The Winter Soldier is Still Here

by jla2016

Summary

You’re working at the local farmers market when you meet Bucky and catch his eye, not only because you’re the only one who sells plums, but because you treat him like a normal
person. As a friendship begins to bloom, it quickly grows into a relationship and you learn that life with Bucky isn’t as easy it originally seemed.
BUCKY POV
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I woke up and stared at the bare ceiling of my studio apartment.

"Oh, God, another day."

I looked to the clock on my right. 7:30. I guess one thing I don't miss from the 40s is the Army morning roll call at 5am. I might as well get up and get going before all the best things are bought.

Going to the Farmers Market in town has become a habit of mine shortly after moving out of the Stark tower and to this mountain town. I don't think I'll ever understand why Steve said this would be a great place for me. There are tens of thousands of college students, individuals, and families all around the town. Despite all of the people crowded into such a small town, I can see the charm he saw in it.

Fall is finally starting to set in. The leaves are just beginning to change shades and the air is crisp. Even back in the 40's, Fall was my favorite season...if for no other reason than all the dolls I went out with were extra cuddly and boy, you could get far for giving up a jacket.

As I got lost in the satisfying memories, I forgot I had been brushing my teeth until toothpaste drivel dropped down my chin and onto my chest, pulling me from picturing one of the gals I had wooed back in the day.

"Wake up, man, you're never going to have that again. You have no warmth. You've killed dozens of people. You're a cold killer even if you choose not to anymore. That choice doesn't change your past or that you did it, no matter what Steve says," I said, glaring at myself in the mirror threateningly.

READER POV
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"Man, do I really want to go this morning?"

I rolled my eyes before slowly pushing myself up and out of bed. I wiped the sleep out of my eyes as I walked to the bathroom, only a few feet away, in my tiny apartment. I brushed my teeth to get the trashy taste out of my mouth and threw my hair into a ponytail. After a deep breath, it was time for coffee. My coffee maker would have to work harder this morning than it had been doing lately. It's getting cooler outside as Fall is setting in. Thank heavens because even in the Virginia mountains, it had been a sweltering summer and I was fed up with sweating the moment I stepped out the door. As I fixed my coffee, my mind wandered, thinking of my family I'd left back in NC. Today would have been a nice day to drive down, but the market is open and I have products to sell and money to make. The bills aren't going to pay themselves. When looking at my watch, I couldn't help but notice I could squeeze in an extra five minutes of thought on my balcony. I opened the sliding door and stepped into the chill air, but was immediately warmed up by the rising sun and the hot coffee in hand.

I can't help but sigh in the contentment of the moment. My eyes graze over the sinuous river, water peacefully lapping on the bank. The train tracks quiet, but in a few hours, once the market starts up, the resounding whistle is sure to be heard. The parking lots are fairly empty still, surprisingly. I figured more people would be getting their outdoor activities started early, but I suppose people just took the crisp morning to stay in bed for now.
"Crap."

Forgetting about my responsibilities, I noticed 10, instead of 5 minutes had passed. I quickly stepped inside and shut the door, locking it, and headed for the sink in one fluid movement. I slipped my Toms on, grabbed my bag, sweater, and beanie before closing the door behind me and locking it. I rushed down the stairs-the lift took too long-and to Kasper, the friendly Kia.

"Ooh! Good morning Kasper! Thanks for being warm and toasty!"

I'm sure glad I got a start up button when I got this vehicle, it sure comes in handy on mornings like this.

"Kasper, aren't you glad we don't have to drive out to the farm this morning?"

Kasper seemed to purr in response as I put him in reverse and headed down Main Street to the unloading spot they reserved for those selling at the market. I quickly unloaded what I had picked at the farm the previous evening. Yes, I live such a glamorous life. In between spending the majority of my time working at The Muse which was my favorite coffee shop when I moved here, two face-to-face classes a week, working through the rest of my grad school work at work or at my favorite local book store, the extra shifts I was able to catch at the school's writing center, and picking fruit to sell at the market, there wasn't really time for anything other than those things. I knew when I made the decision to quit my teaching job and move out of state for grad school, it was going to be a challenging transition, but it was worth it if I could conquer it in the end.

While all of these thoughts swam around in my head, I arranged the fruit, fixed and put up my sign, and waited for the crowds to arrive.

BUCKY POV

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After I was dressed and ready to go, I headed out the door and took the lift. When I walked out of the door of my building, I pulled my sleeves down further and my gloves higher. The sun was shining bright, meaning if even a sliver of my metal arm was showing, anyone and everyone would notice. I took my time walking down the street. Despite that I was observant because of my training from Hydra, I was appreciative of it sometimes. In this mountain town, on a Saturday morning, I always felt like I could observe to relax instead of observe as preparation for conflict.

As I passed a mother and daughter going into Market at Main, I pulled the cap I was wearing further down over my eyes as the little girl pointed, scampering closer to her mother, recognizing me as the Winter Soldier. I looked down at the ground. I hate being something people fear. I hate what Hydra did to me. I'd be better off dead.

READER POV

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The market was filling up with people by 8. I noticed that some of the surrounding tables had some of the same products as I did, but hopefully people would buy from me today. Rent is due on Monday and I'd really prefer not to delve into my savings-the little that's left- for what I'm short on. Luckily at the farm I was able to get some of people's Fall favorites such as apples, cranberries, tomatoes, winter squash, and of course pumpkins. I also was able to get my hands on some items that I didn't see at other's tables, such as parsnips, spinach, fennel, and plums. I hope that I'm able to make get some extra customers because of having different products than others who were selling today.

People were milling around, looking at different items, but no one had paid any close attention to the table yet.
"If I had thought about it, and hadn't been running late, I would have made some coffee for customers to draw them in. Why didn't I just get up this morning!?" I couldn't help but think. I'll be kicking myself the rest of the day because of it. The Lord must have heard my complaints because the teeny elderly lady at the next table sent a customer of hers my way.

"Good morning! How are you today?" I greeted the middle aged woman.

"I'm well, how are you, dear?"

"I'm well also, a little tired, but I'm here and loving this weather change! Is there something in particular I can help you with or are you just browsing?"

"I was actually looking for some parsnips for a recipe I found and it seems you're the only person here selling any. These cranberries would look wonderful on my kitchen table too. I'll take some of both."

I let her pick out how much she wanted, wrapped the parsnips up with some twine and put the cranberries in a baggie for her. We exchanged products for money and I noticed she gave me too much.

"Oh ma'am, you gave me an extra $10."

"No dear, that's for you. I've been wanting to make this recipe and haven't been able to find parsnips anywhere for months. Thanks to you I can finally make the dish, so you keep the extra! Have a great day, sweetie!"

I thanked her before she walked away. If this was any indication of how the day was going to go, I could use more of them.

The morning passed quickly, all the business I was receiving helped the morning move by rapidly. While I enjoy my outdoors time at the market, experiencing a little bit of a social life, I had so many things piled up at home for grad school that I needed to be doing. Whenever there weren't people at the table, I attempted to look approachable while also making mental lists of everything I had to complete.

Around 11:30, I pulled out my snack bar while there weren't many customers around. I remembered that today I was going to be able to splurge, thanks to some extra cash I'd picked up today, and grab some Filipino cuisine before heading home, but the market didn't close 'til 2pm and I'd still have to pack up what leftovers I had, which by the looks of things shouldn't take too long, thankfully.

I was about halfway through my snack bar when this man appeared in front of me, looking at the plums I had for purchase. I had not even seen him approaching. I'm typically an overly observant person so for him to sneak up on me, he must be pretty skilled at hiding in plain sight. Nonetheless, I put my snack bar back in my bag behind me and speedily finished chewing and swallowed the remnants so that I could politely speak.

"I apologize about that sir." I attempted my most size-able smile. "I didn't notice anyone around and my breakfast is long gone. Typically people aren't able to sneak up on me. You'll have to teach me your ways."

He simply stared at me, the smallest hint at a smirk visible, so small I wasn't sure if it was a smirk or not. As I finished my apology, however, I knew it had been a smirk because it left and his face shifted into what seemed a sculpted stone and his eyes turned cold. Despite that cold look, I couldn't quite conjure up the emotion of fear. Instead, sadness and compassion were what took the place of
where fear should have been. I hesitated a moment before speaking, attempting to mend the situation. "I'm sorry, bad joke. Is there something I can help you with? In the market for some plums, maybe?"

His statue face seemed to regain some vitality as I spoke again, almost as if he hadn't realized a change in his face had even occurred. He smiled, however small, and I was thankful to see a smile, even if it didn't reach his eyes.

BUCKY POV
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"No way," I said, just barely audible.

Many people had cleared out of the market by now. The only people left were those who weren't quite as serious buyers and typically just browsing for something to do on a Saturday between breakfast and lunch. That's how I liked it, though. Less people meant less chance of a problem, less chance for the Winter Soldier to escape and Bucky Barnes to get buried in his own mind once again. Don't get me wrong, I know how ludicrous it sounds that someone could get to me and bring out the Winter Soldier in this quaint, yet busy, mountain town of Lynchburg...but if Zemo could get to me in a containment cell at a Counter Terrorist Centre in Germany, someone could get to me here.

I walked over to the table, noticing the girl who seemed to be the seller eating a snack bar on my way, to look at the plums for purchase.

"I can't believe she has plums," I thought.

She apparently didn't notice me approaching, which was fine, I had received a few too many stares this morning. I examined the plums as she finished chewing what she had been eating before looking up at her as she began to address me. She was a little flustered it seemed, possibly embarrassed by being caught off guard, but she had such a winning smile and bewitching eyes attached to the beginning of her apology that I couldn't stop myself from grinning until the end of her statement left her lips.

"My ways? My ways are callously learned. My ways were learned through torture. My ways come through atrocious lessons and from detestable people, if one could even call them that. They made me into this abhorrent monstrosity called the Winter Soldier. My ways were learned through memory loss, leaving me unable to even remember the closest thing to a brother I've ever had," the thoughts reverberated through my mind.

I hadn't even realized that I had not responded or how enraged my face must have become because her attempt to make things better with an apology snapped me back into reality. I gave her a slight smile, she deserved it for not freaking out at my evident change in behavior. There was one thing I didn't understand though, she wasn't afraid of me.

"That's okay. Yes, I'm surprised to see plums. I haven't seen any here before and they're my favorite. They look good. How much are you asking?"

"Well, I'd typically charge .45 apiece, but if they're your favorite and you haven't been able to find any, I'll drop that to .20 apiece," she answered.

"That's quite a price drop, are you sure?" Why was she dropping it so much lower. She wasn't flirting. Why would she do that?

"Yeh," she smiled genially, "definitely. Besides no one has really even paid them any mind today. You're literally the only person who has acknowledged their existence, plus I don't want to take them
home with me. It'd be doing us both a favor if you wanted them all."

I couldn't help but raise my eyebrows in surprise at her offer. Why was she being so nice? People weren't this nice anymore. Even in my natural time of 1940's, people weren't this kind. She seemed genuine, nonetheless.

"Sure, if you're sure you don't mind. Or if you'd like I can come back at the end so not to stop you from making more profit if other people want to purchase them," I offered.

"Nonsense!"

She started grabbing a couple of plums at a time to bag them up. As she was picking them up, she hit one just right and it started to roll off the table. My instincts kicked in and I quickly leaned, stretching around the corner to grab it before it hit the concrete. In the process my sleeve slipped up, exposing most of my metal forearm. I paused when I caught the plum before looking up at her, ashamed and angry at myself for being so careless.

When I looked up, I saw her eyes move from my arm to my face and recognition set in. She knew who I was now. She knew I was the Winter Soldier, Hydra Assassin. No more nice farmer's market girl. I prepared myself for the look of horror, but it didn't come. Something in her eyes flickered, I didn't know what it was exactly, nervousness? Whatever it was, it was masked quickly and she responded almost excitedly.

"That was so awesome! I'm so clumsy. Thank you for catching that. I guess you should technically be thanking yourself since it's a plum for you, but still." She was smiling but you could tell a few nerves had been hit when she recognized who I was. She wasn't freaking out, though? What parallel universe have I stepped into?

I went to put the plum down so that I wouldn't have to hand it to her, but she snagged it from my hand like it was just a normal, innocent human hand, not a frigid, killing machine.

I looked at her, almost in awe, before pulling out my wallet to retrieve the cash to pay for the plums.

"Is there anything else you may be interested in" she asked before totaling up what I owed.

My old self flared up and I had to stop myself from saying "Just a night out dancing with you, doll." The past few months I had had moments like these, almost like nothing had ever changed and I had always been regular Bucky Barnes, that kid from Brooklyn, who joined the 107th, brother and protector of little Steve Rogers, instead of brainwashed and forever changed by Hydra.

"I don't think so, not today anyway, unless you have any apples hidden anywhere? A friend of mine is supposed to be visiting this week and they like apples."

"Oh, no, I'm sorry I don't. I did earlier, but they've all been sold by now. I'm sorry! I saw a few other people bringing in apples this morning, so maybe you'll be able to find some at another table?"

I nodded and pulled out the cash I owed her plus a little extra. I know she wasn't going to make any profit if she only charged me .20 apiece.

"Oh, no, it's only $2.40!" she proclaimed when she saw the $10 I had given her.

"Keep the extra," I said, giving her a smile.

"Wow. Thank you so much. You really don't have to do this."
"No, I don't have to, but I want to. Have a great day." She deserves even more for the way she reacted to the arm, but I didn't want to completely freak her out.

"Yeh," she seemed a little shocked, "you too. Thank you again."

I nodded and turned to walk away. I stopped and turned back to her, trying to think of the best and least creepy way to ask if I'd see her again,

"Do you think you'll have more plums next week?" was all I could come up with.
BUCKY POV
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Steve is going to be here soon. I should really get up and make this place a little presentable. I never
know if he's going to bring company or not with all of his Avengers friends. Sure, Steve was my
friend first, but he has this new life now with all of these other people he cares about and who have
his back, despite the fighting over me. Sometimes, part of me wishes he'd just forget about me. It'd
make his life so much easier, but it seems no matter how much I try to convince him of this, he
denies it and continues moving.

Mostly, I think it's because of his love and care for me due to our relationship back in the 40's before
everything became this outlandish and peculiar hell we're calling life. A small part of me can't help
but tell myself that his not letting go is actually because of his guilt for not being able to keep me
from falling and being turned into this mayhem that is Bucky and his prevailing alter ego, Winter
Soldier.

I strong-armed the thoughts to the back of my mind and forced myself out of bed. I headed to the
kitchen and as I waited for my bread to toast, I washed the few dishes that were in the sink. The
apartment had a dishwasher, but I had never been able to bring myself to use it. Washing dishes
brought back to me faint memories of watching my mother from the kitchen table before she died. I
wonder what she and pops would think of their son.

Before I could delve into that dark and bottomless, pitiless abyss, I heard a knock at the door.

"It's just me, Buck," Steve said delicately from the other side of the door when I didn't open it
immediately.

I let him in and he slapped me on the shoulder reassuringly as he passed.

"The place looks great, Buck," he said looking around.

I knew he was saying this to be polite. I hadn't added or changed anything since I moved in. The
walls were are bare as the bottom of a Christmas tree on New Years. The hardwood floor was clean,
but I had added no carpets or rugs to make things more 'homey'. The fireplace had the same amount
of wood Steve had left when he helped me move. I didn't mind the cold as it fit me well. Of all of the
frigid places- from a winter in Brooklyn to the depths of Siberia and of course there's the whole
cryostasis reason I'm even alive-I had seen and been in my life, a little cold never bothered me.

Nonetheless, Steve plopped down on the ratty couch and motioned to the chair across from him, "so
how have you been, Bucky?"

READER POV
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I rushed across town to C-MED, what I referred to my Classification of Mental and Emotional
Disorders class as because the course name was a mouthful. I didn't want to be late, with it being my
favorite class so far. I was so glad that I was able to take this class immediately upon entering the
program because it was what I wanted to place my focus on as a prospective counselor. I made it in
the knick of time and received a stern look from Professor Brow.

After class, I headed for The Muse. While my shift wouldn't start for another couple of hours, I could
go ahead and begin working on the paper Brow had assigned this morning that was due next class.

"Sometimes I really miss being the one assigning the papers, instead of writing them," I couldn't help but think, smiling to myself.

It's a cool day out, so I'm thinking Christmas in a Cup is a definite to warm me up from the inside out. I spoke with Maggie, the baker/manager/owner (she wore many metaphorical hats), upon entering and explaining what was up as we swapped stories about our day.

After getting my coffee I sat down at the corner booth that I loved so much, whipped out my textbook and laptop. Luckily, Professor Brow had made a statement in class that had sparked an idea for the base analysis path I'd be taking with the paper. My mind tuned out everything else for the next hour and a half before I noticed the time and decided to call it off for the time being before I delved too deep and couldn't pull myself mentally back out for work. I browsed the internet and my social media until it was time to pack my things up and move them to the back. I put on my apron, clocked in, and greeted a customer as they walked through the door.

"What can I get for you today?"

BUCKY POV

Steve and I sat around for a while discussing what had been happening in our lives since I had moved to Lynchburg. Steve didn't, of course, have to share but so much, as so often I heard any news having to do with the Avengers from the radio, the beat up television I had gotten at a thrift store, or people walking around town. He did, however, fill me in on how things were at the compound since when I had left things were quite rocky...which was because of me no matter how much Steve refuted it.

"Buck, you know how it is. I mean, relationships are slowly being mended and rebuilt, but it's going to take some time. Nat is probably having the worst of it, from her playing both sides. She fights with Tony a lot, but that's not completely out of the ordinary," he chuckled after mentioning this.

I couldn't help but smile a little at the thought. While I didn't know the Black Widow as well as Steve, she didn't seem to be one to put up with Tony's arrogance or bullcrap in any form or faction.

"But you know, they're working at it. Tony is holding back quite a bit. Who would have thought that was possible? He and Rhodey are of course thick as thieves, but they've gotten tighter since everything. Peter has visited a few times. He always asks about you, how you're doing and whatnot. He's a good kid, easily swayed sometimes I think, but that's being a kid, you remember what that was like."

As soon as he said it, his face turned to a blank slate, but his eyes held nothing but remorse.

"Buck, I'm so sorry. I didn't even think before I said it," he attempted to explain.

"It's alright, man. No harm done." I meant what I said, but even as I said it, this mass of hot anger started to build within the pit of my stomach and slowly started to rise. I could never forgive HYDRA for what they did to me, to my thoughts, my memories.

We sat in silence for a few moments before Steve asked about things here in Lynchburg.

"It's been an adjustment, but not an unpleasant one. The people seem nice enough, of course, I try and keep the arm hidden." Even after all this time, I couldn't refer to it as my arm.

I divulged details about how I was still working to recover my memory and how being in the
quietness of Lynchburg helped that. I shared with him some of the ups and downs I had had, and some of the things I had been able to see and do, specifically outdoor sights I had seen. That was one thing that I could say was different than anything I could remember. Back in Brooklyn, there weren't beautiful natural sights like there were here. Even when I was working for Hydra, I had never seen any natural beauties like were available to me here. Honestly, even if I had been surrounded by them, Hydra had always trained me to be infinitely focused on my mission and target, that I wouldn't have noticed anything that was there anyhow.

I remembered the apples, Steve's favorite, on the kitchen counter, so I got up and headed for them.

"Hey! I realize it's sort of cheesy, but I picked these up for you at the Farmer's Market Saturday. You know they're not my favorite, but they looked so good I couldn't help myself from trying one, and they're actually pretty good."

I tossed him one and sat back down in the chair, biting into the plum I had grabbed for myself. He eyed me carefully, oddly, enough so that I couldn't stop myself from laughing and asking "what??"

"Since when do you go to Farmer's Markets? Don't get me wrong, I'm not judging, but you've never seemed to do anything like that since I've known you."

"Well, when I was in hiding before you found me, I went to street markets most of the time to avoid the crowds and hassle of a busy store. I figured I'd try the Farmer's Market out when I walked by one day. It's actually pretty peaceful and I enjoy observing people in that type of situation. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it's actually relaxing to me."

"Bucky, it doesn't sound ridiculous. I'm happy you found something you enjoy and that relaxes you."

I sat thoughtfully for a moment as the plum girl...I'm still kicking myself for not getting her name because "plum girl" definitely didn't feel sufficient...flashed across my mind. Before I knew it, Steve was asking,

"What are you grinning about so hard over there? I can't recall the last time I witnessed that."

He was attempting to be calm about it, in order to protect my feelings, but it was blatantly obvious he was anything but calm.

"It's nothing really..." I trailed off. I knew he wasn't going to just let it drop.

"Nah, man. A grin that substantial means something. Come on, Buck, you've got to tell me."

I couldn't help but look at my feet, for some reason feeling shy. I wasn't sure if I really wanted to share about her because what was the point? She was a nice girl who sold good fruit. It wasn't like she would ever become my friend or anything more, no matter how much I'd like her too. However, Steve had always been the most persistent guy I'd ever known so it was either share the info or him bugging me until eternity.

"It's nothing, really. It's just, isn't that apple pretty awesome? I had to snag one myself and try it, it looked so good..."

He looked at me, slightly confused, but answered: "yes, it's pretty good."

"Yeh, well, these plums are amazing. I haven't had as good since I was in Bucharest. I actually got both of these at the farmer's market downtown this past week." I paused looking at Steve, but he just returned a patient and waiting look.
"Well...there was a girl there, she actually sold me the plums..." I went into the entire story. I told him about her reaction to my minor freak out and even the arm. I couldn’t keep it in and somehow I began to feel like nothing had ever changed. Steve and I were just hanging out and talking about life. I think we used to do that fairly often considering we were about all there was to our unique family. He let me finish before he shocked me by saying,

"I'm calling the guys. I think my trip just got extended because I have to meet this girl."

READER POV
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My shift passed by fairly quickly as the customers came in consistently. Inventory had also been taken that morning so part of my duties before leaving was restocking everything and having the fresh items placed out front for customer viewing.

I noticed Maggie had used some of the fruit for new baked goods that I had brought in from the farm yesterday. We had our usual best selling chocolate chip scones, blueberry muffins, and cinnamon rolls. It looked like she had made an apple streusel, cherry custard pastries, and plum tarts. I don't think we've ever served anything with plum before, at least not since I've been working here, so I'm unsure of how they'll sell. I did know that if the man I met on Saturday, the Winter Soldier, what was his real name, Bucky, I think, came in, he'd probably buy us out. Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever seen him around town until last week. Granted, I didn't even know who he was until part of the arm Hydra had given him had been exposed. I didn't realize that part of me wanted to run into him again until the bell above the door rang out, signaling someone had entered, and I looked up hoping it was him.

Instead, in walked the only friend I had when I moved here. Gayle waved a hello and I attempted to wipe the disappointment from my face because I was happy to see her, and I didn't want her to think differently.

"Hey, girl! Are you about to get off?" She asked.

I shook my head, "no, I still have about an hour. How are you?" I walked around the counter to give her a hug.

Since no one was in the shop, she and I chatted, catching up since it had been a couple weeks since we'd seen each other. She grabbed a couple of pastries for her and her husband before leaving.

After I bid her goodnight, promising to text her when I got home safely, I looked up at the clock. We had spent about 15 minutes chatting, meaning I only had about 45 minutes left in my shift. That would leave me just enough time to get the front cleaned up nice like I liked. I'm not sure why, but cleaning up the front brought me peace.

Although it was cleaning, which I typically hated, I think I like the monotony of it, the routine. I also think that I enjoy it because I may have to do everything but mop (I loathe mopping). The closer, Barry tonight, would do the mopping. I feel that Mags consistently scheduled me on this shift because she appreciated my thoroughness in cleaning the front. I shouted to Barry to let him know I was going to be cleaning so if he heard a customer come in, he'd need to take it.

After getting everything cleaned and situated to my liking, I washed my hands and stepped behind the counter to serve my last cup of coffee before my shift ended.

BUCKY POV
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It seemed like we couldn't get through 15 minutes of conversation without Steve bringing her back
up. We had decided to go out and see a movie like old times. It was something neither of us ever really did anymore, so it’d be a nice breather from our present lives.

After we were ready to go to the theater, we headed downstairs to the vehicle. I let Steve drive the beat up Jeep he and Sam had found for me to drive around town if I needed.

We chose a light-hearted comedy once at the theater because with both of our lives going the way they had, comedy seemed the safest choice. Neither Steve or I wanted to chance a film that might contain something to trigger anything Hydra had put in me. Plus, both of us could always use a laugh.

After the film was over, we stepped out into the chill night air. I pulled my jacket tighter around me. I noticed Steve did as well.

"Hey man, where can you get a good cup of coffee in this town?"

He had to ask me this? I had no idea. I had barely been outside of downtown since I moved because the town could feel quite crowded at times. Granted, there are four colleges in the town so it’s not only packed with students but also there are plenty of families living here in addition. I still avoided crowds as much as possible. Steve sensed to read my mind and perceived my discomfort.

"Hey, it's alright Buck. That's what this Google machine is supposed to be for. I can't believe how helpful it is."

I chuckled and when he asked what I was laughing at I said simply, still laughing, "I think it's just "Google," Steve, not "Google machine."

He guffawed and rolled his eyes at me. "Whatever, man." He returned his attention to the search results on his phone. "It says there's this coffee shop, The Muse, not far from here, and it's still open. Want to just walk, like old times?"

I nodded in agreement and we fell in step. We chatted about the new things we had learned, thanks to the Internet, and how things were so different from our time.

We got to the coffee shop and it looked fairly empty. We stepped through the front door, and although the place looked empty, my eyes scanned the shop, noticing a side door...and then a shade of red hair that seemed familiar, walking out the door.
It Takes Convincing

READER POV
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Since I had Friday off and my afternoon class had been canceled, I was able to go to the farm early Friday evening. As soon as I got home, I washed up and crawled into bed.

Thanks to a good nights rest, I woke up Saturday morning feeling refreshed and ready for another day at the farmer's market. This morning was a little different than last week, other than the extra sleep. I noticed I put a little extra time and effort into my appearance. I tried to tell myself that it was just because I hadn't had an opportunity all week to look presentable with makeup and hair fixed and wearing something nice. In the back of my mind, though, I knew it was that I was hoping he'd be there today. After all, wasn't it he who pretty much asked if I'd be there again this week? He may have been trying to hide his question, but it wasn't a great job. I thought trained assassins were supposed to be good at lying.

I finished getting ready and got to the market a little early so once I had everything laid out, I sat and started to read. It wasn't often anymore that I was able to read for enjoyment, but this book "We're All Damaged" had gotten my attention after two sentences in. Matt Norman, the writer, is hilarious.

As people started pouring in, I had to put the book down because people were streaming in and busy didn't begin to cover it. By 11:30, I was almost sold out of everything and about ready to pack up until I heard a soft, yet gruff familiar voice.

"Hello, again."

I looked up and saw those perfect spring sky blue eyes looking at me under long, fluttering lashes attached to a wide grin.

I couldn't help but smile back, probably looking a little dumbfounded because simply put, damn, that's a beautiful man.

"Hi. How are you?"

"I'm good,-- uhhh...I'm sorry, I didn't get your name last week."

"(Y/n). I'm (Y/n), and you?" I asked despite that I knew the answer. It seemed more polite to ask than just assume.

"I'm Bucky. I'm well, by the way. It looks like you're about sold out of everything..." he said looking down and across the table.

Although I wasn't sure, I'm fairly certain his smile became a little dimmer when he didn't see any plums out.

"Yeh, it has been crazy today. I think it's because of the carnival, later on, more people are in town and needed something to do this morning."

"I thought I heard something about a carnival..." He looked back down at the table nervously, "No plums today, huh?"

I stared at him for a moment, even though he wasn't looking at me, and couldn't help but grin. He must have sensed this because his eyes flickered to mine.
"Well, actually..." I trailed off as I bent down and grabbed a basket from behind my table. "I saved these in case you came back today looking for some."

When I saw color run to his cheeks, I felt my own heating up as well.

"Wow. You did that? That's...so nice. Thank you so much. You know these plums are honestly th-" he was cut off by a man slightly shouting "Hey, Buck" as he approached.

