” you quip.

“We could use the help,” Peter adds innocently, as the rest of the kids nod and to that, you really can’t say no.

“I wouldn’t mind,” you mention, but quickly add an afterthought, “But, I don’t have a costume, I don’t even know the theme.”

“Shhh, you let us worry about that,” Michelle winks at you and as the teenagers smile, you can’t help but feel a little fearful over what they have planned.

A week later, you are standing in front of Wanda’s mirror again. She gives an appreciative hum to the glimmering blue dress with eight globes of different colors and sizes placed strategically around the skirt section and a bright yellow belt in the center to setup as the Sun. Dark tights and blue slippers with silver points playing off as stars finish off the outfit — in other words, you are dressed as a pretty Solar System thanks to one May Parker. Wanda had played with your hair so it had a soft, silver shimmer underneath the right light and a shadowy bit of makeup was placed lightly on your face. She smiles at you from the side, as you keep twirling in your outfit.

“You look good,” she pep talks you, as she can’t help but feel excited that you decided to do this tonight,” I hope you have fun.”

“I’m just going to help the Library Club,” you protest, like you had been for sometime now Wanda gives you that grin that says she doesn’t believe you, but she’ll let it slide anyways.

“I believe you, sweetheart,” she chides, and you grab your bag before heading out to get picked up by your Uber. Once she hears the door lock, she gets ready for her own Halloween event, Matcha left ignored in the background, “Man, I can’t wait to tell Carol!”

After arriving and getting hassled by the Library Club, you thank Mrs. Parker. In addition to creating your lovely costume, she is also one of the guardians that volunteered to help during the event. You then go about helping with last minute details for the haunted house, handing out early tickets, and talking to teachers and curious onlookers who are intrigued by the library finally taking part in a school-wide event. Once you are done with everything, you are left standing near the entrance of the library, as Sally and Abe started welcoming students into the horror show.

“Hey Lib,” Michelle takes off her Scream mask as she calls out to you, “I heard that they might need more help near the gym, if ya wanna go.”

“Oh,” you say mildly curious, “Are you guys gonna be okay?”

“Yeah, we’ll be fine,” she smiles as you nod and proceed to walk over to the gym.

The pathway to the library from the gym was long, and if it weren’t for the cute little lanterns placed along the way, it would be scary. You pause to admire them a bit, unaware of the people coming up ahead.

“Hey kids! Either go to the gym or one of the other activities!” a familiar voice yells, causing you to turn and watch said kids run past you. Then, you see a certain man wearing an astronaut outfit with fluffier hair than usual, which makes you grin at the sight. However, Mr. Barnes seems to be at a
standstill with a gaping mouth as you walk over to him. You quirk an eyebrow over his sudden silence.

“James,” you say his name in concern as wide blue eyes look down to meet yours, “Are you alright?”

“Y-Yeah, I’m fine,” he seems to get out of his stupor, as he gives you a look over while placing a gloved hand over his bright face, “It’s just you look…”

You keep staring at him with that questioning face, but his comment never reaches your ears as he simply shakes his head, unable to say anything else. You point to the way back to the gym with him at your side, and while the silence is a little confusing it’s also comfortable until you figure out what you want to say. However, Mr. Barnes seems to beat you to it.

“Umm… You got dragged into this too?” he asks, as the two of you enter the gym hall, decked out in Halloween decorations and spooky holograms on the walls. There were small events near the edge of the gym, like bobbing for apples and even a t-ping contest, as Monster Mash plays in the background. You let out an excited chuckle as James drags a hand through his hair.

“Sort of. The Library Club asked for some help at the last minute,” you explain as loudly as you can over the noise, “then they told me to head over to the gym. They even got me this costume, good kids!”

James goes back to putting his gloved hand in front of his face, as you beam in his direction, though this time it has him shaking his head. The two of you walk around for a bit, watching the students enjoying themselves and seeing some interact with Mr. Barnes like they were good friends. It was nice to see all those little connections up close, and you could only hope you could build some of your own as the year moved forward. You sway a little to the music, as Tinkerbell and Rapunzel wave goodbye at the astronaut a few more times than necessary, but it was cute in a way.

“Did you ever go to one of these as a kid?” he asks, as a new song starts to play that reminds you of your early adult years.

“In my last year of high school and college, one of my friends always dragged me to the parties when I was so caught up with studying for exams or writing essays,” you laugh as James shakes his head, probably thinking about how poor, little you got dragged around by some crazy girlfriend, but you knew it wasn’t a ‘her’ and it wasn’t that bad… all the time, “I know this song! Do you want to dance?”

“W-What?” James lets out in a surprised yelp, as you shake your head, this time unsure of if he’s bashful or if he might not want to be seen with you.

“I mean, you don’t have to…” you dragged the sentence in sudden disappointment, “But, it might be nice to have some fun, no?”

“Y-Yeah,” is all he stutters out before you grab his gloved hand and drag him onto the dance floor. You laugh at the bewildered look on his face as you twirl, glimmering in the spotlight as James’ momentary confusion blooms into a budding confidence as he shows off his own set of dance moves, and boy was he quite the dancer. At this point, you weren’t quite sure what James Barnes couldn’t do.

“And you?” you ask breathlessly, as the song ends and makes way to a slower one. It allows James to look at you, as if asking for permission to bring you in closer for the song. You put your hand in his as he wraps his other one around your waist and you laugh at how he’s trying to find the proper
position between all your globes. You make a really silly looking pair. He shakes his head before speaking.

“I guess I was the wild friend,” James laughs as he twirls you around, “Used to drag around Stevie to dates and parties all the time. He didn’t used to look like he does now, by the way. Then, Sam came around and it wasn’t me so much anymore.”

You laugh out loud thinking about the usually reserved blond man with such a crazy group of friends, but then the moment passes, and it’s a long while of silenced dancing, until James decides to talk again.

“Look, I wanted to apologize, I haven’t been myself and you didn’t deserve to see that side of me last meeting,” he apologizes solemnly, bringing up the subject you have been curious about for quite some time.

“It’s okay, James, people have their moments. And love makes everyone a little crazy right?” you question, as blue eyes stare directly into yours, wondering how much you might know.

“Love?” he questions nervously.

“Your friend Sam said so,” you explain, remembering the event quite clearly, unlike him.

“Yeah, he’s right,” James chuckles before adding amorously as an afterthought, “I’m a fool in love.”

“Well, good luck getting the girl, Mr. Barnes,” you encourage, and you swear he pulls you in a little tighter than before, but you play it off as a trick of the mind.

“Thanks doll,” he says with a little more confidence than before as you shine so brightly just for him in that moment, like the Sun guiding the Earth around it each day.

Too bad, you were in for a rude awakening.

**CUTEST HALLOWEEN COUPLES COSTUME: MR. BARNES AND WHO?**
an attack and a maybe boyfriend.

Chapter Notes

poor poor bucky.

“Are you dating Mr. Barnes?”

For a brief flash in early November, you are one of the most important news topics within the high school after the school newspaper comes out, including all the pictures from the Halloween dance. Front and center in the couple's section is you dancing with Mr. Barnes and that immediately grabs the attention of certain sections of the school. You feel the teenage girls look at you with extra scrutiny, and even some of the teachers look on when you talk too long with the man during the latest development meetings, even though you are more focused on the initial revolution recreations with Mr. Fury. Mr. Rogers’ smile seems friendlier than usual as Natasha raises an eyebrow at how Mr. Barnes’ interacts with you. Maybe, it’s just all in your head, but it feels like that year in high school all over again -- when you first met Wanda and Pietro.

“Doll . DOLL !” you jump at a familiar voice calling your name, and you look up to see worried blue eyes staring at you. The library is empty for lunch this time around since you cancelled today’s meeting, “Are you okay?”

“Y-Yes, perfectly,” you say with a tired voice that you know he doesn’t quite believe. James frowns while bringing over a nearby chair to sit across from you. You place your head on the table and it almost feels like a parallel of the incident from a while back.

“I can smell bs from a mile away,” you can hear his voice, as you let out an annoyed groan. For all you wanted to do and throw yourself out in the world, it was starting to come back to haunt you in terms of irrational fears and potential unmet expectations. Things you didn’t have to deal with if you had stayed in your shell. Wanda and Carol were happy to see the progress, hell even Pietro was grinning from half a world away, but right now you wanted to take everything back. You hear him call your name again and for some reason something snaps inside you.

“Fuck off, James,” you lift up your head, the desperate sound of his name causing him to stop, as you tug the front of your hair a bit in agitation, “How do you do everything all the time? How the fuck is everything you do so fucking perfect?”

Your voice cracks at the end, as you feel tears start to swell in the corners of your eyes. Mr. Barnes looks like he’s in a bit of panic before cautiously taking your hand from across the table and rubbing his fingers over your knuckles softly. He starts humming a song you don’t know as you let out a hiccup.

“Hey, hey, what’s this all about?” James finally has the courage to ask.

“I-I was fine hiding behind Mr. Philips all the time, hell even when I could just sit in the library by myself. But now, people are looking up at me, expecting and wondering things -- I’m scared: What if I mess us? What if they hate me and my ideas? How do you do it all the time? “

You let out a gulp of air, as your eyes start to blur from not being able to stop the tears. While you’re
used to having panic attacks, it feels different--scarier, disgusting--having one in front of him. The chair scrapes and all you hear is rushed footsteps coming to your side as he tries to get you to match his breathing. Your sobbing is echoing throughout the library as he keeps saying inconsequential things to you. It takes a good ten minutes for you to calm down and James rubs some of the tears away before handing you tissues.

“You’ve been feeling like this for awhile, huh?” he questions as you just nod, "But, I ain’t perfect, doll, no one is. I work hard, but I’ve lost a lot of people along the way because of my stubborness. I question if I’m doing the right thing all the time. Hell, I can’t even tell the woman I’m in love with about all the shit I’ve gone through and done. It’s okay to question life, but don’t stop living it ‘cause you’re scared.”

He finishes off softly and you can’t help but agree. Though it doesn’t rid you of your initial fears, it is a step in the right direction of getting used to all these new burdens and responsibilities placed on you.

“You know, you can tell me anything,” He continues after a moment, though his smile is more heartbreaking than before, “We’re friends… I’ve got your back now.”

“I know. Thank you, James,” you croon due to the crying, though you give him your best watery smile, as he grins a little more than before.

