Subject to Change

by HeavenlyDisaster

Summary

Civil War and beyond as told by Bucky.
Before he even knew Steve, he loved him. Every mission he had ever been given had been carried out without question until Steve Rogers. Something about him made it impossible for Bucky to let him die. The more he worked on who he was, the more he realized what a big part Steve played in that answer. Everything about him circled back to Steve. Did Steve feel the same? He sure went through a lot of trouble for Bucky, but did that mean what Bucky hoped it meant?

*I might come back to this someday. I knew I wouldn't like how the Russos and Feige choose to end the characters, but I didn't think it's be this bad. Until then, this is it. *
“You're my mission.” Bucky came out of his dreams the way he always did. Screaming. Captain Rogers was always at the forefront of his dreams. It was never his presence that caused Bucky to scream, it was what Bucky was doing to him. Beating him senseless while the large man lay back and let him. It wasn’t what targets ever did. Everyone wanted to survive. They would kill Bucky at the first chance they got if it meant living through the day. Not Captain Rogers. Bucky would wake himself up screaming. Screaming at himself to stop.

Sometimes, Bucky would think that he recognized Captain Rogers. That he remembered him from some other life he had lived. But he had never lived another life. He had been forged into this life. It was all he knew. He wasn’t the kind of person that would have ever had a friend in someone like Captain Rogers. Someone who would rather give his life than see Bucky hurt. Bucky was a monster and a monster could never inspire that level of loyalty from someone like him.

After he ran away from his handlers, Bucky’s mind began to rewire itself. Things like memories would pop up in the most mundane of situations. The sound of static over a radio, the sight of a fair haired child playing in the streets, the sound of a rifle firing all pulled things from Bucky. Things like memories that couldn’t possibly be memories. Someone who looked like Captain Rogers if he were a foot shorter and two hundred pounds lighter featured in a lot of those memories. The emotions those impossible memories dredged up scared Bucky in a way he had never been scared before.

He knew he needed to remember. Something inside him was telling him that nothing was more important. Every passing memory he had he would scribble into a small, black journal he kept. Every dream he had was jotted down. Slowly, he was piecing himself back together before he even knew he was broken. But most of the pieces were so small they were practically sand sifting through his fingers.

He read that plums were good for strengthening memory functions. He tried to eat three a week. Avocado, egg yolks, walnuts, and green tea all featured heavily in his new diet. A diet he chose for himself. The first time he ate away from his handlers was strange. Nobody had told him he needed to pay for the food. He now felt guilty about the restaurant casualties. He ate until he couldn’t eat anymore. He had never felt so satiated before. He had always been given his meals waking up from the cold box and right before going back in. He hated the cold box.

Thinking of the cold box and how much he hated it brought up memories of the one thing he hated more. The lightning chair. He didn’t remember much from before or after the lightning chair, but he always remembered the lightning. How much it hurt. It would hurt his whole body and the pain wouldn’t go away until he finished his mission. That’s what they told him. But he hadn’t finished his last mission. He hadn’t killed Captain Rogers. It had been months, but eventually the pain went away on its own.

Bucky kept himself locked away most of the time. He worked in a chemical factory in Bucharest that hadn’t asked any questions. They hadn’t even asked for identification. When they asked his name, he responded with Bucky before he knew what he had said. Surname? Rogers. It was the only surname he knew. The pay was minimal, but he could afford an apartment that suited his needs. Primarily, multiple exit strategies. He may not like it, but he was a dangerous man. An assassin. He had killed people. And often. That sort of business comes with a level of danger on its own. Comes with enemies.
It was his day off so he was getting some shopping done. He needed plums and green tea. The plums were best at the market twelve blocks from his apartment so he decided to stop there first and circle back to the market nearest his building on the way back. Ordinarily he would only buy one or two, but today the price was so cheap he bought five.

He was almost back to his apartment stopped by traffic when he felt eyes on him. His entire body went on alert. His face was hidden like always by a baseball cap. He peeked up from under it to the old man running the newspaper stand across the street. He looked away and tried to calm himself down. Maybe Bucky had been mistaken. Maybe he wasn’t looking at him. Bucky looked around as casually as he could, but he was alone. When he looked back, the old man turned and took off down the crowded street.

Bucky crossed to the stand and picked up a newspaper. There was a picture of him in black and white on the front page. The headline announced that the Winter Soldier had bombed the United Nations building in Vienna. Bucky’s first thought was whether or not he had actually done it. It was impossible. He had been in the factory thirteen hours yesterday. His work stub could verify that if his aching back couldn’t. His second thought was that it didn’t matter if he had done it or not. His name was on it which meant that it wouldn’t be long before he was tracked down.

He had no choice but to go back to his apartment first. His go bag was there including the fake passport that would get him out of the country. Maybe he deserved to be punished for the deaths he had been forced to make, but he had spent more than seventy years in a box and he was in no hurry to be shoved back into one.

It took him less than three minutes to get back to his apartment, but he was already too late. Someone was there. Thankfully it was only one person. If it came down to killing one person or being made to kill a hundred more back in HYDRA’s hands, there was no question. One more kill would not make or break him. Not if it kept him from becoming another weapon.

But he recognized that outfit. Those broad shoulders. The shield. He hadn’t ever brought the thought to the forefront of his mind, but Bucky knew he had always been waiting for Captain Rogers to track him down. Hoping for it even. He couldn’t deny the rogue emotion in his chest. If he had known better, he might have recognized it as happiness. He hadn’t noticed Bucky yet. He was reading his journal. It made Bucky uncomfortable and curious. He wondered what Captain Rogers thought of what Bucky had scrawled in the pages. If he had any insight into some of the scattered memories to share Bucky would be grateful.

“Understood.” Captain Rogers said aloud. It took Bucky half a second to realize he was speaking to someone outside the apartment. Something made Captain Rogers turn to him. Bucky was frozen. He didn’t want to fight him. Anyone, but him. Rogers looked Bucky up and down. Bucky wondered what it was he saw when he looked at him. His shoulders relaxed almost like he was relieved, but that didn’t make any sense. Not after what Bucky had done to him. “You know me?” Rogers asked. His voice dragged more memories to the surface. Memories he couldn’t be certain were real. Bucky took a breath. He knew him, but how much did he really know? If Bucky said something wrong would he have to fight him? Better to be safe than sorry.

“You’re Steve.” Bucky couldn’t look at him. Not without remembering what he had done to him. The way his face looked after Bucky had attacked him. Not without guilt gnawing at him in a way that couldn’t be dealt with now. “I read about you in a museum.” His mouth twitched as he said it. He glanced at Rogers who looked down at Bucky’s journal in his hand and sighed. He set the journal on the table and took a step towards Bucky.

“I know you’re nervous and you have plenty of reason to be.” Was that what he was? Nervous?
Anxious seemed more suitable. Whatever was going to happen, he wanted it to happen quickly so he could get on with his life. “But you’re lying.” Bucky’s jaw clenched. Rogers said it so matter of factly. Like he knew exactly what Bucky was like when he lied. Like he knew everything about Bucky. The more memories that surfaced in him, the more and more likely that seemed to be true. Maybe if Bucky explained himself to Rogers, he would believe him. If he knew when he was lying so well, then he should know when he was telling the truth, too.

“I wasn’t in Vienna. I don’t do that anymore.” Something had Steve looking away on high alert. Something that wasn’t Bucky. There was some other danger out there.

“Well, the people who think you did are coming here now.” The people who think he did? Did that not include Steve? “And they’re not planning on taking you alive.” Exactly what Bucky thought.

“That’s smart.” He almost laughed. “Good strategy.” He was going to have to fight. He hadn’t had to fight in over a year. Footsteps sounded above them. Bucky watched the ceiling. They were completely surrounded. He ran through his extensive list of exit strategies. First he would need his go bag. No point running if he was going to get stopped at the border anyway. No way to survive off the land without a few essential tools. All things he kept in his go bag. And he kept his go bag under Steve’s feet.

“This doesn’t have to end in a fight, Buck.” Steve told him. He was so naïve. They never planned on giving Bucky a chance which meant only one thing if Bucky wanted to survive. Bucky moved towards the door and listened to the men outside readying themselves to force their way inside. He sighed.

“It always ends in a fight.” But oh, how he wished it didn’t. Two years of peace, but he always knew it would have to come to an end sometime. At least he got to see Steve before it did. Steve didn’t like his answer. Didn’t like when Bucky pulled off his glove to display his metal arm. Captain America had his uniform and so did the Winter Soldier. No sense fighting without wearing it.

“You pulled me from the river.” Steve accused. Bucky clenched his teeth. He didn’t know how to explain that he couldn’t let Steve die. That he had hung onto the helicarrier for what seemed like an eternity warring with his programming as he watched Steve’s body slip beneath the surface. That diving in after him and saving Steve’s life, saving his target’s life, had changed everything. “Why?” Steve demanded. Bucky couldn’t answer Steve’s questions. Especially not when he couldn’t answer his own.

“I don’t know.” Bucky’s mouth twitched.

“Yes you do.” There was so much more to be said. Maybe if Steve had found him under different circumstances, Bucky could have explained himself better. He wanted to explain himself to Steve. Something told him that Steve was the only one that might understand. That would listen to him. That could fill in the blanks. But it wasn’t time to talk about his fleeting memories or why he felt so comforted by Steve’s presence with no explanation as to why.

Steve’s head jerked to the side and he used his shield to bat a flash grenade away. Another grenade broke through another window and Bucky kicked it to Steve who covered it with his shield. Why did I do that? Bucky wondered. Somehow he had to know that Steve would take care of the grenade. Bullets began flying at him and he lifted his mattress to shield himself. He watched the door break open. He threw the mattress off and flipped the table up to barricade the entrance hall. He just needed to grab his bag.
Two men entered the room. Bucky and Steve took one each. Steve turned to the man in the door he stopped him from firing and Bucky kicked him back through the balcony door and out of the apartment. The man hit his head and went down. He should have been okay, though. Bucky started out the door.

“Bucky, stop!” Steve shouted, he grabbed his arm and Bucky quickly flipped around. He was close enough to see how blue Steve’s eyes were. “You’re gonna kill someone.” Did Steve really think he was going to kill the man? Did he really not trust him? The thought hurt Bucky. He had told Steve he had changed. That he didn’t kill anymore. He used the leverage Steve had given him to lay him on his back.

Bucky punched through the floorboards a few inches to the right of Steve’s head. His metal hand opened in the hole and closed around his bag. Steve was staring at Bucky with bewilderment, fear, apprehension. He supposed he hadn’t given Steve any cause to trust him. He had lied to him twice in the span of four minutes.

“I’m not gonna kill anyone.” He promised. He tugged the bag out of the floor and threw it out the window and onto the adjoining roof. His eyes didn’t leave Steve. He wanted to say more. Make him understand that he wasn’t bad anymore. That he was trying not to be bad anymore. More men were coming. They were firing and Steve was still just getting to his feet. Bucky used his metal arm to shield them both from the bullets. Steve shoved his shield in front of them both. Bucky could smell Steve’s sweat and cologne. It was making it hard to focus.

He decided that if Steve wanted to act like a shield, Bucky would use him like a shield. He picked Steve up and tossed him at one of the gunmen before heading for the door to the stairs. He took out two more SWAT members in the apartment and eight more on his landing. He moved down the stairs the best he could taking out enemies as he went.

Suddenly, Steve was there again. Bucky needed to lose him. It was too hard to focus with him around. His thoughts became too erratic and he needed to focus on the exit strategy. He flipped a soldier over the banister and Steve barely caught him. He looked at Bucky with exasperation.

“Dude.” Was all he said. Bucky wanted to laugh again. It was strange. He couldn’t remember the last time he had ever laughed at all and twice in the span of five minutes, Steve had nearly gotten him to break. Bucky finally got to where he needed to be. On a path to freedom that was incidentally the same path away from Steve. Bucky charged through the hallway and broke through the window flinging himself over to the opposite roof and collecting his go bag as he went.

He was home free. For five seconds. This new attacker was different. It was… a… cat? Bucky moved away from the cat’s hand a millisecond before the claws ripped through the metal ventilation shaft like a knife through warm butter.

*It was my day off.* He whined mentally as he fled from his new attacker. *I just wanted plums.*
Bucky bickers with Sam.

They stuck him in a box. Strapped down like the lightning chair. He had been anticipating this moment for so long. Envisioning all the horrible possibilities. It isn’t often that reality is worse than your darkest imaginings. So Bucky did what he did best when put in a situations like this. He shut down. It was easier to handle the coming pain when you disconnected from your body. Bucky had found that out decades ago.

It was an eighteen hour drive from Bucharest to Berlin. Clearly they didn’t want to risk anything that might happen inflight with the Winter Soldier. Bucky actually had an exit strategy for three different aircrafts. He hadn’t had an exit strategy for the chair or the box. Not a real one. Just the mental escape. An escape so deep even Steve couldn’t break him from it.

Longing.

The basement they stuck him in wasn’t much different from the one he was used to. Like all HYDRA bases, it was designed for productivity.

Rusted.

The walls were cold.

Furnace.

The people were stern.

Daybreak.

Refusal to obey meant pain.

Seventeen.

Bucky had gotten free of his handlers before. He could do it again. Sure, it would likely mean decades in the hands of his masters. Hundreds more bodies he would be forced to drop.

Benign.

More pieces of his newly regained memories being chipped away to nothing, but Bucky could be patient. He already had more death on his hands than he cared for, however much more they put on him would make little difference.

Nine.

They would need him again and when that time came, he would break free.

Homecoming.
He would run farther. Somewhere they could never find him.

One.

Whatever came next, he would get through it. He would survive. After all, he had something new this time. Something he didn’t have last time. Hope.

Freight car.

He remembered Steve. He wasn’t always the hulking brute he was now. He used to be small enough that Bucky could pick him up with one arm and carry him around. It used to tick Steve off, but there wasn’t really an easier way to get him away from a fight. And Steve did so love to fight. Small and sickly, he was an easy target. If Bucky hadn’t been around he might have died several times over. A thought that made him sick.

Steve’s dad had died in the war. The same war that had turned Bucky’s own father to drinking. Steve’s mom had been the only sane adult the two of them had to look up to. Bucky’s mom was too busy running after the dozens of children she had to be concerned about Bucky. Then Steve’s mom had died. They had both been adults by then, but it didn’t make it sting any less.

Steve had refused Bucky’s offer to move in together. Maybe if he had been a little more honest as to why. If Bucky had just admitted that he needed Steve’s company more than the other way around, Steve might have given in. There was no might about it. Steve would have done anything for Bucky. But Bucky had been too worried about his dignity. Which meant that they were doomed to the same outcome that all friends face at one point or another. They were drifting apart.

Bucky held on for dear life. Any excuse he could find, he would track Steve down to talk for a minute or an hour. He set up dates for them because maybe if they both got settled down they could find houses next to each other. They would see each other regularly. They wouldn’t drift apart.

But then the Second Great War started. And everything changed. And they didn’t drift apart. They were ripped apart. And Steve was so eager to go.

He came to on the floor. His arm was pinned down in a vice. It smelt of sewage. Rotten. Bucky tried to work out how long he had been under for. How many people had he hurt or killed? Where the hell was he? Who had him trapped down here and what did they want from him? Why did his body hurt so much? Why did his lungs burn?

He needed to get out of here. He pushed at the vice holding his arm. Worst case scenario, he was perfectly willing to get rid of the arm. If only he could find something to break it off with. He groaned. Whatever he had done while he was under was lingering.

“Hey, Cap!” Someone called. Cap? Steve? Is Steve here? Bucky looked up and his neck screamed with the effort. It was Steve. It wasn’t HYDRA or another seedy warmonger looking to profit off of his kills. It was Steve. Bucky could have cried with relief. He used his free hand to grip the edge of the vice and tried to situate himself better on the wooden crate under his butt.

“Steve.” Bucky must have done something to him. Why else would Steve have him restrained? But he looked good. Bucky hadn’t hurt him again. He looked defensive all the same. What have I done?

“Which Bucky am I talking to?” Steve barked. Which Bucky? There was only ever him. Good
or bad, it was all one Bucky. As much as it pained him to say. But Bucky didn’t think he meant that. He wanted answers to his questions from the apartment in Bucharest. Answers Bucky knew he could give though not in much detail.

“Your mom’s name was Sarah.” He announced. An amusing thought jumped into his head and he chuckled. “You used to wear newspapers in your shoes.” His mouth felt strange pulled back into a grin like it was. But that’s what Steve did to him. Bucky glanced back up at Steve who had relaxed considerably. He even smiled softly back in return.

“You can’t read that in a museum.” He said.

“Just like that we’re supposed to be cool?” Another man asked. He reminded Bucky of Private Gabe Jones of the Howlies. Bucky recognized him from Bucharest and somewhere else he couldn’t quite put his finger on. What he did know was that he hadn’t held back when he was fighting him. Which meant something bad.

“What did I do?” He asked though he was terrified of the answer.

“Enough.” Steve replied. Somehow that answer was worse than a detailed account. Bucky dropped his head and let out a breath.

“I knew this would happen.” He muttered. “Everything HYDRA put inside me is still there. All he had to do was say the goddamn words.” For the first time in almost two years, Bucky wanted to die. Especially when all Steve was doing was staring at him with that pitied look. Like Bucky was a wounded puppy instead of a man.

“Who was he?” Steve asked steeling his expression. Something must have given away what Bucky was thinking. If not to the other man, then to Steve.

“I don’t know.” Bucky whispered. He really didn’t. In none of his fragmented memories could he recall that man’s face. Steve didn’t let up.

“People are dead.” Bucky winced, he didn’t need to be told that. “The bombings, the setup, the doctor did all that just to get ten minutes with you. I need you to do better than ‘I don’t know.’” He wanted to give Steve the answers he was looking for. He wanted Steve to be happy with him again, like when he told him about the newspapers and they had smiled. Bucky dug through his mind for anything that could help. Any sliver of information that might make Steve smile again. Like finding a smoke signal in heavy fog.

“He wanted to know about Siberia.” He said slowly. “Where I was kept.” That didn’t bode well. “He wanted to know exactly where.” Which meant only one thing.

“Why would he need to know that?” Steve demanded. Bucky was doing his best, but Steve still wasn’t happy. He seemed more on edge with every word Bucky spoke. The next words he had to offer would only make him more upset.

“Because I’m not the only Winter Soldier.” There was a long, pregnant pause that stretched until Bucky wanted to tear his arm off. Steve noticed. Steve always noticed.

He unlocked Bucky’s arm from the vice. He watched Bucky roll his shoulder and sit back. Steve fell back against the far wall. His thick arms crossed over his wide chest. Bucky knew he wouldn’t be happy, but that look made him wish he could swallow his words back up.

“Who are they?” It was too late to go back now.
“Their most elite death squad. More kills than anyone in HYDRA history and that was before the serum.” He couldn’t look at Steve anymore. Not with the heavy disappointment so present in his eyes.

“They all turn out like you?” The other man asked.

“Worse.” Bucky had a fleeting thought wishing that man was anywhere else. Especially anywhere other than leaning on the same wall Steve was leaning on.

“The doctor, can he control them?” Steve asked pulling Bucky’s attention away from the other man. The words didn’t work quite as well on them as they did on Bucky, but they did work.

“Enough.”

“He said he wanted to see an empire fall.” Steve told the other man.

“With these guys he could do it.” He pulled Steve’s attention back to him. “They speak thirty languages, can hide in plain sight, infiltrate, assassinate, destabilize. They could take a whole country down in one night and you would never see them coming.” The other man walked over to Steve, keeping a careful eye on Bucky. Whatever Bucky had done to him must have been pretty bad to keep him on his toes like that. If he kept getting that close to Steve, Bucky’d do worse.

“This would’ve been a lot easier a week ago.” He whispered to Steve. Bucky looked down at his hands to appear as though he couldn’t hear them.

“If we call Tony –”

“Ah, he won’t believe us.”

“Even if he did….”

“Who knows if the Accords would let him help.” Bucky wanted to smash the other guy’s head through the wall. What gave him the right to be so chummy with his best friend? He wasn’t held down anymore, who knows? Maybe a last rogue impulse stuck in there by HYDRA made him attack the guy. Bucky had killed men twice his size with half as much cause.

“We’re on our own.” Steve sighed.

“Maybe not. I know a guy.” Good, Bucky thought, then go bother him and leave my guy alone.

He walked away leaving Steve alone with Bucky for the first time. Bucky had more he wanted to say. He wanted to tell Steve everything, but he wasn’t sure if Steve was still mad at Bucky about the other Winter Soldiers. About whatever he was made to do by the doctor.

“What else do you remember?” Steve asked. Bucky looked up. He had to wrestle his HYDRA memories free. They were punctuated by horrible pain which made it difficult to focus.

“They used me to train them.” He confessed. “Some things are… are blocked. I think there was a fight.” Steve shook his head.

“Not about…. No, Buck. What do you remember about me? About you before HYDRA?” Bucky relaxed a bit. It wasn’t an easy topic for him, but it didn’t carry as much weight as talking about his HYDRA days.

“I remember you picking a fight with every schoolyard bully in Brooklyn.” Bucky offered. Steve
grinned at him inspiring Bucky to continue. “I remember coming to your rescue most of the time.” Steve shook his head and rolled his eyes, the grin still hanging on his face.

“I think I remember saving your ass in Italy, so I’d call us even.” Bucky wrinkled his face. He didn’t remember Italy. Steve saw his confusion and the grin dropped from his face. Bucky felt guilty. He should have pretended he remembered. “You don’t remember?” Bucky winced.

“I… some things are blocked. I remember things before the war better than after.” Steve had that pitied look again.

“It’s okay, Buck, it’ll come back.” Bucky shook his head.

“I don’t think I want some of them to come back.” He admitted quietly. Steve opened his mouth to respond.

“My guy agreed to help, he just needs a ride over. Told him we’d figure something out.” The other guy announced coming back in. Steve nodded.

“How much do you trust this guy, Sam?” Sam shrugged and looked pointedly at Bucky.

“More than I trust him.” Bucky’s jaw flexed and his metal hand curled into a fist.

“I trust him.”

“You don’t think your judgement might be a little skewed?” Steve sagged his shoulders and gave Sam an exhausted look. “Okay, I got it. I’ll play nice. First we need to get my guy over here. You wouldn’t happen to know any pilots, would you, Cap?” Steve was quiet for a second before pulling a small flip phone out of his back pocket and dialing a number.

“Clint, yeah it’s me.” Bucky wondered how many friends Steve had though it didn’t surprise him. It had just taken everyone else seventy years and super soldier serum to see what Bucky had seen since elementary school. “I know you’re probably enjoying retirement, but I need a favor. Well, Wanda needs a favor. Tony has her locked up at the compound.” Steve was quiet as he listened to the voice on the other end. “Great, could you pick up Sam’s friend on your way and come out to Berlin? He’ll give you the info.” Steve passed the phone to Sam who told Clint where to find his friend. When he was finished, Steve took the phone back, ended the call and smashed the phone beneath his heel.

“Alright, they’re going to meet us at the airport with a helicopter.” Sam rolled his eyes.

“We’re gonna put this guy in another helicopter?” Bucky squinted at Sam curiously. A hazy memory of him behind the stick of a helicopter nudged at the recesses of his mind punctuated by Steve.

“Sam.” Steve warned tiredly.

“I know, I know. Bigger fish to fry.” Steve looked between the two of them.

“I need to go and get us a ride.” Steve leaned in to Sam to whisper in his ear too quietly for Bucky to make out. He leaned back and looked at Bucky. “Don’t go anywhere, Buck.” Steve told him pointedly. Bucky did want to run, but he wanted to be with Steve more. He wasn’t going anywhere even though Steve was leaving him alone with Sam who was quickly climbing Bucky’s list of least favorite people.

Sam fixed Bucky with a mean stare and crossed his arms over his chest. It would be so easy for
Bucky to take him out right now. One on one. No Steve to protect him. And if he couldn’t kill him, Bucky could at least wipe that smug smile off his face.

“I’m telling you right now, I don’t trust you.” Sam told him. Like it was some big surprise. Bucky chose silence instead of the million biting remarks twirling in his head. Somehow that annoyed Sam more. Bucky fought down a smug smile of his own. He had made the right choice.

Thirty painstaking minutes later, a car pulled into the warehouse and Steve climbed out. It looked like a matchbox car. Steve put his hands in the air.

“Ta-da!” Steve said proudly. Bucky smiled. He looked comical standing beside the dinky, sky blue car.

“Man, what the hell is that?” Sam whined. Steve’s hands dropped to the hood of the car and his smile drooped.

“What? It’s discreet. We’re fugitives, Sam.” Sam rolled his whole head.

“Discreet my ass. That’s a clown car.” Steve frowned.

“You’re welcome to walk to the airport.” Bucky pushed down his smile and started for the passenger seat.

“No, man, if I have to ride in that I’m getting shotgun.” Bucky froze and fixed Sam with a hard stare. Did he just threaten me? Sam stared back.

“It’s alright, Buck.” Steve said, but Bucky didn’t move. “Bucky!” Bucky turned his head slightly to regard Steve. “He means the front seat.” Steve explained. Sam crossed his arms and squinted at Bucky. “It’s actually probably a good idea for you to sit in the back. It’ll make it harder for the cameras to pick you up.” Bucky couldn’t argue with that logic, but the small backseat reminded Bucky of the box.


“Jones.” Bucky growled, wedging himself between the front seat and the wall of the car.

“Jones?” Sam parroted. Bucky flipped himself around in the seat and did his best to get comfortable. Sam looked across the car to Steve who was grinning madly. “Jones?” Sam asked Steve.

“Gabe Jones.” Steve explained. “Private First Class of the Howling Commandos.” Apparently the comparison delighted Sam. His lips twitched upwards with amusement while he took his seat. Bucky would have to work on his insults.
Bucky gets debriefed on their opponents. Steve and Bucky share a bad memory.

I'll get through the Civil War stuff soon I think. One maybe two more chapters.

They were taking the backroads through Berlin as an added precaution. Sam complained for most of the ride about traffic, the mission, potentially fighting their friends, and anything else that he could think up. Bucky sat quietly in the backseat and tried not to think about how hungry he was. He hadn’t eaten since breakfast two days ago just before leaving to go shopping.

“Okay, this definitely doesn’t look like the way to the airport.” Sam grumbled. The car crawled along a dirt path until Steve found a tunnel. A car was already parked at the other end setting Bucky on high alert.

“Whatever is waiting for us in Siberia, we’re going to need our gear to fight it.” Sam didn’t seem bothered at all by the nondescript sedan. Bucky wondered if Sam would mind too much if he shoved him through the windshield should a fight break out. He didn’t really care one way or the other.

“You got my wings?” Steve nodded and turned to look at Bucky.

“Wait here.” He clambered out of the tinker toy that was serving as their ride and met a pretty blonde woman at the sedan’s trunk. Bucky clenched both fists as he watched the girl bat her lashes and flirt with him. His knees were killing him pressed so deeply in the back of Sam’s seat. Everything about the tight fit and the uncomfortable situation was making it hard for Bucky to breathe.

“Could you move your seat up?” Bucky asked as politely as he could. Really he wanted to force the seat forward on its track until Sam was sitting in the windshield, but that might ruin the clandestine nature of the escape.

“No.” Sam replied with no hesitation. Bucky sighed and shifted to the middle of the bench and was awarded with a full view of Steve through the windshield. Then his heart sank into his gut as Steve leaned over and kissed the blonde. She walked away and Steve glanced back at the car with a cocksure grin though Bucky wanted nothing more than to rip that girl’s spine out through her teeth. Bucky wondered if he had had those thoughts before HYDRA or if his inclination towards violence had to do with his programming.

Steve was happy so Bucky smiled back at him despite his heart feeling like it wouldn’t ever beat the same again. Bucky had spent two years on the run after having beaten Steve to a pulp and leaving him broken and bleeding on the banks of a river. How could he expect Steve to forgive
and forget all of that? How could he expect Steve to put his life on hold and what? Wait for Bucky? Bucky who refused to admit out loud everything he felt for Steve? No.

Sam climbed out of the passenger seat and popped the trunk so they could transfer their weapons and uniforms between the cars. Bucky stayed put and gritted his teeth to keep himself from asking questions he knew he would regret. Sam and Steve sat back in their seats rocking the tiny car.

“Now that’s settled, we should head for the airport.” Steve announced. Bucky’s stomach gurgled. Steve turned in his seat to look at Bucky who looked away. “When was the last time you ate, Buck?” Bucky swallowed and shrugged his shoulders. The mission came first.

“Is getting food really a great idea for us?” Sam said asking the obvious question. Steve sighed, turned, and put the car in gear. Bucky’s stomach gurgled again so he pressed his metal arm against it hard. Eventually, it would stop.

Steve pulled into a drive through at some American burger place and rolled down the window. He tugged a blue baseball cap low over his eyes before shouting an order through the speaker. Sam was staring at Bucky. He could feel it. But when they had paid and received their food, Sam was the first to dig in.

“The way I see it,” Steve said after he had parked them under an old, rickety bridge, “we have about five hours before Clint gets here. Which means we have five hours to come up with a strategy.” Sam wiped a glob of ketchup from the corner of his mouth.

“We’re gonna need about ten strategies for all the ways this could go sideways.” Steve tilted his head side to side the way he did when he agreed with someone, but didn’t like it. Steve looked back at Bucky.

“Bucky,” Steve barked. Bucky flinched and looked up. “You need to eat, man.” He urged more gently pointing to the unwrapped sandwich clenched in Bucky’s fists. He took a slow, measured bite and Steve relaxed a bit. Bucky continued eating and tried to ignore the niggling feeling that he was only doing it because it was an order despite being so hungry.

“I don’t know how good Wanda’s going to be with fighting Tony and the others if it comes down to it, but if we make it out without the guys getting in our way, she’ll be a big help with the other Winter Soldiers.” Sam shoved a few fries in his mouth and nodded.

“If only anything ever worked out the way we wanted it to.” Steve laughed breathily and nodded.

“Yeah, well, a guy can dream.”

“You think they’ll bring Vision?” Steve shook his head as he considered it.

“At this point, I really don’t know. If they do, Wanda can handle him too.”

“You think she will?” Steve popped a few fries in his mouth and took a long sip from his drink.

“What can she do?” Bucky asked before pressing his lips together. He wasn’t usually allowed to ask questions. Steve looked over at him and frowned.

“It’s kind of hard to explain.” He said slowly. “She can manipulate, well, everything. She played with our minds like they were Lincoln Logs.” Bucky narrowed his eyes in suspicion. Steve smiled reassuringly. “She’s a good kid. You’ll see.” Bucky nodded. He didn’t get in trouble for asking a question and Steve had actually answered it as best he could. It made Bucky braver.
“And who is Clint?” Steve took another drink.

“He’s one helluva shot that’s for sure and his wife is going to kill me if he doesn’t get back home in one piece.” Bucky nodded. What wouldn’t people do for Steve?

“And your friend?” Bucky asked Sam. Sam seemed put off by the question. He took an enormous bite of his burger. He wasn’t upset that he had been asked, at least Bucky didn’t think so, more so by the answer. Sam swallowed the food in his mouth and cleared his throat.

“His name is Scott Lang.” Bucky didn’t miss that Sam was talking almost solely to Steve although it had been Bucky that had asked the question. “Dude has some type of shrinking tech I’ve never seen before. Makes him really tiny and really strong.” Steve nodded.

“Good, hopefully that means it’s tech they won’t be prepared for.” Sam smirked, seemed embarrassed that he had, and tried to cover his mouth with his hand discreetly. Bucky suspected there was more to the story than Sam let on. He decided to keep his mouth shut about it for now.

Bucky looked down at his hands. He had flashes of memories that seemed recent, but they blended with memories that felt more distant making them indistinguishable. The memories, if that was what they were, were of a woman. Bucky picked at pieces of a shouted conversation in Russian. Bucky couldn’t remember responding in any way which meant she had to have been part of some mission, but he remembered her from hours before which meant she wasn’t dead.

“The redheaded woman….” He murmured.


“Is she on our side?” Steve frowned and put a hand to his head.

“I dunno, Buck.” He sighed. “I’d like to think so.” Sam was shaking his head.

“Dude, she signed. We know what side she’s on.” Steve shook his head.

“Natasha is always going to be on her own side. I think it all depends on who matters more to her.” Steve pursed his lips in thought. “I’m not sure that’s Tony.” Sam nodded but he didn’t look convinced.

“What about the cat man?” Steve and Sam looked over at Bucky.

“T’Challa?” Bucky nodded.

“What’s his deal?” Bucky didn’t think it was a funny question, but Sam laughed anyway.

“His claws are vibranium, I know that much.” Steve supplied.

“The same stuff as your shield?” Steve looked pleased that Bucky knew that. He nodded.

“Which is makes him all that more difficult to fight.”

“Let’s just hope we make it to Siberia before he finds you.” Sam said. Steve nodded.

“Why does he want to kill me so badly? What does he think I did?”

“The bombing at the U.N. T’Challa’s father was killed in it.” Steve told him solemnly. Before Bucky could get in a response, the bridge above them began to rumble and the car filled with the deafening sounds of a train barreling along the tracks. Bucky dropped his sandwich and pulled his
big body into itself tightly. He shut his eyes and tried to ignore the painful, white-hot flashes going off behind his eyes.

“Bucky!” Steve was screaming. His large hands were clamped around Bucky’s shoulders and he was shaking him. Bucky opened his eyes and stared into Steve’s. It had a calming effect on him. The flashes dimmed though they were still present. He couldn’t hear him, but Bucky could see Steve mouthing his name over and over keeping him focused on something other than the train until it moved away and the car went silent and still.

“What the hell was that?” Sam demanded. He had moved to the other side of his seat and was gawking at Bucky with horror like he was some crazy primate in a zoo. Gradually, Bucky’s breathing returned to normal and the whatever pressure in his chest and head let up.

“Are you alright?” Steve asked. Bucky wasn’t sure exactly what they were referring to. “You started screaming.” Steve explained. Bucky shook his head.

“I don’t like trains.” He said slowly. Steve let go of Bucky’s shoulders and sat back. “I didn’t know I screamed.” He mumbled. Steve had a distant look in his eyes that Bucky knew he had put there. “Steve?” He looked up at Bucky and shook his head.

“I don’t like trains either, Buck.” Somehow that made perfect sense to Bucky. He wasn’t sure exactly why and he didn’t especially care to know. When he tried to pick at those memories, it felt like the beginning of something and the end of something else. Bucky had enough sadness so he didn’t feel the need to dig any deeper.

Bucky was mostly quiet for the next four hours while they discussed battle strategy, escape plans, and contingencies. Bucky would pipe in with some tactical advice or another that Steve would roll around in his head before adding to whatever plan they were working on. Sam had relaxed around him. Apparently an over the top freak out over something as minor as a train going by overhead had earned Bucky a smidge of empathy on Sam’s part.

When they pulled into the airport parking garage hours later, the only thing Bucky wanted to do was stretch his legs. Clint, Wanda, and Scott were already there waiting. He wondered what they had been told about him. Were they okay with him being on their team like Steve was or were they more like Sam and only going along with it because Steve had asked them to?

Bucky watched them interact from afar. No reason to put anymore tension into a situation that was already on a wire. Sam’s friend seemed more gung-ho about the mission than anyone else. Bucky wondered if that meant he didn’t understand the gravity of the situation, if he was just that confident, or he really was that good. It probably didn’t matter, but his enthusiasm seemed to amuse Steve. He turned to Bucky as though to say, ‘Do you see this guy?’ The look was likely also doubling as Steve making sure Bucky was still with them.

I’m with you ‘til the end of the line. He tried to keep himself in the moment, but the memory was forcing its way in. The dream he had been having for months. Bucky slamming his fist into Steve’s perfect face over and over again mercilessly. Steve grunting out the line, telling Bucky that he would rather die than see him hurt. Something nobody else had ever done for Bucky.

A German voice crackled over the speakers. His teammates looked around in confusion. Even Steve, who Bucky knew spoke German, squinted at the voice. Bucky took a step away from the safety of the matchbox car.

“They’re evacuating the airport.” He supplied. Steve looked over at Sam.
“Stark.” Sam announced resignedly.

“Stark?” Scott Lang repeated, his enthusiasm waning a bit. So it was my first guess. Steve assumed his Captain persona.

“Suit up.” He barked. Bucky opened the truck, surprised to see his tactical vest mixed in with Sam’s wings and Steve’s shield. He pulled his red t-shirt up over his head trading it for the bulletproof vest. The parking garage became impossibly silent. Bucky looked up, vest in his hands.

Steve had a tight look on his face, it was the look he got when he was trying not to give away anything. He didn’t realize how much that look already gave away. Sam didn’t have the same decorum. His hands were paused on their route to fastening the wings to his back. Scott Lang stared with his mouth open. Clint didn’t seem to be aware of anything important happening. He was focused on loading himself up with an arsenal in the back of the van. Wanda, being the only woman on the team was suiting up in the windowless van.

Bucky looked down at himself. He never really looked at his body. Didn’t notice anything off about it other than the obvious mechanical arm. When he compared himself to Steve’s smooth torso, he finally understood what made them all stare. A thick, spider web of scars stretched around his shoulder where HYDRA had pulled off the rest of his left arm and reattached the metal one. Several other scars laced their way around his back and sides. Bullet holes, stab wounds, explosions. His life as a weapon was mapped clearly on his body.

And it made him ashamed.

“Sorry.” He muttered, pulling the vest around himself to hide the scars. The apology snapped the other men from their trance. They all continued dressing as though nothing had happened, but Bucky saw the look in Steve’s eyes. He wasn’t going to escape an uncomfortable conversation about the state of his body. Bucky was just grateful they had more pressing concerns that would hopefully delay the inevitable.

“Tony’s not stupid, he’s going to take out our exit strategy first which means we’re going to need to take theirs. The Quinjet is here somewhere and we need to find it. Alright, we go in pairs.” Steve announced once they were all dressed and gathered. “Wanda and Clint stay together, you’re on the ground. Sam and Bucky, you’re together. Sam, use Redwing and see if you can spot where they’re hiding the plane. Keep yourselves hidden as long as you can.”

“I guess that means I’m with you, Cap.” Lang said cheerfully. Steve tilted his head and nodded.

“Sam says you can shrink, is that right?”

“Oh, yeah.” Lang laughed. “Sam knows.”

“Good. Then start shrinking. If Tony does what I think he will, he’s going to try to take my shield away first.” Steve fiddled with the shield possessively. Even the idea that someone would take it away made him hold it tighter.

“How do you know?” Lang asked. Steve took a breath and looked at his shield.

“It’s what I would do.” Lang nodded and pressed a button on the side of his helmet. A silver mask snapped over his face and he held up a fist.

“Alright then,” Lang said, “let’s do this!” He pressed a trigger on his hand and suddenly he disappeared. Bucky knew he hadn’t really disappeared, but he was gone. After a few seconds,
Lang’s voice popped through his earpiece. “I’m all set are we moving or what?”

Steve gritted his teeth. Bucky knew he didn’t want to do this. Tony and whoever else was with him were Steve’s friends. Whatever the outcome of today, Bucky knew Steve was going to lose something important. How much he lost, well, Bucky decided that depended on him. So he was going to do his utmost to make sure that Steve’s losses were kept to a minimum no matter what it cost him.
Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve talk about their past on their flight to Siberia.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was infinitely harder to fight someone when you were trying not to kill them. Harder still when you were fighting someone who wanted to kill you. And Bucky was still reeling from the red spandex monkey kid. Bucky was just trying to keep T’Challa from killing him which made getting to the Quinjet impossible.

“I didn’t kill your father.” Bucky told him hoping maybe he could make him understand.

“Then why did you run?” Bucky was thrown off by the question. Thrown off enough to let T’Challa gain the upper hand for a second and kick him into a stack of crates. Why did I run? Would you have let me explain myself if I had stayed? T’Challa lunged for his throat, claws out. Nope, guess that’s just Steve.

T’Challa’s claws were encased in glowing red energy. They both looked over at Wanda who flipped her hands around and sent T’Challa flying across the pavement. Bucky nodded at her wordlessly. He liked her a lot better than he liked Sam. If it came down to a choice between saving the two, Bucky’d choose Wanda. And maybe he’d go back for Sam if he had the chance.

The fake doctor had an eight hour head start on them. He had probably already started waking up the other Winter Soldiers. Bucky ducked through the battlefield to where Steve was crouched behind a metal post. This was all taking too much time. Steve looked over to where his friends were dueling. Bucky could see he was planning on going back out to help despite the plane being in the other direction.

“We gotta go.” Bucky told him. “That guy’s probably in Siberia by now.” Steve looked over to Bucky for a second before the silver Iron Man caught his eye flying overhead.

“We gotta draw out the flyers. I’ll take Vision, you get to the jet.” Bucky didn’t like the idea of leaving Steve to deal with the laser guy. Didn’t like the idea of leaving Steve at all.

“No!” Sam shouted through the earpiece. “You get to the jet. Both of you.” Bucky was starting to like Sam more and more. Maybe he really would go back and save him if need be. “The rest of us aren’t getting out of here.” Well, that settled it.

“As much as I hate to admit it,” Clint said, “if we’re gonna win this one, some of us might have to lose it.” Bucky could see how much that was hurting Steve. Clint was right and there was nothing Steve could do to change it.

“This isn’t the real fight, Steve.” Sam reminded him. Bucky was surprised to find that Sam’s close relationship with Steve no longer bothered him, but relieved him. Sam knew that Steve wasn’t about to leave his team here to fight while he escaped. Not without a really good reason.
Not without being reminded that there was a bigger battle to fight somewhere else.

Bucky didn’t say anything, but Steve looked at him like he knew what he was thinking. Bucky kept his eyes darting back and forth between Steve and the fight a few feet to his right. If Steve tried to make a break for it, Bucky swore he’d carry him to the jet. Steve let out a heavy breath and Bucky knew he had resigned himself to retreating.

“Alright, Sam, what’s the play?” Bucky could have been relieved if he weren’t thinking about the five super soldiers that they were going to have to stop. Five against two. He didn’t like those odds.

“We need a diversion, something big.” Bucky watched Steve thinking.

“I’ve got something kinda big,” Lang piped in. “But I can’t hold it very long.” Steve was lost in thought, making a decision. “On my signal, run like hell. And if I tear myself in half….” Bucky’s mind boggled. “Don’t come back for me.” Bucky shook his head with disbelief.

“He’s gonna tear himself in half?” Bucky wasn’t doing a very good job at keeping Steve’s losses to a minimum. Maybe he should turn himself in, let them do whatever they wanted to him. Better Steve lost a psychotic, HYDRA sleeper agent with a penchant for violence than all of his friends.

“You sure about this, Scott?” Steve asked, keeping his eyes trained on Bucky. Reading his mind.

“I do it all the time.” Lang said easily. Then backtracked, “I mean, once. In a lab. Then I passed out.” Bucky really wished he would shut up. Good thing there didn’t seem to be any stopping him as his mantra, “I’m the boss, I’m the boss, I’m the boss.” Crackled through the comms.

A few seconds later, Scott Lang appeared in the sky above them. He wasn’t flying or floating. His feet were on the ground though they were now each the size of a big rig truck. He towered over the battlegrounds, suddenly fifty feet tall. Bucky couldn’t stop his mouth from dropping open. If they had all been unprepared for the shrinking technology, how would any of them handle that?

“I guess that’s the signal.” Steve uttered in disbelief. They turned for the hangar and started running. Bucky couldn’t help noticing that Steve wasn’t running as fast as he could. Steve knew they had to leave, but everything in him was telling him to stay and fight. Bucky could admire that about him a lot better if their situation wasn’t quite so life or end of the world as they knew it.

Bucky saw the yellow glow of the laser guy’s power hit the communication tower beside the hangar. He inwardly cursed Steve for not running faster when the red glow of Wanda’s power surrounded the falling debris. Steve stopped to look at her, Bucky kept running, picking up the pace. Steve trailed after him, easily catching up. Suddenly, Wanda’s magic was gone. Bucky dove through the debris, keeping track of Steve as best he could until they came out on the other side thankfully unscathed.

They started to run for the jet when the redhead woman stepped out of the shadows. Bucky knew her. He knew he knew her. He just wasn’t positive on where it was he knew her from. Beyond yesterday, beyond Steve, he had a niggling memory stuffed away that she and he went way back. Not as far back as he and Steve did, but years.

Steve was braced for a fight, but Bucky could tell she wasn’t really preparing to attack them. She seemed drained. Like this fight was taking more out of her than it should have. She sighed at Steve, already defeated.

“You’re not gonna stop.” It wasn’t really a question. Steve answered anyway.
“You know I can’t.” Natasha lifted her fist, aiming between them.

“I’m gonna regret this.” She fired. A man grunted behind them and Bucky turned to see T’Challa stopped in his tracks. Natasha jerked her head back towards the jet. “Go.” Bucky followed Steve to the plane who ran much quicker now.

Bucky buckled himself in to the seat behind Steve who started the jet expertly. Steve who Bucky remembered as a small kid struggling to get the radio to cooperate and always had to ask Bucky to tune it. Steve fired a clearing for them to fly through and took off. The silver Iron Man appeared in the window quickly joined by the other Iron Man. Steve pushed the thrusted Iron Man forward in an effort to outrun them.

Vision’s yellow laser flashed out from underneath them and the pursuers vanished along with Sam. Bucky and Steve both turned back to look, but they were already too far away to see just what had happened. Steve let out a sigh of defeat. Bucky stayed quiet in the back while Steve flew them east.

“What’s going to happen to your friends?” Bucky asked after the silence between them grew to be more than he could bear. Steve was quiet for a while. He wondered if Steve was mad at him for causing all this.

“Whatever it is,” he said finally, “I’ll deal with it.” It didn’t escape Bucky’s notice that Steve said he would deal with it. And he was right to exclude him. All Bucky ever brought Steve was trouble. Look where they were. Look what Bucky had already cost him.

“I don’t know if I’m worth all this, Steve.” Bucky looked away out the window.

“What you did all those years. It wasn’t you. You didn’t have a choice.” Steve said defensively.

“I know.” Bucky told him. He did know. But whether it was his choice or not didn’t matter. Not when so many people were dead by his hand. “But I did it.” Steve didn’t have a pep talk for that. He couldn’t possibly know the extent of all that Bucky had done. Even Bucky didn’t know the extent of all he had done. Fragments and flashes of his time under HYDRA’s control and none of it was good. He saved no one. He helped no one. He wasn’t a hero like Steve. Someone for kids to look up to and strive to be.

Bucky remembered all the kids gushing over the Captain America exhibit in the museum. He dredged up a memory from reading about Steve and planes in the museum. Reading about how Steve had gotten himself frozen just like Bucky. Though Steve’s freezing had been an accident. An on purpose sort of accident the way Bucky remembered reading it. Bucky watched Steve behind the controls of the plane now with more scrutiny. Something made Bucky want to tease Steve about it.

“Are you sure you should be the one flying the plane?” Steve turned his head to look at Bucky in confusion.

“What do you mean?” Bucky lifted one shoulder in a half shrug.

“It’s just… I read about you, you know.” Steve nodded.

“Yeah, I heard you.” Bucky fought down a smile.

“Well, you don’t exactly have the greatest track record with planes and ice, you know?” Steve froze. He turned his whole chair until he could see Bucky clearly.
“Was that… a joke?” Bucky couldn’t read the expression on Steve’s face. It looked a little like the hostility the HYDRA agents gave him when he did something they didn’t approve of. He looked down at his hands curled on his lap.

“Maybe.” He murmured. Steve made a sort of choking sound making Bucky look up. He was laughing. Bucky grinned.

“Okay, wise guy, the least you could do is tell me when we’re getting close.” Bucky looked out through the window. Snow covered everything. Bucky tried to ignore the imagined pain that came with the sight. The memories of the box. The chair. The fighting.

“We’re still a ways off.” Steve rolled his eyes at him.

“I’m going to assume that was another joke. I’ll tell you when we hit the coordinates.” Bucky frowned in thought.

“You ever imagine we’d be here?”

“I haven’t been thinking about too much else the past couple of days.” Steve replied. Bucky shook his head.

“I meant here as in… as in now.” Bucky scratched at his neck. “Where we came from….”

“You remember where we came from?” Bucky squinted at a long forgotten memory.

“I remember pieces of it.” Steve smiled.

“Like the newspapers.” Bucky nodded.

“Like the newspapers.” He agreed. “And… dancing.” Steve’s smile dropped.

“What?” Bucky panicked.

“Nothing, I was probably remembering it wrong.” Steve shook his head.

“No, tell me.” Bucky refused to meet Steve’s eyes. “Please?” Bucky huffed, but he couldn’t seem to disobey.

“You were real small so I could be wrong. My mind isn’t what it used to be.” Bucky laughed at himself. “At least, I don’t think it is.” Steve reached out and squeezed Bucky’s shoulder.

“Tell me anyway.” Steve urged. “I’ll help fill in any gaps you leave out.” Bucky’s eyes went soft. It was exactly what he wanted.

“Your mom worked all the time at the hospital so we often had the house to ourselves. A bunch of the kids from school were planning on going to a dance of some sort.” Bucky scratched at his head to remember.

“I didn’t want to go.” Steve told him. Bucky frowned.

“Yes, you did.” Steve bit his lip and looked down nodding slowly.

“Okay, fine. I did, but I didn’t plan on going.”

“Until I talked you into it.”
“Convinced me that all I had to do was show the girls how much rhythm I had and they’d be lining up to dance with me.” The more Steve talked about it, the clearer the memory became.

“So I tuned the radio to Glenn Miller and taught you everything I knew.” Steve laughed.

“Which wasn’t much as it turned out!”

“Hey!” Bucky said defensively. “It was enough to make the ladies swoon.” Steve rolled his eyes again.

“Yeah, and the chiseled jaw and baby blue eyes had nothing to do with that.” Bucky dropped his eyes.

“You have nice blue eyes, too, Steve.” He mumbled. Steve turned his chair around.

“Yeah, but I was a wimpy little nothing that weighed ninety pounds soaking wet. Not exactly what you would call a handsome gent.” Bucky pursed his lips thoughtfully.

“I don’t know, I always thought you were pretty great.” Steve stared down at the screen displaying the coordinates. Bucky hoped he hadn’t said too much.

“You remember how that all ended, Buck?” Bucky furrowed his brow.

“I don’t remember the dance.” He admitted. Steve nodded and looked up out the window in front of him.

“That’s because I got sick right before and was in bed for two weeks.” Bucky remembered that.

“You almost died.” Steve nodded.

“I almost died a lot.” Bucky remembered that, too.

“You always got better.” Steve was quiet for a minute. Bucky wished he could read Steve’s mind like Steve could read his.

“You were always by my side.” Bucky smiled. “We’re coming up on the coordinates.” Bucky looked out the window. He caught sight of the bunker nestled in the snow and his stomach sank. A large, dark truck was parked outside that he knew shouldn’t be there.

“We’re here.” He announced. Steve landed the plane and Bucky unbuckled himself from his seat.

“Guns are in the back.” Bucky opened a drawer and selected a rifle from the lineup. He tried not to think too much about what he was doing. Tried to ignore the muscle memory dug in so deep by all the things he did in the name of HYDRA. He filled his pockets with extra ammo and met Steve at the hatch. Steve hit a button and they waited for the door to finish lowering.

“Remember that time we had to ride back from Rockaway Beach in the back of that freezer truck?” Steve asked. The edges of his mouth were lifted slightly, but Bucky could see the hesitance in his eyes. It wasn’t necessary. Bucky did remember.

“Was that the time you used our train money to buy hotdogs?” Steve grinned.

“You blew three bucks trying to win that stuffed bear for a redhead.” Bucky chuckled. He had known the redhead from school and had been hopelessly trying to impress her. With a shooting game of all things. Too bad he couldn’t go back in time, this Bucky never missed.
“What was her name again?” Steve looked out at the snowy landscape. This whole situation felt increasingly familiar to Bucky. Like they had already been here before. Standing above the snow while they talked about some childhood mishap.

“Delores.” Steve said without missing a beat. “You called her Dot.” Bucky shook his head as he remembered her.

“She’s gotta be like a hundred years old right now.” Or dead.

“So are we, pal.” Steve slapped a hand on Bucky’s shoulder shaking him lightly. They both took a deep breath. They knew they were putting off the inevitable.

Reminiscing was over for now. It was time to fight.

Chapter End Notes

Bucky might actually remember things in more detail in the cannon, but since we don't get specific details Bucky has a more fleeting memory in this fic. (Especially that Natasha bit)

BTW The song I had Bucky 'teaching' Steve to dance to was 'In the Mood' by Glenn Miller if any of you were interested.
The Consequence of Compliance

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve face off against Tony Stark. Bucky's memories come back in full force.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The second his feet hit the ground all Bucky could think was how much he didn’t want to be here. He looked around at the empty, white expanse surrounding them. Something twisted inside him. Some unkind memories forcing their way up. Steve stared at the black hole that was the entrance to the compound. Bucky wished he could look at it with the same unfettered scrutiny that he had instead of with the tight, knot of fear coiling in his gut.

“He can’t have been here more than a few hours.” Steve said. Bucky saw only three sets of footprints in the snow. His, Steve’s, and the fake doctor’s. They may have caught him before the soldiers were sent anywhere, but there was no way in hell they had gotten their soon enough to avoid a fight.

“Long enough to wake them up.” Steve started for the entrance. Bucky buckled down and forced himself to focus on the mission. Force away all the memories of his torture within this cavern, but every step he took another mission found its way into is head. Every name, every bullet, every last horrified expression tearing their way out of his subconscious.

Bucky had failed the first real mission HYDRA had sent him on. Maybe that could have been a silent victory for him long after HYDRA had wiped every memory from his head. Every fragment of who he had been before. But he had still killed three people. None of them were his target. None of them had any connection to what was happening. None of them had deserved to die. The man he had been sent to kill had survived. Some low level bureaucrat with a large enough following to make HYDRA nervous. Nervous enough to test out their new toy.

They showed Bucky his photograph and gave him an order. An order Bucky had failed to carry out. His field handlers had tranquilized him and shipped him back to the compound for ‘reprimanding’. A word that, in HYDRA’s dictionary, meant extreme torture. Bucky might have been injected with a super soldier serum, but he could still be restrained. And restrain him they had. Strapped him to a table that was bolted to the floor and yanked a dirty, cloth bag over his head.

The table beneath him was solid wood and, if he focused on it, he could mostly reassure himself that the water pouring onto his face wasn’t really there. Until he breathed it in and nearly drowned himself. He had tried that once. Drowning himself. But HYDRA brought him back. Each time, they would scream that the only way to make it stop would be to comply. Comply. Comply. Comply.

And he had.

Looking back, if he had just continued to resist they would have likely scrapped him. One time too
many of disobeying orders or failing a mission and they would have stopped resuscitating him. Stuck him in the lightning chair and let the power surge just a second or two too long and fried his brain. He might not be here with Steve, but he wouldn’t have so much blood on his hands that he would never be clean again.

But he had given in. He would have done anything to keep himself from the pain as much as possible. HYDRA had pushed and dug and dragged him searching for his limit. His threshold. The thin line between rebellion and compliance. And find it they did. Bucky ground his teeth together. Sometimes he could still feel the tingle of electricity coursing through them. Sometimes he could still remember a time when he wasn’t the monster they made him.

Then someone would walk in and say those words. Those goddamn words that made him less than human. That got rid of everything he had worked for for the past two years.

They walked into the elevator shaft and Bucky tried desperately not to think about seeing his training rooms again. To think about anything else. But the only thing he could seem to think about was the damn lightning chair. He faced Steve. Steve afforded him a bit of reprieve. Comfort. Steve faced him back. He was reading his mind, but Bucky didn’t mind.

Without a word, Steve asked Bucky if he was alright. He could tell that this place was weighing on Bucky. Knew that he wanted to be absolutely anywhere else, but Steve had given Bucky a mission. Bucky may fail HYDRA, but he would be damned if he ever failed Steve Rogers again. He nodded back in reassurance as the lift reached the bottom and the doors opened.

Steve let Bucky take point. It was a good idea, strategically. Bucky knew the lay of the land better. He crept beside the walls on the balls of his feet until he reached a stairwell. He braced himself and turned the gun around the corner ahead of his body. Empty.

They continued this way until they reached the small stairway that would lead into the main chamber. A clang sounded down the corridor they had just come from. From the elevator. They turned in perfect sync and braced themselves for whatever it was coming at them. Steve held his shield out in front of them both and Bucky aimed the rifle over his head.

“You ready?” He asked.

“Yeah.” There was a measure of comfort Bucky had before fighting when he knew that Steve was on his side. Whatever was coming for them, they were ready for it.

The doors creaked and protested as the person or people on the other side forced them open. They clanged open and the Iron Man stood in the doorway, his eyes and chest piece glowing softly in the darkness of the compound. Steve lowered his shield, but only slightly. Bucky didn’t budge. This man was no friend of Bucky’s and if he had managed to follow them all the way out here, there was no telling what he’d do.

Iron Man retracted his helmet and walked toward them. Steve, keeping his shield up, met him midway. Bucky could tell that he was really giving Bucky a head start in the event that this tete-a-tete went south. Bucky lined up a shot with the man’s exposed head and waited for him to make a move.

“You seem a little defensive.” Iron Man snarked. Bucky’s finger itched on the trigger. He reminded himself that this man was once Steve’s friend. That killing him would upset Steve. It stilled his trigger finger.

“It’s been a long day.” Steve said, nodding at the man. He didn’t seem as put off by the guy’s
temperament as Bucky was. He looked up at Bucky. At the rifle aimed at his head.

“At ease, solder, I’m not currently after you.” He told Bucky as though he would listen to him. As if he had any reason to. Steve didn’t give Bucky any kind of signal that he should lower his weapon, so the gun stayed directed at Iron Man’s unprotected head.

“Then why are you here?” Steve demanded.

“Could be your story’s not so crazy.” He shrugged. “Maybe.” Bucky didn’t buy it. “Ross has no idea I’m here. I’d like to keep it that way.” He leaned against a wall casually. “Otherwise I gotta arrest myself.” Steve was quiet for a beat.

“Well, that sounds like a lot of paperwork.” Iron Man snickered. Bucky didn’t trust him, but Steve lowered his shield and held it at his side. “It’s good to see you, Tony.”

“You too, Cap.” Tony’s eyes went back to Bucky and his gun. “Hey, Manchurian Candidate, you’re killin’ me.” He gestured between himself and Steve. “There’s a truce here, you can drop….” Bucky’s eyes moved to Steve who signaled at him to lower his gun. Bucky kept his eyes on Steve. He lowered his weapon because Steve told him to, but every fiber in his body was telling him to keep it up. He didn’t know Tony and he definitely didn’t like Tony. The only reason he was breathing was because he was Steve’s friend.

There it was again. Bucky’s murderous side. It was much more virulent now. More enticing to give in to. Bucky blamed the compound, but he couldn’t deny the raw feeling of deep seated dislike of Tony. Especially when he took point and relegated Bucky to the rear. Bucky who had been reborn in this base. Who knew every nook and cranny and every hidey hole. Who was Tony to walk through his torture chambers like he knew them inside and out?

They rounded a corner and Bucky saw the room. Pitch black though it was, Bucky didn’t need to see it to know. He felt it in every broken part of him. Every haunted memory. He was standing exactly where he had hoped and prayed he would never step foot again.

“I got heat signatures.” Tony announced.

“How many?”

“Uh… one.” That didn’t make sense. The doctor had had plenty of time to wake them up.

They stepped into the chamber and the lights came up in their pods. The light over the chair came on, too. Bucky avoided looking at it as best he could, but he knew it was there. He knew exactly how many steps it would take to get to the chair from anywhere he was in the room. Bucky thanked god that Steve was here with him.

They looked in the pods at the soldiers. Each sporting red bullet holes in their foreheads. The fake doctor’s plan made no sense. None of it made sense. Why trek all the way out into the wilds of Siberia only to kill the only things of value in the wasteland?

“If it’s any comfort,” the fake doctor’s voice crackled over the speakers. “They died in their sleep.” The three of them moved through the chamber carefully. Bucky didn’t like the other soldiers, but he didn’t wish them this fate. To die without ever seeing the sunlight again. “Did you really think I wanted more of you?”

“What the hell?” Bucky muttered mostly to himself.

“I’m grateful to them, though.” He continued. “They brought you here.” The lights went up in the
blast chamber and Steve chucked his shield at it before Bucky could tell him his efforts were fruitless. “Please, Captain. The Soviets built this chamber to withstand the launch blast of UR-100 rockets.”

“I’m betting I can beat that.” Tony said. Bucky saw his value for perhaps the first time.

“Oh, I’m sure you could, Mr. Stark.” Bucky knew that name. He should have been focusing on the conversation, but the sour memory refused to budge. The snowy road, the car. ‘Him and the wife. Make it look like an accident.’ Bucky had known Howard Stark. He had been one of the scientists that had made Steve what he was. He had outfitted the Howling Commandos with top of the line gear that kept most of them away from death’s doorstep through the Third Reich.