It only took a split second for me to recognize who it was. Captain...America...is walking towards me! Holy crap! Steve Rogers. Damnnnnnn. He is rocking that jacket too. I felt my jaw go a little slack but quickly adjusted it just before Steve Rogers stepped in front of me.

"Hey, man. I was wondering where you'd gotten off to. I guess a guy can't even use the restroom without his friend leaving him these days," Steve turned to me, laughing, and stretched out his hand. "Hi! I'm Steve, how are you?"

"Uhhh, hi...Capt-.Am-.St-Steve." Why the hell did I have to be like this!? "I'm, ahhh, ahm..."

Bucky stepped in, thankfully. "Steve, this is (Y/n)."

I gave a quick nod and attempted a small smile in Bucky's direction as a thank you. God, can you explain to me why I'm speechless in front of an All-American national hero, but a trained assassin gives me no problem? It literally took everything in me not to slap myself on the forehead to try and snap out of it.

"(Y/n), it's so nice to meet you," Steve was saying as my mind struggled back to normalcy.

"Likewise, for sure."

"Oh, you've got plums! Are you the woman who sells the most amazing plums Bucky's ever tasted?" Steve looked at me and I almost felt like he was being...dirty. I don't know how I feel about that Steve Rogers, but before I could think it through, I saw Steve lose some height as apparently, Bucky kicked him in the shin for his remark. Steve handled it well, though, smirking on his way back up to his full height.

"Well, I had plums last week, yes, and Bucky bought some, yes."

BUCKY POV
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"Speaking of," I interrupted before Steve could embarrass me further, "how much are these today?"

She seemed to glance over my entire face before answering by smiling sweetly and saying simply, "on the house."

I saw Steve look between the two of us, turning and smiling widely at me last. She seemed to notice and looked down at the table attempting to straighten up the products she had left.

"Wow, on the house? Maybe I need to come down for all my shopping needs, Buck."

I was about to kick him again, but (Y/n), looked up and said to Steve,

"Oh, for you, it's full price, all day, every day," but she couldn't hold her face straight for long because as soon as Steve's face contorted in shock she busted out laughing and I couldn't help but join in.
Steve was literally speechless, making it all the better.

READER POV
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"Did I really just say that to Captain America? Oh my gosh, Bucky is laughing too! I said it. I said it out loud. Yeh, Steve is in shock, I definitely said it. Wow. He looks so much more free than normal, so much less guarded." My thoughts were running a mile a minute, but when I looked at Bucky, they seemed to slow a little.

He was laughing. I had barely seen a true smile that reached his eyes, but right now he looked free. He didn't have a wall up. He wasn't fearful or anxious. He just seemed happy, over a simple sentence. It's like he had forgotten what had been instilled in him, like just for a moment, he had no memory of the bad things, but only happiness. It looked great on him. I must have been staring because after about 20 seconds of nothing but laughter, he noticed I had stopped laughing to stare in thought, and his guard quickly raised again and here we were back to square one.

I know that I don't deserve to know everything that happened to him. Hell, I probably don't want to actually know, but just to get an inkling of what he's been through, I can't even begin to imagine what type of analysis' could be made.

As soon as the thought crossed my mind, I physically tried to shake it from my mind.

"He's a person, not a psych project," I thought to myself.

There was a moment of silence before Bucky cleared his throat and broached the subject of the plums again.

"I can't take these for free, (Y/n), how much do you want for them?"

"Seriously, they're on the house. There aren't that many and I didn't see many left at the farm, so just take them. I'm not worried about it. I got them specifically for you. You're apparently the only person in Lynchburg who likes plums."

Bucky was about to speak but was interrupted by Steve.

BUCKY POV
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"Okay, I don't know much about you, (Y/n), but I have a feeling you're not going to take money for the plums." Steve paused long enough for her to nod. "I know Buck pretty well and I know he'll argue with you all day until you give in...which doesn't seem like an easy task. Therefore, I have a brilliant idea."

Oh, no. What is his idea? I tried to telepathically beg him not to do something stupid...

"Apparently there's a carnival in town tonight? Buck and I were going to go. You should come with us. You can play all the games and ride all the rides you want, on Buck's dime. That sounds pretty fair and square to me."

I literally closed my eyes and dropped my head to shake it. I could not believe he was doing this to me. Granted, I guess it is a little bit like karma considering I used to drag him into situations like this when we were younger.

Steve elbowed me, saying "doesn't that seem fair, Buck?" to make me look up.

Apparently, (Y/n) didn't know what to do or how to act, which was also why Steve was nudging me
"Ahh, yeh. I don't think it'd pay you what I owe, but it'd be great if you joined us," I tried to explain but not convincingly enough apparently, as her eyes seemed to dim slightly.

Turning her attention back to Steve at first, she spoke softly, "thank you, really, I appreciate that, but I think I'll pass."

Steve was relentless, however. "Oh come on, we freeze pops need someone to breathe some warmth, light, and excitement back into our lives. Come on, please?"

I saw she was about to say no again and before my mind could catch up with my mouth, a better invitation than before was making its way to her ears.

"Yeh. Please join us...if for no other reason, I could really use some relief from listening to this punk all night. I'm sure a conversation with you would be astronomically superior and much more interesting. Please."

I saw her emerald eyes gain back some light they had lost. Although she may not be fully convinced, the probability of her joining us seemed higher.

I noticed Steve had feigned offense at my statement, but couldn't stop himself from smiling because I had seemed much more convincing in my invite this time around.

"Well...I guess I could...I mean, if you're sure you don't mind?" She had stared at me a short moment, considering, before saying this.

"I'm 107% sure," I told her, attempting a winning smile from my glory days.

READER POV

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After making plans with Steve and Bucky, I packed up what was left on the table and put it in a box. The plans, for some odd reason, made me a little nervous. Part of me felt like it was because I still wasn't 100% sure if Bucky wanted me to join in on him and his best friend's fun, but part of me also wondered why I was invited in the first place. I mean, I didn't know Steve, I didn't really know Bucky we had literally only met twice. However, there was something enticing about him, maybe it was his dangerous past?

I literally threw my hands in the air at the thoughts going on in my head after I parked Kasper at the shelter.

I greeted the shelter meal coordinator as I opened my trunk to retrieve the leftovers from the market. I carried them in and put them where I always put any leftover goods from the farm. The coordinator thanked me and bid me farewell as I drove away and headed for my apartment.

When I got home, I was suddenly exhausted. I checked the time and saw I could squeeze in a nap. After waking up late, I quickly threw my hair into a bun, pulled on an oversized sweater over my skinny jeans and converse. I didn't know if I was dressed as expected but it was going to be chilly at the carnival so this would have to do.

We had discussed meeting down the street from my apartment (of which I hadn't told them the location), so I took the stairs two at a time to make sure I was on time. When I got to the block corner, they were already there. Thankfully I didn't feel too underdressed as they were wearing
leather jackets, tee shirts, and jeans.

"So tell me, who's Danny and who's Kenickie," I said laughing at them. "I could have dressed as Frenchie!"

They looked at you a moment, not understanding, and then it hit you that they had missed the wonders of GREASE.

"Uhhh, I'm sorry. Nevermind. It's from this musical called GREASE. Add it to your list to check into. It's pretty awesome."

Steve seemed better at easing any tension than Bucky because he piped up, "no worries, should be interesting," pulling out his little black notebook and writing the information down, before continuing "you guys ready?"
The night consisted mostly of walking around the carnival simply getting to know each other. I walked between Steve and Bucky for the majority of that time. I was able to learn about missions they had been on, more Steve and the Avengers than Bucky's, of course. Bucky had been almost all but silent except when it came to asking questions about me. Once this conversation began, Steve's voice seemed nonexistent anymore.

He walked silently, letting me focus on Bucky's questions. I told them about growing up in NC and although I mostly loved it, I felt like if I stayed there teaching, I'd never leave or live my life for me, but for what my family wanted instead. I explained that I had felt trapped and boxed in by the expectations that had been placed on me and took a leap of faith and decided to leave.

"So, how did you start working at the Farmer's Market... no offense, it just seems like a big difference," Bucky asked shyly. I think he was worried I'd be upset about the question but looked relieved when I laughed, but I was then surprised not to hear laughter on the other side of me. I looked over and noticed Steve was no longer there.

"Ahhh, how long has he been gone?"

"About 10 minutes, I think he stopped for a snack. Sorry, I didn't want to interrupt you....Is that okay?"

I shook my head, smiling.

"Oh, that's fine, I just hadn't noticed. I'm sure he can take care of himself.," I told him winking.

Bucky smiled in response, "as you were saying?"

"Oh yeh, uhh...where was I? Oh, the Farmer's Market! Yeh, that's actually just another way I pick up some extra cash. When I moved here, there was a farm called Yoder's on the outskirts of town...and I mean, it's still there, but I had been once before when visiting a friend, years ago. Anyway, the owners are this much older couple. They're so sweet and have been together since WWII. They're like your poster elderly couple. Anyways, I actually was there shopping on a slow day and they asked me what my story was. I told them pretty much everything I've told you. They actually asked me if I'd like extra crops to sell at the Farmers Market and I could keep the profits. I was fairly shocked but immediately loved the idea. Of course, I enjoy the extra cash, but it isn't just that. I love going out to the farm. By the time I get there, everything is fairly quiet. It's peaceful. It gives me time to think and just take in nature. I know that for that hour or so, I am free to think, dream, and admire the beauty around me without being interrupted. I also enjoy seeing Mr. Roger and Mrs. Betty. They're almost like my adopted grandparent figures here. I like to be able to check in on them each week to see how they are and if they need anything. They have people, obviously, who help out at the farm, but with them being on up in age, it's nice to have an extra set of eyes to look in on them. Sometimes they'll even ask me over for dinner after I finish collecting-like they literally make sure I'm taken care of, so I have to do the same in return. They're a big reason I'm experiencing small successes up here. They encourage me weekly to do better than I think I can." I looked up at the Ferris wheel in front of us and the stars that were shining bright, thanking God for the two of them. Bucky noticed but didn't quite understand my silence.
"Would you like to ride?"
"I'm sorry, what?"

He motioned towards the Ferris wheel. "The Ferris wheel, would you like to ride?"

I couldn't help but chuckle, understanding what had perspired.

"Ahhh, I'm actually afraid of heights, sooo probably not."

Apparently, he found this to be funny as a sly smile crept across his face.

BUCKY POV
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No way! Afraid of heights? Of riding a Ferris wheel?"

"You're joking."

"No, I'm completely serious," she countered.

"Oh come on, you're telling me that you dropped everything, left pretty much everyone that you knew-all security-moved to a new place, and you're scared of a Ferris wheel, doll?"

I hadn't meant to add that last bit. From the look in her eyes, it had surprised both of us. I don't know how, but spending time with her, even though it had only been a couple hours, brought me back to feeling like I had before...before everything. She made me feel warm again. Around her, I felt more confident...more happy. I'm not constantly burdened by who I've been when I'm around her because she doesn't even hint that anything has happened. She treats me normally just like she would any other guy on the street.

"Well it isn't necessarily the wheel that scares me, it's more the falling and-slash-or crashing to my death..." she almost looked queasy as she said this, causing me to chuckle.

"Oh, come on, let's ride! You'll be fine, I promise. I won't let you fall."

She eyed me in careful consideration before hesitantly agreeing. There wasn't much of a line, but we had to wait for one round of riders before we could get on. She had gone silent, watching the wheel go round and round. I noticed a small bit of perspiration on her upper lip and at her temples, despite that it was in the low 40s. She was taking deep breaths and wringing her hands in the bottom of her sweater as the wheel halted and it was our turn to get on. Just before the attendant opened the gate, I couldn't help but nudge her left arm with my right, "you'll be okay, I promise." She looked at me helplessly, and despite my insistence of "ladies first," she made me step up first.

As the attendant secured us in the seat, she wouldn't do anything but look straight ahead. As soon as we started moving, her eyes screwed shut, so tight that her nose was scrunched up. I tried my best not to laugh at her. Thankfully she couldn't see me.

"Stop laughing at me."

"What?? How did you even know!?"

"I may not be able to see, but I can feel the seat bouncing from your laughter."

Her answer caused me to not be able to contain my laughter any longer. It burst forth into the cold night air, like a fog coming in off of the sea in a rush.
"(Y/n), we're close to the top, please open your eyes. It's beautiful all lit up. You can see the shadows of the mountains in the distance. You don't want to miss this."

She peeked her eyes open, similar to a child pretending to close their eyes in the bad part of a movie.

"(Y/n), it's okay. I know you can't see anything like that. You don't wanna miss it."

She took another deep breath before opening her eyes, slowly but fully, this time. She had just gotten her eyes open when they stopped the Ferris wheel as our car had just reached the top.

The car jolted to the stop and her right hand flew down to my left, gripping it tight.

It was now my turn to freeze. Did she just grab my hand, feel the glacial metal, and grip tighter? I was so shocked that my metal hand remained as limp as possible in hers. I looked at her, but she didn't seem to notice my distress. How did she act like this wintry, mindless, death-inducing machine was normal? How was she not freaked out? How was she completely calm about Hydra's addition, but fearful at the top of a Ferris wheel? ....Wait, why am I freaking out? If she's so willing and ready to accept me like this, why am I sitting here freaking out and confused? I don't receive this kindness often. My composure softened at the realization and I gave into the warmth of her hand that my mind imagined was there. I allowed my hand to tighten, only slightly, around hers so as not to harm her.

"See, everything's fine. You're fine. We'll move in a minute."

I looked around for something to try and distract her with.

"So what direction is that farm in?"

"Ahh, it's....ahh...over there," she attempted in between shortened breaths. She took a slow, deep breath, in and out, before continuing. "Ah, yeh, do you see that church steeple? You keep going about a mile farther. Then do you see where it is a little brighter a little farther down?"

I nodded to let her know I was following.

"You turn left there and go for another two miles, so it's dark and you can't really see out there....but that's where it is...."

We sat in silence for a moment, she had seemed to calm down more, apparently noticing she had grabbed my hand finally.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she started to pull away.

"It's okay with me...rather nice actually."

She looked at me and the worry left her eyes. She exposed a small smile and simply replied "okay," before giving my hand a small squeeze again.

READER POV

I hadn't even realized I had grabbed his hand. I'm not even sure why that was my gut reaction. He seemed to have handled it well, though. That was a good sign. It was another sign that he had or was in the process of leaving the person Hydra had made him behind. In fact, he had called me "doll," which definitely wasn't what people said these days. Hopefully, he was finding his old self again. He had smiled when I said "okay," the smile even reached his eyes and he looked content with life-no walls, no suffering, no mental battles-just content.
The car jolted again, worse than before, as the wheel began to move. Immediately my left hand reached for his arm and my face went into his shoulder to hide me from the crushing death that was sure to ensue.

Instead, I felt his hand run over my hair comfortingly before dropping his cheek against the top of my head. This was the first time since I had moved here that I felt completely normal, fully natural, instead of a little bit like a fish out of the water.

It had become a little difficult to breathe so I went to shift my head so that it remained on his shoulder but so that I was looking out into the night. He lifted his head, but after realizing I was readjusting, returned to his former position.

When we were almost down, I heard a loud and manly "awwwww," and I immediately recognized it as Steve's voice. Bucky lifted his head from mine and seemed to scoot away the tiniest bit. I let go of his hand, sensing his nervousness and sat up.

"Wow! I should get a snack more often," Steve seemed to be loving the way he had found us, but Bucky didn't appear very receptive of Steve's excitement. This apparent fact couldn't help but dampen my mood. I tried to hide it, but by the way that Steve's face quickly fell, he clearly noticed.

"Ah, guys, I hate to jet but ahm, I've actually got to work in the morning so I probably need to be heading on home." I checked my watch for emphasis.

Steve's forehead scrunched, "the Farmer's Market is open on Sundays?"

"There are some that do open on Sundays in some locations but not here. I have my other job in the morning. I work at a coffee shop over in the Wyndhurst district....I really appreciate the invite tonight, though. I had a nice time...."

"You're going to walk home alone?" Steve asked surprised, but I couldn't help but feel it was also a subtle hint to Bucky.

"Yeh," I waved my hand as if it was nothing, "it's only a few blocks and it's Lynchburg, not much to worry about here. It's fairly safe."

"You sure?" Steve pressed.

"Positive," I tried to smile reassuringly before my eyes flickered to Bucky and back again. Bucky wouldn't even look at me. "I'll see you guys around. Have a great night. Thanks again..."

BUCKY POV

"Buck, what the hell was that," Steve jumped my case as soon as (y/n) was out of earshot.

"What," I growled back.

"Buck, look," he was trying to keep his annoyance in check, "it's obvious you have feelings for her. Why are you holding back? It's not like she's not interested either. You guys looked pretty coz-"

"Steve, drop it." I had to walk away as my anger was rushing up to the surface.

He followed me to the outskirts of the carnival, letting me get away from people, but I knew he wasn't going to let this go that easily.
"I'm not going to drop it, Bucky. I haven't seen you this happy since 1941 and don't try and deny it. Why are you pushing her away?"

"Why am I pushing her away? Why am I pushing her away?" I had turned quickly on him, but as usual, he was always ready. "I could never forgive myself if I hurt her. That's why! You know as well as anyone else that I can't forgive myself for a lot of things, but dammit, none of that would come close to how much I'd hate myself if I ever hurt her. She's this amazing, happy, and considerate person. She deserves someone who isn't half crazy, bipolar, and, oh I don't know, someone who doesn't have a murder weapon attached to them, Steve!"

What is he even thinking?

"Buck, stop! We've talked about this. It wasn't you! You would never have hurt anyone. You can't help what Hydra did. All those things weren't you, and yes, I know you still did them. I get that, but you've got to try and move on. I have."

"That's so gr-," I began sarcastically, but he wouldn't allow it.

"Don't interrupt me. You know how I feel about it. I can tell you how she feels about it too. She knows, Bucky. She knows who you are. She knows what's happened in the past, or at the very least, she has an idea. She was cuddled into your arm, for heaven's sake, Buck-yes, your arm! The one you refer to as a "murder weapon." She was holding that same hand with care and affection, was she not?"

I couldn't help but glare at him and then through gritted teeth respond, "Steve. I know you're trying to help..but don't. Just leave this alone, please."

"Give me one good reason, Buck. If you can give me one good reason, I'll let it go."

I took a deep breath before giving the only reason I knew he'd accept, "...because...I'm asking you to do this because you're my friend."

Steve just stared at me and nodded reluctantly, once.

READER POV

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Five a.m. came way too early. I got up and dressed, grabbed my apron and a scarf before heading out the door. I hated morning shifts normally, but I felt like the extra time this morning would be nice to think. It wouldn't be like the evenings on the farm, but with being the only opener this morning, the time setting things up and out in the shop would be peaceful.

I set out the pastries Maggie had made the night before, got the coffee going, and made sure everything was set. By the time I had finished, it was time to open at seven. I waited about 15 minutes before the regulars started strolling in. Things had slowed down from the rush due to most church services getting started up when the bell above the door rang and I looked up to greet the new customer. "Good morn-"

Steve gave me a friendly and understanding smile to greet my surprise.

"Steve, hey."

He didn't miss my eyes flitting around him in search of Bucky, which seemed to make his smile grow, but a sliver of happiness left his eyes instantly.
"He's not with me, sorry."

I attempted to shrug and shake my head as if that wasn't what I was checking for, but he knew the truth, and I knew he knew it...but being my stubborn self, I refused to accept it.

"I just thought the door didn't shut completely behind you was all," I attempted to shrug it off. "So how are you? Can I get you something?"

"Ahh, actually, if I'm being honest, I didn't go to five different coffee shops this morning, just to find this one to get coffee..."

"What?" I asked, knowing shock could be heard in my tone.

"If I'm being honest, I didn't go to-"

"I heard you the first time, smartass. I just, can't believe you did that...Is everything okay?"

"Yeh....well, no. ...Look," he took a deep breath before continuing, "I hope I didn't embarrass you or anything last night. I, uh, I was just... I haven't seen Bucky this happy....well, in a very long time. He's my friend and he deserves something good in his life after all of the bad he's been through. I just...I can see that you make him happy and...I can't help but feel like...maybe those feelings are reciprocated, at least a little bit, on your end?"

"Ahh....look, Steve." Why did he have to put me in this situation? I'm already not the most open person. Sharing, or even denying my feelings, in this case, made me nervous. "I...Bucky just doesn't seem like he, well. I don't know, maybe you're reading things wrong. I don't mean that offensively, but maybe you are."

"Look, (y/n), I know that Bucky can be a little...moody...but he has a good heart. He's a good guy, and although he doesn't always do the best job in showing it, he cares about you. I know you guys just met, but I haven't seen him like this in...well, ever, actually."

"I don't know, Stev-.

"(y/n), he's not going to forgive me for this, but...he told me last night how much he cares about you. The only reason he's putting up walls is because he cares about you. He's afraid he's going to hurt you. He doesn't trust himself yet. He blames himself for everything that has happened in his past that Hydra used him for. He does like and care for you, quite a bit."

"Steve...." I looked at the ground and shook my head slightly, trying to decide what to do or say.

"Okay, okay, I can't make you believe me or make you change your mind, but please at least think about it. Can you at least promise me you'll think about it?"

I rolled my eyes and sighed deeply, "fine, I'll think about it."

"Good. I will take a coffee if you don't mind-just the plain stuff, please."

Grateful for some lightness in the air thanks to Steve's comment, I chucked and poured him a cup to go, thoughts of his words and Bucky clouding my mind as he exited the shop.
BUCKY POV
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Steve had planned to stay the entire next week, but got a call from Tony about a mission on Wednesday and headed out early.

Part of me was ready to see him go, mainly because I was tired of him bugging me and making small, sly comments, or insinuations, to me about (y/n). Part of me didn't want him to go because he was about all I had in the world and I'd be back to sitting in my apartment alone.

On Friday I decided to get out. I got in my Jeep and just decided to drive, anywhere, until I was tired of it. This fancy phone Steve was teaching me how to use could get me back to where I wanted if I got lost. I headed out of downtown and drove. I found myself soon on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The trees had changed but hadn't yet become bare. I couldn't help but admire the colors. It made me wonder what my favorite season had been. I tried to think back and recall. I thought back to the Spring. I seem to recall Steve and I working on a beat up Crosby I had bought second hand after my first paycheck from the military.

"Buck, you know I know nothing about cars," Steve had said to me as I had tricked him into stopping by.

"Well then, you can learn! One day some doll is going to sweep you off of your feet. You don't want to be having a great night when your vehicle breaks down and you don't know how to fix it, do you?"

He rolled his eyes at me but took off the button down so he wouldn't get grease on it. We worked on the car all day before heading out on another double.

When thinking back on this, I remembered how it hadn't been warm enough for the beach, but one could walk around comfortably in a tee.

This thought led me to summer. I went to the beach often, I think, as well as Coney Island. Steve and I were together for most of the trips. Sometimes it'd just be a female friend and myself, but that was mostly at the beach. It seems like I enjoyed the beach, or at least people watching, females specifically, on the beach. It seems like....yeh, Steve didn't care for the beach that much. He didn't like or care for being shirtless. I tried to convince him that it wasn't a big deal, that it didn't matter, but that never seemed to work. Ever since he became a super soldier, that doesn't seem to be much of an issue anymore.

I remember...not liking winter...maybe that was a foreshadowing in my life. I've always disliked winter, but now I loathe it entirely.

Fall....Fall, I must have liked. If I didn't like it then, I at least enjoy it now.

I had been driving a while and realized how long it was going to take me to get back to Lynchburg so at the next pull off I turned around and went back the way I had come.

As I came back into the Lynchburg city limits, I recognized that I was near the coffee shop Steve and I had visited after taking in the film last week. I'm not a big coffee drinker, but something warm in my system felt like the right thing right about now. I pulled off the road, parked, and headed for The Muse.
The week had somehow gone by slow and quick all at the same time. It seemed like I hadn't had a ton of time to just breathe. I had worked every day, with doubles on Tuesday, Wednesday, and now Friday. I was exhausted. I had three papers this week which had required quite a bit of research. Typically papers didn't give me much of an issue with my background being in English, but normally I didn't have Steve Rogers' words hanging in my mind, me milking them over and over. I hadn't been able to focus like I would have liked because my mind chose the majority of the week to think about Bucky and what Steve had said about him...and how he cared for me. I had been so out of it that Mags had approached me earlier in the day.

"(Y/n), is everything okay? You've seemed, well, quite out of it this week. Your mind seems to be anywhere but here. I'm not upset, just worried."

I attempted a reassuring smile. "I know, I know. I'm so sorry. I just, well had some things happen this weekend and I'm fine...just have a bit on my mind. I hope it hasn't affected my work too much...."

"No! Not at all, I'm just concerned. If there's anything I can do, please let me know."

"Thanks, Mags. I really appreciate it."

She nodded, giving me a mother hen look, before turning to leave. She was going home for the evening, leaving me to close.

Surprisingly, it hadn't been that busy, for a Friday evening. Granted, the largest college in town was having a big to-do tonight so that was probably where many of the people were. I tried to go ahead and get a lot of things done for closing, despite that there were still three hours left before the shop closed. I was trying to keep my thoughts distracted from Bucky or Steve's words. It worked for a while, that is until I finished everything that had to be done other than washing the coffee makers and putting unsold food back in the fridge.

I walked back around the counter, took a deep breath to exhale in exasperation, and plopped my elbows on the counter in frustration.

Why did Steve have to get in this? Why did he have to be obnoxious at the carnival? Bucky and I had been having such a nice time, or at least I had been. Bucky seemed to as well, though. I'm fairly certain I hadn't imagined it. Don't get me wrong, I know Steve was only trying to help, but maybe if he wasn't pushing Bucky, Bucky would be able to move at his own pace and be more successful instead of closing in on himself. Although I'm not certain, I imagine Bucky suffers from some form of PTSD, like anyone in his position should. Pushing him like Steve seems to doesn't seem to do anything but bring out the avoidance symptoms that Bucky buries. I realize Steve cares about him. He wants to help, I just wish he'd go about it differently. Whatever, he's known Bucky longer, maybe he knows what's best. I hope so. I just, I can't help but love...no, like, appreciate, not love, I don't even know him...anyways, like, not love, the Bucky I see when he lets his guard down. His eyes brighten and his whole body changes. He isn't tight and rigid like he's still frozen in cryo, he seems free, like a normal...we'll say twenty-something like he hasn't experienced an immense amount of bad shit in his life. He...

The bell rang, pulling me from my thoughts, I quickly remembered what Mags had said earlier and tried to pull myself back completely to the moment.

"Good evening, welcome the The Muse!" I slapped a semi-convincing smile as I looked towards the...
customer before me, my eyes widened and the smile left.

"Bucky?"

He looked up, surprised to hear his name and apparently my voice attached to it. I didn't know what to do, how to act. Did he know I worked here? No, no, of course not, not according to the surprise on his face, but that disappeared because a smile quickly spread across his face when recognition set in. I couldn't help but return a smile to the Greek god-like face staring at me.

BUCKY POV
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What was she doing here? Wait, this must be the other job she works, the coffee shop. What's this place called? The Muse. Wait. Hers is the shade of red I saw walking out when Steve and I came last time. Had she known we'd been here. She doesn't look happy to see me. Who could blame her? I treated her terribly after Steve had ruined the moment we had been having on the Ferris wheel. I still can't be anything but ecstatic to see her, even in her work uniform, one can't deny how gorgeous she is. Those emerald eyes mixed with that shade of red hair, all natural it seemed, her beauty still amazes me every time I see her. I couldn't hold down my smile. She's smiling back, maybe she was just surprised like me? Maybe so, she's still smiling.

"How are you, Bucky," she asked me timidly, probably unaware what mood I may be in.

"I'm ah, actually great...now. How are you?"

I noticed her eyes brightened as if the sun had run across of them at my hinting that seeing her made me better than I was.

"I'm well. Thank you for asking.....what can I get for you?"

"Ah, what's your suggestion?"

"Well, that depends. Do you want coffee? If so, hot or iced? Do you want tea? Are you in search of food? Dessert or real food?"