“Bucky, doll. All my friends call me Bucky,” he says as you have calmed down. You’re still scared, but a little more prepared to handle the world now.

“Okay, Bucky,” you say softly, and Bucky swears it’s the best way his nickname has been said in a long time.

Here’s the thing though, as much you want to trust James -Bucky, at least when the kids aren’t around- you don’t want to be an annoyance to someone that you haven’t know that long, and you know you only have to wait out the rest of November. You know after that Pietro is going to come home soon, but first it was Vision. You, Wanda, and Carol set up a small get together (Vision didn’t have many friends) at The Lone Star. You just didn’t know another party was there at the same time, having not yet seen three familiar faces on the other side of the room, though they have already seen you.

“The Barnes Love Radar strikes again!” Sam laughs as he watches Bucky glancing to your table as you chat the night away with the same redhead and blonde from the last time.

“Hmmm, I didn’t know the Librarian was the one Lila wouldn’t stop talking about.” Clint adds his own remark as Laura laughs, remembering how much her little girl had fallen for you in such a short amount of time, even making Bucky promise to bring her again one day -- although he hadn’t told you that yet.

“Maybe, we should add them to the party?” Sam questions with wiggling eyebrows, as Bucky shakes his head before downing his drink. However, that question is ignored when the door opens and everyone is hoping it is their guest of honor.

In the doorway, a tall, blond man wearing thick winter clothing steps in. Blue eyes notice that he is heading towards your table. Bucky lets out a relieved sigh when the redhead is the one that tackles the man down with a hug, as you just laugh and give him a warm greeting. As hard as Bucky hopes you didn’t have a significant other, there was a part in him where that fear brightly burned, especially when you had gotten so distant after he witnessed your panic attack. Maybe you had gotten help
from someone that knew you better, more intimately, than him.

He is too into his own thoughts to notice the door opening again to reveal another tall blond, though this one with shorter hair and no longer wearing the beard his friends were so used to. Thus, it takes everyone awhile to realize that it’s Thor. They all welcome him with cheers, though there is some confusion when they see another person with him.

“It is good to see you all again!” He proceeds to gives gifts and hugs to everyone, as the younger man stands to the side with a bashful smile on his face, completely unaware he’s already been caught by a certain younger sister across the room.

“My friend here has nowhere to stay at the moment since he came in earlier than expected, but can’t contact his sister or loved one just yet. A surprise,” Thor explains, as the silver-haired young man smiles to the rest of the group. They welcome him to the best of their abilities since they were used to Thor doing stuff like this, whether it be helping a stranger or even a lost animal -- the man had a golden heart.

However, Bucky wasn’t paying attention to the conversation at hand, more focused on you heading near his place in the bar to get more drinks. He straightens his back just in case you see him, but everything stops when you both hear a scream behind you.

"PIETRO MAXIMOFF!" Wanda screams, as the silver-blond man freezes at the sight of the woman barreling towards him, only for her to start hitting him and speaking in a language nobody else seems to understand. James turns to look at a wide-eyed you walking past him and towards the two siblings, from what he can tell from their interactions.

“Piet!” your call of his name and greeting is softer, as you pull said man into a hug and James Barnes swears his heart breaks in that moment. That guy, Pietro, pulls you into his jacket as you laugh in a way Bucky has never heard before and he knows he won’t stand watching this for the rest of the night.

“I gotta go,” he desperately murmurs to Sam, completely ignoring all the strange stares he’s receiving.

“But, the party just started,” Sam tries to stop him, as he sees you all being introduced to the rest of the group after the little display, “Oh, oh. You don’t even know how they know each other, Barnes. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket again.”

“It seems pretty obvious,” James declares without listening to anything else, as he walks over to the entrance, puts on his winter coat, and exits the bar. Sam groans in frustration.

After the dramatic entrance, you and Wanda get to pull Pietro to your table for a moment and get his explanation. He had finished his thesis work early and felt homesick so he boarded the first plane with a connection to New York. He lost part of his luggage along the way, but was lucky enough to have met Thor on the last flight back. You were just happy he was all right after all that. After Carol and Vision welcome him back, you pull him to the side for a moment alone.

“What’s wrong, princess?” he smiles, though curious over what you had to talk over since he knew it only came around when you were highly stressed or lonely.

“We really need to talk later, about…” you end your sentence shyly, which causes him to raise an eyebrow, sure you look a little worn out but there was another glow to you that he had never seen before. Pietro, as your closet confident, and fought over that title Wanda from time to time, was
curious over the changes he had missed.

“About what?” He asks.

“I had another nervous breakdown,” you explain. He frowns, but the smile on your face tells him a different story, “And there might be a new friend, I’m not so sure about the last part though.”

“Well, you’ll have to tell me later, about everything.”

Later into the night, both groups have gathered together, even Natasha and her boyfriend had arrived much to your delight, and you introduced them to Carol and Wanda. The whole group is trading stories as more connections are revealed to you, like how Bucky and Steve knew Clinton through different classes but they didn’t all become friends until the ‘archery incident.’ Natasha and Clint were close friends and she had even introduced him to Laura, he had only recently returned the favor. You talked about being roommates with Carol in college, Vision meeting Wanda through her, and the trouble Pietro put everyone through.

“So how do you guys know each other?” Steve questions, as he looks at you sitting between the twins like it’s your god-given place in the world, though the man wants to confirm something for someone more than anything else.

“We’ve been friends since high school,” Wanda explains, as she goes into the story of them transferring to your school during your last year, and the strange incidents that followed. Whether it was getting hit by a tennis ball or flooding the girls’ bathroom, when you were around one of the twins during the first few weeks of school.

“She’s like an annoying little sister to us,” Pietro grins, as he grabs you by the shoulders in half-hug while you laugh.

“Goddamnit Bucky,” Sam curses in the background as Steve sighs.
If there is one ugly part of James Buchanan Barnes’ personality is that he cuts off anything that might hurt him and tries to best strategize how to move forward with the hurt on his own. After everything had failed with Dot, he knew he couldn’t go on with everything that he had built up in Florida, even if it had been his childhood dream, thus he cut all ties and ran back to New York. Now, he was doing the same with you, it wasn’t like you liked him that way, you were much happier with that whatever his name was. So, Bucky tried his hardest to move on by trying to ignore anything that he connected to you -- he stopped visiting, he cancelled those weekend meetings, he hardly went out. James holed himself in his apartment and worked, barely talked to anyone besides Steve.

He prepared himself the whole week to see you again for the VR installation, only to be greeted with a somber Steve.

“Steve, why are you here? Where’s …” Bucky freezes, unsure of how to feel if you had decided to cut him off as well. It would make sense, but it didn’t stop the painful feelings from drilling themselves into his chest all of a sudden.

“Buck, didn’t you hear?” the blond man questions, as he hands Bucky all the files you have been working on, “She collapsed on the last week of school, been out of it since. Wanda’s been giving all of updates.”

“What? Why?” Bucky’s voice gets a little higher, as he pushes his hand through his hair in sudden frustration and disbelief.

“I don’t know, Buck.” is the only way Steve can answer, as the physics teacher gets up ready to leave and rush to your side, though he doesn’t know where you are at the moment, “Hey, where are you going?”

“I have to see her. I’ve been such a fucking idiot,” Bucky declares in annoyance with himself, as Steve just shakes his head, having dealt with this side of his best friend more than once in their shared lifetime.

“Don’t you think she would want you to watch them install this first? You guys have been working so hard towards this for months,” Steve calmly explains, as Bucky begins to cool down a bit, though he’s still pacing back and forth.

“I..Yeah,” he grumbles, remembering how much time and effort you had put into this -- into one upping him and always having some new type of research that blew him away. You were dedicated in your research and wanting to move this project forward, Bucky would be doing you disservice if he walked away from it all -- you deserved that much.

“Watch this happen and then tell her all about it,” Steve gouges him on the idea and Bucky nods. The two friends later on watch as the cable and proper equipment are installed all around the library, it certainly updates the look and feel but the books and everything is left untouched due to the
majority of said devices being portable. There were still extra computers to be added here and there, but James knew that you would be proud and excited of everything was being setup.

The whole installation process takes about three and half hours and Bucky makes sure to take pictures, so that he can show you when he can. He asks questions and makes sure to know what the next steps are going to be, so that he could tell you in person. After all the movers left, Steve was going to ask Bucky if he wanted to grab a late lunch, but the dark-haired man only asks for your address and is out the door before Steve can asks his intended question. Steve grins, though he knows he owes Sam a beer now.

“And the Oscar goes to…” Steve whistles as he leaves the school grounds and heads back home.

Now, Steve wasn’t completely lying when he said that you were ill, though it was just some stressed induced exhaustion and catching Michelle’s cold at the wrong time that had you fainting on the last day of school before winter break. Wanda had freaked out and so had Pietro, but some good medicine and sleep brought you back up quickly with just a minor cough. The danger had past but you were now alone since Carol had deadlines to met, Vision and Wanda had made of love nest in his apartment for the holidays, and Pietro was spending it with some friends from his graduate course. It was lonely, but you were used to that and you used the time to prepare for your upcoming course, though that didn’t stop you from thinking about James every once and awhile -- you hadn’t seen him in a long while.

“Steve, is James all right?” you ask during one of your quick lunches with the man that had become part of your life since getting to know him better after the bar incident, but it didn’t replace the ones you used to have with James and the Library Club, “I haven’t seen him in awhile.”

“He’s writing some papers for a science journal,” he explains with an exasperated smile, “He’ll come around after the holidays. Don’t worry, he’s just like that.”

You could only hope that he was doing all right, especially since you didn’t know how he spent his holidays? Was he going to spend with the woman he was supposedly in love with? Were they together already? Without much to do, your head often ran around with these thoughts. However, this time around it is broken due to the loud banging at the door as you turn to look at it from your place in the living room, piles of papers and books around you in regards to curriculum with a romcom playing as background noise. You grab your shawl as the banging continues. You open the door to see James holding two large bags with a very concerned look on his face.

“Bucky, what are you doing here?” you let out a small cough, as he frowns while making his way into the small apartment. You shake your head as he looks around, his scold deepens at the sight of you being all alone and even working in your current state. He puts the bags down and turn to look at you.

“Where’s your boyfriend?” He asks in exasperation, as you raise an eyebrow, pulling your shawl closer to your body.

“What boyfriend?” you ask, as a dumbfounded but cute (did you really just think that?) look lights up his face.