He remembered Howard and Howard had remembered him, but he hadn’t been in any state to stop himself. He had orders. Comply. Comply. Comply. He smashed his fist into Howard’s frightened face. Maybe if he had a bit of serum in him he would have survived it. Like Steve had. But Howard wasn’t a super soldier. He was a man. A friend. A target.

Tony Stark. Howard and Maria’s son. He had killed Howard and leveled a gun at his son’s head. He had no right to ever call Howard Stark a friend ever again. He had no right to scorn the son of the man he had killed. A man that had worked in large part to keep him and Steve and the rest of the Howlies safe.

The lightning chair was looking a little tempting now. If remembering everything felt like this all the time, it might be better if he never remembered a thing. If he could erase himself again. Freeze himself again. Wake up some time when there was no more damage for him to do. Sure, he would wake up alone, but he wouldn’t have to worry about hurting anyone else he loved ever again.

A machine beeped and Bucky came back to the challenge at hand. Maybe when this was all finished, he could talk Steve into helping him freeze himself again. If he made a strong enough case.

“I know this road.” Tony murmured. Steve moved to the computer screen to watch. “What is this?” Tony yelled at the man who had already disappeared. Bucky saw the car. Saw himself.

“Sergeant Barnes?” Howard’s voice crackled through the speakers. He heard the crack of his fist slamming into his face. He didn’t want this. He relived it already in his memories. Reliving it through video was a pain worse than the lightning.

Tony started for Bucky. He jumped back and instinctively grabbed for his rifle. He knew he deserved to be punished for what he had done, but he didn’t want to die. Steve stopped him. Bucky watched Tony’s face contorted into pain that Bucky couldn’t imagine.

“No, Tony.”

“Did you know?” Steve seemed to share in Tony’s pain. Steve had adored Howard. To watch your best friend kill another one of your friends had to be excruciating. Steve had to be angry, but he was still protecting him. Bucky couldn’t truly fathom as to why. A few fond childhood memories couldn’t explain away the extents Steve was going to for Bucky.

“I didn’t know it was him.” Steve was lying. Bucky didn’t know what to think. When had Steve figured it out? Before Bucharest? Before the helicarrier? Before the river?

“Don’t bullshit me, Rogers. Did you know?” Stark hissed. Steve knew where this was going. He
knew a fight was the only way this ended.

“Yes.” Steve admitted. Tony socked him on the jaw and knocked him across the floor. Bucky raised his gun and fired though it was quickly swept away. Bucky didn’t want to die, but he was fighting with both hands tied behind his back. Pulling his punches to stop from killing Howard Stark’s son. That had been his plan until Steve got involved.

Bucky wasn’t exactly proud of it, but he knew he would kill a hundred men if it meant keeping Steve safe. Even Howard Stark’s only child. Half of the building crumbled beneath Iron Man’s weaponry. Enough to force them apart. Bucky caught sight of Steve in the rubble.

“Get out of here!” Steve ordered. Bucky knew the quickest exit, though it wasn’t necessarily the easiest. He slammed the release button that opened the overhead hatch in the chamber. It was a long climb to the top and he could see Tony navigating his way to him. Bucky started climbing as fast as he could.

Not fast enough. Nowhere near fast enough. Tony shot out the hinge and dragged Bucky down the shaft.

“Do you even remember them?” Tony growled in his ear. Bucky struggled against his chokehold.

“I remember all of them.” But he wish he didn’t.

He aimed his attack at shutting down Tony’s suit. Without his suit, Tony wouldn’t be much of a threat. He and Steve could get away somewhere. Bucky targeted the core in the middle of Tony’s chest. It almost worked. Until his metal arm disintegrated in a final blast from Tony’s chest piece. Bucky was useless. Broken. Exhausted. The arm may have been metal, but the wires in it were connected to his nerves. Now those same wires were open and exposed delivering agony of the acutest kind.

“He’s my friend.” Bucky knew he should get up. Help Steve, but he couldn’t seem to gather his feet.

“So was I.” What was that Bucky had sworn about Steve’s losses? That he would keep them to a minimum? What wishful thinking that had turned out to be. Tony punched Steve in the face and tossed him into a cement pillar. “Stay down.” He ordered. “Final warning.” Tony didn’t really know Steve at all. Not the real Steve. Not the Steve that stared down bullies more than twice his size. Not the Steve that got punched into the dirt time and time again. Not the Steve that always refused to stay down. If he had, he wouldn’t have been so surprised when Steve climbed to his feet once again.

“I could do this all day.” And Bucky knew he would. It wasn’t super soldier serum keeping Steve on his feet. It was his spirit. The spirit that men had tried to break time and again, but they never ever would. The same spirit that had Bucky in just as many fights with just as many bullies trying to keep Steve from an early grave.

Bucky may be down an arm and down on himself, but saving Steve when he was in over his head wasn’t ever a decision for Bucky. It was instinct. He rolled and grabbed Tony’s metal encased leg before he could fire another shot at Steve. He was rewarded by a firm kick to the teeth, but he had given Steve just what he needed.

He grabbed Tony and redirected his flight path straight into the ground. Steve straddled Tony and began pounding at his armor. He stopped when Stark could no longer move freely. When his suit was nothing more than dead weight. Steve picked Bucky up off the ground. It would seem neither
of them had it in them to leave the other to die.

“That shield doesn’t belong to you.” Stark graveled. “You don’t deserve it. My father made that shield!” Bucky’s head was spinning, but he was vaguely away of Steve slipping the shield off his arm and letting it drop.

Bucky walked more on instinct than by conscious decision. He knew he wouldn’t have made it out of the compound if Steve hadn’t been dragging him along. Bucky’s head was resting against Steve’s shoulder, his eyes closed. He had almost completely passed out when the bright light of the sun hit his face.

“Did you kill Mr. Stark, Captain?” Bucky could make out T’Challa’s voice. He was really hoping he was mistaken. There was no way either of them were making it through another fight.

“He’ll live.” Steve shifted their bodies, using his to shield Bucky.

“It seems like your friend may not.” Bucky made a gurgling sound in the back of his throat. He had meant to say he was fine, but was under the distinct impression that that was not what he said.

“He’ll be fine.”

“Relax, Captain Rogers, I now know it was not your friend that killed my father. I have no more quarrel with either of you.”

“Is that so?” Bucky was fascinated by the white flashes going off behind his eyelids. Like a fireworks show in his head.

“If you would like, I could take you both to a physician that can fix you both up.” Steve was quiet. Bucky’s head was slumped against Steve’s chest. He listened to his breathing. His heartbeat.

“I have more work to do.” Work? Steve, no.

“I assure you, Captain, I will help you in whatever way I can.” They were moving again. Bucky groaned with the effort until Steve flipped Bucky up into his arms and carried him the rest of the way. Bucky fell asleep to the low hums of a jet taking off in the arms of his best friend.

Chapter End Notes

Did it bother anybody else in Civil War how Steve and Bucky just ended up in Wakanda with T’Challa with absolutely no explanation as to how that happened or is that just me? Anyway, this is how I say it happened.
Parting is Such Sweet Sorrow

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve argue about him going back under.

Unfamiliar hands were touching him. That was what woke Bucky up. He reacted without thinking, swinging both arms at his would be opponent. Except, one of his arms didn’t get the message. Whoever had touched him had let go and dodged his right hook. Good for them, bad for Bucky. He had put too much force into the punch and subsequently rolled himself off the bed. Bucky threw both hands out to catch himself, but again only one hand appeared to save him leaving the left side of his face to smack into the floor. Everything was coming back slowly. Then, all at once. He rolled onto his back. He still had no idea where he was or what these people wanted. Every last one of them an unfamiliar face. Which made every last one of them a potential threat. “Bucky!” Bucky struggled to sit up to see where Steve’s voice was coming from. His handsome face popped up right in front of him. “Take it easy, man. You’re still recovering.” Steve scooped Bucky up in his arms easily.

“Steve,” Bucky sighed with relief. Steve set Bucky down on the bed and rested his hands on Bucky’s thighs.

“You alright, Buck?” He asked. Bucky could see the patterns of bruising and cuts on Steve’s face. It wasn’t quite as bad as it had been after Bucky had gotten finished with it on the helicarrier, but it definitely didn’t look great.

“Steve,” Bucky sighed again. He knew Steve had asked a question, but his name was the only thing Bucky could think to say at the moment.

“What do you remember, Buck?” Bucky blinked at Steve. He was trying to figure out what he was dealing with. Bucky didn’t really blame him. Steve didn’t know all the triggers that wiped out James Buchanan Barnes and installed the Winter Soldier. He didn’t know if a near death experience was enough to shove his friend aside and bring forward the assassin. And, honestly? Neither did Bucky. Not really.

But everything he had done under HYDRA was still there. All the mayhem and murder. Destruction he had been at the root cause of. It was all there and it wasn’t going away anytime soon. Bucky’s eyes filled. He hadn’t been selective in his victim pool. Anyone in his path had been vulnerable. Men, women… children. Young or old.


“Whoa, hey. It’s alright. It wasn’t you.” Steve soothed. He rubbed his back in big circles until Bucky relaxed against him.

“I’m sorry, Steve.” Bucky said between clenched teeth. He wasn’t used to being this vulnerable.

“Sorry? For what?” Steve pushed Bucky back to look at him. Bucky looked down at the space
between them.

“It was my fault. All of it. You lost your friends because of me.” Steve shook his head.

“I’ll get them back.” Bucky’s shoulders sagged. He turned his head and looked at his left shoulder. He hadn’t imagined it. His arm really was gone. “We’ll get you a new arm, too.” Steve promised. Bucky couldn’t explain it, but he was relieved in a way to be rid of it. A literal weight lifted off his shoulders.

“Captain Rogers,” T’Challa greeted entering the recovery room flanked by two stern looking women in red toting large spears. “Sergeant Barnes.” Bucky gave a slight nod, though he was still apprehensive of the man who had attempted to kill him three times.

“Your majesty.” Steve greeted easily. Steve always did have an easier time forgiving and forgetting. It was probably why he had so many friends to lose.

“You can call me T’Challa.” Steve nodded. “I heard you were awake, Sergeant Barnes. How are you feeling?” Bucky looked up at Steve who nodded at him to answer.

“I’m feeling… much better.” T’Challa noticed his reserve.

“I wanted to apologize for wrongfully attacking you earlier. I know now that you were telling the truth.” Bucky let himself relax. “I heard about your problem.” Bucky wrinkled his brow at the king. T’Challa tapped his temple in explanation. “If you would like, I have many talented doctors and scientists that may be able to help you.”

“Help me how?” Steve’s fingers dug into Bucky’s thigh. He mildly wondered if Steve even knew his hand was there.

“By freeing you from the spell your captors put you under. Making your trigger words no longer affect you.” T’Challa must have realized what he was doing. The unbelievable measure of hope he was bestowing. He put up a hand. “Now, all this will take some time, during which you are welcome to stay here so long as you refrain from stirring up trouble with my people.” Bucky swallowed tightly. It seemed too good to be true.

“I think…” He said slowly. Bucky was completely aware of how statuesque Steve had become beside him. “It would probably be better if I was just put back on ice.” He peeked over at Steve. “It’s a more reliable way to make sure I don’t hurt anyone else.” Steve was doing that thing with his face again. Where he worked overtime to keep every other expression off of it.

“If that is what you truly want, Sergeant Barnes, I can arrange that, too.” T’Challa promised. “But I would not count my researchers out just yet.” Bucky considered the offer.

“Would it be possible for them to do the work while I’m under?” T’Challa shrugged.

“Truthfully, I do not know. If not, they can always wake you up to try their methods.” Bucky nodded.

“Let’s do that.” Steve walked away from Bucky and looked out the window. T’Challa glanced between the two.

“I will go tell them to get set up.” T’Challa nodded to them both and carefully backed out of the room taking his spear women with him. Bucky watched Steve. He wouldn’t turn around to face Bucky.
“Steve,” he started though he wasn’t exactly sure how he was going to explain his decision to Steve. And if Steve told him not to do it, Bucky wasn’t sure he could disobey.

“I just got you back, Buck.” Steve said in a small voice that reminded Bucky of the kid he had grown up with instead of the invincible force in front of him. It made Bucky’s chest ache.

“I’m still not really me, Steve. Not really. Not yet.” Steve let out a big breath.

“You’re you enough, Bucky.” Bucky shook his head.

“You think that now because we’re in a safe place and not out in the world where anything could go wrong.” Steve shook his head and turned to face him.

“No. You’re enough for me right now and if something were to happen we could deal with it.” Bucky groaned.

“You’re so stubborn.” The corner of Steve’s mouth twitched upwards. “It’s not funny.”

“I mean, it’s a little funny.” Bucky arched a brow at him.

“To you. It’s never been funny to me. You know how many punches I’ve had to take because of it?” Steve grimaced.

“It’s not like I asked you to.” Bucky gave him an exasperated look.

“You’re a punk.” Steve laughed softly.

“Jerk.” Bucky smiled.

“It’s not going to be forever. You heard T’Challa, his science guys’ll patch me up and you can come visit me anytime you want. Or stay here and wait it out.” Steve cleared his throat and nodded.

“Yeah, I can’t stay here, though, Buck.” If anything was going to make Bucky stay out of the ice, it was the potential for Steve to get himself into trouble without Bucky being there to get him out of it.

“You’re a wanted fugitive everywhere else. What reason do you have to leave?” Steve cocked his head at Bucky.

“Sam and everyone else that readily laid down their lives to stop Zemo.” Bucky had completely forgotten about them. “According to T’Challa, they’re locked up in a secret super max prison in the middle of the ocean. I gotta get them out. You know they don’t deserve to be in there.”

“I know.” Bucky looked down at his hands. “I would offer to help, but… I don’t think me walking right into the hands that are after me while I’m down an arm and still mentally unstable is the best idea.” Steve smiled.

“Yeah, well it’s the thought that counts.” Steve patted Bucky’s shoulder.

“When you see them, tell them I say thanks.” Steve nodded. “Except Sam.” Steve wrinkled his face in amused confusion. “Tell him I said.” Bucky lifted his middle finger in a mock salute. “He’ll know what it means.” Steve barked out a contagious laugh that had Bucky giggling in turn.

“Excuse me,” a woman interrupted. “We are ready for you.” Steve stared after the woman. Bucky stared at Steve.
“A little help?” Bucky asked. His sudden lack of arm had thrown off his center of balance in a dramatic way. Steve put a thick arm around Bucky’s waist and boosted him from his bed. Bucky focused on the way Steve smelled. Someone had bathed them both. They were both in new, clean clothes though Steve’s were more civilian than Bucky’s stark white patient threads. Bucky’s hair was clean and brushed and free of the grime of battle. Somehow Steve smelled exactly like Coney Island in the summer. He wondered if it was cologne or that was just his natural scent.

A hazy memory poked through from his time wavering between conscious and unconsciousness. A memory of fighting off a plethora of nurses and attendants trying to wash him off until Steve pulled him into a monstrous shower and held him beneath the spray. It could have been an embarrassing moment if Bucky didn’t distinctly remember the time he drunkenly stumbled back to Steve’s house wasted out of his mind and covered in vomit. At least this time Steve had more upper body strength to keep him under the water until he was finished cleaning him off. Back then Bucky had been like a cat escaping a bath. He had awoken the next morning in the tub with Steve slumped against the wall passed out and more soaked than Bucky was.

The memory brought up feelings of guilt. Steve didn’t ask any questions no matter what state Bucky turned up in. He rolled up his sleeves and did whatever needed to be done to help Bucky. Now, instead of being there for Steve when he needed him, he was abandoning him. He assured himself it was for the best. Being there for Steve wouldn’t mean shit if every time something went wrong, Bucky was at the center. He needed a clear mind before he could trust himself around Steve or anyone else for that matter and a clear mind meant subjecting himself to the box. He knew what he had signed up for, but remembering the cold as it shoved its way inside him until he was frozen inside and out was starting to sound like a worse and worse idea. Bucky pushed down his reserved feelings when he saw the box. It was what he had asked for. It was the safest way for everybody. Steve sat him down on an exam table and gave him a small, reassuring smile. Someone came by to check Bucky’s vitals and Steve moved out of the way of the doctors who were preparing Bucky for cryostasis.

He watched one of the men push a needle into his hand and cover it with gauze. He stared at the box as the man moved away. Steve walked back over to meet him. He smiled again and Bucky hoped he wasn’t going to try to talk him out of it.

“You sure about this?” Bucky sighed. Bucky did have reservations about the box, but Steve being with him kept him relaxed. He wasn’t sure about the methods, but he was sure of his reasons. The drugs they had given him were starting to work.

“I can’t trust my own mind.” He explained weakly he saw the look on Steve’s face so he forced out a light, breathy chuckle. “So, until they figure out how to get this stuff out of my head I think going back under is the best thing.” Steve nodded in resignation. “For everybody.” Especially Steve. He didn’t need Bucky screwing anything else up for him. With Bucky frozen, Steve would have plenty of time to work things out with the blonde. And when he woke up, Bucky could work his way around the feelings of jealously and aggression towards anyone that might earn Steve’s affections.

Two doctors came to help him over to the box. Bucky pushed his mind away from his body as they strapped him in. It wasn’t HYDRA. It had been his choice. But when the glass door slid up locking him in the box he had to close his eyes and fight away the terror. When would he wake up next? What would the world look like when he did? Would he ever get the chance to see Steve again?

The only answer he could reassure himself with was that, yes, if nothing else he would see Steve
again no matter what he woke up to. The sedatives hit him before the cold did and for that he was grateful. He was asleep before the freezing.
Chapter Summary

Shuri wakes Bucky up from his lil' nappy time and then kicks him out of her lab for having his toes out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The bed Bucky woke up on was soft. Too soft. It made it difficult to stay asleep. He blinked his eyes open and recognized the high, bright walls of the laboratory. He wondered what had happened. If he had been fixed or if he had been woken up for a fight. Whatever it was, Bucky wanted to get off of this mattress. He sat up and looked around.

The lab was mostly empty save one girl. Bucky tilted his head at her. She was invested in whatever calculations were whizzing by on her screen. It was infinitely more advanced than anything HYDRA had ever had. Bucky scooted himself to the edge of the bed and stood up. It took him a second to find his balance as his arm was still missing.

“Hello?” Bucky garbled. The drugs and the freezing often made it difficult to speak properly for a time. The girl jumped and turned to face him.

“Gah! You scared me!” She yelped. The girl couldn’t have been more than sixteen.

“Sorry,” Bucky muttered sheepishly. Bucky looked up at a video feed in the corner of her screen that was flipping through different security camera footage. “How long was I out?” The girl looked down, a deeply solemn expression falling over her face.

“Two hundred years.” She told him. Bucky’s heart stopped. T’Challa had made it seem like he would be fixed in a year or two tops. Two hundred? He didn’t care what the super soldier serum did, Steve had definitely not survived another two hundred years. Not with his track record. Bucky’s knees went weak and he collapsed onto a chair just behind him.

“Two hundred?” He repeated weakly. The girl was choking out a crazy laugh. She had doubled over and Bucky wrinkled his face at her.

“Your face! Oh my god! I had you going so good!” She gasped out. Bucky ground his teeth together.

“It’s not been two hundred years.” Bucky growled. The girl wiped her fingers under her eyes shaking her head.

“It’s barely been two days!” She laughed. Bucky narrowed his eyes at her.

“Really?” He asked more suspiciously this time.

“Yeah, really.” She sobered. “Oh, relax! You are fine.” Bucky pushed himself up out of the chair and shuffled over to the girl.
“Where is T’Challa?” The girl rolled her eyes.

“He is busy.” She turned back to her screen and fiddled with something on the desk below it. “Besides, he has left you in my capable hands which means you get to do everything I say.” Bucky’s face drained of color.

“What?” The single syllable must have echoed how her choice of words haunted him. Her face fell as she turned back to face him.

“No, not really. I didn’t mean it the way it sounded.” She held out a small circle that vaguely resembled a crown. “Look, I’ll show you.” Bucky regarded her carefully. “Sit, please.” She gestured to the chair he had just been in. Bucky didn’t exactly trust her, but he sat down anyway. She set the crown on his head and pressed it. “Watch the screen.”

Bucky looked up at the screen. Thousands of images were flashing across the screen and to the left, a three dimensional image of a brain was rotating slowly. Different sections of the brain lit up and dimmed as more pictures flashed over the screen.

“What is this?” Bucky asked.

“Well, that over there is your brain. The images are rewiring your brain. I cannot simply erase what your captors did to your mind as the brain is too delicate for that sort of thing. I can put a sort of code over the top of it sort of like when you record over something on a DVD.” Bucky didn’t really understand most of what she was saying, but she seemed to know what she was doing.

“Does that mean you fixed me?” The girl didn’t seem happy that he wasn’t keeping up with her. “I suppose we will find out.” She looked at something on the small wristband on her arm and started reading in perfect Russian. “Longing, rusted.”

“Hey!”

“Furnace, daybreak.”

“No!”

“Seventeen, benign.”

“Wait!”

“Nine, homecoming.”

“Please!”

“One, freight car.” Bucky squeezed his eyes shut and waited. Nothing happened. He couldn’t even remember what it was he was supposed to say. “Look at that! No murder spree activated. I am surely a genius after all.” She announced proudly. “Though that was never really in question.” Bucky was still waiting for his heart to restart. “Are you alright?” She looked a little leery, her confidence waning.

Bucky opened his mouth to answer, but hadn’t found his voice again just yet. He nodded mutely at her instead. That didn’t seem to do much to reassure her. Bucky couldn’t blame her. Just because he hadn’t gone out of his mind in a psychotic rage after the last word fell from her lips didn’t mean he wouldn’t.
“Can you tell me your name?” Bucky put a hand to his temple.

“Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes.” She nodded quietly, but remained unconvinced.

“What year is it?”

“Two thousand… sixteen?” She nodded again.

“Do you remember where you are?” Bucky sighed. He was fine. He thought he had proven that already.

“Kansas.” He answered sarcastically. She gave him a strange look until he smiled at her. “I’m kidding. We’re in Wakanda.” She grinned back.

“A sense of humor!” She crowed, bouncing on her toes. “My work here is done!” Bucky reached up to massage his left shoulder where metal melded with skin.

“What’s your name?” He asked her. The girl stopped bouncing and stuck out a hand to Bucky.

“I am Shuri Udaku, daughter of T’Chaka and sister to T’Challa.” Bucky released his aching shoulder to shake her hand.

“T’Challa has a sister?” He couldn’t keep the surprise out of his voice. “It’s very nice to meet you.” Shuri frowned.

“No one ever said anything about T’Chaka’s daughter out in the rest of the world?” She scowled. “Unbelievable.” Bucky lifted his arm in mock surrender.

“Listen, I didn’t even know T’Challa existed until he tried to kill me.” For some reason that made Shuri laugh hysterically.

“How pathetic! My brother could not even take out one man in combat!” She walked over to a display of mannequins each sporting a slightly different necklace. “I wonder how he plans to manage during the ceremony if anyone chooses to challenge him.” She fiddled with a piece of one of the necklaces thoughtfully. “I hope my hard work is not put to waste because of him.”

“Where is your brother?” Bucky asked again. “I know you said he was busy.” Shuri turned back to him.

“He had to go pick up his girlfriend.” Bucky nodded in understanding. Shuri snickered. “I bet Okoye he would freeze up the second he saw her. Okoye disagrees. She thinks his recent adventures in Europe have matured him. At least, she hopes he has matured.”

“What did you bet her?” Bucky wondered what sort of man T’Challa was beyond the vengeance fueled threat he had come to know.

“She has to be my guinea pig for a few things I am designing.” Bucky looked around the lab. Half-finished projects were scattered everywhere while still maintaining an organized look. Steve would have been proud.

“The man I came here with, Steve Rogers, is he….” Bucky trailed off.

“Captain Rogers left shortly after you were put under with a handful of our Dora Milaje that T’Challa sent with him.” Shuri tapped a few keys on her computer and pulled up what looked like tracing beacons. “Looks like they’re somewhere in Eastern Europe right now.” Shuri frowned. “I
wonder what they are up to.”

“He said he was planning on liberating his friends.”

“I know.” Another beacon lit up in route back to Wakanda. Three words were listed on the beacon, but they were in a language Bucky didn’t know. Shuri spun on her heel to face Bucky. “Right! You need to go.” Bucky started to panic.

“Go? I don’t…. I don’t really have anywhere to go to. And I’m a fugitive from just about every government there is.” Shuri huffed.

“Not go out of Wakanda go. Go out of my lab go!” She grabbed Bucky’s arm and hoisted him out of the chair using more strength than Bucky had attributed to her.

“Okay, well where am I supposed to go to?” Shuri shoved him towards the door.

“They’ll take you.” She nodded to two women sporting spears who looked almost identical to the two spear wielding women that had been flanking T’Challa two days prior.

“Oh, wait! Shuri!” Bucky said as the doors closed in his face. He sighed in defeat and started to turn away when the doors slid back open.

“What is it?” She demanded impatiently. Bucky turned back to look at her. He gave her a small smile.

“Thank you.” Shuri blinked as though his gratitude had been the last thing she had been expecting. She shook herself from the daze.

“You are welcome, Sergeant Barnes.” She smiled back at him.

“Call me Bucky.” Shuri pressed a button and slid the doors back in his face again. The Dora Milaje women tapped the ends of their spears against the backs of his legs.

“Follow us, White Wolf.” Bucky was about to ask about the nickname, but then they barked, “And do not speak.”

They led him through the palace and outside into the early morning sun. Bucky squinted against the light. The women led him down a paved path until it turned to dirt. They then led him down that dirt path until the path disappeared altogether. Even then, they did not stop. There were no markers to indicate where they were or where they were going. As far as he could see there were fields and trees. They walked for close to an hour at a somewhat leisurely pace.

Bucky wondered why it was that he had been kicked out of the palace so abruptly. The Dora Milaje women spoke to each other as they walked in a language Bucky couldn’t identify. He didn’t think they were speaking about him. They seemed to forget he was even there, trailing after them unless he lagged too far behind for one reason or another. Then they would bark at him to keep up.

“You are to stay here.” One of the women told him. Bucky looked over to where they had taken him. It was a small hut in a clearing. A few yards behind it, another, smaller hut stood. There were a few trees scattered about. In all, Bucky thought he had stayed in worse places. At least there weren’t people trying to gun him down here. As a matter of fact, there were no people.

“For how long?” Bucky asked. The woman who had spoken glared at him.

“For as long as King T’Challa wishes it.” Bucky swallowed back every other question he had and
started for the small hut instead. The Dora Milaje turned around and started back the way they had come. It didn’t really matter that there were no bars or cages around the small hut, as secluded as he was, Bucky wasn’t certain he would ever be able to find his way back to the palace from where he stood.

Inside the hut was a modest bed with a clean set of clothing setting on top, a small dresser with some sort of lamp on it, a chair, and a shelf with four books. Bucky wondered what this hut was used for before him. He picked at his thin, white clothing and wavered between leaving them on and swapping them for the red and blue robes on the bed. After careful examination, he decided that he had no clue as to how to properly wear the robes so he would stay in the clothing he was in for now.

Bucky sat in the chair that looked out a small, round window. He was overcome quite suddenly with the overwhelming feeling of complete unfamiliarity. For all its torture and agony, his life in HYDRA had maintained similar elements to his earlier life. He had ‘died’ a soldier and been reborn as one though the execution was different, it was still something Bucky had already known. Now, sitting in a hut in a country Bucky had never once stepped foot in before and completely alone, Bucky felt disoriented.

It was the quiet, he decided. He had never in his life been in a place so quiet and still. It made him itchy. He needed to do something. Bucky stood and walked back out of the hut and looked around the clearing. He walked over to the river that ran beside the invisible path the Dora Milaje had led him down. Even the river was quieter than he was used to. He wondered why he had been kicked out of the palace so unceremoniously. He wondered when Steve would return and whether anybody had told him that Bucky was awake again.

He turned and started for the trees when movement caught his eye. Bucky’s body locked up and he turned his head very slowly in the direction of the movement. There was nothing there that he could see, but Bucky could feel something out there. Something moved on the other side of him near the trees and Bucky braced himself for any sort of attack. He was down an arm, but he was still a super soldier.

Bucky took full stock of his surroundings and worked out a tactical strategy. He was in unfamiliar territory, but what else was new? He was unarmed both literally and in terms of weaponry, but he could make it work. He hadn’t become the world’s most feared assassin by luck alone. Whatever was moving out there, watching him, was going to regret it.

Something let out a cry and flew forward disappearing into the tall grass. Bucky lunged for it growling viciously. Bucky saw the creature was no creature at all, but a small child. It screamed in terror at him and began crying hysterically. Bucky stopped short and blinked at the kid. Two more children charged out of the grass shouting at him and flailing their arms at him. One stood protectively in front of the crying child while the other crouched to help him up.

The biggest child shouted at him in the same language the Dora Milaje were speaking on their way out to the hut. Bucky stared at the children in confusion. Where there are children there must also be parents. And families needed homes so somewhere there must be a cluster of huts housing them.

“Where did you come from?” Bucky asked. The children stared at them with wide eyes. “Where are your parents?” The smallest child that had fallen in the grass was still crying. Bucky knelt and held out his hand. “Hey, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.” He smiled gently. “You know, you kind of scared me, too.” The kid stopped crying and stared at him. Bucky flopped back onto his butt and rested his arm on his knee.
He looked around and saw more children scattered around the clearing. Some were becoming braver and making their way to where he and the three children sat. Most of them stayed off to the side watching apprehensively. He didn’t know how to explain to them that he was not a threat.

“Do any of you speak any English?” At their blank expressions, Bucky switched to French, then German slowly working his way through his list of known languages. Bucky sighed and flopped onto his back. It had seemed so promising.

“Hello.” A small voice said. Bucky pushed himself back up and looked across to a little girl that had come to join the other three children in front of him.

“Hi.” Bucky smiled. “What’s your name?” The girl frowned.

“I learn English.” She told him. Bucky nodded.

“And you are doing a great job.” He encouraged. The girl swallowed. He wondered how much she understood. One of the boys turned and whispered loudly to her. She wrinkled her brow as she tried to translate what he had said.

“What you do here?” She asked. Bucky shifted until he was sitting crisscross on the ground.

“T’Challa brought me here.” The girl chewed at her lip and considered his reply. “What language do you speak?” Bucky asked her.

“I learn English.” She repeated, confused. Bucky scratched his head and nodded.

“I know, but what language was he speaking?” Bucky pointed to the boy beside her who looked both offended and terrified that Bucky was speaking about him.

“It is isiXhosa.” She answered. Bucky nodded.

“Where are your mom and dad?” She twisted her lips and shrugged. Bucky laughed at her ability to work her way around the language barrier. She grinned back at him showing her teeth. Bucky struggled to his feet and the children stepped back cautiously.

Now back on his feet, Bucky looked around the clearing and counted out eight children. None of them looked more than ten years old. Bucky smiled at them reassuringly. They were not so easy to put at ease. One of the children, a boy, ran forward and whispered in the girl’s ear. She frowned and looked at Bucky with reserve.

“We play.” She told him.

“What do you play?” She turned to the boy and touched his arm.

“Ndiyakuthintela.” She announced. The other children scattered away from the boy as fast as they could. Slowly, Bucky realized that it was just like tag. The English speaking girl was tagged again and this time she turned to Bucky and touched his arm shouting, “Ndiyakuthintela!” Before she raced away. The children all watched him, waiting for what he decided to do.

Bucky frowned at his arm where the girl had touched him and discreetly measured out his distance to each of the possible targets. A little girl with multi-colored beads in her tightly braided hair was closest and seemed the best bet. Bucky acted quickly, charging towards the beads girl who screamed and started to run away, but too slow. Bucky’s fingers tapped the girl’s tiny shoulder before he jumped back away.
The children looked at him expectantly. He wondered what they were waiting for him to do now. He looked over to the English speaking girl a few yards away.

“Say, ‘Ndiyakuthintela!’” She shouted. Bucky fumbled his way through the word and the children giggled at his terrible pronunciation. But it did the trick. The kids all ran away from the beads girl who chased after them trying to tag them.

When the sun began to set, the children all turned for home. Bucky stood in the field and watched the sun set fire to the tall grass. The river sparkled in the dying light. It was beautiful and peaceful in a way that made him ache for Steve.

“Ingcuka!” Bucky turned to regard the English speaking girl. “I go home. Good night!” She smiled at him.

“Good night.” The girl started for the trees, stopped, and turned back.

“You say, ‘Busuku benzolo.’” She told him. Bucky repeated it obediently and the girl grinned at him broadly. “Good!” She turned and took off through the trees with just as much confidence as the Dora Milaje had led him out to the hut with no path to guide them.

Life continued in this way for Bucky over the next few days. Each morning the children would greet Bucky shouting, “Mholo, Ingcuka!” A different child would bring his breakfast every day and another would come with his dinner at night. Bucky eventually learned that they were competing with each other for the opportunity.

They played with his hair and taught him how to wear the clothing that had been supplied to him. Through them, Bucky was slowly picking up on the language. Every day he learned a new word. For instance, they never called him Bucky rather Ingcuka which meant White Wolf. Bucky never corrected them. It was a comfortable existence, but altogether Steve-less.

Until one day about a week into his stay. While they were playing a new game planes began flying low overhead. They all stopped and looked up. Bucky watched the first plane get shot down. The children shouted and Bucky reacted quickly ushering them out of the field and into the trees.

“Hide!” He shouted to them. “Ukufihla!” He shoved the children up into the trees and boosted himself up onto one of the lower branches. Bucky looked up through the trees and watched fire rain down from the sky. Some of the children were crying in terror. Bucky had been fine with just the children for company for the past week. Now, Bucky could have really used an adult that knew what was going on and could explain it to him.

Another plane was blasted out of the sky and Bucky wished for Steve. Steve would know what was going on. He always seemed to know what to do. The only thing Bucky could do was make sure the children were alright. They could cry and scream all they wanted just as long as when everything was all said and done, they were all still breathing.

It wasn’t until after the explosions had stopped and a post battle calm had swept the fields that Bucky realized that it had been the first real mission he had ever given himself.
Hi!
Chapter Summary

Shuri visits Bucky bringing gifts and teaching him a lot. Bucky talks to Steve and sort of Sam. All in all a fun time is had.

Chapter Notes

DISCLAIMER: I do not claim to know any actual Wakanda/African anything I have Google Translated everything said in Xhosa. Also Googled some cultural information, but most of it is probably wrong and please take it all with a grain of salt.

Thank you for reading my fic and making it this far! There is still a long way to go, but hey, I did tag it as a slow burn. ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

Three days passed in solitude. The children had all been called home and stayed there leaving Bucky in the field alone. Food was brought to him by an older woman who did not speak to him and barely looked at him. He only saw her once a day when she brought dinner. In the morning, he always woke to find a plate of food set out on his dresser for him.

On the fourth day, he woke to the children hovering around him. Their faces were painted curiously. When Bucky opened his eyes they squealed and ran outside. He heard a familiar voice from the lab. Shuri. She spoke to the children in English, murmuring her questions again in Xhosa. They giggled at her.

Bucky stepped out of his hut and looked around. To his left, in front of the smaller hut were four Dora Milaje. The children hurried away towards them when Bucky stepped towards Shuri. He looked out over the water and took a slow, steady breath. Shuri smiled at him.

“Good morning, Sergeant Barnes.” Bucky hadn’t heard English in over a week. Hadn’t had a conversation lasting more than a few syllables in just as long.

“Bucky.” He corrected. Shuri gave a patient nod. She wasn’t as bouncy as she had been in her lab. Bucky wondered at that. Wondered whether it had anything to do with the planes coming down.

“How are you feeling?” Maybe she was worried about residual effects of his brainwashing. If there were some way to revert him that she just thought up. The thought scared him. She had a small smile on her face, so Bucky took it as reassurance that it was just a routine question.

“Good.” He smiled back at her. “Thank you.” She laughed at him. He assumed it was because of the desperate way he had thanked her the first time, but he didn’t care. He would be thanking her every minute of every day that he didn’t have to fear that someday someone was going to turn him back into the weapon. The machine. The monster.
“Come.” She told him. “There is much more for you to learn.” Bucky stared out at the quiet water again. He wished Steve had been his surprised visitor. Shuri wasn’t terrible and he did appreciate everything she had done for him, but his mind always went to Steve.

“The kids have been teaching me Xhosa.” He told her. Shuri threw an amused look over her shoulder at him. “Or trying to anyway.” She walked between the Dora Milaje and picked up a suitcase.

“I have not come empty handed, Bucky.” She told him with a devilish look on her face as she turned to him and opened the case. Inside was a new metal arm. It was white and plain and looked not dissimilar to his old arm. He swallowed tightly and worked to ignore the sudden intense pressure forming in his chest. “I know you have been hobbling around without an arm for a few days now, but those days are over!” She grinned at him proudly.

“I appreciate the thought, really I do, but I don’t need it. I’ve been doing pretty good as I am.” Shuri’s smile fell.

“I suppose it is pretty plain.” She muttered, looking down at it. She closed the case and set it aside. “That is not all I brought you.” She told him. Bucky really hoped it wasn’t a gun. “Voila!” She said holding out a bag of small potatoes. Bucky took the bag from her and looked at it waiting for an explanation.

“Thank you?” Bucky said, aware she was waiting for a response. “I don’t have a stove.”

“These are not for eating!” Bucky cocked his head in confusion. “They are for planting. You are not easy to feed, you know.” Bucky smirked.

“Bucky Barnes, potato farmer.” He joked. “I suppose it is better than mindless assassin.” Shuri smiled.

“These are just to get you started. If you are going to stay here, you need to contribute to the tribe. You cannot simply play with the children day in and day out and distract them all from their studies.” Bucky nodded. Shuri glanced down at the suitcase. “Now that you know that, are you certain you do not want this arm?” Bucky shook his head.

“It might be more challenging, but I’ll get by.” Shuri sighed and walked into the smaller hut.

“There are gardening supplies in here. If you get stuck, find Thozoma to help you.” She turned back to him. “Do you have any questions?” Bucky looked around the small hut at the supplies for a few seconds.

“N- oh, well…” Bucky chewed the inside of his cheek pensively.

“Yes?” Bucky looked out across the water at the clear sky.

“Did you or anyone happen to tell Steve I was out of the ice again?” Shuri didn’t answer for so long that Bucky turned his head to look at her. She was staring at him incredulously. “Is Steve alright?” He asked, now panicked. Shuri shook her head.

“Do you expect me to do everything for you?” She demanded. Bucky’s eyes widened with shock.

“No!” He threw his hand up in surrender. “Of course not, but it’s not like I have a phone out here to do it myself.” He explained.

“Don’t have a –” Shuri growled at him and shoved past stomping her way into his hut. Bucky
stared after her with his mouth hanging open unsure what it was he had done wrong. “Get in here!” She screamed at him. Bucky jumped and hurried across the short distance into his hut. Shuri stared at him and pressed the wall beside the door. Bucky looked closer and realized there was a small button.

A screen popped up in the wall akin to the screens he had seen in her lab. On the left were a list of options, the middle was a mirror, and the right were features displaying things like the time, the weather, and global news. Bucky gawked at the technology. Shuri reached up on the screen and tapped the phone icon. She searched for Steve’s name and number and clicked it.

“Nobody told me this was here. I didn’t expect this.” Shuri rolled her eyes at him.

“Ignorant colonist.” She muttered. “You can do anything from here. You can Skype, go one Facebook, check out Youtube, you can even play video games.” She moved over to the far right side of the screen and pressed on a slightly discolored panel that popped open to reveal a controller.

“At the risk of making you any angrier, I have to tell you that I have no idea what any of those things are.” Shuri stared at him quietly.

“You have never been on Youtube?” Bucky shrugged at her. Shuri was not having it. She opened a web browser in the middle screen and typed in the Youtube web address. “I have a great video for you!” She squealed excitedly before typing in the search bar. ‘Winter Soldier on Bridge in D.C.’ She selected the first video and Bucky felt his stomach twist as he saw himself terrorizing civilians in a mad hunt for Steve, Sam, and Natasha.

“Turn that off, please,” he asked meekly a few seconds in. Shuri turned. Her smile turned at the expression on his face.

“Sorry.” She clicked away from the video and typed in something else. “Here, these are a bunch of short, funny videos. No Winter Soldier videos, I promise.”

“Funny videos about vines?” Was that what passed for comedy nowadays? Shuri howled with laughter.

“No! Are you crazy? The videos are called vines!” She laughed. Bucky didn’t. She stopped. “A little trust, please. I think I have earned it.” Bucky nodded at her to continue. Once again, Shuri was howling with laughter as the video played through while Bucky was completely and totally lost. “How are you not laughing?” She demanded. Bucky shrugged.

“I guess I just don’t really understand them.”

“What? What do you not understand?” He pointed to a square, yellow cartoon with a long nose.

“Like that. What is that?” Shuri sat in his chair.

“You do not know about Spongebob?” Bucky didn’t like that he had somehow seemingly offended her so greatly.

“Sorry, but it wasn’t like HYDRA gave me a popular culture update every time they decided to thaw me out.” He explained.

“Shuri!” A woman called from outside. Shuri hurried to the door.

“I’m here!” Bucky stared at the screen on his wall. He closed Youtube and brought Steve’s
number back up.

“Your mother is looking for you.”

“Tell her I am busy!”

“Your brother is looking for you, too.”

“Tell him I am busy, too!”

“You were gone before breakfast. They are both worried.”

“I told you where I was going. Did you not tell them?”

“I did, but I also told them that you have not been sleeping much since your father’s passing.”

“Okoye! Why would you tell them such a thing?” Bucky had somehow managed to forget that Shuri was still grieving the loss of her father only a few weeks before.

“I am worried for you, too.” Shuri groaned and stomped her foot. Bucky smiled. She reminded him of his little sister, Becca. The only Barnes child to make it to adulthood with him and the only child left after the war. He had looked her up before he left for Europe. She had lived a long life dying in the spring of two thousand and nine. A few years later and he could have found her again though he had no clue what he might have said to her.

“I have to go for now. I will be back to check on you again in a few days.” Shuri told him poking her head back inside. Bucky nodded in understanding. She pointed to the screen. “The green button starts the phone call.” Then she was gone as quickly as she had come taking the Dora Milaje with her.

Bucky wondered if Steve would answer if he called him. He knew he was probably busy. Bucky hovered his finger over the green button nervously. What was he going to say? What would Steve say? Would he be busy with the blonde already? Or off hiding out with Sam? Bucky knew he was overthinking things so he hit the green button before he could psych himself out any further.

The screen rang out loudly. Once. Twice. Steve picked up on the third ring. “Hello?” Bucky was so surprised and excited to hear Steve’s voice that he forgot his voice. “Who is this?” Steve demanded. Bucky stared at the screen and watched the soundwaves waver with his voice.

“Who is it?” Sam’s distant voice asked.

“Not sure.” Steve answered. There was a loud beep and Bucky realized Steve had ended the call. Bucky searched the screen and slammed his finger against the redial button. The phone only rang once this time.

“Who is this?” Steve demanded. Bucky swallowed.

“Steve?” The line was quiet for a beat.

“Bucky?” Bucky smiled at the screen and nodded.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“Is everything alright? Did something happen?” Bucky sat down on the edge of his bed and watched the screen.
“I’m fine. Everything is fine. Shuri fixed me up about two weeks ago.” The line was quiet again.

“I’ll be right there.”

“What?”

“I need to make sure Clint and his family are alright first then I’ll be right there.”

“I can get them settled. Nat already took Wanda so I’m standing here twiddling my thumbs.” Sam said. “If you need to go take care of something, go.”

“Is that Sam?” Bucky asked.

“Yes.”

“Did you tell him what I asked?” Bucky listened to his low chuckle loving how it made the soundwave dance.

“Sam, Bucky says hi.” Bucky frowned.

“I did not.” Sam muttered something in the background, but he had evidently gotten too far away for the microphone to pick up. Steve laughed again.

“What is with you two?” Sam said something else that made Steve go quiet in thought. “Buck, I can be out there in a day or two if you can wait.” Bucky wondered what Steve would do if he said he couldn’t wait. Would he drop everything and come out to Wakanda? Bucky pressed his lips together. He already knew the answer.

“Don’t worry about it, Steve. Do whatever you need to take care of. I have potatoes to plant.”

“Potatoes?” Bucky shrugged at the screen. He knew Steve couldn’t see him, he did it out of habit.

“Yeah. And Shuri is going to show me who Spongebob is.”

“Where’s T’Challa?”

“I haven’t actually seen T’Challa since before I went under. Apparently he’s been busy what with the planes blowing up.”

“Planes blowing up?” Whoops. He hadn’t meant to give that away.

“It was like four days ago. Everything’s fine.”

“I’ll be there in six hours.”

“Steve –” The call shut off and Bucky sighed at his reflection.

He had six hours to start his gardening. He wondered if Steve would be impressed by his farming expertise. If he would be proud of him. It wasn’t a new desire. Bucky had been drafted for the war against his will while Steve was denied time and again though he was desperate to prove himself. Ordinarily, Bucky would have done the bare minimum of what was required of him, but if Steve couldn’t be drafted, then Bucky would be soldier enough for the both of them. It was the whole reason he had left training a sergeant instead of a private. He wanted Steve to be proud of him.

“Ingcuka!” The children cried at him when he exited his hut the second time.
“I can’t play, guys.” Bucky told them, moving to the supply hut. The children watched him select a hoe and pick a spot in his field to start turning the soil. He worked in silence for a time focusing entirely on his task until he looked up and noticed the children were squatted down around the field pulling tall grass from the ground to help him. One armed and alone, the task could have taken days, but with the children a ten square feet area was cleared in four hours.

The children chattered in Xhosa while they worked and Bucky picked out a few words he knew and tried to fill in the blanks around them. Two children appeared with buckets of water from the river to dump onto the dry soil. Bucky used his hoe to mix the water deeper into the soil and make it more nutritious for the potatoes.

Cutting the potatoes proved to be the most difficult task to get through one armed. The children sat and watched him struggle to keep the potato from rolling off the makeshift table he had made out of a cut log while simultaneously slicing through it with the knife. When being careful and meticulous had failed, Bucky decided that the best way to get the job done would be speed. He gripped the knife tightly and brought it down hard and fast on the potato. It split easily lodging his knife in the wood below.

One of the children came up and grabbed the two halves of the potato and ran back to plant them in the soil. Another child pulled a small, round potato from the bag and set it on the log before backing up and waiting. Bucky worked the blade from the wood and used it to move the potato more into the center. The children watched him split the potatoes with rapt interest. Each time he halved one with a rapid strike from his knife they erupted into cheers and applause. A new child would grab the halves and set a new potato on the log and another would take the sliced potato to plant in the field.

It had been more than six hours by the time Bucky and the children had finished planting the potatoes. It was late in the afternoon and Bucky was a mess. Dirty covered every inch of him. He took the gardening tools back into the smaller hut and pulled out a bar of soap and shampoo he had found inside days before. He stripped down to his underwear and dove into the river to wash off. A few of the children jumped in after him to play in the water.

Bucky’s heart was pounding as he scrubbed the dirt and sweat from his body and hair. A smile was permanently curved into his cheeks. He couldn’t remember a time when he had been this excited.

Steve was coming.
Once out of the river, Bucky disappeared into his hut to find clean robes. He was going to need to learn how to wash his clothes. Bucky’s family hadn’t had much money so they had had to rely on their own gardening for most of their foods which was how Bucky knew what to do when it came to planting the potatoes, but his mom and sisters had been the ones to wash the clothing. He pulled on grey and white robes and took a comb to his hair staring at his appearance in the mirror.

His hair was long like some kind of ne’er-do-well. He fiddled with the wet ends and wondered where Wakanda stood as far as barber shops. It was too late to do anything about it now. Steve said he would be here in six hours and that was seven hours ago. He walked back outside and sat on an upturned log.

It wasn’t long before the children began playing with his hair. He was grateful to them for it. They pulled his hair back out of his face and kept it from looking to wild. Not to mention, they seemed to enjoy it. They would always comment about how soft his hair was to each other. It made Bucky smile and rethink cutting his locks.

After almost another hour of sitting outside waiting, Bucky resigned himself that Steve had likely gotten sidetracked and wouldn’t be coming. He walked into his hut wordlessly and more than a little disappointed. He pushed the button that would bring out the screen and debated calling Steve again. Just to see what was happening.

Bucky groaned at how stupidly he was behaving. He flopped backwards onto his bed and threw his arm over his eyes. He could hear the children running around outside. Some were still splashing around in the water. Bucky uncovered his eyes and stared up at the sky out his small window. What was keeping him?

“Ingcuka?” The English speaking girl, Bashira, called poking her head into his hut. Bucky hadn’t noticed just how quiet it had become.

“Yes?” He asked sitting up to look at her. Bashira looked behind her concernedly then back to Bucky.

“A man.” Bucky stood up and walked to the entrance to his hut and ducked outside. Up on the hill, Bucky could see two Dora Milaje walking back to the palace. His eyes moved across the clearing in search of his visitor, but came up empty. The children had scattered though he could still see a few of them hidden behind the trees watching warily. He looked down at Bashira wordlessly. She pointed behind the hut to the potato field.

Bucky stepped around his hut and looked over to his new garden. Steve was crouched over the dirt examining it. Bucky’s heart was racing again. He had been expecting him, but he was still unprepared for the genuine article. It was Steve. His Steve. Bucky tried to think of something cool to say.
Steve stood back up and turned around to face him. Bucky’s mouth went dry. Steve looked Bucky up and down just like he had in Bucharest. An easy grin split his face making Bucky smile back in return.

“Looking good, Bucky.” He told him.

“You don’t look so bad yourself.” Steve laughed and looked down at himself. He was wearing his typical civilian look. Plain colored t-shirt, brown bomber jacket, and jeans and he still managed to look like he belonged in a fashion catalog. He had a small bag slung over his shoulder the same brown as his bomber jacket.

“T’Challa says he was having family issues, but that he doesn’t expect any more problems of that nature.” Steve told him before he could ask about the bag. “He’s preparing to meet the U.N. at the end of the month. I guess he’s made the decision to share Wakanda’s advanced technology with the rest of the world.” Bucky looked back at his hut and brought his hand up to his hair.

“Opening up Wakanda, huh.” Bucky said. “I hope that doesn’t come with an extradition treaty.” Steve laughed.

“No, Buck, he assured me you were safe.” Steve gestured around him. “I doubt he would have gifted you with this land if he were just planning on turning you over to the first government that demanded you.” Bucky frowned.

“Why did he gift me with this at all?” Bucky asked. Relieved to finally be able to ask the questions that had been on his mind since he had woken up. “Why is he doing this for me?”

“He feels guilty about trying to kill you.” Steve explained. “He’s a good guy, really. He was just grieving. I can’t say I don’t know what that feels like.” Steve looked over the water. “Being so sad and angry that vengeance feels like the only thing that will make you feel better.” Bucky knew he was talking about the train incident.

“You gotta stop blaming yourself for all that, Steve.” Steve looked back at him and gave him a weak smile. “Besides, I’m still alive aren’t I?” Steve laughed.

“Yeah. You feeling like yourself again?” Bucky nodded.

“T’Challa’s sister is something else.” Steve nodded.

“I met her. She reminds me of Becca.” Bucky laughed.

“I thought the same thing.” Steve pulled Bucky into a tight hug seemingly out of the blue. Bucky brought his arm around Steve’s back and sighed against his neck.

“Do you know we are being watched?” Steve muttered against Bucky’s ear. Bucky pulled his head back and looked over at the kids.

“Phuma,” Bucky called to the kids. Steve pushed Bucky back and squinted at him.

“What’s that?” Bucky shook his head at Steve. He called out to the kids again. Bashira came out first and looked at Steve shyly. She moved over behind Bucky in a way that he was sure she thought was subtle. “Hi there.” Steve greeted, surprise lifting his voice.

“This is Steve.” Bucky told her. “He’s my best friend.” Bashira fist her hands into Bucky’s robes.
“Captain America.” She said. Bucky laughed.

“Oh, you know him?” Bashira frowned and looked at the ground in embarrassment.

“Ingcuka knows Captain America?” She asked.

“His whole life.” Steve was watching them with fascination.

“Where is his shield?” She demanded. Bucky’s smile fell. Steve’s shield was gone because of him.

“I had to give it back to one of my friends.” Steve told her. Bashira squinted at him. “He has to fix it up for me since T’Challa scratched it.” Steve made a scratching motion with his hand and Bashira giggled.

“Captain America.” Some of the other children were whispering around them.

“Abantwana!” A young woman yelled from the trees. “Buyela ekuhaya ngoku.” The children stared at Steve for a minute longer before resignedly trudging home. Bashira tugged on Bucky’s robes until he crouched down so she could whisper in his ear.

“He be here tomorrow?” She asked. Bucky looked up at Steve. He didn’t know what Steve planned on doing for the night.

“Are you staying tonight, Steve?” Bucky asked him. Steve glanced over at the hut.

“If it isn’t too much trouble, I thought I might.” Bucky nodded.

“Yeah, he’ll be here.” Bashira grinned and ran across the field and disappeared into the trees.

“The kids love you.” Steve observed. Bucky stood up and ruffled his hair.

“I’m cheap entertainment, I guess.” Steve threw his arm around Bucky’s shoulders and walked toward his hut.

“I don’t think that’s it.” Bucky ducked inside first and Steve followed. Bucky knew his hut was small, but he hadn’t really been aware of just how small it was until Steve was standing inside with him. Bucky moved back and sat on his bed to give Steve more room to move around. He watched him pick up one of his four books and set it back on the bookshelf. He turned around slowly, his eyes taking in every inch of the close quarters.

“Well, I think I like it more than that place you were staying in Bucharest.” Bucky crossed his arms and scowled.

“I liked that place.” He grumbled. Steve chuckled.

“Speaking of which,” Steve opened his bag and pulled something out and tossed it to Bucky. Bucky caught it deftly in one hand and turned it over to look at it. It was his journal. Bucky cracked it open and looked at the picture of Steve from the museum.

“Did you read it?” Bucky asked as casually as he could. Steve stared at the ceiling. “What did you think?” He shrugged.

“Looked like you were missing a few things I think you remember better now.” Bucky closed the journal and set it on his dresser beside the lamp. Steve dropped his bag beside the chair and took off his bomber jacket.
“I had more journals, you know.”

“In Bucharest?” Bucky nodded.

“In my bag.” Steve stuck his tongue in his cheek in thought.

“I’ll find them.” He promised. Bucky laughed.

“You don’t have to.” Steve pointed at the journal on his dresser.

“Did you write more stuff like you wrote in there?”

“Well, yeah.” Steve nodded.

“I’ll find them.” Bucky shook his head.

“I don’t need them anymore. I remember just fine on my own.” Steve dumped himself in Bucky’s chair.

“It isn’t about whether you need them to remember or not.”

“Then what is it about?” Steve was quiet.

“There’s some personal stuff in there, Buck. Do you really want the whole world knowing all that?” Bucky wrinkled his brow.

“I mean, it isn’t like someone is going to publish them. They’re mostly unintelligible nonsense written in about fifteen different languages.”

“Just takes one person to put them out on the internet.” He said.

“Fine, but you sort of promised the kids you’d still be here tomorrow.” Steve stared at Bucky for a second.

“I’m not going anywhere right now.” Bucky smirked.

“Did you suddenly find an ounce of patience in that big body of yours?” Steve frowned at him.

“I knew you resented that I got all bulked up from the serum and made you the short friend.” Bucky scowled.

“I am not short.”

“You aren’t taller than me anymore.”

“I can’t believe this. I am being bullied in my own home.” Bucky pointed to the door. “You can sleep outside.” Steve looked outside and feigned a terrified expression.

“Don’t make me sleep outside, Buck! There are lions and tigers and bears out there!” Steve whined. Bucky laughed remembering teenaged Bucky and Steve going to the movies to watch *The Wizard of Oz* only to be completely blown away by the technicolor.

“Oh my!” Steve moved from the chair to the bed and rolled over the top of Bucky to lay beside him. “I guess you can sleep here as long as you say you’re sorry.”

“I’m sorry, shorty.” Bucky socked Steve in the shoulder hard enough to make him wince. “Ow!
Now who’s the bully?” Bucky had to admit that it was much easier sharing a bed with Steve before he went and subjected himself to military experimentation and gained more than a hundred pounds and a foot of height.

“Say ‘Bucky Barnes is the greatest man that ever lived’ or you’re sleeping with the lions.” Steve laughed at him so Bucky rolled and pushed his knee into Steve’s stomach. “Say it.” He kept pressing until Steve finally slapped at Bucky’s chest to push him off.

“Oh, okay! Bucky Barnes is the greatest man that ever lived!” He cried. “Now get off of me!” Bucky pulled his knee out of Steve’s gut and grinned at him.

“That wasn’t so hard, now was it, punk?” Steve stared at him in silence for half a second before reaching out and shoving Bucky backwards off the bed.

“Ha! So much for the ‘greatest man’!” Steve laughed at him. Bucky growled at Steve and struggled to find something to grab onto to pull himself upright. Steve reached out and grabbed his flailing arm and pulled him back onto the bed. “I’m surprised T’Challa hasn’t given you a new arm yet.” Bucky didn’t want to tell Steve that Shuri had already offered him a new arm that he had declined. He didn’t think Steve would understand.

“I guess they’ve been busy with everything else.” Steve nodded. “Speaking of being busy, what were you and Sam doing?” Steve leaned back on the bed and put his arms beneath his head.

“Clint’s family was compromised so we were working out a strategy to get them out of the farmhouse and to a new secret location.”

“What about Lang?”

“Once he got his suit back, he disappeared. I gotta assume he’s safe wherever he went.” Bucky nodded and lay down beside Steve. The sun had set and the only light in the hut was the glow of the full moon through the window. “Natasha took Wanda so they’re both fine. She’s trading out burner phones every few weeks so we can get ahold of each other whenever need be.”

“I never wanted to bring you all down with me.” Bucky sighed to the ceiling. “That’s why I didn’t stay after I pulled you out of the river. I knew HYDRA would be coming after me. I knew it was only a matter of time until they put me back in the chair and wiped me.” Steve didn’t say anything for a long time.

“You’re saying you left to protect me?” Bucky turned his head to look at Steve.

“Of course it was to protect you.” Steve smiled at the ceiling. “What?”

“I guess I’m just glad to know that I was able to get through to you.” Bucky chewed the inside of his cheek. Steve sat up and looked at him. “What?” Bucky frowned and shook his head. “What did I say?” Bucky rolled over and shoved his feet under his blanket. “Bucky?”

“I can’t believe you were just going to let me kill you.” Bucky muttered.

“What?”

“On the helicarrier. You just laid back and let me nearly kill you with my bare hands.” Steve threw himself back against the bed.

“You weren’t going to kill me.”
“There is absolutely no way you could have known that.”

“I know you. You would have snapped out of it eventually.”

“What if I snapped out of it too late? What if I snapped out of it after your blood was already on my hands? Did you think about that, Steve?” Bucky waited for him to answer.

“I couldn’t fight you, Buck.” There was nothing more to be said. Bucky shut his eyes and let sleep take him.

A few hours later, Bucky woke up to crickets chirping. His body had tensed and he took mental stock of everything around him. The arm draped over him was what had woken him. Bucky stared down at it in confusion. He had slept alone for more than seventy years. He turned his head and looked at Steve behind him. His mouth hung open and he snored lightly.

Bucky looked out the window into the dark sky. He was fighting back feelings of jealousy wondering who else Steve had shared a bed with. He was incredibly comfortable with someone else in his bed. Not like Bucky who couldn’t relax with someone else beside them. Was the blonde somewhere in a hotel room waiting for him to come back to her? Bucky started to slowly shift his way out from under Steve’s arm, but he pulled Bucky back against him putting his nose in Bucky’s hair and breathing deeply.

“Hmm….” Steve hummed behind him squeezing Bucky tightly. “Buck.” Bucky wondered what sort of dream he was having, but Steve said no more and returned to snoring.
**Fucked Up**

**Chapter Summary**

Bucky and Steve play with the children.

**Chapter Notes**

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bucky opened his eyes to the hurried footsteps of one of the children fleeing his hut. Bucky wriggled his way free of Steve’s iron grip and stood. He looked down at the still sleeping Steve. Steve sniffled, rolled over, and continued snoring. Bucky smiled at him with amusement. He wondered when Steve had last had a good night’s sleep. Everywhere he went he had to be on watch constantly which didn’t allow for much rest. Bucky was happy that Steve let himself relax so completely around him. He wished he could do the same.

Four children were huddled to the side whispering to each other. Bucky yawned and stretched his arm up over his head cracking his back. Two of the kids looked up at him and then darted their eyes away. Bucky frowned at them.

“What’s going on?” He asked only to be met with giggles. Bucky huffed and decided the best course would be to ignore them until they decided to tell him. He kicked at the small circle of rocks he had set up as a fire pit a few days before.