My stomach, making an atrocious and obnoxiously loud rumble, seemed to answer for me. I realized I hadn't eaten all day.

"I'm going to take that as hungry for real food, whether you like it or not." She laughed at me as she said this, noticing my embarrassment. "In that case, it'll depend on what you like, the Turkey BLT is one of my favorites. I also love a Chicken Caesar Wrap, I can also whip up a grilled cheese if you'd like something hot. Additionally, we have prepackaged soups I can heat for you if you want something warm, but not a grilled cheese."

"Wow. I don't think I've had a grilled cheese in...." I tried to think about how many years, but they were too many so I continued with, "well, in a very long time."

She gave me a sympathetic but understanding smile, perceptive as ever, knowing why I had hesitated. "Grilled cheese it is! Something to drink with it? We have Coke products."

"Sure, a Coke would be great."

She gave me another smile, grabbing a coke from below the counter, handing it to me, then immediately starting on the sandwich.
"So...you're the only person working?" I attempted small talk as she made the sandwich.

"Yeh, tonight anyways. I worked a double today and I'm closing tonight, so I have a couple more hours. A couple more hours of boredom really, considering my mind was so busy I tried to fill my time by going ahead and getting starting on closing chores, and accidentally completed pretty much every task I needed for closing." She signed deeply at the end, seeming frustrated with herself.

"Is it safe for you to close up by yourself?"

"I mean, yeh. Years ago, I worked at a Starbucks back home and we always had to have two people close for safety precautions, but the majority of the time, you don't have a ton to worry about here. Sure, there's a risk of danger wherever, but in this district especially, things are pretty quiet by eight every night. Speaking of, what brings you here? If you don't mind me asking, that is?

She was trying to be careful with me, not overly careful, but she clearly didn't want me to revert back one of my poorer mood swings.

"Well, actually I was just coming home. I've been driving all day, exploring. I haven't even eaten, which I've just realized. I happened to realize where I was and stopped. I've only been here once...." I don't know whether to tell her I've been since I met her. I don't want her to think I'm stalking her or anything.

"Oh really? It's a great place, right? I mean, I guess I'm a little biased. When did you come? I haven't seen you here before." She asked this while plating my sandwich and placing it on the counter.

"It looks great, how much do I owe you?"

"Second-time visitors get an 'on the house' sandwich and soda."

I eyed her carefully. She could be telling the truth, but the side of her mouth twitched and I knew she was lying.

"You're actually a pretty good liar. The government should recruit you."

"Thank you... I think," she finished, laughing at my choice of response.

"You're going to have to stop with this free stuff kind of thing, though. Not only am I going to outgrow my clothes, but I'll follow you around like a lost animal."

She laughed loud enough to fill the empty shop, causing me to join in, enjoying the reprieve from my normal inner discord.

"Easy there, creeper. It's called being nice...being a friend."

"...I have so few of those that I've forgotten what that's like..."

Her bright eyes lost some light taking in that I said. I hadn't meant to say it aloud, but I had and I couldn't take it back. There was a short moment of silence before she surprised me by saying:

"I haven't eaten anything since breakfast, how annoying would it be as a customer for me, the waitstaff to sit down and eat with you? I'm famished now that I think about it."

"That wouldn't annoy me at all, that'd be great actually."

"Good," she smiled at me, but it didn't reach her eyes. She was still not over my previous friend comment but was pleased, it seemed, nonetheless, "I'm going to heat myself up some soup really
"Is there anywhere, in particular, I should sit?"

"Well, preferably somewhere with two seats." She giggled as I shot her a "seriously?" look. "In all seriousness, preferably downstairs so if a customer does come in I can hop right behind the counter."

There was a two-seater table and a four-seater table by the condiment bar which was beside the entrance/exit of the counter. The two-seater seemed more intimate, which made me initially want to sit there, but the four-seater had a better view of both entries into the shop in case someone came in so I sat there and waited.

I bit into the sandwich just before she came around the corner "oh-my-...God, this sandwich is amazing."

"It's a grilled cheese," she stated plainly, somewhat questioning my enthusiasm.

"Well, you must have put something extra in it because I haven't tasted anything this fantastic in a long time."

"It probably doesn't help that it's been so long since you've had one."

"I suppose there is some truth to that, but don't sell yourself short either."

She smiled and nodded appreciatively, before beginning to eat her soup.

"So you drove all day today? Discover anything new?"

**READER POV**

We discussed our weeks as we ate. I can't remember the number of times Bucky repeated how good the sandwich was. I just continued to shake my head and laugh at him every time. We talked for a good hour before there was a moment of silence when I brought a couple of coffees over.

"...I can't avoid this forever..." he said, taking a deep breath. I was surprised and wasn't sure what he was going to say, so I remained quiet as I looked at him quizzically. "I want to apologize for my behavior last Saturday. I, ah...well, I shouldn't have treated you like that. You didn't deserve it at all. I don't have an explanation or excuse. All I have is an apology."

He had looked down at the table for the last half of the apology, shame covering his face, but at the end he looked up through his eyelashes, causing my breath to catch in my throat, frozen by the conflicted blue iris'.

"Bucky...I appreciate your apology. I really do, but you don't have to do that. If you're uncomfortable with something, then you have every right to react as such. I didn't mean to be too...forward."

"I wasn't uncomfortable. No, not at all. You did nothing wrong, (y/n). I was the one who was rude. I wouldn't even look at you. Steve didn't have to bug me about it, I already knew. I knew I was being rude. I just don't want to....I don't want to hurt you, in any way..."

His confession broke my heart and mended it immediately if that's somehow possible. "Bucky," my
heart started to beat so that I could feel it on the outside of my chest, as I put my hand over his, "I trust you not to do that. I believe you're good...kind. If I can trust you, you have to be able to trust yourself too."

Before he could respond a group of college kids came in at the last minute before closing. I squeezed his hand before I got up to get their order. The moment had passed, I realized, between Bucky and I when he got up from where he sat and headed for the door.

"Thank you for the dinner and conversation." There was that wall again. "I'll see you around?"

I attempted a smile but it didn't come out as convincing as I would have liked. He simply nodded and headed out the door.

Thankfully, it was time to shut down things as he left. I went to lock the side door and as I turned around to approach the front door, Bucky was back in the shop. I hadn't even heard him come in.

"Bucky," I said automatically taking a step back out of shock and intimidation. The expression he was wearing confused me. Before I could think, he was in front of me, taking my face in his hands and his lips met mine. Relief and excitement coursed through my body as his scruff tickled my nose and chin. I didn't resist the kiss or the elation that came with it.

Behind my closed lids, it was like watching the sun rise over the mountains on a crisp, Fall morning. You can almost see the chill of dark blue, remaining at the tip top of the mountains before it fades into a brighter blue, the realization of the sun appearing behind the mountains. The blue transitioning to a light french rose before finally settling into the warmth of a golden orange glow.

By the time our lips parted, I could see and feel nothing but that glow. When I opened my eyes, he was looking at me fixedly, watching me soak in what had just occurred.

I could think of nothing to say but, "you sure didn't forget how to kiss," still mesmerized by his lips.
Then and Now

That night I went home walking on air...despite that I drove. Bucky had gotten my number...or rather, I put it in his phone because he was still learning how to use it. He promised he'd call the next day but asked me to please let him know I got home safely. As soon as I walked into the door of my apartment, I leaned against the closed door, took a deep breath through smiling lips, and pulled my phone from my bag.

Hey, I made it home.

I had to wait eight minutes, scared something had happened, or he had changed his mind before I got a message back:

Good. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Sweet dreams, doll.

I had to think a moment how to respond back? He was still typing. Do I respond back? Do I tell him 'sweet dreams'? Do I say thank you? Do I ask if he got home? I finally settled with simple, not overly committed when he hadn't sent anything, maybe it was a glitch.

Okay. Good night, Bucky.

As soon as my message sent, another message came through:

Sorry, it takes me so long to type.

This made me laugh out loud, literally.

That's okay! I'll try to remember to call from now on.

I had noticed he was typing again after I sent my message.

Either is fine with me. I'll let you go now, I know you're tired. Sleep well.

I didn't think I'd be able to sleep because of still flying high from the perfect kiss, but as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was gone.

When I awoke, my phone had a message from Bucky.

Good morning. :) <--- I learned how to send a smile through text!

I smiled so big that my cheeks hurt, before biting my lip and smiling like I did when I was really happy. I started to text him back but decided to call instead, attempting to shake the grogginess from my voice first, as he answered.

"Hello?"

"Good morning to you, too! I'm so proud of you learning how to make a smiley face!"

"Don't patronize me," he replied lightly.

"I swear, I'm not! I really am proud of you!"

"I could have just text you, you didn't have to call. You prefer text, right?"
"I don't mind, Bucky. Most of the time, yes, I prefer text, but I told you last night I'd call, so here we are."

He laughed before continuing to reassure me that texting would be okay if I preferred it.

"It may take me four months to type one message, and I might miss the sound of your voice, but I'd do it for you."

I couldn't help but bite the inside of my jaw to keep the growing smile out of my voice.

"Okay, Bucky, I'll keep it in mind."

"So...what are you up to today? I'm guessing you aren't going to the farmer's market."

"No, with working every day this week and having school work to complete, I didn't have time to go to the farm to pick up anything. I'll probably just call and check in on Roger and Betty today. They knew I wouldn't be coming this week, but I like to check in on them all the same. I'll probably spend most of my day trying to finish my last paper of the week. I've got some more research and eight more pages to write and since I have to work tomorrow, there won't be a ton of time to work on it."

"Oh, I see. So really busy, huh?"

"I feel like my life is nothing but busy if I'm being honest. What about you? Do you have any fun and exciting plans?"

"No, not really. I'll probably just hang around my apartment."

"You aren't going to the farmer's market today?"

"Probably not...there won't be...anyone there...I want to see."

I felt my chest heat up and begin to spread up to my scalp, thank God Bucky couldn't see me.

"Well, ah, that's a shame..."

"Yeh, it is."

Silence fell between us as I debated what to do now. I hated the idea of him sitting in his apartment all alone. It had been clear Steve had left since they weren't attached at the hip.

"Well...I mean....if you'd like....I'm sure it'll be extremely boring, but if you wanted to, you're welcome to join me in a joyful day of writing a paper. I mean, if you would like some company in doing nothing?"

BUCKY POV
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I had been too nervous to ask her out directly so I asked what her plans were for the day. Busy. I should have known. Now, I can't ask her out, but I still wanted to somehow. As I was trying to think up something, she was inviting me!

"Wait, I'm sorry, what did you say," I asked, unsure I had heard correctly.

"I mean, don't get me wrong. It'll be really boring with me just sitting researching and writing, but you're welcome to watch tv or read, or...I don't know, play solitaire or something. Just so we have someone around and don't sit in our apartments alone? It's only if you'd want to. I know it's boring,
so please don't feel obligated or anything."

"No, that'd be great, I'd lo-..." I've got to calm down, I don't want to sound too overeager and half crazy. "I'd like that. It beats sitting in my apartment alone. If you're sure that's okay."

She hesitated for the briefest moment, for such a short time that if I hadn't been trained in expert conversation analysis, I probably wouldn't have picked up on it.

"Yeh, it's okay, Bucky, it'll be nice to have another body in here. Wow, I definitely didn't mean to sound like a serial killer right then."

I couldn't help but laugh because it had sounded a little homicidal, but the mistake was cute.

"You're sure you're okay with that...and that you won't kill me?"

She joined me in laughing, but I could almost hear her rolling her eyes as she said "oh, hush before I throw a plum at your head. Yes, I'm okay with it. Besides, I enjoy your company." Her voice had changed from joking to complete earnestness, catching me off guard but making me smile nonetheless.

"Okay then. Ahhh, sooo.."

Helping me out she said "I've actually got to get out of bed and straighten up a little. Do you want to say meet here about 11:30?"

"Yeh, that'll be great. Why don't I pick up something for us to have for lunch?"

"You're more than welcome to bring something over for you. I'll probably just eat a bowl of cereal or something."

It was clear, despite that she was trying to conceal it, that she didn't want cereal. She probably was running tight on cash, it sure seemed that way by the number of hours she worked. While Lynchburg may not be the most expensive city to live in, it wasn't cheap by any means.

"(Y/n), I'll bring something for the both of us. What would you like?"

"You really don't have to..."

"(Y/n)."

"Fine. I really don't care, to be honest. Pizza would be good. Chinese would be good. I'm always down for Filipino. Moe's would be good. A sub sounds good too. Ohhh, I'm so hungry, everything sounds good. I'm going to make coffee to hold me over."

I heard covers rustling as I'm assuming she was getting up to make coffee.

"I have not had Chinese in a long time..."

"Chinese sounds great."

"Great. Have any particular dish you like best?"

"Surprise me."

"Okay, I can do that. It's a date."
As soon as I hung up the phone, every ounce of motivation in the world came to me. I started running around my apartment, who thought it was possible to run around such a small apartment, cleaning like Mary Poppins on crack. Luckily, it wasn't in terrible shape as I had cleaned the past weekend, but clothes and dishes were strewn throughout the apartment from a week of work, school, and not much sleep.

I finally got everything fixed as much as I could be content with about 11, so I rushed through a shower, drying my hair, and throwing on simple base makeup. I was just going to sit around all day, whether Bucky was there or not, it'd be dumb to get all fixed up for that...besides he had seen me last night and it couldn't get much worse than that.

At 11, I got a text:

Hey, I just got to the restaurant. I never got your address.

I text him back the address, apologizing for not remembering to tell him before, but then he called me.

"Midpoint Apartments? 601? That's where you live?"

I looked at the ceiling in confusion, a habit I had never been able to break. "...Yeh..." wasn't that what I just sent?

"Beside the James River?"

"....Yes...."

"I live above you in 701!!!"

I couldn't help but physically jolt backward like I had been pushed.

"What? I didn't think anyone lived above me, I never hear a peep." Then, of course, I realized, if Bucky did, in fact, live above me, that'd make perfect sense. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm positive! I can't believe we're neighbors!"

"Me either." I didn't know how I felt about that, living in such close quarters. I'm not sure why I even felt strange about it, maybe it's just surprising. He clearly heard the way my voice wasn't thrilled like his, so he made sure to tone his excitement down before he said:

"I'll be back shortly. Last chance for food choices."

"I'm good with whatever as long as it isn't like duck fetus or something," I didn't want to offend him with my mood concerning the news.

He laughed thankfully, saying "okay, see you soon," before ending the call.

At 11:30 on the dot, there was a knock on the door.

BUCKY POV
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I had gotten back to the apartment 10 minutes earlier than planned. The smart thing to do would have
been to go back up to my apartment and wait, but I was too nervous. This was my first "date," if I could even really call it that, since 1943. Instead of making the logical decision to wait at my apartment, I stood outside of her door, off to the side in case she looked through the peephole until 11:30. I took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

It took her a moment to answer, but when she did, she was smiling nervously as she said hello...at least I wasn't the only nervous one. I lifted up the food,

"...so, may I come in?"

She took her hand and slapped it to her forehead.

"Crap, yes! I'm sorry. My mind, ahh, is kinda gone...clearly." She stepped back and opened the door to its full extent so that I could walk in with arms full of food.

As she closed the door behind me, I heard her ask, "we're the only two eating, right? There isn't a party happening at my apartment with tons of people coming, correct? It looks like you brought enough food to feed an army."

She motioned towards the kitchen counter so I knew where to put the food as I chuckled at her reaction.

"I wanted to make sure you had plenty of options to choose from, in case there were things you didn't like. Plus, like I said, it's been quite a while and I was a little excited."

"Gotcha," she grinned at me. "Well, I hope you know you're going to be taking quite a bit of this home with you....good gracious, these bags are never ending," she said as she emptied one bag and I the other. "Are you secretly Mary Poppins?"

"Am I what?"

"What you're going to have to watch very soon! It's a movie with Julie Andrews-who legit is cutthroat AH-MAZING-one of my favorite people in the world, where she nannies these two British children and she has like 'magic' powers, or whatever. It's wonderful! I adored the movie growing up. I still do actually. I stayed with my grandmother pretty much every day starting from when I was six weeks old and she raised me on a ton of older films, like Shirley Temple, Dick Van Dyke, all the good stuff so to speak."

"Sounds....interesting." I definitely didn't want to offend her, but I was unsure about all of it honestly, so I gave the best answer I could. It didn't seem to bother her, thankfully, as she walked around me to the cabinet for dishes.

"I have water, sweet tea, and Dr. Pepper." She opened up the fridge to show me. I couldn't but notice her fridge was about bare, similar to my own. "I probably should have mentioned that ahead of time so if you didn't like anything I have you could have picked something up..."

"That's okay, if I didn't want any of that, I could just walk upstairs..."

"Oh, yeh, I forgot about that, I guess that's true." It was obvious that she still didn't know how comfortable she was with that fact. Note to self: don't bring it up again.

"...but this whole sweet tea thing does sound interesting."

She smiled at this. "I feel silly asking this, but have you ever had sweet tea before?"
"Honestly, I don't know. I can't remember. Since I've been out of cryo, I know I haven't. I'm looking forward to it."

"Well, if I'm being honest, I don't drink it quite as sweet as a lot of people from the South like it. I can't do too sweet anymore, so maybe it won't be too sweet for you either, or for all I know, you may want it sweeter. I'll pour you a glass. So, what all types of food do we have today, Mr. Barnes?"

"Well, Ms. (y/n), we have chicken chow mein, lo mein, sesame chicken, sweet and sour chicken, fried pork, shrimp fried rice, steamed rice, and egg rolls. I tried to cover all bases."

"I think you covered all bases near and far, but I appreciate your consideration." She pulled out serving utensils for everything, plus some to eat with, plates and poured two glasses of tea.

We fixed our plates full, realizing how hungry we were, and I followed her to the couch. I sat on the opposite side from her, wanting to not make her uncomfortable or come on too strong. We quickly fell into light conversation, discussing the food and the upcoming week. We both ate quickly and were full accordingly.

She got up to clean the food up so I followed her, wanting to make sure I made myself useful.

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Bucky was definitely not from this time. At just the hint of me doing something, he was right behind me, ready to assist. He helped me clean up the massive amount of food he had gotten for us. After getting everything back to normal, other than my fridge actually having a massive amount of food in it, I couldn't help but feel bad about beginning to work on my paper.

"Well...I guess I better get back to my paper...ahhh, I have Netflix and movies, but that's the extent of it. I also have a little library over by the window with all different types of books. I will warn you, they're mostly young adult books because of my teaching days, I always stocked up for my student library."

He stood in front of me, contemplating for a moment, then said, "I think I'll look for something to read, besides, I don't want to bother you with noise."

"Oh, well if you'd prefer to watch something, don't worry about the noise. I write with music. I can't do the whole silence thing. However, if you'd still like to find something to read, you're completely welcome to do that too."

"I think I'll stick with reading. Do you have any suggestions, though?"

"Hmm, let's see." I walked over to my small library, hearing Bucky's footsteps close behind. I browsed the spines, trying to figure out something he might like. "Well, do you have any preference of something you'd like to read?"

"Not really, sorry I'm of no assistance."

"That's fine. Hmmm, well, these are fairly new, Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children. I really enjoyed them. This guy was told stories by his grandfather growing up about this place he went to escape persecution in Europe during World War Two. The grandfather dies and the boy travels to discover for himself that the stories were true. I don't want to give too much away, but I liked them. Then there's...more classic, To Kill a Mockingbird, that's a good one too. The main character is a young girl who is living in a time of racial segregation and blatant racism in the South, seemingly more so than now, and her father is a lawyer. He ends up defending a black gentleman who is
accused of raping a white girl. It's a moving story and really sets the moral standard high. Ooh! Kindred is awesome as well! I read it in college. It is a book that involves time travel, for lack of a better term, from modern times to slavery times. I absolutely loved it. I swear I have more books than just books relating to history. I do enjoy history, though, fiction and nonfiction alike."

His eyes landed on a book and he began to pull it from the shelf. "What about this one? Rebecca?"

"...That's actually my favorite book. Hence the worn pages. It's a Gothic novel by Daphne du Maurier. It's the book that actually made me enjoy reading when I was in seventh grade."

"Sounds like my choice is made then."

"Really??" He nodded. "Well, honestly, it took me a small bit of time to get into it initially, so please try to keep an open mind."

"I can do that."

I couldn't help but smile at him.

"You're welcome to station yourself wherever. I'll be over there at my desk, at least for now. I'll put my earbuds in so I don't disturb you. I won't have it loud, though, so if you need anything just let me know. Make yourself at home."

The afternoon passed quickly. I heard Bucky shuffle back and forth to the fridge a couple of times (I could see the reflection in the window), as well as repositioning on the couch to get comfortable, but other than that, things were quite still and silent.

Around five, Bucky made me about jump out of my skin. I was a conclusion away from being finished, when I heard the book slam shut and he angrily exclaims, "he's such a liar! There's no way he's that upset and angry over her going to a boathouse."

My head had turned so fast that the earbuds ripped out of my laptop and fell to the floor. He was looking up at the ceiling, clearly frustrated. I couldn't help but start to laugh at him.

"Soooooo, how's the book?" I couldn't help but ask him in a teasing and knowing voice.

"I just. I know he's lying! Maxim is shady! He's hiding something and I don't see how no one realizes it! Does he even love her? Like he has a fine way of showing it if he does."

"Soooo, that's a yes or a no?"

"I like the book. I do. It's just frustrating."

"Well you know it's good then if it evokes those emotions from you. It's moving you, to anger or frustration maybe, but it's moving you nonetheless. I'm really glad you like it."

"I'm sorry I interrupted your paper writing, I just couldn't contain it anymore."

"Bucky, it's completely fine. I'm almost finished anyway, thank God. My brain is almost complete mush at this point. Besides, like I said, I'm really happy you're getting into the book."

"Almost finished, huh? Well...maybe I should just head on back to my place so you can relax...."

I looked back at my computer to conceal the sadness I knew had entered my eyes at his suggestion.

"Yeh, I understand it's been boring here, especially today."
"Oh, no, (y/n), it's not that I'm bored. I'm not bored or disappointed in any way...other than maybe that these people can't see Maxim is shady as hell...I'm enjoying it here. It beats sitting in my apartment alone, that's for sure. I just don't...don't want to overstay my welcome, that's all."

"You're not overstaying your welcome, Bucky....you know what we could do!? After I finish, we could watch Mary Poppins! Oh my gosh, or Grease, or....anything really, I would imagine? ...I'm sorry that was completely rude of me."

"Don't worry about it, its true. I need a re-education. If you're willing to teach, I'm willing to learn." He flashed his pearly whites at me, with a wink attached.

"Oh, I'm definitely down. Making someone watch and listen to everything I like? Who wouldn't be up for it? Okay. Just let me type out this conclusion really quick and I'll be ready. It's what," I looked at my watch, "5:30 now? I should definitely be finished by 6."

Bucky nodded, but then his eyes lit up. "Hey, if you would like, I can heat up the Chinese from lunch, or if you'd like something else, I can run out, or call in, to grab something for dinner?"

"That'd be amazing actually. I normally have an afternoon snack but I was so focused on the paper, I'm quite hungry. Reheated Chinese sounds amazing! It was very tasty earlier."

"Great, I'll start on that while you finish."

He was so considerate. Seriously, who thinks about these things nowadays? I could feel my face beginning to widen into a smile before I couldn't hold onto what my heart and mind were yelling at me to say. "Thank you, Bucky. You're such a sweet and considerate person. Seriously, I know it may seem like nothing, but thank you."

He appeared somewhat shocked at my words, his cheeks turning slightly pink. He nodded and smiled a tight-lipped smile as he stepped around the kitchen counter.

I turned back to my paper, a little embarrassed myself and continued writing to the sounds of the fridge opening and closing, the microwave being turned on, as well as the filling of glasses with ice and drink. I was finished 15 minutes later, just as the food was ready.

"Finished!" I halfway sang and halfway yelled. "Well...other than proofreading, but I'll do that tomorrow after work," I finished as I got up and crossed to the middle of my living room.

"That was perfect timing."

"Tell me about it. So what shall we begin your education with? Should it be chronological? Genre-based? Actor or actress based? You tell me. I'm so excited for this!"

"Well... you said that Rebecca was your favorite book, so maybe we should start with your favorite film first and work from there?"

"That's going to be very difficult."

"What about Mary Poppins?"

"It's definitely one of my favorites. You sure that one's okay?"

"Yeh, let's start with that and then maybe Grease since you've mentioned that a couple of times since I met you as well."
A wide smile spread across my face. "I'm sorry about that, they're both just so good!"

"It's fine. I like to see you happy and excited. It looks good on you....if you get the movie ready, I'll fix you a plate. Do you want some of everything? I think we're out of egg rolls, though. Oh, and I should have asked first; I fixed you a glass of tea."

"I'm good with whatever you put on there and tea is fine with me."

I headed over to my DVD collection, turning the tv on, and setting everything up. When I turned around, Bucky had already placed a plate of food and drink at the end of the couch I had sat earlier. I hadn't even heard him move. There was that training showing through again. I noticed he was waiting for me to sit before he did so. Definitely not raised in this time, nope, nope, nope. I love it, though.

**BUCKY POV**

I could tell I had surprised her with having everything in place. I wasn't trying to be sneaky, it just happened after all of the training I had endured. In many ways, due to the length of time I had been living that way, it was more like my initial nature than what people called second nature.

After she came back to the couch and sat, I joined her. I had sat us at opposite ends of the couch again, but I definitely didn't sit as far as I had earlier. I sat down half in the middle of the couch, trying to pretend that I needed the extra room. Maybe it was my imagination, but she seemed to have been sitting closer as well.

"You ready?" She asked me this with one of the largest smiles I had seen on her. Her eyes were aglow like the morning sun coming over the horizon, almost blinding with anticipation.

"Let's do it! Yeh! Mary Poppins!"

She started laughing at me but hit play.

"I'll try not to sing along, by the way. Did I mention this was a musical?" She side-eyed me, completely making it obvious that she withheld this information on purpose.

"A musical is fine..." I grinned back.

She did her best not singing along, but it didn't stop her from mouthing every word. When they were speaking, her lips didn't part far, but she was mouthing every word silently and in perfect time. When the songs came on, she was more obvious, silently singing along with the actors and actresses on the screen. If I'm being honest, I watched her more than I did the film. As she watched, the stresses of being an adult, alone in a city, working multiple jobs, and attempting to support themselves melted away. She became child-like, full of joy, enchantment, and wonder. It was a beautiful transition to watch.

My thoughts were tossed away quickly as she surprised me by leaning over in excitement and slapping my knee.

"Oh my gosh! 'Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious! I choreographed part of this song for a musical I assisted in when I worked my first teaching job! It's lame, but do you mind if I try and remember it?"

"Not at all! I'd be happy to see it."

She stood up, moving the coffee table to make space, rewinding the film.
She executed it quickly and wonderfully, a little to my surprise. I wasn't surprised that she did it so well, but instead that she did it well when it was that complicated and had to be completed in such a short time frame. She was a little out of breath by the end and fell onto the couch beside me when the song went off, laying her head on the back of the couch.

"I'm getting too old for all that. I haven't done the choreography in years."

She didn't bother to move farther from me, nor did I want her too. She was getting tired, I could tell, she wasn't speaking with the movie anymore, but she still sang along silently, just without as much energy.

By the time the film was over, I was going to suggest calling it a night, but excitement caressed her voice once more.

"You ready for the lighting of Grease??" She started cackling, but when I didn't laugh she explained. "Sorry, it was really lame, but it has to do with the movie." She exchanged the DVDs nonetheless.

"I'm ready if you are." I didn't want her to feel pressured to watch it if she was ready to sleep.

"Yes! I was worried you were going to want to leave."

"No, I don't. I just want to make sure you get to bed when you'd like. What time do you work tomorrow?"

"Oh, I'm good. I've just gotten my second wind! I have to be there at 11. I've got a short shift tomorrow, so it's not a big deal at all."

She didn't let me object, simply hit play, smiling coyly at me.