“That Pie guy,” he further explains, and you have to wonder how he knew about Pietro since you hadn’t seen him the night all of Steve’s friends and yours meet.

“Pietro isn’t my boyfriend. He’s my Steve,” you laugh at your own description, before stopping since it still hurts your throat, as he gives you a flabbergasted look.
“W-What?” is all he can say.

“He’s been with me since high school. We’re like the three musketeers at this point,” you shrug, mildly annoyed that you have to explain this to James, couldn’t Steve had just done this. However, your thought process seems to stop once he lets out a relieved chuckle and pushes a hand through his hair, you’re still confused.

“Oh, thank god,” he whispers to himself before getting to work. You watch him setup all the chicken and vegetables in the small kitchen countertop. He asks where your pots and pans are before turning on the stove and setting to work. You sit across from him and watch him move around the kitchen, like he owns the place and while it is a bothersome thought, it still makes you smile.

“James, not to be mean or anything. But why are you here exactly?” you question as he chops up the carrots and rinses them before placing them in the boiling pot. He leans on the counter, his upper body closer to you and blue eyes completely glued to yours.

“Just making up for lost time,” he explains cryptically and with a soft smile. He leans in a bit more and you’re stuck there, frozen and watching his next move more but before anything happens, the time starts beeping that the chicken is ready.

After a meal of homemade chicken soup and some cold medicine, James makes you sit down on the couch while pushing away all the material you had cluttered (promising that he would help work on it with you later) on the table to make way for some healthy snacks, medicine, (he’s such a dad, you thought to yourself) and an array of movies, but halfway through watching Home Alone, a question pops into your head.

“Bucky, how do you normally spend Christmas time?” you turn to look up at him from his side of the couch, only to notice that you had gotten closer as the hours moved forward. He had even gotten underneath your blanket at some point.

“It’s a little disjointed this year, but we all usually meet at my parents’ house,” he explains as you listening intently, “Big tree, even bigger dinner ’cause of my sisters and their loved ones and kids. We used to carol and wait until morning to open presents.”

“That sounds lovely,” you sigh out as James laughs, thinking about what he missed since he was working through the holidays and due to all of his family being in Florida for the time, a place that he didn’t want to be in at the moment, maybe not for a long while.

“What about you?” he asks trying to move away from the heavy feeling in his heart and Bucky swears that his heart stops at moment you smile softly, reminiscing of your own past.

“I’ve spent it more with the twins recently,” you explains as James wants to groan for a moment at his stupidity, but your voice stops him, “But when I was younger, my ma would always take me to the library Christmas read-along than we go walk around the neighborhood to see all the lights. I always got some type of stationery for Christmas,” you laugh awkwardly towards the end since James can’t seem to stop looking at you.

“Oh that reminds me!” you shot up from the couch and run towards the back of the apartment. James gets up slightly from his position on the couch, as he hears you rummaging through something. You quickly run back in with a small package and jump on the couch to hand it to the confused man.

“Merry Christmas!” you smile brightly as he tries his hardest not to blush at the sight of you: bedhead, flushed and smiling, with a present just for him. God, Steve was right, he had it bad.
“Thanks, doll,” he smiles as he takes the package and quickly opens it only to see a package of 100 cheap ballpoint pens, and in the moment he realizes that you know what he has been doing. You laugh loudly as he shakes his head, embarrassed at being found out but relieved that even if you disliked it you hadn’t pushed him away like he initial thought it would.

“Ya got me,” he chuckles as you keep laughing before the coughing fit gets ahold of you. James soothes your back and after a few moments, you find yourself leaning more into his warmth than moving back to your side of the couch. The paused movie now entirely forgotten as you can’t stop staring at him.

“James, thank you for everything,” you mumble sleepy, the drugs and food starting to kick in, as you rub his stubble softly with your right hand, “You’re a good friend.”

“Only the best for you,” James whispers as he places his hand over yours. He feels a little confident for a moment and decides to pull you in closer underneath the blanket once more. Your head is placed directly underneath his chin as his humming and warmth dips you further into the land of sleep. Too deep that you don’t feel the light kiss on your forehead and the anguish in his voice.

“God, I love you so much.”
dear sweetness, this is actually one of the longest things i have written and i know we just had a dancing chapter, but i couldn’t let this one dress go, so tada! gala event. i know the restrictions of the dress for certain people, but it’s just the inspiration, please imagine whatever you want with the description in the story. this one of my fav chapters, the one i have been dying to write – so please enjoy!

UPDATE: I am starting a drabble series as an off-shoot, if you have any requests go ask on my tumblr page

Things start to pick up for all of you as winter break ends and classes start up again. Pietro is working on editing his thesis, Wanda is working and catching up with Vis, and you find yourself spending more time learning about how all the new tech works alongside getting ready for your first classes. It meant a lot more stress and work, but it also meant hanging out with Bucky more as he helped you with both, when Natasha couldn’t. And while you enjoyed learning from both, you couldn’t help but admit that you enjoyed spending time with James more than you normally did when this whole mess started.

“Now, doll, these are all the curriculum standards your class to hit,” he explains to you during your weekend meeting. Lunch already eaten, as he pulls his chair closer to yours while showing you the 2-page list in a book that Natasha had let you borrow. You nod while looking over them, taking notes here and there.

“We’re gonna look over them and make sure the class plans aligned to them, alright?” blue eyes look as you with confidence as you give him an energetic nod. He lets out a small laugh, as you hold out your pencil bag.

“Colored highlighters?” you ask with a small grin of your own, as he laughs at your new willingness to share your writing utensils with him following Christmas break and you had been pleasantly surprised to find he also had his own collection, when he wasn’t forgetting them.

“Definitely.”

“Ohh, who are you thinking about now, princess?” a teasing voice drags you out of your current daydream as you turn to frown at Pietro’s grinning visage. After many reschedule dates, you finally had the time to talk to your oldest friend about the recent events within your life in a diner you used to visit more frequently during college after those parties he made you go to. You spoke about the library, Mrs. Potts-Stark, Natasha and your budding friendship, your stress and fears, but most of all you talked about James -- you talked about him a lot. The most recent talk, before Pietro had gotten up to use the bathroom, had led to your current situation. Pietro had suggested an insight to this new side of you, but you found it posperterous.

“Nobody,” is your automatic and defensive response as he keeps grinning. He goes back to eating his large breakfast, but you know that Maximoff glint in his eyes shining brightly, Wanda got it too from time to time, that only meant something awful for you.
“Maybe,” he starts speaking, as you start to slowly losing your appetite. You shake your head and he just lets out a defeated sigh, for now, but there were already tiny gears working in his head to find a way to make all this work.

Eventually the talk stilled and after splitting the check, the two of you went to see a movie that had caught Pietro’s attention, though the platinum blond knew that your heart wasn’t isn’t the activity as much as before. He knew that he had given you a lot to think about and like the best friend that he was Pietro silently cheered you on.

In a similar fashion to Pietro and a certain librarian, Rebecca Proctor is sitting in the same diner waiting for her older brother to bring back from fruit and hot sauce from the buffet; she swore these sudden carvings were going to kill her. While, all her family had been excited over the news she delivered over Christmas, Bucky hadn’t been there to find out that he was going to be an uncle, so playing catch-up after the holidays the two siblings talked about what they had missed. James had been ecstatic about the news and Rebecca was more than happy to hear he was finally making progress on his 3-year long crush. She smiles to herself, but in that split second moment she sees Bucky looking at two figures leaving the place -- a tall blond man and a more familiar face.

“Buck, are okay?” she questions, as her eldest sibling stands for a moment watching the two figures leave while setting down the plate in front of her. Rebecca looks up and with a closer inspection sees the face that has her brother’s attention and her head starts giving her the worst case scenarios, the two oldest Barnes children tended to over think a lot.

“Not together, not together,” he murmurs to himself, desperately trying to remember what Steve and Sam had yelled at him some time ago, while also going back on your blushing face that was appearing more often during the time he spent with you. There was a butterfly of hope beating softly in his chest, but right now he had to deal with those blue eyes going from looking at the window and then back to him.

“Bucky, is that her?” she finally manages to asks. Rebecca had always been the quick thinker of his sisters and it doesn’t surprise him that she puts two and two together out of just a couple of moments. Blue clashes with blue, as he sees her frown though he doesn’t understand why.

“Yes,” he says, because there’s no use denying it. In fact, it's finally a little liberating to tell someone within his family, to tell Rebecca that this is the woman he has hopelessly fallen for. However, all his younger sister does is slam the table as the food and plates shake in the aftermath.

“Bucky, nooo. You stupid idiot,” Rebecca groans, as Bucky is dumbfounded. After a moment, she finally explains herself and his heart falls to the pit of his stomach, “She’s the customer I’ve been trying to set you up with for months, and you’re fucking in love with her. Goddamn it, ya could’ve been dating by now!”

Bucky watches his younger sister take a deep breath before stabbing the innocent fruit with her fork in misplaced fury, as he slumps down on the chair. He lets out a shaky laugh at how fate seems to play with him all the time like he’s the unluckiest guy in the world. Making him take the longer route when there was something shorter and sweeter in front of him, the life of Bucky Barnes was a constant struggle, even with you -- though something inside home doubted he would have it any other way.

“Why do you always make everything so difficult, James?” Rebecca growls out in frustration, as she stabs another piece of dragonfruit.
And maybe, after that faulty revelation, the world decides to be kinder to James Barnes, as two of his papers go through the next stage of the peer review process for some scientific journals as mid-January rolls around and it is decided that his work will be showcased in a Stark Industries Gala with the school as the centerpiece for the September Foundation. Since you are his partner in all of this, it only made sense to Mrs. Potts-Stark, that you would go as well with everything paid for. Now, standing in front of you as the last bell rings, teaching books long forgotten as you talk about the latest book you are reading for fun, James wonders if he should properly ask you to said event.

“James, are you even listening?” your voice drags him out of his inner turmoil, as he shakes his head and smiles your way, only for you to shake your head in annoyance.

“Sorry, doll. What were you saying?” he laughs sheepishly, as you groan with your face heating up though Bucky doesn’t understand why. You fold your hands in front of your mouth, dying of embarrassment as James’ laughter filters out to a look of confusion.

“Do you wanna go to the gala together?” your fingers muffle out some of the sound, but Bucky hears it clears as day as his heart starts racing. You stare at him with wide eyes, as fear starts to paralyse you at the thought that you might have step over his boundaries, or worst he already had a date.