Bucky walked over to the shed and pulled out buckets and a watering can. It hadn’t rained the entire time Bucky had been in Wakanda which meant that if he wanted his potatoes to grow, he would need to water them from the river.

That was exactly what he was doing when Steve walked out of the hut. Bucky looked up from his task and gave Steve a wide grin. Steve rubbed his face and rolled his shoulders. The children were lurking behind the hut now, watching with fascination. Bucky emptied the watering can only halfway through watering the garden.

“What?” Bucky asked in Xhosa, shaking the can at one of the boys. The boy looked between Bucky and Steve hesitantly before hurrying over and taking the can from Bucky and running over to the water. “What do you think of my farm?” Bucky asked Steve in English. Steve rubbed the backs of his fingers over his jaw surveying the land.

“I think if you actually get something to grow, you really are the greatest man that ever lived.” Bucky grinned.

“I’m gonna make you eat your words.” Steve snorted and rolled his eyes. “Oh, ye of little faith.” The boy ran back to Bucky carrying the can sloshing with water. “Enkosi.” He told the boy turning to finish watering the plants.

“Ingcuka and Captain America play?” Bucky nodded, still watering the garden.

“Give us a minute.” Bucky told him, holding up his index finger. The boy shouted with delight and took off to find the rest of the children.
“What is Ingcuka?” Steve asked. Bucky emptied the watering can again and headed back to the small hut to return it. Steve followed after him.

“A nickname I guess.” Bucky shrugged. He brushed his hands against his robes to dispel some of the dirt that clung to him. He turned back to Steve.

“Isn’t Bucky already a nickname?” Bucky breathed out a laugh.

“What are you jealous?” Steve frowned.

“Of course not.” Bucky stepped around him and walked towards the kids gathering at the edge of the field. “I just don’t see what’s wrong with the name Bucky.” Bucky elected to ignore his friend and knelt down to the kids’ level instead. There were six children there including Bashira.

“Play Ndiyakuthintela?” She asked.

“He wants to play hide and seek.” Bucky told them in broken Xhosa.

“Too hard.” A boy, Dakari, whined. Bucky pointed up at Steve.

“Hide and seek is Captain America's favorite game.” He told them still speaking in Xhosa. “Okay?” The children nodded excitedly. “He counts first.” The children giggled and looked up at Steve waiting for him to close his eyes and count. Steve looked at Bucky in confusion.

“What do they want?” He asked. “What did you say to them?” Bucky grinned and stood up.

“We’re playing hide and seek. You’re it.” Steve frowned at Bucky.

“I hate hide and seek.” Bucky started jogging away from him. “This is what you do all day? Really?”

“That’s an awful lot of chatter for someone who’s supposed to be counting.” He called. Steve huffed, but the needy and demanding faces of the children had him covering his eyes with his hands and starting a count. The children squealed with excitement and raced away to their hiding spots. Before Steve got to ten everybody was successfully hidden.

“Ready or not!” Steve shouted opening his eyes. Bucky watched from the tall grass. He was glad he had switched out of his red and blue robes for a more muted color. Steve surveilled the farm with hard learned calm. His eyes passed over Bucky without seeing him and landed on something or someone else a few feet to Bucky’s left. Steve’s eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly. He continued his surveillance, filing the information away as he worked to pinpoint the five other children playing with them.

Steve didn’t move until he found four out of the six children. Addo and Dakari were the only children that were still hidden. Bucky searched the field for them. Addo was up a tree almost near the canopy. Bucky had hidden there during a game days before. Dakari was still nowhere to be seen. Steve looked up and found Addo.


“You go get him. Touch him to find him.” Steve looked up the tree again. His shoulders sagged in defeat.

“Son of a bitch.” He muttered obviously forgetting his manners. Bucky pushed his face into the
dirt to keep himself from laughing out loud. Steve backed up from the tree and took a running start before leaping halfway up the tree. The children all gasped in amazement and then erupted into applause. Even Addo was clapping from his perch while Steve climbed the tree with outstanding ease. Bucky glanced at the children and found Dakari half out of a bush watching Steve’s ascent.

Once they were both on the ground, Steve found Dakari in the bush and pulled him out. He looked at the children huddled before him and did a mental count. The kids stared at Steve enamored.


“Never find Ingcuka.” She told Steve. Steve crossed his arms and eyed her seriously.

“Is that so?” He looked around the field. “We’ll see about that.” Bashira shook her head.

“Nobody never find Ingcuka. He is ghost.” She swore. Bucky wanted to laugh again. Steve had such a look of determination.

“I found him once when he didn’t want to be found. I can do it again.” Steve moved around the farm carefully. The children sat down in the clearing and watched. They had never been able to find Bucky on the days they played. Not unless Bucky decided to come out and let them find him. But this was Captain America. If anyone could find Ingcuka, it had to be him.

Steve wandered into the trees a ways until Bucky couldn’t see him any longer. A few minutes later, he emerged cursing and flipping a fallen log over with one of his hands. The children oooed and ahhed at his display of strength. Bucky rolled his eyes at Steve’s impatience. Steve poked his head into the hut and then walked around it. Bucky had to laugh at the growing desperation Steve had in finding him.

Out of mercy or a quiet desperation of his own, Bucky waited for Steve to wander close enough to his hidey hole. When Steve’s boot stepped just in front of his face, Bucky snaked his hand out and snared him. Steve stumbled and fell forward onto his face. He rolled the second he landed as Bucky knew he would and as soon as he did, Bucky jumped onto him and pinned him on his back.

“Gotcha.” Bucky announced smugly.

“That’s not how you play hide and seek.” Steve growled at him. Steve grabbed a bunch of Bucky’s robes in each hand and used the leverage to throw Bucky off him and then some. Bucky landed hard on his left shoulder making him wince. He knew it wasn’t going to feel great once the adrenaline left him. Bucky flipped himself up onto his feet and charged Steve who was ready for him. “This isn’t how you play hide and seek!” Steve yelled again, slapping his open hands against Bucky’s back as Bucky carried them both down into the dirt again.

“Ingcuka!” The children cheered. Steve adjusted his grip on Bucky and flipped him upside down before bodyslamming him into the dirt. Bucky let out a half whimper half groan and punched Steve in the gut as hard as he could. Unfortunately he wasn’t looking where he was aiming and wound up hitting Steve south of the belt with enough force that even the children winced.

Steve dropped to his knees breathlessly beside Bucky holding himself and trying to catch his breath. Bucky looked over at him and laughed at his face. It was so red it was almost purple and tears were streaming down his cheeks. Steve somehow managed to give Bucky a death glare even as his testicles ruptured.

“Sorry!” Bucky apologized still laughing.

“I’m gonna kill you.” Steve gasped. Bucky slumped back onto the dirt and chuckled at the sky.
“I thought you both were super soldiers.” Shuri’s voice interrupted. Bucky sat upright immediately. “Now you are wrestling in the dirt like children?” Bucky gave her a weak smile before noticing that she had more company than just the Dora Milaje escort. Bucky leapt to his feet.

“T’Challa, it’s good to see you.” T’Challa nodded at Bucky and looked at Steve concernedly. “You’re gonna have to give him a minute. I may have accidentally hit him where the sun don’t shine.” T’Challa grimaced. Bucky looked around and noticed that the children had all vanished.

“Accidentally my ass.” Steve grumbled from the dirt. He struggled to his feet and wiped the tears away hastily. “Your majesty.” Steve nodded, his voice still tight from having the wind knocked out of him.

“What were you two doing exactly?” Shuri asked. Bucky pressed his fingers into the sore flesh around his metal shoulder.

“We were playing hide and seek. Why? What did it look like we were doing?” Shuri raised an eyebrow suggestively and Bucky’s smile fell away.

“I see you managed to get the potatoes my sister brought you planted.” T’Challa observed. “Was it much trouble?” Bucky shook his head.

“No, the children have been more than helpful and I have a bit of gardening experience from growing up poor in Brooklyn during the Great Depression.” T’Challa nodded.

“That is excellent. If there are any other seeds you desire, send a message to my people and I will have it taken care of.” Bucky shook his head.

“I don’t really need anything else, your majesty. I honestly didn’t expect anything like this in the first place. Thank you.” T’Challa nodded.

“It is good in your hands. You have earned the trust of these people in such a short amount of time. It is truly impressive for an outsider.” Bucky looked at the dirt. He had never really been good at taking compliments.

“We both really appreciate what you’ve done for us, T’Challa.” Steve said, answering for Bucky. T’Challa nodded at him.

“It is the least I could do. However, my sister is here with something more for Sergeant Barnes.” Shuri grinned and brought out the suitcase from the day before. Bucky’s body locked up. Nobody seemed to notice. Shuri set the suitcase down on an upturned log and opened it.

Inside was a new arm. This one was silver with six buttons down the inner wrist. Shuri pulled the arm out of the case easily and held it up for Bucky to better examine. It was entirely unnecessary. He didn’t want to inspect the arm because he didn’t want the arm at all. Steve looked more interested. He fiddled with the fingers and inspected the buttons.

“What do these do?” He asked Shuri. She didn’t try to hide the thrilled expression at having been asked. She pointed to the first one closest to the palm.

“This one fires vibranium bullets that will pierce anything.” She moved up. “This one releases tear gas.” She moved up and pressed the middle one. Four blades shot out the side. “This one releases blades for hand to hand combat.” She continued on and Steve listened interestedly.

“Good thing you weren’t in HYDRA when Bucky was captive. I don’t know how I would have
managed against this arsenal.” Shuri beamed at the strangely worded praise.

“Luckily, I am here to ‘arm’ him for our side.” She giggled and T’Challa gave Bucky a look of
mild annoyance.

“Try it on, Buck.” Steve told him, patting his armless shoulder. Bucky gave them both a tight
smile.

“I appreciate the offer and I don’t want to seem ungrateful, but I would really prefer not to.”
Bucky avoided Steve’s eyes. Shuri stared down at the arm collapsing the blades back into the
metal.

“You are sure?” She confirmed. Bucky nodded. “It was the wrist blades, wasn’t it? Too
Assassin’s Creed?” Bucky had no clue what she was talking about. He was just relieved when she
put the arm back in the suitcase.

“Captain Rogers, we have a jet ready to take you wherever you would like to go fueled and at the
ready whenever you wish to rejoin your friends.” Bucky’s gut twisted.

“Thank you.” Steve said. Bucky gave Shuri and T’Challa smiles that were more grimaces and
excused himself. Steve stayed behind talking to T’Challa, but Bucky didn’t want to hear anymore.
He didn’t know if he could take it. He hadn’t been under any false pretenses that Steve would be
staying with him permanently. It was more or less a fact that Bucky had elected to ignore until it
came back to bite him in the ass.

Bucky walked into the smaller hut and picked up an axe. He could feel their eyes on him. He
leaned the axe against his chopping log and set a smaller log on top to split. He lifted the axe and
brought it down forcefully, splitting the log easily. He set the axe back down and repeated the
process until he had a small pile of split wood to start a fire.

“We are leaving now, Sergeant Barnes!” T’Challa called over to him. Bucky looked up and gave
a salute.

“Good night.” Bucky called back. He started in the task of setting up the fire pit. A few minutes
later a pair of hands joined him in his task. Bucky looked up at Steve reservedly. “I thought you
were taking off.” He said with forced casualty. Steve nodded.

“I’ll be shipping out tomorrow morning.” Bucky found his flint and struck it until a spark leapt
from the stone to the kindling. Soon, a modest fire was burning between the two soldiers. When
Bucky looked up, Steve was staring at him.

“What?”

“Why didn’t you take the arm?” Bucky shrugged.

“I dunno.” Steve clenched his jaw.

“Don’t give me that.” Bucky looked into the flames.

“When I wear the arm it changes me. I’m not just Bucky Barnes anymore. I’m a weapon.” Bucky
shifted onto his butt and rested his arm on his knee. “I just want a little bit of time to be just James
Buchanan Barnes. Not a machine or a weapon.” He looked at Steve through the fire. He had a
distant look in his eyes considering Bucky’s reasoning. “If a fight comes our way or if you need
my help, I’ll pick up whatever attachment Shuri works up for me and I swear I will be right by
your side on any battlefield you choose.” Steve raised his hand to silence him.
“Buck, it’s alright. I get it.” He smiled. “Take your time. You deserve it.” Bucky brought his thumb to his lips and nibbled on the pad.

“You planning on sleeping in my bed again tonight?” Bucky asked after almost half an hour of thoughtful silence. Steve snapped himself from his thoughts and blinked at Bucky.

“Yeah, why?” Bucky pursed his lips and shook his head.

“Just try not to snore so much.” Steve’s face softened.

“At least I don’t throw elbows.” Bucky’s brow wrinkled.

“Do I?” Steve chuckled and nodded.

“Oh, yeah.” Bucky lifted his good shoulder in a half shrug.

“Whoops.” Steve laughed, shaking his head and looking away.

The low glow of the fire turned his blonde hair auburn. Shadows danced around him making him look almost ethereal. Bucky wanted to ask what he was thinking, but there was something behind his eyes that made him hesitate. A silent sadness he was trying to hide. Bucky knew Steve. If Bucky asked him about it Steve would deny it was even there. Steve had been a soldier even before the serum forever fighting an internal battle Bucky couldn’t join him in. Not because Bucky didn’t want to, but because Steve refused to include him.

When the fire had died down to little more than a smolder. He stood up and headed in. Bucky’s shoulder was killing him. He tapped the lamp on and pulled the sleeve of his robe down to examine the area. It was red and inflamed. He had landed in such a way that the metal had broken through the skin and caused it to bleed a bit. A bruise was spreading up towards his neck and around his back.

“Is that from earlier?” Bucky jumped and turned to Steve hastily trying to pull the sleeve of his robe back up to no avail. Steve crossed to him and brushed Bucky’s long hair out of the way.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” He demanded.

“It’s fine.”

“It is not fine. Bucky, you’re bleeding.” Bucky shook his head.

“It’s mostly scabbed over already.” Steve grimaced at the bruise. “I’m fine. If this were the worst thing I had to deal with life would be pretty okay.” Steve leaned away and looked Bucky in the eyes.

“You hurt somewhere else?” Bucky rolled his eyes.

“No.” Steve sighed with relief. His hand was lingering on Bucky’s metal shoulder. His fingers toyed with one of the braids in his hair.

“How did you manage to braid your hair with only one arm?” Steve murmured. He was impossibly close. The smell of Coney Island in the summer wafting into his nostrils.

“The kids like to mess with it.” He mumbled. Steve nodded, his fingers still twisted his hair around and around. So soft it was sending chills down Bucky’s back.

He wasn’t sure how it happened or who initiated it, but Steve’s lips were pressed against his so
softly Bucky couldn’t remember a kiss ever feeling like this. It was chaste and lasted maybe a second or two before Steve pulled back dropping Bucky’s hair and taking a step away. He stared at Bucky with wide eyes and breathing heavily. Bucky stared back. He pressed his lips together and his tongue darted out to wet them. Steve’s eyes went back to his mouth.

They stood there. Quiet. Breathless. For what seemed an eternity. And all at once, they collided. Steve’s hands cupped Bucky’s face between them and Bucky’s arm wrapped tightly around Steve’s back holding his big body against him. Bucky pulled Steve’s bottom lip between his teeth and sucked gently before releasing it. Steve’s tongue slid between his teeth and tickled Bucky’s. It was like a dam had broken and suddenly everything unspoken and suppressed was pouring out. It was volcanic. An eruption of ninety years’ worth of repressed attraction and desire.

And just as suddenly as it started, it ended. Steve pulled away again and put his hand to his mouth. Bucky could feel his heart beating in every inch of his body. It was like something had woken up in him. Steve’s eyes slid past him. Bucky followed his gaze to his journal resting beside the lamp on his dresser. Wordlessly, Steve turned and ducked out of the hut.

“Steve?” Bucky called. He followed him outside, but Steve was already halfway up the hill leading to the palace. “Steve!” Bucky growled and punched the wall beside his entryway. A mantra was starting in his head. *I fucked up. I fucked up. I fucked up.*

Chapter End Notes

Cliche?
Chapter Summary

Bucky becomes depressed in Steve's absence. Shuri and T'Challa work to cheer him up.

Steve didn’t come back. He didn’t answer the phone either of the times Bucky got up the courage to call it. It had been sixteen days. Sixteen days where Bucky struggled to do absolutely anything he could to convince himself that Steve just needed time to figure himself out. Bucky reasoned that he had needed the same. But Bucky had come to grips with his feelings two weeks before. Steve was still avoiding him.

Bucky had assumed he would have to come back when he realized he had taken off without his jacket or his bag. Bucky pushed them both under the chair for safekeeping. Whatever was going on in Steve’s head Bucky knew he would get over it. He would come back if only to collect his forgotten things. Bucky hoped he factored into that category. He certainly felt forgotten.

Shuri had been by with seven more arms in the time since Steve had left. Each arm was more intricate than the last. Bucky focused on farming. His potatoes had finally sprouted and he focused on weeding and maintaining the plants. He was covered head to toe in dirt and sweat that he didn’t bother washing off. What was the point?

It didn’t take long for everyone to catch wind of his depression. The children stopped coming to play with him. He couldn’t blame them. He smelled like a truck stop bathroom and looked like a mud monster. His hair was greasy and stringy and unkempt. So disgusting that even Shuri had stopped bothering to coming down to show off her newest inventions.

Or so he thought.

After sixteen days of poor hygiene, diet, and social interaction, two Dora Milaje appeared at his farm. Bucky grunted a greeting to them and kept at his task which was, currently, expanding his tilled area in hopes of planting more vegetables. The Dora Milaje said nothing as they grabbed him by his arm and fistfuls of filthy robes tossing him head over heels into the river. Bucky broke the surface sputtering and gasping for air.

One of the Dora Milaje had disappeared and the other stared down at him with unabashed disgust. Bucky stood and started for the shore when she held up a hand. The other warrior reappeared holding soap and shampoo. She tossed it at him maintaining her distance. Bucky caught the soap in his hand and pushed the floating shampoo container towards the banks lest it be swept away.

“Clean yourself. The king demands an audience.” Bucky wiped the mud from his eyes and stared up at them. They stared back. Bucky pressed his lips together and looked down.

“Are you two planning on watching?” He asked at last. The two warriors shared a look before turning to face the farm.

The Dora Milaje took away his disgustingly tattered robes and stuck them in his fire pit. The one that had given him the soap and shampoo gave him new robes to wear. Clean and dressed, the
Dora Milaje led him up and away from his farm. Bucky kept quiet as they walked. Lost in his head. Steve had come this way in the dark. Down unmarked paths in what was mostly farmland. Bucky wondered how long it had taken Steve to get back to the palace. Just how determined did he have to be to get away from Bucky to brave unfamiliar territory in the pitch blackness of the night?

Bucky was thankful for his escort when they reached the palace. The many overlapping and intersecting hallways made him feel much like a rat in a maze. He wondered if they would ever make it to the throne room when he heard the slightly muffled voice of T’Challa.

“What is all of this?” He asked.

“I was hoping you would ask! I am getting ready for my new career.” Shuri replied. Bucky slowed his walking. He hadn’t been the kindest to Shuri in the weeks prior. Something that had him wrestling with guilt ever since.

“New career? What are you talking about? What career?”

“As an arms dealer!” She giggled. “Get it? Arms!” The Dora Milaje turned into a wall that opened for them. Bucky followed them through it. He got the pun as he looked around the lab. An entire wall was dedicated to the many arms Shuri had brought to him for inspection and many more she hadn’t. Bucky prayed this wasn’t why he had been summoned here. He didn’t know if there were any more polite ways he could decline the offer.

“Sergeant Barnes, so good to see you up and about.” T’Challa greeted. “My sister told me you had been feeling a bit under the weather.” Bucky pushed on a tight smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes and shook his head.

“I’m fine.” He assured them. Neither of them looked convinced.

“It appears you have been quite the inspiration for my sister.” T’Challa said, blessedly changing the subject. He gestured to the wall of arms. “You have so many arms to choose from yet you choose to remain as you are. Why is that?” Bucky fidgeted with his thumb and forefinger nervously.

“I would rather do what I can to make it without the prosthesis for now.” Bucky avoided T’Challa’s eyes.

“Of course one could not send a one armed man to war.” Bucky nodded.

“Or use him as a weapon.” T’Challa watched Bucky thoughtfully. T’Challa was wiser than he appeared. Bucky thought they might even be good friends by now had they met under different circumstances. Any of the first three times they had met could have radically changed Bucky’s perception. For now, he knew he was still a bit prejudiced towards him. It isn’t easy to forget when a guy tries to kill you on three separate occasions. But Bucky had resolved to try.

“Hopefully, when the time comes, you will change your mind.” Bucky gave a short nod. T’Challa walked past him to the door. “Come with me, Sergeant Barnes.” T’Challa led them away from the lab and through the palace until they were back outside in a new area containing an enclosure of sorts. Small and fenced in, unlike the rest of the palace this looked like something that had been hastily thrown together. A small bleating sounded from something resembling a doghouse.

“What is it?” Bucky asked stepping around the enclosure. T’Challa gathered his hands behind his back and nodded to the doghouse.
“One of our farmer’s goats died giving birth to these two last night. He does not have the time required to raise them at the moment and has asked me to find someone to care for them. I thought they would make a great addition to your farm.” Bucky stepped over the short fence and squatted down in front of the small doghouse. The kids were impossibly small. Bucky reached in and scooped one out. It was small enough to fit in his hand.

“I don’t know how to take care of goats.” Bucky explained. T’Challa put up a hand.

“We will provide you with the necessary equipment, you need only dedicate a bit of your time to their well-being.” Bucky held the baby goat against his chest. As far as tasks went, this one seemed daunting. “I will have somebody take them to back to your farm.” T’Challa said, making the decision for Bucky.

Once back at the farm, Bucky set about the task of figuring out how to care for his new wards. He brought up the screen and opened a search engine like Shuri had taught him. According to the search result, he would have to feed them every six hours for the first thirty days and every eight hours after that. It didn’t seem too hard.

Bucky pulled out two bottles from the box of supplies T’Challa had sent with the kids. A five gallon container of goat milk was set up in a stand with a spigot at the bottom. It made it easier for Bucky to fill the bottles but not much. The kids were bleating hungrily from the hay filled crate they were nestled in. Bucky brought the filled bottles over to the crate and sat down beside it. He dipped his hand into the crate and lifted out a soft, brown kid and settled it in his lap.

The goat drank greedily from the bottle until it was completely empty. Bucky repeated the process with the white and brown kid. The first baby fell immediately to sleep upon returning to the hay. The second baby bleated impatiently for something more that Bucky wasn’t sure about. He didn’t think he should give them more than one bottle each at the risk of upsetting their stomachs. Bucky weighed the options and in that time, the second baby settled down beside its sibling and went to sleep.

Bucky sighed down at them and debated his next course of action. He couldn’t leave them outside unattended where the wild predators might get to them. As carefully as he could, Bucky lifted the crate and carried his new responsibilities into the hut. He sat down in his chair and watched them sleeping for well over an hour. At some point he knew he would have to get busy and build a pen or somewhere to keep them, but for the time being, they seemed perfectly happy to sleep in the crate beside his bed.

The kids woke up a while later and began bleating for attention. Bucky lifted them both out of their crate to let them walk around a bit. The brown one butted his head against Bucky’s dresser and backed away blinking.

“Settle down there, Dum Dum.” Bucky laughed and patted the baby’s head gently. The brown and white goat traipsed outside. Bucky followed it out keeping a watchful eye on Dum Dum behind him. Bashira was investigating his box of goat supplies when the white and brown baby wandered over to her.

“Hello, goat.” Bashira greeted in English. Bucky smiled when she looked up at him. “Ingcuka is feeling better?” She asked. Bucky nodded. She was quiet for a few minutes petting the brown and white baby. “Captain America divorce you?” Bucky balked.

“What?” Bashira picked up the brown and white baby to pet her in her lap.

“Captain America divorce you.” She repeated. She looked over at him and saw his confusion.
She held up her two index fingers side by side and then split them apart. “He love you no more.” Bucky hadn’t thought about Steve since he arrived at the palace hours earlier. It dawned on him that that might have been T’Challa’s and Shuri’s intentions in inviting him to the palace and gifting him with new responsibilities. They wanted to take his mind off what was bothering him. And it had actually worked. Bucky scrubbed his hand over his face. He would never be able to repay either one of them.

“I don’t think it was that.” Bashira shrugged indifferently. “Do you know something I don’t?”

“Bashira knows much you do not.” Bucky huffed and came to sit beside her. Dum Dum glued itself to his left side and refused to leave. Bucky reached around his waist with his right arm to pat his kid comfortingly.

“About Steve I mean.” Bashira shook her head. She sighed and looked up at the canopy of trees overhead. Like the weight of Bucky’s relationship problems were resting on her slender shoulders.

“You get sad when he leave you.” Bucky nodded. He hadn’t really made any effort to hide it. A hole was still punched through the wall of his hut that he hadn’t ever bothered to repair.

“I guess I did.” He agreed.

“He get mad when he leave you.” Bucky tipped his head to the side. It had been half past midnight when Steve had left. There was no way for Bashira to know what Steve looked like when he left.

“What?” Bashira pointed to the trees behind her.

“My brother hunt there. He see Captain America breaking trees with his hands. He see Captain America growl like lion.” Bucky followed her finger and stared at the forest. Bashira dropped her hand and turned to look at Bucky again. “Then he fight jaguar.”

“Your brother fought a jaguar?” Bashira rolled her eyes at Bucky.

“Captain America fight jaguar.” She fiddled with the baby’s ears. “He win.”

“He usually does.”

“Ingcuka goat mother now?” Bashira usually changed topics abruptly and with no warning. At first it had given Bucky whiplash as he struggled to keep up with both her broken English and sudden change in conversation. Now, he was used to it. He even found it almost endearing. Bucky stroked Dum Dum’s soft cheek with his thumb.

“I guess we’ll see.”

“Ingcuka takes baths now?” Bucky laughed and nodded.

“Yes, I’m taking baths again.”

“Good.” She waved two fingers in front of her nose. “Too smelly we cannot play.”

“I’m sorry.” Bashira shook her head. They were quiet for a time. Bucky figured it was coming up on the babies’ next feeding. Just as he was about to get up to start on their bottles, Bashira spoke again.

“Captain America come back.” She declared. Bucky sat back down.
“What makes you so sure?” Bucky wasn’t.

“He love you.” Bucky frowned.

“You just said he didn’t love me anymore.” Bashira shook her head.

“He think that. I do not. I see. I know.” She nodded to herself and smiled at the little goat in her lap.

“Is that so?” Bucky flopped back into the dirt.

“You love Captain America, too. He come back. You be happy.” Bucky watched the clouds drifting through the sky. Bashira said everything so matter of factly. Like there was no use in debating her. Bucky hoped she was right. Bucky was sad Steve had left, of course. Steve was his best friend. He loved reminiscing with him and playing. However, now whenever Bucky thought of Steve all he could think of was how it had felt kissing him and how much he wanted to do it again. Not that he would admit that out loud to anyone. Least of all Steve.
Chapter Summary

Bucky has a nightmare and gets accustomed to his life in Wakanda.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something woke Bucky up. He opened his eyes and blinked around the hut trying to pinpoint whatever had disturbed him. It didn’t take long. Bucky bolted upright in bed and stared at Steve standing near the entrance to his hut. He was wearing the same clothes as the first time he had stood in Bucky’s hut. Everything about him was the same from the brown bomber jacket to the matching bag slung over his shoulder.

“Steve?” Bucky croaked. Steve gave him a soft smile.

“Hey, Buck.” Bucky stood and straightened his robes. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes to dispel the lingering sleep.

“What are you doing here this late?”

“I had to see you.” Steve said it so simply like that would answer any questions Bucky could come up with. And it did.

“I missed you.” Bucky confessed. Steve closed the distance between them. His palm cupped his cheek, his fingers tangled themselves in his hair. Bucky pushed his hands under Steve’s unzipped jacket and fist his fingers in his shirt.

Like magic, Steve was kissing him again. It was delirious. It was perfect. It was everything Bucky had wanted. He couldn’t be certain how long they stood there exploring every inch of each other’s mouths. Bucky didn’t care. They could stay that way forever.

“What are you doing?” Bucky broke away and turned to look at the source of the voice. Steve kept his hands on Bucky’s face, staring down at him seemingly oblivious to their guest.

“Bashira? What are you doing here? Go home!” Bashira looked between Steve and Bucky for a few minutes.

“What you are doing is wrong.” She announced simply. She turned without another word and left. Bucky pushed Steve’s hands away and sat down on his bed. Steve dropped his hands and stood staring down at Bucky wordlessly. Bucky wanted to throw up. He wanted to scream. The damned silence was deafening. Suffocating.

“She’s right, you know.” Steve said, breaking the silence. Bucky looked up at him.

“Is that why you left for so long?” Steve nodded. Then his face brightened as he remembered something.

“That reminds me! I have something for you.” Steve opened his bag. Bucky wondered if he had
found the rest of his journals. Steve straightened and held something out to him. It took Bucky a full two seconds to process what it was. A gun.

“Steve?” Bucky’s mouth had gone completely dry. Steve was pointing a gun at him.

“What you’re doing is wrong, Buck. I gotta take you out.” Steve gave him an apologetic shrug. “Sorry.” He pulled the trigger and the resounding bang of the pistol cracked the night.

Bucky sat up in bed in a cold sweat. He was panting and he had to struggle to slow his breathing. A nightmare. It was just a nightmare. He told himself. Next to the bed, his goats shifted in their box sound asleep. Under the chair, Steve’s jacket and bag still sat untouched. Bucky looked up on his wall to check the time. One feature he was grateful Shuri had set up for him. It was almost four thirty in the morning. Time to feed the babies.

He had gotten into a routine over the past week since acquiring the babies. The first feeding was as soon as he woke up. When he was finished, Bucky watered the potato plants and the newly planted tomatoes that he was hoping would sprout in the next few days. After he finished weeding and watering the garden, he started on the pen he had been working on for the babies. It was taking longer than he thought it would both due to his physical limitations and the added stress Bashira had accidentally given him as far as the jaguars went.

The pen turned out to be entirely necessary. At every turn, Bucky had had to usher the babies away from the trees and back into the yard. Twice they had managed to slip past him and into the trees where danger lurked at every turn. It was near impossible to keep the brainless creatures safe at the rate they were going. So Bucky concentrated on building a pen good enough to keep them from slipping out and walking to their deaths.

At ten the babies were fed again. The children came by around one or two in the afternoon. They would help him finish whatever project he was working on so he could play with them for a few hours. Two of the children would feed them at about four. The children left between seven and eight each night. Bucky would get the babies settled in their crate for the night and watch the news or play one of the video games Shuri had shown him. At ten, the babies’ were fed for the last time of the day.

Bucky might have been sublimely happy in his new life if he could stop thinking about Steve. Stop longing for Steve. Stop thinking about kissing him. Stop thinking about doing more. Maybe it was a new attraction. Bucky had been with loads of girls before the war. He had been out with two ladies the night before he shipped out to London. So why couldn’t he remember their names or faces? Why was the only thing he could clearly remember from that day Steve?

Both of Bucky’s goats were girls. He had named them Dum Dum and Jack before he knew and it felt wrong to change their names now. Especially when they were so fitting. The children didn’t know any different. Whatever Bucky had decided to call them didn’t concern the children whatsoever. He could have named them Bingpot and Mookie and the children would have carried on just as they were.

It helped to think about the kids. Human and animal alike. If he didn’t think too hard on Steve he could sleep better. Or at least some. It had been almost a month since he left without a word. He might as well have been a stranger in Bucharest all over again.

The sun was just beginning to rise the next day when Bucky finished his work in the fields. Jack and Dum Dum chased each other around the field near the fire pit. It had rained overnight which meant that Bucky had less to do. He grinned excitedly at the three new sprouts emerging from his tomato area. Seventy-five years later and Bucky still had his green thumb.
Nervous bleating called Bucky’s attention to the front of his hut. Bucky shifted his weight to the balls of his feet and crept to the wall of his hut. He eased his way down the wall until he could peek around to see what the fuss was about. Dum Dum came barreling around the side of the hut for the fields, but Bucky leaned down and snagged the kid in midair and held him to his chest. Bucky leaned out to look for Jack. His heart lodged itself in his throat.

Steve.

Bucky blinked. It had to be a mistake. Or a dream. Steve was in a dark grey jacket instead of the brown bomber jacket he always dreamt him in. And he hadn’t appeared right in front of Bucky like he usually did. Bucky bent his head and bit the back of his hand. He was definitely awake. In all of Bucky’s dreams be they about Steve or about other matters, Bucky had both arms. It was sort of like his body had adjusted and his conscious mind had come to grips with the missing appendage, but his subconscious was holding on with an iron grip. It made it easy to settle matters. No arm, he was wide awake.

Bucky watched Steve duck his head inside the utility hut and come out frowning. Judging from the dark circles under his eyes, Bucky would guess that he hadn’t slept in a few days. Steve moved around the other side of the main hut Bucky was ducked behind. Bucky turned around in time to see Steve stop and stare at the plants. Dum Dum had been sucking on Bucky’s fingers until he became frustrated at the lack of milk they supplied and released them bleating angrily. Steve’s head snapped over to the side of the hut where Bucky was still hidden from his view.

Bucky set Dum Dum down quietly and slid around the hut just as Steve started in his direction. It was stupid and Bucky knew it. He had wanted Steve to come back for so long and now that he was here, Bucky had no clue what to say to him. For a long time, Bucky thought about apologizing. The longer Steve was away, the angrier Bucky became with him. Bucky wasn’t about to apologize for anything. Steve had been the one to run away. To avoid him. If anyone were going to apologize, it was going to be Steve.

Bucky continued backing up soundlessly until something scampered beneath his feet tipping him over and dumping him onto his back. Jack bleated and ran into the main hut to hide. Bucky cursed his own incompetence and rolled himself over to his stomach to stand up as quietly as possible hoping he hadn’t already alerted Steve to his presence. Wishful thinking as it turned out.

“Bucky,” Steve called behind him. Bucky squeezed his eyes shut, his whole body tightened with fear and anticipation. What are the odds that I can out run him? Bucky considered it. He had nearly done it in Bucharest if Steve hadn’t hijacked a car and Sam hadn’t flung T’Challa at him. “Are you mad at me?” Bucky’s flight or fight response flipped. He whipped around and gave Steve a withering glare.

“What was that?” Steve grimaced and scratched the back of his neck the way he often did when he was uncomfortable.

“I’m guessing yes.” He muttered. Bucky ground his teeth together to keep himself from saying something he was going to regret. “Can you hear me out at least?” Bucky took a long, slow breath to try and calm down the onslaught of rage boiling in his gut. “Sorry.” Steve pulled his bottom lip between his teeth and stared at the dirt.

“You came all the way here for that?” Bucky asked. Steve walked over to an upturned log and sat down. He rested an elbow on his thigh and used one hand to cover his eyes and massage his temples.

“I fucked up, Buck. I don’t know why I did what I did. I haven’t really been thinking clearly
around you since I found out it was you beneath that mask and believe me, I’ve been trying.” A crease formed between Bucky’s eyebrows. “It was a messed up thing to do and I knew you’d be pissed at me for it and I just needed a while to… I dunno. Sort things out, I guess.” Bucky opened and closed his mouth on three different responses. A fish in uncharted territory.

“Do you…” Bucky frowned and ran through Steve’s apology in his head once more. “You think I’m pissed at you for kissing me?” Steve looked up at him for the first time since Bucky turned to face him.

“Well, aren’t you?” Bucky laughed. He couldn’t help it. Bucky had been under the impression that Steve could read Bucky’s mind for so long that the thought that he could be under any misunderstandings between the two of them had become ridiculous.

“No.” Steve blinked clearly thrown off guard. He threw his hands out in the universal sign for ‘what gives’.

“Then why are you mad at me?”

“Are you kidding?” Steve shook his head, his mouth hanging open. Bucky held up a finger for each reason he counted. “You took off in the middle of the night, you fought a jaguar, you didn’t answer your phone when I called, you went completely M.I.A. for almost a month, and you let me think it was my fault.” Steve raised his brows in surprise.

“I didn’t answer my phone because I wanted a chance to explain myself before the fighting started and I was gone for so long because everything I wanted to say just seemed like it was going to drive you away.” Steve slapped his hands on his knees and stood up. His excuses had only served to make Bucky more annoyed. If Steve had just stayed long enough to talk it out or even picked up his goddamn phone when Bucky had called the whole situation could have been resolved. Instead Bucky spent two weeks as a depressed mess and another week and a half getting himself over it.

“And the jaguar?” Steve frowned.

“What jaguar?” He asked innocently. Bucky gave him a ‘don’t bullshit me’ look. Bucky twisted his mouth and looked over to the trees. “Were you following me?”

“I have eyes everywhere.” Bucky smiled at his own joke. Steve sighed, his fingers flexed at his sides.

“Okay, the cat jumped down on me from one of the trees and I threw it off. It’s fine, I think.” Bucky looked around. Dum Dum and Jack had disappeared. Bucky’s heart sank. It must have shown on his face. “What is it? What happened?”

“Dum Dum? Jack?” Bucky shouted, all but ignoring Steve. Bucky walked into his hut. A black bag was dropped in the doorway so Bucky kicked it away to the wall. He crouched under the bed hoping to see them hiding. Bucky came back out and cast his eyes over the field frantically. “Dum Dum! Jack!” He yelled. Steve looked around the field, too, though he didn’t know what it was he was looking for. “Shit.” Bucky cursed making a beeline for the trees.

“Bucky?” Bucky would deal with Steve later. An interesting thought considering he had spent the last month thinking of little else, but his babies were missing. He made it about three steps into the trees when he heard bleating behind him. Bucky spun around and headed back to his field in time to see Jack trotting around the hut from the direction of his garden.

Bucky hurried over and scooped her up continuing around the hut to the garden. Steve trailed after
him quietly. Bucky let out a frustrated growl. Dum Dum was gnawing on the stalk of one of his potato plants. Half of the others were chewed on or destroyed. Bucky pushed Jack into Steve’s arms and stomped over to pick up Dum Dum. Bucky held the kid up to his face.

“Bad girl, Dum Dum. Very bad girl.” Dum Dum continued to chew the bit of potato plant in her mouth unbothered by Bucky’s scolding. “You are both getting a time out.” Bucky walked back past Steve and around the hut to dump Dum Dum into the crate. She bleated in outrage, but Bucky ignored her and turned to get Jack. Steve was a lot closer than Bucky had anticipated forcing Bucky to take a step back. He kept his eyes on Jack taking her from Steve and settling her in the crate beside her sister.

“You’re raising goats now?” Bucky nodded, staring at his angry babies. “I shouldn’t have left like that.” Bucky tried to swallow, but his mouth was completely dry. “I just want to be clear here,” Steve said. He grabbed Bucky’s shoulder and turned him around gently. “You said you weren’t mad about the kiss.” Bucky couldn’t remember how to breathe. “You were mad that I stopped kissing you?”

“What?” Bucky’s ears were buzzing. Steve pulled back reservedly. His nose scrunched up and he looked away.

“Nothing. Never mind.” Steve stood there for a beat longer before ducking back out of the hut. Bucky looked down at Dum Dum and Jack who had given up trying to get out of the crate and nestled down to sleep.

Bucky took a calming breath and steeled himself. He stepped outside in time to see Steve trudging up the hill towards the palace. Bucky curled his hand into a fist at his side. He wasn’t running away again. Bucky jogged after him, catching him just before he reached the crest of the hill.

“Steven Grant Rogers, where the hell do you think you’re going?” Steve turned around bewildered.

“I was going to come back.” Bucky closed the distance between them in a single step. It was Steve’s turn to freeze up as Bucky reached up to pull Steve’s head down and press his lips against his.

“I wasn’t mad you kissed me.” Bucky reaffirmed. Steve grinned, his thick arms encircled Bucky’s waist and pulled him flush against his body. Steve nuzzled his bearded cheek with his nose and pressed another kiss there. Bucky turned his head and found Steve’s mouth again. The moment was so perfect and without equal that Bucky was beginning to worry that it really was another dream. He pulled away from their kiss and stared at Steve trying to find something out of place with him.

“How did you get here?” Steve kept his hands on Bucky’s waist. His fingers flexed against his robes, curling into his sides forcefully and letting up again. Dream Steve could never speak and act at the same time. It was always one or the other.

“One of T’Challa’s jets.” Bucky frowned. “Or did you mean out here to your farm? Because a man doesn’t trample through the wilds for five hours without figuring out how to get where he wants to be.” Bucky started to smile and stopped.

“Hold on. Did you just say you were lost for five hours?” Steve shrugged.

“I thought you had eyes everywhere?” Bucky put his hand to his forehead.
“God, Steve. Why are you like this?” Steve chuckled pressing his forehead against Bucky’s.

“I told you I was worried you would be mad at me.” Bucky was quiet for a minute.

“Didn’t I kiss you back?” Steve pulled his head back.

“Did you?” Bucky scrunched his face up trying to remember.

“I thought I did.” Steve shrugged again.

“Maybe you did, but I wasn’t really thinking clearly.” Steve reached up and toyed with a strand of Bucky’s hair. It felt so nice Bucky decided then and there that there was no way he was cutting it. “It’s not braided today.” Steve murmured.

“Yeah, I washed it last night and the kids won’t be here for another few hours.” Bucky grabbed Steve’s arm and turned it until he could see the time. “What time is this set to?” Bucky demanded. Steve looked over at it.

“D.C. Why?” Bucky pushed Steve’s hands away and hurried back to the hut. “What’s up?” Bucky opened his goat kit and pulled out their bottles. The kids had painted both of them to distinguish which bottle went to which goat. He stuck the first bottle between his knees and worked the cap off.

“I’m late,” Bucky told Steve when he joined him at the milk dispenser. Steve picked up the other bottle and twisted the cap off while Bucky filled the first one with milk.

“I have a lot of questions.” Bucky grinned at him, handing him the filled bottle and lid.

“First one being why am I filling up baby bottles with milk?” Steve nodded.

“For one.” Bucky laughed trading Steve bottles.

“Dum Dum and Jack are orphans. They are on a strict feeding schedule of goat milk until they’re a month old.” Bucky ducked inside and sat down on the edge of his bed. Steve took the chair. “Who do you want?”

“I don’t know which is which. I guess, this one.” Steve picked up a sleeping Jack who began bleating hungrily immediately. Bucky picked up Dum Dum and held the bottle out for her to start sucking down.

“Any more questions?” Bucky asked in the silence that followed. Steve was watching Jack greedily wrestling the milk from the bottle.

“Where did they come from?” Bucky tipped his head at Steve.

“Do you really need another birds and the bees talk?” Steve rolled his eyes grinning.

“You know what I’m saying.” Bucky laughed, patting Dum Dum’s back.

“T’Challa said their mother died giving birth to them and the farmer didn’t have the time to take care of them.” Steve frowned with some thought. “What?”

“No, nothing.” Jack emptied her bottle and began nibbling at Steve’s fingers. Steve set the empty bottle on the dresser and settled Jack back in the crate. A few minutes later, Bucky did the same with Dum Dum. Steve picked up his bottle, his eyes landing on Bucky’s journal that had remained untouched the past month. “I brought you something, by the way.” Steve announced. Bucky took
the empty bottle out of Steve’s hand and started down to the river to rinse them out.

“You didn’t have to do that.” He crouched down on the bank, scooped water into each of the bottles, and dumped it out. He stood and turned back to Steve who was standing above him holding the black bag from earlier. Steve gave him a smile and unzipped the bag reaching inside.

“Steve?” Bucky felt his throat close with fear. Steve turned back to him to show off what was in the bag. Bucky’s knees had locked up preventing him from moving. It was his nightmare all over again.

“It took me a while to track them down, but I figured I would need a peace offering if you were really mad at me.” Steve held up another journal identical to the one on Bucky’s dresser. Bucky’s heart slowly started to beat again. Steve noticed his panic. He shoved the journal back into the bag and moved down the slope to the bank. “You good, Buck?” Steve brought his hands up to cup Bucky’s face.

“Yeah. I’m good. I’m good. Thanks.” Steve searched his eyes trying to read his mind. Trying to figure out where the sudden panic attack had come from.

“You sure?” Bucky smiled and nodded. Steve’s eyes dropped from Bucky’s eyes to his lips and back again. Bucky tilted his head at him slightly. A question and an invitation all at once. Steve leaned forward and melded their lips together. Bucky was quickly becoming convinced that there was no better medicine for any ailment than Steve’s kisses. If he had planted one on him back in D.C. there was little doubt in his mind that he would have snapped out of HYDRA’s programming that second.

Chapter End Notes

I admit I was getting impatient with the slow burn.
Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve get into a lover's tiff.

The children didn’t show up like they usually did. Bucky checked his clock again and then the fields. They were nowhere to be seen. Steve had pulled his chair outside and was sitting beside the hut cradling Jack in his lap. Bucky walked around to the garden and tried to figure out what to do now that his plants had been eaten. The pen would be the first solution. No sense fixing something if it was just going to get destroyed again.

Bucky let out a long sigh. It was a lot of work. None of which he felt compelled to do anything about at the moment. Not when Steve was sitting ten yards away looking like ice cream on a hot summer’s afternoon. They had only broken apart because neither of them were particularly fond of public displays of affection. Not to mention they had both grown up in a time when two men engaging in any form of sexual relationship was punishable by lynch mob.

“What is your goal with this crudely designed collection of wood?” Steve asked when Bucky emerged from around the hut. Steve reached over and jostled a post held up by six other boards nailed to it unevenly. “Is it an art sculpture? Lawn ornament?” Bucky made a small sound in the back of his throat.

“You know I leave all that artsy stuff to you. It’s going to be a pen for those little assholes that ate my garden.” Steve gasped and covered Jack’s floppy ears.

“James Buchanan Barnes! Language!” Steve cried in mock horror. Bucky laughed walking over to scratch Jack’s hard head. His hand pet Jack’s little body a few times stopping short of Steve’s hand resting on Jack’s belly. Each time Bucky’s hand came a little closer to Steve’s until he bumped his hand against it. Then pulled away and bumped against it again. Steve stopped him the third time by twisting his fingers around Bucky’s.

“How long are you planning on staying this time?” Bucky whispered. Steve had focused on their hands. The way they fit together. The way they resembled each other’s.

“I wasn’t sure when I came here. I never let myself think that you wanted this too. I stayed at the palace for two days just working up the courage to come see you.” Bucky frowned.

“How did you explain that to T’Challa?” Steve used his other hand to scratch lightly at a spot just under his left eye.

“T’Challa left the day I arrived.” Bucky scrunched up his face. That was the first he had heard of T’Challa’s absence.

“Where did he go?” Steve patted Jack a few times before lifting her out of his lap and settling her in the grass.

“The U.N. meeting, remember? I know I told you about it.” Bucky’s mouth formed a little ‘o’ as the memory came back to him. He had worked to block out those two days for almost a month and
had evidently been on his way to succeeding. “Anyway, he’s due back at the end of the week and I’m supposed to meet Nat and Wanda in Belgrave the next day.”

“Six days.” Bucky mumbled to himself. Steve fought a smug smile and avoided eye contact, but Bucky knew he had been caught. Bucky squeezed his fingers around Steve’s letting him know he knew, too.

Hours later, they were still sitting outside watching the sky turn colors as the earth hurtled around its axis. The sun had set hours before, but neither seemed willing to start what they both wanted to happen. Bucky searched through his extensive vocabulary knowing there was a specific word for that, but unable to remember exactly what it was.

Steve stood up abruptly knocking Bucky out of his head. “I’m gonna head in.” He announced. Bucky nodded mutely and watched Steve walk into the hut. Steve turned on the lamp so Bucky could see him through the opening. Could watch Steve pull his t-shirt up over his head baring his over muscled body to Bucky and the night. Steve unbuckled the belt at his waist and flicked his eyes over to Bucky who quickly averted his eyes over to Bucky who quickly averted his eyes.

When Bucky pulled his senses back together enough to look again, Steve was gone and the lamp was out. Bucky stared at the dirt. Dum Dum and Jack were sound asleep in their crate in the middle of a still shoddily put together pen. All excuses for Bucky to stay awake or stay outside were void. He stood and made his way over to the hut.

Steve was outstretched on the bed in his starched white boxers. He smiled at Bucky when he walked in. Bucky couldn’t feel his face so he couldn’t be sure if he smiled back or not. Instead, Bucky turned and untied the curtains at his entryway so the two of them were somewhat more concealed.

Bucky fiddled with the neckline of his robes. Steve’s body was flawless. Perfect. It made Bucky only that much more self-conscious of his own mutilated flesh. He remembered the way Steve had looked at him back at the airport in Berlin when he had seen Bucky’s bare body for the first time since the war. Bucky dropped his hand and knelt on his knees on the bed completely clothed.

Steve sat up and put his hand in Bucky’s hair. “You okay?” He murmured. Bucky nodded leaning his head against Steve’s hand. “Is this too much?” Bucky smiled and shook his head. Steve moved forward until their lips were a whisper away. “Are you sure?” Bucky pushed his fingers into Steve’s light hair and pressed a firm kiss against his lips.

Steve sighed against Bucky’s mouth giving him the opportunity to deepen their kiss. Bucky pushed Steve back onto the bed kissing him hard. His lips became a thing for him to devour until he wanted more. Bucky moved away from Steve’s lips to his stubble covered jaw and down his neck. A contented groan sounded from the back of Steve’s throat that made Bucky more confident that he was on the right track.

Bucky continued kissing down Steve’s stomach loving the feeling of his muscles rippling under his touch. Steve fist his fingers in Bucky’s long hair. Bucky slid his thumb under the waistband of Steve’s boxers. Steve quivered beneath him. Bucky looked back up at Steve who had his head tilted all the way back looking away from him. Bucky turned his head and nipped at Steve’s hip just hard enough to make him jump.

“Hey!” He cried. Bucky grinned up at him devilishly. Steve reached down with both hands to yank Bucky back up beside him on the bed and press a kiss on his cheek, his jaw, and his lips. Steve had unwittingly pinned Bucky’s arm under his body keeping Bucky from touching him like he wanted to. Bucky did his best to nonchalantly free his arm amidst Steve’s sanity ending kisses.
His hip was pressing into his wrist and Steve’s leg was pressing Bucky’s hip into the bed making it almost impossible for Bucky to free himself.

“Steve,” Bucky finally said when Steve had moved to his neck. Steve stopped and looked back up at Bucky.

“Yeah?” Bucky scrunched his face up, embarrassed about his situation.

“I’m lying on my arm.” Steve blinked at him waiting for more. Bucky sighed and pushed up against Steve knocking him back and freeing his arm. Bucky rolled onto his back and flexed his fingers. Steve sat up and looked at him.

“You know that’s the first thing you’ve said to me since this afternoon.” Steve announced. Bucky stared up at him.

“Sorry.” Steve scowled at the apology.

“What’s going on?” Bucky pushed himself up so they were eye to eye.

“Nothing’s going on.” Steve turned and leaned back against the wall, his hand over one eye.

“You know, it used to be reversed.” Bucky cocked his head at him. Steve gave a wry chuckle and shook his head. “It used to be you that could never shut up.” Bucky smiled.

“Seventy years of being punished for speaking has a way of changing all that.” Bucky laughed. Steve’s smile fell and his eyes went wide. Immediately Bucky regretted opening his mouth. Bucky put his hand over his eyes.

“Bucky –”

“This –” Bucky stopped and growled at himself. “This is why I don’t say much.”

“Why? Because I react to your torture like a human being?” Steve demanded.

“Because I know you’re still blaming yourself for me getting captured.”

“Why shouldn’t I blame myself? It was my fault!”

“No it wasn’t! There was nothing you could have done. If you had gone out any further the only thing you would have done was taken yourself down with me.”

“At least I would feel like I did something.”

“You think I was the prize hen at the fair? HYDRA wanted you. Can you imagine? Captain America switching sides for the Ruskies.”

“I wouldn’t have submitted to them.” Bucky’s mouth hung open on a retort that had become lodged in his throat. Parts of his time with HYDRA were still buried. Not by brainwashing techniques or anything so sophisticated, but by his own mind. Things that were too painful to remember.

With that one declaration, it became apparent that Steve was blaming Bucky, too. Blaming him for becoming the Winter Soldier. Not that he would ever admit it out loud in so many words. More like offhand comments like that. And if he didn’t think he was blaming Bucky, he still thought he was weak.
Bucky shook his head slowly, shaking himself from the situation. He stood up and walked out of the hut to the river. The moon was sinking in the sky. He cursed himself. He should have kept his mouth shut. If he had he would still be in bed kissing Steve.

He heard Steve walk up behind him, but Bucky couldn’t look at him now. Not without the overwhelming urge to punch him in his perfect nose. They stood staring out over the water for long, quiet minutes. Bucky had given up trying to find any words to say to him, but it seemed like Steve might still be trying.

“Did you hear of the Avengers while you were hiding out in Romania?” Steve asked, breaking the silence. When Bucky didn’t answer, Steve cleared his throat and continued. “Earth’s Mightiest Heroes was what they called us. There was Tony and Natasha, who you know, and Clint and Bruce Banner, who you never got to meet, but he’s a great guy, and me.” Steve took two steps forward until he was standing beside Bucky. “Then there was Thor.”

“Why are you telling me all this?” Steve smiled.

“Just let me finish. Okay?” Bucky gave him a shrug to indicate that he continue. “So coming up on five years ago, Thor’s brother, Loki, tries to take over Earth. This is before you came out of the ice, mind you. Anyway, the Avengers assemble and we have to take down Loki and a million bug aliens called the Chitauri. Loki and his alien army wound up killing hundreds of people that day and we still don’t really know his full motives behind the attack.

“So Thor takes his brother back to Asgard –” Bucky scrunched his face, in confusion. “Asgard is where Thor and Loki are from.” Steve supplied. “So Thor takes Loki back to Asgard to be punished for his crimes and he is. Loki sat in Asgardian prison for over a year until Asgard was attacked and Thor was forced to go to his brother for help.” Steve scratched at his jaw. “There was a lot more that happened there, but honestly he lost me a couple times when he was telling the story. Anyway, Loki and Thor end up in this big fight against a bunch of aliens and Loki sacrifices himself to save Thor. Now, Loki was no wimp. He had me and Tony almost dead to rights before he just gave up. Back then, I thought we had overpowered him, but later I realized he had been holding back. A lot.” Steve was quiet for a few minutes while he gathered his thoughts.

“Anyway, my point is, Loki wasn't a good guy. He killed people. A lot of people. But Thor is still grieving. And he is still blaming himself for the death of his brother even though there was nothing he could have done to stop it. And I know it sounds crazy and stupid, but there’s this anger that comes with losing somebody you love. And for some people it isn’t so bad and they can move past it and heal, but for other people it isn’t so easy. That anger refuses to let up and it has to go somewhere and when there isn’t anyone else to direct it at, it’s sometimes easiest to direct it at yourself.” Bucky was quiet long enough that he could hear Steve getting shifty.

“Man,” Bucky said, “you really got gabby in your old age.” They laughed and Steve threw his arm around Bucky’s shoulders.

“And you got mean.” Bucky turned his head to kiss Steve’s cheek.

“Mean?” Steve fought back a smile. Bucky kissed his cheek again bringing his hand up to curl into Steve’s hair. “Me?” He peppered kisses up and down Steve’s neck. “Really?” He murmured. Steve chuckled, wrapping his arms around Bucky and walking them backwards.

“You know, you’re right. What was I thinking?” Bucky turned around in Steve’s arms so he was facing him. He kissed him again and nibbled at his bottom lip. Steve backed them into the hut and pulled the curtains back into place.
“I have a few ideas.”
“Ingcuka!” Bucky groaned and sat up in bed. The sun was already high in the sky. Bucky glanced at the clock. It was nearly noon. He groaned again and flopped back down on the bed. Steve grumbled next to him pulling the pillow out from under his head and covering his face with it. “Ingcuka!” The children yelled impatiently from outside.

Bucky lay still for a few minutes longer before springing out of bed. *Fuck!* He whipped the curtains out of the way and ducked outside. Dum Dum and Jack had managed to flip the crate over until they were able to get out and roam the half-finished pen. Bashira and Addo stood near the pen with worried looks on their faces.

“Jack Jack hurt.” Bashira told him. Bucky leaned over the enclosure to see Jack’s front leg was bleeding. Bucky reached inside and pulled Jack out. She bleated and squirmed in his grip smearing her blood up his arm. Bucky examined the wound and determined that the cut wasn’t deep but it was long and he didn’t want to risk her dying of an infection.

“Shh, shh, it’s okay, Jack.” Bucky cooed at her. Jack would not be soothed and struggled the whole way to the supply hut. There was a small first aid kit inside that had disinfectant and gauze. “Bashira, can you get the bottles ready?” Bucky called out as he concentrated on wrapping Jack’s injured leg though she refused to stop moving.

“We feed Jack Jack and Dum Dum already.” Bucky looked up at Bashira.

“You did?” Bashira nodded and looked down at her feet. “When?”

“They yelled for food, but you did not feed them. Addo and Bashira come to feed them for you, but you put them in cage and make it harder. We put the bottles through the bits of cage and let them eat, but there was something sharp on the cage and Jack Jack get hurt.” Bashira explained. Bucky exhaled heavily. He set Jack on the ground to see how she walked. Her leg didn’t seem to bother her too much which was good.

“I’m sorry, Bashira. Thank you for helping.” Bashira looked like she might cry.

“Ingcuka mad at Bashira and Addo?” Bucky furrowed his brow in confusion.

“Mad? Why would I be mad?” Bashira’s bottom lip quivered and she took a shaky breath.

“Bashira got Jack Jack hurt.” Bucky’s face softened.
“No.” Bucky pulled Bashira over and hugged her. “No, it wasn’t your fault. I promise. Look at her, she’s fine.” Bashira watched Jack trot over to Addo who looked equally terrified. Bucky let go of Bashira and walked back to the pen to lift Dum Dum out.

“Ingcuka is sick?” Bashira asked. Bucky squinted down at her.

“Sick? No. Why do you ask?” Bashira looked over at Addo and back to Bucky.

“Thomoza tell us we are not to come yesterday. She would not say why. Today you sleep very late and do not feed Jack Jack and Dum Dum.” Bucky paled. Thozoma must have seen Steve and him earlier yesterday. How much she had seen was now up to Bucky’s imagination. He tried to recall the exact time and events of yesterday morning.

“Well,” Bucky started without any idea what to say.

“You have a house the size of a closet, Buck. Where’s the shower?” Steve demanded walking outside in his boxers very obviously still half asleep. Bucky shut his eyes and grimaced.

“Captain America.” Addo uttered breathlessly. Steve’s eyes popped out of his head and he turned to quickly hide himself back in the hut forgetting how low the archway was and smacking his forehead on the stone. It made a solid thwack! that would have worried Bucky if Steve wasn’t so bullheaded.

Bucky chewed the inside of his bottom lip and watched Steve scramble to his feet and lunge into the hut to hide. The children laughed at his frantic efforts. Bashira tapped his metal shoulder, hidden under his robes once Steve was back in the hut. Bucky turned his head to look at her. She grinned at him smugly.

“I tell you he come back.” Bucky laughed.

“You did.” Bashira touched his cheeks with her index fingers.

“You happy again.” Bucky touched the tip of her nose.

“Don’t say any of that to him, okay?” Bashira nodded seriously.

“We go now.” Addo announced. Bashira nodded.

“We be back later.” She told him. Bucky grabbed Bashira’s arm and pulled her over so he could whisper in her ear.

“Not today, come over tomorrow and we can all play. Deal?” Bashira nodded again and ran off with Addo back to the village. Bucky watched them go before standing and heading back into the hut. Steve was sitting in the chair putting his shoes on.

“They left.” Bucky told him. Steve sagged in the chair.

“You could’ve warned me they were out there.” He accused. Bucky raised an eyebrow at him incredulously.

“We weren’t exactly being quiet. I thought you were a trained soldier. Shouldn’t you be aware of your surroundings?” Steve scowled.

“I’m not exactly at the top of my game at the moment. I haven’t had a decent night’s sleep in a month.” Bucky knocked his knees against Steve’s.
“Really?” Steve wrapped his hands around the back of Bucky’s knees. “A whole month?”

“Yeah?” Steve eyed Bucky suspiciously.

“That’s interesting because you only got here yesterday. Who else has been keeping you awake?” Steve narrowed his eyes up at Bucky and pulled his knees until he fell into Steve’s lap. Bucky caught himself with his arm on the back of the chair so he didn’t end up headbutting Steve. Steve leaned his head back on the chair and shut his eyes.

“Quit being cute. It’s too early for me to deal with it.” Steve grumbled. Bucky grinned and pressed his forehead against Steve’s whose eyes were still shut.

“It’s a quarter after noon.” Steve opened his eyes a fraction.

“Which means I got a whopping four hours of sleep.” Bucky frowned.