She sang the intro song this time and while I'm not sure why I was surprised, she could sing beautifully. At times, she definitely sang worse on purpose, but she actually had a good voice. I wish she had sung more during the first film now.

When the film started, however, she simply watched. She was still next to me. After a few scenes, she stood up to go to the other end of the couch, but before I expected her to sit, she asked if I was cold. After I shook my head "no," I realized she was grabbing a blanket and then returned to my side, covering herself, and pulled her feet up beside her, which ultimately shifted her weight more towards me.

By, what I would assume, half the movie, she had laid her head back on the couch and she repeatedly nodded off, fighting sleep. As she was about to nod again, as gingerly as I could, I reached my arm around her and shifted her into my side, as I readjusted so that she'd hopefully be comfortable.

After a few moments of watching her sleep, seeing if she appeared comfortable, pink hair drew my attention back to the film.

At the end of the movie, the last song got extremely loud, and I couldn't get to the remote without waking her, but when the chorus hit, it didn't matter because it woke her up. I felt her body jolt when the "ooh, ooh, ooh"'s hit.

Her eyes shot open and she sat up straight, immediately her face morphing into regret.

"Oh my gosh, Bucky, I am so sorry."
"What? Why? What are you sorry for?"

"Well not only did I fall asleep on you, but I literally fell asleep on you. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

"I wasn't uncomfortable..."

This thought apparently hadn't occurred to her, as I saw her somehow grow an ashen red, even more embarrassed, now. Neither one of us said anything for a moment, her staring at the tv and me at the wall.

To hopefully relieve the tension, I decided to bring things back to the movie. "I enjoyed the movie, by the way. It was pretty funny. I liked that "Greased Lightening" song. I'm guessing that was the reference you were making earlier."

She cleared her throat, still clearly flustered. "Really? I'm glad. It's a good one. I wouldn't say it's one of my favorites of all time or anything, but I do enjoy it. And yes, that was the reference I was making." She attempted to smile, but it didn't come off quite normal, which said to me that it was time to go.

"Well, I know you're tired and," I faked a yawn to insinuate that I was tired as well, "I'm getting there myself." I stood from the couch and stretched.

"Bucky, I'm so sorry for acting like this. It's stupid. I'm so glad you came over today. I really did enjoy it, believe it or not."

"(Y/n), please don't worry about it. I'm not. I enjoyed spending time with you."

I couldn't help but sit back down beside her, placing my right hand on hers as I said this. I must have been angled just right apparently because she leaned into my shoulder, moving her hand from my right and taking my left....the one I hated.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"I don't want to offend you or anything and if it does, or it makes you uncomfortable, you definitely can just say that and it's okay, okay?"

I nodded, waiting intently for her question.

"Why will you not touch me with your left hand?"

I should have known she was going to ask something along those lines, but I had been so lost because of her touch heating my skin and making my hair stand on end.

"I, uhh, well...I just don't want to hurt you."

She moved her head off of my shoulder and her body away from mine, but wouldn't let go of my hand.

"Bucky, it's like I told you last night, I trust you not to hurt me."

"(Y/n), I don't think you realize what this thing has done." I couldn't help but remove my hand from hers and hold it up. "Do you know how many people it has hurt, how many people it's killed? I don't think you realize how much pain this has caused people, figuratively and literally." I knew my face
had turned cold, just another reason I shouldn't be here, I shouldn't be getting close to her.

She didn't say anything for some time, but I could feel her eyes on me nonetheless. There isn't really any reason for me to still be here at this point, after pushing her away further, so I stood to leave. She didn't move or react in any way to me getting up, all the more reason for me to head out.

I got to the kitchen counter leading to the door but then I heard her voice, timider than I had ever experienced, so timid that it was barely audible.

"Please don't believe that is who you are..."

I turned around and looked at her. She was looking down at her hands and I saw tears falling into them. Was she crying? For me? She was actually shedding tears...for someone like me? This realization glued me to where I stood, frozen in time. When I didn't respond, she continued, still focusing on her hands, tears still falling.

"Bucky, I am not going to pretend to understand what you've been through. I'm not going to even attempt, but I do see you for who you are now. You are kind. You are considerate. You wouldn't hurt anyone purposefully. You're thoughtful. You are a good person. 'That thing,' you refer to your arm as, it's a part of you now. I'm sure things happened that you would rather not have been involved in, things that include that arm...but that's not who you are. Maybe it's who they were, but it's not you. You didn't have a choice. I know you had no choice because I know if you did, you wouldn't have ever followed through with those things. I can't understand, remember, or even fathom what you've been through, what you've experienced, but I really wish you didn't have to live with the guilt and pain that you carry around with you. I wish you didn't worry so much. I wish you weren't so sad all of the time...I wish you could see and understand what a wonderful person you are...and that the things that have happened in the past are not who you are."

She exhaled after finishing and I literally had no words. She finally looked up at me, tears drying on her cheeks. She stood slowly and approached me carefully, unsure of my reaction, as well as of herself. I couldn't move. I just watched her. She reached for my left hand with both of hers. I let her take it gently between hers. She caressed the cold metal at first, pushing my long sleeve shirt up my arm a little so that she could run her fingertips over my wrist and up my forearm. I watched her fingertips glide over the metal, watched her eyes doing the same. She looked up at me, catching my eyes and pulled the arm around her back, placing it on the small of her back. After she saw that I wasn't going to move it, she reached for my right hand, pulling and placing it beside my left.

She waited for me to accept this and refused to move closer. When she felt my arms begin to tighten, pulling her in closer, she began to smile and once I had pulled her close enough, she buried her face in my neck.

Words finally found me. "Thank you for that."

I felt her smile grow in the crook of my neck, my face mirroring hers, as I absorbed her words and the moment we were in.

After basking in each other's embrace after a few minutes, she pulled back to ask, "will I see you tomorrow," with the smallest smile forming at the corner of her mouth.

I leaned down, placing my lips on hers, wordlessly giving my answer.
The next morning when I got to the coffee shop, things were hectic, especially for a Sunday. Granted it was the weekend before Fall Break so there were plenty of papers due, but it was probably the busiest it had ever been since I started working there.

It slowed down finally around two and my brain actually had time to think about something other than coffee. My mind immediately went to Bucky and I felt myself smile involuntarily. "This cannot be happening," I thought to myself causing my smile to grow even more. Bucky is quite possibly the sweetest guy I've ever met. He is thoughtful, well mannered, and yes, quite handsome. He-

My thoughts were cut short when I heard the bell ring and looked up to see the current core of my thoughts. He was wearing a burgundy shirt that stretched tight across his chest, underneath his brown leather jacket. He wasn't wearing the ball cap he wore out most of the time so that the sunlight streaming through the shop windows caught his eye making them glow sparkle like clear water in the Caribbean.

"Hello there, handsome," I said slowly, taking in his beauty.

"Hey, beautiful."

He approached the counter then looked around at the nearly empty shop.

"So, do you think I could sneak a little something to you?"

"As long as it isn't drugs," I began chuckling at the surprise that was apparent on his face.

"Uhhh, no, not that." He looked back and forth again, before leaning over the counter a little bit, raising his eyebrows flirtatiously at me, then I realized what he wanted to "sneak."

I stood on my tiptoes to lean on my side of the counter, nearing my lips towards his. He placed a quick and soft kiss on my lips before pulling away, hearing Maggie call my name as she came from the kitchen.

I quickly stepped away from the counter to act as if nothing happened, but she just looked at me with surprise before smiling and lifting her eyebrows at me as if to say "oh, yeh, I saw that! Good job."

I felt myself blushing before I dropped my eyes from hers and glanced at Bucky who was looking at the counter, trying, and failing, to contain a grin at being caught.

"Hello, sir! I'm Maggie, the shop owner. Is there something we can get for you? Something to go along with that little bit of sugar you just had?"

My eyes widened and a grin, turned full tight-lipped smile, formed on my face. I tried to elbow Maggie, but she dodged it.

Bucky took it in stride, chuckling, and answered.

"The sugar was quite sweet, so maybe just some strong coffee?"

"Great, I'm sure (y/n), can whip that right up for you. Right, (y/n), you have time for that before your
Before my break? I didn't get a break because my shift was so short today.

"My break? But I don't..." then I figured out what she was doing. I raised one eyebrow at her, grinning with only one side of my mouth. I can't believe she's doing this.

"Yes, before my break. I guess I have time for that."

She smiled back at my understanding and response.

"Great. Oh, no, sir. The coffee is on-the-house." Maggie refused Bucky's money. He looked at me, but I just held my hands up in surrender.

"Don't blame me. It isn't me this time," you said as you grabbed a cup and began to pour the coffee.

He went back to the table we had sat at together a few evenings ago. I brought him the cup of coffee and sat down beside him.

"The sugar was too sweet, huh? Maybe you shouldn't try it anymore." I grinned mischievously at him.

"Well, maybe I need to try again, just to be sure."

I busted out laughing in his face but leaned towards him anyways, giving him a peck on the cheek first before placing my lips on his. I'm not big on pda (believe it or not), so it was quick, but it didn't take away from the tingly feeling on my lips, nor the scent of Bucky's aftershave from underneath my nose.

"Not too much sugar, but I don't think I'm sure yet."

You giggled before playfully slapping his arm lightly. He returned your smile, the brightness reaching his eyes.

"So how's your day been?"

"It's been boring until a few moments ago," he said winking at me. "How about yours? Has it been slow like this all day?"

"No actually, it just slowed down about 15 minutes before you got here. I had just been able to think about anything other than coffee."

"And what were you able to think about?"

He had no idea that he was what I had been thinking about, and honestly, I couldn't decide whether to let him in on that bit of knowledge or not. I mean, shouldn't I play hard to get, at least a little bit??

"Oh, screw it, I was thinking about you if I'm being honest. You walked in and interrupted me, so it didn't last long."

His eyebrows shot up in shock. This definitely had not been something he expected to hear. I'm fairly certain it's a rarity for him to be caught off guard. Honestly, it felt pretty good to be the person to do so. He didn't even say anything for a moment, but took a sip of his coffee instead, in order to gather his thoughts.

BUCKY POV
I can't believe she was thinking about me. She's got to be joking, but the look in her eyes tells me she isn't. The pupils haven't dilated and the right corner of her mouth hasn't twitched whatsoever, which is a tell she's lying.

"I guess it's only fair since I haven't stopped thinking about you since you locked me out last night."

"Bucky! You make it sound like I kicked you out. You left of your own volition, mister."

I thought about saying something a little cheeky but decided against it as I didn't want to take anything too far. Instead, I chose to nod in agreement, smiling all the while.

She looked at her watch, stood from the bar stool, gave me a peck on the cheek while simultaneously giving me a hug from the side that I couldn't return, and said

"I've got to get back to work. You going to hang out for a while?"

I pulled Rebecca out of my bag, which (y/n) had thankfully let me borrow, showing it to her, and answered:

"Yeh, I've got three more chapters left."

Her chin moved to her chest in disbelief.

"Just three!? Are you serious!?"

"Yeh, I was up until four a.m. reading last night."

"You really like it that much?" She was clearly flattered. Her voice had softened just as much as her eyes had.

"I haven't ever stayed up reading anything until four in the morning, so I'm going to go with 'yes'."

She smiled and turned around to head behind the counter just as a new customer walked in. As soon as she was busy, I lost myself in the book that (y/n) loved so much. As soon as she was busy, I lost myself in the book that (y/n) loved so much. I didn't remember enjoying reading like this before going to war. I feel like it's because before I didn't see a lot of reasons to leave the confines of my own mind and escape to someone else's world, to someone else's problems.

Next thing I knew, I heard my name, but with the tone accompanying it, it wasn't the first time she had tried to get my attention.

"Earth to Bucky. You okay? Or just into the book?"

"Just the book, I have a few more pages left."

"Oh okay, well my shift is over, so I thought I'd head out. Would you like me to sit with you until you finish?"

"No, that's okay. I can head on out too."

Her face scrunched, she didn't like that idea. The normal emerald shade of her deep-set eyes had changed to the color of fir trees in the winter, just before they die out and brown. She was sorry she had interrupted me.

"You don't have to do that, Bucky. You can stay and read if you'd like. I don't mind staying a few
minutes or I can catch you later. It doesn't matter to me. I just need to proofread my paper before I go to bed tonight. I have an eight a.m. class in the morning."

"Okay, if you're sure you don't mind. I think I will stay back and finish."

"Yes! Let me know you get home safely?"

"Will do."

She placed her hand on my right, giving it the smallest squeeze so that I almost didn't notice.

After a few more minutes, I had finished the novel and I looked up, questioning the ending. I couldn't believe that was how it ended. Then I noticed the store owner eyeing me. Maggie, I think her name was. She saw me notice her watching me, this must have made her think I didn't mind her approaching me.

"Hello, Bucky, isn't it?" She waited for me to nod. "So you and (y/n) seem close?"

"We met a few weeks ago and have developed a...friendship, yes. I'm not sure how 'close' we are."

She took in my words, debating how to broach what she truly wanted to say.

"Well, I'm glad that she has gained...a friend. She is a bit of a loner, and being new to town doesn't help that. Not to mention that she needs some excitement in life. She needs something other than just working and school 24/7. She needs someone to share some downtime with. I haven't seen her this happy since I hired her the day she moved here. If you don't mind me saying so, it seems like that goes both ways..."

She waited for a response, but I didn't give one, I sat there and digested the words, the information I didn't know about (y/n). Maggie seemed to pick up on this and continued, realizing I wouldn't be answering anytime soon.

"Can you just do me a favor?" My eyes met hers at this. "Please don't hurt her. She is one of the kindest people I have ever known, not to mention she is probably one of the hardest working people I've ever had to work for me. She deserves the happiness I saw on her face today. She deserves someone who will treat her well. She doesn't need to be hurt in any way by anyone. Please don't be one of those people who will inevitably hurt her."

She didn't realize how much that favor resonated with me. Hurting (y/n) was the whole reason I had stepped back in the first place. I don't want to hurt her, ever. I'm not sure why I had let myself even get in this. I don't want to push her away because wouldn't that be doing exactly the opposite of what Maggie was asking me? However, how much did Maggie know about me? Did she realize who she was talking to? What I had done? What it had done? Surely, she didn't. If she had, she'd probably ask me to move away and leave (y/n) alone.

I decided to reply with the truth. "Not hurting her is what I care about most."

READER POV
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When I hadn't heard from Bucky by 11, concern started to consume my mind. I had finished proofreading my paper and putting it on my flash drive to print out on campus in the morning three hours previously. I had turned on 'Will & Grace' on as a comfort an hour ago. I decided to text him just to check. I waited for another 30 minutes, receiving nothing before I heard a deafening thump from the apartment above me. This was completely out of character so I threw on my slippers and bolted out of my apartment, heading for the stairs. I took them two at a time and knocked on the door
to 701. No one answered the door, so I knocked again and called out: "Bucky? Are you okay??" I had to wait another five seconds or so, but then the door swung open and a dense sheet with the aroma of tequila almost knocked me off of my feet.
READER POV
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I looked at him. His eyes were bloodshot and glazed over, as he leaned against the door frame and just looked at me. He didn't say anything, just stared at me and chewed on his bottom lip. I figured out quickly, that just like the day we met, I was going to have to begin the conversation.

"Bucky, are you okay? I heard a loud noise."

He rolled his eyes and stood to his full height before turning away from me. He answered as he walked away, leaving the door wide open.

"I'm fine. I'm perfect."

It was clear he was anything but, not to mention the 100% sarcasm in his voice.

I wasn't sure what to do. Should I shut the door and leave? Leave him be and work through whatever was going on? Should I stand at the door for a conversation? Should I text Steve? Maybe it'd be okay if I follow him inside to talk about it? Will it be safe to do that? I continued to stand at the door, confused and trying to make a decision.

I decided to go with two options. I text Steve quickly before deciding to go in.

Hey. This is (y/n) from Lynchburg. Does Bucky get drunk often because he's really drunk right now and I know something is very wrong; I'm going to try and talk to him. I just thought you might like to know.

I pushed the phone back in my jeans pocket, thankfully I hadn't changed into pj's yet before stepping into the apartment slowly.

"Bucky, is it okay if I come in?" I called but didn't receive an answer. After a moment I told him I was doing so. "Okay, I'm coming in. I hope that's okay." Still, there wasn't an answer.

I stepped in fully and shut the door behind me. I walked slowly into the apartment. As I entered beside the kitchen, I noticed how bare his place was. It was a cold place, both literally and metaphorically. It didn't seem fitting of Bucky at all, the Winter Soldier maybe, but not the Bucky I had gotten to know.

Bucky was sitting on his couch, three empty bottles of tequila on the table beside him and one half empty bottle in his hand. How in the world was he even still alive? I'm guessing whatever Hydra did to his body must have set his alcohol tolerance off the charts.

"Bucky?"

He wouldn't even acknowledge me. He just stared at the fireplace that was empty, part of the reason it was so cold in here.

"Bucky, is it cold in here to you? I can get a fire going or turn the heat on."

"No. I want it cold, like me."

His harsh tone made the hairs on my arms jump up similar to a fish trying to get a mosquito floating
above the water' surface. His voice definitely matches the temperature of the apartment. Well, if I guessed this had something to do with his past, that answer definitely was leaning towards correct.

"Bucky, are you okay? Clearly, you're not, but would you like to talk about it?"

"No."

BUCKY POV
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Why did she not get to leave me alone? Why was it every time I turned around she was there, whether physically or just in my mind? Why was she still being so nice? Why did I have to be hung up on this woman? I don't want to hurt her. That's all I want, but if she refuses to see that I'm bad for her, there's no hope that she'll ever remain fully unharmed. Maybe if I'm rude enough now, in the beginning, she'll change her mind.

Why is she coming closer? Maybe I should dial up the iciness of my voice.

"Do you mind if I sit?" She asked me. When I didn't answer or acknowledge her, she sat anyway but kept distance between us.

"Bucky, clearly something is wrong. Did something happen?"

I'll just go with the silent treatment, maybe she'll get the hint. After a few moments, she broke the silence.

"Fine. I don't want to push anything, it's your business. I was just worried about you when you didn't text me to let me know you were home, then heard the loud noise above me.....if there's something I can do, will you let me know? Maybe I can get in touch with Steve if you want to talk about it with him. Maybe he text me back," she said as she started to reach for her phone.

I couldn't stay silent anymore.

"What do you mean 'maybe Steve text you back'?' I heard the anger in my own voice, fueling the growl growing in my throat. "Why are you talking to Steve?"

She stopped reaching for her phone, surprise apparent on her face, not expecting the tone in my voice, or the response at all, more than likely. She seemed to shrink into herself a little in response.

"I just..."

I wouldn't let her finish. "No, you know what? Go ahead, talk to Steve, be friends with him. Leave me be." I stood from the couch, running my left hand through my hair, still clutching the tequila bottle with my right and walked towards the window.

I watched her in the window's reflection, I could see the color drain from her face as she sat there and stared at the wall for a moment before she regained the courage to speak.

When she spoke again, anger was in her voice, but she was attempting to remain calm.

"Bucky, listen to me. I care about you. I just want to help. If you're upset, I'll listen, whatever it is, but you can stop trying to push me away, I'm not going anywhere."

Time to kick things up a notch I see.

"Why not? Just leave. Go talk to Steve. You wouldn't have to worry about him like you worry about
me. I'm just trying to start a new life alone. Can't you see that? But no, every time I turn around, you're there. I can't be hindered from going about life because of some woman. Just leave me be."

"Well that's funny, Bucky," her voice was calm, but it was anything but nonchalant. "You see, the way I remember it, you're the one who walked into my life and wouldn't leave. You're the one who came back to my table at the farmer's market. You're the one who wanted me to keep holding your hand at the carnival. You're the one who agreed to come hang out at my apartment. You're the one who comes to visit me at work. Don't you dare put all the blame on me, just because you're upset about whatever the hell you're upset about." She had risen off of the couch by the end of her speech.

My body seemed to react without my permission. I turned so quickly that my eyes took an extra moment to adjust from the alcohol, but as soon as they did, they narrowed. I began to approach her and stepped into her face.

"Then leave. I don't know why this is even happening. Leave me alone."

She was surprised, but she wouldn't let me talk down to her.

"Fine, Bucky, if you want me to leave, I will, but don't regret it later. You'll have to live with that decision." Her voice was softening but just a bit. "Don't let it control your thoughts and decisions," she started reaching for my left arm, but my instincts took over.

READER POV

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Before I knew it, I felt a sensation that I hadn't felt before in my wrist. It was bleeding and I was sitting on the floor beside the couch. My phone had fallen out of my pocket and I saw the text from Steve as the half-empty tequila bottle flew against the wall.

(Y/n), no! Leave him alone. Don't go in alone.

The phone started ringing, making Bucky angrier. He picked up the phone and answered seeing it was Steve.

"What the fuck do you want?"

I was literally in shock and couldn't make myself move. I watched the scene unfolding, more scared than I had been since I met Bucky. This...this was not Bucky. I heard Steve's voice through the phone.

"Buck, where is (Y/n)? Is she okay? What's going on?"

Bucky squeezed his eyes shut, pinching the bridge of his nose between his pointer finger and thumb, seemingly attempting to stay in the moment.

"Bucky, are you there? (Y/n)??"

I had to call out. I had to let him know I was still there.

"Steve, I'm here," I said loudly enough for him to hear, but this only increased Bucky's anger.

He picked up two empty tequila bottles with his left hand and threw them into the fireplace with such force that some of the glass ricocheted back towards the couch.

"(Y/n)! Get out, get out, now!" Steve was yelling into the phone to make sure I heard him.
I did, but I couldn't make myself move.

"Why the hell would she leave now? Why would she get out now? Isn't this what you wanted, Steve? You're the reason for this. I told you! I told you no! But you had to keep pushing. He flipped over the coffee table, it ramming into my kneecap. I groaned in pain, but I still could not move.

"Bucky! Please! This isn't you! Don't blame Steve."

"Don't blame Steve!? Isn't he the one who pushed us together, despite that I said no? I told him I'd hurt you and guess what, it's happened now, hasn't it? I told you, Steve. I told you this would happen." He punched the fireplace wall, causing pieces of brick to instantly turn into dust.

Steve was still yelling to me through the phone, ignoring Bucky. "(Y/n), if you can move, get out now! Listen to me, please. Leave now!"

Thankfully the nerves moving from my brain to my body seemed to be transitioning again and I started to stand, as wobbly as it was. I started to limp backward towards the door, not wanting to turn my back on him. He picked up the last tequila bottle and threw it at me or the door, I'm not sure which. I ducked just in time.

"Bucky, please stop this isn't you. Don't let the past take you over, please?"

I saw him going for the tv....he wouldn't...

I fell to the ground quickly as he picked up the tv and got ready to throw it at the door to block my way.

"You're not going anywhere. That's what you said," he yelled at me.

I crawled into the kitchen but after the crash of the tv, I could sense he was coming near me, even if I couldn't hear him.

He grabbed me by the wrist and dragged me back to the living room, over shards of glass, making me exclaim in pain. I saw the phone, destroyed on the floor. He had crushed it in his hand.

He looked at me as if I wasn't anyone to him, no one he recognized. His eyes were no longer blue, but gray with absolutely no life left in them.

"Bucky, please..."

He dropped me, just before he answered:

"Who the hell is Bucky?"

He threw me against the wall and everything went black.

When I woke up, I was in my bed and Sam Wilson was beside me. I tried to sit up.

"Whoah there, little lady. Take it easy."

I sat back defeated.

"I'm Sam. I'm not here to hurt you."

"I know," I said before laying my head back against the pillow.
I pulled my hand from under the covers and extended it towards him to shake his hand, but the sight of my arm stopped me. There were cuts and bandages up and down my arm, my wrist was the deepest purple I had ever seen, bruised entirely.

"I appreciate the sentiment, but I'll excuse it this time. Just rest. It's nice to meet you, (y/n)."

Alarmed, my memory caught up with me.

"Wait! Where's Bucky? Is he okay? Is he still Bucky? What's going on? What happened?" I tried to keep my voice from frantic mode, but it was useless.

Sam remained silent for a brief moment, weighing out the best way to tell me whatever the update was.

"He's...Bucky. Steve and I were on the way when you guys were on the phone last night. When we got here, we saw you unconscious on the floor and he was destroying the apartment...worse than it already probably was."

"What happened? Is Steve okay?"

"Yeh, he's Steve, of course, he's okay. He, uhh, took Bucky somewhere to help him calm down, up in the mountains, I think."

"But Bucky is Bucky now? He's not the Winter Soldier anymore?"

Steve walked in the door before Sam could answer.

"Steve, where's Bucky? I thought he was with you! Is he okay?"

"Yes (y/n), he's...upstairs."

"To be the one laid up in bed, you're sure worried about the one who put you there a whole he-" Sam began before Steve cut him off.

"Sam, do you mind going up to sit with him for a few minutes?"

Sam nodded and headed for the door.

"It was nice to meet you, (y/n)." It seemed like he wanted to say more, but the look Steve was giving him stopped him.

"You too, Sam. Thank you."

"How are you feeling?"

"I don't know, honestly."

His voice became vigilant, "is your body numb? We may need to go to the hospital."

"No, no. Physically, I'm definitely sore, but I think I'll be okay. Emotionally......now that's a whole different story."

"Do you mind if we talk about what happened?"

"I, uhhh, well, ....from where in the story?"
"From wherever you'd like, but definitely from the moment you entered the apartment."

I decided to tell him everything but left some of the mushiness out. I felt it was necessary to share how things had been going between Bucky and me to compare to the quick change.

"Being thrown against the wall is the last thing I remember."

Steve sat in thought for a moment after I finished. He sat long enough that I couldn't help but ask again about Bucky.

"So he's upstairs? How is he? How did you guys get him back to normal?"

He decided not to answer my questions.

"(Y/n), I think Buck was right. I shouldn't have pushed this, on either of you. It may be best if you keep your distance from Buck. Maybe you two can be friends in the future, but I think maybe you should wait until he is more stable."

I shook my head in disbelief and looked around the bedroom. This is what Steve chose to say?

"Steve...are these your words or Bucky's?"

He took a breath before answering:

"Technically, they're both of ours."

I ignored the pain as I ripped off the covers, determined to see Bucky and talk to him myself. When I stepped onto the floor, however, my knees gave way and I collapsed. There were more cuts on my legs and both kneecaps were bruised in their entirety. Tears filled my eyes, from both physical and emotional pain.

"What ar-" I heard Steve shocked that I had gotten out of bed, or so I thought. The next thing I knew, I felt cold skin behind my thighs and cold metal against my back as Bucky appeared out of nowhere, picking me up off the ground and gingerly placing me back in the bed and pulling the covers over me.

Steve looked pissed when Sam ran into the room.

"I went to the bathroom for two seconds. Man, you said you wouldn't go anywhere."

Bucky's eyes never left you.

"I lied. Is that so hard to believe?"

The tension was palpable in the room, but I couldn't do anything but stare at Bucky. His eyes were back to his blue, the color I now only associated with his eyes alone, but they were filled with emotion, like the turning of a storm at sea. His hair was disheveled. It appeared as if he had run his hands through it a million times, pulling at it in frustration. His eyes were glassy, but not from alcohol this time, but from the water pooling there.

"Can you guys give us a minute," I asked.

BUCKY POV
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"I've got to take a piss. You'll stay here, right?" Sam eyed me, analyzing my response. It didn't quite work out well for him as I had been trained much differently than him. As soon as he entered the
restroom, I dashed out of my apartment and down the stairs. When I reached her apartment I didn't hesitate to knock...which probably would have been a wise decision, but instead ran in. I heard voices from the hallway. I got to the doorway and listened for a moment. She was asking about me? She was concerned for me? Then Steve told her what we had discussed, well part of it. Of course, she'd be stubborn and question who's idea it was. I heard quick movements and stepped inside just as her knees gave way and she fell to the floor.

My entire body clenched before stepping in and picking her up as gingerly as I could. I placed her back onto her bed and pulled the covers back over her.

I saw all of the bruises, the gashes, and the injuries from the evening before.