“I mean--” you start with a disappointed sigh, as James grabs your hands and huge smile on his face.

“Yes, I’d loved to. You know, as partners,” he gets so excited that he starts to ramble, unaware of the sad smile on your face over the last part of his sentence, and then you remember that he’s in love in someone else. Your eyes soften a bit as he keeps talking and you two turn to talking about the finer details of what you are going to dress in and such.

Outside of choosing silver as a color for the two of you to wear, neither you nor Bucky talk about the gala event in the next two weeks between VR lessons, your own classes, and the library club there was a lot on your plate, even though it was something you always kept in the back of your mind. It took you one long weekend between you, Wanda, and Natasha to find your perfect dress. I wish I could be there to see the look on his face, Natasha had said and for once you couldn’t wait to see how he would react as well.

It was a little different for James since even with all his work, he found himself thinking about the gala event constantly, even dreaming about it as the day got closer. It had been easy acquiring a nice silver tux for the event, he even got a haircut a few hours before, but all he wanted to know was how were you going to look like. You were a dream during the Halloween dance, all shining and shimmering like some kind of star he was lucky enough to spend the night with. How were you going to top that?

Well, standing in the large ballroom entrance way, waiting for you to show up, James finds out how.

“James!” your voice rings out clearly in his head as he stops pacing, only to turn and have his jaw drop.

The usher takes your dress jacket and blue eyes get the full view of your neck and shoulders as the
white-silver dress starts on your chest, tight and bejeweled until it flowered out into a flowing skirt filled with colorful planets, stars, and comets. There is nothing covering that bright but anxious smile on your face since your hair is pulled back, though your face shimmers with some light make-up. Somehow you had managed to steal his heart all over again.

“You look handsome,” you managed to say, while giving a one over James as he runs his hand through his gelled hair. His blue eyes sparkled a little bit more gray while wearing the tailored-made dark gray suit, though the white shirt and blue tie add a little pop of color. As always, James Barnes cleaned up nicely, though him coughing sends you a confusing signal.

“You look...wow. It’s just...you look gorgeous, doll,” Bucky finally manages to say, as you laugh.

“Well, I gotta make you and the stars look good tonight,” you wink at him, reminding him that while you are here to show off the school, it was James’ research that landed you here in the first place. He nods, a little more unsure than before, as you suddenly lop your arm around him and pat it slightly, somehow feeling the anxiety that is all of a sudden coursing through his body.

“Let’s go show them, starboy!” you wink at him, and while James isn’t sure what has gotten into you tonight, he is glad to have your moral support any which way as you enter the large ballroom.

To say that you are right is an understatement, after the Tony Stark declares who is at the event, people come to pool around to talk to Bucky about his latest paper and everything else they can think about -- it’s almost like he’s a mini celebrity in this world. Even Dr. Banner, a good friend of said billionaire, comes to discuss of few things with the man, which ends up taking up twenty minutes of your time. You shine here and there as well, especially when Mrs. Potts-Stark takes you to talk about the VR tech in the various classroom, and let’s just say Tony Stark couldn’t be more excited to take the next steps. You move around the ballroom for some time with the redhead, though always keeping watch of your partner from the corner of your eye.

“You two are good for each other,” Mrs. Potts-Stark declares as you pick up a glass from one of the waiters, as you see James talk to a circle of men he seems awfully familiar with. Her question makes you look up at the older woman with a questioning face, as she laughs.

“I know Mr. Barnes has a strong personality to work with,” she starts, as you rolls your eyes remembering how it was in the beginning with him a few months back, “And you like to hide behind things, but you two found a balance in that and make each other better as a result. It’s truly been a lovely sight to see.”

“Ahh..thank you,” you say bashfully, as you play with your earlobe for a moment, “I feel like I’ve grown a lot, come out of my shell even. And it wouldn’t have happened if it weren’t for you...or him.”

“That’s good to hear--” she starts to say, as an upbeat song starts to play in the background. You pause listening to her for a moment, as you feel a hand on the lower part of your back. You turn to see James looking at you with a bright smile and twinkling eyes.

“That’s good to hear--” she starts to say, as an upbeat song starts to play in the background. You pause listening to her for a moment, as you feel a hand on the lower part of your back. You turn to see James looking at you with a bright smile and twinkling eyes.

“I’m sorry, but I was wondering if I could steal my date back,” he grins at the principal, as she nods and shushes you away before you can say anything on the subject. He pulls you onto the dance floor, which is quite different from the high school dance since this time your dress isn’t keeping you away from his body heat, as the song has the two of you tight together with your hands around his neck as his arms don’t seem to leave your lower back.
“How are you so far tonight, Mr. Barnes?” you ask, as he smiles before twirling you.

“Good, but better now,” he nods and you immediately understand his hidden meaning as you laugh. The two of you keep dancing until the song ends, but instead of moving to the sidelines, Bucky pulls you in closer. Blue eyes are burning brightly with something you can’t seem to explain, but they never leave your face as you start to feel self-conscious and look at anything but him. You stay quiet and turn your head, only for him let go of your waist for a moment and put his right hand underneath your chin so that you could look at him.

“Just wanted to say you look gorgeous tonight, like starlight,” he murmurs softly while smiling like you had never seen before, however instead of answering back with a thanks, your mind blanks out and you blurt out.

“Okay, twenty questions!” blue eyes widen at you sudden declaration, but he can’t help but nod as you start of the round of questioning. You go between the two of you exchanging childhood memories, your current favorite things, and stuff that Bucky didn’t remember from the last time he had asked you all this. You keep dancing and asking questions until the one you fear the most to ask seems like the only one left.

“Are you interested in anyone?” you say in a meek voice, thinking back to what you and Pietro had talked about a while back, unsure of how you are supposed to feel about how he might answer. He pauses for a moment, moving you to the tempo of the newest song before answering.

“Yeah,” is all he manages to say, as you go back to Sam and the longing James seems to have towards this mystery woman, “Just waiting for the right time to confess, ya know?”

“That’s good...good,” is all you manage to say as he gives you a shy smile.

“And you? Anybody got your heart beating?” James tries to make a joke that comes out as an awkward laugh, as he bites his bottom lip due to nerves.

“Maybe,” you smile weakly and James feels his heart drop for a moment before shaking his head, trying his hardest not to over analyze the situation like he had done so before. He stays silent and an tense aura fall over the once joyful air as the last song ends. And while, neither of you say much of anything else, the two of you stay close and make a few more rounds around the ballroom together with his arm splayed across your lower back like it belonged there and you holding on his hand tightly.

As the night comes to a close, Bucky ends up driving you back to your apartment as you continue the game from before in his car (though a bit more cautious than before), while listening to his prime selection of music, though you laugh every time David Bowie comes on. There’s a huge smile on his face the entire time, but time seems to pass too quickly as you are already in front of your apartment building, as you give him a soft smile before opening the car door.

“Goodnight Bucky,” you whisper softly and lean in to kiss him on the cheek. Your smile is a bit more insecure than before, but all he does is nod and return the sentiment before you get out of the car. You rush into the building’s hallway entrance without a glance back though with a bright red heat overtaking your face, completely unaware of a certain man leaning into his steering wheel, screaming for joy at the small victory that came with tonight.
the center of a realization.

It rolls in gently like the sea waves and you don’t know exactly when it started. It was surely before
the gala, that much you knew -- maybe, Christmas break. Hell, maybe even the Halloween dance. It
just took Pietro to point it out to you, and as much as you denied it and lied to yourself -- it was so
fucking obvious, how couldn’t you have seen it? The notes of your journal were filled with lines just
for him, little things that he did that made you laugh or simply things that reminded you of him.
Weekend meetings were highlighted and marked with pastel colored pens, those that you never
wanted to use because of the connotation they held for you. Only one person knew what that meant -
- that’s why Pietro knew so well, he had only seen this once before in all the years he had known
you -- he knew even before you.

“Are you in love with him?”

No, no, no! You want to say a million times over that it isn’t love, want to push aside and say it’s a
 crush or a simple infatuation. It’s a soft and sweet hum that fills your chest with warmth every time
he looks at you with those pretty baby blues of his. It makes your heartbeat race like a hummingbird
when he says your name, or even calls you “doll”. Yeah, that can’t be love, right?

You’re happy to see him even when he’s just there to bother you. The silence with other people had
always annoyed you, but in the dampness of the library simply reading or playing with the VR tech,
it never worried you with him. The you from few months ago would have frowned at such a thought,
now you were smiling like an idiot as he talked with the Library Club. However, it wasn’t that you
loved him because he pushed you to change, but rather that he walked alongside you as you changed
yourself and welcomed it all with open arms, though there had been some bumps along the way.

You had blossomed and he had accepted it wholeheartedly. How could you not love him?

“Doll, is everything okay?” James asks, as he turns to you. There’s a bright smile on his face, as he
plays with the VR pad, it was something that he had come to enjoy after your research class was
over and he could come over during his free class period. He’s smiling like a little kid with bright
blues burning like this moment, this irreplaceable time with you is the only thing that matters.

“I’m fine. Just tired, Bucky,” you hum out softly while closing your eyes, missing that little uptick of
a smile he always seems to have when you call him by that nickname, though you always tend to
miss it. Just like he’s missing your heart breaking right in front of him, as you take the device from
his hands and smile.

“Teach me how it works, Mr. Barnes,” you laugh as he gives you that perfectly crooked grin. He
knows that you know how to use all of this, but that doesn’t stop him from wanting to be close to
you for one second more.

“Are you in love with him?”

Yes, you are irrevocably in love with James Barnes, but he certainly didn’t love you back.
February passes like a blur and the both of you are too cowardly to do anything for Valentine’s Day, though the ask was at the tip of your tongue only for fear to drown it out. So here you are back in your favorite stationery store with flowers blooming everywhere, as Rebecca can’t stop grinning at the sight of all of them, while rubbing her growing stomach. It didn’t take you long to put two and two together as you congratulate her, secretly noting that William is a secret romantic at heart. You walk around looking at all the bright reds and pinks, only stopping at the pastel pens section to see what you could get. God, how pathetic were you, to look at something that you clearly couldn’t have?

You let out a sigh that Rebecca is quick to catch it.