“I went to sleep at six.” Steve nodded his hands sliding slowly up the backs of Bucky’s legs.

“And I had to check in with Sam at seven and Nat at eight. I fed the goats and tried to figure out your screen there for a bit. Shuri is supposed to send some guys down to put together a pen for the goats at some point today or tomorrow.” Bucky raised his brows.

“What a busy little bee you are.” Steve squeezed Bucky’s ass causing a strange choking sound to rumble from his chest.

“Are you sure the kids left?” Steve murmured against Bucky’s lips. Bucky was breathing hard, his chest tight with anticipation.

“I told them they could come back tomorrow.” Steve pressed a kiss against Bucky’s waiting mouth. He pulled back and smirked at Bucky.

“Tomorrow? You got plans with us today or something?” Bucky laughed and nuzzled Steve’s jaw.

“Maybe.” He pressed a kiss where his jaw met his neck. “You interested?” Steve squeezed Bucky’s butt again in response. Bucky set his teeth against Steve’s flesh. Steve stood up and carried Bucky back over to the bed. Steve’s hands were tugging at the belt holding Bucky’s robes up. Bucky froze and put his hand over Steve’s to stop him.

“What?” Bucky swallowed and searched for the right words.

“I don’t want you to look at me.” Bucky managed after a few tense moments. Steve sat back and looked down at him.


“Yeah and I saw the way you looked at me the last time you did.” Steve wrinkled his nose.

“How did I look at you?”

“Abject horror probably gets closest.” Bucky looked across the room. “Pity.” Steve turned and sat with his feet on the floor and his head in his hands.

“I didn’t mean to…” Steve used both hands to ruffle his short, blonde hair. “Seeing those scars on your body and knowing that I could have potentially prevented any of them if I had just looked for you after the fall makes me feel like I let you down.” Bucky huffed.
“I told you to stop blaming yourself.” Steve shrugged.

“If only it were that easy.” He turned around on the bed and stood on his knees in front of Bucky. “But I can’t exactly make you feel the way I want you to if you insist on keeping yourself covered up all the time.” He nuzzled Bucky’s neck on the left side. Close to the spider web of scars around his metallic shoulder. “I trust you, Bucky.” Steve whispered against his skin. “Do you trust me?” Steve wove his fingers into Bucky’s hair and gently massaged his scalp. Bucky’s eyes rolled back in his head. “Do you?”

“Hmm?” Bucky asked. Steve nipped at Bucky’s earlobe.

“Do you trust me, Bucky Barnes?” He whispered in his ear.

“Yeah.” Steve’s hands were on the belt to his robes again and this time Bucky let him undo it. Steve kept peppering kisses over Bucky’s neck and jaw and cheeks and lips as he worked the belt free and pulled the robes away. Bucky shut his eyes so he didn’t have to see the look on Steve’s face when he saw his scars again.

Steve’s mouth didn’t leave Bucky. He kissed down his chest until he came to the waistband to Bucky’s pants. He untied the drawstring with one hand and used both hands to slide the pants and underwear down in one deft motion. Bucky was completely naked now. He could have felt embarrassed if he wasn’t losing his senses to Steve’s touch.

Steve slid his hands down to Bucky’s thick thighs and pressed a kiss to the head of Bucky’s hard cock. Bucky let out a guttural moan and fisted his fingers in Steve’s hair. Steve slid a hand back up Bucky’s leg and gripped the base of his cock. Steve could give a seminar on how to expertly blow a guy. His tongue curled around Bucky’s shaft and sucked deep like taking a long drag from a cigarette.

“Oh fuck.” Bucky hissed. Bucky felt him smile around his cock. Bucky pulled Steve back by his hair just before he came. Steve pushed Bucky’s hand away making Bucky look down at him curiously. Steve laughed and pulled his t-shirt over his head, using a clean part to wipe the jizz off his neck.

“Don’t apologize.” Steve pulled Bucky’s face over and pressed a quick peck against his lips. “I told you you’d feel good.” He shrugged. “I probably didn’t do it as great as you do, but I’m learning.” Bucky’s brows shot up. Bucky leaned up and kissed Steve deeply.

“No more learning. If you get any better at it it’ll probably kill me.” Steve chuckled against Bucky’s lips.

“That good then?” Bucky groaned.

“Don’t get cocky.” Steve smirked and let his eyes fall to the side. Something flickered in his eyes, but he quickly locked it away. Bucky ground his teeth together. “You know that face doesn’t hide anything.” Steve looked back up into Bucky’s eyes in shock.

“What face?” He asked in near total innocence.

“That one.” Bucky poked Steve in the cheek. “I know what you were thinking.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was thinking about how good you look naked.” Bucky scowled.

“Don’t fucking lie to me, Steve.” Steve sat back and let himself stare at Bucky’s metal shoulder.
openly. Bucky let him look, but the whole time all he wanted to do was hide. Cover himself in whatever was closest.

“Does it hurt?” Bucky glanced over at his permanent war wound. He considered it in a way he never let himself before.

“Sometimes.” Steve frowned. He reached out and whispered his fingertips over the marred flesh so lightly it raised goosebumps over the rest of Bucky’s body and made him tremble.

“Did you ever take anything for it?” Bucky scrunched his face up in confusion.

“I didn’t think they made a pill to grow back lost limbs?” Steve let a soft laugh bubble from his lips.

“No, no.” He shook the laugh from himself. “I meant something for the pain.” Bucky shrugged.

“HYDRA thought I cooperated better if they kept me in a state of constant pain just at varied levels.” Steve had frozen his face again. “In comparison, I don’t think I’ve ever felt better than I do now.”

“Does it hurt to wear the arm? Is that why you don’t want another?” Bucky shook his head.

“No? Or, I guess I don’t really know. The arm HYDRA fit me with was heavier than a normal arm. And I don’t want an arm for all the reasons I’ve already told you.” Steve held up his hands in surrender.

“Okay.” Steve looked around the hut. “Where the fuck is your shower?” Bucky laughed.

“I just bathe in the river.” Steve looked horrified.

“You live in the most advanced country in the world and you don’t have a shower?” Bucky shrugged. Steve shook his head. “No.” He stood and called up the screen. He flicked through the directory until he found Shuri’s name. He pressed a blue square next to her name and waited. The middle screen went black. Bucky thought Steve might have messed something up because it never did that when he called someone, but a few seconds later Shuri’s face popped up on the screen.

“I am very busy so this had – AAHH!” The screen went black again. Steve turned to look at Bucky in confusion.


“She’s nice though.” Steve agreed and found her name again. Bucky stood up and knocked Steve’s hand away to hit the green button Shuri had shown him to use. They waited for the call to go through listening to the ring. She answered after five rings to Steve and Bucky arguing.

“This doesn’t look like the right screen.”

“This is the button she told me to use.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t change anything. The other one looks like the button Tony and Bruce showed me.”

“Shuri told me to hit the green button for calls.”

“Well the blue button called her, too, didn’t it?”
“Shuri made this not Stark. We’re listening to Shuri.” Steve gave him an annoyed look.

“You needed something?” She asked, her voice high and tight. Steve and Bucky jumped at the sudden sound of her voice.

“Yeah, I was just wondering at the plumbing system out here. Bucky is a little bit of a barbarian, but shouldn’t he have an actual shower? Or a toilet?” Shuri was quiet on the line for a long time.

“I could, um, I could send somebody down to, um, show you.”

“Are you okay?” Bucky asked concernedly.

“Yup.” She answered a little too quickly. “Someone is on their way down now. Bye.” Steve and Bucky shared a look.

“We don’t need to worry about her, right?” Steve asked. Bucky laughed.

“I always worry about her.” Bucky looked around for his pants. “We have company coming. Put a shirt on or something.”

“What are the odds that whoever is coming down here is going to bring food with them?” Bucky opened the second drawer in his dresser and pulled out a bag of flavored chips. He tossed them to Steve who caught them and turned them around in his hands. “Where’d you get these?”

“I traded with the kids.” Bucky pulled out a new pair of underwear and sat down to put them on. Steve was watching him as he ate making Bucky incredibly self-conscious. He pulled out fresh robes and worked the greyish blue pants up his legs and tied the drawstring to the best of his single handed abilities.

“Why don’t you just wear one of my shirts instead of fighting with that thing?” Steve offered. He pulled out his black bag and searched through the contents pulling out a plain white t shirt and a soft grey t shirt.

“It’s not too much trouble. I’m used to the robes by now.” Steve frowned and pulled on the white t shirt.

“A t shirt is easier to get off.” He mumbled. Bucky chuckled shaking his head and holding out his hand.

“What a control freak.” Steve handed him the grey t shirt.

“Not really.” He leaned down to kiss Bucky lightly. “I just know I’m going to be taking your clothes right back off the second company leaves.”
Bicker

Chapter Summary

Bucky gives a TED talk, Bucky gets more visitors on his farm, and they engage in some manual labor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Joining an elite squad of super powered warriors is exactly the type of stupid I asked you to stay away from.” Bucky murmured thoughtfully. His head was resting on Steve’s bare shoulder. Their naked legs were entangled beneath the blankets. Steve chuckled softly, his hand gently stroking Bucky’s long hair.

“You might be forgetting that I am a super powered warrior.” Bucky shook his head against Steve’s chest.

“I did not forget. I do remember that that was the last thing I said to you before you went off and jumped into some military experiment.” Steve was quiet for a moment, his hand never stilling in its lazy path over Bucky’s hair.

“Where would we be if I hadn’t?” He mused aloud. Bucky didn’t reply. He knew exactly where they’d be. Steve would be long dead and Bucky would have wound up the Winter Soldier a lot sooner. Although he might still have both arms. He would have no hope of breaking HYDRA’s hold. The world would be under their control. One stupid act from his best friend changed the fate of the whole world. Bucky turned his face into Steve and pressed a kiss at his shoulder.

“Tell me about your friends.” Bucky asked, changing the subject. Steve shifted beneath Bucky, pulling him more firmly against him.

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything.” Bucky craned his head to look up at Steve. “You know where I’ve been the past seventy-odd years. I want to know more about you. I’m sure your stories are happier than mine.” Steve frowned.

“Maybe they aren’t as heavy as yours, but I have a hard time remembering ever being happy without you, Buck.” There was something hollow in Steve echoing out as he recalled the years before he knew Bucky was alive. The years before now. Before they were lying together in bed together fresh off the high of sex. It renewed Bucky’s guilt. Guilt in leaving him on the banks of the river instead of waiting for him to wake up and even before when he wasn’t fast enough on the train. More recently, when he elected to go into cryostasis rather than stay with Steve no matter how short a time he was under.

Bucky leaned up and kissed Steve softly. Steve’s hand never left Bucky’s hair. “I’m sorry.” Bucky whispered against his lips. Steve pushed Bucky’s head back to look at him.

“I don’t blame you, Bucky. It wasn’t your fault.” Bucky dropped his head back onto Steve’s chest.
“I blame me.” They were both quiet again. Bucky listened to Steve’s steady heartbeat. His fingers made small circles around Steve’s exposed flesh.

“Peggy told me that if I trusted and believed in you, I shouldn’t blame myself for what happened to you.” Bucky swallowed away the twisted feelings he had for Peggy Carter. Something somewhere between infatuation and envy. “I think she was right. What happened was an accident and it sucked, but there was nothing either one of us really could have done to prevent it. What matters is what we do now.” Steve cleared his throat. “Not that I think Peggy would necessarily be thrilled with what we’re doing now.”

“What ever happened between you two?” Bucky asked before he could stop himself. He didn’t want to hear about Steve’s ex when he was laying naked beneath him.

“I went into the ice and she married one of the men we liberated in Italy.” Steve was quiet for a beat. Bucky didn’t know what to say. “She died a few days before I found you in Bucharest. I was in London for her funeral when I got the call about the U.N.”

“You weren’t at the Accords?” Steve’s chest rumbled in Bucky’s ear as he chuckled. Bucky scowled at a thought. He sat up and stared down at Steve. “You went to the funeral of one of your last living friends from your time and none of your friends showed up for… for moral support?” Steve smiled patiently, reaching up to toy with a strand of Bucky’s hair.

“Sam came.” Steve settled his hand in the crook of Bucky’s neck. His fingers stopped just before his scars. “Natasha stopped by, too.”

“I’m sorry, Steve.” Steve tipped his head up at Bucky in confusion.

“What for?” Steve was still smiling up at him gently. Reassuring Bucky that he held no blame for anything Bucky had or hadn’t done in the time between the train and Berlin.

“I don’t know. I’m just… sorry.” Steve frowned now. He pulled Bucky’s head down to him kissing him hard. Bucky tried to keep his balance, but Steve used his knee to knock Bucky’s legs out from under him. Keeping his mouth on Bucky’s, Steve rolled them until Bucky was pinned beneath him. It was a position that, ordinarily, Bucky would have resisted violently. He was completely at the mercy of Steve, but instead of being bothered by it, it soothed him.

“No more apologizing Barnes.” Steve ordered between kisses. He slid a hand down Bucky’s chest, around his waist, and paused at his thigh. His other hand held Bucky’s arm in place at his side. Steve’s mouth moved down from Bucky’s lips to his jaw. To his neck.

“Sorry.” Bucky murmured thoughtlessly. Steve nipped at the tender flesh near Bucky’s collar bone. A small sound, almost a whimper, escaped the back of Bucky’s throat.

“What did I just say?”


“How about you just stop talking?” Steve suggested.

“You get mad when I’m too quiet.” Bucky reminded. Steve winced and sat back freeing Bucky.
“I don’t remember you being this impossible.” Steve grumbled. Bucky frowned.

“Then you might have me confused with somebody else because I don’t remember you winning a single argument.” Steve squinted at Bucky.

“I won just about every argument.” Steve argued. Bucky made a face.

“You don’t think I let you win?”

“Why would you let me win?” Bucky shrugged indifferently.

“It made you happy.” Silence fell between them. Bucky watched Steve war between believing him and finding it romantic or not believing him and finding it annoying. Bucky laughed as he saw the scale tipping towards the later. “Okay, and there was the fact that whenever an argument got too intense you would start hacking up a lung like you were dying. It was easier to let you win. Even when you were wrong.”

“It’s not like I was wrong all the time.” Steve grumbled. Bucky’s eyebrows shot up.

“Do you know how many show times we missed because you insisted they were at later times than they really were?”

“Okay, but those were easy mistakes. Anybody could get the show time wrong.”

“Steve, you told me the Dust Bowl primarily affected the South East.”

“Well, yeah.” Steve nodded. Bucky groaned and threw his head back against his pillow.

“The Midwest, Steve. It was the Midwest.”

“Well, you told me there were color films before The Wizard of Oz.” Steve accused. Bucky sat up and put his head in his hand.

“That’s because there were.”

“Ah ha! See? I looked it up and that was the first movie that ever used Technicolor.” Steve announced proudly. Bucky stared up at his smug face.

“Technicolor is the camera that was used.” Steve stared at him blankly. “A Technicolor camera uses three separate film reels in three colors and combines them to make them colored. There are other ways to color film.” Steve considered the information.

“Wizard of Oz was still the first to use it.” Bucky shook his head.

“The Gulf Between was the first film to use it.”

“Never heard of it.”

“That’s because it’s from nineteen-seventeen.” Bucky brought his knee up to his chest and watched Steve process.

“Fine, then Wizard of Oz is the first technicolor movie we ever saw.” Steve amended.

“You’re forgetting The Cat and the Fiddle. The last scene was in technicolor.”

“We never went to see that movie.” Steve argued. The rest of the memory came back to him
making Bucky regret his choice of conversation.

“I did.” Bucky admitted.


“Adelaide Luther.” Bucky told him in a small voice.


“Steve?” Bucky chewed at his lips reservedly.

“Before or after?”

“What?”

“Before or after… the incident.”

“Before. Jesus, Steve! Do you really think I could stomach being in the same room as her after what she did? Let alone take her on a date.” Steve twisted his mouth in thought.

“A pretty face can make you do pretty stupid things.” Steve scrubbed the backs of his fingers over his forehead. “Like stripping down to your underpants in the janitor’s closet only for the pretty face to give your clothes to Jerry Traeger so he could string them up on the flag pole.”

“If it’s any consolation, they’re both probably pushing daisies by now.” Bucky supplied. Steve laughed softly then harder until he was doubled over holding his sides. Bucky leaned forward and patted Steve’s back lightly. “I didn’t think it was that funny.”

“It is!” Steve gasped out, still laughing. “Don’t you see?” Steve looked Bucky in the eyes and sobered instantly. “Wait. Did you kiss her?” Bucky’s brow wrinkled.

“What?” Steve rolled his eyes impatiently.

“Did you kiss her?” He repeated. “After the movie. Or during, whatever.” Bucky scratched his bristly jaw.

“Well, yeah.” Steve’s eyebrows shot up again and he laughed impossibly harder. “Okay, I should remind you that people are dead, Steve. You’re laughing at the dead.” Steve flopped back onto the bed, his arms spread wide.

“No. I’m laughing at the situation.” Steve corrected.

“What situation?” Steve gestured between them.

“I’m willing to bet that you were supposed to go on another date with her, right?” Bucky nodded, slowly still not catching the joke. “But you didn’t go. You stood her up.” Bucky nodded again. “Why?” Bucky had to think for a minute.

“You had pneumonia. I had to take care of you while your mom worked.” Steve grinned.

“I knew it!”

“Knew what?” Bucky demanded. Steve sighed.
“You know, for a know-it-all you’re pretty slow on the uptake.” Bucky kicked Steve in his exposed ribs. “Ow. Okay. You stood up Adelaide to take care of me. Adelaide was jealous of me which is why she stole my clothes and had Jerry hoist them up the flag pole even though you already had the reputation of a playboy so it wasn’t like you were heading for a lasting relationship. Now Adelaide is either dead or really, really old with a million great grandkids running around and you’re naked and in bed with me.” Bucky stared down the bed at Steve.

“I did not have the reputation of a playboy.” Steve arched a brow at Bucky. “And it wasn’t that funny.”

“It is to me.” Steve linked his fingers together in front of him and stretched. “I wound up exactly where she wanted to be.” He announced proudly.

“Be nicer if it was exactly where you wanted to be.” Bucky muttered. Steve dropped his arms onto his chest and looked over at Bucky.

“Well, it’s not.” Bucky looked down at his knees. Steve rolled over onto his belly. He grabbed Bucky’s ankles and yanked him down onto his back. Steve peppered kisses up Bucky’s leg to his thigh and around his shaft. Bucky inhaled sharply through his nose as Steve’s mouth engulfed Bucky’s cock.

Just as Bucky was reaching the brink of climax, Steve released him and kissed the rest of his way up Bucky’s body sending chills over every inch of him. Steve kissed his neck and jaw before finding Bucky’s mouth with his own. Steve’s hand closed around Bucky’s cock and pulled him the rest of the way over the edge. Bucky shouted against Steve’s mouth and clung to him as best he could with only one arm.

Steve relaxed against Bucky’s exhausted body and kissed along his jaw until he reached his ear. Steve’s fingers massaged Bucky’s scalp lightly and gently urged his head closer to Steve.

“Now I’m exactly where I want to be.” Steve whispered into Bucky’s ear. Bucky groaned and shoved Steve over onto his back. “Hey!”

“Shh.” Bucky shushed, pressing a firm kiss to Steve’s lips.

“You can’t just stay still for five minutes?” He argued.

“Shut up, Steve.” Bucky growled in Steve’s ear. Steve grinned and pulled Bucky into a bear hug.

“Look at you getting all confident and giving orders.” Steve gushed. Bucky squirmed against Steve’s hold. Annoyed at Steve’s resistance to letting Bucky do what he wanted.

“Why are you being difficult?” Bucky grumbled struggling against Steve’s arms.

“Because it’s nap time.” Steve declared. Bucky huffed in frustration.

“Nap time can wait.” In response, Steve let out a fake snore. Bucky pushed against the bed with as much force as he could muster to no avail. Steve held him until Bucky stopped resisting and relaxed against him. Steve rubbed Bucky’s bare back soothingly until Bucky started to doze off.

A noise outside the hut jerked Bucky from his sleep. It wasn’t loud and it wasn’t particularly close, but Bucky recognized it as footsteps. Adult footsteps. Bucky’s body locked up. Every muscle was coiled tightly and ready to attack. He slowly pulled himself out of Steve’s arms only to find Steve already awake. He had heard it too.
Bucky reached down and pulled his pants on. Steve rolled to the other side of the bed and quietly pulled his clothes on as quickly as he could. Bucky pointed Steve to the window at the back of the hut. The curtains were drawn in the doorway so any exit through them would pull too much attention. Bucky had no trouble fitting himself through the narrow opening, Steve was another matter. He almost got himself stuck on his broad shoulders in an attempt to slip through.

Bucky crept around the hut and looked into the pen for Dum Dum and Jack. They were gone. Bucky’s hand curled into a fist. He scanned the immediate area for the potential offenders. He didn’t need to look far. Two men stood near the utility hut, one holding both goats in his arms while the other held what looked like a gun in his hand. Bucky counted a total of five men on his farm. Three more were messing with something at the edge of the forest.

Something made a clicking noise and Dum Dum bleated in pain. Bucky saw red. He charged the men holding his kids screaming. The men jumped in surprise at Bucky’s sudden appearance. The man holding the gun dropped it and put his hands up in surrender. The three men by the forest stopped whatever they were doing and hurried over to help their friends.

“Stop! Stop!” One of the men shouted urgently. Dum Dum and Jack struggled for Bucky in the stranger’s arms.

“Who are you?” Bucky demanded. He was surrounded, but it didn’t worry him. Bucky didn’t need a metal arm to be dangerous.

“We are here to help. We are to put in a barrier for the goats.” The man that had spoken announced. “We have orders to install a livestock barrier on this farm.”

“Who does this white man think he is?” One of the other men whispered in Xhosa. Bucky’s eyes snapped to him and he blinked in surprise. “Does he know what I’m saying?” He whispered again, still in Xhosa.

“Who gave the order?” Bucky asked, electing to ignore the man. The first man that had spoken pulled up a screen on his wristband.

“The princess.” The man clicked something with his finger translating the message into English. “She said it was a request.”

“It was.” Steve supplied from behind Bucky. “He just didn’t know when to expect you.” Steve explained. Bucky ground his teeth together. He wished Steve had kept his mouth shut. Bucky could handle this.

“What are you doing to my goats?” Bucky demanded. The man that had dropped his gun in surrender bent down and picked it up.

“He is putting a tracker in them. It is how the barrier works. It limits where they can and cannot go.” The wristband man announced. Bucky took him as the leader.

“You didn’t ask before you started injecting my goats with trackers?” Bucky demanded. He pulled Dum Dum out of the stranger’s hand. Dum Dum relaxed as soon as Bucky had him, but Jack bleated harder and kicked against the stranger’s hold.

“It was requested.” The leader explained again. Bucky nodded and passed Dum Dum to Steve.

“Go ahead then.” Bucky grumbled. The man with the gun held it to Jack’s ear and pulled the trigger. Jack screamed in pain and Bucky flinched empathetically. The man holding Jack handed her to Bucky quickly and followed his fellow workers back to the edge of the forest to continue
working.

Bucky pet Jack and made quiet hushing noises to calm her down. Steve took Dum Dum back to the pen and set her down gently. Bucky held Jack until she calmed down before letting her join her sister in the pen. Steve patted Bucky on the back maintaining a considerable distance in light of their audience.

“It’s alright. They’ll be fine.” Steve consoled him. Bucky couldn’t rid himself of the feeling of guilt. He had gotten himself so distracted with Steve that he had let his goats down. Anybody could have come by and just walked off with them both and Bucky would have been none the wiser. “Hey,” Steve shook Bucky from his rabbit hole. “It’s okay. They’ll be happier when they’re able to run around freely.”


“Let’s go inside. We can watch a movie until they leave.” Steve suggested. Bucky looked over at the workers who were digging small holes at the edge of the forest and dropping small, silver balls into them.

“You go ahead, I’m going to help them.” Bucky headed for the trees and watched the men for a few minutes more before he started digging his own hole three feet from the last hole. The men stopped what they were doing and watched Bucky working.

“You do not need to do that.” The leader told him. Bucky shook his head, his long hair falling over his face.

“They’re my goats.” He told them. “It’s my farm.” The men didn’t argue any further. Steve came over to join them, taking a place three feet to Bucky’s right and starting his own hole. The seven men continued in this way until they had worked their way in a wide circle around Bucky’s hut. Bucky was careful to exclude his field from the circle to prevent another potato eating incident.

The sun had set by the time the five workers packed up and set off for home. Bucky and Steve thanked them and watched them go. Bucky reached into the goats’ pen and lifted Jack and Dum Dum out to feed them. Tomorrow, Bucky decided he would set to taking the hobbled together pen apart and building a lean to instead.

“Look at that.” Steve remarked after they had finished feeding the babies. “We’re all alone again.” Bucky smiled at him.

“So we are, Captain Rogers.” Steve rolled his eyes.

“Not a captain anymore, Buck.” He wrapped his arms around Bucky’s waist and settled his chin on Bucky’s good shoulder. “War criminals don’t get fancy military titles.”

“You aren’t a war criminal here.” Bucky argued. “We both know governments can be wrong.” Steve smiled at Bucky, but there was only grief in his eyes. “I can’t kiss you if you’re going to keep looking like somebody stole your candy bar.” Steve chuckled.

“That’s too bad. A kiss sounds like exactly what I need to stop looking like that.” Bucky rubbed Steve’s bristly cheek lightly.

“You think so?” Steve nodded. Bucky leaned up and pulled Steve’s bottom lip between his. He kissed him slowly, easing Steve’s mouth open to find his tongue with his own. Steve, for his part, let Bucky do as he pleased. He didn’t try to take control of the kiss or move them into the hut.
Bucky wondered at that, but couldn’t deny that he was grateful. He liked when Steve took control, but he liked it even more when Steve let him make the decisions. He supposed that might have something to do with being at the mercy of a corrupt organization for seventy-plus years. Steve must have had some idea that Bucky needed to have some control.

“Are you going to follow orders this time, Rogers?” Bucky crooned against his lips. Steve’s brows shot up in surprise. He grinned slow and easy.

“Sir, yes, sir.” Bucky pushed Steve back towards the hut and slapped his ass.

“Get in there and strip.” Bucky barked.

“Sir, yes, sir!” Steve answered, running into the hut with Bucky close at his heels.

Chapter End Notes

I minored in film and Bucky planned a double date to a science fair. This seemed fitting.
Steve gets ready to leave again and Bucky tries to talk him out of it.

“Nesoka! Catch!” One of the children yelled at Steve. The girl threw a small ball made of petrified wood at him. Steve caught it easily, turned, and lobbed it across the field to a child about a hundred yards away.

Bucky hadn’t yet figured out what the nickname meant, but he assumed it was something that would embarrass them both based on Bashira’s reaction whenever he asked. And her reluctance to answer. Bucky figured he would work it out of her after Steve left.

In ten hours.

“Dum Dum! You cannot eat wood!” Bashira scolded the little goat. She was gnawing at one of the mallets the children had been using to hit the ball earlier. Bucky moved back and forth between the utility hut and his garden. He had been working on repairing the damage the goats had caused on and off for the past week.

Steve was content to let him work while he played with the kids. Bucky was glad Steve had the chance to relax here. Once he left he was going to have to keep his guard up at all times. There would be no laughing or smiling. No playing or fun. Not for Steve. Bucky forced himself to stop thinking about it.

“We are late!” Bashira announced, dropping the bat and looking around at the cluster of children on the farm. She shouted at the other kids in Xhosa to hurry home. Steve tossed the ball to a child a few feet to his right and turned to find Bucky.

“I’m going to miss them.” Steve confessed. Bucky laughed lightly.

“They’re going to miss you, too.” Bashira eyed the two super soldiers.

“Why miss you?” She asked. Steve looked down at her in surprise.

“I have to leave tomorrow.” Steve explained. Bashira’s eyes went wide and she gave Bucky a deeply concerned look.

“Did you fight?” Steve wrinkled his forehead.

“No?”

“You cannot leave, Nesoka! Ingcuka will be too sad!” Steve laughed and patted Bucky on the back.

“Ingcuka will be fine. We’ll talk on the phone and I’ll be back to visit in no time.” Bashira fidgeted considering Steve’s answer.

“How long will you be away?” Steve was suppressing a smile desperately trying not to laugh at
Bashira’s line of questioning.

“Could be a couple of weeks or it could be a month. I won’t know until I’m out there.” Bucky knelt down in front of Bashira.

“You don’t have to worry, Bashira. I won’t be alone will I?” Bashira stared at Bucky.

“You won’t?” Bucky shook his head and smiled reassuringly. “Because Dum Dum and Jack Jack?” She took a shaky breath to calm herself.

“And you.”

“Me?”

“You’re still going to come and visit me, aren’t you?” Bashira smiled with relief.

“Yes. I come visit you while Nesoka is away.” She agreed.

“And you’re going to tell me what his nickname means while he’s gone, right?” Bashira blushed deeply. Bucky laughed at her reaction and started to get back to his feet. Bashira grabbed his wrist and pulled him back down to whisper in his ear. She released him and bolted away clearly embarrassed. Bucky stood back up, blushing brilliantly. Steve patted his shoulder, shaking him lightly.

“What did she say?” Bucky cleared his throat and shook his head.

“Tell ya later.” He uttered. Steve threw a casual look around the now empty field. He stepped behind Bucky and wrapped his arms around his waist.

“It’s our last night together for a bit.” Steve purred in his ear. He kissed the spot just below Bucky’s earlobe. “I think we should make the most of it. Don’t you?” Bucky leaned back into Steve’s hard chest and shut his eyes.

“Do you have something special in mind?” Bucky pressed his ass against Steve’s quickly stiffening crotch. “Or are you just horny?” Steve nuzzled the crook of Bucky’s neck with his bristly chin.

“Why can’t it be both?” He murmured. Bucky rolled his head heavenward and shut his eyes with a heavy sigh. Steve’s fingers fumbled with the belt at Bucky’s waist, his lips moving over his exposed flesh. Just as he got the belt undone, Bucky pushed his way out of Steve’s embrace and walked into the hut.

Bucky finished undoing his robe and set it on the back of his chair. He turned and looked back outside where Steve was still standing. He was staring at his hands and frowning, an internal conversation happening on his face. Bucky fought a wicked grin. Steve dropped his hands shoving them in his pockets and looking up at the moon.

“Are you going to just stand out there all night? I thought you had something special in mind.” Bucky called over to him. Steve jerked his head down to look at Bucky standing bare chested in the archway. He grinned pulling a hand from his pocket and shoving it into his hair hustling over.

“I thought I was just horny.” He retorted before closing his lips over Bucky’s. Bucky fist his hand in Steve’s hair and kissed him hard. Like his life depended on it. And it really felt like it did.

“Why can’t it be both?” Bucky gasped as Steve untied Bucky’s pants and shoved them down his
legs. Steve smiled against Bucky’s mouth and kissed him again. Careful to close the curtains before walking them both over to the bed.

“I have an idea.” Bucky announced in the quiet confines of their bed. Steve couldn’t be bothered to formulate an articulate sentence so he hummed his response. “You stay here with me and let Sam and company survive on their own.” Steve groaned.

“Buck,” he graved. “You know I can’t do that.” Bucky pressed his forehead into Steve’s chest.

“Why not? They’re big boys and girls. They can protect themselves just fine without you.” Bucky argued.

“And if something happened to one of them?” Steve countered. “Something that might have been prevented had I been with them instead of distracting myself with you?” Bucky sat up.

“Oh? So I’m a distraction now?” He demanded more than a little insulted. Steve rolled his eyes and pulled Bucky back down to his chest.

“You know that’s not what I meant.” Steve rubbed Bucky’s back and pressed his nose into Bucky’s hair. “I have to go. I already promised Nat I would be there and T’Challa has a jet set to drop me over Belgrave tomorrow.”

“Drop you over?” Steve groaned.

“Are you going to get this nitpicky over every little detail?”

“Only when it includes you jumping from planes.” Bucky snapped. Steve huffed.

“I’ll be fine.”

“Famous last words.”


“I don’t want you to leave.” Bucky admitted. Steve squeezed Bucky tightly. Not tight enough for Bucky’s liking, but comfortably. Steve pressed a kiss into Bucky’s hair.

“What did Bashira tell you earlier?” Steve whispered after a while abruptly changing the subject. Bucky was clinging to Steve like a life preserver in a violent ocean.

“What your nickname means.” Bucky sighed contentedly. Steve’s heartbeat was steady in his ear playing Bucky’s favorite song. Steve whispered his hand over Bucky’s hair in long, slow pets.

“What’s it mean?” Bucky smiled at the knowledge.

“I’m not saying.” Steve stilled his hand.

“That bad?” Bucky shook his head against Steve.

“When you come back next I will tell you.” Bucky grinned. “But only if you bring me something.”

“This sounds like extortion.” Bucky laughed.

“Fine, I won’t tell you.” Steve rolled them over until Bucky’s back was pressed into the mattress and Steve was straddling his hips.
“I’m willing to bet I can make you.” Steve taunted playfully. He slid his fingers down Bucky’s belly softly and gripped his hips in both hands.

It was meant to be seductive. It should have been erotic. Instead, something else made Bucky’s heart start to race and his throat close. Steve didn’t notice right away, he simply smiled down at him. But then it wasn’t Steve. It was another man. A less friendly man. Bucky shoved Steve back with all his strength knocking him off the bed and into the wall hard enough to crack it.

“I won’t do what you want.”

“Is that so?”

“No matter what you do to me, I will never do what you tell me to.”

“I’m willing to bet I can make you.”

Before Steve could find his feet again, Bucky was on his. He was shaking violently and he knew he needed to calm down. He was trying to calm down. Steve slowly got to his feet and held a hand out to Bucky, showing he was unarmed. Signaling that he wasn’t a threat, but Steve kept flashing to the other man and that man was a threat.

Bucky grabbed his pants off the back of the chair and dashed out of the hut. He pulled the pants on as he ran. An amazing feat for any person let alone one with only one arm. He heard someone following him and logic said it was Steve, but everything else was saying it was HYDRA. Bucky was already reaching speeds of forty miles an hour, but his pursuer was hot on his trail.

He didn’t know where he was. He didn’t know where he was going. He made a sharp left heading for trees. Hoping he could lose his pursuer in them. Just before he reached them, a brick wall slammed into him, tackling him to the ground. It snaked around him and held his legs and arm down at his side. Bucky squirmed and jerked and fought back as hard as he could.

“Bucky!” Someone said in his ear. It was a familiar voice. “Bucky! Bucky!” It was Steve. It was Steve, but it wasn’t Steve. “It’s okay! It’s okay, hey.” The voice dropped from frantic to soothing. “Shh, shh, it’s okay. It’s just me, okay?” His captor rocked them slowly. “It’s alright, Buck. It’s me. It’s Steve. Shh. It’s Steve.” Bucky’s heart gradually slowed back down. His sense worked its way back into his mind.

“Steve,” Bucky repeated more to himself than Steve.

“That’s right.” Steve cooed, still rocking them slowly.

“Steve.” Bucky gasped again blinking away the memories. The trauma.

“Shh.” Steve shushed. “You’re okay.” Bucky’s face was wet, but it wasn’t raining. Sluggishly he realized he was crying.


“I know you are, Buck. I know.” Steve was petting Bucky’s hair back from his face never stopping his steady rocking. He needed to say something else. Think of more words.

“Sorry, Steve.” Awesome.

“Quiet now, Buck. Just breathe.” Bucky did as he was told and tried to shake away the feeling
that Shuri’s technique hadn’t worked. That he was broken beyond repair. Steve made soothing noises in Bucky’s ear until Bucky’s breathing became less erratic. Bucky sagged against Steve, exhausted.

“I’m okay, Steve.” He told him. Steve rubbed his hand over Bucky’s chest.

“You sure?” Bucky nodded and pushed his way out of Steve’s arms to stand up. Steve jumped to his feet first and kept a steadying hand on Bucky’s waist. “Do you know what happened?” Bucky put his hand over his face.

“It wasn’t a fugue like Berlin if that’s what you’re thinking.” Steve squeezed his fingers around Bucky’s waist lightly.

“Then what was it?” Steve asked gently. Bucky shook his head slowly.

“A memory, I guess.”

“A memory of what?” Bucky felt his eyes heating up again, but he refused to start crying again.

“Before they broke me.” Steve was quiet for a few seconds. The night noises were the only sound.

“And I made you remember that?” Bucky pressed his temples with his fingers. There was no way for Steve to have known that that phrase would set Bucky off. Bucky didn’t even know. It wasn’t his fault, but Bucky was certain Steve would no doubt blame himself.

“Oh, shit.” Bucky cursed. “Is your back okay?” Bucky started around Steve to examine any damage he had caused. Steve grabbed Bucky’s arm and stopped him.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry about me.” Bucky gave him a small smile.

“No amount of torture or brainwashing could ever get me to stop worrying about you, Steve Rogers.” Bucky swore. Steve grinned and tugged Bucky into a tight embrace. He kissed the side of Bucky’s head and rubbed his hands up and down Bucky’s bare back.

“Buck?”

“Hmm?”

“You know where we are, right?” Bucky leaned back and looked around them. There were no obvious or recognizable landmarks around them and it was nearly pitch black to boot. Bucky frowned.

“I don’t.” Steve grimaced and leaned his head against Bucky’s.

“I had a feeling you were going to say that.” Bucky shrugged and started back the way they had come.

“Why don’t we just follow our footprints back?” He suggested. “Not like we were being especially covert in our midnight sprint.” Steve joined him on his path locking his fingers with Bucky’s.

“You always were the smart one.” Steve declared. Bucky snorted.

“I was the logical one.”
“Isn’t that what I said?”

“No. It’s different. Logical just means I use my common sense.” He squeezed Steve’s hand. “You tend to go with your gut, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t smart. Just means you aren’t logical.” Steve shouldered Bucky playfully.

“Are you trying to flirt with me, Barnes?” Steve taunted. Bucky frowned and shook his head firmly.

“Of course not. If I were flirting with you, you wouldn’t have to ask.” Steve nudged Bucky again.

“Okay, then. Show me.”

“What?” Bucky was thankful that it was the middle of the night so Steve couldn’t see how furiously he was blushing.

“Say something flirty to me.” Steve insisted. Bucky shook his head.

“I can’t just turn it on like a switch.” Steve stuck out his bottom lip and put his free hand on his back.

“Oww.” He whined. “My back.” Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve and jerked his hand out of Steve’s. “I think it’s responding to you being mean to me.”

“You punk.” Steve made his bottom lip quiver.

“It feels like someone threw me into a wall.” Steve whined. Bucky gritted his teeth and stopped walking.

“Let me see it.” He ordered. Steve turned around and let Bucky examine his back. It wasn’t even bruised. Bucky slid his hand over the smooth flesh and stopped at the waistband of Steve’s jeans. Steve was standing perfectly still. Bucky grinned mischievously and pushed his hand under his jeans resting his chin on Steve’s shoulder. He squeezed Steve’s bare ass making Steve groan. “You’ve got a great ass, Rogers.” Bucky murmured in his ear. Steve smiled.

“That so?” Bucky pulled his hand out of Steve’s pants wrapping his arm around Steve’s waist and kissed his neck.

“Almost as great as your smile.” Steve beamed and turned around to face Bucky.

“I gotta say, that sounds an awful lot like flirting.” Bucky pulled Steve’s bottom lip between his teeth and sucked.

“What do you say we go back to my place so’s I can get a look at that great ass up close an’ personal?” Bucky continued, affecting a thick Brooklyn accent. Steve laughed against Bucky’s mouth.

“Lead the way.”
While the Cat's Away

Chapter Summary

Shuri distracts a depressed Bucky in Steve's absence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve was gone again. Bucky had tried not to let it bother him. To just get on with his life while Steve was away. For about an hour. Then he flopped onto his back in the dirt and watched the clouds drift by overhead. Jack and Dum Dum came by and snuffled at his hair and hand. Bucky sighed mournfully.

He should have gone with Steve up to the palace. The kids were the only reason he hadn’t. They couldn’t be left alone and unsupervised even with the trackers in their ears. Anything could happen to them. Bandits could come cut their ears off and whisk them away for some nefarious purpose. Maybe as a ransom to force Bucky to assassinate someone for them. So Bucky had stayed and Steve had left.

“Sergeant Barnes?” Shuri called cautiously. Bucky didn’t move, he just kept staring up at the clouds and the blue, blue sky.

“Good morning, Princess. Beautiful day, isn’t it?” The words were robotic and apathetic. Shuri leaned over his head and stared down at him, blocking his view.

“What are you doing?” Bucky huffed out a sigh.

“Wishing I were dead.” He grumbled. It wasn’t true. He was wishing he were wherever Steve was, but he wasn’t about to tell that to Shuri.

“Are you going to be this mopey every time your boyfriend leaves the country?” She demanded. Bucky’s cheeks ignited and he quickly sat up.

“What?” Shuri rolled her eyes.

“Do you think I cannot put two and two together?” She demanded. “Captain Rogers leaves early this morning and I come here to find you lying on your back in the dirt. It isn’t hard to see why.” Bucky cleared his throat.

“No, I meant….” Bucky stood up and started for the utility hut. “Steve and I are just friends.” Bucky explained. Shuri arched her eyebrow at him.

“Just friends?” She repeated. Bucky reemerged from the hut holding a bucket and a hoe. He nodded at her. “That’s odd.” Bucky squinted at her.

“What’s odd?” He started for the garden. Shuri followed him leisurely.

“I have a lot of friends, too, you see.” Bucky laughed and nodded.
“I could have guessed as much.”

“Both boys and girls, too.” She clarified. Bucky set his bucket down on the edge of the field and started to use his hoe to move some soil away from the broken stalk of his potato plants.

“Is that right?” Bucky answered distractedly.

“That’s right. And maybe it is just an odd American thing that I simply haven’t heard of before, but…..” Bucky knew she was goading him, he just couldn’t figure out her angle.

“What are you getting at?” Bucky demanded getting tired of her game.

“I don’t make a habit of sitting butt naked in bed with my friends is all.” Bucky forced the hoe down at a bad angle slicing through the base of the potato stalk he was working at.

“Ha?” He choked out. Shuri was barely containing her laughter from her success at having caught him off guard. Bucky tugged the blade of the hoe out of the mud and worked on composing himself.

“I think you might almost be as embarrassed as I was.” Bucky cleared his throat.

“What are you talking about?”

“If you are going to use the video call, at least put on pants first.” Shuri wrinkled her nose. “There are some things that I really don’t care to see and you naked is one of them.” Bucky was desperately trying to come up with some excuse for why he and Steve would have been naked together that didn’t sound absurd. He was coming up with nothing.

“It wasn’t what it looked like.” Bucky managed. Shuri smirked at him.

“No?” She chuckled. “Then what was it like?”

“We, uh,” Bucky looked around avoiding her eyes. “I was getting dressed after washing myself.” Shuri squinted at him.

“Then why was Captain Rogers calling to ask about a shower?” Bucky remembered the aforementioned phone call. “And your hair was bone dry.” Bucky swallowed nervously.

“Sorry.” He didn’t know what else to say. He rubbed his neck nervously as he recalled reading a story of two men being strung up by lynch mob in South Carolina after being found in a relationship. Shuri was smiling at him and it seemed friendly, but his eyes were scanning the area for a hidden mob ready to tear him to pieces.

“For exposing yourself to me?” Shuri hummed. “I suppose I can forgive you, but you are going to have to do me a few favors.” Bucky scratched his jaw.

“Favors?” He parroted reservedly. Shuri nodded.

“Like trying on one of my arms and assisting me in my lab for a couple of days.” Bucky blinked at her.

“You aren’t….” Bucky looked at his feet and dug his toe into the dirt. “No lynching?” Shuri scrunched up her face at him.

“Why on earth would we do a thing like that?” Shuri demanded. Bucky rubbed the back of his neck and focused on his severed potato plant.
“Because we’re two men and we… we uh….” Bucky couldn’t bring himself to finish the sentence. He could barely let himself believe that Shuri found nothing impure with his and Steve’s relationship.

“That might be a problem where you are from, but here in Wakanda we are much more evolved.” Shuri declared proudly. Bucky peeked up at her from hooded eyes. She straightened her back and picked up her chin proudly. Daring him or anyone else to defy what she had declared. Bucky let himself relax, but only a bit.


“How does he feel about that?” Bucky pressed his lips together in a reserved smile.

“He doesn’t know. I mean, he doesn’t know what it means. He knows they call him that, obviously.” Bucky was rambling. He never rambled anymore. He stopped and started worrying at his cheek.

“Are you going to tell him?” Shuri asked, not noticing or not understanding his change in demeanor. Bucky nodded, keeping his eyes glued to the ground.

“I am here as requested.” A woman announced stepping hesitantly towards Shuri. Shuri turned and beamed at the newcomer.

“Thank you, Thomoza. You are a wonderful help.” Shuri pointed to the front of the hut. “The goats are up there.” Bucky’s head snapped up.

“What’s happening to my goats?” Shuri and Thomoza froze and looked at Bucky.

“Nothing is happening to them. Thomoza is going to keep an eye on them for a while.” Shuri told him calmly. “They are not going anywhere.” She assured him.

“Why does….” Bucky remembered what Shuri had demanded of him as penance for flashing her. “You want me to go right now?”

“Afraid?” She teased. Bucky nodded slowly.

“Of you? Absolutely.” Shuri beamed at him. Reaching out to tug on his arm.

“Let’s go, you big baby.” Shuri chattered as they walked back to the palace about anything and everything under the sun. Apparently she was going to be spending a lot of time in California in the coming months which meant that she would have less time to tinker in her lab. She was excited about the new position she had been given by T’Challa.

Shuri led him through the maze of the palace and straight into her lab. There were three more scientists in the lab studying various designs and codes that Shuri had evidently created. Bucky couldn’t help but feel awed at the amazing creations abundant all over Wakanda, but especially in Shuri’s lab.

“Sit down.” Shuri ordered, gesturing to a high backed medical chair. Bucky did as he was told and jumped up on the seat. He sat for maybe an eighth of a second before he leapt back down breathing heavily. Shuri turned back around and looked at him concernedly. “Are you alright?” She walked forward reaching towards Bucky as she did. Bucky jerked away from her almost instinctively. Shuri dropped her hand. “Sergeant Barnes?”

“No.” Bucky spit out. He was fine. He was fine. He was in Wakanda. He was with Shuri who
he trusted. Did he trust Shuri? He should. Steve obviously trusted her. Steve wouldn’t leave Bucky with somebody he didn’t trust. But Steve trusts everybody. He trusted Tony Stark and they almost killed each other. Steve trusted Bucky and Bucky had almost killed him, too.

“Are you having another memory?” Shuri’s voice was extraordinarily soothing. “Can you tell me about it?” Bucky shook his head. His teeth were clenched together so hard he was amazed he hadn’t bitten clear through his skull. “No you aren’t having another memory or no you can’t tell me about it?”

Bucky couldn’t respond to her. He was spiraling. It was like losing his mind all over again. Watching it happen of its own free will and twice in as many days to boot. He was somewhat grateful that he seemed to be cognizant for it. At least he could stop himself from killing anybody if it came down to it. Maybe.

“Sergeant Barnes?”

“No.” He growled through his clenched teeth. Shuri was quiet for a moment. Watching him. Evaluating him. Bucky flicked his eyes up to the exit. The other three scientists had all stopped what they were doing and were watching him with reserve. There were two Dora Milaje posted outside and several more spanned the palace and Wakanda as a whole. He wasn’t getting out without a fight if he got out at all.

“Bucky?” Bucky’s eyes went back to Shuri’s. She gave him a small smile. “Bucky, you can tell me about your memory, right?”

“The chair.” Bucky ground out. Shuri looked over at the high backed chair. Her eyes scanned over the equipment surrounding it and nodded slowly.

“How does this chair hurt you, Bucky?” Shuri pressed gently.

“It hurts.” Shuri frowned and went to the chair, running her hands over the cushions carefully.


“But not this chair, right, Bucky?” Bucky swallowed and stared at her. “This chair does not have lightning.” Bucky looked at the chair again. The color was a bit different than HYDRA’s lightning chair. The shape was more rounded at the top and there were no steel restraints on the arms or feet.

“No lightning.” Bucky repeated. He blinked away the image of the lightning chair. His shoulders sagged. “It’s not the same chair.”

“It’s alright, Bucky.” Shuri soothed. She turned to the other scientists. “Would you mind giving us the room?” The scientists dropped whatever it was they were working on and quickly exited the lab.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.” Shuri let out a laugh.

“As if you could frighten me, Ingcuka!” She turned away from him and returned to her earlier task. Bucky scooted back until his butt hit the edge of a table. He boosted himself up onto it, away from the chair.

“You looked a little scared.” Bucky accused. Shuri turned around holding an arm. It was black
with gold stripes. Like a reverse tiger. Bucky’s gut twisted.

“I was concerned.” She grumbled. Bucky smiled at her as she started to attach the arm to his metal shoulder. It clicked into place and Bucky looked over in surprise. It was impossibly light and comfortable. He moved the hand up to examine it.

“Whoa.” Bucky breathed. He turned his wrist slowly and dropped his hand back down. Shuri was pleased with the results.

“How does it feel?”

“Like I never lost my arm in the first place.” Bucky admitted. Shuri grinned.

“This is my simplest design. I added a shielding mechanism, but that is about the extent of my fiddling.” She announced. Bucky was still staring at the arm turning it this way and that way to get a good sense of it. “So you’ll keep it?” Bucky dropped his arm and looked at her.

“It’s not that I don’t appreciate everything you’ve done – are doing for me. It’s just that I want to get by without a loaded gun attached to me.”

“It’s an arm, Bucky. It isn’t a weapon.” Bucky stared at the black and gold palm.

“On me it is.” He whispered. Shuri took a long breath and let it out slowly.

“Alright. If you are sure.” She started to take the arm back off.

“Hey, if war gets declared on Wakanda or if Steve or anybody needs me for some life or death mission, this is absolutely the arm that I want for the fight.” Bucky promised her. Shuri grinned as the arm popped back off.

“It’s a deal.” Shuri promised. Bucky flipped his robe back over his metal shoulder and pushed his hair back out of his face.

“What’s next?” He asked. Shuri smiled, her eyes brightened with excitement at a somewhat more willing subject. He wondered how her other forced subjects must behave when she tried to show them something.

Shuri had Bucky trying all manner of gadgets, devices, and games she had figured out. Bucky, while admittedly reluctant at first, was all too happy to join her in whatever it was she wanted to try next. Bucky marveled at the extreme level of invention she had created at only sixteen. Technology had always amazed him. From the time he was six years old, he had made it a habit to discover the inner workings of every new invention possible.

If only Bucky’s family had had enough money to send him to college he could have been a great engineer. But then Bucky wouldn’t have enlisted when the war started. He wouldn’t have been Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes and Steve would likely have still ended up in the war. Only without Bucky he might not have made it out. Or maybe he would have fared better. There was no sense in imagining things that never would be, but Bucky couldn’t stop himself.

It was midnight before Shuri decided to call it a day. Bucky started for the door when Shuri called him back. Bucky stifled a yawn and returned to Shuri’s side.

“It is too late to go back to your farm now. Do not worry about the goats, Thomoza has them covered. You can sleep here.” She pointed to the hospital bed he had woken up in. Bucky wrinkled his nose at it.
“That’s a really nice offer, but….” Shuri giggled.

“I am kidding. You will sleep in one of the guest bedrooms.” Shuri brushed past him and led him deeper into a part of the palace he had never seen before. “We have beds so soft you feel like you are sleeping on air and beds so firm you feel as though you are sleeping on a slab of stone. Which do you prefer?” Bucky fiddled with his hair as they walked.

“Firmer is better.” Shuri nodded and turned down another corridor. She walked past three doors without even glancing at them and opened the fourth door down.

“I will have someone escort you back to your farm first thing in the morning.” Shuri led him into a room that was larger than his hut. It might have even been larger than his whole apartment back in Bucharest. There were four large windows that stretched from the ceiling to the floor looking out onto the city. “Unless you would like to stay and have breakfast. We could even go back to the lab and I could show you a few more of my toys.” Bucky bobbed his head up and down, still reeling over the extravagance of the bedroom.

“Yeah, breakfast sounds good.” He mumbled distractedly. Shuri turned and headed further into the room to another door.

“The bathroom is just through here. The shower is temperature controlled so it won’t get too hot or too cold. The toilet is on the left so don’t sit on the one on the right unless you want a surprise.” She laughed. “I will send someone down to get you for breakfast in the morning.” She walked back toward the hallway. “Good night, Bucky.”

“Yeah, g’night.” Bucky was staring out the window at the spectacle that was the Wakandan capital. The door opening made him turn around. “Shuri, wait.” Shuri paused, her hand on the handle.

“Yes?”

“Earlier you asked if I was having, ‘another memory’.” Shuri nodded. “Did Steve tell you about yesterday?” Shuri pressed her lips together. She had already answered his question.

“He was concerned about you.” She explained. Bucky nodded.

“He thinks I’m still the Winter Soldier.” Shuri shook her head.

“Do you know what post-traumatic stress disorder is?” Bucky shook his head. “It is a little hard to explain, but when the body experiences a traumatic event, especially when that traumatic event stretches out over the span of days or months or years, the body has a difficult time processing it. The subconscious mind often replays moments of extreme stress keeping the body in that traumatic environment. You have been in a traumatic event longer than anyone else on record. There is no telling the effects that kind of stress will have on your body.”

“So I’m traumatized. What else is new.” He muttered. Shuri shook her head.

“It goes beyond trauma. Your mind has been rewired to expect certain things in certain situations, like with the chair. Your body expected pain when you sat in it which is why you started having your episode in the lab.” If that was true then everything should be causing those episodes. Bucky always expected pain. “We just need to figure out what triggers these episodes. From there we can likely work up a treatment.”

“Steve asked you to do this, didn’t he.” He wasn’t a question. Shuri smiled at him softly.
“He loves you and wants the best for you. There is nothing wrong with that, is there?” Bucky chewed at his cheek. This was the second time someone had told him that Steve loved him and it wasn’t Steve saying it either time. Admittedly, Bucky had never told Steve he loved him either.

“Thank you, Shuri.” Shuri nodded.

“Of course, Bucky. Get some sleep and I will see you in the morning.” She took two steps backward and shut the door, locking Bucky alone with his thoughts. As massive as the room was, there was no way it was large enough to contain all the thoughts and emotions coursing through Bucky’s body.

He let his shoulders sag and crawled into the bed pleased to find that it did in fact lean closer to feeling like sleeping on a slab of stone. It was easier for him to fall asleep without Steve in bed with him. The past five nights had afforded Bucky very little sleep. He couldn’t get himself to relax enough with someone else in bed with him even if that person was Steve. Yet when he did fall asleep, Steve was the only thing he dreamt about.

Chapter End Notes

DISCLAIMER - I'm not a psychiatrist so my explanation of PTSD may not be entirely accurate. This is a work of fiction and there is still a lot of research being done on people with PTSD.
Earn Your Place

Chapter Summary

Bucky meets more Wakandan royalty. T’Challa loses an argument. Bucky wins a fight. Steve does something unkind.

Bucky didn’t sleep long. The environment was unfamiliar and he could hear the occasional footsteps of passing guards pacing in the halls outside his door. In all, he might have slept two or three hours which was what he had become accustomed to in the past week. He watched the sun rise over the capital. Awed by the way it slowly came to life. People sprang out of their homes and began moving around the streets the second the sun rose above the horizon.

Someone knocked at his door and Bucky turned around, relieved he had already showered and dressed. He opened the door to one of the Dora Milaje. She stared at him impassively for a long, quiet minute before sighing heavily. Bucky rubbed his jaw with the heel of his hand.

“Good morning?” He greeted, breaking the tense and awkward silence.

“Mholo.” She returned. Bucky gave her a tight smile and looked beyond her into the hallway.

“Kwasekuseni?” The Dora Milaje arched a brow at him curiously. The corners of her mouth flicked upwards for a millisecond before she corrected herself and resumed her stern countenance. She turned away from him and led him through the palace until they reached a wide, open room with a table half the length of a football field running through it.

Five people sat around it. T’Challa was seated at the head of the table on the opposite end of the room from where Bucky had entered. A woman with short hair in a green dress sat beside him to his right. A large man in fur sat to her right speaking to T’Challa. A woman with snow white hair braided back from her face sat on his left. Shuri was seated beside the white haired woman. She looked up when Bucky entered and her face split into an easy grin.

“Good morning, Bucky!” She greeted merrily. She jumped up from her seat and hurried over to him. The other occupants at the table grew silent and stared at him.

“Mholo.” Bucky mumbled back, very aware of the stares he was receiving.

“Is he albino or is your sister dating a white man?” The big, fur covered man whispered to T’Challa. T’Challa waved away the question.

“Sergeant Barnes, it is good to see you again. Come sit and have breakfast with us.” T’Challa called to him.

The Dora Milaje that had guided him to the dining room moved over to stand behind T’Challa. Shuri tugged him over to the seat on her left. She set her hand on the white haired woman’s shoulder and smiled at Bucky.

“This is my mother, Ramonda.” The Queen Mother nodded gracefully to Bucky. Bucky nodded back.
“It’s nice to meet you.” Shuri pointed across the table to the woman in green.

“This is Nakia, T’Challa’s girlfriend.” Nakia blushed and looked over at T’Challa shyly.

“Hello.” Bucky greeted quietly. Shuri pointed over to the fur covered man.

“That is M’Baku he is the leader of the Jabari tribe.” M’Baku fixed Bucky with an intense glare. Bucky tried to smile at him, but wasn’t sure he achieved his goal.

“Morning.” Bucky greeted despite the glare.

“And you already know T’Challa and Okoye.” Shuri said, pointing to the Dora Milaje behind T’Challa. Bucky gave her a short nod. He was fidgeting behind his chair suppressing his instinct to run from the room.

“Please, sit, Sergeant Barnes. We have plenty of food.” T’Challa gestured to the plethora of breakfast foods spread out on the table. Bucky was surprised to see pancakes and waffles among the breakfast items. There looked to be food from all over the world.

“Thank you.” Bucky said quietly. Shuri stared at him as she shoveled food into her mouth. Bucky sat stiffly beside her staring down at his empty plate. After a few minutes, someone began piling food onto his plate. Bucky looked up and saw Shuri grabbing one of everything and setting it before him.

“This man cannot even feed himself?” M’Baku berated. Bucky looked up biting back a retort. He set his hand on Shuri’s wrist and smiled at her. Shuri got the message and sat back. Bucky set his hand back in his lap and stared at the food trying to make himself relaxed enough to eat it.

“Does nothing look appealing, Sergeant Barnes?” Ramonda asked. Bucky looked up at her in surprise. She hadn’t said anything since Bucky had entered the dining room.

“No, it looks fine. Everything looks fine. Wonderful. Thank you.” Bucky stammered.

“We would be happy to have someone make you something more suitable to your tastes if you would like.” Nakia offered. Bucky smiled and shook his head. Nobody looked convinced so Bucky scooped up a sunny side up egg and stuffed it into his mouth.

“Is anybody going to explain to me who this white man is?” M’Baku demanded. “Is he like the other one?” Bucky wrinkled his brow. Had this man met Steve?

“This is Sergeant Barnes –”

“Call him Bucky.” Shuri corrected. T’Challa looked from his sister to Bucky before nodding.

“Very well, this is Bucky. He is a great warrior with a troubled past and he is taking refuge in our great country.” T’Challa told M’Baku skipping over most of Bucky’s history. Not that Bucky minded. “He is a guest.”

“A guest.” M’Baku scoffed. “You say he is a great warrior, but he looks like a weakling to me. He cannot even feed himself.” Bucky picked up his fork and stabbed it through a pancake shoving the whole thing in his mouth in one bite while maintaining eye contact with the Jabari leader. M’Baku raised his brows and leaned back. “He is a refugee which means it is probably best that people outside of Wakanda do not know he is here, correct?”

“Then he will fight me.” M’Baku declared. Bucky swallowed his pancake keeping his eyes on M’Baku.

“He is a guest!” Shuri protested.

“And you say he is a great warrior. I do not believe for an instant that he can hold his own in battle. He is wide eyed like an antelope.”

“There is a time and place for such discussions.” Ramonda admonished. M’Baku, for all his posturing, actually looked sheepish. For a brief moment at least. He cleared his throat and looked over at T’Challa who was finding his mostly empty plate entirely fascinating and avoiding eye contact with everyone else at the table.

“He proves himself to me or I expose his location to Ross.” M’Baku threatened.

“You will do no such thing!” Shuri exclaimed.

“To even say such a thing is treason.” Okoye announced. M’Baku crossed his thick arms over his chest and leaned back in his chair.

“Sounds to me like you all are afraid he is not the great warrior you claim.” T’Challa said nothing, but looked at Bucky to respond. Bucky understood that the decision was up to him. If he decided not to fight M’Baku, T’Challa would no doubt do whatever it took to keep him safe. Bucky sighed. He didn’t realize staying for breakfast would cause this many problems.