How could I have let this happen? How could I have done this to her? She was so strong, yet now, she looked entirely fragile...because of me. She looked broken, even her eyes had lost all of the life they normally held. The wind had been knocked out of her in every way possible. She looked smaller. Her deep-set eyes seemed sunken completely into the sockets due to the dark purple circles around them. They must have formed due to the blunt force of her hitting the wall I had thrown her into. I had felt the gashes as I had picked her up off the floor. I had dragged her across the floor! What the hell was wrong with me?

This is why I hadn't wanted to get too close to her. I can't trust myself to remain me. I don't even know what triggered the Winter Soldier part of me.

"Can you guys give us a minute," I heard her say, pulling me from my thoughts. I immediately looked at Steve, not trusting myself to be alone with her again. I could tell he didn't like the idea either. His jaw clenched while his eyes met mine before returning to hers.

"Steve, please."

Her pleading made him change his mind, and while I didn't like the idea, I'd give her whatever she wanted to ask for after all of this shit I've put her through. He nodded once and stood to leave, patting me on the back as he walked by.

Before he walked out, he made sure to let us both know he would be remaining close

"I'll just be in the living room so if either of you need anything, I won't be far."

Both of us nodded as if we were being disciplined by an authority figure. I continued to look at the doorway after he left, but I felt her eyes shift to me.

"Bucky, please sit."

I turned around and walked to the chair beside her bed, not able to meet her eyes. Once I sat, we remained silent for a moment, me looking at the floor while she looked at me. I finally couldn't hold in words anymore.

"(Y/n). I am...so, so....so sorry. No amount of apologies could ever, EVER make up for what I've done. I...this...the triggering...I don't even know what it was. I don't know why it happened...this is what I was afraid of. My biggest commitment was not to bring you any hurt or harm and then here you are, bruised, marked up, probably with a concussion..I just can't do this to you again. I can't let it...happen again. I know I can never apologize or make up for it so that it fits, but I'll stay away from you forever. I'll move back to Stark tower, or go under cryo, you can ask me to do anything, disappear from everything so you don't even ever have to see me on the news, I'll do it. Anything you ask, I'll do it."
I felt hot tears on my face once I stopped speaking. She didn't answer for so long that I finally looked up at her. Her eyes hadn't left me since I had entered the room, other than looking to Steve briefly. Once she saw she had my attention, she finally spoke.

"You'll do anything I ask? You're sure abo-"

"Anything, I swear. Anything I can do to try and make up for this."

"Fine. This is what I'm going to ask of you." Her face remained stone. She spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, pushing away all or any emotion that may be mistaken for weakness. "First, I want you to stay away from an abundance of alcohol. I'm certain that didn't help anything. Second, I want you to apologize to Steve, if you haven't already, for the way you spoke to him last night. Third....I want you to try and forgive yourself...not just for last night, but for everything that has happened when you weren't in control......Lastly...please don't push me away." She saw that I was about to object. "Don't interrupt me. I know, Bucky...I know that most people would say I need to distance myself from you, to get away from you as soon as possible. I get their point if I'm being honest..." I looked down at the ground, but she continued. "Bucky, look at me." I obeyed, as I let my eyes slowly leave the floor to look back at her bruised, yet determined, face. "I get their point, but if everyone left every time someone hurt them, everyone would be alone in the world, and before you voice your opposing opinion, I know this isn't necessarily your run of the mill 'someone getting hurt,' but Bucky...I still trust you. If we're being honest, I didn't exactly make the wisest decisions last night. While they were made with good intentions, I went against my better judgment. I knew that things weren't right. I knew when you opened the door that I could very well be hurt later, but I made the decision anyway. You're not at fault here, Bucky. That's what I'm trying to say so, please. Please forgive yourself. Please don't distance yourself from me. I care about you too much..." She finally drifted off from her speech and in the process looked away from me for the first time. She looked down at her bruised hands and rubbed the bruises lightly instead of wringing her hands nervously like I knew she wanted to.

"I can't make any promises, (y/n), but I'll try."

________________________________

Notes:

First off, I want to say that I DO NOT condone domestic violence or staying in any type of relationship in which it exists. PLEASE LEAVE, please cut anyone out of your life that brings violence or abuse (physical or emotional). I do not care how much you love them, how many time they promise to stop, to never do it again, GET OUT. Please.

On a lighter note, I wanted to share these lyrics with you guys. I feel like it fits well with this part. It's from the song "War" by a former NC band named Farewell. Even though they aren't together anymore, check out their stuff. :)

Well, you said you wanted war
But nobody wants to fail the future
If you say it's too late
It's not too late, it's not too late, whoa

I wanna wake up on the day I found you
I wanna wrap these shaky arms around you
I wanna find a decent way to tell you
I need to spend some time alone

I wanna take this in the wrong direction
I wanna say this to my own reflection
I wanna find a decent way to tell you
I need to spend some time alone

Right now, it was the words that you were gunning for
All I wanted was to let you know
Just wait a second
And I'll give you what you're waiting for
I'll make a promise and refuse to show
Things fall apart

Well, you said you wanted more
(You said you wanted more)
But nobody wants to wait forever
If you say it's too late
It's not too late, it's not too late, whoa

I wanna show you all the things I promised
I wanna give away the things I won't miss
I wanna find a decent way to tell you
I need to spend some time alone
It took about a week for my body to heal. I worked on school work from home and had to call Mags and lie about being really sick. I hated lying to her, but any conversation about what happened would not go well. Somehow she didn't seem to know who Bucky was.

Steve had been at my beck and call every day, but was sometimes replaced by Sam and Bucky. Bucky didn't have much to say to me or to anyone from what it seemed. He was drawing even more into himself than he had before. Despite all that I was wanting to do was to help him, I decided not to push it this time. I tried to give him encouraging smiles when I caught his eye, but he would always look away whenever we made eye contact.

On Saturday afternoon I walked into the living room to see Steve lying on the couch. He was adorable all scrunched up on my tiny couch. I started some coffee and headed back to my room so as not to wake him.

When I reentered the kitchen to pour me a cup, Steve said from behind me.

"You're walking on your own seems back to normal."

I turned around to see him sitting up on the couch, but his legs were still stretched out.

"Yeh, everything is pretty much healed, thankfully. Being laid up is not my idea of a good time. I'm ready to get things back to normal."

"Speaking of that, I kinda need to speak with you about something."

The seriousness of his tone peaked my interest so I left the coffee cup and entered the kitchen as he moved his feet to the floor allowing me to sit. He angled his body away but facing me.

"Steve, what's going on?"

"Look, (y/n)...please just let me finish, okay. You're not going to want to, but please allow it."

I felt my jaw and lips tighten, partially an attempt not to interrupt, part of me already not wanting to accept what he had to say, part of me simply nerves flowing at an excessive speed throughout my body.

"(Y/n)...I wanted to wait until you were well to talk about this. ...We think that it'd probably be best...if Bucky moves back to Stark Tower for awhile until he is more stable. He doesn't completely know what triggered his actions and we need to work to figure it out. Tony has some ideas and some tests he wants to run, but Buck doesn't need to be around...normal people during it. I know that you two were getting close very quickly, but I...we, Bucky and I, both think it's for the best."

My eyes immediately filled with tears as I took in what Steve was saying. Bucky was leaving. I had finally found someone worth spending time with, someone, who didn't annoy me and understood my schedule.

"Steve, please..." I tried to continue but a sob caught in my throat. "Please, don't do this. Don't take him away."
I looked into his eyes and I saw the grief that was growing. He knew this was hurting me worse than the injuries from a week ago. I had asked about Bucky every single day, multiple times, especially when he didn't visit.

"(Y/n), I'm sorry. I really am. I wish there was another way bu-

"There is! There is, Steve! Let him stay here. Let me take care of him. I'll keep an extra eye on him. If I sense any trouble I'll let you know asap."

"But (y/n), that's how last time went and look what happened. It came out of seemingly nowhere. Bucky doesn't even know what triggered it. Keeping him here wouldn't only be a danger to you, but to the community....and Bucky himself."

Despite the emotions coursing through my body, I immediately recognized that he was trying to convince me with telling me Bucky would be endangering himself if he stayed. I knew I wasn't going to win. No matter how sorry his eyes were, I wasn't going to win, but I also didn't plan on going down without a fight.

"And how is Bucky going to get hurt? He's all but invincible. You know better than I do. You've seen more of what he's capable of than I have. He isn't going to hu-

"You know just as well as I do how much more emotional pain takes a toll on a person." He was getting slightly irritated now, but remaining calm, his tone only slightly sharper than before. "How many times has Bucky come voluntarily to see you this week? He remembers everything he did to you and he can't stand to see the effects of it. He can't stop replaying it in his mind over and over since you guys parted Sunday evening. He keeps trying to figure out why, and in doing so he has to replay it all. He's mentally exhausted. I haven't even seen him so low, (y/n). He's a mess. He needs help. Tony even thinks he may be able to get rid of some of Buck's bad memories. It's something we've got to try. Please try and understand."

I let his words sink in and although part of me wanted to argue, the other part just wanted Steve to leave so that I could break down in privacy. I knew if I spoke, my voice would fail and it'd be nothing but sobs, so instead I looked at my lap and slowly nodded. He knew it was best to leave, so he said:

"I'm going to head out, okay. Call me if you ever need anything okay?"

I nodded again, attempting to hold back the dam of tears ready to burst forth from my eyes. When I heard the door shut, my body half fell, half slid onto the couch. I grabbed a pillow to clutch close to my chest. The sobs racked through me, the sound echoing off of the brick walls and the hardwood floors. My throat felt raw, the pillow I'd laid my head on soaked on one side, but still the sobs and tears came.

It was a little hard for me to believe I was this upset. I hadn't been this upset in ages over anything. I had only known Bucky a few weeks. We had only just begun to get close, but for some reason, it was like I felt a connection to him that I hadn't felt with anyone before, friend or lover. As cliche as it sounded, I was drawn to Bucky from the first moment I saw him. When I saw those troubled eyes, it was like looking into my own less darkened soul. The feelings of being lost, starting over, trying to figure out who and what to trust. I had identified with it immediately. When I figured out who he was, that drew me in further instead of pushing me away like most normal human beings would have had it. Not to mention that his skittishness added to me wanting to be his friend, his companion, someone in general that he felt like he could trust. He seemed so alone...I suppose because in actuality he was, he had been for a very long time. I felt alone now most of the time and maybe that was a partial connection between us. While we still had a lot to learn about one another, there was a
base connection between us that I couldn't explain...and I'm not sure he could either. Any close proximity between he and I made every inch of my skin tingle. When we kissed, it was like watching the sunrise over a beach on a Fall day repeatedly every time our lips met and parted. His chest seemed the safest place I had ever been. The way his arms, bionic and human alike, pulled me in closely without losing one ounce of gentleness, never failed to amaze me. How could he be so harsh, been involved in so many harsh and dark things, yet still be the genuine, careful, and caring person he was? It was simple. He had two "personalities" fighting against each other at every moment.

By the time my body and mind were too exhausted to continue physically mourning, I noticed it was close to dark outside. I went to the bathroom to wash my face with cold water. The salty tears had dried my face out completely, making it almost sticky. The water felt so good on my face that I decided simply to take a shower. My muscles wee knotted up from being in the fetal position for so long and I was fairly certain it would only help the remainder of the wounds I had. After washing and conditioning my hair, and bathing, I let the water run over me, trying to put myself in a more peaceful mindset. I ran back over my conversation with Steve, trying to make sure I couldn't come up with any other alternatives, despite that I knew it was pointless. Even if I did come up with something else to keep Bucky here, I knew Steve was right. Bucky needed help...sadly more help than I could give him. Deep down, I want what's best for Bucky...even if I selfishly want myself to be happy in it to...and without him here, my life went back to being shadowed and bland. After putting clean sweats and a Tshirt on, I reached the end of Steve and I's conversation.

"I'm going to head out, okay. Call me if you ever need anything okay?"

If I ever need anything. That sounds like a goodbye....but surely?

I dropped my hairbrush and dashed for the door as quickly as I could without rehashing any wounds on my legs. I took the stairs, against my better judgment, but I couldn't wait for the lift, it'd take 10 years. Once I got to Bucky's door, I stopped and took a deep breath...a few actually as all of the commotion inside of me had stolen my breath. I knocked on the door three times in quick succession. I waited but received nothing. I knocked two more times, a little louder this go around...still nothing.

"Bucky?? Steve? Sam? Is anyone here? Please open up."

I put my ear to the door and heard nothing. I wonder.... I decided to try the door. It was unlocked. I walked in, calling for them again, but with no answer.

"Please...no....no....he couldn't have left...no...not without saying goodbye...."

But as I walked in, the few possessions that had sat in his apartment were gone. I went to the other rooms, nothing was there. It looked like my apartment when I had moved in....meaning he had, in fact, moved out.

Then my eyes caught the shiny keys on the kitchen counter. My eyes begin to sting, but there were no tears. My throat constricted, but there was no audible sob. Everything seemed to go numb and I sunk to the floor of Bucky's living room...or at least that's what it used to be.

BUCKY POV
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Steve walked into the apartment around two. I could tell by the look on his face that things hadn't gone well, but I couldn't help but ask nonetheless.

"How did she take it?"
"She tried to argue it for a few moments, but she only wants what's best for you so the arguing didn't last long."

"Maybe I should go and explain." I started for the door, but Steve placed his hand on my chest to stop me.

"I wouldn't. She's taking it pretty hard. I heard her sobbing through the door after I shut it. It may be best to just let her grieve in privacy." He saw the tears forming in my own eyes, taking in what he said. "C'mon, lets work on packing this stuff up and moving it down to the truck. Keep your mind busy."

I nodded, swallowing the lump in my throat. We moved the big things near the door first. There wasn't much as I had destroyed a lot of it in my rage last weekend. The bed frame and mattresses, the table and nightstands from my room were left. In the living room, there was no more tv as I had destroyed it. The coffee table was damaged, but not completely trashed and one side table remained.

The items wouldn't fit into the elevator so we had to carry them down piece by piece. Sam had gotten the truck and moved it to the apartment buildings loading dock.

The building had been renovated into an apartment location. It had previously been a popular shoe factory here in Lynchburg. It had shut down in the 60s and had been vacant until about 10 years ago when some contractor swipe it up and turned it into what it is today. I had to give the businessmen what they were due, however, while they brought things up to modern times, they were very skillful in the way that they left the classic and original feel of the building. When Steve told me about it, included in a few other options, it stuck out to me because of the history. I liked that they had taken something from the past, something that had been completely abandoned, forgotten, and trashed, but then gave it a chance to prove itself in today's world. It was kinda like me.

Every time Steve and I went back and forth up the stairs, of course, Birdbrains stayed downstairs leaving all of the work to us, I looked at the stairwell door to floor six. I longed to go comfort her. Steve attempted not to notice the first few times, but he couldn't ignore it forever.

"Buck, don't torture yourself. She'll be okay...eventually."

I couldn't meet his eyes. I knew he had to be right. She would move on, she would find better, she had to. She'd forget all about me one day. She deserved to be able to do that.

After we had everything packed, I walked back up the stairs alone. I opened the door and took one last look around. I hadn't had much of a life here until a few weeks ago. Life had happened to me. She had happened to me. As usual, I had ruined it. I dropped my head, shaking it, as I took out my keys and laid them on the counter for the property owners. I went to the elevator, but what was another trip down the stairs.

Now that Steve wasn't with me, I took the chance to check on her. When I got to the floor six stairway door, I slowly opened it, peeking to make sure she wasn't in the hall. I stepped to her door and started to knock, but stopped myself short and decided to listen instead. I heard nothing but silence. There was no crying, sobbing, no life that I could hear on the other side of the door. I turned around and headed back for the stairs. Maybe she was already moving on, leaving me with nothing but a memory.

READER POV

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I sat for a few moments and stared at the wall, then got up and walked to the window to look out at
the river. I knew I could use some fresh air and to be quite frank, the frigid air would help numb me further, so I stepped out onto the balcony. I looked out at the river, wishing I could jump in and float anywhere away from here, let it wash away my thoughts, feelings, my memories. I wish HYDRA would find me and erase my memories. I looked down and shook my head, venturing to wipe that wretched thought of my brain. I opened my eyes and I almost didn't believe what I was seeing.

"No! Wait! Don't leave, please!! Steve, Sam! Stop!"

Once I saw them acknowledge my calling out, I whisked around and took off, leaving every door I passed through open. I dashed down the stairs. I couldn't get to them fast enough. I hadn't seen Bucky. I had no clue if he was even still here, but one small shred of hope had entered my heart and I couldn't bear to let it leave.

When I reached the door to the loading dock I had to stop, even if but for only a moment. Not only did I need to catch my breath, but I also needed to attempt to mentally prepare myself in case Bucky was already gone. One of the other Avengers could have easily already come for him. After about 30 more seconds, I took a final deep breath before opening the door. As I stepped out, my eyes were immediately drawn to a shaggy dark haired man, dressed in that leather jacket I loved, standing in the light of the street lamp.

"Bucky," my voice was just barely audible, but he heard it and had to take only a few steps before I reached him, sprinting all the way. When I reached him I practically fell into his chest, wrapping my arms around his torso, and squeezing so hard that if he were a "normal" guy, he surely would have complained of bruised ribs. He didn't hug me back, but he didn't try to make me let go either. I held onto him for a moment or so before I said "Bucky, please, please jus-," but he knew what I wanted and his arms wrapping around me and pulling me even closer to him than seemed possible, cut off my plea for his affections.

No more words passed between us for a few moments. I heard the crunching of rocks under moving shoes that were approaching. Assuming it was Steve and Sam trying to get my attention I pulled away but refused to let go of Bucky completely.

I didn't take my eyes away from Bucky's as I said to Steve and Sam behind me: "sorry for yelling at you guys. I was a little shocked to see you still here. I went up to Bucky's apartment and saw everything was gone."

"Yeh, we moved everything out earlier," Sam was the first of them to speak.

To my surprise, Bucky, just loud enough that Sam could hear, countered with "tweety bird didn't do anything but get the truck."

Did he really just crack a joke? At this moment? I looked at him raising an eyebrow as the side of my mouth began to show a grin. He winked at me and returned a smile my way.

"Shame on you, Sam, making these old men do all the work," I couldn't help but throw out against Sam's glare that I could feel aimed at Bucky through my back.

I tried not to laugh, but after viewing Bucky's initial shock, I had to as I turned around to see Sam smirking and Steve's shock mirroring Bucky's.

"I can't believe you just said that (y/n)," Steve couldn't hold it back.

When I looked back to Bucky, still smiling, I saw his eyes had softened and he had the slightest of smiles on his face as he looked at me fondly.
"Sorry, but if Bucky can make and take a joke right now, you can too, Steven." I looked at him now as he and Sam had walked beside us, to my right.

He rolled his eyes. "I'm only letting it go because of earlier." Without meaning to, his words put a dampness in the air, bringing Bucky and I both back to the reality of the situation. Noticing this, he continued, "Shit. I'm sorry, guys." Both Bucky and I looked at each other and nodded simply, accepting his apology even though we couldn't tear our eyes away from each other to do so.

"Steve how about we get the truck warmed up?... (y/n), it was great to meet you. Hopefully, we'll see you around."

Thanks to the last part of his statement, I was able to throw my attention in Sam's direction. I let go of Bucky and stepped in to hug Sam.

"Thanks, Sam. I really appreciate that. It was wonderful to meet you."

When I stepped out of the hug, I knew I might as well get my farewell to Steve over as well. I stepped up to him as he held his arms open. He started chuckling when I just stood there. He grabbed me and pulled me into the hug. He whispered so that only I could hear: "it'll all be okay, I promise. You have to trust me. We'll see each other again. You'll see him."

When I nodded into his chest, he continued so that everyone could hear: "I'll expect some free produce next time I see you, or is it still full price all day, every day for me?"

"Double the price," I started giggling just enough to keep myself from silently sobbing. He squeezed me tighter before finishing his statement.

"I'll see you around. Take care of yourself."

As he released me, he nodded once at Bucky before following Sam to the truck. I didn't even want to turn around and look at Bucky because I knew I would have to watch him walk away. He appeared to sense this so he came and hugged me from behind, breathing in the scent of my shampoo, before kissing me lightly on the head.

"(Y/n), I lo-"

"I know."

I turned around and he leaned down as I stood on my tip toes. Our lips met and it was like nothing had even changed-like nothing had happened-like everything was normal. Then I felt his arms tighten around my lower back before he lifted me off the ground. The passion, urgency, and longing behind the kiss accelerated quickly. It was as if I were sending him off to war, not knowing if I'd ever see him again. He kissed me as if he would never kiss anyone again. My hands began to run through his hair as he lifted me to his height. I wrapped my legs around his waist, wanting every last particle of his being to enter mine so that I would never be without him. When our lips parted for the final time, both of us were out of breath and the air around us quickly turned to fog in the cold night air. He held me in place for a few moments, our foreheads meeting, eyes slightly unfocused from the ecstasy of the moment, before I began to whisper:

"I lo-"

"I know." He looked into my eyes and smirked, causing a giggle to erupt from the bottom of my stomach. I unwrapped my legs from him and let him slowly place me back on the ground, sliding down his body on my way. He didn't release me.
"I'm not going anywhere."

"What?"

"I'm not walking out of your life unless you ask me to. My location may change, but the way I feel about you won't."

"Me either."

He didn't say anything in response but simply looked into my eyes before they flickered to the truck.

"Let me know when y'all get there, okay?"

"I will."

I took his left hand, interning our fingers as I walked with him slowly to the truck. After he climbed in, stuffed in the middle, Steve in the driver's seat and Sam in the passenger's, I stepped up and leaned in the window.

"I asked Bucky to let me know when you guys get there, y'all feel free to let me know as well, alright. No fighting or elbowing each other. You can stop for ice cream if you behave." I smirked when they started laughing. "Seriously, take care of each other. I'll miss you."

"See you soon," Steve said pointedly.

I nodded before stepping down and away from the truck so that they could pull away. I watched them reach the street before I saw Steve pull Bucky's arm just barely out of the window to wave goodbye, making me laugh.

"I told you I'd get her to laugh! Cut the check!" I heard him yell, presumably at Bucky. I watched them pull onto the street and drive into the darkness. Although the normal, dark, pessimistic side of me wanted to sink into the pavement and give up all hope, a small part of me, shining brighter, knew that everything truly was going to be okay.
I knew him.

READER POV
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I went back to work and classes on Monday. Sunday I used to completely recuperate. I also used it to come up with many symptoms and sick issues I supposedly had. My lies came pretty naturally, to my surprise.

The week passed quickly and uneventfully. I was pretty lonely and I found myself thinking of Bucky often. They had gotten back safely, but I hadn't heard anything other than that from anyone. I finally decided that maybe if I left them alone, allowed them to try and figure these things out to help Bucky, maybe he'd be back sooner.

After about a week of silence, I finally broke down and text Steve.

Hey, I'm sorry to bother you, I just wanted to check in on you guys. I hope you're all well and things are improving.

It took a good 36 hours, but I eventually received word back. When I got off of work Monday night, I had a missed call and a voicemail from Steve. I decided to listen first before beginning my drive home.

"Hey, (y/n), this is Steve Rogers." I love how he felt the need to explain who it was like I wouldn't know. "I got your text and just wanted to call and check in with you. I'm guessing you're working or are busy. Things are good here. I'm sorry I haven't contacted before. Things are good, but a little chaotic." You heard a loud noise in the background, what sounded like falling metal and shattering glass. "Ah, (y/n), I've got to go. Everything's good here. I'll contact soon. Bye."

The end of the message was urgent....he was attempting to be reassuring that everything was okay, but it was clear not everything was as smooth as he tried to make it seem. However, his message also seemed like a hint to let them contact me, instead of me contacting them.

I sighed deeply as I put my phone in the cup holder, put the car in drive, and headed home.

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It was three more weeks before I heard from them again. It had literally taken me working doubles every day that I didn't have class, running throughout the city whenever I had downtime, and every ounce of will power within me not to call or text them at the very least. I had started to leave my phone on me at all times, whether on full volume, or where I could see the screen light up, even at work. During Thanksgiving, my family became annoyed because I only half paid attention, hoping that maybe they'd make contact then with it being a holiday, but no such luck. The only time I ignored my phone was when I went out to the farm to visit. I didn't work the Market during the winter, but I didn't want to stop visiting with Roger and Betty.

The first Wednesday of December, I got home after a shift, grabbed my mail, and headed up the six flights of stairs, completely exhausted. I wanted to curl up with some hot tea and quickly go to sleep. I threw the mail on the breakfast counter once in my apartment, undressed, and took a scalding hot shower. As I was getting out I remembered about the bills due on Friday. I drudged my way back to the living room to pull out my computer to review my bank account and the payments due. I hadn't seen my electric bill come in yet so I went to check the mail I had received that day.

"Junk, coupons, ads, more junk, the previous tenant, ughhh how long am I gonna get these? There
"you are, bill!" I recited my stack of mail, but as I pulled my electric bill from the stack, another envelope caught my eye. I didn't recognize the handwriting, but it appeared masculine and the return address said, New York.

"New York!!" My eyes bulged as I ripped open the envelope as quickly as I could. I got a few paper cuts, but I couldn't care less at the time because as I pulled the piece of paper out of the envelope and opened it, I saw the signature on the bottom was from Bucky.

(Y/n),

I'm sorry I haven't gotten in touch with you since I left. Things have been...a little crazy here, but Tony has tried some things and we think they're working. I'm remembering some things from my past, good things this time. Sadly, he hasn't yet figured out how to wipe the bad memories, but he's still trying.

How are you? I miss you so much. Every night before I go to sleep, I think about you and wish you were asleep on my shoulder like when we watched the movies that night. How is work? Are things crazy with your classes? Are you making any new friends? You should, you know. As if I have any room to talk...anyways. I want to hear from you soon. You don't have to write me, you can text or call me. I just...I guess this is the communication I'm most familiar with. I hope it isn't boring or too old fashioned for you. Again, I miss you so very much.

I know,
Bucky

I couldn't believe he sent me a letter. He actually took the time to hand write me a letter! By the time I finished reading, I was crying. All of the emotions I had been holding in spilled over the dam I had put up. I was crying sad tears, happy tears, exhausted tears, tears I didn't know I even had within me. I picked up my phone and called him immediately, hoping he'd pick up.

As I was about to give up hope, the line picked up but it was Sam's voice, not Bucky's.

"This must be (y/n)."

"Yes. This must be Sam." You answered sarcastically. "But how did you know it was me? My caller ID?"

"Yeh, it's just five heart eye emojis."

I felt my grin grow to my ears and my skin heated quickly.

"Oh, so now you have no smartass comment?"

"No, but I did call Bucky's phone to talk to Bucky, not Big Bird," you sniggered when he scoffed at your insult.

"Don't be rude." His voice changed though as he said the next thing. His voice was soft, being as gentle as he could. "Bucky's actually ahh, indisposed right now. Tony's been running tests all day long and they're still at it. I'm sorry."

I took a deep breath and said "okay," as I let it out. "Can you tell him I called? Or better yet, can you hang up and let me call back to leave a voicemail?"

"I mean, I can just tell him."
"Sam, I'd rather leave the voicemail, if that's okay."

"Fine, but don't leave him a nasty one, I don't think he could quite handle that," he started chuckling at his hinting of a prospective sexual voicemail.

"Sam, really? Grow up!" You couldn't stop yourself from laughing along with him, though.

"I'll hang up, alright. It was good to talk to you."

"Yeh.....Sam, will you please tell me how things really are? I know Steve is trying to protect me, but I'd rather just know."

He remained silent for a moment, probably trying to decide what to do or how to answer.

"(Y/n), it's a process, a grueling process, things really are okay, though. He's okay. I mean...for Bucky/Winter Soldier trying to get rid of Winter Soldier...he's okay. Steve isn't lying to you-"

"And if he was, you'd continue the lie instead of telling me the truth...."

"Well, yeh, if we're being honest. I don't dislike you at all, but I have my loyalties."

"I get it, Sam, I really do. I just. It's hard to be here and not know anything for weeks and then feel like I'm being lied to and I can't do anything. It just....really sucks."

"I know, (y/n), I know."