“Love troubles?” she questions from behind the counter, as you turn to look at her with a soft smile trying to keep your darker thoughts at bay. You had never been the type to bother people with your personal problems, only Pietro and he had struggled for years to get you to open up, and seeing Rebecca glowing with all the love she has and possesses made you feel a bit childish. However, all she does is smile and it reminds you of someone else, trembling upper lip and blue eyes -- you were such a goner.

“I think I’m in love, Becca,” her smile drops at the watery sound of your voice, because she knows that nobody should be sad when they are in love. You’re not supposed to look like you’re about to cry when you’re in love, she knows that from personal experience. She tells you come over and you try your best to wipe away anything coming down your face before it begins, though it has the same effect of turning your face a blotchy red.

“With who?” she asks while patting your hand. You give her a heartbreaking smile and she swears that even with all the emotional turmoil, this is the prettiest she has ever seen you. God, Rebecca can only imagine if you were smiling right now, her brother would have heart attack. You choke up a little as Rebecca tries her hardest to not stop that silly smile from forming on her face.

“My coworker, Mr. Barnes,” you sigh like a lovestruck teen from those 80’s films that Rebecca is so fond of and she tries not to scream right then and there because her favorite customer could potentially be her future sister-in-law But, that’s getting a little ahead of herself, right now she just needs to play her cards right -- the complete opposite of Bucky.

“How did that happen?” the older woman asks, though a little unsure if she wants to know about her older brother’s love life, but this was you --teary eyed and mournful-- and she is a bit too protective of you after all these years, “I thought you hated him.”

“I know, I know, Becca,” you whimper helplessly, picking up an eraser as she lets go of your hand, “But, he’s so kind and just let me be me, ya know?”

“So, what’s the problem?” Rebecca asks, as she places her arm on the counter with her hand on top of her palm, while she briefly wonders if she had it this bad for her husband while they were dating - - she would have to ask Lizzie and Millie later.

“He’s in love with someone else,” you explain as Rebecca stays quiet, though she is internally screaming,“A woman he hasn’t confessed to.”

“Well, well. We just need to have in fall in love with you instead,” Rebecca grins at the sight of your widening eyes, “And I have the perfect plan.”
James Barnes is in quite a scuffle because he knows something is wrong with you after the gala event. He had thought he was good, he was ready to confess when Valentine’s Day came around, but your sudden change in attitude gave him cold feet. Was he wrong in the way you looked at him that night? In the way that you giggled and called him “starboy” like he was yours alone? He replayed that kiss on his cheek over and over again, dreams about until he just didn’t want to wake up anymore. James was a man possessed by one thing and he had come to the realization that this love had ruined him for anyone else now. He had been the closest he had even been to you in the 3 years of this godforsaken crush, but now he was the farthest from you emotional.

Bucky heaves a heavy sigh in his lonely living room, dirty and barely held together, because he doesn’t think he could go back to when he didn’t know you, when this all an ideal daydream that he passed the time and the loneliness in his heart with. You swore you were just tired, and in a way James was tired too -- tired of being alone, tired of seeing his life move past him. James wants to live and love, like he had done once and forgotten how to so many years ago. Was it so bad that he wanted all that be with you?

He pushes an agitated hand through his now longer than usual hair before taking another swing of his beer. James doesn’t want to give up, but he’s damn near that stage again like he had been some many months ago, right before Mrs. P had come in and thrown him into this beautiful, crazy loop.

*The morning sun is soft and heavenly behind her and James is awestruck. She clutches her books a bit closer than before as she gives him a tight but sweet smile. This is it, this is the one person he had been searching for months now.*

*This is her, and James falls in love completely.*

A long time ago, James would’ve been fine with that one memory. Now, he wasn’t so sure anymore, not when he had seen you smile, laugh, and had make so many faces that were just directed at him. He groans in pain and places his hands in-between his palms, just wanting to forget everything for a moment.

“LOVER BOY!”

“*JAMES BUCHANAN BARNES!*”

Bucky jumps at the sudden and loud declaration of his name by an all too familiar voice, as it is followed by some heavy knocking at his front door. He rushes off of the couch and runs to the door in nothing but sweatpants and a dirty old t-shirt, Rebecca would be annoyed but he just wanted to wallow in his own misery for the night. He hears talking going on behind the closed door, as he opens it to see two very familiar faces -- neither which he is very happy see.

“Pietro Maximoff,” the blonde declares while shaking the smaller woman’s hand.

“Rebecca Proctor,” she smiles as Bucky looks confused at this sudden alliance. Both laugh as James leans into the frame of the door, not exactly sure of what he is seeing but scared knowing what his younger sister is capable of and of hearing your tales of what Pietro could do with his single-minded tenacity.

Both of them look at him and grin.

“Time to play Cupid to these idiots!”

“My sentiments exactly.”
where the heart belongs.

Chapter Notes

REVELATION CHAPTER! So many things will finally be revealed and I hope you don’t get ya heart broken along the way. 2 chapters + epilogue to go! <3 There is still time for drabble request too!

Rebecca tells Bucky to wait two weeks, that’s all the time she needs to have everything set in motion. If it had just been her telling him all this, James doubted he would have gone through with such a plan because he knows what goes on in said amount of time and he would rather have a good memory of his early birthday party than one where you potentially crushed his heart -- like that old Simpsons episode that used to scare him so much. However, a grinning Pietro is sitting across his coffee table and him being here, the person that knows you best, has to mean something, right?

It is due to the simple fact that James decides to wait. At least if it doesn’t work out, he’ll have a week away from you to tend to his broken heart through that yearly conference that he always goes to -- truly like Orion and Diane. However, his sister and Pietro won’t leave until he answers that one question, the one that has been boggling their minds since they put two and two together.

**How exactly did you fall in love with her?**

With a lovestruck grin, James starts a little tale because he had been in love with you since before he even saw you.

*James Buchanan Barnes came to this dingy high school during one of the worst times of his life. He had lost his fiancee to a trusted coworker because she was “feeling lonely”. His job was fulfilling but without this other half, Bucky Barnes lost some deep part of himself -- one that told him it was all worthwhile, so he ran. He ran back to New York with Steve and Peggy welcoming him until he got back on his feet again. Hell, Steve even recommended him for the teaching position at the high school he worked at, without many options, James accepted it though his heart was never fully in it throughout the whole hiring process.*

*It isn’t until his first day sometime before winter break ends and he is bringing in his stuff into the empty classroom and James see the little welcome basket on his desk, that he starts to feel something warm and welcoming after such the emotional drought he had been through.*

*He pauses and clears away the plastic wrapping only to see the basket full of sweets and school supplies -- the all too familiar bee logo his father made looking back at him. He has to sit down and stares at the casing with longing, reminding himself of how he hadn’t seen his parents or sisters since moving back. James didn’t want to disappoint them, but god looking at all these pens and stationery make him want to go back. He wonders if the person who made this (maybe Steve) knew that. His eyes get a little misty, as he finally notices a card envelope with a flower motif.*

*Welcome to our school, Mr. Barnes!*

*I was in your shoes not that long ago, but I hope you feel welcomed here! Everyone*
always says: “we’re lucky to have you”, and with someone like you we are. But that’s not the point, sorry. Our school’s motto is: If you want support, you must offer something in return. Now, that could be taken in a bad way, but to me, you being here is making our teachers and students stronger. You’ve got our back and we got yours, ya know? It’s a little family here, even if you don’t see everyone! So, even when you’re weary or tired, maybe even about to give up, remember -- I got you.

I hope you have a great first year.

And in the darkness of his classroom, James has his heart stolen by a few words.

Two weeks. Rebecca tells you to wait two weeks before moving forward with anything. You’re a little confused by her sudden demands, but after getting Pietro’s advice you wearily agree to. However, you didn’t think that you were going to stop seeing James all together either. It feels like that moment all those months ago, but worst because you can’t help but look at the door every time it opens, hoping that it’s him. The library was silent, no more laughs at lunchtime or geeking out over the VR tech, and for the first time in your life the building you loved couldn’t stop the loneliness you felt deep inside your heart. That’s when you knew --a week in-- that James was it for you.

“Hey Lib, are you okay?” Michelle asks the 2nd Tuesday without seeing James, after lunch though she decides to stay behind and skip. Usually, you would shake your head and give her a note for when she needs it, but this time nothing -- just staring blankly at your desk. Her voice breaks you stupor for a moment, as you give her a sad smile. Then, it clicks.

“What did Mr. Barnes do?” Michelle asks in accusation, as you shake your head. She frowns, not entirely sure what to do besides grabbing your laptop and pushing it in front of you.

“You know what’s the best advice you can get from a teenage girl?” she states, while grinning and feeling slightly accomplished when you crack a smile at her own self deprecating comment.

“What?”

“Shop ‘till you drop,” she grins and the two of you end up surfing for new clothes and stationery from different countries until the end of school, and while you feel a little guilty, you can’t help but feel a little better.

Here’s the thing, every early March for awhile now, the adult Barnes kids celebrated James’ birthday early because soon afterwards he would be traveling to different science and space conventions that he was invited to. This year was a little different since their parents were on a cruise and their younger sisters, due to various reasons, couldn’t attend. This left a very bossy Rebecca and William to deal with everything with some side help from Steve and Peggy, but this also allowed her to set-up the stage for your inevitable confession.

The problem was that you didn’t know that James was her older brother, so it had been struggle for both her and Pietro to convince you to go when you clearly didn’t want to date the man, especially when you clearly loved someone else. It had been a hassle to get everyone gathered in Washington Market Park (with the traditional party set up around an old wooden bench with starry tablecloths and plates since everyone was going to bring something), Rebecca knew the memories that felt special for Bucky in this particular area and she wanted to make him happy again. What she didn’t expect is how early you would get there and just how pretty you would look in the late spring weather, as you give her a bashful smile, wearing a blouse and long skirt with a stylish pair of shoes. It seems like Michelle’s instance worked out in the end.
“He’s just gonna die, when he sees you like this,” Rebecca smiles, as you stand in front of her and give her a confused look. *It was now or never,* she thought with hope and worry in her heart.

“Becca, I don’t know your brother,” you explain, unsure of where this is all going, “I thought--”

“You do know my brother, sweetie,” Rebecca tries to soften the blow, as she looks into your panicking eyes, “Please don’t be mad, but do you know what the ‘B’ in the store’s name stands for?”

“Bumble bees?”