“I’ll fight you.” Bucky told M’Baku. M’Baku shifted his gaze back to Bucky and nodded.

“Good. Then it is settled.” Bucky stood up, bracing himself.

“Not here, for crying out loud.” Ramonda cried. “Take them to the training field.” T’Challa scrubbed his hands over his face and stood up.

“Why do I keep inviting you to breakfast?” T’Challa shot at M’Baku.

“You never invite him.” Okoye muttered.

“He shows up like a cat that smells food.” Nakia finished. T’Challa sighed and led his posse out of the dining hall and through the palace. Bucky noticed Shuri did not follow them. He was a little glad for that. If he lost control of himself while fighting he would prefer not to frighten her.

The training field was immense. Like a coliseum on steroids. Bucky stepped onto the hot sand in his bare feet. M’Baku went straight to a weapons rack and pulled out a club. Bucky looked at the assortment of weapons. He could get more done with a pocket knife than with any of the available weapons. Even one handed.

Before he could make a decision on a weapon, Shuri appeared at his side. Bucky looked down at her determined face. “You do not need one of those.” She uncovered something in her hands. Bucky sighed at it. It was the black and gold arm. “You said this was a loaded gun when it was attached to you. Now is your chance to prove it.” Bucky shut his eyes and nodded. “Once you kick M’Baku into the sand, I will take it right back off. I promise.” He let her attach the arm to his shoulder and turned to face M’Baku.

“What is that?” M’Baku asked, squinting at the arm. M’Baku pulled his fur off so he stood bare chested in the middle of the arena. Bucky pulled the top part of his robes off in imitation. If he had to guess, he would say that none of the present company had ever seen him shirtless before.
With exception of Shuri, everyone seemed to be holding back thinly veiled expressions of shock, pity, and disgust.

Bucky flexed the fingers on his metal arm experimentally and rotated it on his shoulder. It felt as comfortable then as it had the night before. He dropped his shoulders and set his feet a little more than shoulder width apart. A firm stance. M’Baku took a similar stance. He grinned maliciously at Bucky before lunging at him. Bucky ducked under his big swing and spun in the same moment. He kicked the back of M’Baku’s knee forcing him to the ground.

M’Baku brought his club up towards Bucky’s gut, but Bucky quickly moved his metal arm down to block it and used his other arm to boost himself over M’Baku’s back. He wrapped his arm around M’Baku’s neck and used the man’s weight against him, pulling him over and throwing him onto his back. M’Baku let out a gasp and took half a second to find his bearings. Bucky didn’t wait for him. He ripped the club from M’Baku’s hand and flung it across the arena as far as he could.

M’Baku waited for Bucky to get close. He grabbed Bucky’s metal arm with both hands and rolled up so he could get his feet on Bucky’s chest. He pulled as hard as he could trying to unarm him. Bucky let him try for a few seconds before he used his leg to break M’Baku’s hold and picked the man up. He tossed M’Baku a few feet across the sand and watched him land and slide. Bucky waited for him to get to his feet or surrender.

“Does he have the power of the Black Panther in his blood?” M’Baku accused. T’Challa grinned and shook his head.

“I promise you he does not.” M’Baku snarled and looked back at Bucky who was still waiting for him to decide whether he wanted to continue the fight or surrender.

“I guess this means I do not have to go easy on him anymore.” M’Baku snarled pulling a sword from the weapons rack and turning back to Bucky. “You think you are tough, huh?” M’Baku taunted. “You won’t feel so tough when I finish with you.” Bucky watched M’Baku wordlessly. He paced around the edge of the arena waiting for an opening he wouldn’t find.

Bucky decided to let him think he found an opening when he got around behind him. He took a step to the side to keep an eye on him and let his arm drop a fraction of an inch. M’Baku charged him swinging the sword at him wildly. Bucky ducked and grabbed his wrist with his hand and snapping it with his metal hand. M’Baku shouted and dropped the sword. Bucky used his grip on M’Baku to flip him over his shoulder, but before he could, M’Baku swung with his free hand and caught Bucky on the jaw.

Bucky’s head snapped to the side and he dropped his hold on M’Baku to stumble backwards. M’Baku grinned and growled, marching for Bucky and grabbing him around the neck. Bucky put both hands on M’Baku’s arm and both feet on his chest and kicked. They both fell onto their backs in the sand. Bucky flipped backwards and stood. M’Baku rolled to the side and got to his feet.

Bucky moved quickly, he grabbed M’Baku’s injured wrist with one hand and stuck his foot in M’Baku’s shoulder and pulled. He heard it pop and M’Baku screamed. Bucky released his arm and kicked him in the chest sending him flat onto his back again. This time, Bucky followed him over and pushed his foot down onto the man’s throat. M’Baku reached up to push his foot away with his uninjured arm and Bucky grabbed it and twisted until he grunted with pain.

“Yield, M’Baku.” T’Challa called. “Before you are injured too much more.” Bucky put a bit more pressure on M’Baku’s throat and twisted his arm a fraction more.

“Just dislocated, you will be fine. Have the doctors reset your joints.” She told him.

“White devil.” M’Baku hissed. T’Challa walked over to help the man to his feet.

“I told you he is a great warrior. You did not believe me.” T’Challa told him. M’Baku snarled in response.

“Ready?” Shuri asked Bucky. Bucky looked down in confusion. She took his metal arm in her hands and Bucky nodded. She pressed at his shoulder and the arm released from his body. Bucky stretched his neck and back. He rubbed his sore jaw with his hand and watched M’Baku shuffle off to the palace alone.

“You never cease to impress, Sergeant Barnes.” T’Challa told him.

“Bucky.” Shuri corrected. T’Challa nodded.

“Why not keep the arm now?”

“Leave him be.” Shuri huffed. T’Challa looked offended.

“It was a simple question.”

“A question he has already answered on several occasions.” T’Challa turned to Nakia for help, but she just shrugged at him.

“If he has already given you an answer, you really should not keep needling him about it.” Nakia supplied. “To do otherwise would be rude.” T’Challa balked.


“At least you weren’t trying to kill me again, huh?” Bucky joked. T’Challa bit his bottom lip and nodded.

“You tried to kill him?” Nakia asked aghast. She had evidently not been filled in on Bucky’s history either. T’Challa winced.

“There is a lot more to the story.” T’Challa started.

“So you tried to kill him and then you let M’Baku try to kill him while he is a guest in your country and then you act surprised when he wins?” She continued.

“Nakia, it wasn’t –”

“You are unbelievable.”

“No, ma’am, he thought I killed his father. It wasn’t his fault, I was framed pretty convincingly. Even I had to remind myself that I wasn’t even in the country when the bomb went off.” Bucky told her rushing to his benefactor’s aide. T’Challa pointed to Bucky and nodded.

“Yes, you see?” Nakia narrowed her eyes at T’Challa.
“This man was framed for a bombing that he wasn’t even in the country for and you couldn’t do a bit more research before you tried to murder him for a crime he did not commit?” T’Challa flinched and looked at Bucky helplessly.

“Well, I am a pretty notorious assassin so I’m a pretty easy patsy to pin things on.” Bucky supplied weakly.

“You do not have to defend him, Bucky. He should own up to his mistakes or he will never learn from them.” She scolded. Bucky looked over at Shuri for help. Shuri shrugged.

“I have learned from them. He is here is he not? No one can frame him for something if he is under Wakandan protection, right?” T’Challa thought for a moment. “And even if they did, they could not get to him here.” Nakia shook her head.

“You are unbelievable.” T’Challa rubbed his jaw.

“Well, as fun as this conversation has been, I think I shall escort Bucky back to his farm now.” Shuri announced mercifully. She pushed Bucky’s arm into Okoye’s hands. “Please take that back to my lab for me.” She requested with a wink.

“I will do that right away.” Okoye swore before hurrying away. Shuri turned back to Bucky and pushed him across the arena.

“Move faster.” She hissed at him. “We have about thirty seconds before they start pawing each other like rabbits.” Bucky glanced back over his shoulder at the pair who were standing inches apart. Bucky turned away just as they collided. He looked down at Shuri who was focused on putting as much distance between her brother and his girlfriend and them as she could.

“Ingcuka!” Bashira screamed the second they reached his farm. She leapt into his arm. Bucky caught her easily. Shuri laughed beside them. “I thought you were gone forever!” She whined. Bucky set her down and patted her head.

“I just had a few things to take care of at the palace.” He told her. “How are Dum Dum and Jack?” The kids charged around the side of the hut as though he had summoned them.

“Thomoza says they are spoiled. They did not want to eat because you were gone and they slept on the bed and Thomoza could not get them to stay outside.” Bashira giggled. Bucky pet them both and kissed their hard heads.

“Is that right? Are you girls spoiled?” Dum Dum bleated at him making him smile.

“Did you do something to Ingcuka in your lab?” Bashira asked Shuri. Shuri nodded.

“Nothing bad, I swear.” She smiled. Bashira turned back to Bucky.

“Nothing bad?” Bucky looked over at her.

“Of course not.” He laughed. Bashira nodded.

“Is Nesoka coming back?” Bucky frowned.

“I haven’t talked to him since he left. I don’t know what he’s going to do.” Bashira frowned. Thomoza appeared from the side of the hut with Addo beside her.

“Bashira, Thomoza says it is time to go home.” Addo called. Bashira huffed.
“Ingcuka just got back!” She protested.

“Bashira! Home now!” Thomoza ordered. Bashira scowled and stomped her way to the edge of the farm.

“Good night, Bashira!” Bucky called out.


“Thank you for keeping an eye on these two, Thomoza.” Thomoza stared at Bucky for a few minutes.

“You have bad goats.” She declared before following Addo and Bashira through the trees to the village on the other side.

“My goats aren’t bad.” Bucky muttered. Shuri traipsed inside his hut and turned his screen. Bucky sat in the dirt patting his goats and cooing at them sweetly.

“Bucky, come in here.” Shuri called. Bucky stood and walked over to Shuri. She pointed to a flashing icon in the corner of the screen. “That means you have a voicemail.”

“What is a voicemail?” Shuri rolled her eyes.

“A recorded message.” She told him. “It means somebody tried to call you and you didn’t answer so they left a message.” Bucky furrowed his brow. “Just press it.” Bucky tipped his head and did as she said.

“Hey, Buck, how are you doing? Uh, I guess I must’ve missed you or you’re busy with the goats or the kids or the garden or, uh, something. Anyway, I was just calling to say hello. I don’t know what time it is where you are so maybe you’re sleeping in which case I am sorry for waking you. Go back to bed. Okay, well, call me when you get this I guess. Or whenever you have a minute.” The message cut off. Bucky reached over and scrolled through his contacts until he found Steve’s number.

“Hey, hey. Wait until I leave, would you?” Bucky froze and looked over at her.

“Right. It’s probably getting sort of late about now, huh?” Bucky said. Shuri smirked at him and shook her head.

“You should hit the blue button this time.” She suggested moving around Bucky and standing in the archway.

“Blue button? What does that one do?” Bucky looked at the square and triangle. “Did you tell me this already?”

“Oh, that button is the one you hit to return voice messages. So if he leaves a message for you, you have to hit the blue button to call him back.” Bucky nodded. That made sense. “Good night, Bucky.”

“Night, Shuri. Thank you for yesterday. And tell your mother breakfast was wonderful.” Bucky told her out of politeness.

“You know my mother did not cook the food at breakfast, right?” Bucky wrinkled his brow.
“Right. Yeah, of course not. Thank Nakia.” Shuri giggled.

“How about I thank the cooks instead?” Bucky nodded.

“Yeah, right. Of course.” Shuri shook her head.

“Good night, Bucky Barnes.” She walked away shaking her head and Bucky returned his focus to his screen. He cleared his throat and hit the blue button. The screen went black just as it had when Steve had used it earlier. It rang out a few times before Steve’s face popped up on the middle screen.

Steve smiled easily. “Hey, Buck.” Bucky wondered if Shuri had all of Steve’s old movies somewhere in her computers. Steve was so comfortable on film. He remembered when Steve and the Howlies had been followed by that film crew documenting the successes of Captain America. Bucky stared at Steve’s perfect face for a few seconds longer.

“I miss you.” Bucky said. Steve’s smile broadened.

“I miss you, too, Bucky.” Bucky’s eyes popped out of his head.

“How the hell did he do that?” Bucky whispered to himself.

“It’s a video call, Buck. Didn’t Shuri explain that to you?” Bucky swallowed.

“Can you see me, too?” Steve laughed.

“Of course I can, Buck. That’s what a video call is.”

“Holy shit.” He whispered.

“Steve?” A woman called in the background. Steve turned and looked to the left.

“Yeah, just a second.” Steve called back to her.


“It’s never a bad time for you.”

“Steve, Natasha said Wanda attracted some bogeys. They’re diverting and heading east now. She’s going to call you when they’re clear.” The blonde from Berlin came into view behind Steve. Steve turned around to face her.

“Either of ‘em hurt?” The blonde shook her head. She was wearing a bathrobe and had a towel around her head. Bucky swallowed tightly. What was Steve doing with her?

“No, Romanov says they both got out unscathed, but they don’t want to lead trouble to our doorstep so they’re moving away until the coast is clear.” Steve nodded.

“Okay, well, get some shut eye and we’ll regroup in the morning. Figure out where to go from there.” Bucky’s chest was squeezing. He didn’t want to think about Steve and the blonde sleeping in the same room together. Not when the taste of Steve’s mouth was still fresh on his lips.

“You know there is such a thing as being too much of a gentleman.” The blonde teased. She stepped closer to Steve and put her hand on Steve’s chest. Bucky ended the call. He couldn’t stomach seeing anymore. He wanted to throw up as it was.
Bucky pressed the button to close the screen and flopped down on his bed. Jack and Dum Dum jumped up onto the mattress beside him and curled up. Bucky stared up at his ceiling and tried to banish the images of Steve fooling around with the blonde. They wouldn’t budge and Bucky didn’t sleep.
What's the Opposite of an Apology?

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Bashira do some trading and Steve comes back to Wakanda to talk to Bucky.

Twenty-seven voicemail messages flashed on Bucky’s screen. All of them were from Steve. Bucky stared at the messages blinking at him expectantly. He couldn’t delete them but he couldn’t bring himself to listen to them either. He didn’t want to hear Steve’s feeble excuses for why he was staying in a hotel room with the woman he had kissed right in front of him and why she still thought she and Steve had a romantic relationship in the works. Unless he had slept with her anyway which Bucky really had no desire to hear about.

Bucky groaned and turned his screen off. This should have been a happier day for him. It was time to harvest. He had been harvesting tomatoes the past week as they became ripe and traded them with the villagers for other foods. Today he was harvesting his potatoes.

Bucky shuffled outside and grabbed his bucket from his utility hut and made his way to the garden. It was hard to believe he had already been in Wakanda for almost three months. He worked his first potato from the ground and massaged the skin to make sure it was fully ripened. When the skin didn’t rub off, he set the potato in his bucket and moved on to the next one.

He wound up with sixty-two potatoes altogether. He took them down to the river to wash them off before he began separating the potatoes he would trade from the potatoes he would replant. They were much larger than the potatoes he had cut up to plant which meant he would be able to cut them into quarters instead of halves and grow more. He decided on keeping twenty potatoes, trading thirty-two, and keeping the final ten for himself.

The potatoes he would be replanting were left in the bucket beside the field. The potatoes he was keeping he took inside his hut and stored in a bowl on his shelf with his two tomatoes. The trading potatoes he put in a basket. He had showered the day before and the children had already fixed his hair so he decided it would be a good day to go to the small village market and trade.

He waited for Bashira. As good as his Xhosa was getting with the constant exposure to it, he wasn’t completely fluent which made it easy for him to get had by sellers in the marketplace who already hated him because he was a white man in their land. Bashira tended to soften their views on his presence and she was a fierce haggler. She could get more out of a single tomato than Bucky could get out of a dime in nineteen thirty-seven.

She didn’t take long to appear. She knew he was planning on harvesting that day and had planned to arrive early to go with him to market. It had become something of a routine in the past week since his labors had borne their fruit. They walked the seven miles to the market place and back which gave Bashira ample time to tell him everything that had ever happened to her, around her, or in Wakandan history ever.

She didn’t take long to appear. She knew he was planning on harvesting that day and had planned to arrive early to go with him to market. It had become something of a routine in the past week since his labors had borne their fruit. They walked the seven miles to the market place and back which gave Bashira ample time to tell him everything that had ever happened to her, around her, or in Wakandan history ever.

Bucky never minded. Even when she switched back and forth from English to Xhosa with little to no warning. Her stories made the fourteen mile journey feel like nothing at all. The goats had even matured enough that Bucky didn’t need to babysit them every waking hour of every day.
could leave them be for a few hours and not worry about them getting into everything. They were good goats no matter what Thomoza said.

“We should hurry quickly to the market today, Ingcuka. Dakari’s brother says they have American candies today.” She told him excitedly. Bucky let her lead the way, easily keeping up with her running over the rough terrain. “I want a Snickers bar like they have on the commercials. Or Skittles if they have them. I wonder if they really start to grow out of your body when you eat them. I don’t know that I would like that.” She babbled. “Baba gave me two coins to spend today since Addo sprained his ankle and cannot go.”

“Addo sprained his ankle?” It was news to Bucky.

“Yesterday he was helping the builders on a new hut and he fell through a weak spot in the roof. Baba sent for a medic and they did an x-ray to make sure it wasn’t broken. It wasn’t, but he cannot walk on it for one week.” She flipped back and forth from English to Xhosa making her story difficult for Bucky to keep up with, but no less entertaining and educational.

They continued their walk in this manner for over an hour until they reached the bustling marketplace. Bashira exerted much more energy than Bucky had to give. She hopped over logs and swung on low hanging tree branches and skipped and sang as they walked. Bucky couldn’t help but smile at her spirit.

An hour later, they were on their way back with their arms loaded down with their scores. Bashira had managed to get four candy bars with her coins. Bucky traded one of his potatoes for two candy bars of his own. He would have to put them in the freezer in his utility hut the second he got home so they didn’t melt in the heat. He also traded for a pot to cook in, three baby chicks so he could have eggs, corn feed for the chicks, two watermelons, and a wagon.

Bashira berated him for buying the wagon. It was old and rusted and the wheels were squeaky. She insisted that Shuri would have happily given him a hover cart if he asked. “We could even ride the hover cart to and from market because they have an autopilot feature and are capable of carrying thousands of pounds of stuff.” She declared. Bucky shook his head at her.

“Walking is good for you. It’s exercise.”

“Bah.” Bucky laughed at her disgusted look. She poked her fingers through the woven cage the chicks were settled in and wiggled at them. “What will you call these ones?” Bucky shrugged.

“Haven’t decided yet.”

“How did you decide on Jack Jack and Dum Dum’s names?” She asked.

“Dum Dum Dugan and Union Jack were friends of mine back in the forties.” Bucky explained. “Those weren’t their real names, just so you know. They were their nicknames, like how you call me Ingcuka.” Bashira nodded.

“I know. Your real name is Bucky.”

“Bucky’s actually a nickname, too.” Bashira wrinkled her brow.

“Do you not have a real name?” She demanded. Bucky laughed.

“Of course I do! Bucky is short for Buchanan. My full name is James Buchanan Barnes.” Bashira scrunched up her nose at him.
“White people have the weirdest names.” She said. Bucky laughed again.

“I guess so.” They walked on in silence until they reached Bucky’s farm again.

“James Buchanan Barnes.” Bashira said. “There is someone down there.” She pointed toward the fire pit and Bucky tensed up.

“It’s Steve.” He said. He sighed and patted Bashira on the shoulder. “Head on home for the night. Thank you for coming out with me.” Bashira nodded and ran down the hill heading for home. She passed Steve as she went.

“Busuku benzolo, Nesoka.” She told Steve.

“Night, Bashira.” Steve called after her.

Bucky pulled the wagon over to his utility hut and started unloading it. The chicks would stay in their woven cage until he got trackers for them. He sprinkled a bit of the corn feed in the cage with them and put the cage just outside the utility hut. Bucky heard Steve walk up behind him, but elected to ignore him just as he had ignored the twenty-seven voicemails.

“Hi, Bucky.” Steve said. “Oh, hi, Steve! Great to see you again! Haven’t seen or talked to you in over a month, how have you been?” Steve responded in lieu of Bucky’s response. “Oh, I’ve been pretty torn up since my best friend refused to answer any of my calls or respond to any of my messages.” Bucky picked up one of the watermelon and carried it into his hut settling it on his table. “Buck, can you just talk to me?” Steve asked following after him.

“Sounds like you’re doing a fine job carrying on this conversation all on your own.” Bucky told him returning for the second watermelon.

“I can only assume this is all because of Sharon.” Steve proclaimed. Bucky picked up the second watermelon.

“Is that her name?” He said as he passed in front of Steve again. Steve sighed and put one hand over his eyes and the other on his hip. Bucky set the watermelon on the table beside the first one and came back out to the yard.

“Look, nothing happened between us. I promise. And you would know that if you had stayed on the line a few seconds longer instead of hanging up and throwing this month-long hissy fit.” Bucky picked up his axe and walked over to his pile of firewood. There was enough firewood there to last ten Brooklyn winters already, but Bucky found the practice cathartic.

“Hissy fit.” Bucky parroted vaguely sarcastic.

“Yeah, Bucky. That’s what this whole display is. The refusal to have a conversation about what’s bothering you everything you’re doing right now. You’re acting like a three year old having a temper tantrum.” Steve continued. Bucky brought his axe down on a log forcefully.

“Did you come all the way out here to do this?” Bucky demanded. He settled a new log in front of him.

“Have this conversation? Because I wouldn’t have had to come all the way out here if you had just answered your damn phone.” Bucky shook his head.

“I mean did you come all the way out here to be an asshole?” Bucky brought the axe down on the log and looked up at Steve. Steve stared at him for a few seconds. The muscle in his jaw
twitched.

“Fine.” Steve flipped his hands up before shoving them in his pockets. “But at least I tried.” He turned for the hill.

“Did you try to tell Sharon you weren’t available anymore? Did you try to tell her you were seeing somebody else? Or did you spend the night with her in a hotel room in Budapest or Brussels or wherever the hell you were?”

“Belgrave.” Steve mumbled.

“Right. So you two obviously have an attraction for one another and you decided to share a hotel room with her anyway.” Bucky brought his axe down on another log. “And if you try and tell me it was for some bullshit tactical reason think again. We were taught the same tactical skills and we were on a hundred missions together so I already know it’s bullshit so just don’t.” Steve put both hands over his face.

“We were going to be spending a lot of time going back and forth between our rooms anyway and it was safer to stay in one room instead. Less possibilities for detection.” Bucky scoffed and split the next piece of wood. “Did you want me to get caught? Do you even know where they’re sending gifted people that don’t abide by the Accords?” Steve accused.

“Don’t do that.”

“It’s called the Raft. It’s a prison in the middle of the ocean. If you have powers they put a dampening collar on you like a dog. They lock you in a cage and make sure that even if you somehow escape, you’ll die before you make it back to solid ground.”

“Shut up.” Bucky warned.

“If that’s what you want for me I can go turn myself in to any U.N. government right now.” Bucky saw red. He chucked his axe at Steve, aiming just an inch to his right. It sailed past him and landed somewhere in the middle of the river. “Are you insane?” Steve cried.

“You don’t get to come here and make me feel guilty because you fucked up! You stayed alone in that hotel room with the blonde you kissed in Berlin. Nobody made you. That was your choice. You didn’t bother to either end the call with me or tell her you were too busy to talk when I called. And you and nobody else forgot to tell her you were already involved with somebody else before she started making moves on you. So don’t come at me with your bullshit, Steve. I’ve got better things to do.” Bucky shouted. Steve nodded slowly.

“Sorry I wasted your precious time.” Steve said. He turned for the hill again and Bucky was content to let him go. He was far too angry to tolerate him. Even if it was Steve.

“Don’t leave, Nesoka!” Bashira cried, running out of the trees. Bucky wheeled around and grabbed her around the belly to stop her. She pushed Bucky’s arm away impatiently. “No, Nesoka! Don’t go, Ingcuka didn’t mean it! He was sad. Don’t leave when he is sad!” She pulled at Steve’s shirt with both hands though they had no effect.

“He doesn’t want me here, Bashira.” Steve told her. Bashira was practically sobbing into his shirt.

“He wants you here. He wants you here.” She cried. “Please, please don’t leave.”

“Let him go, Bashira.” Bucky told her. She glared at Bucky.
“Tell him you are sorry! Tell him you want him to stay!” Steve looked over at Bucky completely expecting him to obey.

“I don’t have anything to apologize for. And his apology was more of an accusation.” Bucky shook his head at the two of them and started for his hut. “I think we could both use a little more time apart.” Bucky flopped onto his bed and listened to Bashira beg Steve not to leave a few minutes more.

Bashira stomped into his hut. Bucky looked over at her tear stained cheeks and reddened and puffy eyes. Her bottom lip was trembling and her hands were fist at her sides. Bucky couldn’t force her to understand the argument she had walked into. He didn’t know how to explain to her why Steve’s explanation didn’t make anything Bucky had seen or Steve had done any better.

“I hate you, James Buchanan Barnes.” She spit at him. “I will never go to the market with you again and I will never argue with the merchants over how many potatoes the things you buy are worth and I will never come to play with you ever again.” Bucky was working on a response, an apology, or both when she turned in a huff and stomped back out of his hut and back to the village.

Steve had come back again and somehow Bucky had lost both him and Bashira. Bucky knew he wasn’t going to sleep anytime soon. He sat up and hit the button to bring up his screen. The twenty-seven voice messages flashed lazily in the corner. Bucky tipped his head at them. They’d already had the huge blowout fight. Nothing Steve had said over the phone could be worse than that. Bucky stood up and pushed the first voice message.

“Bucky, what happened? Did we get cut off or something? Where’d you go? Call me back.”

Bucky clicked the garbage can icon to delete the message. The second one queued up and began playing immediately.

“I’m going to go ahead and assume you hung up because of Sharon, but she wouldn’t have said anything to anybody if she had seen you. I promise.” Bucky rolled his eyes and deleted the message.

“Okay, maybe you’re mad about her coming on to me. I get it. You’re jealous. It’s kinda cute really. I promise nothing happened between us so just call me back.” The messages weren’t especially long winded or even that apologetic. Steve didn’t seem to think that he had done anything worth apologizing for.

“Are you really not going to answer you phone? You’re acting like a child. Call me back. Please.”

“You know what? When I was dodging your phone calls and avoiding you, you got mad at me. Now you’re doing the same thing. Do you see how that’s a bit hypocritical? I’m not even in the same hemisphere as Sharon anymore. Get over yourself and pick up the damn phone.”

“Bucky, buddy, please call me back. I miss you. I know you miss me too.”

“Remember that time Scooter Ramone called me dainty and told me I should wear a dress after I had that asthma attack in gym class? I know he just switched schools after that, but I’ve been thinking maybe you really did kill him. Not like you beat him to death or anything, but like one of his cuts got infected and he died because he didn’t want to be called dainty for going to the hospital.” Steve laughed into the phone. “You hear about these asthma inhalers they have today? What I wouldn’t have given for one of those back in the day. Oh and they can cure scoliosis now, too. Isn’t it amazing? Okay then, call me later.” Bucky smiled in spite of himself. Steve hadn’t ever outright apologized for the hotel room, but it was absolutely impossible for Bucky to stay
mad at Steve even when he deserved it.

“Bucky, I am flying in to Wakanda in two days. You’re going to have to talk to me then. Even if you’re still mad about something stupid.” Bucky deleted the last of the messages and walked outside.

Steve couldn’t have left the country yet. He had just arrived and T’Challa wasn’t going to just send out a jet wherever Steve wanted at the drop of a hat. They may be friends, but T’Challa had a country to run. Bucky checked Dum Dum and Jack who were sleeping inside the utility hut and dropped some more corn feed in the chicks’ cage. He dusted his hands off on his robes and started the seven and a half mile jog to the palace.
Bucky scares the bajeezies out of T’Challa.

Bucky had seven miles to think up what he was planning to say to Steve. Seven miles without a child or non-super soldier stringing along beside him forcing him to pace himself. So… about ten minutes. In which time he decided that the one thing he was definitely not going to do was apologize. And an extra two minutes to remember why he was angry with Steve in the first place.

Bucky maneuvered through the palace with a bit more ease now that he had spent enough time in, out, and around it. He found his way to the main room where he could hear Steve’s low rumble. Bucky gritted his teeth. He had started for the palace with good intentions, but now that he was here his anger at Steve dredged itself back up. Bucky shoved the door open to the main room and T’Challa and Steve both turned to look at him.

“Sergeant Barnes, good to see you again so soon.” T’Challa greeted. Bucky had tunnel vision. All he saw was Steve and rage. Steve looked entirely patronizing at Bucky’s sudden appearance.

“Buck, look, you don’t have to say anything. I know you probably didn’t mean—”

“And another thing,” Bucky shouted over him. Steve’s face fell and he took a step back. T’Challa’s brows shot up. He had never seen Bucky angry. Not even when he was trying to kill him. “You say all the time how nothing I did while under HYDRA’s control was my fault, but you never seem to miss an opportunity to bring it up or allude that something I’ve done is the product of being the Winter Soldier.”

“Oh, come one. When have I ever said that?”

“When you said very clearly that you would never have submitted to HYDRA’s influence. Like, like, like somehow you’re stronger than me.” Bucky huffed. Steve took a deep breath.

“Maybe we could do this somewhere else?” Steve suggested. Bucky felt himself becoming blinded by this rage that was broiling in his gut. The worst thing was that he knew it was an overreaction. He knew he was making a bigger deal out of practically nothing. But he didn’t know how to make himself stop.

“Don’t patronize me.” Bucky snarled. Steve’s eyebrows shot up with surprise.

“I wasn’t. I just think this is a personal matter. If we’re going to argue, we should do it privately.” Steve’s logic was sound. Steve had always been against what he called, ‘public indecency’. Everything from kissing to brawling were all personal matters that should be kept out of the public eye. Hugs were okay as long as they were kept short. Sure the arguments might start publically, but they were always settled privately in a back alley. Bucky knew all this, but he didn’t seem to have the patience for it at the moment.

“Is it so hard for you to just say, ‘I’m sorry’ and be done with it?” Bucky snapped. “That’s all you ever had to say. Instead, you treat me like an idiot for being hurt by what you did.”
“I didn’t do anything. I told you nothing happened. And you are an idiot.” Steve looked over at T’Challa hesitantly. T’Challa had his hands folded in front of his face watching the argument thoughtfully. Bucky could tell Steve wanted to ask T’Challa to leave, but this was T’Challa’s home in the country that T’Challa was the king of. He was outranked in every possible way which meant that T’Challa would leave when T’Challa wanted to.

“You didn’t do anything?” Bucky stomped towards Steve and slugged him right on the chin. Steve’s head snapped back leading his body to the floor. T’Challa leapt up onto his chair as though a mouse had skittered under his feet.

Steve sat up on the floor and rubbed his chin gingerly. “Use your words, man.” He muttered. Bucky stared down at Steve fighting down his own shock that he had thrown a punch over something so insignificant.

Bucky took a deep breath and held it. He counted to thirty and slowly released his breath through his nose. Bucky was trembling. It felt like something else had taken over his body. It wasn’t HYDRA command, of that much he was sure. It was more like HYDRA influence. He had lived seventy years by their order. More than three times as long as he had ever lived without it. It was like their ideals and philosophies had borne into his bones and made themselves cozy. Number one ideal; order through pain.

“Shit.” Bucky put his hand in his hair. “Shit. Shit. Shit.” He cursed. “Sorry. I’m so sorry.” Bucky fisted his hand in his hair and pulled a bit. Like he was pulling the thoughts and impulses from his mind.

“Bucky?” Steve got to his feet slowly. Warily.

“Ah, dammit. I’m sorry, T’Challa. I should never’ve barged in like that. And then to start yelling, I mean.” He scoffed at himself. “And, Steve, I can’t believe I hit you!” T’Challa set his feet back on the floor, standing out of his chair.

“Are you feeling unwell, Sergeant Barnes?” T’Challa asked gently. Bucky gave himself a little shake.

“It’s fine. I’m fine. Sorry.” He inclined his head respectfully toward T’Challa and turned for the door.

“Should I send someone to escort you home?” T’Challa called after him. Bucky shook his head and waved him off without stopping or turning around.

The hallways were quiet. Bucky had never seen them so empty. He was almost out of the palace when he bumped into Nakia. She seemed more surprised to see him than he was to see her. She quickly looked around him clearly expecting someone else to be with him.

“Where are you off to so late, Nakia?” Bucky asked, forcing a casual air into his voice. Desperate to forget everything that had happened in the past twenty minutes.

“Keep your voice down!” She hissed at him. Bucky’s interest was piqued.

“Aren’t you about to be the queen? What are you sneaking out for?” Nakia huffed and grabbed Bucky by the wrist and dragged him out of the palace with her. “Are you hiding from T’Challa?”
“As if that idiot could do anything to stop me doing as I please.” She scoffed. Bucky had to agree with her. When it came to Nakia, T’Challa seemed to be little more than a helpless, drooling puppy.

“Then why are you sneaking?” They hurried down the palace steps quickly and quietly.

“Because if Okoye sees me outside the palace in the dark she is going to carry me kicking and screaming back to my rooms.” Bucky chuckled.

“Why don’t you just tell her where you’re going?”

“I left T’Challa a note.”

“Are you running away?” Bucky’s heart sank. “I thought you loved T’Challa.”

“I do. I’m coming back.” They stopped at the turn off to Bucky’s farm.

“Where are you going?” Nakia sighed.

“I got a letter from an old friend of mine that her sons had been stolen by rebels to serve as child soldiers. I am going to liberate them.” She saw Bucky’s deeply concerned face and sighed. “Do not worry. I have a group of highly trained Wakandan operatives set to meet me at the coordinates and T’Challa knows where I am going.”

“Why don’t you send T’Challa? Or at least take him with you?”

“He has a country to run. I can do this myself.” She pushed Bucky lightly down his path. “Go home. I’ll see you when I get back.” Bucky nodded slowly, resisting the urge to follow her.

He had made his way halfway home when he heard footsteps behind him. Bucky’s ears prickled. The hairs on his arm stood on end. Nobody took this path unless they were going to his farm. The fork to the village near his farm was half a mile back. Still, someone was running down the path headed straight towards him. Bucky ducked into the trees quickly and made his way up the trunk of one nearest the path.

The footsteps came nearer until Bucky could make out the shape of a man beneath him. Bucky’s ears prickled. The hairs on his arm stood on end. Nobody took this path unless they were going to his farm. The fork to the village near his farm was half a mile back. Still, someone was running down the path headed straight towards him. Bucky ducked into the trees quickly and made his way up the trunk of one nearest the path.

The footsteps came nearer until Bucky could make out the shape of a man beneath him. Bucky dropped from the tree and tackled whoever was coming down his path. They rolled together off the worn path and into the tall grass. Bucky pushed the intruder away and flipped to his feet. He assumed his fighting stance and waited for the man to make his move. He got to his feet spitting and cursing. Bucky dropped his hand.

“Are you kidding me?” Steve groaned. Bucky flinched.

“I didn’t know it was you.”

“Who else would it have been?” Steve demanded. Bucky shrugged disingenuously.

“Who knows? I thought you were leaving.” Bucky walked around Steve and started down the path home again. Steve stood in the grass a second longer before joining Bucky.

“I was actually planning on it until you came all the way to the palace to sock me on the jaw.” Steve massaged his tenderized chin.

“I hit you in the face and that made you think I was in an okay mood to deal with you?” Bucky derided. Steve shoved his hands down into his pockets and shrugged.
“You apologized for it after.” Bucky glowered at him. “Looked torn up about it, too.” Steve continued like he didn’t notice the look. If Steve wasn’t going to pay attention to Bucky’s feelings, Bucky wouldn’t pay attention to Steve at all. Two could play that game. “Sharon Carter.” Steve said. Bucky pretended he hadn’t heard. Steve was aiming for a response out of him and Bucky wasn’t about to give it to him. “Peggy Carter’s niece.”

Bucky wondered how that information was supposed to make him feel better about her being half naked and putting the moves on Steve while Bucky watched. Steve had been head over heels for Peggy. And her niece was no sad sack either. Why wouldn’t Steve be into her? The whole situation just made Bucky wish he would’ve hit Steve harder. Right in the teeth so Bucky didn’t have to listen to him make excuses.

“I actually met her before I knew you weren’t long dead.” Steve continued. They reached Bucky’s farm fairly quickly. Bucky didn’t wait for Steve to finish his longwinded explanation before marching into his hut. Steve buried his face in his hands and growled.

Bucky grabbed one of his tomatoes and took a large bite out of it like he was eating an apple. He sat on the end of his bed and let the juices drop into the dirt. He looked up when Steve ducked inside the hut. He arched an eyebrow at him and slurped the juice from his fingers.

“Don’t remember inviting you in.” Bucky muttered. “Too bad you aren’t a vampire.” He turned away from Steve and continued eating his tomato. Steve sighed heavily behind him.

“I’m sorry.” He sighed. “I’m sorry. I told you nothing happened and I meant it, but it doesn’t change the fact that she was in there and I clearly didn’t tell her about you and me.” Steve slumped into the chair behind him. “I just felt so awkward trying to explain it to you and to her and I thought maybe you would understand.”

“I did understand.” Steve rolled his eyes again.

“Yeah, the bruise on my jaw begs differently.”

“I understood, Steve. I understood tactics and strategies and the safest possible route for everyone. What I couldn’t understand was how you thought it was okay to stay in a hotel room with a woman you clearly share an attraction with and not tell her that you were already involved with another person. You didn’t have to say it was me. You could have just told her you were seeing somebody else. But you didn’t. And you left me on the line long enough to see that. To see her thinking she still had a shot with you. And that made me think that maybe she does.” Bucky was down to a quarter of the tomato. He took it outside and set it on a log where the seeds would dry in the sun over the next week or so before Bucky planted them. He went into his utility hut and rinsed his hands in the hidden sink.

“She doesn’t.” Steve said when he returned.

“What?”

“She doesn’t still have a shot with me. She hasn’t had a shot with me since you kissed me back.” Bucky stared at Steve.

“Well, maybe it’s me you don’t have a shot with anymore.” Bucky said. Immediately he regretted saying it. Steve looked like Bucky had just shoved his hand into his chest and ripped his heart out.
“You don’t mean that.” Steve declared. Bucky set his teeth and stared down at Steve mutely.
“Tell me you don’t mean that.” Bucky stayed silent. Steve got to his feet. “Bucky, I’m sorry. Please. I know it was a bad situation and I handled it even worse, but I don’t exactly have experience in this kind of thing. You know that. But I’m trying. I’m trying, I really am. Please give me another chance here.”

“I can barely trust myself half the time. I don’t need another person to doubt.” Steve slowly brought his hands up to cup Bucky’s face.

“You can trust me, Bucky.” Steve whispered.

“We were together a week. The second you left it was like that week never happened.” Steve shook his head.

“That week was the best week of my life, Bucky. Don’t say it never happened.”

“Better than the week we spent in Austria in ’43?” Bucky asked lightly. Steve chuckled softly.

“Because of the strudel?”

“I still have dreams about that strudel.” Steve leaned his forehead against Bucky’s laughing.

“I’ll have to bring some for you next time.” Steve suggested.

“The shop we got ‘em at closed in ’87. Nowhere else seems to be as good.” Bucky pressed his lips together and pushed away the disappointment it dredged up. They were quiet for a while. Content to listen to each other breathe. Bucky’s hand was on Steve’s waist and Steve still had Bucky’s face held between his hands, their foreheads pressed together.

“I love you, Buck.” Steve whispered. Bucky shut his eyes and relished in the words. Let them wash over him and cling to his skin like static. Bucky moved forward and lightly kissed Steve’s soft lips. He let out a breath and kissed him again with more fervor. Steve moved one hand to Bucky’s waist keeping the other one in Bucky’s hair. They clung to each other, drinking one another in like camels that hadn’t seen water in months. Bucky dug his fingers into Steve’s back urging him closer, but close was never close enough.

Somehow they ended up on the bed. Their clothes shed and forgotten on the floor. Nothing but the sound of heavy breathing filled the air. Bucky twisted under Steve until he forced Steve onto his back. Bucky held himself over Steve balancing most of his weight on his one arm and kissed him hard. Steve groaned against his lips.

“I love you, too, Steve.” Bucky crooned against Steve’s mouth.
Bucky has another episode and Steve is faced with difficult information.

“What do you mean house arrest?” Steve’s low voice carried into the hut from outside stirring Bucky. He rolled over and dragged his hand down his face. Bucky pried his eyes open and looked at the clock. It was barely after six in the morning and the air was already hot and sticky. It was going to be tough getting any work done with the air strangling him with every time he took a breath. As nice as Wakanda was, Bucky did miss winter.

“No, Sam, I don’t want you to go over there and check it out.” Steve continued. Bucky stood up and stretched. Steve was still whispering which meant he still didn’t realize Bucky was already awake. “Because I don’t think the U.S. government is going to be as lenient with you as they were with Clint and Lang.” Bucky saw Steve’s broad, toned back facing him. It was really too easy. Bucky crept up behind Steve as stealthily as he could. “No. Look, if they managed to work out deals with the government without selling us out, then I’m happy for them. Hell, even if they had to sell us out to get their deals I’m still happy for them.”

Bucky snaked his arm around Steve’s waist and tugged him back against him. Steve gasped slightly and stumbled back a bit, catching himself before Bucky accidentally took them both down. Bucky kissed at Steve’s neck, his tongue flicking out to lick the sweat from him. Steve’s body rippled beneath Bucky’s touch.

“No, Sam. Just make sure Wanda and Natasha are okay. Tony won’t let the government go back on their deals. I’m fairly certain he was the one that helped arrange them in the first place.” Bucky pulled on Steve, urging him back into the hut. Steve pushed Bucky’s hand away and took a few steps forward. Bucky huffed and stomped around Steve to the utility hut. If Steve wasn’t going to play with him, he was going to get some work done.

Bucky was already elbow deep in dirt by the time Steve finished his call. Over the past month, Bucky and the children had expanded his fields to nearly twice their size. Now Bucky was half finished replanting his potatoes for his next harvest in another three months. Steve stood at the edge of his field and watched him working for a few minutes.

“So Scott Lang and Clint Barton are under house arrest in America now.” Steve called. Bucky sat back on his haunches and looked up at Steve. “I guess it’s for the best since they’re with their families now.” Steve looked distressed.

“Doesn’t seem like you’re that happy with it.” Bucky observed. Steve massaged his eyebrow and stared at the fertilized soil.

“I knew about Clint, but Scott has a daughter, too.” Steve rolled his head back. “I didn’t even ask before asking him to jump into the fire. Didn’t think about it.” Steve moved away from the field and started for the river. “It was selfish of me. All of it.” Bucky clapped his hands together to
 dispel some of the dirt and followed Steve over to the river.

“Don’t you think you deserve to be a little selfish, Steve?” Bucky asked sitting beside him in the grass.

“Not when it gets others hurt. I should never have called Clint. I should have dealt with Tony alone.” Bucky didn’t know what to say. Didn’t know how to make Steve feel better about his decisions. Bucky had never wanted Steve to lose the friends he had made in the wake of Bucky’s absence. He had never wanted Steve to hurt.

“You don’t think they made their choices?”

“If I hadn’t asked they might not have had to make those choices.”

“You brought fathers, but Tony brought a child. Do you think he’s sitting by the river crying about it?” Bucky challenged.

“You don’t know Tony.” Steve said. “He wouldn’t have brought the kid if he thought he was in any real danger.”

“He brought the kid knowing I was going to be there.” Bucky dug his fingers into the dirt. “I’ve killed kids half the spider-boy’s age without hesitating.” Bucky’s eyes were hot again, thinking about the things he had done while HYDRA controlled his mind and body. “Maybe I’m paranoid or maybe I was with HYDRA so long that I see duplicity in everyone, but something in me thinks that Tony was hoping I would hurt the kid. Hurt him in front of you so that you might turn your back on me.”

“Bucky, stop. Tony isn’t like that. He doesn’t think like that.”

“Doesn’t he?” Bucky sighed at Steve’s look. “Fine. What do I know? I was a sleeper agent for seventy years. Mankind could have set foot on the fucking moon and I wouldn’t know it.”

“We did.” Steve said after a beat of silence.

“We did what?”

“We landed on the moon.” Bucky rolled his eyes.

“As far as subject changes go, that was not a smooth one.” Bucky mocked. “Landed on the moon. Whatever, Steve.” Bucky got to his feet and started back for his field.

“No, Buck, I’m serious. Nineteen sixty-nine.” Bucky turned back around to look at Steve.

“There is no way.” Steve laughed. “Are you fuckin’ around with me?” Steve shook his head still laughing.

“Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, Apollo eleven.” Bucky stomped into his hut and jabbed his finger at the button to call up his screen. He opened the search bar like Shuri had taught him and typed in the three names. It was the first result. July twentieth, nineteen sixty-nine. Bucky’s head was buzzing. He wanted to know everything. What did they use to get up there? Was it built on the framework HYDRA had set? What did it feel like on the moon? What does it feel like to be in space?

“Buck? You okay?” Steve asked coming into the hut.
“Steve.”

“Yeah, Buck?”

“I wanna go to the moon.” Steve chortled. Bucky frowned at Steve. “Don’t laugh at me. I want to go.”

“Yeah, you and every other five year old on the planet.” Steve joked.

“You don’t want to go?”

“I fought an alien army that came down to take over the planet. If that’s what’s waiting for us up there, I’d rather keep both feet on the ground.” Steve shook his head slowly. “Tony went up with a nuclear bomb and isn’t convinced that we have enough man power to deal with whatever threatens the final frontier holds.”

“Tony, Tony, Tony, Tony.” Bucky muttered, dropping himself onto the bed like a sack of dead weight. Steve threw a leg over his hips and straddled him. Bucky watched him with heavy lidded eyes. Steve slid his hands up Bucky’s body and sealed their lips together.

“Are you jealous?” Steve hummed. Bucky fisted his hand in Steve’s hair.

“Are you trying to give me another reason to be?” Bucky tested. Steve pressed his lips together and looked down between them.

“There is only you for me, Buck.” He said after a while. He kissed Bucky’s collarbone. “Only you.” Bucky let Steve kiss his way over Bucky’s body. The air was stifling.

“We should go swimming.” Bucky suggested. Steve’s head popped back up.

“In your great big bathtub?” Steve taunted.

“I don’t have the energy to argue with you right now. It’s way too hot.” Bucky pushed Steve over onto the bed and dropped his pants leaving his boxers on. Steve followed looking all too forlorn. Bucky wished it were a few degrees cooler, but sex was the last thing on his mind in this heat.

Bucky dumped himself into the river which afforded him some marginal relief from the sweltering heat. Luckily, the deeper Bucky went, the colder the water was. Steve dropped his pants and jumped in after him. Steve stayed under the water for a while. Bucky knew he was trying to make him uneasy, but it didn’t really bother him. Water couldn’t kill either of them. It seemed to be death by fire or no death at all.

Steve broke the surface gasping for air hardly an inch from where Bucky was treading water. Bucky reached over and shoved Steve’s head back under briefly. Steve fought his way back to the surface and grabbed Bucky around the waist. Bucky wrapped his arm around Steve’s neck and stared at him. Daring him to retaliate.


“I’m pretty sure if you spend any more time underwater you’re gonna grow gills.” Bucky teased. “I think you’ll be fine.”

“It worried you a few years ago.” Steve grumbled. Bucky shrugged.

“I was honestly more concerned about your bullet wounds – which I am sorry for, by the way.
Besides, I didn’t really know you back then.”

“Oh, man. That’s right. You shot me.” Steve mused.

“Don’t be a baby about it. Plenty of other people have shot you and you’re fine.” Bucky slid his hand off Steve’s shoulder and down to his abdomen. “You don’t even have a scar.” Steve’s eyes snapped to Bucky’s scars instantly.

“None of the other people that shot me were my best friend.” Steve chided. “Nor are they alive any longer.” Bucky found Steve’s cock tucked away in his wet boxers. The second Bucky’s fingers landed on it, it stiffened. Bucky slid his hand under the elastic of Steve’s boxers and gripped his cock.

“You sayin’ you want me dead, Rogers?” Bucky susurrated. Steve closed one hand over Bucky’s. Bucky pressed a light kiss against his lips. “Or do you want this?” Steve released Bucky’s hand and shoved both hands into Bucky’s long hair.

“This.” Steve hissed. “God, this.” Bucky took a deep breath and slid under the water sucking Steve’s cock into his mouth. Steve was a little more reluctant to hold Bucky under the water like Bucky was with Steve. He kept his hands on Bucky’s head, but Bucky could feel how much Steve wanted to pull him out of the water.

A sudden pain shot up Bucky’s leg forcing him to release Steve’s cock and looked around under the water. Everything changed. Like someone had turned the radio dial to a different station. He was locked under the water. No. Not water. Ice. He was in his box. Frozen. Every muscle in his body was taut. Like he was fighting to free himself from the box. From the cold. From his captors.

Someone pulled him out of the water. Large, firm hands. Bucky blinked, trying to get a sense of his surroundings. The lab. The chair. The doctors. Not doctors. Scientists. He was only free for a moment. They were hissing the words at him. Demanding compliance. Demanding obedience. Demanding order. Through pain.

“STOP! STOP! STEVE! STEVE! STOP IT! PLEASE!” They wouldn’t stop. Begging didn’t matter. Screaming wouldn’t solve anything. Help wasn’t coming. Steve had abandoned him to his fate. It would seem Lady Luck would only smile on Bucky once.

“Ingcuka?”

“Comply.” They snapped the rod against the soles of his bare feet again. Bucky felt his skin bursting apart. Heard his bones crack under the abuse.

“Bashira, you and the others need to get away from here now. Go quickly.” More pain. Pain that seemed to come from everywhere all at once.

“This will go so much easier if you do as we say, Sergeant Barnes.” Bucky couldn’t be sure if the crack he heard was from the rod hitting him or from his bones breaking.

“Is Ingcuka alright?” The child’s voice was out of place. What use could HYDRA have with a child?

“Comply, Sergeant Barnes.” He wouldn’t comply and he couldn’t die. How long could a body take so much abuse? HYDRA seemed intent on finding out.

“STEEEVE!” Bucky screamed. They could put him back in the box. The cold was preferable. He
struggled against his shackles. He would put himself back in the box if it would save him.

“I’m here, Bucky.” The hands stroking his head, his chest were gentle. The voice in his ear more gentle than the one from his cage. Bucky wanted to go towards that voice, but he couldn’t move.

“Lemme go. Lemme go, please. Please. Lemme go or kill me. Kill me. Killmekillmekillmekillmekillme.” Bucky slumped against his restraints. He couldn’t fight anymore. Just let them kill him. He couldn’t fight. He couldn’t comply. He couldn’t handle any more pain.

“No, Buck, no.” The gentle voice whispered in his ear. “If I kill you, you’ll never get to the moon.” The moon?

“No more, please. I can’t take anymore.” Bucky begged, but they were already dragging him to the lightning chair.

“Shshshshshshh.”

“I don’t wanna do it. I don’t wanna do it.” He would do anything to get away from the lightning and he couldn’t remember why he was fighting against them so hard in the first place. He couldn’t remember a time before the torture. And all he had to do to get it to stop was comply. Easy.

“You don’t have to do anything, Bucky. You don’t have to do anything. Just sleep, okay? Sleep.” Bucky fought against his restraints one last time. He had to give it one more try. He had to even though he no longer knew why.

“What do I have to do?” Bucky finally asked.

“What did you say?”

“What do I have to do?” He repeated.

“Bucky, English. Speak English.” English? They only ever spoke to him in Russian or German.

“What do I have to do?” Bucky asked in English anyway.

“Sleep, Bucky. You have to sleep.” It was a command. An order. Bucky had assured his compliance and as far as orders went, this one was simple enough. He shut his eyes and let himself relax enough to sleep.

It was pitch black when Bucky opened his eyes again. Bucky sat up and looked around his hut. He felt off. Like he was missing something. He rubbed his face and got to his feet. He felt strange. Like the first time he had come out of his haze on the D.C. freeway. His panic set in at that realization.

Bucky stumbled outside and looked around. What did he do? What did he do? Bucky hadn’t checked the time before walking outside, but he could see the sun peeking over the horizon and guessed it was about a quarter to five. Nothing on the farm seemed broken or out of place. Dum Dum and Jack stood at the edge of their boundary chewing grass. He moved over to his field and saw that the rest of his potatoes had been planted.

“Bucky?” Bucky spun around to face Steve. Steve had a towel around his shoulders and his hair was wet from the shower. Bucky was afraid to ask. Afraid that Steve knew what Bucky did. That he was still the Winter Soldier. That he would always be the Winter Soldier. That Bucky was broken beyond repair. Beyond hope. Beyond redemption.
“Did I hurt anyone?” Bucky whispered. Tears were choked up in his throat. Threatening to burst out at any second. Steve’s shoulders sagged and he pulled Bucky against his chest.

“Everything is okay, Buck.” Steve soothed, rubbing a hand over Bucky’s back. “You’re okay.”

“I think I heard Bashira. Is she….” Bucky couldn’t finish the thought let alone the words.

“She’s fine. Everyone is fine. You didn’t do anything except sleep. I promise.” Bucky was still for a minute.

“Will you tell me what I did? What happened?” Bucky asked slowly. He had bits and pieces, but there was a huge back spot where his memory should be.

“We should get you back inside first. You cut your foot open pretty badly earlier.” Steve led him back into the hut and sat him on the bed. Bucky stared down at the bloodied bandage on his right foot as Steve unwrapped it. He hadn’t even felt it.

“How did I do that?” He mused.

“You stepped on your axe.” Steve frowned at the bottom of Bucky’s foot and set about doctoring it. “Bet you regret chucking that thing in the river about now.”

“I can’t really feel it.” Bucky shrugged. Steve looked up at him in surprise.

“You don’t feel this?” Steve clarified. Bucky shook his head. Steve frowned and pushed on the bottom of Bucky’s foot. A twinge of pain ran up his leg. “You feel that?”

“Yeah.” Bucky pulled his foot back a bit. “It’s fine. My pain threshold is just much higher than normal.” Steve looked like he wanted to cry or punch someone or both. “Can you tell me what happened now?” Bucky asked desperate to get Steve’s mind off Bucky’s torture.

“What do you remember?” Steve said carefully. Bucky sighed and slumped back on the bed.

“I was underwater until it turned to ice and I was frozen. Locked in the cryofreezer in Siberia. They kept me on ice between torture sessions because they could hurt me longer and more severely while the ice gave my body time to heal without me dying.” Bucky peeked down to see that Steve had steeled away his emotions.

“That would explain why you stopped moving and responding in the water. Do you remember what happened after I pulled you out?”

“Torture.” Bucky responded simply. “Like always.”

“Nobody was torturing you, Buck.” Steve told him.

“Felt like they were peeling the flesh from my bones while I lay there unable to stop it.” Bucky continued, ignoring Steve’s proclamation. “I screamed for help, but help didn’t come. Help never came.”

“I didn’t know.” Steve whimpered. “I didn’t know or I swear to God, Buck, I would’ve come.”

“A man can only cheat death once. How many times do you think I have cheated her? Because I sat in a land that even Death refused to go.” Bucky garbled to the ceiling. Steve furrowed his brow at Bucky.

“Why? What? What was I speaking?” Bucky didn’t remember switching languages, but then again he didn’t really remember learning all the other languages he spoke.

“Arabic if I had to guess.” Steve had finished with Bucky’s foot. He set his leg down and moved to lay beside Bucky.

“Oh, right.” One of the few missions he had completed without a hitch that still resulted in a loss for HYDRA. The man Bucky had been sent to kill had thought to scare him. As if anything could truly scare him beyond what he already feared. He had announced that many men had tried to assassinate him before and all had failed. The Winter Soldier did not. “It doesn’t matter.” Bucky told Steve.

“You asked me to kill you.” Steve said. Bucky tucked himself into Steve’s arms relaxing only when he heard Steve’s steady heartbeat sounding in his ear.

“I’m glad you didn’t listen.”

“When you asked, you weren’t asking me. You were talking to someone else.” Bucky let out a heavy sigh.

“That would have been my torturers every time they woke me up before I let them break me.”

“I wish I had saved you.” Steve whispered. Bucky tipped his head back to look Steve in the eyes.

“You did save me.” Bucky smiled. “In the most brainless way possible, you saved me.” Bucky kissed Steve.

“I should have saved you sooner. I should have looked for you sooner.” Bucky shrugged.

“You always did suck at hide and seek.” Steve finally cracked a smile. “A-ha! I still got it, folks! I can still make Steven Grant Rogers crack when he is in the foulest mood on this green earth!” Steve laughed.

“Idiot.” He kissed Bucky long and slow.

“And damaged. You can’t forget damaged after that shit show.” Bucky pointed out when they broke for air.


“But I’m your damaged idiot. Right, Steve?” He murmured. Steve was practically vibrating beneath him.

“Yeah, Buck. You’re my idiot and I’m yours.” Bucky tipped his head up and pressed his forehead against Steve’s.

“You’re a damaged idiot, too, Steve. You think I don’t hear your nightmares when you’re sleeping right next to me?” Steve pulled back. “It’s okay. At least you don’t have very public, very dangerous breakdowns.”

“They don’t keep you up, do they?” Steve asked quietly. Shame filling his words. Bucky stared out the window. Steve having nightmares didn’t keep him awake so much as Steve’s presence kept him up. All that time and he still wasn’t used to not sleeping alone. It would seem that seventy-plus years trumped just under three months.
“You can tell me about them, too, you know. I want to help you fight your demons the same as you help me fight mine.” Bucky told him instead of answering. Steve was quiet for a few minutes. It was nice. Peaceful. Perfect.

“I want to tell you about them, Bucky, but I don’t think I’m ready to face those demons just yet.” Steve rubbed Bucky’s back and smiled down at him reassuringly. Bucky leaned up to place a lingering kiss on Steve’s lips.

“That’s okay. Whenever you’re ready, you’ll know where to find me.”

Chapter End Notes

Please don't give me any hate for the Tony stuff. I love Tony. I love all of the Avengers. Doesn't mean I can't question their choices.
Friends and Faded Memories

Chapter Summary

Bucky takes a phone call and finds a photograph he did not know he had. Bashira and the children come to play with Steeb and Bucky.

Bucky watched his three knew chicks scurry around the yard. It had taken him fifteen minutes of struggling to attach the trackers to their legs before Steve had taken over and snapped the devices onto them. They were all still nameless, but Bucky had an idea on what to name the chick that had bit him during the tracker struggle.

“How do you know if they’re boys or girls?” Steve asked, watching one of the chicks scratch at the dirt.

“They’re all girls.”

“How do you know that?” Dum Dum was hiding in Bucky’s lap. She had more than tripled her size from the first day Bucky had held her, but the tiny chicks terrified her.

“Rooster chicks have more feathering up top.” Bucky put his hand behind his head and flared his fingers out over the top. Steve smiled at him. “Besides, I got ‘em so they’d lay eggs.” Bucky patted Dum Dum on the side. “Like Jack and Dum Dum here are going to eventually become dairy goats.”

“Don’t they have to have babies first?”

“Yeah. Thomoza is going to help me breed them when the time is right. She likes to tell me whenever I do something wrong with the goats.” Bucky pulled at Dum Dum’s ear lightly. “I guess these two were from a very prestigious line of goats in the area. She hates that T’Challa gave them to me of all people.”

“I thought their mother died.”

“She did. T’Challa bought them from the farmer to compensate for his loss of income. The fact that T’Challa gave them to me seems to be a point of contention among the Wakandan people.”

“It has been bugging me about why T’Challa would give you newborn baby goats instead of entrusting them to a more experienced farmer.” Steve mused. Bucky glared at him.

“They are perfectly fine with me.” Bucky spit. Steve threw his hands up and shook his head.

“Hey, hey, I didn’t say they weren’t. I said that T’Challa must have some ulterior motives for giving the goats to you and not anybody else.” Bucky laughed softly and scratched at Dum Dum’s hard head.

“Yeah, he knew I was lonely.” Bucky would never be able to repay T’Challa for all that he had done for him. Steve leaned over to kiss Bucky softly.

“Are you still lonely?” He asked. Bucky smiled against Steve’s lips.
“Not so much. I have my best friend to keep me company.” Steve scooted himself closer to Bucky and kissed him again.

“More than just keep you company I hope.” He murmured. Bucky pulled away and frowned.

“No. Well, she helps me out with things when my lack of arm gives me trouble.” Steve’s smile fell away. Bucky watched the gears turn in his head as Steve worked out what he had just said.

“Who are you talking about?”