I felt some tears and sniffles approaching so I decided to go ahead and end the phone call.

"Sam, I'm exhausted so I'm going to go ahead and hang up, but I'm going to call back for the voicemail, okay? I'll talk to you later. Thanks for talking with me."

"Anytime. Have a good night. I'll make sure he checks his phone."

"Thank you. Talk to you later."

After the call ended, I waited for a few moments, wanting to regather my thoughts and control of my voice.

I clicked Bucky's name and sent the call. He hadn't even changed his inbox, a robotic voice read the message and phone number.

"Hey, Bucky, it's (y/n). I just got your letter!! It completely made my night. I love handwritten letters by the way, so that works out perfectly. I'm keeping really busy to be completely honest, but I want to write you back so I'll save all that information for the letter. I couldn't stop myself from calling and thanking you, though, and telling you how much it means to me. I miss you so very much. I hope to talk to you soon....I know."

I hung up the phone and crawled into bed, deciding the bills could wait.

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I wrote and mailed him a letter first thing Thursday and on Saturday evening, I received a phone call.

"Barry!" I shouted at my coworker. "I need to watch the front. I've got to take this call. Hello!?" I practically yelled as I saw Bucky's face disappear after hitting answer.

"Hey,"
"Hi!! Oh my gosh! It's so great to hear your voice!"

"Yours too, doll. I've missed it."

He heard the bell over the door ring.

"Are you at work? I'm sorry. I'll let you go."

"No, Bucky, wait! Don't hang up, it's okay. Barry is watching the front."

"But you don't need to be on your phone at work; you'll get in trouble."

"Bucky, it's okay, I promise. It's really slow and I've spent the majority of my time working since you left so I'm here all the time. It's about time I checked out of work mode for a few minutes at least."

"I got your letter. You shouldn't work that much, you know. It's not healthy."

"Bucky, I'll be okay. It helps to keep me and my mind busy, plus the extra cash has really helped."

"Still. Don't overdo it, okay?"

"Okay," I smiled, in order to lie, but he knew I was.

"I know you're lying to me, but I appreciate the effort. Did you know that if you're working all the time, you can't travel anywhere?"

"I wasn't really planning on traveling anywhere anyhow so I don't see the difference that it makes."

"Well, that's partially why I wanted to call you. I was wondering if you'd be interested in coming here to spend some time for New Years?"

My heart seemed to stop completely before attempting to sprint out of my chest.

"What!?"

He laughed softly at my reaction. "I was hoping we could spend some time together after Christmas, maybe ring in the new year together? Steve and Tony are planning a big bash here. I was hoping you'd be my date."

"Bucky...I'd love to. I'll have to check with Mags about work, but I'm fairly certain she'll work with me to have a few days off. I can't believe I'm going to get to see you."

"It's going to be too long, but I'm glad too. I cannot wait."

The conversation continued for a few more minutes before Bucky's insistence about me getting in trouble for talking on the phone at work, so I agreed to hang up as long as I didn't have to wait for so long to hear from him.

"You shouldn't have to wait too long if you haven't checked your mail today."

"WHAT?!" I squealed, causing Barry to run back to the back to check on me. I waved him away, assuring him I was okay.
He laughed loudly. God knows, I had missed it.

"Okay, (y/n), seriously, I don't want you to get in trouble, so I'm going to hang up, but I'll talk to you soon, okay? Promise me you'll let me know when you get home?"

I was so excited, that I couldn't answer verbally, I just nodded vigorously. He must have heard the rustling of my hair as it bobbed back and forth against the phone.

"I'll take that as a yes...."

I made an "uh huh" sound in response.

"I'll talk to you later.... I know."

"I know, Bucky," I whispered back before I ended the call.

When my shift was over, I dashed out of the shop so quick, running to my car and sped home. Once I got my mailbox open, I ripped through the mail and saw Bucky's letter. I didn't even begin upstairs, I opened it right there and read the entire thing. After I finished, I held the letter to my chest and waited for the lift upstairs. As cheesy as it seemed, I changed and got into bed, laying the letter down on the pillow beside me, falling asleep dreaming about the beautiful words I had just read.

The next few weeks passed quickly. I had things figured out with Mags about time off for time with family in NC for Christmas and then traveling to NY to see Bucky. Anytime I had enough free time, I went to visit Roger and Betty before I left out of town for a week or so. I went one last time on my way out of town to check in with them.

As I traveled down the drive, I noticed they had put more lights up around the porch and it made me smile. I stepped up to the door and knocked shortly and Mr. Roger came to the door to let me in. As I stepped inside he pulled me in for a hug.

"Hello, my dear! Betty! Come see who's here," he called down the hall towards the kitchen.

"Hey, Mr. Roger! It smells so good in here! Are you baking something delicious, Mrs. Betty?" I asked her as she appeared in the hallway.

"You're just in time for some apple pie, sweetheart. Hello, how are you," she asked as she stepped up, giving me a hug.

"I'm well. I wanted to stop in for a few minutes before I headed out of town."

"Well dear, come in here to the kitchen! We'll sit and chat shortly over pie and coffee."

I followed but insisted feeding me wasn't necessary. "Mrs. Betty, I promise, I don't have to eat every time I visit. I'd love to chat for a few minutes, though." Mr. Roger chuckled quietly behind me, causing me to turn around and smile when he shook his head, knowing my insistence on not eating was pointless.

"Nonsense! You've got a bit of a drive ahead of you. You need fuel so you don't fall asleep. Have a seat. Roger, will you pour us some coffee, please?"

I did as I was told, knowing arguing would be fruitless. I watched them in contentment. It had been so long since I had had the privilege of watching a head over heels in love elderly couple work
together like this. On one side of my family, my grandmother passed away young and my grandfather never remarried. On the other side of my family, you almost questioned whether my grandparents loved each other or were together for convenience. Roger and Betty's affections for each other were evident. When doing the simplest of things, you could still catch them watching the other every now and then in admiration. When they were in close quarters, they had to be touching, even if it was just that they rubbed elbows. When they spoke to each other, there was never any condemnation or malice, even in their disagreements, which I had witnessed more than once since I had met them. Even now, as Betty was preparing to cut and serve the pie, Roger stopped his coffee preparation to assist her in getting the plates out of the cabinet so that she wouldn't have to reach so high. He stepped up, placing his palm lightly on the small of her back and reached in the cabinet for the plates. When he had placed them on the counter for her, she reached her short left arm around his waist, pulling him into a side hug as he lay his arm around her shoulder, pulling her closer and kissing the top of her head. He then returned to the coffee and brought three fresh cups to the table as Betty began bringing the slices of pie as well.

"So, (y/n), you're heading home to North Carolina for the holidays, correct?" Mr. Roger asked.

"Yes, sir. I figure I'll get home around 7 or 8 p.m. tonight and the holiday festivities will begin tomorrow. Everyone will be coming over to my parents in the afternoon before we head to my mother's side of the family."

"Are you excited? It's been a while since you've gone home, hasn't it?" Betty piped up.

"I am excited. I actually haven't even been home since I moved. My parents have visited a couple of times, but that's it. I'm looking forward to seeing the rest of my family as well."

"And after Christmas, you're going to see that young man, correct?"

I felt myself blushing and Betty smiled knowingly.

"Ahh, yes ma'am," I heard myself laugh nervously. "Bucky, I'm going to visit Bucky in New York."

"I sure do hate we didn't get to meet him...."

You smiled at the mischievous look on her face.

"I know, I know you would have liked to. I, ahh, well, if he hadn't had needed to go back to New York so quickly, I would have introduced you."

"You never did say why he left so quickly," Roger was joining in on the small interrogation now.

"I didn't? Well, ahh, he just.... he needed to move back for his health. People who know his case are in New York, so they're more knowledgeable in helping him...what plans do y'all have for the holidays?" I wanted to avoid giving too much information about Bucky to them. I knew I wouldn't be able to lie easily to them, nor did I want to.

We spoke for a little while about their plans and how their holidays had been spent differently in the past. I had enjoyed their stories so much that I hadn't even noticed it getting dark outside. When I did. I looked at my watch and said:

"I didn't realize it was getting dark. I better be heading out. I prefer not to drive all of those back roads in the pitch black."

We all slowly stood. As we did so Roger caught me off guard.
"So what was this Bucky's last name?"

"Oh, Barnes. Bucky Barnes."

Roger looked at me strangely before saying, "I used to know a Bucky Barnes who was buddies with my older brother when he was in the army."

I couldn't hide my fear and shock quick enough as I knew this was more than likely the same Bucky. I didn't want them to know it was one in the same. They watched the news. They knew all about the Winter Soldier. They knew what he was capable of. I don't know if they'd approve of my seeing Bucky. I attempted to remain calm and pretend that didn't mean a whole lot to me, not that it wasn't important but to pretend as though there was no correlation.

"Really? That's cool. Maybe Bucky's a relative down the line or something....well I guess I better be going." They followed me to the door. I turned to give Betty a hug. Afterward, I stepped to Roger for a hug, but he stopped me and said, "I'll walk you out."
Protective Anger

Chapter Summary

Author's note: Sorry guys, but this is going to be a short filler/background chapter.

READER POV

"So your kids can't make it for Christmas this year? I hate that," I said as Roger and I walked to my vehicle.

"(Y/n), how much do you know about this Bucky Barnes?" Roger's tone and pointed question caught me off guard. It was the quietest and simultaneously serious I had ever heard him. His voice had an edge I had never experienced.

"Mr. Roger, what do you mean?"

"(Y/n), I knew Bucky Barnes. I knew my brother, well. I want to tell you about him and how I knew Bucky as well. Jimmy met Barnes in training and they became friends quickly. Barnes didn't have any family, only a civilian friend, Steve, so he came home with Jimmy most of the times they were allowed to visit family. Bucky became a part of our family quickly. He was charming and made others laugh. He and Jimmy were a lot alike in that way. Before Jimmy left for war, he was the same big brother I knew and loved. He always made time for us, his siblings, it was just he, our younger sister, and me. He took interest in us and always showed us how much he cared about us. He always did his best to protect us in every way possible, which is why I saw him as the perfect person to become a soldier. He was always happy, he never let things get him down, even when things weren't so great for our family, but he always kept spirits lifted with his jovial mood."

Listening to Roger, it was evident how much he looked up to and idolized his brother, his serious tone had changed to more of a reminiscent one. "I don't think I've ever heard you talk about your brother this much, Mr. Roger. That's lovely. I'd love to hear about him more sometime."

"Good, because you're about to." The slick and sharp tone was back. "After my brother came back from war, he was not the same person I just described. He lost every friend he had made, including Bucky Barnes. They had all died or been captured and no one knew their whereabouts. He, Jimmy, was frail, paranoid, and hermit-like after he returned. When he was awake, and we were actually able to get him to leave his room, he would sit and stare, mind far from where he was. There were many nights that I ran to his room as I heard thrashing, crashing, and yelling. As you can imagine, he returned from war with PTSD. The entire first week back, he wrecked the house every night as sleepwalking was mixed with the nightmares he fought. In his nightmares, he was still at war, and our house displayed this." He paused and took a deep breath, and I could tell things were getting difficult for him so I jutted in.
"Mr. Roger, you don't have to do this. I'm not sure why you're telling me this. You don't have to, though. I don't want you to be upset."

"(Y/n), is, or is not, this Bucky you're going to see, the same James 'Bucky' Buchanan Barnes who fought alongside my brother, many others, and his best friend Steve Rogers, well known as Captain America, who was kidnapped by HYDRA and made the Winter Soldier? You're not going to lie to me, are you?"

His point blank question made my skin crawl. I could feel my hands and feet go cold, but my face turned warm. He knew I wouldn't be able to lie to him. He knew my heart could not bear it, not after everything he and Mrs. Betty had done for me, after growing so fond of them.

"Mr. Roger...I, uhh...Bucky...he isn't the same person as the Winter Soldier..."

"So he is one in the same. You know this for a fact?" His voice was stressed.

".....yes, sir." The concern in his eyes grew, so I added, "I trust Bucky, he wouldn't hurt me."

"You trust him-Bucky-not to hurt you?"

"Yes, sir." I had gotten used to having to repeat myself sometimes in Mr. Roger's presence.

"You trust Bucky. What about the Winter Soldier?"

Apparently, repetition wasn't what was needed. He was making a different point. "...Mr. Roger....it's like I said, Bucky and the Winter Soldier are two separate people."

"You have good reason not to trust the Winter Soldier. The Bucky I used to know is trustworthy...but that was before he went to war and Hydra got a hold of him."

"But Mr. Roger, he doesn't do that anymore, he's just Buc-"

"Let me finish telling you about Jimmy." He paused before continuing. "About eight months after his return and our constant battling and dealing with his symptoms, one night he beat our mother. He was inside of his dream and didn't realize who he was beating in reality. He beat her badly, (y/n), badly enough that she remained hospitalized for a month afterward. Now, if we hadn't already felt like things were bad for Jimmy before that incident, afterward it was 10 times worse. He closed in on himself completely, there was no shimmer of Jimmy's former self. He was a danger to everyone around him, and to himself, and he knew it. One day when we came back from church, we found him. I don't want to be too graphic, but he had killed himself. He left a letter explaining why he had done it. He felt he couldn't control his mind or his actions anymore. He couldn't live with what he had done to our mother. He didn't feel like he could chance something like that happening again. Now, I don't want an actual answer, because to be completely transparent, I'm afraid I already know the answer and I don't like it. Why did Barnes have to leave so quickly to go back to New York? Was it because he was Bucky, or was it because the Winter Soldier made an appearance? Even if you trust Bucky, and for good reason, he has been through a lot, an astronomical amount that neither of us will truly and completely understand. The Winter Soldier is still here," he said pointing at his head, referencing Bucky's mind. "No matter how much he fights against it, it's likely there's always a risk that Bucky will lose control and someone will get hurt, either those around him, or even himself...like Jimmy. It's obvious how much you care about him, and if you stick around him, there's a good chance you'll get hurt at some point, in some way....I don't want to see that happen, (y/n)."

"I understand where you're coming from and what you're saying, Mr. Roger, I really do...I just...he's my friend now...besides Steve, I think I'm just about the only friend he has. Doesn't he deserve that,
need that, after all of this time, after all of his suffering? Doesn't he Mr. Roger?" My eyes had widened and tears had begun to form, thinking of the idea of leaving Bucky alone.

Mr. Roger pulled me in for a hug before he responded: "I know I'm not any relation, dear, but I care for you like my own daughter, both Betty and I do, and I don't want to see you get hurt. That's all. I watched my brother change into a stranger and it took a long time for all of my family to get past it. It hurt, badly, and I wouldn't have gotten through it without Betty's support and love. I don't want to see you experience that or similar pain."

I pulled out of the hug and looked at him in the eyes, all seriousness in my body transitioning into my own eyes. "Mr. Roger...I may be completely wrong...it's all still too new to know...but what if what Bucky needs is a Betty? If it is, why shouldn't I be his Betty?"
Temporary Fix

After the holidays, I traveled back home to Lynchburg and was there only long enough to do laundry and get a few hours of sleep, before I was headed to the airport. Tony had been the one to supply the tickets, first class might I add, and transport services to the tower. I met the famous Mauve (a second progression of Jarvis, post-Ultron) in this process which was unreal.

"Hello, Ms. (y/l/n), I'm Mauve, here to assist you with anything you might need. I will be traveling back with you to Stark Tower. Is there any location in which you need to stop first?"

"Ahh, no, I don't think so."

"Then we'll be there shortly, miss. In the compartments to your left and right, you'll find any beverage or snack of choice."

"I'm fine, thank you, Mauve...by the way, it's nice to meet you."

"It's lovely to meet you as well."

The ride to the tower was quiet as I took in the city as we rode by. Mauve didn't bother me, nor did I have much to say to him, but as I saw the tower ahead of us through the windshield, my nervous system kicked into overdrive. My hands began to get clammy, despite the 22-degree weather outside. All of the senses in my body seemed to be on high alert as my body began to tingle like when a part of it falls asleep. My stomach began to churn. I didn't know why I was so nervous.

"Mauve..."

"Yes, ma'am?"

"How are things at the tower? How is Bucky doing? Is everyone okay with me visiting?"

"Ma'am, I'm not sure I have the right to answer those questions."

"Not you too, Mauve! Can no one tell me anything?"

"I can tell you that Mr. Barnes is happy to be seeing you."

"Well, I guess that beats bad news...." I muttered to myself. Once we stopped, the door to the vehicle opened, seemingly of its own volition. I stepped out, dragging my bag behind me.

Sam appeared at my side, taking my bag.

"Hey, (y/n). Let's get inside, I'll show the way."

He didn't give me a chance to reply. He all but pushed me forward and into the building. Once we were in an elevator, I dared to speak.

"So hello to you too? What's the hushed rush about?"

"Brrr, it's cold outside. Can't you tell?" He was a terrible liar. I looked at him in the eyes, but he immediately looked away and to the LED screen telling us which floor we were on.

"Sam, what's wrong? Where's Bucky? What's going on? What about Steve?" I flew into a mountain of loaded questions. Why didn't Bucky meet me? Something clearly had to be wrong.
"Ahh, Bucky and Steve are a little preoccupied right now is all. I'll help you get settled. That's all."

"Sam. Steve and Bucky don't just become preoccupied unless something is wrong. Has Bucky had an episode? Dammit Sam, just tell me!" I half-yelled this at him, fed up with the secrecy, as the doors of the elevator opened. I continued to glare at him instead of out the doors until I heard Bucky's voice.

"I told them you wouldn't like this plan."

My head swished so quickly to see a healthy and happy looking Bucky. He grinned at me, eyes skimming down my body, taking in the sight of me. I couldn't help but stare at him. The elevator doors began to close, but I didn't notice until they were almost shut. I jumped forward, yelling "no!" while Sam's voice cut through the fog "calm down, woman, damn," as he pressed the door open button for me. Once the doors opened again, I jumped into Bucky's open arms. He held me tight and picked me up off the ground, but not far. My eyes squished tight, relishing in the moment and the feel of being in Bucky's arms again. He put me down after a few seconds but didn't let go. I looked around him and saw Steve smirking in our direction. I also saw party decorations spread across the massive...I assumed, living space. I also saw many of the Avengers sitting on the couches, staring at the exchange.

"Ahh, Bucky, what the hell..." I whispered to him.

"We're here to meet you," Peter Parker called.

I couldn't even acknowledge what was happening. I did feel my face heating up, however. Bucky leaned down slightly to give me a peck on the cheek and took my left hand, leading me over to where everyone else was sitting. Sam had joined them, but Steve had continued to the fridge and was pouring himself a glass of water.

"Everyone, this is (y/n)."

"So we finally get to meet the infamous (y/n). You're the only thing he knows how to talk about." Nat spoke boldly, almost seemingly annoyed. I wasn't sure why, but I immediately knew she was not going to be my biggest fan. Steve must have shot her a look from behind me because she quickly scoffed, rolled her eyes, and looked out the glass wall into the courtyard.

"So you're from that mountain town Lynchburg, right?" Wanda Maximoff asked, standing to greet me. She reached out her hand to shake mine.

"Ah, well it's where I live now, yes. It's nice to meet you.."

"I'm Wanda, it's a pleasure to meet you, (y/n)."

"Mr. Barnes, I have to argue with you about the color of Ms. (Y/n) eyes. It seems that instead of being the color of emeralds, they appear to be more of a sea foam variety."

"Well, Vision, I suppose that's one reason they call you that? Nice to meet you." I piped up, slightly offended (but still flattered) that Vision wanted to argue against Bucky, but I let it go. Vision smiled and nodded in my direction as an acknowledgment of what I had said. He must have sensed my dislike of his arguing as he didn't have anything else to say. I didn't mean to offend him, but I felt my protective instincts kicking into high gear, instincts to protect both Bucky and myself.

"We have some snacks and cake over here, (y/n), if you'd like something?" Steve was attempting to help the situation.
"Ahh, yeh, why don't you guys go ahead?"

"We've been waiting on you. You're the guest. You're supposed to go first," Natasha's words cut into me.

My face was heating, in anger, at this point. What the hell had I done to her? I turned my head quickly in her direction and dropped my hand from Buckys.

"I'm sorry, but what the h-"

"Nat, can I see you down the hall, please?" Steve cut me off, knowing this would not end well.

She huffed, but stood up and led the way down the hall. I turned to Bucky, partly embarrassed that I had almost shown my ass in front of people I didn't know...superheroes at that, but I didn't appreciate her attitude. Super assassin or not, I hadn't done anything for her to be hateful towards me.

Clint Barton stepped up to me, extending his hand. "Please excuse her, she was already upset before you got here. I'm Clint. It's nice to finally meet you."

I smiled at his kindness. "Lovely to meet you as well. If y'all are really waiting on me, please go ahead, I actually need to use the restroom."

"Here, I'll show you to your room. There's a bathroom there."

Bucky picked up my bags and motioned for me to walk ahead of him as he placed his hand on the small of my back, guiding me where to go. Once the door to the elevator shut, I immediately looked at the floor, shaking my head.

"I'm sorry I lost my temper with your friend. I just...I don't understand why she was being so rude when we had just met."

"You don't have to apologize. She was being rude...and don't get me wrong, these people haven't treated me poorly, but they're more Steve's friends than mine. I thought your reaction was funny, actually. I'm glad you stood up to her. I should have stepped in, honestly, but like I said, they're more Steve's friends than mine."

The elevator doors opened and we stepped out into a different looking floor that was full of doors, presumably bedrooms.

"No, it wasn't your place either. Don't worry about it. If you're not worried about it, I'm not going to worry about it either."

"This one here on the right. If it's not okay, we can arrange something else. My room is four doors down on the left if you need anything. I'll give you a few minutes to let you get settled if you'd like. You have an ensuite bathroom," he said as he stepped in, placing my bags on the bed.

"Yeh, that'll be great. I'd like to change into something a little nicer anyway."

"Okay, you don't have to, though, just so you know." He reached around my waist and pulled me in close. "You look beautiful just as you are." I stood on my tiptoes to meet his lips that were approaching mine. At the moment our lips touched it was as if all was right in the world. Things were normal, nothing was weird. Bucky was Bucky, I was myself, and we were the only two people that mattered in the universe. I'm unsure how I had fell so quickly, but I loved this man, and while I knew it wasn't going to be easy, I didn't want to ever let him go.

Our lips parted and he grabbed my hand to kiss the back of it, gripping it tightly in this thick and rough hand. He gave it a squeeze before letting go and throwing "I'll be in my room if you want to
come get me whenever you're ready," over his shoulder as he walked out, closing the door quietly behind him.

I went into the bathroom to throw cold water on my face. I needed to calm down. I was on edge after the rough and awkward situation with Natasha. Bucky helped calm me, but not completely. I looked at myself in the mirror, taking deep breaths and stilling myself and my determination to make nice with everyone. If I was being honest, while I found it important to get along with these people considering they were around Bucky more than I was at this point, seeing Bucky happy and healthy was my main goal, it's what I cared about most. I changed into clothes that were still comfortable, but looked nicer, and put on some makeup for extra effect. I still threw my hair into a loose bun on top of my head before taking a deep breath and walking out of my room and down the hallway.

"...how many doors did he say..." I wondered quietly to myself. "Crap." I stepped to the third door and tried to speak only loud enough that someone on the other side might possibly hear me, "Bucky??" I waited but heard nothing. I repeated the action at the next door. I still heard no answer. "Maybe it was the fifth?" I whispered to myself. I stopped at the next door and repeated my actions. I heard someone approaching the door so I smiled, thankful to have found the right room. To my surprise the door swung open, "this isn't Bucky's room. What the fuck do you want?" Natasha's icy voice met my smile, quickly turning my smile into a grimace.

"Well, clearly you know damn well what I want---ugh. This is fucking ridic-"

"There isn't anything ridiculous but as to why you're at my door. I didn't ask you to come here. If you're looking for Bucky, don't come to my door. He sure as hell isn't in here." Her voice had risen in volume. "He's too fucking hung up on y-" the door on my left swung open.

"(Y/n), I'm the fourth door down." He stepped out of his room and moved quickly to your side protectively. "Sorry, Natasha, it was an honest mistake. She didn't mean to bother you." He began to guide me away from the door as I glared at her for her attitude and words.

"Yeh, don't worry, it won't happen again." I spat back at her as Bucky practically pushed me into his room, closing the door before Natasha could return any words of her own. We heard her door slam and Bucky cringed before looking at the ceiling and rolling his eyes.

"Sorry about that...again."

"Bucky, you don't have anything to apologize about. She's being a bitch." I didn't bother with quieting my voice. I didn't know if the walls were soundproof or not, nor did I care. She could surely kill me in a second if she wanted, but at this point, I was beyond pissed and I didn't care. I normally wasn't a confrontational person, but something about Natasha put me on edge and made me crave violence.

I plopped onto the bed, head swimming with anger. Bucky got down on his knees in front of me, taking hold of my hands, enveloping them in his own.

"I think she's heading out on a mission in a few days. Let's just try and stay clear of her for now. I don't want anything to ruin my time with you, okay?"

I took a deep breath and let my eyes find his before smiling and saying: "Okay."

"Do you want to go downstairs now for what's left of your little welcoming party?"

"Sure, I don't want to be rude...well, rude to anyone else," I finished with laughter. He stood from the floor, pulling me up with him. We went back downstairs to find most of the goodies gone, which
was fine considering Bucky didn't eat much and I wasn't really hungry as I had eaten a big breakfast before leaving Lynchburg. We hung around with everyone, except Natasha, who had seemingly barricaded herself in her room, having a lovely time. The crowd was full of jokers who loved having the others at the expense of their jokes. I continually caught Bucky looking at me with a grin on his face, Sam didn't miss it either because he kept calling Bucky out for it, causing us both to blush and the group to laugh. After a few hours and things were cleaned up, we went different ways. Some went to train, some to prepare for an upcoming mission, and some to relax.

"Want to sneak out of here? Go see the city," Bucky leaned in and whispered, even though we were seemingly alone.

I turned to him, a grin appearing. "Really?" I whispered back. "Yes, that'd be awesome. Let me grab some warmer clothes."

"I'll race you," he said as he was already making a mad dash for the stairs.

"Not fair!" I exclaimed, jumping up and running after him. He, of course, beat me but turned around at his door to wait for me to reach my own. He winked at me, causing me to roll my eyes and step into my room. I grabbed my coat and some warm accessories-head/ear wrap, gloves, and a big fluffy scarf.

When I stepped outside of my room, I wasn't expecting to see Bucky standing against the wall waiting, making me jump slightly, but of course, he noticed.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you." He snuck his arm around my hips as we walked to the elevator. We headed down and out into the cold, winter air. He pulled me closer for warmth. We walked happily along, catching up and discussing how things had been since we had parted in October. We walked around the city, taking in the tourist spots. Afterward, we went to Brooklyn. He wanted to show me where he and Steve used to live. I knew this was something he didn't share with a lot of people, so I was pleased he wanted to share it with me. Apparently, Steve had arranged to purchase the properties when he came out of the ice and got back on his feet. Bucky pulled out keys to open the door and once I stepped in, it was like stepping back in time.

"Yeh, Steve, with Tony's resources, fixed his place like it was when we were living here. He felt like it would be a nice place to get away for himself and then when he found out I was alive, he fixed this place up to try and help me remember."

"It's lovely, Bucky." I walked around inspecting all of the things from the past, afraid to touch anything, but looking at everything closely. He sat on the couch and watched me looking at everything before he realized how cold it was when he saw a chill run over my body. "Here, I'll make us some coffee." He stood and moved to the kitchen as I continued to look after thanking him.

He brought me a cup shortly and I followed him to the couch and sat beside him. I removed my shoes and pulled my feet up beside me, leaning into his side slightly.

"Do you remember anything about living here?"

"A few things. I'm remembering more, the more that Tony runs his little experiments...which has its benefits, but I'm also remembering bad things too...which sucks, but for now it's what I've got to deal with."

His face lost some of its color, his eyes losing a dash of life and his smile was no longer there, his face seemed to go blank.
I placed my head on his shoulder, nuzzling into his neck just a little to hopefully distract him. "Would you mind telling me some of the things you remember about living here?" I asked this as quietly and as gently as I could, so as not to set him off in any way.