“Close. More like the Barnes children are all busy little bees,” she smiles, thinking about her childhood and what her father used to say whenever all four of them used to run around this very same park on special outings. She signs, ready to devastate you but in the best way possible, “Rebecca Barnes is my maiden name, and I run Barnes’ Stationery.”

You’re quick to put two and two together.

“Then, you knew… all this time?” you ask, voice quivering and shock running through your veins, though there is a little part of you that doesn’t want to believe, but you know Rebecca you never lie to you, “Does James know?”

“No, he doesn’t know… this was all my idea,” she explains, noticing the shaking in your hands as the panic gets the better off you and your throat dries out at the moment. She hopes you’ll stay, but your next words don’t shock her either.

“I can’t do this.” you whimper and even though you know she had the best in mind for you --for James-- you can’t do it like this -- you aren’t ready for the pain, “I gotta go, Becca.”

“*Please,*” she tries to plea softly, but you have already let go of her hands and run off.

At the same time, Steve, James, and Peggy are all early for this time honored tradition and are walking in the opposite direction and get to see some of interaction going on between you and the younger Barnes, as Bucky watches you walk away with a very distressed Rebecca just standing there trying to take some deep breaths. Peggy looks at the two in a way that they know she means business before heading over to the expectant mother. James stands dumbfounded at the situation and how pretty you look before Steve finally decides to step in.

“Go get her!” the blond yells, as Bucky jumps out of his daydream after seeing that you have gone deeper into the park.

Steve pushes him to get moving, as Bucky nods and starts running down an all too familiar path, too high on his personal emotions to realize it has started raining. It reminds him of how when he’s always at the end of his hope, Steve somehow manages to save his ass -- Bucky really owes that punk too much.

“Oh, are star pens popular now?” Steve questions, as they sit in together during lunch though Bucky is busier grading some quizzes, looking at said writing utensil, “The assistant librarian has one just like yours.”

“Who?” Bucky stops everything and looks at his oldest friend, who obviously didn’t know that James had been looking for the person that written the note all those months back. He had struggled and searched, moving from Natasha to Ms. Hill, thinking one of them knew about the stationery store or even wrote like the little note he had locked up and safely kept in his desk drawer, but no such luck. James had given up.
“Mr. Philips’ assistant. Sweet woman, if not a little shy,” Steve explains, as blue eyes widen, “She tends to hide in the library a lot, but you can always see her running around, doing errands for him.”

Bucky’s heart staggers and stops. He knows he has to meet this woman, and he wishes with all his heart that it’s her.

James stops running as the rain starts falling a harder, finding himself in an area of the park were there are splattering of old gazebos here and there. He runs a cold hand through his matted air, as he looks every which way that he can searching for you, worry that you might get sick or injured due to the rain burning within in his chest. He walks around a bit more, looking into every gazebo he passes until he sees a figure sitting in one near the lake. Bucky starts walking a bit faster, though he wants to stop and admire how beautiful you look today, taking in the fact you had dressed up in a long, dark skirt and flattering blouse just for him.

Steve is right about one thing, the library assistant is a tough gal to catch though he was sure he had caught glimpses of her here and there. He had even meet Mr. Philips and though he was a quiet man James could tell there was a stern aura to him, that he knew well enough they wouldn’t get along if he ever crossed the library.

He knows you have those stars pens that Becca carries, hell even the little bag you carry had the familiar bee logo -- the one he knows to make like the back of his hand. It has to be you, but when will get the chance to say something, even a simple thank you. He gets his chance early one morning, halfway through his first year. James gets in way earlier to work than he should, but it was one of those nights where his thoughts wouldn’t let him sleep -- he was tired and a mix of all other negative emotions that he still refused to acknowledge. He signs the roster without another word to the office secretary, though he hears an unfamiliar voice that has him perking up for a moment.

“Good morning,” is all she says softly. The morning sun is swans and heavenly behind her and James is awestruck. She clutches her books a bit closer than before as she gives him a tight but sweet smile before heading out of the office. This is it, this is the one person he had been searching for months now.

This is her, and James falls in love completely. But, he also knows he’s still not in a good place.

However, now wasn’t the time for reminiscing. Right now, James needs to make this happen, this longing and love that has haunted him for 3 years a reality, and that started by calling out your name. He runs a hand through his wet hair as blue eyes watch you shivering for a moment, as you move to the other side of the gazebo, though he doesn’t stop walking towards you until he has you backed into one of the pillars. There are tear steaks on your face and while he wants to hold you, he knows that won’t help his cause.

“What did Becca tell you?” James asks hesitant, unsure of how much of his feelings were told to you by Rebecca, even though he doesn’t want to think of his sister as that type of person. However, she tended to push things to far at times when she wanted to get things done her away.

“Today, that you’re her older brother,” you explain while playing with the buttons of your new blouse, “Before that you had run back home, bad fiancee. You weren’t doing well back then...she’s was trying to get me on a date with you some time ago though.”

You laugh weakly at the last part, still unsure of how to merge the image of Becca’s deadbeat brother to James’ handsome visage. Maybe, love did really make you blind? However, James only frowns
because he had been in a bad place for a long time and it wasn’t until everything settled down that he finally did get help -- your note had been a great support during that time. However, he didn’t go to counseling and all those sessions due to the ideal image he had of you, it was for himself -- because James was tired of what he wasn’t, falling in love with you and what he saw every chance he could in those 3 years was part of the process. Everything, including his sister and your best friend melding had brought him to this point.

Now, if he could just fucking confess.

“I--I--I…” you take a large gulp of air, as you break his train of thought. However, first thing is calming you down of whatever lead to this panic attack, though he knows it is surely related to him.

“Yeah, but that was a long time ago. First, ya gotta calm down, doll,” he admits and steps forward, placing his hands on top of yours and rubbing circles on your palms; he’s secretly happy you don’t turn him away at this point, “Take it easy, one step at a time.”

You take a deep breathe, gaining all the imaginary courage you have and grip his hands tightly. Your voice is a little sore when you begin, as curious blue eyes stare at you -- wondering if you are going to reject him like he always feared you would.

“I hated not seeing you these past few weeks,” you confess, as Bucky stops breathing for a moment,”I’ve known for awhile now, but it took that time for me to realize I’m falling in love with you.”

“What?”

“I know you love someone else,” you don’t let him speak, as everything comes out in a rush due to your fear. Your eyes close as you let it all out, “But, I’m in love you, James Barnes.”

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, sweetheart,” he’s surprised, and you’re ready for the killing blow, as he lets out a lovesick sigh. Truly content that everything is finally falling into place, “There’s nobody else, but you. Been in love with you since Day 1.”

“What?”

“I love you -- just you, have for a long time now,” he murmurs softly, blue eyes full of adoration meeting yours as he brushes your bottom lip with his thumb. You’re dumbstruck as you open your eyes and a faint, weary giggle leaves your lips. He smiles, placing his forehead on top of yours, the rain drowning out anything else, as you press a hand on his cheek with a shy smile on your lips.

“Literally, two fools in love, huh?” you question with a teasing uptick in your voice, as he laughs. His bubble of happiness soaring even higher, as he places his cold hand around your waist and you don’t push him away, eyes equally loving as his own.

“Yeah--” James begins to say, but the emotions and dizziness that come with such a confession make you a bit bolder than usual, as you move your hand to the back of his neck and pull him -- his lips crashing into yours as he lets out a little gasp of surprise.

Bucky catches up quickly, as he tightens the hold on your waist, pulling you closer to his body heat that you can feel through his wet clothes. Soft and slow, memorizing every part of this moment, James rubs small circles onto your wet shirt just above your waist, as you whimper and put your arms around his neck bringing him in as close as you possibly can -- because it’s not enough, it’s never going to be enough. And you two stand there, kissing and laughing for a good long while, enjoying the simple bliss of it all.
The stars, and everyone else in the party later on, lets out a collective sigh as these two fools in love, finally become lovers indeed.
You and James decide to wait for the rain to let up before walking back to where his friends and Rebecca are supposed to be at. It was laughing and kisses for awhile, until you finally decided to walk back with his arm on your lower back, pulling you close in order to share whatever body heat you had between the two of you after everything you had gone through beforehand. Bucky whispers everything he can remember about the old park and how his parents would take him and his sisters all the time, only for them to get into the craziest of situations. You laugh and he can’t help the huge grin on his face from having you so close, that after all these years of pinning he finally confessed. He stops walking for a moment, as you look to stare at him with a soft smile.

“I haven’t asked the most important question,” he pulls you in closer until you’re face-to-face. Your eyes shining brightly as his heart speeds up, “But, will you be my girl?”

“Absolutely, starboy,” you giggle at the huge grin on his face, before he grabs and spins you again. You cup his face and drag him into a kiss again, your hands on his cheeks so he can’t pull away -- like he would want to.

“FUCKING FINALLY!” a voice can be heard in the back, as Sam raises his beer only for the others underneath the shade of the picnic table clap and cheer with Rebecca even talking a picture with her phone, as William reassures that everything ended up well because of her.

James swears it’s one of his best birthday parties.

March 3rd.

It’s less than 48 hours later when you are standing in front of Bucky’s apartment building, as he packs his stuff away in the yellow cab that is to take him to the airport. James had told you about his conferences and while you were excited and proud of him due to his more recent papers, you knew you were going to be a little lonesome especially after only just getting him back from those 2 weeks he ignored you. He walks back up the sidewalk and guilty smile on his face. You pout as he laughs for a moment.

“I promise we’ll go on a date once I come back,” he sighs out, while rubbing your cheek softly. You nod and give him a quick peck before the taxi driver honks at him.

“Gotta go,” he pulls aways, though his fingers linger on your cheek for a moment, “Take care of the library punks for me! Becca too!”

“Good luck at your nerd expo, starboy!” you yell, as he gets into the car. You keep waving at the disappearing vehicle, ignoring the early morning on lookers, until you can’t see it anymore. Eventually, you start making your way to your favorite bistro when your phone pings twice. You take it out from your coat pocket and can’t help the giggles rising from your throat. You swear you
haven’t been this happy in a long time.

**Starboy**: Missing you already, doll!

**Becca**: So, what are you planning for his late birthday?

**March 6th.**

It takes them a few days to notice, what with Mr. Barnes being gone and all, but Michelle can see the happiness shining brightly on your face compared to a few days ago. She notices you looking at your phone every so often and sighing or laughing at whatever you are looking at on the bright screen. You’re doing everything you’re supposed to, from getting the final touches of science fair put together to finishing your classes before finals pick up to simply keeping everything in the library together, with a softer, dreamier look on your face. It was completely different from the last time she had seen you, sad and mopey, and she needed to find out why though without causing a scene. She waits, like always, until lunchtime ends and she is the only one still there. You glance at her from across the table, you know she knows, as smile on your lips as you wait for her next action.