“I should go call Sam and Nat.” He finally said after a while. Bucky watched him get to his feet and trudge away toward the hut pulling his cell phone from his pocket as he went. Bucky wanted to laugh at him. Jealous of a ten year old girl. It was laughable.

“Hey, Sam. I’m just calling to check in. You good?” Bucky gnawed at his cheek. Maybe he shouldn’t have teased him about Bashira being his best friend.

“No, that was… it was Bucky.” Steve said into the phone. “I don’t know what he’s talking about.” Bucky looked back at his chicks and grinned. The one that had bitten him went back to pecking at the same stick she had been toying with seconds earlier.

“Oh, Sam, you useless chicken!” Bucky shouted again.

“No, it’s not – he’s not talking to –” Steve sighed heavily and stomped over to Bucky handing him the phone. Bucky looked up innocently and took the phone from Steve’s hand. “You did this to yourself.” Steve muttered.

“Hello?” Bucky said putting the phone to his ear.

“Listen here, you one armed fossil, you think I’m a chicken I will take you on any day any time. I will end you. Done. Finito. Before Steve can say, ‘Hey, man, I knew him before he could read’ you’ll be on the ground!” Sam ranted. Bucky’s eyes twinkled with excitement and he grinned fiendishly.

“Couple of things, Sam –”

“That’s Sergeant Wilson to you, you greasy haired ape.” Sam growled.

“Right. So, Sam, couple of things,” Bucky pressed his lips together when Sam growled into the phone again. “First, I taught Steve how to read so he didn’t know me before I could read. Second, I’m going to point out that we already had this fight ohhh, two or three times already and by my count it stands three to zilch in favor of me. Now, I would be all too happy for another showdown if that’s what you’re looking for, but I doubt you want to embarrass yourself again. Or should I tell Steve about Lang?” Sam was quiet on the line for a long time. Bucky looked up and met Steve’s confused eyes. He gave Steve a reassuring smile which only served to make him more suspicious.

“You really think that Chatty Cathy was keeping a story like that close to the vest?”

“Shit.” Sam cursed under his breath. “When did he even have time to tell you that story?”

“Parking garage.”

“Of course.” Sam hissed. A few seconds passed as Sam considered what Bucky had said. “You knew about that story for months and you didn’t tell Steve?”

“I don’t see him very often.”

“He was there for like a week a month ago. What the hell were you doing all that time?” Sam demanded. Bucky flushed.

“Oh, look, Steve wants his phone back!” Bucky cheered. “Bye, Sam!” Bucky shoved the phone back into Steve’s hand. He pushed Dum Dum out of his lap and stood up moving away quickly.

“What did you say to him?” Steve asked into the phone. Bucky scrubbed his hand over his face. “I told you we mostly just reminisced. We’re old geezers, you know. Jawed about the old days until we lost our voices.” Steve was quiet a few seconds more. “You make a good point, but maybe we could drop it.”

“Ingcuka!” Bucky looked up to see a horde of children springing through the trees. Bashira ran over to Bucky breathlessly and stared up at him. Addo and the other children were arguing over what game they should play.

“I was calling to check in. You sound fine, I’m hanging up.” Steve started to pull the phone away from his ear. “Sam.” Bashira tugged on Bucky’s pants.

“Ingcuka is feeling better now?” She asked in a small voice.

“I am. I’m sorry you had to see me like that.” Bucky told her. Steve hung up the phone and walked over to them.

“Nesoka say you were dangerous.” Bashira announced.

“Did I scare you?” Bucky asked gently. Bashira shook her head quickly.

“Bashira thought it was Nesoka hurting you.” Steve looked taken aback at the very idea of hurting Bucky. “You scream so loud for him to stop. Screaming and screaming.” Bashira hugged Bucky around the waist tightly. “I’m sorry I said mean things to you.” Bashira apologized in Xhosa. Bucky smiled and patted her back.


“Now there’s a game I can get behind.” The children screeched excitedly and dashed around the field. Dum Dum and Jack joined in the fun with no idea what the game was. A few times Dum Dum headbutted one of them and Bucky had to tie her down.

It was hours before Bucky and Steve were alone again. Steve started a fire and Bucky filled a pot with water to boil over it. He was getting his bowl of potatoes off his shelf when he stepped down on his foot at a bad angle. His leg gave out and he knocked the bowl and three books onto the floor. Bucky groaned and set about straightening up the mess. Bucky’s journal had fallen open
Bucky set the journal back on the shelf with the rest of his stuff and dropped to his knees to find the runaway paper. He sat back on his haunches and looked at the paper that turned out to be an old photograph. Bucky was surprised to see it. The photograph wasn’t his, he knew every word on every page in each of his journals. The photographs he had were the ones on sale at the museum. This wasn’t one of them.

The five Howlies were huddled to the left of a small campfire watching and laughing at Bucky and Steve. Bucky had his left arm around Steve’s neck and his right fist twisting on the top of Steve’s head. Bucky stared at the picture and tried to remember the day. Military days were still tough. He could remember most of the people, but as far as events went he may as well have been absent.

“Buck, the water’s boiling. Where are the potatoes?” Steve stepped into the hut to find him. Bucky looked up from the other side of the bed. He gave a small smile and stuffed the photograph into the pocket of his robes. Bucky picked up the two potatoes he had come in for and nodded at Steve to lead the way back outside.

Bucky was about to toss the potatoes into the pot skin and all when Steve took them from his hands and set about peeling them. Bucky picked up another knife and diced up the potatoes after Steve had finished peeling them. Steve had already diced up some of the raw rabbit meat Thomoza had brought over for him to store for dinners. She would never say it to his face, but Bucky knew she liked that he was capable of cooking his own meals.

Bucky could feel Steve’s eyes on him. Lingering. Scrutinizing. Calculating. Bucky tried not to worry about it. The photograph was burning a hole in Bucky’s pocket. He wanted to pull it out and stare at it until he remembered where it had been taken and what Steve and Bucky had been arguing about. He knew if he had pulled it out, if he had asked, Steve would have filled in all the blanks in a heartbeat. But Bucky didn’t want Steve to tell him what to remember. He wanted to remember on his own.

“Are you okay?” Steve asked, breaking the silence. Bucky looked up from the pot and gave Steve a small smile.

“Of course I am.” Bucky leaned back on his arm and looked up at the stars.

“Did you hurt yourself earlier?” Steve looked down at Bucky’s foot. “It looks like it’s starting to bleed again.” Bucky twisted his leg until he could see the bottom of his foot. The bottom of the bandage was already black with dirt, but he had to admit that it did look a bit wet.

“It’s probably just from all the running around we did earlier.” Bucky waved it off. It was a quiet night. One of those nights when Bucky could feel himself sinking into nature. Almost like if he sat still enough for just long enough he would stop being Bucky Barnes, traumatized, brainwashed, ex-HYDRA assassin and become one with the dirt instead.

“You never should have played. You were injured, the kids would’ve understood that. Addo watched from the sidelines.”

“Addo isn’t a super soldier.”

“Buck.” Steve groaned in that vexed tone he got whenever he thought Bucky wasn’t listening to him. Bucky shut his mouth and stared at Steve obediently waiting for him to continue. “Just because you don’t feel your injury doesn’t mean you aren’t hurt. If you aren’t careful you could end up with an even worse injury. It could get infected.” Bucky picked his good shoulder up and
dropped it heavily.

“Shuri’s gonna send a guy down to check on it tomorrow morning. I’ll be fine.” Bucky picked up a wooden spoon from the rocks around the fire pit and stirred their dinner. Steve sat back opening his sketchbook and focusing on whatever he was drawing instead of Bucky’s bullheadedness.

While Steve wasn’t looking, Bucky pulled the photograph out of his pocket and looked at it again. The crackling light from the fire made the photograph look bizarrely three-dimensional. As though they were sitting around that fire with Dum Dum, Union Jack, Gabe, Jacques, and Jim. Like they weren’t all just one train ride away from misery.

“As far as girls back home goes, I think Cap’s the only one with a babe.” Dum Dum had declared. They were talking about friends and family. People to go home to. Bucky had had that conversation before, shortly after he had been shipped out to London. Before he and his entire regiment had gotten themselves captured. Bucky had stopped sharing his backstory. It was a lot easier to watch the guy next to you have his brains blasted all over the walls of the tranches when he was just the guy to your left and not Dave Sinclair or Bart Collins. The Howlies were the first friends he had bothered making in months.

“Well, now, wait a minute. Ol’ Jimmy’s got himself several dames eagerly anticipating his return to Fresno.” Jim argued causing the rest of the Howlies to laugh.

“I’d bet you’ve never even talked to a girl!” Union Jack taunted. Jim scowled.

“Speak for yourself, man.”

“Hey, hey. If you wanna talk, it’s Stevie over there that never talked to girls. I think Carter might be the first female he didn’t faint in front of.” Bucky taunted. Steve flushed and glowered at Bucky.

“You wanna talk about freezing up around girls, why don’t you tell them about Esther?” Steve countered. Bucky pressed his lips together and wrinkled his nose.

“Esther?” Dum Dum said. “Yes! Tell us all about Esther, Buchanan!”

“What’s to tell? She was just a regular dame like I’m sure you’ve all seen before. Pretty smile, cute face, nothin’ not to like.” Bucky shrugged it off like that was the end of the story. Steve grinned at him viciously.

“Yeah, except when you finally got up the nerve to talk to her she told you had ketchup on your shirt and you ran off and hid in the janitor’s closet for the rest of the day.” The Howlies laughed and Bucky lunged at Steve tackling him to the ground and giving him a noogie.

Jonathan Giles had been shadowing the Howling Commandos and Captain America for a few weeks taking photographs to send back to the Allies to rally their spirits. A few times they sent film crews in to show how effective the squad was at taking down HYDRA operations. After a while, for every piece of Nazi propaganda there was Captain America and the Howling Commandos publicity.

“What is that?” Steve’s voice broke the silence making Bucky jump. He looked up at Steve and back down to the photo. Bucky leaned around the fire to hand it to him. Steve smiled down at it. “You know, I can’t even remember what we were bickering about. We looked pretty damn happy, though.”

“What about her?”

“What we were talking about then.” Bucky explained gesturing to the photo. A sizzling noise drew Bucky’s focus back to their dinner. The pot was boiling over. Steve grabbed the repurposed robe Bucky had been using for a potholder and pulled the pot away from the fire and settled it on Bucky’s table.

“I never looked them up.” Bucky told his bowl of stew.

“Never looked who up?” Bucky pushed at his potatoes with his spoon like they were his guilt and if he held them under the brew long enough they would all just disappear.

“Any of them. I saw their stuff in the museum back in D.C., but I barely even glanced at it. And after, I only ever really remembered you.” Bucky leaned back and looked up at the stars again. “I always did suck at making friends.”


“Sam hates me.” Bucky took a bite of his stew and smiled.

“No he doesn’t. He’s a little scared of you, but he doesn’t hate you.”

“Yes he does.” Steve gave him an annoyed look.


“He told me so.” Bucky smiled at Steve again.

“When?” Steve’s demeanor shifted. It looked like he couldn’t decide whose side to jump to the defense for. It made Bucky chuckle.

“Back at the airport. We were tied up with that Spider-Kid’s goo and he told me he hated me.” Steve stared down at his stew in consternation. He knew that Sam and Bucky constantly butted heads, but he figured they would grow to like each other once they got to know each other better. Steve didn’t like being wrong.

“Maybe he didn’t mean it. Maybe he was just tired.” Steve muttered filling his mouth with stew. Bucky laughed.

“It’s fine, Steve. I don’t need everyone to be my friend.” Bucky looked away to his goats. “As long as I have you.” He said under his breath. Bucky glanced back at Steve. He was smiling down into his stew which meant he had heard every word Bucky had said.
Chapter Summary

Steve has a nightmare. Bucky gives Steve a mission.

The clock on the screen read three a.m. Bucky had given up trying to sleep and instead read quietly in the chair by the low light of his lamp. Occasionally Steve would snuffle into the pillow and Bucky would worry that he was having another nightmare. When he settled down, Bucky went back to his book.

“You’re killing him.” Steve announced in an unsettlingly clear voice. Bucky knew he was still asleep, but it didn’t stop his heart from stuttering.

“Who?” Bucky asked patiently. Steve rarely answered, but Bucky always responded in hopes that Steve would confide something he ordinarily wouldn’t.

“Me.” Steve answered just as calmly. Just as clearly. Steve’s back was to Bucky so he couldn’t see his face. Couldn’t tell whether the dream was torturing him or informing him. Bucky closed his book on his finger and leaned towards Steve on the bed.

“You mean you are killing someone or someone is killing you?”

“Yes.”

“Which one, Steve?” Bucky prodded gently. He waited, hoping to be told something he could help with. Anything. But Steve didn’t answer. Instead, he whimpered and rolled, his arms reaching out for someone. Bucky set his book on his nightstand and returned to the bed where Steve clung to him in desperation. Like Bucky was the only thing keeping him safe.

Bucky hated how much he enjoyed that thought. It made him feel like he was happy that Steve was suffering. He knew it was because he hated feeling like the only helpless traumatized victim of the war. As much as he liked being able to be the shoulder for Steve to lean on, he liked having someone to share in his misery. That thought made him sick.

Bucky pushed Steve’s hair out of his face and pressed a kiss against his forehead. Bucky was intrigued at how long Steve’s hair was getting. When they were kids, he had his barbershop appointments scheduled once a month six months out. When he was twelve or thirteen Bucky had let himself go. He bathed infrequently and hadn’t gotten a haircut for almost a year. Steve had finally gotten the nerve to ask him about it and Bucky had had to explain with no shortage of shame that it was because his family couldn’t afford to get his hair cut after paying for the funerals for his twin brothers. Pox had taken them both the past winter leaving Bucky as the only surviving son.

Steve had disappeared for two whole weeks after that and Bucky had ignorantly assumed it was because Bucky wasn’t living up to Steve’s hygienic standards. Instead, Steve had spent those days going through every back alley dumpster from Brooklyn to Hoboken for recyclables. He came back with four dollars and eighteen cents which he promptly shoved into Bucky’s hands and announced that it would pay for enough haircuts for the next eight months.
“If you keep looking like some punk delinquent, Ma’s not gonna let you hang around the house anymore.” Steve had declared. “She’s worried you might be getting in with the wrong crowd and I might get hurt because of it. I told her it wasn’t true, but you know Ma.” Steve had given him a goofy grin and shrugged as if to say, ‘what can you do?’

“You’re tellin’ me that while I was workin’ my ass off wakin’ up at quarter ta four every morning’ to get my ass up ta Fifth Avenue to hock papers was fer nothin’?” Bucky had accused. The look of complete and total shock on Steve’s face was one that Bucky knew then that he would treasure forever.

“You went to Manhattan?” Bucky’d shoved his hand into his good pocket (the one without any holes) and pulled out eight dollars and eight-one cents. A relative fortune back in those days.

“Those hoity-toots up there flip you a coin without even checkin’ the worth. I had to be careful not ta give my ma more’n what I usually make in case she starts sendin’ me up there on the regular. Nearly got myself into a brawl with some pimple face claimin’ I was easin’ in on his turf.” Bucky scoffed, but the pride had been evident in his voice.

“Looks like you made it out alright, but you’re right. If she started sending you across town regular she might not let you go to school anymore.” It had been a real fear. Sarah was far more protective of Steve. He wasn’t allowed to hock newspapers because raising his voice brought on his asthma. Any work he did had to be low stress which was a tough gig for a scrappy little kid to find back in those days. She got around Steve’s protests by insisting he go to school. Bucky’s mom wasn’t so gentle. The family was big, though it was getting smaller by the minute, and every dime counted.

“I’ll take fifty cents and I’ll get a haircut, but then we’ll go see a movie with some of the rest. We’ll save everything else. Call it a rainy day fund.” Bucky had suggested sagely. Steve had considered it for a minute and Bucky thought he might protest.

“Well, we could see the movie first and then you could get your hair cut later.” Steve had replied innocently. Bucky’d grinned and yanked Steve under his arm to ruffle his floppy hair.

“Always so impatient!” Bucky had laughed. “Alright, let’s go see what’s playing at the theatre.” They had ended the day with eleven dollars and eighty-seven cents having sprung for a cup of popcorn at the theatre. By the end of the summer they had saved more than twenty-five dollars.

It had been a hundred years ago. Three lifetimes ago. But it had been the best time of Bucky’s life. A twisted thought considering it had been no less death-filled and tragedy ridden. Steve contracted scarlet fever just three months later and hovered on the cusp of death for weeks. Bucky had stayed by his side and begged him not to die. He remembered the raw fear and grief at the thought that his best friend would fall to the same fate as his brothers. He remembered three weeks later even better. When Steve was up and about as though he had never been sick in the first place.

“Bucky?” Steve graveded. Bucky looked down at Steve who had woken up. The sun was peeking through the window softly.

“Good morning, Nesoka.” Bucky greeted cheerfully. Steve sat up bleary eyed and scrubbed his hands over his face.

“When the hell do you even sleep, man?” Steve grumbled groggily. Bucky frowned. He often pretended to be asleep for Steve’s benefit. There were only a few times when Bucky let on that he had been awake before Steve. Although it had been Steve that had made a living as an actor and not Bucky which probably meant that he hadn’t been fooling Steve as much as he thought he had.
“Nesoka is so grouchy in the morning.” Bucky teased. Steve inhaled deeply through his nose and stretched.

“And Ingcuka is a bigger idiot in the morning.” He snapped. Bucky frowned.

“Mean.” Bucky kicked his feet over the edge of the bed and stood up. Steve reached out and grabbed Bucky’s wrist lightly.

“Wait.” Steve covered his eyes with his hand and shook his head. “Sorry, you’re right. That was mean.” Bucky took a step back towards Steve who released his wrist so Bucky could rub Steve’s shoulder.

“Bad dream?” Bucky asked, knowing the answer while also knowing that Steve wouldn’t tell him regardless.

“Did I wake you up?” Steve wrapped his arms around Bucky’s waist and pressed his forehead into his hard stomach.

“Nah. I had my own nightmares to contend with.” It wasn’t entirely untrue.

“Wanna talk about it?” Steve asked.

“Do you?” Steve didn’t reply. Bucky knew he wouldn’t. They stayed that way for a few minutes. Quietly burying their own troubles before rising to brave the day.

“What does it mean?” Steve asked once he woke up under the stream of cold water spraying out from the shower head. Bucky was massaging shampoo into his wet hair while he waited for Steve to finish rinsing off.

“What does what mean?” Bucky wiped the back of his hand across the corner of his mouth where shampoo had fallen.

“Nesoka.” Steve stepped out from under the water trading places with Bucky.

“I thought I said I was only going to tell you if you brought me something.” Bucky taunted. Steve huffed as he wrapped a towel around his waist and started for his clothes.

“Is my mere presence not gift enough?” He challenged. Bucky blew the water away from his lips. He looked down his nose at Steve and raised a sudsy eyebrow. “Okay, fine. What do you want?” Bucky shut off the water and squished the excess water from his hair. Steve pulled his jeans on and watched Bucky toweling off.

“Do you remember my last night before I shipped out? After I caught you brawling behind the theatre with the guy twice your size?” Bucky stepped into his pants and shimmied them up his legs.

“How could I forget? That was the night I met Dr. Erskine. And the first time we ever saw Howard Stark in person.” Bucky soured at the details, but nodded.

“Okay, well while you were agreeing to dangerous genetic experimentation I was at home alone.” Bucky flipped his robes over his shoulder and around his waist. Steve frowned holding his t-shirt in his hands.

“Didn’t you go dancing with those two dames?” Steve backed out of the shed and into the sun before tugging his grey t-shirt on. Bucky followed him out holding a comb.
“I was planning on it, but one of the girls said she was starting to feel sick so I walked them home and spent the rest of the night trying to calm my nerves with a fifth of whiskey.” Steve fisted his hands in his hair and squeezed his eyes shut punishing himself for his past mistakes. Bucky continued on, knowing the only way to get Steve to let go of it was to give him something else to focus on. “Yeah, well, I sort of made a… I guess you could call it a time capsule.”

“A time capsule?” Steve parroted, dropping his hands and giving Bucky a curious look.

“Yeah, well it was just a few things I wanted to keep safe in case I ever made it home.” Bucky slumped into a chair near the fire pit and rubbed the back of his neck. “But I never really made it home.”

“What was in it?” Steve asked, sitting in the chair next to him. Bucky looked up at him shaking his head slowly.

“Yeah, that’s the thing. I remember the box and putting things inside and I remember exactly where I buried it, but I have no memory of what was inside. Just that whatever it was is important.” Bucky chuckled softly to himself. “I actually had a plan to go back and find it before I was framed for the bombing. Nothing concrete, but I knew I wanted to find the box.” He gestured around himself. “Now I can’t leave without causing an international incident which means I can never go back and find my time capsule.”

“You know New York has changed a lot since we’ve been away. A lot a lot. Somebody might’ve already dug it up.” Steve explained gently.

“I gotta know, Stevie.” Bucky started working the comb through his wet hair. The gears were turning in Steve’s brain. It was risky. There was next to no chance that Steve would make it in and out of American borders without being detected. Bucky knew he was asking a lot and offering just about nothing in return. Something was in that box. And the longer he went not knowing, the more pressing it became that he found out.

“Where’d you bury it?”

“Prospect Park.” Steve smiled at him. “Yeah, right there.” Bucky agreed knowing Steve was remembering all the sunny afternoons they had spent at the park.

“I wonder if Shuri would be at all able to build a portable scanner that’d be able to tell me if it was there and where it was before I started digging holes in the park.” Steve laughed. “I might be able to escape detection as Captain America – War Criminal, but the crazy guy digging up half of Prospect Park screams for the authorities.” Bucky finished combing his hair and laughed along with Steve.

“She might be able to make you something that did all the digging for you discreetly.” Bucky suggested. Steve reached out for Bucky’s wrist and tugged him forward until he was seated on Steve’s lap.

“It’s probably going to take some time to organize a plan, get there, find your time capsule, and come back.” Steve said. His thumbs massaged Bucky’s thighs. “What you’re asking is extremely dangerous, you know.” Bucky nodded, watching Steve through heavy lidded eyes. “What if I don’t come back?” Bucky pulled back, frowning and sticking his tongue in his cheek. “You aren’t going to send me to the grave without knowing what my nickname means, right?” Steve finished. Bucky turned his eyes back to Steve’s in irritation.

“You’re a punk.” Bucky spit, pushing his way out of Steve’s lap and starting across the yard.
“Alright! Fine. I won’t ask again until I have your damn time capsule.” Steve shouted in an effort to appease Bucky. Steve was quiet for a while, watching Bucky work. “What does your nickname mean?” Bucky dropped his trowel and gave Steve a withering glare.

“That’s funny. I don’t see my time capsule in your hands.”

“The time capsule is for my nickname.” Steve corrected. “I want to know what the kids are calling you.” Bucky chewed at his bottom lip reservedly.


“Ingcuka.” Steve said under his breath. “So does Nesoka mean Captain Wolf then?” Steve grinned. Bucky rolled his eyes.

“No box, no name.” Bucky proclaimed. Steve huffed and stomped away pulling out his phone. Bucky returned to his work, planting his newly dried tomato and watermelon seeds. The watermelon, he planted in a separate field he had turned the day before. They grew on vines and he didn’t want to risk them strangling his other plants.

“Okay, as of right now I am leaving tomorrow afternoon with Shuri who had plans to visit a new Wakandan Outreach center they are arranging in New York City at the end of the month anyway. Five days I’ll be there and back with the capsule. The only caveat is that Shuri gets to be here when you open the capsule.” Steve announced more than three hours later. He scratched his chin and looked up at the sky. “She is bizarrely fascinated with the so-called ‘old school junk’.”

“You’re leaving tomorrow?” Bucky’s gut twisted. Steve nodded.

“Well, yeah. And to be fair, I did ask Shuri what my nickname meant.” Steve confessed. Bucky arched an eyebrow at Steve and set his hand on his hip. “She’s generally very talkative, but for some reason when it came to asking her about it she became a steel trap of information. That plus the kids all being reluctant to say what it means plus your reaction when Bashira told you is all adding up to something bad.” Bucky kept his face impassive.

“Looks like you’ll just have to find that time capsule.” Bucky told him. Steve frowned and crossed his arms.

“You wouldn’t let them call me anything too terrible, would ya?” Steve pestered. Bucky sighed and rolled his eyes.

“Like what? You’re a six foot tall Hercules. You think they’re calling you scrawny or tiny? I didn’t let it happen when we were kids and I wouldn’t let it happen now. Relax.” Steve nodded, but the pad of his thumb was affixed between his teeth. Bucky dropped his trowel in the dirt and moved over to Steve. “Do you trust me?” Bucky murmured. He pressed a kiss on Steve’s throat. Steve swallowed hard and let Bucky push his arms away. Bucky slid his fingers up under the hem of Steve’s t-shirt. “Steve?” Bucky persisted when he received no answer.

“Yeah?” Steve replied clearing his throat.

“Do you trust me?” Steve smiled down at Bucky. His hands came up to cup Bucky’s face while Bucky tickled his fingers across his belly.

“Copycat.” Steve goaded, kissing Bucky deeply. Bucky kissed him back for a few breathless moments before pulling away.
“You didn’t answer me, Steve Rogers.” Steve pressed their foreheads together.

“You know my answer.”

“I want you to say it.” Bucky whispered back. Steve smiled and kissed him lightly.

“I trust you.” Steve kissed him again. “You know what else?”

“What?” Steve kissed him a third time.

“I love you.” This time when Steve kissed him, he did it slowly, deeply. His tongue danced with Bucky’s in a way their feet never could. When they finally broke for air, they were breathless.

“I love you, too.” Bucky panted. “I love you, too.” Bucky could say the phrase ten billion times and it would never be enough to convey just how much he felt for Steve. How deeply. How passionately.

The next morning, Bucky watched Steve pack his bags and get ready to leave. The feeling of fear and dread he had felt an inkling of the day before was back in full force. The feeling that this might be the time that Steve leaves and doesn’t come back. The feeling that came every time Steve packed up to leave.

“Steve?” Bucky called as Steve started for the hill. The sun was still low in the sky. Rain had come in the night and was quickly rising in the heat of the new day. The earth was filled with mist making it look eerie and ethereal. The goats and chicks were playing quietly at the back of the hut. The only sound was their breathing.

“Yeah, Buck?” Bucky stared at Steve, taking in every minute detail of his appearance. Focusing on the way he smelled. The way his blue eyes sparkled in the low morning light.

“Come back.”

“Sir, yes, Sir.” Steve joked. Bucky shook his head.

“I mean it, Steve.” Bucky insisted. It gave Steve pause. He set his bags down and crossed back to Bucky kissing him hard. Bucky curled his hand around Steve’s. At that moment, Bucky would’ve given anything for Steve to forget the capsule and stay there kissing him. But it was set and Bucky couldn’t deny that as much as it pained him to let Steve leave, he knew that it would be that much more rewarding when he returned.

“I promise.” Steve swore. He let go of Bucky, stooped to pick up his bags, and started for the palace. Bucky watched until he disappeared beyond the tree line before going in search of his animals. Five days seemed a lifetime.
“Ingcuka.” Bashira loomed over him. Her skin glowed orange in the light of the setting sun. Bucky stared up at her cherubic face impassibly. “Where is Nesoka?” She demanded in Xhosa. Bucky blinked slowly up at her. Hearing her words, but not fully processing them. Too lost in his own thoughts. “Ingcuka!” She said more firmly. “Where is Nesoka?”

“No here.” He answered. Xhosa was coming much easier to him now. A few more months and he might even be considered fluent.

“What do you mean he is not here?” She demanded. Bucky shut his eyes.

“I mean he is somewhere that is not here. He is elsewhere. He is away.” He told her in short, clipped sentences. Bashira crossed her arms and stamped her foot right next to his head. Bucky could feel her anxiety pushing in on his own.

“You said five days, Ingcuka. You said he would be back before we had time to miss him. You said that was why he did not say goodbye.” She ranted.

“I know what I said, Bashira.” Bucky answered. His voice was empty of all emotion. His responses were stiff and robotic. It didn’t mean that he felt nothing. It was actually the opposite. The truth of it was that he was feeling too much. He was brimming with negative emotions and shutting down was his go-to response. It had been his response with HYDRA’s torture and it was his response when his crippling anxiety, depression, and self-loathing all reared their ugly heads.

“Are you sure? Because you said that seven days ago!” Bashira berated. Bucky blew a breath through his lips and sat up.

“Bashira, we’re friends, right?” Bucky asked.

“Yes?” His sudden friendliness was throwing her off.

“Then can I ask whether you think that I don’t care whether Steve – Nesoka – is here or not? Do you think you are the sole member of the ‘I miss Steve’ fan club?” Bucky accused. It was a heartless thing to say in retrospect, but Bucky was in a dark place and couldn’t find it in himself to muster up any more patience.

“No, but –”

“And do you think that you are the only one counting the days until he comes back?” Bucky continued.

“No.”
“So if you know this, then why are you here hassling me?” Bucky had switched back to English unable to find the right phrase he was looking for. Bashira’s face crumpled. Bucky’s gut twisted as the harshness of his words came back to him. “Shit. Bashira, I’m sorry. I know that was mean. I know you’re just worried for him. I’m worried too. I guess I took it out on you.” Bucky apologized. “That was wrong of me. I’m sorry.” Bashira wiped the tears from her cheeks and nodded glumly.

“I am sorry, Ingcuka. I know you miss him, too.” She whimpered. Bucky patted her head soothingly.

“I do.” He got to his feet slowly and looked around the farm. A group of Dora Milaje had brought an adult goat and two fat hens to his farm five days earlier as gifts. T’Challa insists that they are not. That he is merely burdening Bucky with more work, but Bucky knew better than he did when T’Challa gave him Dum Dum and Jack. The goat was grey and fat with little white specks all over. According to Thomoza she was four years old and nameless.

Bucky felt uncomfortable milking an animal when he didn’t even know its name so he decided to name her before he milked her. The only problem was that he couldn’t decide what to call her. He had asked Bashira what she thought he should name her, but Bashira said it was bad luck to name farming animals. As such, Bucky had yet to milk her himself. Instead, Bashira or one of the other children would milk her though he never actually asked them to.

His chickens were a little less strategic in their naming. Generally they fell on whatever he took to calling them. Sam was the biggest of the chicks and the only one that gave him any trouble. If he had a scratch anywhere all bets were on Sam for giving it to him. The other two chicks he called Shrinky-Dink and Hawk. The two hens were both named after Steve. Cap and Meri.

Cap was an idiot. Bird brained didn’t even begin to cover it. He wondered if she even knew the right way out of a chicken coop. Bucky constantly found her on top of the huts which might have been fine if she didn’t sprint forward unhinged when feed was spread out. She didn’t open her wings to slow her fall until she was about three inches from the ground. Constantly worrying over whether or not she had seriously hurt herself had distracted Bucky all the way up to day five.

“Has he called you?” Bashira asked cautiously. Bucky glanced at his hut and back out to the farm.

“Not in four days.” Bucky confessed. It had been a short call that night, too. Steve was sleeping in the jet in the basement of the outreach center. The call ended when he heard a door open somewhere and Bucky hadn’t heard from him since. It was swiftly driving Bucky to madness. And all because Bucky had wanted some stupid memento from his life before the war.

“Have you asked King T’Challa?” Bucky looked at Bashira with newfound wonder. The uninhibited, simplistic mind of a child making the simplest of suggestion. It was something he should have thought of on his own days ago and instead he let himself be swallowed up by fear, grief, and guilt.

Bucky started walking towards the hill, slowly at first then picking up speed. Bashira called out behind him, but his focus had shifted and he didn’t hear what she said. Bucky made it to the palace in record time. The Dora had become more accustomed to his presence and were less shifty when he appeared. Some even spoke to him casually and answered his questions provided he ask in isiXhosa.

“Well if it isn’t the White Wolf of Wakanda!” M’Baku shouted from the foyer. Over the weeks, M’Baku and Bucky had become better acquainted. When he had learned about Bucky’s torture and memory loss, M’Baku had said, “This is why we don’t give technology to white men” and
dropped the subject. Bucky had immediately taken a liking to him after that. He was one of the few, if not the only, person that had not demanded more information regarding his captivity upon learning about it. Bucky wasn’t some poor, tortured soul to M’Baku. He was just the one armed warrior that had kicked his ass.

“Don’t you have a mountain somewhere with a throne and subjects?” Bucky teased. “Why do I always see you here?” M’Baku flashed his teeth at Bucky.

“I am going home to them now. Are you asking to come with?” M’Baku laughed before he could answer. “I am kidding. My mountain is always covered in snow. You would not survive the night!” Bucky smiled.

“I was forged in the ice. I’ve known temperatures so low they would kill an ordinary man. Your snowy mountain doesn’t scare me.” Bucky moved around M’Baku starting deeper into the palace.

“You cannot forge something in ice.” He said, almost to himself. “You have to melt metal down and that takes fire.” Bucky considered it.

“But you can break anything if it gets cold enough and you hit it hard enough.” M’Baku grunted in agreement and shuffled out the door. Bucky spun on his heel and went in search of T’Challa. As he entered T’Challa’s study, he spied the green fabric of Nakia’s dress.

“Nakia!” Bucky called out, chasing her out of one of the study’s backdoors and into a corridor. If anyone knew where T’Challa was, it would be her. Bucky hoped he might even get lucky and be able to find everything out from Nakia.

“Bucky? What are you doing here?” Nakia looked around her and shoved Bucky backwards into the study.

“I need to talk to T’Challa. Have you seen him?” Nakia turned and shut the door to the corridor behind her.

“T’Challa is not here.” Nakia said quietly. Bucky’s spirts plummeted.

“Really?” Nakia nodded. “Where did he go?” Bucky could tell she wanted to lie. He hoped she wouldn’t. It would only confirm the dread bubbling up in his gut.

“He’s away at a meeting with some foreign diplomats. He should be home soon.” It didn’t sound like an outright lie, but she was hiding something.


“Of course it is. Why wouldn’t it be?” Bucky felt bile rising up in his throat. Something bad had definitely happened. Something they were refusing to tell him about which meant it likely had to do with Steve and they didn’t want Bucky to get himself involved. In an instant, Bucky reviewed every shred of information Steve had given him about ‘super prison’ and decided on a course of action. Plan A, Plan B, all the way to Z. His backup plans had backups. Steve would be free by midnight or Bucky would be deep in his grave.

In his needlepoint focus, Bucky completely forgot Nakia’s presence. He walked away from her wordlessly, staring at nothing and taking in everything. Every guard, every weapon, every step he took he clocked them all and readied a strategy to get past them. He needed to get to Shuri’s lab and find his arm. It didn’t even matter at that point if it was the tiger arm or one of the cache from the walls. They messed with Steve, they were getting the Winter Soldier.
“Bucky!” Nakia’s hand around his bicep nearly had him ripping her arm off. It must have shown on his face because the instant he turned to face her she threw her hands up and took a cautious step back. “Whatever you are thinking of doing, don’t.” Bucky had no intentions of staying idle while Steve was in trouble for something he had asked him to do. “Please.”

“Nakia, I like you, but if you get in my way I will go through you.” Bucky rumbled dangerously. Nakia narrowed her eyes at him, her body tensing for a fight.

“You need to calm down. I will tell you everything, but you need to stay here.” Nakia ordered. “Start talking or I march.” Bucky knew he was being rude, but Steve’s life was potentially at stake. *Steve*. Manners didn’t rank very high on a list that had Steve on it. Nothing ranked above Steve.

“You do remember that I am soon to be queen, correct?” Bucky stared at her impassively. Nakia sighed and resigned herself to the story. “Some thieves broke into the New York City Outreach Center with the mind that they would steal some valuable Wakandan wares and sell them on the streets. Captain Rogers stopped them, but unfortunately not without them figuring out who he was.” Bucky snarled and turned for Shuri’s laboratory again. “Hold on I am not finished!” Nakia insisted. Bucky’s body was shaking. The tremors before a catastrophe.

“Steve is in danger. I am going.”

“Rogers is fine. Shuri masked his scent and covered all traces of him. There is no evidence he was in the outreach at all. The police decided it was likely the thieves were making up a story to underplay their crimes.” Nakia explained.

“If all that is true then why did T’Challa need to go to personally see to the situation?” Bucky asked. “Why isn’t Steve back yet? Why isn’t Shuri?” Nakia brought her hands up to steeple them in front of her face. She was equally concerned.

“When they were looking for Captain Rogers, one of the policemen happened upon an invention of Shuri’s. I suppose you could call it a magnet of sorts, but it attracts more than just metal. Well, the policeman took it and caused a bit of an issue in the city. Iron Man showed up to help and the magnet was returned, but it has caused a bit of an international incident.” Bucky felt the tremors fading. The danger seemed to have passed without Bucky being any the wiser. It was really all political for the time being.

“So where’s Steve in all this? Still hiding at the outreach center I take it?” Bucky sighed. Nakia chewed at her cheek and grimaced.

“I should remind you that Wakanda is the only country on the planet that you are not a wanted fugitive in and leaving would be disastrous for everybody.” Nakia explained.

“I should remind you that Wakanda is the *only* country on the planet that you are not a wanted fugitive in and leaving would be disastrous for everybody.” Bucky’s panic was back.

“Nakia, where is Steve?” Bucky ground out. Nakia winced.

“Okay, that is the bad thing. Nobody has seen Steve since he disappeared from the warehouse. *But* if anyone had captured him it would be headline news and we would have known the second it happened which means that wherever he is, he is safe.” Nakia said hastily.

Bucky was quiet for a while. Deliberating. Bucky pulled a small screen from his pocket. Shuri told him it was a phone though it looked nothing like one. Bucky scrolled through his available numbers until he found the ones Steve had added himself. It was the last thing he wanted to do, but needs outweighed preference. He dialed Sam’s number.
“Hello?” Sam answered on the first ring.

“Sam, it’s Bucky.” Bucky met Nakia’s curious eyes and he turned away from her.

“How the hell did you get this number?” Sam demanded. He sighed and answered his own question, “Steve.”

“Yeah, Steve. Have you seen him?” Bucky asked impatiently. Sam crunched on something on the other end of the line.

“Wasn’t he just with you? It was like a week ago. I remember it very clearly. You called me a chicken and then threatened me with a story some shady criminal made up in a parking garage.” Sam rambled.

“That was before he went to the States. Have you heard from him in the past four days? Anything?” There was dead air on the line and Bucky worried they had been disconnected.

“Why the hell would Cap go to the States? It’s rule number fucking one!” Sam disintegrated into a mostly unintelligible tirade.

“Sam, focus!” Bucky screamed into the receiver. Nakia circled him slowly, watching his face interestingly.

“What?” Sam snapped back.

“Do you have anybody in the states you could check with? Anyone who he might have gone to for cover?” Bucky wished he had insisted on learning more about Steve’s new friends. People he would have turned to in a crisis when Bucky or Sam were unavailable.

“I’m the guy he goes to for cover.” Sam barked. Bucky wished Shuri’s tech was slightly more advanced. Just enough so that he could reach through the screen and punch Sam in the nose.

“What about Thor? Steve mentioned him a few times. Would he help him?” Bucky asked choosing to move beyond his jealousy.

“Oh, absolutely. Thor would totally help Cap out. They’re best buddies! Why didn’t I think of that?” Bucky ground his teeth at Sam’s heavy sarcasm. “Oh, right, nobody’s seen or heard from Thor in years.”

“Well, maybe Steve knows where he is.” Bucky bit out.

“If he knew that, why would he have recruited Lang? Or Barton? Or hell, why even bring either one of us to that airport in the first place?” Sam ranted.

“Right. Good talk.” Bucky snapped, ending the call. He moved down the list and found Natasha’s numbers. He had to work his way down the list until he found an active phone line.

“Where are the fossils?” Natasha demanded in lieu of a greeting.

“If that’s a passphrase, I don’t know the answer. My name is Bucky Barnes. We met at the airport in Berlin. I’m Steve’s friend.” Bucky explained quickly before she had the chance to hang up the phone.

“Dobroye utro, Soldat.” Natasha said after too long. Bucky let out his breath.

“Zdravstvuyte.” Bucky returned switching from English to Russian without thinking. Nakia raised
her brows at the sudden language switch. He wondered if she spoke Russian along with her array of other languages. “Have you seen or heard from Steve?”

“What do you mean? The last I heard he was with you.” Natasha snapped her fingers three times away from the phone. “Away from the windows.” She hissed to someone else.

“I want to go outside. I am suffocating in this room.” Another woman whined also in Russian.

“No, no. Steve left a week ago on a personal mission. He went dark four days ago so I was hoping one of you might have heard from him. Maybe he contacted you for extraction.” Bucky explained with as little detail as he could skirt around. Nakia didn’t seem to be paying attention to what he was saying so much as his body language which made him think that maybe she didn’t understand Russian after all.

“We are moving out in two days. Stay still a little while longer and we’ll go somewhere we can blend in.” Natasha said to the other girl Bucky assumed to be Wanda. “Personal mission? Extraction from where?” Bucky marveled at her seamless multitasking.

“The States.” The phone went quiet again.

“Tell me about this personal mission. What was so important that he broke the first rule of wanted international war criminal 101?” Natasha demanded. It was Bucky’s turn to be quiet. His reasons seemed flimsy at best in hindsight. “Barnes! Why is Steve in America?”

“Love?” Bucky answered weakly. Natasha considered his answer.

“I think I need a better answer than that.” She declared. “Sharon already told me he rebuked her and Peggy is months dead. What or who does Steve love enough to risk his life for?”

“Does it matter? I just need to know if he has any associates in the States that he might turn to in a time of need. Specifically in the New York/Tri-State area.”

“It matters, Barnes, because I can then determine the risk level of the mission and the value to Steve. Did you already call whoever Steve was there to meet?” Natasha was like a dog with a bone. Relentless.

“He wasn’t there to meet anyone. He was there to retrieve something.” Bucky confessed.

“Retrieve what? His shield? He wouldn’t take the risk. He knows Tony too well to try something like that especially without backup. What could possibly be so important for him to do something so stupid? What could he hope to gain from a mission like that? What could he possibly love that much?” Bucky’s head was throbbing with stress.

“ME! Okay? He did it for me! He went to Brooklyn for me! Because I asked him to. Because he loves me.” Bucky shouted. Nakia jumped in surprise and took a few steps back. Bucky gave her a half apologetic look and turned away from her again. “Do you know anybody he might have gone to? Please.” Bucky begged more calmly. Natasha didn’t say anything for a few seconds.

“Let me make a few calls.” She said. “I’ll get back to you.” She hung up and Bucky slumped into one of the plush armchairs in the study.

“I take it she wasn’t able to help?” Nakia asked gently. Bucky set his phone on his thigh and dragged his hand over his face.

“She’s going to check around and get back to me.”
“I could call T’Challa.” She offered. “See if anything has changed. Maybe Steve has already returned to the outreach center.” Bucky let out a shaky breath and tried to calm his rattled nerves. He nodded not trusting his voice.

Seven minutes and twelve seconds later, Bucky’s phone rang. Natasha’s name flashed on the screen. Bucky answered hastily. “Anything?” He asked.

“Steve’s fine. He’s with Fury, a friend of ours. You might remember him. You shot him in Steve’s apartment after you tried to blow him up in his car.” Natasha sounded bitter and Bucky couldn’t really blame her, but it wasn’t the time for sentiment.


“I can’t tell you over the phone. This line has been used too much. As soon as this call ends I am destroying the phone and moving locations.” Natasha announced.

“Wait. Before you do, could you get a message to Steve? Tell him to get back to the princess. They’re waiting for him. It’s his surest way out of the country.”

“I’ll get the message out.” Natasha promised. Bucky started to pull the phone away from his ear when she spoke again. “I don’t know if you guys are keeping it quiet out of embarrassment or fear or something else, but you don’t have to worry. When it comes to secrets, I’m a vibranium vault. Proshchay, Soldat.”

“Proshchav.” Bucky shoved his phone in his pocket and walked over to Nakia who was still on the phone.

“Hold on a second,” she told the person on the line. “Did they help?” She asked Bucky.

“Steve’s making his way back to the outreach now. I told him they would be waiting for him.” Bucky told her.

“Captain Rogers is on his way back to you now. He knows you are expecting him.” Nakia told the other person in Xhosa.

Bucky walked away and sat down in the armchair. Knowing where Steve was relieved a lot of Bucky’s stress, but he was a long ways from safety. Now all Bucky could do was wait for them to return and wallow in his guilt and endless self-hatred. So a typical day without Steve.

“They are going to keep us up to date on everything from here on out.” Nakia told him after ending her phone call. She gave him a reassuring smile. “You can stay here tonight. They should be back tomorrow.” Nakia offered sweetly. Bucky nodded hiding his face in his hand.

“Nakia, I can’t apologize enough. I never should have spoken to you that way. You have never been anything but nice to me and I had no reason to snap like that.” Bucky told her.

“You were worried for you boyfriend.” Nakia shrugged. Bucky was still getting used to hearing Steve referred to as his boyfriend. It was a distracting word. “I’ve been there.” She gave him a reassuring smile. “Although, if you are going to stay in my house you need to shower. You smell like a cow’s backside.” She wrinkled her nose and waved her hand in front of her nose reminding Bucky of Bashira.

“Yeah, I guess that’s better than sitting idle waiting for updates.” He agreed standing up.

“I’ll let you know if I hear anything.” Bucky set his hand on her shoulder and smiled down at her.
“Thank you, Nakia.” He said.

“Of course, Bucky. We are friends after all.” She smiled. Bucky’s face went blank for a half second before his face split into a wide grin. He nodded in agreement. Her simple statement worked like a magic spell. His tension lifted from his shoulders. He wasn’t in this alone. He had people he could turn to. People he could lean on. It was a feeling he hadn’t known with anyone other than Steve in a hundred years. It only took a crisis to make him see it.

Chapter End Notes

If anybody has like a popular Tumblr or other media outlet that does fic recs and is even mildly amused by this bag of cats feel free to share it ;]
Bucky was notorious on the playground. A triple threat, he was smart, cool, and strong. But he had spent the summer working in the factory with his father. It had certainly made him stronger, but it had kept him isolated from his schoolmates. After seven weeks without a word, Bucky didn’t think they would even remember him now.

Bucky felt like a kindergartner all over again. Sure, he had been popular in kindergarten, but this was first grade. A whole summer had passed and Bucky wasn’t sure if that meant everything from last year was wiped away. He made his way over towards a boy called Johnny Waters that he had been good friends with the year before.

“Hey, Bucky!” Johnny called when he caught sight of him. Bucky smiled and waved.

“What’s goin’ on, Johnny?” Bucky asked in the same tone of cool indifference he had learned from his father.

“Did you hear about Katie Buford?” Johnny whispered. Bucky shook his head. The summer in the factory had only served to alienate him from his classmates. “Remember how her mom was sick?” Bucky nodded. “I guess she died and Katie’s dad sent her to live with relatives in Oklahoma.”

“That stinks. Katie was nice.” Bucky leaned against the metal leg of the jungle gym. That was when Bucky spied him. He was so small, Bucky thought for sure he was a toddler that had gotten lost. All skin and bones and blonde hair. He stood in a line with the other kindergarteners at the edge of the playground. Bucky remembered the feeling. All the other kids were so intimidating that they were all afraid to play.

They caught the fifth graders’ eyes, too. They walked over and started hassling the newbies. A few of the kids burst into terrified tears and ran for the schoolhouse. Bucky recognized the fifth graders. Tommy Harrison and Gregory McAdams. They were large and intimidating even to other fifth graders. The skinny kid was the only one that didn’t run away.

Bucky shuffled forward slowly. “Hey, what’re you doin’, Bucky?” Johnny hissed. Bucky shook Johnny’s hand off his shoulder and continued forward, listening to what Tommy and Greg were saying.

“All newbies have to pay the protection tax. Hand it over.” Tommy ordered. Bucky gritted his teeth. He only had fifteen cents for his lunch that day, but he could spare a bit for the kid if he ended up losing his lunch money.

“If I give you my money I wouldn’t have anything for lunch. Does it really look like I can afford to skip a meal?” The kid asked. Bucky’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. The kid pointed at Tommy’s rotund belly. “Looks like you can, though.” Bucky would have laughed if Tommy handed reeled back and slugged the kid right in the face.
Bucky jumped into action, running to the brainless, skinny kid’s defense. Tommy leaned over him and held his fist in front of the kid’s face. Bucky’s hands curled into fists, he might have been half their size, but Bucky knew he packed a powerful punch. It was one of the few things his father praised him on.

“Hand it over or I’ll keep punching until you ain’t got no more teeth to chew with!” Tommy threatened. Bucky circled around, crouched slightly, and socked Tommy on the jaw throwing him off his feet.

“Leave him alone.” Bucky warned eyeing Greg who was standing to the side debating his next action.

“You broke my nose!” Tommy screamed. Blood was gushing from Tommy’s nose like water from a geyser. It wasn’t from Bucky’s punch, it was from the fall.

“I’ll break more’n that if you don’t leave him alone.” Bucky snapped. Greg decided against trying his luck with Bucky. Instead, he turned and helped Tommy to his feet escorting him to the nurse’s station.

Once they were gone, Bucky turned and offered his hand to the skinny kid. He eyed Bucky’s hand apprehensively. Bucky gave him his best and most friendly smile. The skinny kid accepted his hand and Bucky pulled him to his feet. Impossibly, the kid weighed even less than he seemed.

“Thanks.” The kid said somewhat begrudgingly. “I did have it under control, though.” His declaration made Bucky laugh.

“The only thing you were under was Tommy Harris’s fist.” Bucky told him. The skinny kid reached up and massaged his sore face, wincing with pain. “You ever been in a fight before?” The kid looked up at Bucky and back down to his too big shoes.

“I been in fights I just never been punched before.” He admitted in a small, hopelessly endearing voice.

“How’ve you been in fights without ever gettin’ punched?” Bucky asked.

“My ma always says that any good argument can be settled with the right words.” The kid announced. “If the right people had used the right words, my dad would still be alive.” Bucky sighed.

“No offense to your mom, kid, but that’s a load of malarkey. I never seen a few words simmer a bully and that’s who starts fights.” Bucky crossed his arms over his chest. “If you plan on talkin’ to people like you talked to Tommy, you’re gonna hafta learn to throw a punch.”

“I can throw a punch.” The kid said defensively.

“Show me.” Bucky suggested. “Hit me as hard as you can.” The kid eyed Bucky suspiciously.

“I’m not gonna hit you.” The kid said cautiously.

“C’mon, it’s fine. Here,” Bucky pointed to his left shoulder. “Hit me right here as hard as you can.” The kid made a fist, tucking his thumb into his palm and cranking his arm back. “Okay, stop!” Bucky said throwing up his hands. The kid’s eyes went wide and he dropped his hand.

“Show me your fist, kid.” The kid stuck his fist out for Bucky to examine. “Don’t tuck your thumb in like that, kid. It’s the surest way to break it.”
“Really?” The kid looked down and opened his hand. Bucky reached over and curled his fingers down and pressed his thumb down over the top.

“Okay,” Bucky said, satisfied with the kid’s fist. “Now hit me.” The kid pulled his arm back and punched Bucky in the shoulder. His fist was sharp and bony, but it didn’t have much force behind it. Bucky didn’t even move. “You should come find me tomorrow morning, kid, or get ready to give up your lunch money to Tommy and Greg.”

“That bad, huh?”

“It wasn’t good.” The kid looked disappointed. Bucky reached out and patted him on the shoulder. “It’s okay, kid, stick with me and you’ll be fine.”

“It’s Steve.” The kid announced. “Steve Rogers.” Steve Rogers stuck out his tiny hand to shake. Bucky smiled down at it, taking it in his own.

“Bucky Barnes.”

“Bucky.” Bucky waved away the foreign voice. It wasn’t part of that day. “Buck, wake up.” Bucky opened his eyes and looked straight into Steve’s soft blue ones. Not skinny Steve from nineteen twenty-three. Real Steve. Safe. Alive. Home. Bucky pushed himself out of the armchair he was sleeping in and into Steve’s arms. Over his shoulder he saw T’Challa carrying a still sleeping Nakia out of the study.

“You’re here.” Bucky murmured against Steve’s shoulder. Steve’s hands rubbed up and down Bucky’s back soothingly. “Thank God.” Steve pressed a quiet kiss against Bucky’s hair and took a step back.

“It’s sorta nice to know you still worry about me.” Steve told him. Bucky glowered at him landing a solid punch to his shoulder. Steve let out a low cry of protest and stepped back rubbing his shoulder.

“What the hell were you doing letting me panic like that?” Bucky accused. Steve sighed and smiled at Bucky dropping his hand.

“I left my phone in the jet when I took off. Couldn’t get a message out. I ducked down with Fury for a bit to let the situation work itself out.” Steve rubbed the back of his neck. “Almost went back when that officer had Shuri’s tech which would have been bad considering how quickly Tony got there.”

“I never should’ve sent you back there.”

“Hey, hey. I could’ve said no. Besides, everything worked itself out.” Steve tipped his head. “And I managed to learn there are still people out there that I can rely on.” Bucky had another admonition. A heavier one.

“I called your friends when I didn’t hear from you.” Bucky confessed. Steve nodded even as he was turning away from him and picking up one of his bags from the floor. “Sam was no help at all.”

“Yeah, he gave me an earful when I was on my way back.” Steve laughed. “Thanks, by the way. Now Sam thinks I’m some sort of Thor fanboy.”

“I called Natasha after he turned into a dead end.” Bucky continued.
“I know that, too.” Steve was fighting something out of his bag. “She called Hill who patched her through to Fury.”

“She was sort of… reluctant to help.” Steve sat down to focus more on freeing whatever it was from his bag.

“She can be like that sometimes.” He agreed. Bucky stared at Steve’s back. His wide shoulders. Already holding the weight of Bucky’s problems. The last thing he wanted was to add to Steve’s stress. “She comes through though. Just has to work through her trust issues. It’s nothing personal.” Bucky nodded to himself.

“She’s a frustrating person.” Steve laughed.

“Yeah, sometimes. But she’s a good person.” Steve wasn’t necessarily defending her, just stating the facts as he knew them. Bucky took a deep breath and held it.

“She knows about us.” Steve stopped wrestling with the bag and looked at Bucky over his shoulder.

“She knows what about us?” He said. “Why would you tell her something like that?” Bucky grimaced.

“In an unfortunate turn of events it became the fastest way for me to get her to give me what I wanted.” Bucky explained. Steve used his free hand to squeeze his temples. He was quiet for a few tension filled moments before blowing a heavy breath out his mouth and nodding.

“Okay. I can fix it.” He said. “The ‘back in my day’ excuse should just about cover it.”

“The ‘back in my day’ excuse?” Bucky repeated. Steve nodded.

“Oh, yeah. People these days have no clue what life was actually like back when we were growing up so if I ever do anything that seems out of the ordinary for them I just explain that that is how it was done back in the day.” Steve explained. Bucky furrowed his brow. “Forget to wear my seatbelt? Back in my day cars didn’t even have seatbelts. Make a mess with the toothpaste? Back in my day we didn’t have toothpaste. Etcetera, etcetera.”

“There’s no way that would work in this situation.” Bucky declared. Steve shrugged nonchalantly.

“I dunno, Buck. I got out of doing any housework at the compound by explaining that only the women did household chores and it was forbidden for men to cook, clean, or do the washing so I didn’t know how.”

“I’ll believe that worked for maybe a day, but you’re a neat freak. You iron your bed sheets.” Bucky accused. Steve shrugged again.

“It started as a sort of test. Tony was getting on everybody nerves and I felt like messing with him. Then I felt too guilty about it after Tony hired a team of professional cleaners for my quarters alone so I never said anything. The four years I lived with the Avengers were amazingly the laziest years of my life. Believe me.” Steve boasted.
“I still don’t think it’s going to work in this situation.” Steve arched a brow at him and crossed his arms.

“Bucky and I aren’t in a romantic relationship. When we were growing up it was commonplace to call male friends boyfriends and female friends girlfriends. People engaged in romantic relationships used to be called sweethearts and all social gatherings used to be called dates. Times have changed and language is weird, but there is nothing other than friendship between Bucky and me.” Steve monologued. Bucky’s jaw dropped in awe. “Yeah?” Steve asked smugly.

“You’re officially too good at lying.” Bucky said. Steve laughed.

“Yeah, well it works best if you don’t do it that often.” Steve explained. “Moderation is key.”

Steve stopped, made a disgusted face, and groaned. “Christ, I sound like one of those educational videos.”

“One of those whats?” Steve blushed and looked at his feet.

“I may or may not have been involved in a series of videos promoting positive behavior in school aged children.” Steve mumbled. Bucky stared at him.

“Like… before Italy?” Bucky asked. Steve pushed his fingers into his eyes. 

“Like four years ago.” Bucky’s eyebrows shot up.

“You went back into P.R.? I thought I’d seen it all!” Bucky cackled. The sound of fabric tearing sounded over Bucky’s laughter and something large came flying at his face. Bucky threw his hand up and struggled to catch it. He set it on the ground and stared at it. His laughter dying instantly. “You found it?”

“You said you wanted it.” Steve answered simply. “I wasn’t about to come back empty handed. Not after all that trouble.” Bucky bent down and looked at the combination lock. He spun it thoughtlessly. Seven, four, eighteen. Bucky tugged at the rusted lock until it fell open. “Hold it!” Steve said. Bucky looked up at him. “I made a deal.” He walked out of the study and Bucky fiddled with the latch on the box.

“You’re kidding! You actually found it?” Shuri exclaimed. Steve followed her back into the study. “I can’t believe no one found this thing for seventy years.” She wrinkled her nose at the box. “It sure is rusty.”

“Can I open it now?” Bucky grumbled. Steve inclined his head towards the box and crossed his arms over his belly. Steve thought he was nervous? This box had plagued his memories for two years.

The hinges creaked as he pried the lid up. Midway, one of the rusted hinges snapped leaving the lid to fall awkwardly to one side. Inside were mostly papers yellowed and musty. Bucky picked up a book buried under the papers. *Mechanical Engineer’s Handbook* by Lionel S. Marks. Bucky remembered the Christmas Steve had given the book to him. He flipped through the dog eared pages. Bucky had scribbled in the margins on several of the corners making notes of the bits Bucky found most interesting.

“Christmas of ’33.” Steve said quietly. Bucky smiled softly. He set the book on the floor beside him and sifted through the pages. Most of them were Steve’s drawings. He had his father’s pocket watch tucked away under the papers in a corner. Shuri reached her hand out for the drawings and Bucky handed them to her to look through. There were a couple of worn
photographs, one of his family before the twins had died. One was Steve and Bucky from when
they were twelve and had splurged and paid to get a picture taken together with some of their
savings.

A thick envelope drew Bucky’s attention. On the front there was only one word; Steve. Bucky
flipped the envelope over to open it when Steve reached down and snatched it out of his hands.
Bucky jumped to his feet and reached for the envelope.

“It’s addressed to me.” Steve announced. Shuri looked up curiously.

“Yeah, in nineteen forty-two when I thought I was going to die.” Bucky retorted. Shuri held her
hands up.

“Boys, boys, why doesn’t Bucky just agree to read the letter out loud?” She suggested. Bucky and
Steve looked between Shuri, the letter, and each other. Having no counterarguments, they
conceded. Bucky took the letter back from Steve’s somewhat unwilling hands and opened it.
There were nearly three pages of meticulously scribbled words.

“What’s it say?” Steve demanded. Bucky cleared his throat. It didn’t seem to be anything too
embarrassing.

“Steve, if you’re reading this I didn’t make it back from the war and you found my treasure box. I
know how badly you wanted in on this fight, but even if I’m dead I’m glad you aren’t in harm’s
way.

“Inside this box are the best memories of my life. If I haven’t already had a funeral, I would like
you to share them with my family and friends. There are some of the hundreds of pictures you
drew during the thousands of hours we spent in this very park. I also put the engineering book you
gave me for Christmas ten years ago in here. In another life, you would’ve been a famous artist
like Rockwell and I would’ve been a great inventor like Stark.

“My dad’s pocket watch counted down the minutes between the times we were together just as it
now counts down the minutes before I step on a boat and hurl myself into another fight.
Although this one wasn’t started by you.” Steve scoffed at that line and rolled his eyes. Bucky
gave him a look telling him to shut up. “My Pee Wee Reese rookie card I waited three hours in the
rain to get signed is now yours. I have a feeling he’s gonna be one of the greats so maybe this card
can be like an inheritance or something and just in case you fall on hard times I’m putting in every
penny I ever saved. I would count it, but I’m about halfway through this bottle so you can do it
yourself.” Shuri picked up a small drawstring bag and took it upon herself to count out the money.
Bucky read a little further while she did and felt his throat close. The memory of the night he
wrote the letter was coming back despite being blindingly drunk at the time.

“A hundred and fourteen dollars and seventy-seven cents.” Shuri announced. Bucky looked down
at the pile of money. “Although the money itself is now worth much more than that.” She
explained. Steve was indifferent to the money. He kept his eyes on Bucky and the letter.