I sensed him smiling beside me. He began to tell me everything he could remember, mostly good memories, but there were a few sad ones. He told me about the good memories he had with his family before they passed away. He told me about some good times he had with Steve, including wrestling matches and cartoon marathons when they were able to pull their money together to afford a small television set. He also explained the differences that occurred in their lives here when their parents and siblings had passed away. He shared how things had changed for them and around them, how it had brought them closer together.

"And so far, that's all I can remember....but I guess it's quite a bit considering it's 6 p.m..."

By the time he finished speaking, I had fallen even more in love with him, but I tried not to let it show. I looked at him fondly, almost in a daze, "is it really? I could care less. Can't we just stay like this forever?"

He smiled at me, putting his arm around my shoulder and pulling me as close as he could. "I'm surprised they haven't come looking for us yet, to be honest."

"I guess that's a hint we should probably be heading back?"

"Yeh," he sighed, "probably so," he said, taking the coffee cups to the sink to wash. As he ran the water to wash the cups, I stepped up behind him, wrapping my arms around his tiny waist and placing my head on his back. I couldn't muster words in the moment, I just wanted to pour out all of the love and affection I held for this man from the pores of my skin into his. He finished washing the mugs quickly but didn't attempt to turn around, instead he placed his hands and arms on mine, and simply stood like that for a moment. He slowly turned around and I looked into his face, but not for long because there was a link between us that looked and felt like the cord from Back to the Future that had just sent Marty McFly back to his own time. Before my thoughts caught up with my actions, my body was pressed into his, mouths meeting and parting quickly. His hands reached to the back of my thighs, picking me up so that I could wrap my legs around him. In the process, I kicked the counter causing us to laugh between kisses as he stepped away from the counter. He walked towards the couch, bumping into tables and chairs on the way, causing me to giggle more, breaking apart our lips. He laid me on the couch and laid down on me, holding himself up slightly with his right arm. My arms still hung around his neck before a shrill ring broke us apart. His phone, probably the loudest phone ringtone I've ever heard, was going off.

"Shit." He breathed into my face. He stood up and pulled the phone out of his pocket. "What do you want, Steve?"

"Buck, where the hell are you? We've been looking all over. Is (y/n) with you? What's going on?" I heard Steve practically shouting through the phone.

"Oops," I whispered before bursting into a giggling fit, causing Bucky to lose the anger in his face and begin to smirk at me.

"Everything is fine. (Y/n) and I wanted to get out in the city. We're in Brooklyn, at the house. Can I let you go, please? We'll be back later."

"Buck, first off, you could have just told someone. Second off, I kinda need you back here."

"Why? What's going on?"
"Just need you back. We can discuss it when you get here."

Bucky sighed deeply. "Fine." He heard a returning sigh on Steve's end. "And don't sigh at me, acting like I'm interrupting your plans."

"See you soon, jerk."

"Whatever, punk."

He hung up the phone and shoved it in his pocket, looking down at me still sprawled on the couch.

"So we have to go back, huh?"

"Yeh, I guess so."

It was now my turn to sigh as I sat up, "alright, let's do this then." We grabbed everything we had brought and stepped outside, Bucky locking the door behind us. As we stepped to the curb, he began to hail a cab. I stuck my hands in his coat pocket, pulling him closer to me. He started giggling and I raised myself on my tip toes and began to stroke the inside of his neck with my nose before gradually adding butterfly kisses along the way. As he continued to attempt to get a cab to stop, the affections increased with the longer amount of time I had to wait in the cold. He began to chuckle as I tickled his neck with my tongue. A cab pulled up as he had just pulled me closer. He opened the door to the cab for me. As I climbed in I practically pulled him along behind me as I still had my hand in his coat pocket. He slid in beside me and barely got out "50th and Broadway," to the driver before I pulled his face to mine. He started to pull me closer as we kissed, but it wasn't close enough. I broke away just barely enough so that I could straddle him in the backseat, an audience of a taxi driver completely forgotten. We couldn't get enough of each other. This was something we had both felt, but not acted on. It was as if this was the last opportunity we had, last we would ever have. We wanted to completely devour each other and use each other up until there was nothing left, then come back for more. His hands grasped my back, lowering and raising depending on the moment. To have been what he had been through, for the amount of time, he hadn't forgotten how to kiss...how to touch...how to feel a woman in all of the right ways. My skin was crawling with exhilaration and my spirits soared. Before we knew it, the cab had stopped and the taxi driver had to cough loudly four times to get our attention. I was the one who finally heard him as I dislocated myself from Bucky's lips, leaning down into his shoulder and started laughing.

"Shit. Sorry, sir." I muttered loud enough for the cabbie to hear, trying to keep from laughing. Bucky brushed the inside of my thigh on accident as he reached into his pocket to get his wallet with cash and tip for the cab, causing both of our cheeks to turn scarlet. He handed the money to the driver, staring deeply into my eyes the entire time. I slid off of his lap and out of the cab first, grabbing his hand on my way out. Once the door shut, I pulled him in again, not caring who saw or who was around.

After a few moments, he pulled away, gasping, voice husky, "okay, okay, we've got to...let's just slow down," he had pulled his lips away, but he placed his forehead on mine, eyes hazy in the heat of the moment.

Breathlessly I replied, grinning, "okay. Slow down. I can do that."

He looked at me, chuckling. "Something to eat?"

"Other than you, you mean?" I replied seductively, but at seeing his eyes triple in size and his jaw drop, I stepped back to avoid crashing my head into his chest as I had to drop and grab my side in laughter.
"I was thinking more like...a burger..."

His response made tears come to my eyes from laughter and he shortly joined me.

"I guess that'll work too. Let's go." I grabbed his hand and we headed for a food truck I saw down the street. After getting our food, I saw the tower a few blocks away so we headed in that direction as we ate.

"So what do you think is going on? Why Steve needed you back?"

"Honestly...there's probably nothing going on. They probably just don't want me to be away from the tower and go off the reservation."

I stared thoughtfully ahead, contemplating how to respond to this information.

"...Bucky....is it really that bad? I mean...is the treatment and tests they're doing helping at all? Is it making things worse?"

"It's just....there's a lot to be undone. It takes time....I'm just hoping it'll work...."

"I hope, for your sake, it does too."

"....and what if it doesn't?"

"What do you mean?" His question worried me. What was he thinking? I hope he didn't mean something like he'd harm himself (the story of Jimmy wouldn't leave my mind) or go back into cryo. I don't think I could easily live without him anymore. I realize this seemed silly, but the idea of him not existing on this earth anymore completely broke everything inside of me.

"....I guess what I mean is....if it doesn't work.....what are we going to do....about us....I can't let what happened, happen again....I just can't." His argument was so reminiscent of the story Roger had told me about Jimmy.

We had reached the tower. I stopped walking and stared at Bucky, tears forming in my eyes. He stopped and turned around to look at me.

"Buc-...I ca-...I won-....Bucky, jus-" I wanted so badly to assure him, but I was cut off by Steve stepping out and pulling us both inside.

"(Y/n), can you please go back to your room," Steve said, Vision appearing out of nowhere. "I need to borrow Bucky for a little while. Vision will show you where to go."

"Steve, wh-"

"(Y/n), please, it's important."

"Fine," I bit the word at him, thoroughly frustrated. I followed Vision, arms crossed in anger. Once Vision left me at my room, I decided that I wasn't going to put up with this. What the hell was so important? I snuck out of my room and went to Bucky's room first, but he wasn't there. I began to explore. I wandered around seemingly aimless for a while before I heard shouts from down a hallway I'd found on a different floor.
"Nat-calm down. Nat-listen to me! He's here, okay. He's okay. He's here." I recognized Steve's voice. Even in intense situations, his voice always remained calm and one of reason.

I stepped slowly closer and around the corner, a glass wall was revealed. This must be their training room. I peeked around the corner, not wanting to be seen, but wanting to see everything. Bucky slowly walked across the room, cautiously towards Natasha. She stopped fighting and struggling against Clint and Wanda. When she saw Bucky, understood it was him and that he was okay, her face changed completely. Clint and Wanda released her as she ran to Bucky and forced herself into his arms. He held them out, instead of enclosing them around her. His face revealed confusion, but Steve simply looked at him and gave him "it's okay, just go with it" hand signal. It was at that moment I realized why Natasha hated me.

She was in love with Bucky.
Relive the Moment

BUCKY POV
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She was finally here. I could finally have her near and it was as if simultaneously, years, yet no time had passed since we were last together. After the events of the afternoon, including she and Natasha exchanging words, meeting everyone, and finding herself in a new place, I felt that she needed some time out, and honestly I couldn't turn down a chance to get out from under their watchful eyes. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate everything they're trying to do for me, but I just wanted to be alone with her, no curious or judging eyes to worry about. Once the crowd parted, I somehow knew she'd be up for some time out in the city.

I hadn't originally planned on taking her to Brooklyn, but as we walked through the city, it was like something was tugging me there, wanting to spill every detail of myself, that I could, with her. I didn't know how she'd take it, but as I mentioned it, she seemed touched and excited that I wanted to share that part of my life with her. As we entered, I let her walk ahead. She seemed to take everything in, looking at everything in almost adoration. She was in awe of the collection of the 1940s and I knew she must have felt like she was taking a literal step back in time, but she seemed to appreciate it nonetheless. I, of course, didn't notice the cold quite as much until I saw her shiver. I went to make some coffee and we sat down to enjoy it. She sat next to me and leaned in. Whether it was heat from her body, or the excitement in my own building up, my body temperature and nervous system seemed to be changing quickly. I still couldn't believe she would risk such closer quarters with me. I tried to push away the urge to slide away and keep my distance, her injuries from a few months before flashing across my mind. She asked about how my memories were, and while I wanted to lie and say everything is okay. I couldn't. I even heard Steve's voice in my head:

"I told her everything is okay. She doesn't need to know how rough things are. She's already worried enough. She doesn't deserve all of that burden on her."

Despite that, I couldn't not tell her. I couldn't lie to her. I didn't tell her how bad it was, or had been at times, but I didn't lead her to believe everything was great either. As bad memories hit me, she gently took my mind off of it by asking me to recall positive memories. When I looked at the clock it was 6p.m. I couldn't believe I had talked for that long. I mentioned this and that we should probably be heading back soon. I took the cups to the kitchen sink and began to wash them before I felt her wrap her arms around me from behind. My skin began to crawl, in a good way. I felt the blood flowing in my veins begin to speed up. I haven't felt like this...since I had last lived here. I turned around, looking into her eyes, searching for an answer to the question mine held. Her answer was simple, she leaned into me and kissed me. My lips joined in the kiss and I reached down to pick her up and place her around my waist. I needed her like I needed my next breath, and it seemed she felt the same way. In the process of picking her up, when she went to wrap her legs around my waist, she kicked the counter I was leaning against, causing us both to laugh. As if the kiss couldn't get any better, the laughter and light-heartedness only improved the moment. I carried her across the room. Considering I hadn't been here often and couldn't remember everything, I bumped into a few things on my way to carrying her to the couch. This made her laugh more. I joined her. Once I reached the couch, I hovered my body over hers. I looked into her softening eyes. I leaned down and kissed her neck ever so lightly. She drew back from me, which made me look to her frightened, but when I saw it was due to her being ticklish, I grinned and went back for more. I kissed below her ear before slowly moving down the side of her throat. This came natural, apparently, as if I had never stopped doing this. I dragged my nose back up the path where my lips had just caressed. I let my face travel across her throat lightly to the other side and drug my nose and lips just into her hairline before kissing my
way down the other side of her throat, I let my teeth nibble just slightly in this process and I heard her
breathlessly utter my name. I pulled back, but put more weight on the right side of my body so that
my left hand could run down the side of her body ever so lightly and at a glacial pace. Her skin was
prickling and her eyes had turned smoky.

My phone rang, of course, and I couldn't help but curse the phone. Of course, it was Steve. Of
course, he wanted me to come back. Of course, he had to choose this moment of all moments to call
and need me. We got our things and needless the say the cab ride was interesting. Our moment
continued, but with an audience, however, neither of us cared. We just wanted each other in all ways
possible. We got back to the tower after grabbing a bite to eat and once back Steve interrupted yet
another important moment. He pulled me away quickly.

"Steve. What the hell is so urgent? You kinda interrupted some very important moments for (y/n) and
I."

"Buck. I'm sorry, but Natasha has been having a meltdown for the past hour and a half. She thinks
something has happened to you, that Hydra has found and taken you."

"Why does that matter? Why is she even worried about me? She doesn't even like me and she clearly
doesn't like (y/n). Why would she be concerned about us?"

"....Buck, I just need you to show her you're okay, alright, and then I'll let you get back to (y/h).
Okay? I promise."

"Fine, I still don't understand wh-" I began to mutter as we entered the door to the training room.
However, the sight of Natasha stopped my speech and my movements. Upon entering, I saw her
fighting, very strongly, against both Clint and Wanda. Considering Clint was her best friend, the
dangerous attempts to get away from him shocked me. He could easily get hurt, which is what
brought on the assistance from Wanda. Natasha was strong, though, and she was giving them a run
for their money. Her face showed pure agony, hot anger, tear-stained agony. Her normal hard-as-
nails, 110% determined facade completely diminished and was nowhere to be found.

"...Buck?" Steve whispered to me, causing me to begin moving slowly in Natasha's direction. When
he saw that I was following beside him, he spoke to her.

"Natasha. Natasha, listen to me. Look. We found him. We found him. He's okay. He was just out in
the city. He's here. He's back. He's okay. You have to calm down." She wasn't calming down. She
wasn't paying Steve any attention. She was still too busy fighting. "Nat." His voice remained calm,
but there his tone was less gentle, more direct, and slightly louder in volume. "The Winter Soldier is
here. He's okay. Look over here."

Her body stilled mostly as the words seemed to register with her. Her eyes met mine and she
collapsed, Clint keeping her from hitting the floor.

"Let me go, I'm....fine......James," she whispered so that we barely heard her. "J-James. You're
okay." She rushed towards me. I didn't say anything, I just stared, not having seen this shocking side
of her before. I didn't have words so I just nodded. When she reached me, she grabbed onto me,
tossing her arms behind my back and pulling our bodies as close as she could get them. I looked to
Steve for help. I didn't understand what was happening. Why was she doing this? What was
happening? He attempted a smile and shake of his head as if to say "just go with it." I didn't return
the affection, but it didn't seem to matter. After a few awkward moments, Clint came up to us.

"Nat, you're exhausted, why don't you get some sleep for the night. Everything's okay now," he said
as he placed a hand gingerly on her shoulder. She stepped away from me, nodding in Clint's
direction. She looked at me again, stepped towards me and leaned up to kiss me on the cheek before following Clint out of the room. Wanda tapped me on the shoulder reassuringly on her way out behind them, leaving Steve and I alone.

"Wha....what the hell was that, Steve?"

He looked at me with what looked like pity in his eyes, but he quickly pushed it away. "Don't worry about it right now, Buck. Why don't you get back to your 'moment' with (y/n)." He finished the phrase with a smile. I knew he was avoiding something big, putting it off, but the idea of getting back to (y/n) was more powerful than my curiosity and confusion. I nodded, turned, and made my way upstairs, my heart slowly swelling with joy in every step.
Emergency

READER POV
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I rushed back upstairs and quickly to my room, trying to avoid running into anyone. As I got to my door, I noticed a figure form to my left. I looked up, afraid Bucky caught me eavesdropping. To my surprise, it was Natasha. She stared at me, for the first time, not in anger, but with complete sadness. I nodded in her direction, unsure what to do with this new Natasha, before entering my room and shutting the door behind me. I took a deep breath before heading to the bathroom to change and wash my face. It wasn't even late, but my mind seemed so boggled that the best solution seemed to be to go to bed. I laid down, deep in thought, a few moments later I heard a soft knock on my door.

"(Y/n), it's Bucky," I heard softly through the door. I hesitated a moment before answering.

"Come in."

He walked in slowly, cautiously. When he saw me in bed already, he became unnerved, worried he had wakened me. I began to sit up, pulling the covers around my chest and torso and laying back against the headboard.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you," he stood in the doorway, unsure what to do.

"You didn't, it's okay, come on in." I patted the side of the bed, motioning for him to sit.

He still stood just for a split second, obviously debating on what to do, but he shut the door behind himself and approached me slowly and sat, with a little distance left between us.

"So is everything okay?" I asked this, trying to make it seem like I was completely in the dark.

"Yeh, I think so anyways....so back to our conversation."

"Honestly, Bucky, can we not talk about it anymore tonight?"

He looked at me, a little surprised, unsure what to say next.

"Come here," I said before an Ed Sheeran song popped into my mind.

For a little lie down with me
If you fall asleep
It wouldn't be the worst thing

He gave me a small smile as I took his arm and pulled him gently closer to me. I lowered myself just a little and placed his head on my stomach, and began running my fingers through his thick hair.

"Please continue singing," he requested, causing me to grin.

But when I wake up
Your...warpaint.... is on my shoulder
And tell me, if I lie down
Would you stay now
And let me hold you?
He began to grin as his eyelids fluttered shut. I lowered my voice to a softer volume and continued the song, but at a slower pace than it was written.

But if I kissed you
Will your mouth read this truth?
Darling, how I miss you
Strawberries taste how lips do
And it's not complete yet
Mustn't get our feet wet
'Cause that leads to regret
Diving in too soon
And I'll owe it all to you
My little bird
My little bird

I leaned down slightly to kiss his forehead before I fell asleep myself.

BUCKY POV

---------------

I woke up around 4 am, used to waking up to train before Stark ran any treatments or tests, whatever it happened to be that day. When I awoke, it took me a moment to realize where I was and where the warmth emanating on my chest and around my waist was coming from. I became rigid immediately before realizing it was (y/n)'s head and arm cuddling against me. I relaxed a little, trying to make sure I didn't wake her. How could she be so comfortable like this? Not that laying on me would be uncomfortable, but the fact that it was me, Bucky, the Winter Soldier, that's what I didn't understand. Part of me felt like she was naive. Part of me felt like she was too trusting. Part of me felt like running....but the largest part of me felt like I never wanted her to let go. I didn't want to ever have to move, just to lay like this forever and I'd be perfectly satisfied. Her breathing was slow and deep. Her hair, draped in her face, mouth slightly agape, she seemed to be sleeping soundly. I lay there, staring at her for half an hour, admiring the gentility of her person. I heard someone calling my name, it sounded like Sam, outside my door down the hall. I felt my phone in my pocket. Luckily it was on the opposite side (y/n) was sleeping on so I tried to move the least amount possible, retrieved the phone from my pocket, and shot a text to Sam letting him know where I was. In just a few seconds, the door to her room cracked open and sure enough, there was Sam, grinning at me like an idiot. I hated him so much....I still would do anything for the man, though.

"Awww, aren't you two so cuuuute?" Sam hissed this through the cracked door. He had to hold back his laughter when he saw me roll my eyes.

"Hush, don't wake her up," I whispered back as harshly as I could.

"Are you not training today? Oh, wait, nevermind. You are training, of course. Training for how to be with a woman again," he said, wiggling his eyebrows. I raised my left arm, flipping him the bird, but couldn't help but let a small smirk crack the side of my mouth. He returned the smile, saying "alright, I'll let Steve know where you are and why" and closed the door softly behind him.
Her hair had fallen in her eyes once again. I brushed it gently back so that I could see her face completely. I caressed her arm until I fell into a dreamless sleep myself.

I wasn't able to sleep too long. About 7, I awoke again. This time I remembered where I was and why I was warm. I looked down and was met by her emerald eyes, still hazy with sleep.

"Good morning, star shine," she whispered groggily to me.

"Good morning...ahhh...sunshine?"

She began to laugh. "Sorry, it's a reference to a song, but I actually know it from a movie. We should watch it sometime...it might weird you out, though."

"I don't think anything "weirds me out," as you say, anymore. I've seen too much." My eyes went unfocused as unpleasant memories began to rush my brain. A gentle hand on my cheek pressed pause on my brain.

"Hey. Hey, don't leave me, please. Stay in this moment." Her eyes peered into my own, watching the storm in mine begin to clear. Her gem eyes sparkled, like water rushing across the rocks in a small stream. A small smile came to me as I looked at her and remembered all the happiness she had brought me since we had met. "Good. Welcome back." She moved her hand to the back of my neck. I leaned down voluntarily to kiss her. Just as our lips touched, there was a knock on the door, causing her to groan in annoyance and roll off of my chest onto the other side of the bed before getting up and heading to the door.

She cracked it open so that they couldn't see inside. "Yes?"

"Ah, good morning (y/n), I was looking for Bucky," I heard Steve say.

"Bucky? Have you checked his room."

"Ah, yeh," he was definitely nervous. He sounded like that small kid in Brooklyn I used to know when talking to a strong female. I had to hold back my snickering. "Yeh, ahm, I did check it. He's not there, so I figured I'd check with you." She turned her neck to quickly scan the room, making sure not to linger on me.

"Nope, sorry. As I said, haven't seen him. Maybe he went for a walk."

"(Y/n), you wouldn't lie to me, would you? It could be an emergency."

At his words, she opened the door wide enough to squeeze through into the hallway, shutting the door behind her.

**READER POV**

----------------------------------------

I look at him, completely annoyed, but attempting to stifle my quickly growing anger. "Steve, first off, is everything here a supposed emergency, because it sure feels like it. Secondly, I came here to spend time with Bucky, not have you drag him away at every turn. Can't he just get a few days off from all of this chaos, which if we're being honest, probably isn't chaos? Literally, all I'm asking is for a few days. Can't you guys...I don't know, go somewhere else or just leave him out of it for a few days?? If I had known it was going to be like this, I would have just stayed home..." I looked down, frustrated, trying to gather my next defense.

"I'm sorry, (y/n), I really am. It's just...things have just gotten stressful here over the past couple days.
I want to make sure everyone is okay, that includes Bucky's treatments."

"Make sure everyone is okay....that sounds about right," I muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing. Forget it.- Can I ask why you need him now?"

"Tony needs him for a couple of hours."

"Can I at least go...wherever it is, to be with him during?"

He seemed to mull it over, but before he even spoke I knew his answer. "I don't think that'd be the best idea. I'm sorry."

"Steve," I lowered my voice to make sure Bucky couldn't hear through the door, "he's already beat the shit out of me before, and I'm still here, I'm clearly not that concerned for my health."

"Steve, just let her go. She may be able to assist in keeping him stable and focused." My head whipped to the right as I heard Natasha's lightly terse voice. I hadn't even seen her come out of her room. I couldn't help but stare at her, slightly embarrassed, but partially grateful. I also couldn't help but wonder why she was siding with me. Maybe she was hoping Bucky would turn and kill me and then she could have him all to herself. Whatever the reason, when I saw Steve's face change, I knew her words had changed his mind and in that moment, I, for some reason, felt indebted to her.

"Fine, but only if Tony is okay with it," he nodded in Natasha's direction before returning his blue eyes back to mine. I waited until Natasha was out of view and earshot before I allowed a huge grin to pass across my face.

"Really??"

"If Tony is okay with it....so now do you know where Bucky is," he said, smirking. I had completely forgotten about my lie. "I'm sure I can find him. When does he need to be wherever?"

"Has he eaten breakfast?"

"Steeeeeve, I don't know where he's at, so I don't know, remember???

"Right. Do you think he has?"

"My thoughts are no, probably not."

"Well when you," he lifted his hands to make air quotes," find him, can you make sure he eats and then heads down to the lab? He can direct you where to go. Let's say the goal is by 9:30?"

"I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you."

I nodded and began to open the door, but Steve grabbed my wrist, pulling the door shut once again.

"And (y/n), I'm sorry to keep you two apart so much. I realize that's why you're here. I apologize for making things difficult."
I saw the flecks of green in his eyes seemingly grow in size during his apology. I placed a hand gently on his shoulder.

"Steve, you're a great friend. I don't just mean to Bucky, but to all of these people. I know you care for each of them deeply and I know you only want their happiness and well-being. For this reason, I can never stay angry with you. You're too considerate for one to remain with grudges."

"So, I'm forgiven?"

"Always." I patted his shoulder twice and turned back to the door. I walked in, closed the door behind me and crawled back in bed with Bucky, cuddling up into his side.

"Looks like you found me," he said.

"Yeh, looks like I did." I placed a kiss on his chest, then on his shoulder, into the crook of his neck, before reaching his jawline. "Bucky."

"...uh-" I attempted to conceal my giggles as I heard the breath catch in his throat. "...yeh?"

"How long has it been since you've shaved?"

He looked down at me, surprised that had been what I wanted to say to him. He rolled his eyes. "Too long apparently."

I couldn't help but give him a wink, quick peck on the cheek, and a chipper "yep!" before crawling out of bed.

"Come on, let's get some breakfast. I promised Rogers I'd have you...wherever it is you meet Tony for your treatments at 9:30."

"But shave first?"

I couldn't help but bust out laughing between his response and the tone in which he used while saying it. I could hear the slight irritation in his voice, almost completely masked with sarcasm. "...well...that's up to you," I said playfully.

Again, he rolled his eyes and shoved himself up out of the bed. "I'll shave really quick. I'd like to take a quick shower and brush my teeth actually. Meet you downstairs? Or do you need an escort?"

He smirked, knowing good and well that asking if I needed help with directions would irritate me.

"No, I don't. Thank you very much." I stuck my tongue out and twirled around and walked, somewhat heavily, into the bathroom to change and get ready for breakfast and the day.

After getting ready, I headed downstairs. Thankfully someone had made a pot of coffee, so I poured myself a cup. As I was stirring in the small amount of creamer, I felt a warm hand on my lower back. I smiled. "What would you like for breakfast, Mr. Barnes?"

He made an "hmm" thinking sound in his throat. His hand dragged across my skin to take a hold of my hip, squeezing it.

"Whatever you're having is fine for me."

"Alright, Maggie Carpenter."

I turned to see his confused eyes searching for an answer.
"Movie reference. Sorry."

"Is the movie good?"

"It's one of my favorites, Runaway Bride, and I think it's good, obviously."

"Can we watch it later?"

I grinned at him. He was always so ready to show interest in things I cared about. Part of me questioned whether that was because of the time he grew up or it was just how wonderful of a human being he was, or even a mixture of both.

"I'd love to. It's definitely a 'chick flick,' though, just to warn you."

"That's okay."

"So coffee and eggs good for you?"

"Sounds great."

"......Do you, ahh....remember how you like your eggs?"

He sat at the breakfast bar and stared off away from me. His face changed to disappointment after a brief moment. "All I remember about eggs is that Steve likes his sunny side up......sorry."

I walked to the bar and leaned across to put my hand on his. "Bucky, it's okay. You don't have to apologize. Besides, try and look at it this way, you get to experiment and test them all out. Your preferences could have changed."

He finally met my eyes and gave me the smallest smile and nod. I patted his hand gently before walking over to the stove and beginning to prepare our breakfast. I cooked in silence as I heard him sip his coffee, feeling his eyes on me the entire time. When finished I brought him a plate and sat down next to him.

"I don't want to do the tests today," he said quietly.

His statement caught me off guard and it made my heart hurt for him. I didn't know what to say for a moment so I nodded instead and chewed a bite of my eggs before speaking. "Can I ask why?"

"I just don't. I have you here. I don't want your time here to be ruined. I don't want the tests to affect me negatively and I end up screwing things up again and...." he trailed off, putting his fork down, folding his hands in front of him and leaning his forehead into his fist. I quickly turned sideways, straddling his side slightly and snaked my arms around his torso, laying my head lightly on his shoulder.

"Bucky...." I didn't know what to say. I wanted to tell him he didn't have to do anything he didn't want to. I wanted to say that he needed to do it so that he could get better. Part of me wanted to grab him and kidnap him. I felt so terrible and so lost.

"Hey, it's almost 9:30, you guys ar-" I heard Sam's voice coming from the entrance of the room. He stopped speaking, knowing something was up.