“Lib, did you--” Michelle starts, but your excited nodding stops her. A huge, cheshire grin on her face as she leans into the table. You tap your fingers onto the table for a moment before taking out your journal, the teenager can’t help but cock a curious glance at that pastel colored gel pens you seem to be carrying now.

“I...confessed,” you admit shyly as Michelle hits the table in surprise, “And we’re ummm yeah, official.”

Michelle makes a flustering and embarrassed you tell her every single detail and she can’t help but congratulate you and say how disgustingly cute it is all in the same sentence. You laugh at her comment, as it echoes happily in the empty library. However, she is also now completely overjoyed that the rest of the Library Club owes her lunch for a month now.

**March 10th.**

The lazy morning sun spills into an unfamiliar hotel room, as the man on the bed groans before turning over to the other side. He had gone out the previous night to celebrate his actual birthday late into the evening with Dr. Banner and some other colleagues he had been introduced to, hell even Stark was there was a moment. However, James Barnes didn’t expect for the quiet man to hold his liquor and so much of it so well, he was truly a beast -- and Bucky got drunk under the table before he knew it. At least he was taken back to his room without any problem. Though, now he had a pounding headache, as his phone began to light up with messages.

However, his head shots up at the sound of a completely new ringtone, as a familiar name pops into his notifications. Bucky gets up a little, blurry-eyed and groggy, to see your message.

**Starlight**: Happy Birthday, James! I hope you have a great day today <3

Bucky can’t help but grin into his pillow at the attached picture of you and Matcha wearing party hats, as he wonders how much you had to fight with the cat in order for that to happen. He laughs when he notices that there are bandages wrapped around some of your fingers, already thinking about how he had seen you fight with said cat before. He rolls over and can’t help but fall back asleep with a smile on his face.

Bucky thanked his lucky stars that he was fortunate to finally have you by his side, and that he would cherish it as long as you allowed him.
March 14th.

It takes you awhile for figure out what you are going to do, planning and strategizing takes you awhile but it makes you feel better about the plan in the long term. You get a mini journal, blue with silver lining, from your unused pile and begin to write down everything you need and how you could call on. There is a little tremor in your heart about if this is too much for a first date, but you want to celebrate Bucky’s birthday your own way, even if it’s a little late.

“Nah, he’ll love it,” Rebecca explains, as she looks over your layout and notes, “Bucky is sort of dramatic. You’re going after his heart right here.”

“Really?” your eyes light up and she can’t help but grin smugly at all her hard work, though she knows deep down that you both deserve all the happiness you can get, even if it makes roll her eyes at just how potentially lovey-dovey the two of you will get. She grins before putting the book down, her blue eyes on you as she moves from one accomplished plan to another.

“So, what help do you need from me?”

March 18th.

James had spend the previous day packing and simply resting a bit before things picked up again and school was back on his mind. However, all he wanted to so was see you again, while your relationship had just barely begun, Bucky was trying hard to keep 3 years of longing at bay. He wanted you close, he wanted to get to know better than he did now -- there was so much he wanted to say and see, but he didn’t want to scare you away either. James knew he could be too intense with his emotions, “dramatic” was what his sisters liked to call it. He looked at his cellphone, the last message you had sent was wishing him good luck on the plane ride back. You hadn’t answered when he landed at JFK, though he simply pushed it to the back of his mind and caught up with everything he had missed.

Now, that he was done with everything the thoughts were resurfacing again. He picked up his phone from the nightstand after taking a shower, ready to send you another message, when it pings on its own.

Stevie: Get fancy, picking you up in 20.

Bucky: What? Why?

Stevie: Secret. From ya gal ;)

Bucky can’t help the huge growing on his face at the last part of Steve’s message, as he starts walking around his bedroom, unsure of what to wear though eventually deciding on a pair of dark jean, dark button-up, and blue motorcycle jacket with his hair slicked back just a bit. Steve arrives just a promised and the blonde can’t help but grin at the excited look on his best friend’s face. Steve hadn’t seen his friend this happy and in love in a long time, he could only imagine how Bucky would get when he say what you had in store.

“So, where are we going, punk?” Bucky finally decides to ask, as his oldest friend shakes his head and effectively keeping his mouth shut. James shakes his head, but he’s feeling like a kid on Christmas day. He decides to catch up with Steve instead, asking what has been going on in school and with Peggy, which allows the car ride to move a bit faster. The car stops in a familiar little coffee shop, though there are fairy lights string around the opening and the owner, Stan, is sitting in front in
his usual attire -- a white button and slacks. Blue eyes clash with as Steve shrugs.

“She’s gonna knock your socks off,” Steve smiles as Bucky begins to get out of the car, “I hope you have a good time.”

“Good evening, James,” the old man smile as he opens the door to a very confused younger man, “Your sweetheart is waiting upstairs. I hope you have good night, and happy belated birthday.”

“There’s an upstairs?” Bucky questions for moment, before grinning, “Oh, thank you...I guess I’ll be heading up, then?”

Stan nods, leading the way to a smaller back door near the the kitchen area. James looks at Stan from a moment as the old man nods and he heads upstairs step by creaky step, only to be surprised at the sight of more fairy lights around the whole room. There is small table in the center filled with food and a small cake and another table near the far right corner with a record player playing a familiar song. And that’s where you are standing, wearing a floral patterned skirt and dark short-sleeved shirt, a bright smile on your face that takes his breath away all over again.

“Doll, what is all this?” he questions as he walks over and takes your hands into his, already swaying to the background music. You smile and he catches it just as quickly.

“I know you said we would have a date after you came back,” you explain, as he slides his arm around your waist, spinning you around for a moment, “So, I planned ahead.”

“You’re setting the bar pretty high, starlight?” he chuckles softly, as you shake your head.

“I better be,” you grin, “But, you won’t win me over unless you tell about Orion and Diane.”

“Well, I’ll just have to unleash all my astrology knowledge on you,” Bucky dips you while looking at the dinner on set up with a box at the center.

“Maybe, over dinner?” he looks down to look at your smiling face, as you nod. He starts to pull you back up, but you grab his neck and drag him to your level for a gentle but quick peck on the lips.

“Happy belated birthday, James.”

“Thank you, doll,” he grins as you look him with eyes shining like starlight, as he leads you to the table looking at at the things you had made and bought.

Stories and laughter are shared throughout the night, James swears it’s the best late birthday and first date later on, but nothing has you laughing more than when you give him his birthday gift -- a gift card to B’s stationery.
March rolls away softly with sweet dates and eager kisses. April is a bit cooler, but just as sweet with ending of your first semester. Yes, there are setbacks and things you still have to learn, but you enjoyed everyone’s research presentations and some of the students had been kind enough to give you feedback on how you could better yourself– they were a wild group, but you knew they were good kids. From that point forward, you move towards adding the finishing touches to the science and book fairs. Both would be held near the end of the school year, though students had been told two months in advance in order for them to prepare their project, since they would be judged by the Board and Tony Stark himself.

So, here you were on weekend, discussing the final details with Mrs. Potts-Stark.

“And with that, the event will end with a mini fireworks display, per the request of Mr. Stark,” you explain the last bit of your notes, as the redhead shakes her head lightly at her husband’s dramatics though there is still a bright smile on her face, the love evident on her face. You laugh, catching her off-guard, as she coughs lightly before going back into work mode.

“That sounds perfect,” she says as you nod, “I know that you’ve done a lot of things out of your usual job, but thank you so much for the help. I look forward to working with you towards the new school year as well.”

“Ah,” the sudden praise now catches you off-guard, as you nod your head at her gratitude, “Thank you for taking the chance at me. I’ve grown a lot this past school year.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Potts-Stark exclaims, as you give her a questioning look, “You should thank Mr. Philips for that.”

“Ummm…what do you mean?” you ask curiously. Mr. Phillips was someone you looked up as a mentor because while he was rough around the edges, he was a kind-hearted man that often spent the time telling you about his WWII background and fishing adventures when he wasn’t sending you to do the chores for the library since his back often went out due to a previous injury. You even got postcards from him and his wife every so often since they had started their RV adventures a little over two years ago.

“He said, ‘That’s kiddo is a spitfire if you give her the right work. She just needs to move on from her mourning, is all’” she explains, trying her best to imitate his voice near the end, which causes
you to laugh, though you understood where he was coming from – you had mourned your mother for a long time and it wasn’t until you became the Head Librarian that you were pushed out of it. This whole year had gotten you to past that it seems.

“He’s just like a noisy grandpa,” you giggle, as she shakes her head. Her expression a bit more open before, “But, thank you, Mrs. Potter-”

“Pepper,” she cuts you off, as you look at her in confusion.

“Excuse me?”

“You can call me Pepper,” she smiles and you do as well, a little prouder than before at the privilege she has given you, something you would have never thought you deserved last July, but you had gained and grown so much thanks to her – you owed so many things to everyone and you only hope that things would get better from here on out. She grins and taps her pen on the desk before going to the next stack of papers you had handed her at the start of the meeting.

“So, you wanted to make some changes to Mr. Barnes’ classroom?” she tries to go back to her regular business mood, but can’t help but grin at the sight of your plans. *Ah, fools in love,* she thinks as it almost reminds her of another person with a passion for science and wonder.

“Ah, yes! I was hoping to…” you explain your plan under watchful blue eyes.

Pepper Potts-Stark can only hope she gets an invitation to a certain event in the near future, as she sees your bright eyes full of love and adoration. It was still too early, but she had a gut feeling for the both of you, one that had never been wrong – as Tony would like to say. And I mean, she was the one that pushed you together from the beginning, no?

“Now what are you planning?” Steve questions as he sees you leaving Bucky’s classroom on a Thursday, one of the two days that he doesn’t have tutoring or any clubs to deal with. You had promised to meet him later on for dinner with the excuse that you still had some work to deal with.

“Something, something,” you answer, as he shakes his head.

There was a huge grin on your face, as he watches you enter the room before following you. In the past couple of months, Steve had seen you break out of your shell and become a completely different person that didn’t hide behind Mr. Philips’ shadow, but he had also seen Bucky –the romantic and never ending optimist– come back from the dead after several years.