“Keep reading.” He commanded. Bucky looked down at the pages in his hand and took a deep,
shaky breath.

“I’m afraid, Stevie. I know I never said it and I always did my best to keep my cool in all situations
and I guess I get that from you, but I’m laying it on the line now. I’m scared. I don’t want to go to
war and I don’t want to die. I know you think you’re being punished by being denied, but it’s not a
punishment. War is a punishment. Being taken away from the people you love is a punishment.
Being kept away from you is a punishment.
“That’s more of a declaration than I was planning on making, but I’m drunk and probably dead so what does it matter? It’d be great if your last memory of me was from tonight. From the Stark Expo instead of whatever I’m going to look like in my coffin. Remember me when we were with those girls and I couldn’t keep my eyes away from you. Remember me happy. Remember I –” Bucky stopped reading out loud. He finished the letter in his head. His eyes filled with tears. The last words engraving themselves into Bucky’s brain.

_I love you. I’m sorry._

Bucky shoved the letter into Steve’s hands and started moving things back into the box. The room was dead quiet. The kind of quiet that made Bucky want to claw his skin from his body. Steve read the letter silently to himself.

“The box was meant for Steve?” Shuri asked, breaking the silence. Bucky hastily wiped his tears away and nodded. “Why didn’t he know about it?” Bucky cleared his throat.

“I didn’t see Steve again before I shipped out so I sent him a letter when I got to London explaining the box and where it was, but by then he had already enlisted and was away at boot camp.” Bucky looked up at Steve. “He never got the letter.” Shuri nodded and reached inside to pull out the baseball card still sealed in a thin plastic box.

“Who is Pee Wee Reese?” She asked, examining the card. Steve laughed.

“Who’s Pee Wee Reese?” He parroted. “That’s like asking who Jackie Robinson is. Who Babe Ruth is.” He scoffed. “Pee Wee Reese is one of the best baseball players the Brooklyn Dodgers ever had and that is his rookie card.” Steve plucked the card from Shuri’s fingers and smiled at it.

“He was a friend of ours.” Bucky explained, giving Steve a pointed look. “We met him by chance before he got signed by the Dodgers. We saw him less afterwards, of course, but he remembered me when I went to have the card signed. I enlisted later that day.”

“I’m keeping this.” Steve announced.

“Yeah, right.” Bucky scoffed.

“Hey, hey, it’s my inheritance, remember?” Steve taunted. He held the card above his head when Bucky tried to grab it.

“You drew all of these, Captain Rogers?” Shuri asked, looking at the pictures again. She had evidently become bored with their sports talk. Steve looked down at the drawings and nodded.


“He’s being modest. Steve’s a regular Rockwell.” Bucky said. Shuri nodded, sifting through the drawings.

“You said you weren’t a couple before you were both taken off ice?” She asked. Bucky’s mouth went dry.

“We weren’t. Just really good friends.” Bucky agreed.

“But you were in love with each other.” She said it so simply. Like there was no question.

“No.” Bucky argued anyway. Shuri arched her eyebrow at him. “Well, I may have been in love with Steve since then, but it wasn’t reciprocated until… until recently.” Shuri nodded slowly and
then held up one of Steve’s drawings. It was Bucky sleeping in the park with a book open on his chest.

“Are you sure about that?” Bucky shrugged at the drawing.

“It’s a drawing. I was sleeping. I was an easy practice subject.” Bucky explained. Shuri flicked her eyes over to Steve whose face was frozen. She pursed her lips and nodded trading the drawing for another.

“What about this one?” It was Bucky waist deep in water. Other people were around him but they were mostly dark scribbles. Only Bucky was depicted in strong detail. When they didn’t concede, Shuri held up yet another portrait of Bucky, this one a profile. “And this one?” She asked. “I will say that if I found somebody with this many sketches of me, I would assume they were in love with me.” She mused. She rifled through the sketches until she stopped on one. “Oh, wait! Here’s one without Bucky in it!” She showed them a sketch of a dog lying on someone’s feet. “Is this your dog?” She asked Steve.

“No.” He paused and looked at his feet. “It was Bucky’s dog.” He mumbled.

“Oh.” Shuri looked at the drawing again. “Whose feet is it on?” She asked. Steve pressed his lips together.

“Bucky’s.” He grated. Shuri smiled victoriously.

“Why can’t you just admit that you were in love with him?” She pestered.


“No, Steve. You said the bridge. You said you only started feeling this way on the bridge in D.C. two years ago.” Bucky corrected. Steve refused to meet their eyes or explain himself further. Obviously uncomfortable, Steve turned and excused himself from the room. Bucky looked from the door to Shuri and back again.

“Go after him.” Shuri ordered. “I will have your things sent down to your farm later today.” Bucky didn’t need any more encouragement. He dropped the few papers from his hands and ran out the door after Steve.

Steve hadn’t gotten far. He was almost at the end of the empty corridor leading to the foyer. Bucky hurried up to him and pulled him around. Bucky fist ed his hand in Steve’s t-shirt and kissed him. Steve settled his hands lightly on Bucky’s waist and kissed him back, but Bucky could feel his guard up. His public indecency radar was on high alert. Bucky released him and took a half step back.

“Tell me you love me.” Bucky commanded. Steve’s cheeks brightened and he threw a cautious look around them. “Tell me you love me or I’ll kiss you again.” Bucky threatened. Steve looked back at Bucky and fought back a smile. He leaned forward and put his lips next to Bucky’s ear.

“I love you, James Buchanan Barnes. With my whole heart from the first time you picked me out of the dirt in the schoolyard. I have loved you and will love you until the end of the line.” Steve rumbled in his ear in a low, steady voice. He pressed a quick kiss on Bucky’s cheek and pulled back. It was Bucky’s turn to turn red.

“I love you, too.” Bucky mumbled back with no shortage of embarrassment.
“Can we go home?” Steve asked. “I would really like to kiss you in a way that is definitely not appropriate for an audience.” Bucky laughed and nodded leading them the rest of the way out of the palace.

“Hey,” Steve asked as they strolled down the path to Bucky’s farm.

“Yeah?” Bucky replied, squeezing Steve’s hand in his own.

“What does it mean?” Bucky laughed and shook his head.

“You are about as relentless as Natasha.” He teased.

“I brought you the time capsule. That was the deal.” Steve argued. Bucky nodded.

“I know, I know. I’ll tell you, but it’s embarrassing.” Bucky warned. Steve squeezed Bucky’s hand.

“Tell me.” Steve insisted. Bucky leaned into Steve as they walked.

“Boyfriend.” He confessed. “Nesoka means boyfriend in Xhosa.” Steve was quiet, his steps never faltered. Bucky turned his head to look at Steve. His face was pink, but he didn’t look upset. “Steve?”

“Nobody’s ever called me that before.” He explained. “Not even Peggy.” Bucky was quiet, watching him process. “I think I like it.” He smiled at Bucky and pressed a quick kiss on his forehead. “Yep, I like it.”
Bucky’s mom started packing his lunch after the first week of school. She had started to harvest the food from their small garden. It worried Bucky to see her outside doing so much work when she was already waddling around rotund with pregnancy. His little sister wasn’t much help. She could barely use the bathroom by herself.

If it weren’t for his excellent grades, his mother might have pulled him from school long ago. Even at six years young, Bucky knew that any sign of trouble he might have at school would mean the end of it. So he kept it bottled up. Any questions directed at him about it were met with brief, undetailed responses.

Steve was his saving grace. He kept Bucky from losing himself. Reminded him how much he enjoyed school. Enjoyed learning. After the first day, Steve was always at the schoolyard early. How early Bucky couldn’t say. No matter how early Bucky got to school, Steve was already there waiting. The instant his eyes landed on Bucky, his face would split into a big, goofy grin. He didn’t smile like that for anyone else. That grin was Bucky’s alone.

“Heya, Bucky!” He cried running over to him. “What took ya so long? The bell’s about to ring.” Steve gasped, desperately trying to belie the way his lungs were straining.

“I had ta help my mom with my sister.” Bucky explained. They walked over to the bench and Bucky pushed Steve down onto it to make sure he caught his breath. Steve’s face was a brighter red than it usually was. Before Bucky had time to worry, Steve nodded and changed the subject.

“I’m gonna go to the corner store for lunch today.” Steve grinned. Bucky held up his tin lunch box. Two sticks of celery, an apple, and a peanut butter and jam sandwich rattled inside. Steve stared at the box with an imperceptible expression on his face. The kid quickly locked whatever it was away and graced Bucky with an easy grin. “Wanna come with me?” The bell rang before Bucky could answer. “I’ll meet you by the fence at lunch.” Steve called to Bucky over the stampede of children. Bucky kept an eye on Steve instinctually. He was so small, so easily smooshed in the throng of bustling students. Bucky couldn’t help but make sure he wasn’t trampled.

“Bucky, let’s go!” Johnny urged, pulling Bucky into the classroom. The four hours before lunch were long and not particularly interesting. The class was learning things Bucky had learned the year before. His kindergarten teacher had marveled at his ability to learn things so quickly. Bucky was the first kid in his grade to learn how to read but his favorite subject was math. He liked
The way you could put two small things together and get something much larger.

Bucky’s new teacher was a little more reluctant to give Bucky more interesting work. She didn’t want the extra hassle of making special worksheets for him to complete and her to grade. As a result, Bucky could often be found reading at his desk while his classmates struggled through their problems. It also meant that Bucky had to make multiple trips to the Brooklyn Library each week to keep something to read during these moments.

“Ready?” Steve asked brightly. Bucky smiled down at the kid. Barely three feet tall and every last inch filled with twice the energy of a normal kid. Steve was an unstoppable force always ready for anything. But that kind of energy brought on a lot of negative attention from kids that weren’t so cheerful. For that, Steve had Bucky. When it came to protecting Steve, Bucky was an immovable object.

“After you,” Bucky gestured out to the sidewalk. Steve grabbed Bucky by his shirt sleeve and tugged him along. “Calm down, kid, what’s the rush?” Bucky whined. Steve tossed a grin back at Bucky over his shoulder. He didn’t answer the question, just grinned and continued pulling Bucky down the block.

The store was packed as it usually was at lunchtime. Mr. Ossani stood behind the counter with his arms crossed glaring at the squabbling children eagerly choosing their lunches and counting out their money. His daughter, Lena Ossani, desperately tried to keep the kids in order though she was only thirteen herself. She didn’t go to school like the other kids. Her brother, Kevin, had died in the Great War a few years earlier and her parents decided she was needed more at the store.

“Oh, Bucky, pick a candy.” Steve ordered. Bucky wrinkled his brows at Steve.

“I don’t have any money today, Steve. Besides, Mom would kill me if she found out I bought candy with my lunch money.” Bucky explained. Steve shook his head.

“My treat.” Steve said. He stuck his hand in his pocket and stood really close to Bucky to shield wandering eyes from his treasure. Bucky’s eyes nearly popped out of his head. It was a fifty cent piece.

“Where’d you get that?” Bucky asked in awe. Steve grinned at him again.

“My mom had a sleepover with one of the doctors from the hospital and he gave me this this morning.” Steve told him. Steve paused and looked away, a deep frown on his normally cheerful face. Bucky was about to ask about it when the look fell away and Steve grinned up at Bucky again. “So pick whatever you want. My treat.”

Steve went back to the deli counter and ordered a ham on rye from Mrs. Ossani. Bucky leaned down over the candy selection. He hadn’t had a candy bar in months. Not since his very first paycheck. His dad had let him use a dime out of his wages for a treat after his first week of work. Back then he had picked out the first candy bar he saw in case his dad changed his mind. His eyes skipped over the Heath bar and landed on a row of new candy bars. He was debating between a Milky Way and a Baby Ruth when he heard Steve across the store.

“None of your business, twerp.” Gerald Cook growled as Bucky rounded the aisle and his eyes landed on the situation. Lena was on the floor holding her head in her hands and Steve was in front of her, fists clenched at his sides.

“Apoloize to Lena, Gerald.” Steve barked. Bucky sighed and brought his hand to his forehead. Gerald was an eighth grader. Even Bucky was no match for him in a fight. Gerald clenched his
fist and took a step towards Steve.

“You wanna die, shrimp?” Gerald growled. He pulled his fist back and Bucky sprang into action. He kicked the backs of Gerald’s knees knocking him off his balance and sending him to the ground. Not for long. Gerald rolled to his feet and swung at Bucky who barely managed to dodge the meaty fist of the large boy. Steve grabbed Gerald’s right hand in an effort to stop the boy from taking another swing at Bucky, but his thirty-five pound body was no match for the fourteen year old. Steve was flung across the floor landing harshly. Bucky jumped in between Steve and Gerald and raised his puny fists again. His gut twisted with fear and anticipation as Gerald’s fist flew towards his face.

At the last second, a larger hand stopped Gerald’s fist and shoved the boy away hard. Gerald fell to the floor and stared up at Bucky’s savior in horror. Mr. Ossani glared down at Gerald with murder in his eyes.

“If I ever see you near my daughter or my store again, I will personally tear each and every one of your limbs from your body while you watch.” Mr. Ossani rumbled in a dark voice. The threat wasn’t directed at Bucky but he still felt his stomach sink with despair. Gerald slowly got to his feet and raced from the store. Bucky turned around to pull Steve to his feet.

“What were you thinking?” Bucky said under his breath so only Steve could hear him. Steve groaned and rubbed his shoulder.

“He was grabbing Lena and she looked so scared and helpless. I couldn’t just ignore it.” Steve explained. He walked past Mr. Ossani without looking at him and picked up his now smooshed sandwich. “You pick your candy?” Steve asked, walking back over to Bucky nonchalantly. Bucky shook his head slowly, his eyes still on Mr. Ossani. The large man frowned at the boys and walked around the aisle and back to his usual spot.

“You’re nuts.” Bucky muttered. Steve took his sandwich to the counter to pay picking out a Hershey’s almond bar as he went. Bucky grabbed a Milky Way and set it on the counter with Steve’s lunch.

Steve stuffed his hand into his pocket and frowned. He checked the other pocket then turned them both out in desperation. He stuffed his pockets back in his pants and turned around looking around the floor urgently. Bucky knew immediately what had happened. In the skirmish, Steve had lost his fifty cent piece.

“Bucky what am I gonna do?” Steve whined. “That was all I had for lunch!” Bucky crawled on his hands and knees down the aisles on the hunt for the coin.

“Relax, kid, if we can’t find it you can have half of my lunch.” Bucky consoled. Steve was near tears now.

“No, Bucky, no. That’s your lunch. I don’t want you to be hungry because of me.” Steve slowly got to his feet resigned that he had lost his fifty cent piece. “Let’s just go.” He mumbled to the floor. “We’ll be late if we don’t head back now.”

They were the last ones in the store. Bucky turned around and sat on his butt. He stared up at Steve for a second before letting out a deep breath and taking off his shoe. Steve scrunched up his nose at Bucky’s curious behavior before Bucky pulled a quarter out of the toe of his shoe and held it up for Steve to take.

“I been keeping a quarter in my shoe for emergencies.” Bucky explained at Steve’s befuddled
look. Bucky shook the quarter at Steve. “Here, take it.” Steve shook his head slowly. “Look, you can pay me back sometime. Just get your sandwich so we can go.” Steve took the quarter and took a few steps to the counter. Bucky pulled his shoe back on before joining him.

“No charge.” Mr. Ossani grumbled. Steve stared up at the grizzly man with his wide, doe eyes.

“What do you mean?” Steve asked, still holding Bucky’s quarter out for the merchant to take.

“Take it and go.” Mr. Ossani clipped. “Now before I change my mind.” Steve collected the items from the counter and hurried for the door with Bucky at his heels. Lena stopped them at the door.

“Thank you.” She whispered. Bucky could see she had been crying. “With it so crowded, I didn’t think anyone would have seen what was happening much less helped me. So thank you.” Lena bent down and kissed Steve’s cheek. The poor sap froze like a pond in the dead of winter. Bucky settled his hand between Steve’s pointy shoulder blades and pushed him out the door and down the street towards the school.

“Did you see her kiss me?” Steve asked, his voice light and dazed. Bucky chuckled.

“Calm down, kid, it was just on the cheek.” Bucky settled his arm around Steve’s bony shoulders and mussed his hair. “More importantly, since you didn’t hafta pay for your grub mind givin’ me back my quarter?” Steve shook himself and grinned at Bucky.

“You didn’t hafta pay either.” He accused waving the Milky Way and the quarter in front of Bucky’s face. Bucky stared at the reward.

“Okay, the chocolate’s nice and all but if you ever pull a stunt like that again I’m leavin’ you to get hit.” Bucky told him taking his arm from around Steve’s shoulder and grabbing his stuff.

“That’s fine, Buck. I can take it.” Steve announced opening his sandwich and taking a big bite as they walked. He held it out for Bucky who accepted it though taking a smaller bite.

“Why did you jump in? You saw it was Gerald. He coulda killed you with his bare hands.” Bucky demanded. Steve took another bite from his sandwich and shrugged.

“She was in trouble and needed help. If I let him get away with it just because of my size it’d be just as bad as if I was bullying her myself.” Steve explained around his sandwich.

“You’re somethin’ else, ya know that?” Bucky said. He meant it in a good way. Steve really was something else. Not like every other person Bucky knew who was only in it for themselves. Steve was more concerned with the well-being of other people than with his own. It was the first time Bucky ever realized that Steve Rogers was the best person he knew though it wouldn’t be the last.

Steve snored softly into his pillow. The way his face was mashed into his pillow made Bucky smile. It reminded him of Steve before the super soldier serum. Of the innocent Steve he had lost. Of the innocence he had lost himself.

Bucky had managed to get a few hours of sleep. A great accomplishment he thought considering how little he slept when Steve stayed over. Bucky was settled on his chair by the lamp doing something he hadn’t done since Bucharest. He was reading his journals. Or trying to anyway.

Most of the journal entries flip flopped languages without cause or warning. They slipped between Russian, German, and English. The later volumes were more Romanian than anything else. He owed that to his environmental influences. The longer he spent listening to and speaking in a language the more he began to think in that language.
He flipped to one of his marked pages and stared at it. He only marked pages with entries that he knew related to other snippets on other pages or in other journals. Not all of his entries were complete thoughts. They were hurriedly scrawled notes of fragments of shattered memories. Jagged like puzzle pieces and Bucky had been convinced that if he could just collect all of the pieces and then put them together in the right places he’d be able to see the full picture.

The puzzle pieces made infinitely less sense now than they had when he was missing almost all of his memories. Bucky was reading his second journal, started only three months into his self-issued exile. The page he was on was written in Portuguese, but Bucky had no memory of Portugal. A picture of trees crowding a statue was scribbled at the bottom. Bucky turned the journal to read what was scribbled along the edge of the page.

Away from them before. Away from them again.

Bucky stared at the note, a heavy crease between his brows. It was impossible to get himself back into the headspace he was in when he had written the note. Even if he could he wasn’t sure it would solve any of his questions. The note was fairly straightforward and still utter nonsense. The ‘them’ he was talking about was surely HYDRA, but he had never been away from them before. Unless he was talking about Steve rescuing him in 1943.

Something nudged at the back of his head. It wasn’t the Austrian rescue he had been talking about. There was something else. Something more. flashes of memories were passing through his mind. The more he tried to focus on them the more painful it became. Echoes of mind numbing electricity warping his thoughts. His focus. His life. Bucky’s head felt like it was splitting open. He whipped the journal away from him and clutched at his head.

“Buck?” Steve whispered from the bed. Bucky grunted in answer then whimpered as his head throbbed. Steve moved over toward Bucky. “Are you hurt?” His hands moved over him gently. Looking for the cause of his distress. Bucky whimpered again. Even Steve’s soothing vibrato was a cause for pain.

“My head is killing me.” Bucky managed. Steve’s hands rested on Bucky’s exposed rib cage.

“Do you need aspirin? Do you have aspirin?” Steve asked. Bucky shook his head. The pain was spreading. His neck was stiff and his shoulders were starting to ache. “What do you need, babe? Tell me so I can help.” Bucky shook his head again. “Bucky?”

“SHUT UP!” Bucky screamed. His whole body was on fire. He wanted to bury himself alive. He wanted to die. Anything to stop the pain. He slammed the side of his fist against his head and screamed again.

“Target acquired.” The Winter Soldier graveled into his comms in husky Russian. He was set up on a roof in daylight somewhere tropical. It was hot enough to make the soldier sweat, but he was on mission. A bit of discomfort meant little to him.

“Take the shot. Meet at the rendezvous point in twenty minutes.” His handler ordered. The soldier took a slow, even breath and fired the rifle at his target’s head. The man fell and panic ensued. The Winter Soldier stood and packed his rifle back into its case before tossing it over the edge of the roof where it would be collected by the cleanup crew and replaced with an identical rifle containing another man’s fingerprints.

The Winter Soldier moved down through the building quickly. He had been through it once the day before when they were planning the attack. This one was a public assassination though most of his hits were more clandestine in nature. He was used to make accidents more than public hits.
It was in HYDRA’s best interest to keep their prized asset a secret.

The streets below were crowded. Typically this was a good thing. It was easiest to lose oneself in a crowd. But the Winter Soldier looked anything but discreet. His silver arm glinted in the sunlight. He was the only one wearing pants and sleeves. In a sea of bright pastels, Bucky was a black stain standing out and calling attention to himself. He tried to pass it off as nothing. His only orders now were to get to the rendezvous point.

“Aren’t you hot?” Someone was speaking to him. The soldier continued forward ignoring the small voice. “Hey, Mister!” The voice was following him. Insistent. Rendezvous point. “Are you American?” The voice asked. The soldier turned and looked at the source of the voice. A little boy with mussy blonde hair. “I don’t speak English so good. Do you speak Portuguese?”

The soldier turned away and looked forward. The little boy moved around the soldier to block his path. The soldier clenched his fists and stared down at the boy. Something ticked in the back of his head. It nudged and urged him to pay attention. Something important was happening. Rendezvous point. The soldier looked up at a statue of a man helping up another that had fallen.

The soldier moved forward through the crowd. The little boy was not so keen on being ignored. He hopped along beside the soldier as he moved. He knew he would have to lose the boy before he reached the rendezvous point. Lose him or kill him. Those were his options. The boy yelped suddenly and stumbled. It was the perfect opportunity.

“Look what you did you stupid kid!” A man growled. The boy cried out in pain. Something made the soldier look back. The man was kicking the kid in his stomach as he lie on the ground. The soldier had his orders. He had his orders. But the soldier marched back over to the man and grabbed the back of his neck. “This your stupid kid?” The man snarled. The soldier said nothing. The man tried to twist out of his grip, but nobody could escape the soldier’s clutches.

The man swung his fist back at the soldier determinedly. The soldier pushed the man away and reached down to pull the kid to his feet. The poor boy couldn’t stand. He coughed and spit out a mouthful of blood. It meant something to the soldier though he didn’t know what. The man refused to be beaten. He swung his fist and struck the soldier in the back of the head.

The soldier turned around with a surreal measure of calm. The broken boy was clutched in his right hand. The man swung again this time the soldier caught his fist and twisted. The man’s arm gave a satisfying crack as it shattered in his hold. The man screamed in agony drawing unwanted attention. The soldier released the man’s arm and grabbed his neck. The man was crying. He begged the soldier to stop. Begging was a fool’s last resort. The soldier tightened his fist on the man’s throat and watched the light fade from his eyes.

The soldier released the carcass scooping the boy into his arms and striding away before it hit the ground. The pressing need to protect the small boy was bypassing everything. He turned away from the rendezvous point and made for a worn down building nearby with the boy in his arms.

Steve disappeared. The pain didn’t. Bucky fell forward out of his chair screaming. He thrashed and kicked. The memory was clawing its way out of his head. Bucky kicked against an invisible enemy landing blow after blow on the solid walls of his hut. The walls rumbled above him. Dirt and straw from his thatched roof rained down onto him.

“SHUT UP!” Bucky screamed at nothing. He just wanted the pain to go away. He needed the ice. He needed sleep. Something heavy and hard fell down on him. Bucky groaned and pushed it away. He pried his eyes open and squinted down at the offending object. It was a piece of his
wall. Bucky looked up. His hut was teetering dangerously above him. He had managed to kick through the base of the wall.

The hut was coming down. Bucky rolled over to his stomach and crawled toward the bed. “Steve?” He croaked. His head kept pounding. The ache flowed out to his fingertips and down to his toes. His jaw was tight and he felt bile rolling up his throat. “Steve get out of the hut.” He told the bed. Bucky was exhausted. The walls crumbled around him. Bucky dropped his head into the dirt and let himself fall into the darkness.
Away Before

Chapter Summary

Bucky deals with the aftermath of his migraine and works free a bit more of a hidden memory. Bucky and Steve have a small spat.

Chapter Notes

I swear every time somebody tells me how much they love this fic I write another thousand words on the pure ecstasy in the knowledge that people out there are actually reading this and enjoying it. You all hold a very dangerous power in your hands. Thank you for using it kindly! =]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I’m Vito.” The boy told the soldier. Vito had four broken ribs and a broken wrist. The soldier had done his best to doctor him up though he wasn’t sure where the knowledge had come from. He worked a lot on instinct. Things he knew without knowing how or why he knew them.

It was day three in the warehouse. The soldier left only to steal food and medicine while the boy slept away his injuries. Something strange was niggling in his brain about the situation. Three days seemed a long time for a boy to be alone. When the soldier went out into the city nobody appeared concerned about his absence.

“You’re supposed to tell me your name now.” Vito told him. The soldier passed the boy an apple and turned away again. Vito crunched into the apple behind him. “Okay, don’t tell me your name then. Where are you from?” The questions were causing a physical reaction. His breathing was becoming shallow. The soldier put his metal hand to his head. Vito took another crunchy bite of his apple. “Do you have parents?” A face leapt into his mind distorted and unfamiliar. “Brothers or sisters?” More faces none of them human.

The soldier picked up his knife and turned to look at the boy. Vito was thin and bony, but you could tell he used to be healthy. The soldier knew that meant something must have happened to his food supply. Something must have happened to him. Vito eyed the knife in the soldier’s hand and shifted back in the bed. The movement put stress on the boy’s broken ribs causing Vito to cry out in pain making the soldier’s heart squeeze in panic. The soldier set the knife down and sat on the dusty mat Vito was propped up on to check his vitals.

“I’m okay.” Vito told him. “I should thank you. If you hadn’t stopped that guy he probably would’ve killed me.” The soldier hadn’t stopped the man, he had killed him. Did the boy not understand that? The soldier stood back up taking an extra step back away from the boy. “Just out of curiosity, can you speak?” The soldier stared down at the boy silently. “I knew a girl whose farm burned down while she was in it. She survived, but she couldn’t speak afterwards. Maybe you’re like her.” Vito squinted at the soldier. “Shake your head if you can’t speak.” The soldier stared down at the boy.
They were running low on food. The soldier picked up his knife and headed for the door. He had missed his extraction time. His handler was bound to be looking for him. The soldier determined it was time to find a boutique. The boy’s recovery would take time and nobody else seemed willing to take over.

“How much are you sleeping?” Shuri asked. Bucky sat on an examination table in her lab. He had been sedated and dragged from his farm up to the palace where he was kept in a medically induced coma for two days while his body healed from have a house dropped on it.

“It varies night to night.” Bucky answered. Shuri had him hooked up to pain medication. The most amazing invention since penicillin. He felt so loose and free. He didn’t ever remember feeling this good.

“Give me an average. Or a range of sleeping hours.” She pressed. Bucky considered the question and lost himself in the rainbows radiating from the princess in front of him. “Bucky.” Shuri snapped her fingers in front of his face bringing him back to the moment.

“Oh, I guess five or six hours normally and probably one or two when Steve’s here.” Shuri wrinkled her nose writing down his answer nonetheless.

“I thought you people were more demure in the olden times.” She commented. Bucky tilted his head at her and watched the room spin lazily.

“Was that crass?” Bucky asked. Shuri squinted at him.

“Maybe we should cut back on the pain meds.” Shuri said. “You are high as a kite.” Bucky shook his head.

“Nope. I feel great. This stuff is amazing. Is this how everybody feels all the time? Because this is amazing. Why is there even still war going on when this stuff exists?” Bucky rambled.

“Yep, we are definitely cutting back your meds.” Shuri looked down at her clipboard and frowned thoughtfully. “What were you doing before you kicked your house down? Steve says you were awake before him.”

“Steve sleeps a lot.” He mumbled. He glanced up at Shuri and sighed at her expression. “Reading.” He told her. Bucky flopped back on the table and sighed sleepily.

“What were you reading?” Shuri continued. Bucky groaned and fumbled around for a blanket.

“My journals.” He answered. Shuri walked over and fiddled with his intravenous bag.

“Was there anything specific in them that you were reading?” She asked. Bucky pulled open the drawer on the nightstand and scowled when it was empty.

“Gimme blanket.” Bucky grumbled. He looked up at her with his best puppy dog eyes. “Please?” He slurred. He made a grabby motion with his fingers and jutted out his bottom lip. “I don’t like to be cold.” Shuri’s face was drawn in sympathy. She turned and walked into a different part of the lab and returned with a thick blanket.

“Answer my question.” Shuri ordered passing the blanket to him. Bucky wrapped the blanket around him snuggly and sighed contentedly.

“Once upon a time I killed a guy in Brazil and then I lived there.” Bucky’s gaze fell to the right of Shuri. Lights were shining up through the window from the floor below. Pretty, pretty lights.
“Vito.”

“You lived in Brazil?” Shuri repeated.

“Good bedtime story.” Bucky mumbled. “G’night.”

“No, Bucky, you need to stay awake. I have more questions.”

“Uh uh.” Bucky shut his eyes and wiggled down into his blanket. “Sleep time.” Bucky heard Shuri growl and storm out of the room just as he fell asleep.

It was an unconventional relationship. The soldier and the boy. Vito became used to the soldier’s continued silence and elected to instead fill the air with stories of his own. The stories were dark and full of unhappy beginnings and endings. Vito’s father had been killed in a protest riot. His mother had tried to get by working three jobs to support her four children. Two of whom died in the months following.

After his mother died in a factory accident, Vito took over care for his younger brother. Then the brother had gotten sick and didn’t get better. By the time he was eleven, Vito was completely alone. Stories that evoked a similar sadness in the soldier and yet they were told with such exuberance it was hard to stay sad long.

It became easier for the soldier to be with the boy. He would often jar himself out of these states of easy mindlessness. A sort of mindlessness he couldn’t imagine ever having had before or since. Relaxed. The soldier felt relaxed around the boy. He felt it so much that it let free a waterfall of memories he would have done better to forget.

They started as déjà vu. Sometimes when the soldier would glimpse the boy out of the corner of his eye it wasn’t Vito he was seeing. About four months into his refuge, the floodgates broke and our poured a torrent of memories from a life he left behind. It was different. The memories, though they were, all felt so far away from him. Thinking about them made him feel like he was watching them happen to someone else.

It was six months before he uttered his first word. Vito was completely healed and ready for action. He was desperate to get out onto the streets and prove himself to the soldier. To prove he was brave and strong and worthy of the soldier’s concern. It was the overeager go-getter kind of attitude that would likely get them killed which meant that it needed to be tempered.

“I’m ready. I’m ready I’m ready! Let’s go out.” Vito pestered. “I’m twelve and a half, you know. It’s not like I’m a little kid!” The boy chided. “C’mon, Soldier! I’m ready.” When that elicited no response, Vito changed tactics. “I’ll have you know that I was fairing just fine on my own before you came along. I once pickpocketed a guy with two hundred dollars in his pocket. What’s the most you ever picked off a guy? Huh?” Vito was relentless. “Maybe I should say it in English. I have been practicing after all.” The soldier rolled his eyes and continued cleaning the animal he had caught that morning.

“Hey, Soldier!” Vito said loudly in English. “Let’s get out of here. We got places to go to.” Vito crossed his arms over his skinny chest and raised his chin brazenly. The soldier kept his eyes on his work. Watching the blade slip between the animal’s skin and meat. Vito started jumping up and down eagerly. “Let’s go! Let’s go! Let’s go!” He cried each word punctuated by his jump. On the last jump Vito stumbled and bumped the soldier’s shoulder forcing his concealed metal arm towards the blade of the knife.

“Cut it out, Steve!” The soldier snapped. His jaw hung open on the last syllable. He hadn’t
spoken in so long and to suddenly speak such foreign words. Such familiar words. It made him blink.

A few empty seconds ticked by where the two boys tried to figure out exactly what had happened. Vito’s eyes were wide and hesitant. He looked on the verge of both excitement and horror unsure of which way he should lean. The soldier gritted his teeth and slammed the knife through the table pinning the animal to it. He marched up the rickety staircase that led to the rooftop of his little hideaway.

A few hours later Vito followed him up to the rooftop. He rarely ventured up the stairs. The only time the soldier went to the roof was when it was best that he was left alone. The only other time Vito had come up the soldier had been in a vicious state. He had grabbed Vito around the neck and barely stopped himself before breaking the kid’s neck.

“Are you okay?” Vito asked from the doorway. The soldier stared out across the city. He could smell the ocean water from the warehouse, but the buildings made it impossible to see the water. Vito danced in the doorway debating venturing out further onto the roof or receding into the warehouse. “I know you can talk.” He announced, his voice shaking slightly with fear.

The soldier huffed and got to his feet, but too quickly. Vito jumped back into the recesses of the warehouse, eyes wide with fear. Every move the soldier made, the boy’s eyes followed intently. Any sign of aggression and the boy would flee. The soldier held up his hands to show he meant no harm and stepped around the debris on the rooftop carefully. The closer he came to the staircase, the further down it Vito retreated. Finally, the soldier relented and sat on a wooden crate a few feet from the stairs.

Vito steeled himself and climbed the stairs again to confront the soldier. He sat on the edge of another wooden crate, eyes trained on the soldier and the exit. The soldier sighed and put his face in his hands. He hadn’t meant to frighten the boy. The soldier was just forgetting how intimidating he looked. How hard and fierce his owners had made him.

“Who’s Steve?” Vito asked after a few quiet minutes. The soldier looked up meeting the boy’s reserved eyes. The soldier cleared his throat.

“I don’t know.” He whispered. Each word made the soldier anticipate a punishment though his owners were miles away.

“Then why did you say his name?” Vito persisted. The soldier didn’t like thinking about his memories. Memories he was certain did not belong to him. Memories of a boy grinning up at him madly. The soldier shrugged. “Will you at least tell me your name now that you’re talking and all?” The soldier stared at the ground.

“I don’t have one.” He whispered. Vito scoffed.

“Of course you have a name! Everyone’s got a name.” Vito frowned at the soldier’s stoic response. “What do other people call you?”


“So you are a soldier.” Vito said. He frowned again. “What did people call you before you were a soldier?” The soldier kept his eyes on his boots. The toe of his right boot was beginning to fray. He had stolen the light clothing he had taken to wearing, though he kept his vest and sleeves beneath the tropical shirt all but destroying the very purpose of the light and breezy material. It might be time to find new boots.
A memory flickered in the soldier’s mind. The first dialog he had recalled was a single sentence.
“Bucky, let’s go!” The grinning boy tugged at another boy’s sleeve. A boy with heavy shoulders,
but an unfultering eagerness to please the small, grinning boy. The name he said belonged to him.
He knew that intrinsically. Like there was no other name that could possibly belong to him.

“Bucky.” The soldier said as it came to him. “Steve called me Bucky.”

“Bucky.” Vito repeated. They sat there, the soldier’s name hanging in the air, for an impassible
stretch of time. “Where’s Steve now?” He asked. “Was he a soldier, too? Did he die?” The
soldier’s chest clenched hard.

“No.” He gasped. “Not Steve.” The soldier felt the world shifting beneath his feet. He threw his
left hand down to catch himself and punched a hole through the roof. Vito yelped but it was
distant. “You can’t hurt Steve.” The soldier was muttering. “Hurt me, but not Steve.” The
soldier was dizzy. “Not Steve.”

“Hey, hey, Buck.” Steve was standing above him, petting his hair away from his face. “I’m here.
I’m right here. No one is going to hurt either of us.” Bucky blinked up at Steve’s face in
confusion. He couldn’t fix on the moment or his location. Nothing but Steve. Bucky sat up in the
bed and looked around the lab.

“You’re bleeding.” Bucky told him, pointing to a cut that ran the length of his bare forearm. Steve
looked down at the injury and shook it away.

“I was training with some of the Dora here. Okoye got me with her spear before I got a handle on
it.” Steve explained. He chuckled. “She was even almost sorry about it.” Bucky rubbed his eye
with the heel of his hand.

“Doesn’t sound like Okoye.” He mumbled.

“Yeah, well I did say almost.” Steve chuckled again. Bucky looked around the lab. It was
curiously empty.

“Where’s Shuri?” Bucky’s arm pinched and he looked down to see he had snagged his I.V. line on
the bed. He pulled the needle out impatiently and stood. Steve held his hands out ready to support
him if he needed help. “Where’s everyone else?”

“Shuri thought we should talk.” Steve explained. “Privately.” Bucky’s eyes finally landed back
on Steve’s face.

“You look like you’re about to tell me my dog died.” Bucky observed. His gut twisted. “Wait.
Steve?”

“Okay, so I’ve got a lot of bad news and then a little bit of good news. I’m going to start with the
good news.” Steve pushed Bucky back down onto his bed and took a seat beside him. “Your
migraine seems to have dragged out your destructive side and you kicked down your hut with you
still inside – that’s not the good news. The good news is that T’Challa’s got a bunch of people
down at the farm building you a new hut and Shuri is personally seeing to its being outfitted with
every comfort.” Bucky nodded numbly.

“You weren’t in it when….” Bucky vaguely recalled telling Steve to get out of the hut after he had
realized what he’d done.

“No. No. I was in the other hut looking for aspirin or anything to help you. I pulled you out of the
rubble and brought you here for medical attention. If you didn’t have that serum in you, you
probably would have died.” Steve told him.

“That should be the title of my autobiography.” Bucky said wryly. Steve laughed lightly along with him. “What’s the bad news?” Steve reached over and took Bucky’s hand in his.

“You weren’t in the hut alone when it came down. Jack had wandered inside to investigate your screaming, but a piece of the hut came down and struck her.” Steve sucked in a breath. “She didn’t make it.” Bucky pulled his hand out of Steve’s and stared at him.

“I killed her?” The horror he felt dripped around his words. “I killed Jack?”

“No, no. Buck it wasn’t your fault. You were in pain and there was no way to know that she would follow the sound of your screams. It was an accident.” Steve countered. Bucky shook his head.

“I killed her. I killed her because I was too consumed in dirty memories better left forgotten.” Bucky’s hand was curled into a white-knuckled fist. “She died because she trusted me. Because she loved me. It was stupid of me to think that I could relax and let my guard down. To think that I could put my past behind me.”

“Buck.”

“Don’t pretend like you know what I’m going through.” Bucky bit. Steve just stared at him empathetically. He reached out and took Bucky’s hand again.

“I’m sorry, there’s more to it.” He said tugging Bucky toward him. “Shuri seems to think that the reason behind your more severe outbursts is sleep deprivation.” Bucky focused on his breathing. Jack was dead by his hand – or foot as it were. Nothing would assuage his guilt. “She seems to think that most of your sleep deprivation is coming from me.”

“It’s nothing.” Bucky answered immediately. “I’m just getting used to other people again. I’ll be fine.” Steve was shaking his head now.

“You’re staying at the palace while your new house is being built and Shuri would like to take this opportunity to monitor you.” Steve announced.

“What are they giving us separate rooms or something?” Bucky asked. Steve’s face was pinched with discomfort. “Steve?” Bucky knew what he was going to say.

“Buck–”


“Bucky, Bucky, you’re not losing me. I’m not going to be gone forever.” Steve soothed. “As soon as Shuri finishes her little experiment I’ll be back.” Bucky stared off into the middle distance. He clenched his jaw and sat back from Steve.

“What if I don’t agree to her little experiment? What if I leave? Become nothing more than a whisper on the wind.” Bucky challenged. “I’ve done it before, Steve, you know I can do it again.” Steve looked like he might cry.

“You would do that to me?” He asked, anguish in his voice.
“You would do this to me?” Bucky defied. Steve brought a hand to toy gently with Bucky’s hair.

“I’m doing this for you.” Steve argued. “You seem to be under the impression that it is somehow easier for me to be away from you than it is for you to be away from me.”

“You’re awfully good at saying goodbye.” Bucky accused.

“Because I know that even if I leave you’ll be here. Safe.” Steve brought his hands up to cup Bucky’s face and pull his face to his. Steve kissed him intensely. He held Bucky to him the way he never did when he was awake. When they finally broke free they were both panting. “In nineteen forty-three I watched you die. You fell right out of my hands and there was nothing I could do about it. I was ready to follow you right into that early grave. I chose to drive a plane into the ocean rather than live a life without you.” Bucky scowled at Steve.

“Not as romantic as you might think.” He grumbled. Steve ignored him.

“You have no idea what it felt like to wake up seventy years later and learn that I would be cursed to relive the worst day of my life over and over and over again until Fate finally decided to let me rest.” Steve continued. “I was done fighting the second the mask came off. The only thing I wanted was this.” Steve squished Bucky’s face between his hands and pressed a firm kiss on his puckered lips. “I spent two goddamn years looking for you in everyplace I could think to look until I came to the heart wrenching conclusion that I didn’t know you anymore. Not this Bucky. Not the Winter Soldier.” Steve stopped and looked down between them. “As long as I am cursed to walk the Earth the only thing I will ever want until my dying breath is you.”

They sat on the bed for a few minutes. It was quiet save for the occasional hum of the vibranium trains whizzing by in the caverns beneath their feet. Bucky knew he was probably being obstinate, but in all Steve’s rambling he still couldn’t figure out just why he felt the need to leave the country.

“Don’t leave.” Bucky whispered. Steve was quiet for a few seconds more. “Please.”

Chapter End Notes

**********SORRY ABOUT THE DEATH**********
Bucky had a curfew. He had never had a curfew before. Not even as a toddler waddling around the mean streets of Brooklyn. Still, ten o’clock every night no fewer than four Dora Milaje showed up wherever Bucky was to escort him back to his room. Protests went unheard.

It made it especially uncomfortable to spend time alone with Steve knowing that no matter where they were or what they were doing, four spear wielding battle maidens would show up to drag Bucky away whether his pants were up or down. Of course with Steve’s hardened beliefs on public indecency, it wore their…activities down to just about zilch. Bucky had to practically put the guy in a sleeper hold just to get a kiss. And every time Bucky’s patience ran thin, he had to remind himself that at least Steve was still here. He hadn’t left him.

Shuri hadn’t left his sleeping reports to Bucky. She said that desperate men will often lie to get what they want and Bucky had made no secret of what he wanted. Every hour Bucky slept was logged, every word he said while he dreamt was recorded. He had no privacy. Just like with HYDRA. But minus the torture and with the added bonuses of gourmet meals, ample free time, and Steve.

Bucky stole his little bits of privacy for himself. In the form of a new journal that Shuri had designed for him. Only accessible by someone with Bucky’s fingerprints. He began writing not just the memories he was unlocking, but the way he felt about them. The way he felt about himself. About everything, really. Even Steve.

Two weeks into the experiment Bucky woke up in a cold sweat. His body ached in ways it hadn’t ached in ages. Tears stained his face. He fumbled for the remote that would turn on the clock on his wall. Four-oh-seven. Bucky leaned back against his pillows and tried to calm his racing heart, but the second he closed his eyes the images returned.

He fussed for another twenty minutes before giving up and rolling out of bed. He knew Shuri would nag him about the interrupted sleep when he saw her in six hours, but he needed to do something. He needed to get the images out of his head. He needed Steve.

Bucky opened his door slowly and looked out for any patrolling Dora. When the coast was clear he crept from his room and tiptoed down the hall towards Steve’s room. He heard the even steps of a Dora and ducked inside an empty room until she passed. He kept his breathing quiet and even as he made his clandestine escape. Steve’s room was three turns from Bucky’s. Designed to make it daunting for either one to creep into the other’s room. Bucky had only tried twice and had been caught both times, but never this late. It might have been his saving grace as he opened the door to Steve’s room and swung inside.

Securedly locked inside Steve’s room, Bucky let out a heavy breath and relaxed marginally. He turned to look at Steve sleeping on the enormous bed pushed against the middle of the far wall. Steve grimaced at something in his dream and batted an invisible enemy away. Bucky crept over to the bed and carefully stretched himself out alongside Steve even as he tossed and turned. Bucky

“Send who?” Bucky whispered. Steve squeezed his pillow tight enough to break some of the seams.

“Buck n’ me.” Steve mumbled back.

“Where are you going?” Bucky pressed gently. Steve pressed his face into his pillow and let out a sob,

“I wanna go back.” He cried. “I wanna go back. I don’t wanna be here anymore.”

“Back to New York, you mean?” It only seemed reasonable that Steve would be homesick. He had always loved Brooklyn. He had been so delighted by everything the city had to offer. Steve once told Bucky that America was the land of possibilities, but that New York was where you went to make it all happen.

“All the way back.” Steve said more clearly. Suddenly, Steve released his pillow and grabbed Bucky instead. He pressed his face into Bucky’s neck and wrapped his leg around Bucky’s waist. The room was quiet for a while, Bucky relishing in the pure ecstasy that was being held by Steve Rogers. Steve inhaled sharply against Bucky’s hair and Bucky felt Steve’s body tense up.

Steve blinked himself awake and sat up pushing Bucky away in surprise. Bucky sat up slowly and gave Steve a sheepish smile before looking down at his hand. Steve glanced at the door and back to Bucky.

“What are you doing in here?” Steve whispered. Bucky chewed at his cheek in contemplation. He knew Steve wanted Bucky to participate in this sleep experiment. It was the only reason he had stayed in Wakanda. He knew that if he left, Bucky would not submit to any testing. He even believed Bucky when he had suggested that he would flee the country to hide out somewhere nobody would know his name or face if Steve left.

“I couldn’t sleep.” Bucky told him truthfully. “There’s… stuff… floating around in my head that won’t let me sleep.” Steve relaxed against the headboard and nodded in understanding.

“Why don’t you tell me about it?” Steve suggested. Bucky was going to point out that Steve was never forthcoming with his nightmares. He wanted Steve to open up to him the way he was always insisting Bucky opened up with him. But Bucky actually did want to talk to Steve about what he had done. He needed someone to hear it because of all the death that bloodied Bucky’s hands, this one was by far the foulest and least known.

“Did you know I escaped HYDRA once before?” Bucky started, watching Steve’s face carefully.

“Shuri might have mentioned something you said while you were high on painkillers.” Steve answered, nodding. Bucky laughed quietly. “You said Brazil, I think?”

“Yeah. Back in the early seventies.” He agreed. “It was all done by some accident or miracle. There was a little boy, Vito, he stopped me on my way to an extraction point. I ignored him at first, focused on my orders. Then he bumped into a man who started beating on him. Absolutely mercilessly just pounding on this little kid and it kind of triggered something in me. I killed the man and carried the boy to a nearby warehouse where I fixed him up to the best of my abilities.
Kept him safe. Looked after him. We sort of became friends, or as close to friends as I could get back then.

“I started to have memories, but not like I did this time around. Back then I didn’t have anything to focus on. There were bits and pieces, but they were fleeting. It took me six months just to remember my name. All the same, I felt relaxed around Vito in a way I hadn’t felt in any time that I could remember. We were friends.” Bucky stopped and put his hand to his eyes, hopelessly trying to push the visions from his head.

“It was almost three years before HYDRA managed to track us down. I got sloppy. Forgot my training. Thought they might have given up on me, but I was still the only successful Winter Soldier at the time. I should’ve known better. Didn’t make me anymore prepared when they broke down the door of the small apartment we were living in. Didn’t stop them from retaking their greatest asset.” Bucky could feel the tears on his cheeks again. He wiped them away hastily and stared at the dresser across the room. Steve was perfectly quiet. Listening to his story while trying to keep his obvious pity unnoticeable.

“When I woke up back in the compound, I was strung up and whipped like a dog. I can’t remember how many times they struck me. When one man got tired, they traded the whip to another who continued the job and so on and so forth until the skin on my back was more of an idea than an actual thing.” Bucky let out a breathy laugh through his nose and shook his head. Glancing at Steve and then quickly away. “You know, something sort of amazing happened around the fourth or fifth guy. They were down to the bone in some places. That’s where most of the scars on my back are from, by the way. And as flayed as I was, the lashes sort of… stopped hurting. Like my body had adapted to the abuse.” Bucky pulled his knee in to his chest and rested his chin on it.

“I knew I was bound for the ice. That I would get my brain fried in that fuckin’ chair first so I couldn’t remember that I ran away. So I didn’t think to make a run for it ever again. What I didn’t take into account was Vito.” Bucky choked on a sob and hid his face in his hand. Steve was around him, holding him. Shushing his tears and rocking them both slowly.

“They brought Vito out in chains. He was barely fifteen at the time. He had just had his first kiss with a girl.” Bucky paused as he tried to recall the girl’s name. “Elena.” He nodded to himself. “They shackled him to the floor and unhooked me from my own. Vito, he… he looked so relieved to see me.” Bucky croaked. “Like everything was going to be okay now.” Steve was around him, holding him. Shushing his tears and rocking them both slowly. “They put a gun in my hand and told me to kill him, but I didn’t. I refused. Even after the lashings I refused.” Bucky insisted.

“I know, I know you did. I believe you.” Steve said, quietly. Bucky sobbed again, his whole body shaking with the force of it.

“They brought Vito out in chains. He was barely fifteen at the time. He had just had his first kiss with a girl.” Bucky paused as he tried to recall the girl’s name. “Elena.” He nodded to himself. Only slightly pleased that he was able to remember such a small detail. “They shackled him to the floor and unhooked me from my own. Vito, he… he looked so relieved to see me.” Bucky croaked. “Like everything was going to be okay now.” Bucky choked on a sob and hid his face in his hand. Steve was around him, holding him. Shushing his tears and rocking them both slowly. “They put a gun in my hand and told me to kill him, but I didn’t. I refused. Even after the lashings I refused.” Bucky insisted.

“I know, I know you did. I believe you.” Steve said, quietly. Bucky sobbed again, his whole body shaking with the force of it.

“But then they said those fucking words! They held me to the spot and barked ten little words at me and ordered me to kill him again.” Bucky turned and buried his face into Steve’s chest. “I did it, Stevie. I killed Vito. I shot him in the head. The kid trusted me! He thought I would be the one to save him and I destroyed him! He was a kid! He was just a kid!”

“It’s okay, Buck. It’s all gonna be okay.” Steve soothed, petting his hands down Bucky’s back. “I
promise it’s going to be okay. HYDRA is gone. They won’t get you back ever again and Shuri made sure those words could never be used against you ever again.”

“People know about most of my kills. They know the people, the names, the families. Nobody knows about Vito. Nobody cared when he disappeared. He had no family left. I was the only one that cared about the kid. He called me his brother. Treated me like family. And he was killed for it.” Bucky released a slow, shaky breath and tried to calm himself down. “I couldn’t remember him for so long and now I can’t get his face out of my head. That look of betrayal when I raised the gun at him. The way his body crumpled to the floor. His blood pooling around him even as I was dragged away. He deserved better. He was just a little boy.”

“I know, Buck.”

“He wasn’t super or powerful. He was just a boy.” Steve moved back against the headboard, pulling Bucky along with him. Bucky’s head was pressed firmly against Steve’s sternum. Steve’s hands moved soothingly up and down Bucky’s back. Bucky focused on the gentle thrum of Steve’s heartbeat. The rhythmic movement of his breathing. Bucky’s sobs subsided and his breathing soon matched Steve’s slow, even breaths.

He slept hard. No dreams or memories plagued him. Nothing but still, calming darkness. The only thing that woke him up was the light streaming in through the windows and landing on his face. He sighed and slowly pulled himself off of Steve’s chest. He sat up and rubbed his eyes trying to orientate himself into his surroundings.

“Morning.” Steve said quietly. He glanced up at the clock. “Or, afternoon I guess.” Bucky rolled his neck and stretched.

“What time is it?” He asked, voice still heavy with sleep.

“A little after one.” Steve stood up and stretched himself. Bucky groaned.

“Sorry.”

“Nah, I get the feeling you needed it.” Steve said brushing off the apology. He shut off the screen in his bedroom and set the remote back on his nightstand. “Besides, it’s been too long since I got to just hold you like that.”

Bucky smiled to himself before rolling back onto the bed. He reached out and grabbed a fistful of Steve’s t-shirt to yank him down onto the bed beside him. Steve let out a sharp yelp which Bucky quickly smothered in a deep, slow kiss. Steve yielded almost immediately. He wanted it as much as Bucky did. His long fingers worked their way into Bucky’s long, dark hair. Bucky started working Steve’s pajama pants down his hips.

“What’re you doing?” Steve murmured against Bucky’s lips. Bucky moved away from Steve’s mouth to his neck, licking and kissing any part of him he could find.

“Whatsoever I want if you just shut up about it.” Bucky grumbled. Steve choked out a laugh and pushed Bucky back just enough to pull his t-shirt up over his head. He grabbed Bucky’s head and pulled their lips back together before gripping the hem of Bucky’s shirt and pulling it up over his head.

“Two can play that game.” He teased easing Bucky’s pants off. Bucky sucked in a breath through his teeth when Steve gripped his ass in both hands and squeezed hard. Bucky kissed Steve again.

“Steve.” Bucky moaned. Steve let Bucky push him back down and take over. He seemed content
just to have Bucky all to himself. To be touching him in ways nobody else ever had and to have him to the same.

“I think I’m in trouble.” Bucky said an hour later. He stared up at the ceiling, Steve’s head resting on his belly.

“Trouble with who?” Steve asked, his words marred by the way his mouth was pressed against Bucky’s flesh.


“Shuri knows where you are.” Steve told him. “She came to find you earlier this morning. She almost fought me on letting you stay, but you were sleeping so soundly it was hard to argue.” Steve pressed a kiss against Bucky’s belly and moved back to sit beside him.

“I should go see her.” Bucky said resignedly. Steve smiled and pressed a kiss to Bucky’s bristly cheek. Bucky shut his eyes and let a breath out through his nose. Steve brought a hand up to cup Bucky’s cheek turning his head to press a kiss on his lips.

Bucky kissed him back, but his thoughts were back on Vito. A memory that had taken him almost three years to remember. A memory he wished he had kept buried. He couldn’t imagine a memory he would have that would be anything other than further proof of the monster he was. A monster undeserving of Steve and his kisses. Undeserving of any of the kindness he had been shown by any of the people of Wakanda. Bucky deserved to burn for all the crimes he had committed. Whether by his will or another’s.

“Buck?” Steve rubbed the pad of his thumb over Bucky’s cheek dragging him out of his head and into the moment. He raised his eyebrows and gave a quick smile.

“Hmm?” Bucky stared into Steve’s blue eyes, relieved the serum hadn’t changed everything about Steve. Steve sighed and dropped his hand flopping back against the headboard.

“What’s on your mind?” Steve huffed. Bucky shook his head and gnawed on the inside of his cheek instead. “You know you can tell me anything, right? You can always trust me, Buck.” Steve offered. Bucky’s mouth twitched down in disdain.

“Yeah, why is it always me that’s doing the trusting, Steve?” Bucky asked before he could stop himself. Bucky brought his knuckles to his lips, subconsciously trying to shove the question back into his mouth. Steve had frozen beside him.

“That’s not true.” Steve said, though Bucky could tell he didn’t really believe what he was saying. “It isn’t a trust thing.” He said with more absolution. Bucky sighed, dropping his hand and looking away. “I just… I know you’re going through a really rough time right now, Buck. I don’t want to add to your worries.” Steve explained weakly. Bucky scoffed.

“All the fuckin’ time.” Bucky said bitterly.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Steve demanded defensively. Bucky moved to the edge of the bed and started pulling his pants on.

“It means that you always have some excuse. Not just now with everything that’s happened to us and between us. This has been going on since we met.” Bucky stood up and worked his pants the rest of the way up his legs. There were no drawstrings on this pair of pants. The royal tailor had outfitted him with more modern clothing including slacks not dissimilar to the ones he was used to
from the forties.

“That’s not… well, you know how much I hate being pitied.” Steve argued. Bucky dropped to his hand and knees to look for his missing t-shirt.

“Yeah, but you can pity whoever you damn well please, right? Fuckin’ hypocrite.” Bucky bit out, grabbing the first shirt his hand closed on under the bed.

“I don’t pity whoever.” Bucky sat up clutching the wadded up shirt in his hand to arch an eyebrow at Steve. “It’s not…..” Steve shut his mouth and turned his back on Bucky.

Bucky was grateful that Steve wasn’t looking at him as his struggled with the t-shirt. He had accidentally tried to shove his head through the left armhole and his right arm through the neck hole. As quietly as he could, Bucky worked his arm and head back out of the shirt. He let out a sigh of relief when he managed to turn it right side up and smooth the fabric down over his torso.

He sighed and looked over at Steve to make sure he hadn’t turned around during his fashion crisis.

“I love you, Steve.” Bucky said quietly. “I love you so much that more than seventy years of HYDRA torture and brainwashing couldn’t make me forget how much I love you.” Steve was completely still. Bucky hoped that meant he was listening. “If somebody methodically peeling the flesh from my bones couldn’t make me stop loving you, how do you imagine anything you say or do is going to have the desired effect?”

Steve didn’t move or give any inclination that he had even heard what Bucky had said. That he understood what it meant. Bucky clenched his fist at his side and tried to keep calm. Ignoring the mantra ingrained in him by HYDRA. The voice in his head still whispering to him. *Order through pain*. The voice he had to work overtime just to keep from taking over again. Bucky needed to make it more difficult for the voice to get its way so he left.

Shuri was in her lab as usual. Bucky shoved his hand into his front pocket and stood at the edge of the table she was working at. He knew she knew he was there. He also knew that she would acknowledge him when she was ready and that interrupting her would bear no fruit. Bucky watched her work silently. It was a nice reprieve from her usual hammering of questions. A nicer reprieve from his argument with Steve.

“You know I’m debating whether your little escape last night has completely invalidated the rest of the experiment or aided it.” Shuri announced, still staring at her screen. Bucky nodded. Shuri turned just enough for Bucky to see the stern look she had given him. Not speaking unless spoken to was a big issue they were working on.

Shuri had brought in a specialist to work with Bucky’s trauma, but she hadn’t gotten the results she was hoping for. When the specialist had insinuated that it had nothing to do with them and everything to do with Bucky. Shuri had fired them on the spot. Then, she had spent the next seventy-two hours learning everything she could about trauma counseling, the mind, post-traumatic stress and any other psychological research she could get her hands on to help Bucky herself.

“Sorry.” Bucky muttered. Shuri let out a great sigh and waved away her screens to give Bucky her full attention.

“It is alright. I have decided to make it a new facet of the experiment. Of course, it will start at the end of the week we are on.” She pulled up Bucky’s chart and pointed to week three. They were already on day three. “Weeks four through six will be devoted to this new layer to the experiment. It is just as important to see how you deal with sharing a bed with someone else as it is to see how you sleep alone.” Bucky paled.
“Wait. You plan on monitoring Steve and me sleeping *together?*” Bucky’s stomach twisted. Shuri rolled her eyes.

“I’m not a porn director, Bucky. I am only interested in your sleep cycle. Nothing more.” Shuri blanched at a memory. “By my ancestors, please, nothing more.”

“I thought my new house was going to be finished by the end of next week.” Bucky reminded. Shuri slapped his chest and scowled.

“Don’t be ungrateful.” She scolded. Bucky looked at his feet sheepishly.

“Yeah, sorry.” He agreed. Shuri beamed at him.

“You wanna see what I made?” Bucky looked up at her amused. Shuri moved around the table and pulled out two guns. She stuck a red necklace around Bucky’s neck and affixed a blue one to her own neck. She passed a matching red gun to Bucky and held her own out to him so he could see what she was doing. “Safety, target, fire, and release.” Shuri showed him each of the buttons. “You shoot yourself in the foot, you lose points. Use your safety.” She warned. “Is it light enough for you to use like that or do you need a hand?”

Bucky felt the gun in his hand. He flipped it up and down and balanced it on his forearm to aim it. He flicked the safety off and pulled the trigger at the wall. A small, red laser shot out from the end of the gun and bounced off the wall, the floor, the ceiling, until it finally disappeared. Bucky grinned. Shuri had been talking about laser tag for months.

“You work fast.” Bucky moved around the table toward the stairs to the upper deck. Shuri had started doing the same.

“I had a whole day to kill since you slept like the dead.” She shrugged before diving to the ground to avoid Bucky’s shot. She sat up laughing. “Ha!” She cried. “You missed!” Her necklace made a sad beeping sound and she looked down to see her health points drop. She turned around to figure out what had happened, ducking back below a table. Bucky had used the ricochet against her counting on Shuri dodging the laser at first.