"Sam, can Bucky take a few da-"

"It's fine." Bucky's voice was like ice. He stood and sighed. "I'm sorry," his voice gaining the slightest bit of warmth, but no life. "It's okay. I'll head on down. Why don't you finish your
"Breakfast?" He placed a light kiss in my hair before walking out of the room.

"Everything okay with Mr. Froyo?"

"Sam. Do you really have to call him that?" I attempted not to laugh at his lame nickname for Bucky.

"Fine. Ancient Froyo."

"Shut up, Sam. I have a serious question."

"Shoot."

"Does he have to do the tests every day? Could he take some time off? They seem to wear him out, physically, mentally, and emotionally."

"...ahhh, I'm probably not the person to be talking to about it. Plus, you probably wouldn't like my answer."

"Probably not, but if it's honest, I may just have to accept it."

"Sure?" He raised his eyebrows questioningly before watching me nod encouragingly. "No, I don't think he should skip them. I think the quicker he gets that distressed brain straightened out, the safer everyone who cares about him is."

I couldn't argue with that, so I simply nodded. I approached the elevator.

"Hold down the basement button for 5 seconds," I heard Sam call after me, letting me know where to go.

I mulled over Sam's words as I rode the elevator down to this sub-level basement. I guess he had a point but it didn't make things easier. My heart still hurt for Bucky.

I stepped out of the elevator and walked towards the left where I heard what sounded like endless monitors beeping. When I came around the corner, I saw Steve staring through a glass wall, into a room where Bucky was strapped to a hospital-like bed and Tony sat beside him, pressing a substance-filled needle into an IV stream going to Bucky's bloodstream.

"Steve. I-"

"He can't take time off. As much as I wish he could, he can't. I'm sorry."

"How did you know that's what I was going to say."

"He warned me when he got down here. Told me to make sure I told you 'no'."

I looked away from him and into the room.

"Is he asleep for the tests?"

"Sometimes. Not always."

"(Y/n), he may be out for a few hours. You don't have to hang out down here."

"Are you?"

"Yeh, I'll be around in c-"
"Then I will be too. You shouldn't have to bear all of this on your own, you know."

"You're a good friend, (y/n). I'm glad to call you one of mine and I'm equally glad you and Bucky have become so close. You're one of the few eternal bright spots in his mind and heart."

"Yeh, well," I began, slightly embarrassed, "that goes both ways."

"Hello. I'm Tony. Let's see, seemingly normal, but apparently insane chick hanging outside of a former deranged assassin's hospital bed? You must be (y/n). It's nice to meet you, I think."

"And you're the arrogant smartass everyone says you are. Nice to meet you too."

"Ah. Ah. Ah. Such language? In the presence of an old man? I like your gut."

"Shut up, Tony."

"Well look. I skipped breakfast to get things ready for the iceman cometh, so I'm going to get something and I'll be back. He's going to be out for an hour at least, by the way."

"Come on, (y/n), there's no sense in us just standing here," Steve said to me.

"You go ahead. I want to stay with him in case he wakes up."

"You still will need to stand out here, Mauve won't let you inside the room. Might as well join us," Tony attempted again.

"That's okay. I'd still rather stay, thank you, though."

"Suit yourself."

"If you need anything, just press this button, Mauve will relay the message immediately," Steve pointed where he was referencing.

For a few moments, after they were gone, I examined Bucky. He seemed peaceful for once, believe it not. I began to survey the room he was in, all of the equipment hooked up to him and which sat around him. After I saw there was nothing left to see, I sat on the floor, as close to the glass as I could and pulled my phone out to scroll through Tumblr. After some time, I realized that I felt odd. I felt like something was wrong. I looked up to see Bucky staring at me, but I recognized that face, that set jaw, and those cold, lifeless eyes. He was staring at me, eyes full of hatred.
"Bucky?" I wasn't sure if he could hear me or not. "Bucky. Your name is Bucky Barnes. James Buchanan Barnes. This is not you. Hydra isn't here." At the word Hydra, he began struggling against the straps.

"Shit. Bucky, I'm sorry. You're okay! I promise. Calm down, please." In response, one strap flew off of his body and he began to reach for others. I ran to the button. "Steve. It's not Bucky. He's awake. The Winter Soldier is here. Hurry! Steve! Sam! Tony! Anybody! Please! Help him!"

By the time I looked back, the Winter Soldier was stepping forcefully onto the floor causing the bed to ram into equipment. "Bucky. Please. Please don't do this again. You're not the Winter Soldier. Bucky! Please. Remember me, (y/n)? We met at:" but his metal arm flying into the glass (which must have been bulletproof) cut my words off. The glass began to crack, but I couldn't help but stare in shock. This couldn't be happening again.
Emergency Pt. 2

READER POV

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I watched as the glass began to crack and flecks of glass began to fly to the floor on my side of the
glass encasement. I could feel my eyes continue to grow wider than they were the previous second,
despite that everything seemed to be moving in slow motion.

I wondered if he could, in fact, break through the glass. Will Steve get here in time? Will Bucky
realize he's Bucky? Looking at all of the concrete surrounding me, would this be the last time I see
Bucky? If this was the end, would he be able to forgive himself and move on? His fist broke through
the glass, just as that realization broke through every wall in my mind. His fist began to pull pieces of
glass away so that there would be a whole large enough for him to get through. With each punch, I
felt my survival instincts finally kicking in and I found myself stepping slowly back. I had to try
again.

"Bucky, I know. Do you hear me? I know, Bucky. Please, Bucky, this isn't you. Don't do this!
Come back to me."

I found my back against the wall. He acknowledged my words, but they seemed only to anger him
more.

My mind began to whirl: "Don't panic. No, not yet. Sometimes before it gets better. The darkness
gets bigger."

Out loud my thoughts continued: "Sometimes the person that you'd take a bullet for is behind the
trigger." I felt the tears fall down my cheeks as I realized this was going to be it. My voice began to
 crack as I almost silently said as I watched him step through the glass wall: "Oh, we're fading fast. I
miss missing you now...and then."

He heard every word I said. He stopped and looked at me, breathing heavily. I could have sworn I
saw his eyes flash blue. He looked lost, confused, and for just an instant like he recognized me and I
wasn't an enemy.

"Bucky?"I whispered.

His face became cold again and he started to run towards me. I turned away, trying to crawl into the
wall, waiting for the strike of the Winter Soldier. I didn't want my last view of Bucky to be the
aggressive one of the Winter Soldier. Instead, I felt no expected blows from his metal fist, but the
sound of punches being thrown reached my ears.

When I looked back, I couldn't believe my eyes. Natasha was fighting Bucky. Was she defending
me? Her movements were so quick. Bucky was on the ground. Nat straddled him, throwing
continual punches to his head with all the force she could muster. I barely could see her face, but I
noticed the wetness on her cheeks from tears. She didn't want to be doing this. The tears must have
blocked her vision just enough that he had an opportunity to get off the ground, carrying her with
him. He threw her in my direction. She crashed into me and he wasn't far away. As his punch came
towards us, she reached around and grabbed my neck, yelling "duck" as she pulled me down. He
grabbed her, lifting her off the ground, giving her the opportunity to wrap her legs around his
shoulders and flip them both, giving her the power once again. In between breaths I heard her yelling
"Run! (Y/n)! Run, get out of here."

Once the words registered, I made my way to the elevator doors. I heard a cracking noise and turned around to see Bucky...the Winter Soldier holding Natasha by the throat high on the wall. The cracking noise must have been her skull hitting the concrete. Her face was turning purple but I could hear her whisper:

"James. Please...just...recognize me."

I couldn't just leave her. I couldn't let this happen.

"BUCKY!" I screamed as loud as I could. He acted as though he didn't hear me. I took off my shoe and threw it at him because I couldn't think of anything safer to do. It hit his right arm and simultaneously got his attention. He dropped Natasha to the ground and even as tiny as she was, her body made a thud as she hit. She was unconscious, the Winter Soldier was anything but. He was approaching me now, surely to do the same or worse to me. I couldn't think of anything to do but quickly fall back against the wall and collapse, holding my legs to my chest and hiding my face in my knees.

I didn't mean to but I began to weep, almost silently, yet profusely somehow. I cried and waited. Waited for the pain. Waited for the hurt. Waited to feel the cold lifeless metal rip me apart. I waited for the hatred that I knew was not the Bucky I knew. I waited...he should have gotten to me by now. I tried to listen over my whimpering. I heard nothing. I dared to look up through my tear-coated lashes, attempting to move as slowly as possible. When I could just see the floor in front of me, I saw Bucky's bare feet facing in my direction. I continued to raise my head when it seemed as if he wasn't even thinking about moving. When I saw the set of his jaw, it was almost quizzical...how a jaw could look quizzical, I'd never know. I continued to slowly raise my eyes so that I could take in his entire face. His hair fell to both sides of his face, aligning with the hollows of his cheeks. When my eyes reached his, the color seemed to be striving for a change to blue.

"...Bucky?" I dared to whisper. "Did you come back to me?"

He looked at me, his head tilting so slightly that it was barely noticeable. I could see the inner struggle going on but I too was battling the concept of trying again or to remain silent. I chose to remain silent, both of us rapt. I stared at him and noticed his breath normalized and as his shoulders rose and began to fall in a deep breath, I noticed that Steve and Sam were right behind him and before I could stop them, they tackled him to the ground. They had run around the corner, saw Nat unconscious, me on the floor, and Bucky standing in the midst of the scene.

"NO!" I shrieked. "It's Bucky! He's back! Don't hurt him." I was on my feet and quickly approaching them. "Look! He's not fighting. It's Bucky! Let him go!"

My words finally resonated with them and they realized I was right. They lifted themselves off of Bucky and as soon as they were out of the way, I moved to Bucky's side.

"Check on Natasha," I attempted to mutter so that Bucky would not hear, but of course he did.

He sat up and pushed me away.

"No, just...just leave me alone...please." He rose and left me still kneeling on the ground staring after him.

BUCKY POV
I couldn’t look at her when I left. I had to get away. I had to run from what I had done. I couldn’t look her in the eyes anymore. I couldn't look back at what I had done to the Black Widow. I knew it was bad, but hearing (y/n) tell the guys to check on her, especially when they hadn't gotten along since she arrived, I knew it was even more serious than I had originally thought. After I got out of sight, I began to run. Run from her, run from the situation, run from Steve, run from...myself. I passed through the tower, taking the stairs two at a time when I reached them. I ran out the door and into the street. Luckily there were no cars on the street...then again maybe if a car would be there, speeding, it would pose an easy solution to keeping everyone safe. I ran to the sidewalk anyways and just ran. I dashed through the streets, trying to maneuver people and make sure I didn't run into them and hurt anyone else...but they didn't seem to remain in my way long. I didn't know or care where I was running to, I just had to keep running. The sun was hot on my back and I could feel the sweat pooling at the top of my sweatpants. I realized that I was shirtless, which was why the sweat was pooling and not being soaked up by a shirt. The arm was exposed. No wonder people were moving as quickly as possible out of the way. I didn't recognize where I was until the sun had already begun to sink lower in the sky. I was at the doorstep of my childhood home. I stopped and debated whether to go in.

"Well, I could go in long enough to get a shirt and jacket to hide the arm," I thought.

READER POV

I stared after him for longer than I realized. Tony approached me and crouched beside me. He placed his hand gingerly on my arm, cupping the back and attempting to lift me to my feet.

"Hey, come on. Let's go upstairs."

He did get me up, but it wasn't mentally. I could think of nothing but Bucky, but my body seemed to be following commands for me. I took a few steps and the scene of Natasha throwing herself in front of me flashed across my mind. I stopped moving and turned back, walking in her direction.

"Is she going to be okay," I asked Steve.

"She will be, but I don't know how long it'll be."

She was still unconscious.

"What can I do? I need to help her...she...she saved my life."

When the words left my mouth, I saw her eyelids flutter slightly. She was coming to.

"Wow. I forgot how bad that arm hur-," she said before she noticed me. She stopped herself short upon noticing my presence.

I didn't know what to do or say, but I couldn't just let the moment pass without acknowledging the sacrifice she just made for me.

"Thank you. Thank you for what you did, Natasha. You saved my life."

She seemed to debate how to respond.

"Don't mention it."
"Let's get you upstairs," Sam told her.

Steve nodded in agreement and mentioned that they needed to be careful moving her.

"I've got it. I can get up. Just..make sure I'm steady. I'm still dizzy."

I watched them help steady her by her elbows as she rose. She looked at me watching her.

"Don't look at me like that. I don't want, nor do I need your pity. This isn't the first time I've gone up against Ja-...the Winter Soldier...and I doubt it'll be the last if we're being honest."

She turned away and headed with the guys at her side towards the elevator. I ran ahead of them and pushed the button. She eyed me, while they eyed her, but she didn't say anything. When they had left, I asked Tony how he really thought she was.

"Honestly, Nat is one of the strongest people I know, in many ways, so I imagine she'll be fine. She probably has a concussion, but she'll snap back pretty quickly...she always does," he quietly mentioned the last bit. "Come on. Let's get you up to your room."

"What about Bucky?"

Mauve broke into the conversation.

"We are currently looking for him. He left the tower."

"So no one knows where he is?"

"No ma'am."

"Well, then I need to go look for him."

"That's probably not the best idea," Tony said.

"It's Bucky. He's fine....well, he's not fine. He's upset, but he's not dangerous. I need to find him."

"(Y/n), I promise, we're doing all we can to find him and bring him back. He'll be okay. You need some rest."

"Tony! He nee-"

"Don't make me put you on lockdown, please. I will if I have to, but I don't want to."

I huffed, frustrated.

"Fine."

We were at my door.

"Will you at least let me know when he's back?"

"Of course, first thing."

I stepped into the room long enough for him to leave. I snuck to Natasha's door first, and then I was going to look for Bucky. I didn't care what Tony said. It'd be better if I found him first and I was sure I knew where he would end up, purposefully or not. I knocked on the door lightly.

"Come in," I heard her say exhaustedly.
I peeked my head in and alerted her it was me.

"Hey, it's (y/n). Still okay if I come in?"

She laid discerning eyes on me briefly but replied with a nod.

"Is there...ahhh...anything I can get or do for you."

She thought for a moment. "You can do us both a favor and leave James be."

I hadn't expected the iciness, so I couldn't control my face. She didn't miss it.

"I mean for the safety of both of us. No offense, but getting my ass handed to me to save someone who is...again, no offense...but moronically suicidal for sticking around a ticking time bomb is not my cup of tea."

"Then why are you still sticking around if 'James' is a ticking time bomb? Why are you still pining for him?"

I didn't mean to call her out, but my temper got the best of me. I squeezed my eyes shut, realizing I had let the cat out of the bag. Surely she'd reach out of the bed and slap me. Surprisingly her eyes just enlarged slightly.

"You're observant and you do truly care, don't you...I can see why you two get along well."

"You two used to be together and now you see me as taking him away from you? Taking a chance away from you for him to return to you?"

She seemed to think over my words before answering.

"It's a long story to be quite honest. I suppose what you say is true in one way or another." Her face dimmed and sorrow overtook her features. "However, he...he did come back to you didn't he? He didn't recognize me, but he recognized you and it brought him back...."

I didn't know what to say. I could see the pain in her eyes and I didn't want to make it worse so I didn't say anything for a few moments. We sat in silence until I decided to speak the truth.

"I don't want to hurt anyone..."

She looked up at me.

"Yes, I know that...will you do me a favor?"

I made sure to think before I answered.

"I'll try to."

She laughed just enough to make her pain return and air knocked against her rib cage so that she winced.

"Good answer. Actually, I doubt that it'll be much of a favor considering you were probably already planning to...but go find him and bring him back. You know where he's at don't you?"

"I...don't know for sure, but I have an idea...and yes, I was planning it."

"Well, go ahead. He needs you. Don't let him push you away. He's going to try, but don't let him."
I nodded and stood, making my way for the door. I stopped before I stepped out.

"Thank you...for everything," I turned back to look at her.

She nodded, letting her lips curl into the smallest smile.

I grabbed my bag from my room, a shirt and jacket from Bucky's and made my way to the bottom floor and out into the New York afternoon. I headed for Brooklyn. I got to the place Bucky had brought me, found the key under the mat, and let myself in. I sat on the couch, Bucky's shirt and jacket beside me and waited.

BUCKY POV
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I stepped up to the doorstep.

"Shit." I realized I didn't have my keys, then my eyes caught sight of the brick laying not far from the door. I reached down, move the brick, and luckily found the key underneath. I put the key in the slot and turned the doorknob. I walked in, closed the door and turned to walk down the hall. As I passed the living room, my peripheral revealed I wasn't alone. I stopped and turned, actually shocked. She looked at me with pity in her eyes.

"I was wondering how long I was going to have to wait,' she said quietly. She rose at a creeping pace, turning her full body towards me. She was trying to decide whether to approach me or not. I remained where I was and didn't move. She chose the less safe choice...of course. She approached me and saw me begin to step away. The pain that crossed her eyes and face as she next spoke burned every fiber in my being.

"No, Bucky. Please don't," her voice cracked and she halted. "Pl-please do- don't move away."

When I acquiesced her request, it motivated her into movement once again. This time she approached me with a little more speed, surely in hope that if I attempted to move again, she could reach me first. I couldn't bear to see the pain in her eyes again, so I chose to remain still until she reached me and obscured my entire upper body in her arms so that only my legs were able to move, but I remained still nonetheless, my breathing barely causing me to move.

She held on for a moment before loosening her grip long enough to free my arms and loop hers back around my torso. I stood there, and the fact that she was still here, ready and willing to stand by my side, caused my body to slump. She felt my weight fall on her, against my will, but she withstood it.

"Come on," she said faintly, letting go of my right side, and still supporting me on my left, half dragging me to the couch. She sat me down, crouching only long enough for me to reach the couch, and considering our height difference she may have well actually sat.

"I'll be right back. Don't...run....okay?"

I refused to look her in the eyes, instead choosing to stare straight ahead into the fireplace, but my jaw tightened and I nodded just enough so she would know I would follow her directions. I heard her move into the kitchen. I noted the sniffling I heard before running water started at full pressure. She was striving to whitewash the noise accompanying her tears. This realization made me want to run...and I almost would have, but I couldn't go back on my word, not after everything. She returned with a wet rag and a glass of water and sat down beside me. She handed me the glass.

"I imagine you're thirsty."
I hadn't realized it really, but she was right and once I was aware of this, I gulped the water down in about five seconds.

"Thank you.

"You're welcome. I'll get you some more," she offered.

"No, I'm good. Thank you, though."

She nodded and then eyed my chest, shaking her head. I followed her eyes and noticed all of the cuts, bruises, and dirt. She rose from the couch again.

"Where are you going," I asked. Without meaning to, I could hear the anxiety in my voice with the idea of her leaving without saying so first. She turned back, stupefaction apparent on her face. Despite her surprise, the cloudiness in her eyes began to clear and the most minimal smile perked up the corners of her mouth.

"I'll be right back, I promise. I'm just going into the kitchen for something."

My eyes followed her as she walked into the kitchen. She opened the cabinet below the sink and pulled out a small basin and put it in the sink, and began to fill it up with water. She turned around and came back into the living room. She moved to the other side of the couch and picked up the clothing I had not even noticed being there.

"Is that my shirt and jacket?" I knew the astonishment in my voice and face was recognizable, but at that moment, I didn't care.

"Yes. I brought them from the tower. I hope you don't mind that I went into your room to get them."

"No...not at all...just...how did you know to get them and...end up here?"

"I'm good with directions, remember?" She attempted a joke to try and break through the dense environment that we happened to be stuck in.

"But how did you know I'd be here? That this is where I'd come? I didn't even have a plan to come here. I literally just ran and found myself here."

"Well...honestly," she sighed, "I didn't know. I guess part of me was just hopeful that I'd be able to find you, and knowing this as the only other place in New York we had been, I guess I hoped you'd end up here. The other part of me actually felt drawn here. Part of me thought that whether you meant to or not, this place brings back memories that you've begun to remember and therefore almost unconsciously, you'd show up here...I guess that was wishful thinking too..." she trailed off. "I'm sorry if it was overstepping the bounds, I ju-shit." She took off to the kitchen. "I forgot about the damn water basin." She reached the sink and breathed a sigh of what I figured out was in fact, relief. "Just in time." She lifted the basin, letting the water run out of the sink before pouring some of the water out of the basin as well. "Lie down, please," she said over her shoulder as she lifted the basin out of the sink and turned to make her way back to the living room. I started to obey but she asked me to wait as she put the basin down. She then went down the hall to the closet and got some towels. She came back and laid the towels on the couch beside me.

"Okay, you can lay down now, well actually, let me check your back." She walked behind the couch and looked me over, or so I assumed. "Yeh, hold on." She made her way back around to the water basin and the rag she had laid on the end table. She dunked it into the hot water. I could see the steam rising, despite that the apartment wasn't very cool. She wrung it out mostly, then returned to the back of the couch.
"Lean forward just a bit." I did. "This may be a little painful..." I couldn't almost feel her cringe at what she had said. "Well...for you, it'll probably be nothing. Sorry." I just shook my head and took a deep breath as she sponged over the wounds. "Your back is mainly bruised. There are a couple of scrapes, but they're not that bad. Your chest, on the other hand, is a different story."

"Yeh, I didn't notice until you did." She finished wiping off my back and urged me to lie down by placing her hand tenderly on my shoulder and putting the slightest pressure to guide me. She walked back around the couch and kneeled down, dipped the rag into the water again, and moved over to where she could reach my shoulders. She began to clean the grit off of my skin, moving more carefully over the dried blood.

"The cuts are a little deeper and worse here," she warned before washing in some areas. I watched her carefully, still unable to wrap my mind around the fact that after everything, she was still here.

READER POV

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I could feel his eyes on me, but my mind was too busy with everything that had happened, today particularly. I avoided his eyes until he grabbed my hand, putting the cleaning to a halt.

"(Y/n)...how....why....you need to get away from me. You need to forget me. I... I've cause you enough pain...and I know I'm causing you more now by saying this to you...but you need to let me go."

I removed my hand from under his and decided to ignore his words, but instead finish cleaning his wounds. He didn't say anything else as I finished. I took the rag and the basin of dirty water to the sink poured and rinsed both. I returned to the couch, grabbed a blanket off the chair and laid it over him. I leaned over, kissed him on the forehead, holding back the tears to the best of my ability, and told him the only thing I could think of to say.

"I love you, Bucky."

I turned on my heel and headed for the door. Neither of us said a word. I opened the door, stepped out, and didn't look back as I closed it.
Unhinged.

BUCKY POV
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Right now my head
Isn't screwed on right
And I can't decide what I want

Every sweat just breaks me a little
And I know you can't take this back and forth
It's not really safe for you in the middle
When you close that door you see
It's unhinged, it's just like me

I stared at the door for quite some time. I have no idea how long I just laid there, staring in unbelief. Part of me half expected her to come back through the door any moment, smiling with a joke to lighten the mood. I could almost see and hear the scene in my own mind.

A shadow appears behind the glass on the door. I lay there, recognizing immediately the outline of her. She stands there momentarily, before leaning into the window to see if she can see me well enough through the cathedral glass. She would give up, an almost visible sigh, and walk through the door with a smirk on her lips. "I bet you thought I left, didn't you?" She would ask me, flashing a Dunkin' Donuts bag my way. I would smirk back, pushing away the legitimate fear mixed with relief. "You? Never? You told me you wouldn't leave me," I would attempt to joke to mask the true stress that had mounted my entire body as I thought she had finally chosen sense in getting away from me. She'd cross the room cheerfully and when she reached me, she'd lean me up so she could sit and place my head in her lap and begin to run her fingers through my hair until I fell asleep, perfectly content in that moment. Then a thought literally made me shake.

She actually left. She left. She told me she loved me...and she walked out the door...out of my life. My mind seemed to go completely blank due to shock. As stubborn as she is, I didn't expect her to actually leave. I felt my head grow cold. It was as if the farther she got away from me, the iciness crept back into my mind and body. I just...can't believe she actually left. I know she'll be better off without me. I know she's safer. She'll be happier. She won't be as worried all the time. She can get back to her life, a normal one. I could hear myself listing positive facts to combat the underlying depression that was creeping back in. One of those Ed Sheeran songs she loves popped into my head.

Ain't nobody hurt you like I hurt you.
But ain't nobody love you like I do.
Promise that I will not take it on personal
If you're moving on with someone new...
Until then I'll smile and hide the truth
That I was happier with you.

Ain't nobody hurt you like I hurt you
But ain't nobody need you like I do
I know that there's others that deserve you
But my darling, I am still in love with you

This was my life now. Back to the never ending darkness. Maybe once I got the guts to go back to
the tower, or if they found me first, I could see if Tony could figure out how to erase her from my memory. The coffee table fell down. I didn't realize I had been gripping the leg of it. I had squeezed it until the wooden leg broke in half. How could I ever think that? How could I ever forget her? I couldn't. I'd rather live through this hell of a life and have a few good memories of it. Glimpses to prove that I could be happy at some points even if they were very few.

My eyes flickered to the door quickly when I saw the remnants of a shadow, hope inside my chest doing the same. The door opened and in my mind, I saw her but after I blinked, it wasn't.

"Steve."

I uttered his name but it was a dumbfounded utterance. I was still shocked and it felt like I was dying all over again.

"Hey man."

He came in and sat down in the chair beside the couch and just looked at me.

"So you're back to you, huh?"

All I could do was make a noise that was an attempt at a yes, but it didn't have any meaning or life behind it.

"How's Natasha?"

"She's okay. She's resting."

There was silence for a long time. He didn't say anything, nor did I. I think it was the first time I could remember—which wasn't saying a lot—Steve not being able to find what to say. After I couldn't bear the silence any longer, I was able to muster up the words I didn't want to believe.

"She's gone."

He looked at me, suddenly confused by my words and who I was talking about. Then he realized.

"No, Buck, she's back at the Tower. She's okay. She's waiting for us to find you and bring you back."

"She's gone."

"Buck—she's not. She's at the t-"

"Steve!" My tone gained his attention and made him stop. "She's gone. She was here.....She's gone."

He looked at me bewildered.

"She...she was here when I got here. She knew where I'd end up, Steve. I didn't even know I'd end up here, but she did. She was waiting right here." I sat up and pointed at the couch cushion to my left. "She was here waiting patiently, fearlessly, despite what she had just witnessed." I waited for him to ask me something, but he just waited for me to continue, knowing that'd probably make things easier on me. "She...hugged me, held me, explained she felt drawn here...cleaned me up. She told me she loved me." He couldn't stop himself.

"And left? Maybe she's just gone to the store, Buck. She probably went to get some antiseptic or some-"

"No. She's gone." I knew I was staring at nothing, the bleak black hole that was red eclipsing in my
"Buck, you don't kno-"

"I told her to." That stopped his argument. I could hear the anger begin to grow in his voice.

"You told her to? You told her to leave?" I could only nod, waiting for the tongue lashing that meant nothing because she was gone and that was all that mattered. "Buck! Why the hell would you tell her to leave? Bucky, she's the most important thing to you and the main source of happiness in your life, for Christ's sake! That's the last thing you need!" He rose from the chair and began to pace. My eyes didn't follow him, but my senses knew the movement well.

"I couldn't...risk...hurting her again, Steve. You know that."

"Buck! You didn't hurt her! You literally stopped yourself! You saw her and came to your senses! YOU came back because of her! That's progress!" My body and voice rose in response.

"So what, Steve?! How close was I to hurting her? Had Natasha not been there, I would have hurt her!"

"Dammit, Buck! You don't know that!!"

"Steve. I do know! I'm the one stuck in my own mind, remember? I know exactly what I would have done and how bad I would have hurt her. Natasha was the only distraction that saved (y/n)’s life!"

My words didn't quite shock him, but they stopped his argument nonetheless. He returned to his chair so I did the same, letting my blood pressure return to normal.

"Do you know for sure?"

"I told her to leave. She didn't say much for a while, just continued to clean me up. She finished, put away the cleaning supplies, told me she loved me...and walked out. She was about to cry. It's the best I can figure. She didn't even argue it." I paused and when I tried to speak, the words caught in my throat. "She always argues it..."

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