At your surprise shining bright in front of him, Steve couldn’t help but grin and that’s when he knew you guys were perfect for each other – maybe, even like Andromeda and Perseus, without the whole sacrifice and rescue motif though.

The whole school festival celebration ends up being a 3-day event that starts with a book fair, which you are quite busy running and showcasing several different works of the students throughout the different classes. Mr. Rogers’ classes hold a mini art gallery, Ms. Romanoff’s students showcase their digital art in the same space. In the second day, Ms. Hill replicated her earlier success with a school-wide poetry slam, and there were sports events with prizes thanks to Mr. Barton. However, the crown jewel was certainly the science fair on the last day.
This time around Bucky was busy showcasing his students to the board members and Mr. Stark, as you run around making sure everything is in place. It wasn’t until mid-afternoon that you both had a break since everyone was celebrating Peter’s win with his webbing, that quickly caught the former CEO’s attention, along with a visiting princess that had come along with her older brother to visit Stark Industries. You pull the man away from the festivities and drag him to his room, as he gives you a curious look.

“Doll, what are you planning?” he questions, as you laugh though without telling him anything. You shake your head, as he can’t help but smile at what silly thing you might be up to because since you started dating Bucky had come to realize you could be a tease and prankster when you wanted to be.

“It’s not a secret, if I tell ya, Bucky,” you shake your head as he sighs. You tell him to close his eyes before opening the door to his classroom. You wait one, two, three seconds before opening the door and telling your boyfriend to open his eyes.

“Damn,” is all he can breathe out at the sight of his classroom cloaked in darkness close to his desk, but speckles of stars and familiar constellations scattered throughout the classroom ceiling. As it moves further out from his desk, the skies starts to lighten up with the farthest wall in an array of warm, pastel colors in its own artificial sunset.

“So, where are they?”

“What is, starlight?”

“Where the hell are those pens you took from me, James?” you question and hit him on the right shoulder as blue eyes widen. He lets out a nervous laugh, fully knowing that they are stored safely in one of his desk drawers back home where he used them for his own journaling – not that you were going to figure that out anytime soon. You pout waiting for answer. Instead, he chooses to grab you by the waist and spin you among the stars before planting a sweet, long kiss on your lips.

However, that doesn’t stop your plight.

“You better by me some new ones, Mr. Barnes,” you pout, as he sways you back and forth to some old song you have realized he had become fond of humming, though you don’t know which one yet.

“I’ll buy you the whole damn store, Ms. Librarian,” he grins before peppering kisses throughout your face. Your shared laughter echoing in the room full of stars.

Because while you could thank a lot of people for this happening in the end, it was really just a pen – your precious stationery— that caused all this to happen.
Several Months Later.

The new school year had passed you by and you found yourself getting pulled into various new activities, while trying to keep up with the Library Club and what you had already established. You were working more on how to improve the school with Mrs. Potts-Stark that you were basically her right-hand woman, but you were also thinking about going back to school for your Master’s degree, though you didn’t know in what yet, and while you loved the library, there were just so many options opened to you now. James had been in the same boat with working on papers and his increased amount of time with Dr. Banner and Mr. Stark. Together you had hit close to year and half when Bucky had exclaimed he had a surprise for you over summer break.

To Florida – to visit his family. You remember how that went when you first found out.

“James, are you sure about this?” you pause looking at the little drawing in your hand declaring your trip’s destination, at least it wasn’t anything crazy, “Do we have time? And what about your parents?”

“I set time aside for both us, doll. The Starks know, even pushed me too it,” he laughs while grabbing your hand gently, as your eyes flicker up to see his smiling face, “And you know my parents are ecstatic, especially my mom.”

“But, are you okay with this?” you murmur softly, knowing by now the story of why he had run away and why he didn’t exactly like thinking about the Sunshine state. You frown in concern and he can’t help the lovestruck smile on his face over how much you care about him.

“I wouldn’t have suggested if I wasn’t,” James explains, as he leans in closer, pressing your forehead against his, “We deserve a break, starlight. Just think the nice weather, barbeques at night, sunny beaches—”

“Buck, are you just trying to get me in a bikini?” you question in laughter, as his face brightens up just a little at the thought.

“Maybe,” he explains shyly, as you put your hand on his stubble before dragging him into a quick peck on the lips. You shake your head.

“Haven’t been to the beach in a long while,” you say as blue eyes light up, “And you always do have the best ideas.”

“Is that yes?” he asks, looking like an excited puppy dog.

“Yes, Mr. Barnes.”

The both of you decide to take the week following July 4th as gateway time because it was
relatively slow following such a big holiday, but you were still in New York to celebrate Steve’s birthday. It’s a little confusing to pack because you hadn’t done it since you had moved to the big city in the first place, but Pietro was there every step of the way – even when you picked out swimsuit, though it was all in jest, so he could send some hilarious texts to Bucky. You head out two days after Steve’s party, and you can’t help but still be a little nervous at the thought of being with the Barnes family for an extended amount of time.

“Sweetheart, it’ll be alright,” James tries to soothe you, as he holds your hands with his, as the two of you walk out of the Daytona Beach International Airport terminal and while he was right, it was still a feeling you couldn’t let go off. Yes, there had been a splattering of dates and boyfriends in your young adult years, but nothing as serious as spending time with his family – this was a little nerve wracking, but also a little sad in a sense because you knew James would never meet your own mother, who you knew would have just loved him.

“I hope so,” you let out an unsteady laugh, hoping that he doesn’t notice the sudden sadness you might be feeling, as you notice two very familiar people standing on the side waving at you and Bucky.

“Ma! Dad!” James picks up speed, but never lets go of your hand until you end up standing in front of a smiling Mrs. Barnes. You give her a smile, James catching up with his father, as the older woman returns it. Her eyes wrinkling in the corners, which make you think once again that James really does take his look after his mother.

“How was the school year?” she questions, as the four of you proceed to leave the airport. The two Barnes man watch you and Winifred still walking on eggshells around each other, though they both knew the truth.

“It went well!” you laugh and James watches in awe, all over again, from the back as you go into your area of explaining how you were doing in your classes and just life in general. A sweet smile sweeps over Winnie’s face and she instances on riding in back with you for the rest of the car ride back to their condo.

Your time in Florida is mainly spent around Daytona Beach, an area that the George and Winnie had fallen in love with when James still lived there. You didn’t ask much of the past, but you knew there were moments that is still bothered him, but you said nothing and spent your time going to the beach, checking the local popular spots with the Barnes woman, and the occasional barbeque-- though both of you were you wanted to go the most.

“James, where are we going?” you ask, wearing jeans that stopped at your knees, a good pair of running shoes with a light sweater -- just as he had asked of you earlier in the day. It was just the two of you this evening, and he wasn’t telling you anything as he drove the car a bit farther from the beach area you had hung out in most of the week.

“It’s a surprise, starlight,” he explains, using the words you use so often against him, while grabbing your hand and kissing it. He’s nervous, but he was trying his best to make it up to you.

James knew in his heart of hearts that he had wanted to take you to the Kennedy Space Center. He wanted to show you everything that he had loved so dearly once, however deep down he was still scared -- he didn’t want to look back at his failures, at what could have been -- at least not now. However, you never said anything, just smiled and planned your days at the beach with Rebecca and the rest of the Barnes family. He knew you were too good to him most of the time, and now it was his turn.
“Bucky, is that a lighthouse?” you look up at the tall red building in front of you, as James parks the car. The sunset is splattered in front of the ocean as you look at him with a glow that takes his breath for the moment.

“It’s the Ponce de Leon Lighthouse,” he explains after getting out of the car, while walking towards the lighthouse with his arm around your shoulders, “One of the best place to sees the skies in all of Florida, if you don’t mind the 2,000 step climb.”

You look at him with an excited glimmer in your eyes, in which he knows he made the right decision in the end, as you tighten your hold on your water bottle, “Then what are we waiting for, starboy!”

It takes you two a good long while to reach the top and while there are moments when you complain and murmur that you regret the decision in your fatigue -for Bucky to laugh- are thrown into the window when you see the view of the Atlantic Ocean from the lighthouse, as the sun finally gives out its last bits of light to the cloaking darkness that the two of you love so much.

“This is beautiful, Bucky,” you exhale, looking for all the constellations you are familiar with while leaning into his warmth, as it was significant colder than when you had started the your journey up the lighthouse.

“It sure is,” he breathes out before kissing your temple, though you never see that he is staring at your awestruck expression the whole time.

While, you had been spending your vacation days on the beach, you didn’t really wear a swimsuit or bikini for the occasion. It was usually shorts or a beach dress, even though you had spent an entire weekend searching for one with Pietro. However, it wasn't exactly you, which lead to you and Rebecca looking for a proper swimsuit towards the last two days of your trip. Thus, leading James to play with baby Nina (alongside her father) as he waited for all of you to show up since you had gone shopping earlier.

“They’re planning something,” William declares as he grabs his daughter and bounces her on his knee, “Rebecca had that smile on her face this morning.”

“I think it’s something she is still getting used to,” James laughs because since you had started dating and even more so after Nina’s birth the two of you had gotten closer, you even spoiled his niece with outfits and toys from time to time.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” you state, as James looks up only to have his jaw drop. You’re standing there in a red, polka-dot pinup style swimsuit with a floppy white hat and matching sunglasses. There’s a timid smile on your face, as he knows deep down that he’ll have to thank either Rebecca or Pietro for this later, as much as it kills him.

“Is it okay?” you ask taking his brief silence the wrong way, though before you do anything else, Rebecca speaks up.

“You can’t blame him. He’s been waiting 3 years to see you like that,” Becca teases and while she expects Bucky to say something back, all she is welcomed with is two pairs of widening eyes, as you turn from looking at her to looking at your boyfriend, who seems to be glowing brighter by the minute though not because of the Florida sun.

All thoughts of your swimsuit are gone, as you declare loudly.

“You liked me for 3 years?” you look at James from where he is sitting, as he rubs the back of his neck and lets out a sigh, “I mean...how did you even know me?”
That’s the million dollar question, as Rebecca smiles behind her baby’s hat while William shakes his head. James gets up and slings his arm around your waist (as you give him a curious look), too embarrassed to tell you the story of how he fell in love with you indirectly, but maybe he would one day. For now, all he would say is:

“Your pens, sweetheart.”

And wasn’t that the truth.

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