“Rule one in any battle, Shuri,” Bucky called from his perch.

“What’s that, Ingcuka?” She called from her hidey hole. Bucky studied the lab from his new vantage point. He could see her shoe sticking out from under a table and moved on to the next hiding spot. Shuri was smart. She wouldn’t let herself be caught with something so obvious. He caught sight of her grinning face in the reflection from one of her gleaming toys. Bucky fingered the trigger.

“Know your opponent.” He answered far too quietly for her to hear.
Both Ways

Chapter Summary

Shuri and T’Challa show Bucky his new home. Steve confides in Bucky.

Bucky had always known that Steve was too small for a kid his age. Too skinny. Things like that meant nothing to little children. Which meant it meant nothing to Bucky. Steve was his friend. That was where the concern between the boys’ differences began and ended. Bucky was stocky and strong. Traits that made it easy for Bucky to fall into the role of Steve’s protector. And protect him he did.

At least when it came to people. Sickness was another thing. Maybe if Bucky had been a bit older he might have recognized Steve’s size and general physique for what it was. Frailty. Sickness. But Bucky only saw a skinny kid with the biggest and brightest grin he’d ever lain his eyes on. The bravest kid he knew. His best friend.

Three days without Steve at school didn’t necessarily worry Bucky. He was only curious. In those days attendance wasn’t a life or death issue. It wasn’t truancy, children were more than dependents back then. They were extra hands in everything. Daughters took on housework as soon as they were able to walk. Sons went off to low paying jobs wherever they could find them as soon as they could find them.

That being said, Bucky missed his friend. If Steve had been pulled from school for some reason, Bucky wanted to know. He knew where Steve lived already, but he’d only been once before. When he had taken Steve home after a brawl with a couple schoolyard bullies. Steve’s nose had been spurting like a geyser so Bucky wasn’t paying too much attention to where they were walking, but he remembered the house and the road it was on.

Bucky knocked on the door lightly at first. Hesitantly. Then more firmly after there was no answer. The door swung open after a few moments and a stern old lady glared down at him. Her grey hair was pulled tightly back from her wrinkled face. She was plump in a way that reminded him of one of the nuns he saw at the private school he and his dad passed on their way to the factory.

“Well?” The old woman demanded. “Where is it?” Bucky’s eyes widowed with panic. He didn’t know what the woman was talking about, but he was starting to think he had gone to the wrong house.

“Is this the Rogers’ house?” Bucky asked.

“Well, of course it is!” The old woman berated. “Now, do you have the medicines Sarah sent you with or not?”

“Medicines?” Heavy coughing drew the old woman’s attention away from Bucky. She turned quickly back into the house leaving the door open with Bucky standing in the entryway. Bucky stepped inside mostly from curiosity and slowly closed the door behind him.

Steve was laying on the couch. A thick blanket was wrapped tightly around him even as he jostled
with his coughing fit. His floppy blonde hair was matted to his sweaty forehead. His hands were whiter than a sheet of paper, but his face was red and purple with the strain of his coughing. The old woman cradled Steve’s tiny head in her arm and held a cup of warm broth to his lips in efforts to soothe his throat and end the coughing.

At last, Steve settled back down and breathed a bit more easily. The old woman stood to take the cup of broth back to the kitchen when her eyes landed back on Bucky. She glared at him and held the bowl of broth on her hip. Bucky stared back and forth between the old woman and Steve. Steve who was covered in twice his weight in sweat. Steve who could barely keep his eyes open.

“What the devil are you doing in here?” The old woman demanded. “If Sarah did not send you with the medicine, you had best be getting gone.”

“What’s wrong with him?” Bucky asked focusing on the old woman.

“I don’t think I can make myself any more clear. Get out.” Bucky swallowed back his question and turned for the door.

“Bucky?” Steve said weakly. It sounded like it took all the strength in his body to produce the name. Bucky turned back and saw Steve’s tired eyes looking over at him.

“Heya, Stevie.” Bucky greeted. He looked up from his feet to find that exhausted, sickly Steve was beaming at him with his thousand watt smile as though he weren’t laying at death’s doorstep.

“You know this derelict?” The old woman asked. Steve nodded to her.

“This is Bucky.” Steve managed. The old woman looked back at Bucky with a curious expression. Seeing Bucky with new eyes. “Can’t he stay for a bit?” Steve asked. He had to stop to take a breath between each word, but Steve was determined. The old woman could see that if she refused, Steve would no doubt argue. The last thing Steve needed right then was to exert any kind of energy on something like that.

“Only for a few minutes.” The old woman relented. “But you need your rest.” She turned then and disappeared into the kitchen.

“You aren’t lookin’ so good there, Stevie.” Bucky told him. He took a few hesitant steps toward his friend stopping at the small coffee table littered with medicines, herbs, and various notes hastily scribbled on scraps of paper. A metal bucket sat at the head of the couch and, judging from the smell, was half filled with vomit. “You’re not gonna die, are ya?” Steve wheezed out a soft laugh.

“This is nothin’.” Steve said. “Ma says I got through worse as a wee bairn.” Bucky nodded, thoroughly unconvinced.

“You’re ma is scary.” Bucky confessed, darting his eyes back towards the kitchen. Steve’s eyebrow furrowed and he tilted his head at him.

“You’ve seen Ma?” It was Bucky’s turn to be puzzled. “She’s supposed to be at the hospital until tonight.” Bucky pointed to the kitchen.

“I thought she was your ma.” Bucky explained. Steve smiled and wheezed again.

“That’s Mrs. H. She’s lookin’ after me since Ma has to work.” Steve explained. Bucky nodded in understanding.
The two boys sat together in quiet for a few minutes. Bucky listened to the labored breathing of his friend. He hoped it was just nothing like Steve said. He hoped that Steve would be back on his feet and back at school in a few days. But Bucky knew better. He knew that when a kid looked as sick as Steve did, the odds of them living through it were slim to none.

“What’s a ‘wee bairn’?” Bucky asked. Steve blinked at Bucky tiredly.

“It’s…um… ya know….” Steve started to cough, his shoulders shaking from the force. “When you come out –” Steve’s eyes began to water from the coughing. Bucky froze in terror. Steve’s face was a ghastly purple, his eyes red and watery.

“Alright, boy-o, you’re alright.” Mrs. H said coming back into the room. She cradled Steve’s head again and rubbed her hand firmly over his tiny chest. Bucky’s own eyes filled with tears. He turned and ran from the house unwilling to watch his best friend die.

“Is the blindfold really necessary?” Bucky asked. A legion of Dora Milaje surrounded Shuri, T’Challa, Steve, and Bucky on their way back to Bucky’s farm. Shuri had insisted on blindfolding Bucky before they left to ‘amp up the surprise’ as she said. Bucky hadn’t walked the path to his farm in two months. Walking it blind now was proving difficult.

“Stop arguing with me, Ingcuka!” Shuri snapped. Bucky pressed his lips together in a smile.

“As usual, I find arguing with my sister to be of little use. She will do as she pleases no matter what. Children are often like that.” T’Challa mused. Shuri let out an indignant cry and Bucky heard the solid whack of her striking her brother. “Okoye! Did you not see that?” T’Challa yelped.

“We both knew where that comment would lead you.” Okoye answered. Bucky grinned again. He couldn’t see anything, but he knew what T’Challa’s annoyed face looked like. He often wore it whenever one of his friends teased him in front of Nakia. Fitting that he was the Black Panther since Bucky remembered the day Nakia had caught him off guard and he had tripped over a settee onto his face in a room full of people. He turned red when everyone laughed, but when Nakia joined in he ran off and sulked for days.

“I should have made you all stay in the palace if this is how I am to be treated.” T’Challa grumbled. Bucky’s foot caught a rock at that moment and he pitched forward. He threw up his hand to catch himself but he never hit the ground. Steve set him back on his feet resting his hands on Bucky’s arm and waist.

“You alright?” Steve asked. Things had been tense between them for weeks. It seemed Steve’s plan was to ignore the argument that had happened weeks earlier instead of making an effort to deal with it. It only soured Bucky’s opinions on the situation. More so than ever he felt like Steve didn’t trust him. A feeling ever worsened by the fact the Bucky didn’t trust himself.

Bucky set his hand in the middle of Steve’s chest and pushed him back gently. “I’m fine.” Bucky started moving again. Somewhere in the next few yards the road would curve to the left and back again. It was only two more miles after that. He could feel Steve hovering around him, watching for anymore missteps.

“We should have driven.” Shuri announced. T’Challa made a noise.

“I am not putting you behind the wheel of any more vehicles.” He told her.

“And what exactly have I done to earn such judgment?” Shuri demanded. “I am an excellent
driver.” T’Challa groaned behind Bucky choosing to stay silent and let the argument drop.

They walked the rest of the way in silence. It was much further than Bucky remembered it being, but he supposed the slow ambling speed of his company had something to do with it. Shuri’s small hand pressed into his chest to stop him. He could feel her excitement in the air between them. She dropped her hand and stepped back clearing her throat.

“Captain, if you would do the honors.” T’Challa asked. Steve stepped up behind Bucky slowly. His long fingers grabbed the knot securing Bucky’s blindfold in place. Bucky kept his eyes shut as Steve pulled the fabric from his face. His bottom teeth set into his upper lip when Steve’s fingers tickled through his long, brown hair.

Bucky opened his eyes squinting hard against the sudden light. They were a ways back from his original plot. The new hut was more of a log cabin in color and design. The roof had shingles on it instead of thatch. Two paddocks were built near the house with Dum Dum and the nameless goat inside along with two more goats. A new chicken coop was hidden behind the house with a dozen more chickens inside than before.

“Come on, Bucky!” Shuri cried. “The good stuff is inside!” She grabbed Bucky’s hand and tugged him towards the house.

He tossed a look back at the place his old hut used to be. The rubble had been cleared away. His garden was long dead meaning he would need to start again from scratch. A single stone caught his eye. A slab from his hut erected in the soil. He didn’t need to inspect it any closer to know. It was Jack’s grave.

“Everything here is state of the art. A new screen with voice controls and an indoors bathroom complete with a bathtub and not just a stand up shower.” Shuri dragged him around the space. It was still a small place, but it was roomier than his old hut had been. “The walls are reinforced with vibranium so no more accidents. There is a well in the back so you have running water to the main hut now. The shingles are made of solar cells that generate enough power to run a jet engine for a ten thousand miles. Every day.”

Bucky took a slow turn around his new place. Familiarizing himself with the positions of the new furnishings. New technology. New everything. Shuri watched him inspecting everything. He knew she was waiting for his assessment. A thank you or a suggestion. A question she could answer or a toy she could show off. Bucky was silent too long.

“The bed!” Shuri exclaimed. Bucky looked up and watched her hurry over to the absolutely monstrous bed in the middle of the main room. She opened a panel over the headboard and pressed a button. “It splits apart, see?” The bed divided down the middle leaving a foot between the two halves. “So you shouldn’t have any trouble sleeping.” Shuri smiled proudly for a split second before turning back into the bathroom and reemerging with a handful of prescription bottles. She held them up one at a time. “This is for your migraines, this one is for your anxiety, this one is in case you have too much trouble sleeping, and this one you need to take whenever you feel an episode coming on.” She returned the pills to the bathroom. “They’re all behind the mirror in here.” She called back to him.

“Thank you, Shuri.” Bucky said. Shuri came back out and hit the button above his headboard to close the bed back together. She smiled at Bucky.

“You deserve happiness, Bucky.” Shuri told him. “No matter what you believe of yourself.”

“What do you think?” T’Challa asked, entering the new house and looking around. Bucky gave
him a smile.

“I think you do too much for me.” Bucky confessed. He didn’t have to look at Shuri to know the irritated look she was giving him. T’Challa passed a cursory glance around the place and frowned.

“When I first brought you here I had only hoped to make amends with the man I wrongfully blamed for my father’s murder. To help a victim of war. A wounded soldier.” T’Challa told him. “But over time I have found you to be a truly honorable man. You have grown into the hearts of my people. You certainly have my sister’s affection.” T’Challa looked pointedly at Shuri who scowled and crossed her arms. “Okoye is not so obvious, but she admires you as well.”

“Nakia might love him more than she loves you, brother.” Shuri muttered fidgeting with the lighting panel. T’Challa turned red and pressed his lips together.

“You know she’s messing with you, right?” Bucky said quietly. T’Challa let out a slow breath and nodded.

“What I am trying to say is that I am no longer doing this for the benefit of a man I wronged. This house is not for the Winter Soldier, but for you. Bucky Barnes. A man I consider my friend.” T’Challa watched Bucky for a few seconds before nodding to himself and turning out of the house.

“Aww,” Shuri cooed, “he loves you!” Shuri patted Bucky on the chest and danced out of the house to tease her brother. Bucky sat down on the edge of the bed and let his shoulder sag. It was too much. The farm, the goats, the new house Bucky knew he deserved none of it.

“Do you remember when you had typhoid fever?” Bucky asked. It was the only thing they could speak easily about. Their shared past. At least they both knew that much about each other.

“I remember I had it at least.” Steve admitted. He frowned deeply and struggled at the distant memory a crease forming between his eyebrows. “I think I remember the hospital.” Steve looked over at Bucky. “I don’t remember you being there when I had Typhoid.” Bucky swallowed stiffly and nodded.

“That’s because I didn’t stick around.” Bucky confessed. “That was the first time I had ever seen you sick. The first time I had ever seen anyone so sick.” Steve chewed his cheek and looked away, nodding slowly.

“It couldn’t have been a pretty sight. Although I don’t think it ever was.” Steve looked out Bucky’s window. The river was much farther from his house than it had been before. Bucky could usually hear it babbling when it was as quiet as his house was. He couldn’t hear it now.

“I thought you were going to die.”

“You always thought I was going to die, Buck.”

“No. I really thought you were going to die. So much that I already counted you dead.” Bucky took a deep breath. “When I left your house that day it was with the knowledge that that would be the last time I ever saw you. You were dead as soon as I walked out that door.” Steve was quiet. What could someone say to that? To know that their best friend had given up on them so easily.
Out of the blue, Steve started laughing. Softly at first and more until he was in a full roar shaking the bed. Bucky curled his upper lip back and looked at the man incredulously. Of all the responses he had been expecting, this had not been one of them. Bucky stood up and paced the room waiting for Steve to finish.

“Dammit! Why are you laughing?” Bucky demanded. Steve dragged a hand down his face, pulling the laughter from him. Calming himself.

“The look on your face.” Steve giggled. “When I went back to school.” Another bought of laughter bubbled from his lips. “You looked like you had seen a ghost because you thought you were looking at one.” Steve put his hands in his hair and grinned at Bucky. If not for the beard sprouting from Steve’s face, he would have looked exactly like he had when they were kids. Always beaming up at him with that silly grin. “I wish I had known it then. I would have messed with you so much!”

“You don’t see?” Steve’s smile faltered at Bucky’s question.

“See what?”

“I gave up on you.” Bucky swallowed again. “So easily.” Steve’s eyes softened and he reached out to grab Bucky’s hand.

“First of all, you were six years old. Second, I was sick. Really sick. Even I thought I was going to die. If I saw any kid that looked as sick as I did back then I would’ve counted them among the tombstones too.” Steve rubbed his thumb over the back of Bucky’s hand.

“I wish you’d stop forgiving me for things so easily.” Bucky grumbled. Steve smiled up at him.

“I wish you’d stop holding yourself accountable for things that you couldn’t prevent.”

“Is that what you did?” Bucky set his teeth on the inside of his bottom lip. Too late now.

“Hmm?” Steve dropped his hand down Bucky’s until he was holding onto only his fingertips. “Is that what I did with what?” Bucky swallowed and gave his head a slight shake.

“Did you stop holding yourself accountable for… the Alps.” Steve dropped his hand and sighed. Bucky shut his eyes and rolled his head up toward the ceiling.

“No.” Steve said quietly. “You’re right.” Bucky blinked up at the ceiling before turning to look at Steve.

“I love you.” Bucky uttered. Steve gave a curious smile and moved back on the bed kicking his boots off as he went. Bucky watched him settle against the headboard. His face became more serious, his gaze more distant.

“Can I ask what it felt like all the times you came out of the ice?” Steve asked. Even his voice had become more distant. The sudden turn in subject and mood intrigued Bucky. He sat back at the edge of the bed and considered the question.

“It was a little different each time.” Bucky started. It hurt to think about, but he wanted to answer honestly. He hoped that if he did, Steve would reciprocate. “The first time I came out of the ice I didn’t really have much time to think. To get my bearings. I was returned to my torturers immediately although I did have a moment where I thought I was waking up back in our place in Brooklyn. Thought the cold slab I was on might have been the floor and I had just fallen out of bed.”
“And the last time?” Steve hedged. Bucky frowned.

“You mean here? Or…?”


“I remember being numb. I was just ready to do the job and be done. I was annoyed by my new handlers because they didn’t seem to know the correct procedure for anything. They didn’t feed me until after I lost Fury. They whipped me after they fed me for losing the target. Then they sent me back out to your apartment. I wanted to go back under. I didn’t want to deal with those inept handlers anymore. The ice had become comfortable.” Bucky sighed and scratched the back of his neck. “I dunno.” He glanced back at Steve only to catch the man staring off and away.

“I wanted to go back under, too.” He whispered. “More than that, I wished they had just left me alone. Frozen in that ocean.” Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve. There was more to it. Steve was sharing, yes, but he was holding something back too.

“Was it so bad when you first came out?” Bucky couldn’t imagine the government torturing their beloved poster boy. But Bucky also knew that same government had used him to hunt Steve down in broad daylight in their capital city. In that sense, it was anybody’s guess what Steve went through coming out of the ice.

“Not in the physical sense, no. They set up a fake room in S.H.I.E.L.D. Headquarters to look like a hospital room in the forties. Sent in a fake nurse and had an old ballgame playing on an old radio. The nurse really gave it away. Looked nothing like a real army nurse would look like. The ballgame was a recording of one of the games we went to from before the war.” Steve shrugged at the memory.

“Tell me.” Bucky urged gently.

“People always say I was sleeping all that time, but it wasn’t sleep.” Steve looked up at Bucky. Searching his face for validation. Bucky raised his brows and nodded. He knew exactly what Steve was talking about.

“Limbo.”

“What?”

“Limbo.” Bucky repeated. “It’s what I called the time I spent frozen. I wasn’t dead, I wasn’t alive, I didn’t exist. The ice was Limbo.” Steve nodded. His big body relaxed. He was relieved to find that someone understood so implicitly.

“I remembered the train first. Peggy and the Colonel, the plane, the war. Everything came back, but the memories that came back weren’t good. They had been twisted in Limbo. Everything happy had been squeezed out of them and all that was left was this blackness. So black that if I stepped into it, I lost myself for days.” Steve dragged his leg up so he could hug his knee. “I didn’t want to leave my room. I didn’t want to see anybody. They were all just strangers’ faces. People that had no idea what it was to be in that place. That darkness so whole and complete that it was impossible to get rid of.”

“You seem to have done just fine getting along. You have your Avengers. You went right back into Captain America.” Bucky meant it in a positive way. As praise. Steve scoffed into the crook of his arm and shook his head.

“Going back to work was the only thing that kept me out of the blackness.” Steve’s eyes had
gotten watery. It made Bucky’s gut twist. Steve didn’t often cry. “You remember the bridge. When I saw your face it was like… like a pinpoint of light had appeared in the darkness. I couldn’t believe it, but it was you. Alive and right in front of me. But you didn’t know who I was. You didn’t know who you were. And suddenly that light was swallowed up by the darkness and it grew larger. To have you and not have you. I don’t think you really understand that kind of pain.”

Steve stopped short and looked up at Bucky with wide eyes. “I didn’t mean you don’t understand pain.” He said quickly. Bucky held up his hand to cut Steve off and shook his head. “I know what you meant.”

“Just…. Okay, I know I attacked first on the helicarrier, but you know I was holding back the whole fight. I was fighting because I knew what would happen if I didn’t, but it wasn’t what I wanted to do. Even now I have nightmares about what I did. Nightmares where we are still on the helicarrier and we’re fighting, but this time I’m killing you and I can’t stop myself. When you’re dead, I take off your mask and it’s me. Different pieces of me that I keep killing and they’re all me, but they’re all you.”

“I’m your nightmare?” Bucky murmured. He stared at the floor, his brows scrunched together.

“No!” Steve insisted. He sighed. “Sometimes.” He amended. “Less now, but before D.C. I used to dream about you as a zombie. You would find me wherever I was blaming me for your death. Dragging me to hell with you.” Steve shrugged. “It was more me blaming myself I guess.” He chuckled. “I remember the Cyclone turned into a coaster to Hell and took us both down to the flames.” He swallowed hard, his face pinched in pain. “Peggy and the boys all hissing that I deserved this.”

Bucky kicked his boots off, pulling his shirt up over his head and tossing it towards the bathroom. He crawled up the bed after Steve pulling him against his chest and holding him firm. Steve wrapped his arms around Bucky’s waist and held him back. Bucky pressed a kiss against the crown of Steve’s messy hair resting his forehead against it.

“They don’t always go away.” Steve whispered. “Even when I wake up, they stick to me like molasses dripping into everything. And I have to go about my day tarred and feathered with the agony that haunts me every day.”

“I love you.” Bucky told him, his voice muffled by Steve’s hair. “I love you. I love you.”

“I love you.” Steve answered. He picked his head up and caught Bucky’s lips with his own. Bucky slid his hand up from Steve’s back to fist in his hair. Bucky shifted until he was straddling Steve, kissing him deeply. Something wet hit his cheek making him pull back and look at Steve. “Don’t.” Steve begged. Bucky brushed a stray tear away and kissed Steve again.


“Until the end of the line.” Steve agreed, kissing Bucky fiercely.
Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve settle into a home life however temporary.

A wheat field had been dug in Bucky’s absence. T’Challa had informed him that it was one of the only crops planted in that part of Wakanda in the summer. It was strange to think that all the hot, sweaty days he had endured were considered mild to the natives. For once Bucky was glad he had kicked down his old hut. Shuri had blissfully installed air conditioning in his new one. The most incredible technological advancement that Bucky had ever known.

On the nights it was hardest for Bucky to sleep through the night, he hit the button and split the bed apart. Combined, the bed was monstrous taking up most of the main space. Split, the beds more closely resembled the army cots he had grown used to over his long life. Interestingly enough Bucky found that while it was sometimes difficult to sleep when Steve was on the same mattress, it was infinitely harder for him to sleep without the gentle sounds of Steve’s breathing. Or so he learned during a two week excursion Steve had taken to do a quick head count of his refuged friends.

Bucky wasn’t having any such trouble at the moment. He pulled himself closer to Steve’s bared chest and inhaled deeply breathing in his scent. Steve snuffled lightly before his arms came around him and held him close. Bucky smiled at the small act unconsciously done. In spite of all he had lost, Bucky often found himself feeling not only content but happy. With the help of Steve and all of his new friends in Wakanda, Bucky was even beginning to think he might deserve it.

Steve often slept late. Something that amused Bucky given Steve’s unrelenting desire to enlist in the army. An organization that prized the early risers and light sleepers. But Steve had always been a deep sleeper. Awake, he ran his body ragged and often fell to injury or illness. Sleep was the only way his body could keep the boy down long enough to recover. It made sense that he was nearly impossible to wake.

Bucky stifled a laugh as he recalled an excursion in Europe during the Blitz. Bucky, Steve, and the Howlies had been encamped a mile from one of the larger battlefields that had been quiet for a few days at that point. Until late one night the Germans started firing everything they had startling Bucky and the Howlies awake and on guard. Everyone reached for their weapons and waited for their orders from the captain.

“What do we do, Cap?” Dum Dum had screamed over the sounds of the blasts. When no answer came back, they all looked around for Steve only to find him snoring soundly in his tent.

Morita had an absolute fit which only made Bucky howl harder. Steve had told him the serum enhanced everything which he supposed also included his catatonic sleeping habits. Of course, when Gabe aimed a solid kick to Steve’s ribs, he jumped up ready for battle in an instant. It was the only thing that kept the Howlies from ganging up on him every time he slept through a raid.

Bucky leaned down and pressed a kiss to the spot on his ribs where Gabe’s boot had struck him all those years ago. It was, of course, many years too late, but Bucky hadn’t been in a position to do so back then. And he was nothing if not determined to make up for lost time.
Now that he’d started, Bucky couldn’t help but continue kissing his way across Steve’s broad, smooth torso. Still deeply asleep, Steve let out a deep moan and dragged his nails up Bucky’s back. Using his one arm to prop himself up, Bucky was forced to improvise and used his feet to slowly drag the threadbare sheet down over Steve’s hips and out of the way of his mouth. Steve may not have been awake, but his libido surely was.

Bucky licked around the base of his stiff cock moving languorously up enjoying the small hitches in Steve’s otherwise even breathing. Suddenly, Steve’s hands shot down and into Bucky’s hair. Bucky froze, his mouth still around Steve’s cock. He darted his eyes up the firm, muscled body and straight into Steve’s heavy blue eyes.

“Don’t stop.” He grated. The corners of Bucky’s mouth twitched upward for a split second before he returned to his task.

Steve dragged Bucky back up beside him before he’d even finished cumming. He sighed into Bucky’s waiting mouth, his strong hands roving Bucky’s body unabashed. Completely by accident, Steve’s fingers dug much too hard into a scar on his back that still pained him causing Bucky to shout in pain and shy away from the touch. Steve dropped his hands and looked Bucky over cautiously.

“It’s fine.” Bucky said at his look massaging the sore area tenderly. “You didn’t know. It’s okay.” Bucky said it to comfort Steve, but realized he was also calming himself. After so much physical abuse done at the hands of his abductors, it was physical pain more than anything else that dropped him into an episode. He had fought off an episode or two in the past weeks, but for the most part all he could do was ride them out.

“Buck?” Steve looked like he wanted to reach out to him. To offer a soothing hand, but Bucky couldn’t bear human touch just then and they both knew it. The hand he knew to be clean and bare was suddenly covered in a thick, black leather glove. Shit. No fighting it then.

“Blue bottle.” He told Steve simply. He blinked away the blurred vision, but it came back in an instant. He felt the bed shift and heard footsteps move quickly away. “Hurry.” He said on a whisper or a scream he couldn’t say for certain.

“Here.” The voice was distant. It’s Steve. Bucky told himself. Oh. Right. But wait. Who’s Steve? Someone touched his hand and he acted on instinct flipping the person onto his back. Unfortunately, they fought back and successfully pinned Bucky down shoving something into his snarling mouth and jamming his jaw shut until he swallowed it.

Bucky woke that frosty December to the sounds of his mother screaming. Becca sat up on the pallet beside him clutching her raggedy stuffed doll to her thin chest. Fearful himself and determined not to show it, he set his tiny feet on the icy floorboards and crept down the hall towards his parents’ bedroom. Just then, George Barnes came tripping down the hall yanking up his pants by his suspenders as he went.

Seeing little Bucky, his hand shot down and grabbed him firmly by his upper arm and he hauled him back down the narrow hallway with him. His father’s hard grip hurt, but Bucky knew better than to voice it. “Get dressed, boy.” George Barnes barked flinging Bucky across the room towards his dutifully folded clothes even as another agonized shout echoed down the hall.

“What's wrong with Momma?” Becca whimpered from the pallet. George shot a hard look at his tiny daughter. His gaze softened minutely before steel returned.

“Babe’s comin’.” He answered gruffly. “You,” he growled pointing at Bucky who was struggling
to pull his boots on. “Get the midwife.” Bucky’s eyes went wide.

“Midwife?” He had no clue what his father meant by that, but he’d be damned if he didn’t obey his father’s orders without question. George yanked his coat from its hook by the door and stamped out either not hearing the uncertainty or not hearing his son speak in general.

Bucky pulled on his coat in a fashion similar to his father trying not to panic at the continued shout from his mother down the hall. Becca stared down the hall in terror. Bucky found his hand knit mittens and tugged on the somewhat matching hat.

“Becca, you gotta go check Momma. Make sure she doesn’t die before I find the… the midwife.” Bucky ordered. Becca’s eyes bulged near out of her skull.

“No, Bucky! What if she’s dying back there?” Becca whined. Bucky opened the door and let out a huff watching his breath float away on the winter wind.

“She’s just havin’ a baby, Becca. She had you an’ me already. Just go help her.” Bucky didn’t wait for Becca’s next argument bustling out into the cold night in search of a midwife. Whatever or whoever that might be.

The streets of Brooklyn were mostly deserted. A few stray houselights were on from men coming back from their thirteen or fourteen hour shifts in the factories. He wandered the streets for well over an hour looking for any sign of a midwife or someone that might be able to tell him who or what exactly it was he was searching for. Before he knew it, he found himself standing in front of Steve’s house.

It had started to snow in the time since he began his search and a light dusting covered the roof and windowsills. Bucky stared at the black windows and tried to think what he should do. Steve said his ma worked at the hospital and if having a baby was anything as painful as it sounded, Bucky figured she probably needed something like a doctor. Gathering his courage, he knocked lightly at the door. When nothing stirred in the house, Bucky knocked again more firmly.

The door swung opened so fast Bucky slid back on the slippery step and barely caught himself on the wrought iron rail before he hurt himself. A pretty woman stood in the doorway staring down at him with soft blue eyes and wispy blonde hair. Her soft, pink lips turned down suddenly in a frown at poor, shivering Bucky on her step.

“An’ wha’s all this then?” She demanded in a heavy accent Bucky couldn’t place. “Who’re ye?” Bucky opened his mouth to answer, but only a terrified squeak came out. “Listen ‘ere, boy-o, I jus’ came home from sixteen hours at the hospital. I’m expected back in less seven hours. Ye’d better have a damned good reason fer wakin’ me a quarter ta one in the mornin’.” Bucky’s little body trembled more from fear than the cold though it wasn’t helping.

“M-midwife.” Bucky managed. The woman paused and looked Bucky carefully up and down before her eyes softened and she pulled Bucky into the house and shut the door behind him.

“I dunno wha’ yer folks have tol’ ye about me, bu’ I’m no midwife.” She told him sitting him in a chair in the kitchen. She pulled up a heavy iron kettle and started to fill it with water only to drop it. The clanging noise was so loud and so sudden that Bucky jerked clear out of his chair and onto the floor.

“I don’t know what a midwife is.” Bucky shouted, tears springing up in his eyes. He was determined not to cry. He was a man dammit. The woman had started a string of unintelligible words Bucky was sure weren’t English, but he knew cursing when he heard it. She stopped in her
tea making and turned to Bucky with her hands on her hips.

“Ye don’t know what a midwife is?” She demanded. Bucky was barely holding back his tears now. “Why’d ye come here after one then?”

“My dad told me to.” He whimpered. "He says Momma’s babe is on the way.”

“An’ he told ye ta come here?” She insisted. Bucky shook his head miserably.

“I couldn’t find a midwife.” He confessed. “I looked everywhere. Dad told me to fetch her and I tried, but I couldn’t and now my momma’s gonna die ‘cause of me.” Bucky couldn’t restrain his terrified sobs any longer.

“Ma?” Steve said tiredly from the doorway. “I had a nightmare.”

“Ah, mo gra,” the woman said before continuing to speak to Steve in that other language. Steve sleepily replied in kind leaving Bucky to snuffle his tears back into his eyes.

“Bucky!” Steve exclaimed suddenly. The woman looked back at Bucky whose eyes were still rimmed with red, but no longer filled to the brim. “Why’re you here?”

“I didn’t know where else to go.” Bucky said carefully. "Momma’s baby is on the way and Dad sent me to find a midwife, but I couldn’t find one and I remembered you said your ma works at the hospital and I hoped she could help.”

Steve’s mother spoke to him in her language then leaving Bucky to stare between them in utter confusion. Steve’s eyes kept darting over to Bucky and occasionally he would give him a reassuring smile before continuing to speak to his mother. Finally, the woman stood up and disappeared back into the house leaving Steve and Bucky alone in the kitchen.

“Are you hurt?” Steve asked suddenly. Bucky looked up, startled, and shook his head quickly.

“No. Why?” Steve touched a tiny finger to Bucky’s cheek just under his eye.

“You were crying.” Steve dropped his hand. “Figured you musta hurt yourself somethin’ awful for it to make you cry.” Bucky flushed with embarrassment at the truth of it.

“I didn’t mean to cry.” Bucky said hurriedly. “I just got so scared I couldn’t stop myself.” Steve nodded in understanding. They were quiet for a few minutes.

“Sometimes when I get really sick…. ” Steve paused and touched his chest crumpling the bed shirt under his tiny fist. “There are times I can’t breathe right. Ma says it’s on account of my lungs being confused by the air. But when it happens and I can’t breathe I get real scared, too. The edges of my eyes get all dark and fuzzy and my whole body gets… I dunno, far away I guess.”

Steve picked at the hem of his shirt deep in thought. “It’s like I can see death, Bucky.” He whispered so low Bucky had to strain to hear him. “I can see into Hell and it scares me to my bones.”

Bucky was quiet as he processed Steve’s confession. Steve continued to fidget with the hem of his shirt only looking up when his mother hurried back into the kitchen fully dressed and wearing a battered winter coat. She pressed a firm kiss to the top of Steve’s tiny head and ruffled his hair before hurrying out the door shouting back at Steve in their language.

“Where’s she goin’?” Bucky asked suddenly worried.
“To help your ma.” Steve answered simply, moving out of the kitchen and down the hall.

“But I didn’t tell her where my house was.” Bucky argued.

“She knows where you live, Bucky.” Steve replied easily. Bucky scrunched up his face.

“How’s she know that?”

Steve stopped abruptly and turned to face Bucky sheepishly. His face, normally sickly pale, had turned a pale pink. “Sometimes on her days off we go for walks and I started walking us down by your house.” Bucky’s confusion only mounted.

“Why?”

“Well, if you were ever playing outside or somethin’ we could say hi to each other and maybe you could walk with us or somethin’.” Steve shrugged and stared at his feet in embarrassment.

“You ever knock?” Bucky wondered where he had been on those days Steve had walked by with his mom. Steve shook his head.

“I meant to at least once or twice, but I was worried about bothering you.” Steve settled himself onto the couch where just two months earlier he had been lost in the heat of Typhoid fever. Bucky sat gingerly next to him. The house was dead quiet. The snow had picked up outside dampening any noise that might occur.

“Why Hell?” Bucky wondered aloud.

“Hmm?”

“Why do you think you see into Hell? Isn’t that only for bad people?” Bucky must have struck a nerve because Steve became unusually morose. His tiny hands fisted in his lap.

“I think maybe I did something real bad in a past life or something. Maybe I was in Hell before and God sent me back to Earth to try again to be good. That’s why I don’t die when I get too sick. I know I need more time to try and be good.” Steve smiled at Bucky suddenly. “Like you, Buck. You’re all good without having to try so hard. I bet if you saw death it’d be Heaven.” Bucky didn’t know what to say. Steve often left him speechless.

“How about we wait until we’re both a hundred before we find out?” Bucky suggested instinctively shying away from the morbid subject. Steve laughed.

“If I live to be a hundred that would make you a hundred and one.” Bucky sighed back against the couch cushions. Now that his job was done, exhaustion was settling in.

“You think we’ll still be friends in a hundred years?” Bucky asked sleepily. Steve settled his bony shoulder against Bucky’s arm. His blonde head settled on Bucky’s shoulder and the soft hair tickled his cheek as he nodded.

“We’ll always be friends, Bucky. For a hundred years or a thousand.” Steve yawned and snuggled closer.

“Best friends.” Bucky agreed, his eyes already closing.

Bucky’s ears were ringing. He pressed his hand into his head, but the ringing persisted. Sluggishly he realized the ringing was coming from Steve’s phone on the nightstand to his left.
Suddenly, Steve’s heavy body covered his as he rolled to grab the phone. He watched through slits as Steve checked the caller I.D., sighed, and answered the phone.

“Romanov, it’s barely five in the morning.” Steve grumbled. He listened to the spy on the other end for a few minutes before springing to his feet and grabbing at clothes. “How long?” He demanded. “Why would you tell him that?” Steve let out an animalistic growl at the response. “I don’t care that you thought he would want to know. He doesn’t need to have any reasons to break his house arrest. Did you even think about what that would do to his family?”

Five in the morning meant Bucky had been out nearly twenty-four hours. He wondered what Bashira had been doing all that time. The kid had barely left his side over the weeks he had returned from the palace. Stuck to him like glue making it exceedingly difficult to find private moments with Steve. Bucky stood up out of bed and stretched his dully aching body keeping an ear on Steve’s conversation.

“I’ll call him myself. You need to activate her tracker. If she’s in the Raft Clint is the last person we need there.” Steve pulled his jacket out of the closet but didn’t put it on. “Let Sam know to be on standby. Standby, Natasha.” He was starting for the door and Bucky’s arm flung out almost completely of its own accord to stop him. Steve turned and looked back at Bucky seeming surprised to see him there. “Hold on.” Steve said into the phone before pulling the receiver away from his face to give Bucky his full attention.

“Where do you have to go this time?” Bucky asked the question easily. As though it didn’t bother him that Steve was going to up and leave without a second thought.

“Wanda’s gone missing. I have to go help find her.” Steve stared at Bucky waiting for him to argue or agree. Looking for understanding in his eyes.

“Okay. Do you need help?” It would only take a few seconds to find and attach his arm. Or another arm. Despite having no desire to charge into another fight, he couldn’t deny he would feel a whole lot better with Steve running off on a rescue mission if he were going with him. Instead, Steve gave him a tight smile and shook his head.

“It’s okay, Buck. Stay here. I’ll be back before you know it.” He gave Bucky a quick kiss and hurried out the door arguing with the spy on the other line.
A Bad Feeling

Chapter Summary

Bucky does something stupid and dangerous. Hanging out with Steve Rogers is starting to rub off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky had a bad feeling. The last time Steve had run off on a mission Bucky had spent the next week in a fit of nerves waiting to hear news. Hopeful for good news, but doubtlessly expecting the worst. He refused to be reduced to that miserable state once again. This time he didn’t even have a time frame to count on in the event that the mission went south. No. Bucky wasn’t going to leave Steve to his own devices this time.

The Quinjet from Siberia allowed Steve to travel easily in and out of Wakanda without troubling T’Challa for resources any more than necessary, but he still had to request permission to enter and exit the secure dome. It was really more of a notification so that the watchers wouldn’t accidentally get a little trigger happy and shoot him down before he made it out of the country. Either way, it gave Bucky plenty of time to stop by Shuri’s laboratory and grab his arm.

Thankfully, Shuri wasn’t yet in her lab as early as it was so it was a quick snatch and grab before he made a mad dash to the hangar. Just as he shut the lift to the Quinjet he heard Steve’s low rumbly voice echo down the corridor. Bucky had been in the Quinjet before and knew there weren’t many ideal places for a stowaway to hide. He stuffed his arm into the arms drawer and slid his body into what could only be called a locker.

The gate dropped to allow Steve admittance to the Quinjet only seconds after Bucky finally wedged himself in the tight space and shut the door. Steve was still speaking to someone on the phone, but it wasn’t deterring him from firing up the jet engines and calling for the hangar door to open. Bucky wondered how long he would have before Steve thought that turning around to take Bucky back would waste too much time.

“Clint, a little trust here. Think of your kids. I don’t care what you think you owe Wanda, but we both know she wouldn’t want you to risk your family for her. Especially when it still might be nothing serious.” The jet took off relatively smoothly and Bucky was only mildly jostled by the movement. Not enough noise to make Steve pay any attention. “According to Natasha, she’s been trying to go off on her own for weeks now. Come on, man. I’ll let you know if it’s really something to be concerned about. I gotta go. Bye, Clint.”

The jet rocked precariously and Steve let out a low curse. Bucky was positive that they were no longer in Wakanda. The video phone on the jet rang and Steve answered it gruffly. Bucky ground his teeth together against a painful groan. A hook in the back of the locker was digging into his ribs. They were still far too close to Wakanda for Bucky to reveal himself just yet.

“You know if you didn’t spend so much time on a different continent from the rest of us we wouldn’t be sitting on our hands while we try and figure out a plan.” Sam whined.
“I hate to say it, Sam, but people are more likely to recognize Captain America than Falcon or even Black Widow.” Steve chided.

“What? I’m memorable!” Sam yipped indignantly.

“I’m not saying you aren’t. But I have been around longer. By almost eighty years.” Steve reminded the man. Bucky pressed his lips together to squelch a laugh.

“Yeah, well what about the other old guy? For all that trouble we went through I don’t see him lifting one metal finger to help when we need it.”

Bucky’s mouth went dry. Eavesdropping mission relevant things while stowing away to help your boyfriend save his missing friend was one thing. Eavesdropping on a conversation your boyfriend is having with his friend about you while his friend is in the dark about a number of things regarding your relationship is another thing entirely. It felt wrong. And at the same time, Bucky just couldn’t help himself.

“I told you why he couldn’t help, Sam. And you’ve seen it yourself. Don’t start acting like you want him out in the field with you now.” Steve said. Bucky’s jaw went slack. The closet was suddenly a vacuum.

“Yeah, but you’re saying he hasn’t gotten any better?” Sam insisted. “You spend a hell of a lot of time with the guy. You say you’re there trying to help get his memories back. Maybe restore the friend you lost. If none of that’s working don’t you think it might be time to hang it up?”

Bucky leaned his head against the wall of the locker and tried to steady himself. At once, his mind began thinking up excuses for Steve’s cruelty. He did just have an episode barely twenty-four hours ago. It made sense that he wouldn’t want to expose Bucky to potentially traumatizing situations. But it didn’t take any of the sting out of his words and it didn’t give any credence to the reasoning behind letting Sam Wilson think he was still an evil, brainwashed thug.

“There has been improvement.” Steve said defensively. “A few days ago I saw him smiling without the usual haunted look in his eyes. Plus, I think working on the farm T’Challa gave him has been really good for him. He’s been doing manual labor practically since he took his first steps.”

“T’Challa gave that one armed maniac a farm?” Sam demanded incredulously. “Maybe I should get brainwashed by HYDRA.” He muttered.

“Sam,” Steve said warningly.

“I know, I know. HYDRA’s long gone.”

“How long until you reach the rendezvous?” Steve asked changing the subject.

“Lookin’ at an hour. Maybe two with traffic like it is.” Sam answered. “I really hope you reach her before I do. Nat is one scary lady and stress does not make her any easier to deal with.”

“I might have to disappoint you there. I’m at least a half hour behind your time.” Steve told him.

“This is why we all need to be on the same continent. Your old war buddy seems to do just fine by himself in Wakanda and you said yourself that the reminiscing isn’t having the desired effect. Just bunk down with me or Nat and Wanda when this is over. You can always call him when you start feeling nostalgic or homesick or whatever.”
Steve didn’t answer. Bucky’s stomach twisted. Steve was thinking over what Sam had said. Worse, he was even considering it. Considering not returning to Bucky. Without any intention of notifying him. He was seriously regretting his choice to stowaway.

“Son of a bitch!” Sam shouted. “Yeah, we’re all in a hurry, guy! You ain’t special!”

“Alright, Sam. I’ll see you at the rendezvous. Try not to kill anyone. We really don’t need that kind of attention.” Steve reminded.

“Yeah, yeah.” Sam grumbled hanging up.

The jet was quiet for a few minutes. Bucky considered opening the door and revealing himself to Steve when his phone started to ring in his pocket. The quarters were much too close for him to even think about reaching it. It was too late anyway. Steve had already heard it. The door creak open seconds later and Bucky was face to face with the man he thought he loved.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Steve demanded enunciating each word. Bucky wriggled out of the locker and stood to face Steve.

“Had a bad feeling. Wanted to help.” Bucky announced shortly. Steve’s jaw hung open.

“You wanted to help?” He repeated. Bucky gritted his teeth to keep himself from saying the first sour remark that crossed his mind. Steve pointed at his left shoulder. “You’re down an arm and barely three hours out of your latest episode. What the hell were you thinking?” Bucky pulled back.

“I don’t know. I guess for a minute there we were just Steve and Bucky and my first instinct as Bucky has always been to protect Steve whenever he got himself in over his head. That’s how it worked for our entire childhood. That’s how it worked at soon as you forced yourself into a war I never wanted you to be a part of. Me protecting you was the bedrock of our entire relationship. It was the only reason your mom didn’t boot me out of the house after we stumbled home drunk at fourteen.” Bucky hit the release on the arms drawer a lot harder than necessary. He pulled his arm out and attached it securely to his shoulder. “And I did bring an extra arm because I’m not a fucking idiot.” Bucky pushed past Steve and sat down in one of the plus chairs. “Piece of shit.” He muttered angrily.

“Dammit, Bucky! I don’t have time to turn around and fly all the way back to Wakanda!” Steve whined. “You know I don’t leave you there because it’s fun for me. It’s not a way to punish you. You stay in Wakanda because it’s safe. Because you are protected. And I haven’t needed your protection since Dr. Erskine and Howard Stark made me the toughest guy on the playground.” Bucky scoffed.

“Oh, no? I’m pretty sure if I hadn’t been so worried about protecting you we both would’ve died on that train instead of just me.” Bucky winced and shoved his hands over his face. Steve quietly reclaimed his pilot seat. “Shit.” Bucky hissed. “I didn’t mean that.”

“Yeah, you did.” Steve answered quietly. He gave his head a little shake and after a few seconds he spoke again. “Okay. You can stay, but when we land you stay with Sam. Both of you are on standby. No running off anywhere without an okay from me, you got it?” Steve’s voice was steady, but Bucky could see the small tremble of fear as he considered all the possibilities. Everything that might happen to Bucky if he was spotted or captured. Bucky had to admit he had run the risks, too, but if Steve was braving those odds so was he.

“I thought you weren’t a captain anymore.” Bucky teased. “Doesn’t that mean I don’t have to take
orders from you?" Steve turned stone faced to Bucky.

“I may not have time to turn back, but if it’s between being a few hours late to the rendezvous and potentially losing you forever I won’t hesitate.” Bucky could see how much his presence was making Steve sweat. The muscle in his jaw hadn’t loosened since Bucky had come out of the locker.

“Okay, but if we’re going to Paris you can find me on standby at Le Grand Vefour.” Bucky ceded. Steve cracked a small smile.

“We aren’t going to Paris.” He turned in his seat to take the controls again. “And the Grand Vefour you know is now an overpriced tourist trap.”

“What? Like it doesn’t have the best French rum in the city anymore?”

Steve laughed. “It never did. You guys all just liked it ‘cause it was cheap and they gave you free drinks when I went with you.”

“Ah, that was most places.” Bucky retorted, waving away the notion. “To hell with war bonds, any restaurant, bar, or hole you poked your face in immediately had a spike of patrons no matter where we went. The least they could do was give you and the undefeatable Howling Commandos free drinks or meals in return.”

“I think you’re missing the point. We aren’t going to Paris.” Steve repeated. Bucky made a sound in his throat he recognized as Okoye’s influence.

“Fine. Wherever we go is sure to have a bakery and that’s where you’ll find me.” Bucky had been all over the world both as a soldier and as an assassin. It would be the first time he had stepped foot in Europe as himself since the war. The first time he would be able to see just how much it had changed since he fell.

“Buck,” Steve said after a few minutes. “I know I probably don’t need to say this, but they don’t know about us and I would like to keep it that way.” Bucky stared out the window. He had been catching up on a lot of events he had missed since the train. Same sex relationships were no longer as tabooed as they once were. Still, he couldn’t deny the almost instinctual need to hide what he had been told all his life was a dirty and unnatural thing. And at the same time he wanted to shout it from the rooftops.

“I know. I won’t say a word.” Bucky answered quietly. “On one condition.”

“There’s a condition?” Steve said bewildered. Bucky nodded. “What is it?”

“When this is all over and Wanda is back safe, you come back with me to Wakanda.” Bucky swallowed tightly and repressed the fear creeping into his chest.

“You overheard Sam.” Steve said in understanding. Bucky didn’t respond. “Oh God.” Steve uttered suddenly. He hit a button and turned his chair to face Bucky. “You heard all of it.” Bucky swallowed tightly keeping his eyes trained on the clouds out the window. “There’s no excuse for the things I said. I am so sorry.” Steve reached out and grabbed his right hand where it rested on his knee. “Bucky, I am really sorry.” He said earnestly.

Bucky threaded his fingers through Steve’s fingers. “Just don’t use my PTSD as an excuse anymore, okay? I have never used any of your weaknesses against you.” Steve nodded solemnly.

“I’m sorry.” Steve whispered again. Bucky gave him a soft smile and used both hands to tug
Steve easily out of his chair and onto Bucky’s lap. Steve’s eyebrows shot up in surprise even as Bucky slanted his mouth over his and held him tight with both arms as he hadn’t been able to before.

The jet’s phone rang just then and Steve broke their kiss abruptly. The screen read Romanov. Steve slid off Bucky’s lap and back to his own chair wiping the back of his hand across his mouth and straightening his shirt. Bucky leaned back in his chair to keep himself from grabbing Steve back into his arms as he answered the call.

“I’m going to miss the rendezvous, Rogers.” Natasha said without preamble.

“You find her?” Steve asked as calmly as he could belying the endorphins coursing through his big body. Bucky glanced down and spied the outline of his cock pressed hard against his jeans. He bit his cheek to repress a smug smile.

“Tracker says Eastern Europe and moving. From the looks of it she’s heading for the Ukraine. She’s in Slovakia now which is where I’m heading. Pick up Sam and meet me in Bratislava.” Natasha ended the call without commenting on Bucky’s presence. He wondered if that meant she hadn’t noticed him or if she just didn’t care what he was doing there or why.

“Dammit, Wanda. What the hell are you doing?” Steve whispered into the air.

Steve landed the jet and ordered Bucky to stay aboard while he grabbed Sam from the rendezvous and caught him up to speed. Steve had barely finished explaining that there had been a change of plans and that they were now meeting Natasha in Bratislava when Sam’s eyes landed on Bucky.

“What the hell?” He uttered. Bucky bit his cheek and nodded cordially to Steve’s new friend. Sam shook his head and turned around on Steve. “I thought you said he wasn’t okay enough to leave Wakanda. That’s what you said. You said he was too fucked in the head to be trusted in the field.” Sam hissed sort of under his breath. Bucky opened and closed both fists and reminded himself that he was here for Steve.

“I didn’t say that.” Steve argued weakly obviously trying to think of some other excuse for Bucky’s sudden appearance than the concerned boyfriend story.

“Yes you did. Yes you did!” Sam forwent any thought of discretion his voice raising to just below a shout. “Now he’s here and I’m, what? Supposed to babysit him and pray he doesn’t go full Russian drone and try to kill me again?”

“I’m not going to go full Russian drone.” Bucky declared from his seat. “I won’t even go half Russian drone.” Sam gave him a withering look and stomped up the gangplank to throw himself into the pilot’s seat.

“This is fucked up, Steve, and you know it.” Sam grumbled, flicking a couple of switches and taking off. Steve hung in the back for a few minutes sighing heavily.

“Are we sure he isn’t related to Gabe?” Bucky asked Steve quietly. Steve pressed his lips together and gave Bucky a light shove.

“Cut it out.” He murmured back. Bucky grinned.

“I’m just saying, he acts a lot like him. Big crybaby. Remember when you accidentally hit his gun with your shield during a fight and broke it?” Bucky laughed. “He didn’t stop whining about it until we raided that HYDRA base a week later and you stole him a new gun.”
“Buck, c’mon.” Steve said covering his face with his hands. He hadn’t sat down yet, instead he towered behind Bucky’s chair watching the situation unfold.

“Should’ve brought him one of Shuri’s vibranium guns. Maybe that’d soothe him.” Bucky suggested.

“You keep talking about me behind my back, soldier boy, I’ll show you who’s a crybaby.” Sam growled from the pilot’s seat. Bucky lost it. He flopped back against his chair howling with laughter.

Steve reached out and grabbed Bucky’s right hand in his own squeezing firmly. Bucky took a deep breath to calm himself then another. Steve pulled his hand away and braced it in the crook of his neck, using his thumb to toy with Bucky’s long, soft hair. Bucky cleared his throat and shifted in his seat to a more comfortable position.

“Sorry.” He muttered to Sam. He scratched lightly at his bearded cheek and glanced out the window.

“What was that?” Sam asked. “Was that an apology?” Bucky ground his teeth at the heavy sarcasm. “What exactly are you sorry for, huh?” Sam turned in his seat to look at Bucky and he felt Steve’s hand drop down his back and fix on the backrest of his seat.

“Sam, play nice.” Steve said warningly. Sam glared up at Steve.

“No, if he’s apologizing I would like to get it all out.”

“Then listen to him. You’ve had a grudge against him since the bridge and it’s clouding your judgement. You know better.” Steve continued. Sam rolled his eyes.

“The bridge was… hmm.” Bucky stopped in thought. Steve’s hand tightened on the backrest and it creaked in protest. “No, no.” Bucky told him absently. “I’m fine. Just gotta remember it all.” Sam’s eyes flickered up to Steve’s worried face and back down to Bucky with renewed apprehension.

“Did you bring the blue bottle?” Steve murmured quietly. Bucky shook his head.

“It’s okay.” He reassured Steve. “The bridge and Sam.” He mused thoughtfully. “I blew up your car.” He announced to Sam who tilted his head in ascension. “Sorry. Then I shot at you. No. I shot at Steve. Then Natasha. I shot at all of you. Sorry. Then you kicked me and Natasha shot a grenade launcher at me.” He raised his eyebrow at Sam expectantly. Sam looked up at Steve, back at Bucky, and rolled his eyes.


“I ripped your wings off on the helicarrier and kicked you over the side.” Bucky continued. “Sorry. Happy you survived, though.”

“Really?” Sam challenged in disbelief. Bucky looked up, his eyebrows raised innocently.

“Of course I am. Maybe you can be a bit of a dick sometimes, but I don’t want to kill you.” Bucky looked down at his lap. “Anymore.”

“Anymore?” Sam huffed. “So you admit you tried to kill me.”

“I never tried to kill you.” Bucky argued. “Not really.”
“Liar!” Sam accused. He looked up at Steve and gestured to Bucky with his whole hand. “He’s lying, man, how can I trust that?”

“I’m not lying. Even in my Winter Soldier state you were never a big enough threat to justify killing. If I ever tried to kill you, you’d be dead.” Bucky told him simply. Sam scoffed.

“What about the helicarrier then, huh? You’re saying you didn’t try to kill me then?” Sam demanded. Bucky shrugged.

“Just had to get you out of the way. Steve and Natasha were my only targets.” Bucky looked down at his hands. The subtle glint of his new metal arm taking him back to his most infamous nightmare. Punching Steve in the face over and over and over again as the helicarrier exploded around them. “I knew him.” He muttered out loud. “I knew him. It was Steve. My Steve.”

“Bucky.” Steve nudged him in the back and Bucky shook himself.

“Right. The holding cell was really more your fault than mine. I don’t know what gave you the impression that you were any sort of match for me. Especially when I was so far beyond caring about my own well-being.”

“That’s some douchebaggy apology.” Sam grumbled. Then squinted at Bucky in a scrutinizing way. “You sure you should be here?” Bucky tilted his head at Sam in confusion. First he was upset that Bucky was staying away from the fight and now he was upset that he was joining in.

“I’m fine.” Bucky answered simply. Steve pressed his fingers firmly against the base of Bucky’s neck.

“And unless it goes the other way, you two will be spending the next day or so in here.” Steve added. “Out of sight and out of trouble.” Bucky shook his head.

“Nope. We’re going to Bratislava which means I’m getting schnitzel.” Bucky announced proudly. Steve scowled at him.

“Bucky.” He warned. Bucky leaned back in his chair and grinned up at him.

“I’ll save some for ya.” He offered. “Maybe I’ll get lucky and find someplace serving funnel cakes.” Steve frowned down at him so Bucky leaned forward and grinned at Sam. “You ever had a funnel cake, Sam?” He asked.

“Yeah, when I was nine.” Sam nodded. “My aunt took me and my cousins to a street fair and we all split one. Powdered sugar got everywhere.” Bucky crinkled his brow.

“Powdered sugar? I don’t think we’re talking about the same thing.” Bucky said slowly, shaking his head. “We’ll get you a real, bonafide Slovakian funnel cake after schnitzel.” Bucky promised. Sam’s mouth twitched into a reluctant smile.

“How do you plan on paying for this?” Steve demanded. Bucky grinned and pulled his wallet from his pocket.

“Nakia gave me a credit card.” He boasted, waving the black plastic card around. “As a fellow undercover operative, she felt it imperative that I have access to funds that are not so easily frozen by outside sources.” Steve yanked the card from his fingers and inspected it closely. His fingers whispered over the raised letters of his name clearly imprinted in the plastic.

“I really need to talk to T’Challa about spoiling you.” He muttered. Bucky grinned madly and
yanked the card back out of Steve’s hand and slid it back into his wallet.

“Won’t do you any good.” Bucky said smugly. “Mama Ramonda was the one who suggested it in the first place. Between his fiancée and his own mother, your chances of turning his opinion on the matter are slim to none.”

“Yeah, but he’s the king.” Steve mumbled. Bucky crinkled his nose and shortled, slapping Steve’s hip familiarly.

“You should spend one honest day listening to his conversations in the palace! He tripped over a marble column in the foyer in front of half the Dora just because Nakia said she liked the shirt he was wearing that day.” Bucky sighed at the memory, still grinning.

“When did that happen?” Steve demanded incredulously. Bucky arched an eyebrow at him.

“Oh, about three weeks ago? I’m pretty sure you were there actually.”

“I don’t remember that.” Steve said firmly. Bucky grinned at him again.

“Well, your mind might have been on other things at the time, Nesoka.” He chided. Steve’s eyes went wide and a delicious red hue crept up his neck and onto his cheeks. His eyes darted over to Sam who was eyeing them curiously.

“Get yourself a Wakandan girlfriend, Steve?” He goaded. “That’s the real reason you’ve been staying out there, huh. Not this one armed cyborg. You could’ve just said so.” Steve swallowed against his obvious panic managing to answer only with a short nod. “I’m starting to think maybe I should go to Wakanda. Get me a fancy royal girlfriend to fund my global expeditions.” Sam mused. “I’m pretty sure the last hotel I stayed at had bedbugs. Bedbugs, Cap.”

“Yeah, we’ll, uh, we’ll get you settled somewhere nicer.” Steve answered absently, obviously still reeling from Bucky’s slip of the tongue.

“Sorry,” he mouthed to Steve adding in a pitiable expression for his benefit. Steve gave a small nod and busied himself with looking at the coordinates. The final forty minute stretch seemed to last ten hours until they landed at last on the outskirts of Bratislava.

Chapter End Notes

Sure this probably strays pretty hard from cannon (like the rest of it doesn’t) but I really missed writing Sam Wilson.
The search for Wanda drags on. Natasha and Bucky spend some quality time alone.

The floor was cold enough to make Bucky miss the Wakandan summer heat. He rolled onto his back and stared up at the cracks in the ceiling. Wanda had proven more elusive than originally thought. Now a week into their rescue mission, the four rogues had taken up a room at a dingy motel outside of Stryi, Ukraine.

It was a small, drafty room with two beds between the four of them. Out of respect for her gender, Natasha had one bed all to herself. The three overgrown men shared the second. Two people on the bed was crowded enough and Bucky wasn’t going to sleep wedged between two other people try as he might. He volunteered himself for the floor nearest the door and settled in for a few long nights.

Steve’s hand dropped off the edge of the bed and brushed his metal shoulder. Bucky looked up and over into his sleeping face. It was smooshed against the hard mattress and his lips were puckered and slightly opened. Bucky smiled and reached up with his right hand and traced his drooly lips lightly enough so as not to wake him. It had been too long since he had last kissed him.

Steve snorted suddenly and slapped his hand against his own face. Bucky drew back, sitting up against the bedside table apprehensively. Steve let out a small groan and dropped his hand back over the side of the bed. His fingers flexed desperately as though reaching for something on the floor. He let out a whimper.

“Bucky,” he whined. “Take my hand.”

So it was the train dream again. Bucky wanted to reach out. To grab Steve’s hand firmly in his own and let him know that he was there. But he had tried that before. It calmed Steve for a second or two, but the nightmare took a vicious turn. Bucky wasn’t sure just what it was that Steve saw and even Steve didn’t remember upon waking, but it was horrible enough to make him scream his throat raw.

“Bucky.” Steve repeated more insistently. He lunged forward, arm outstretched and smacked his face onto the cold, hard floor. Bucky stared at him quietly. Waiting. Slowly, Steve brought both hands around and pushed himself up off the floor.

He turned and looked back at the bed where Sam was snoring peacefully an accusation clear in his eyes. Steve dragged the rest of himself off the bed and sat on the floor with his back against the bed frame. Only then did he notice Bucky. His eyes tripped over him in that discerning way he had when he already knew the answer and was only looking for proof.

“How much did you sleep?” Steve whispered. Bucky shrugged indifferently and sat up to look over Sam to Natasha. She was a light sleeper if ever there were one, but it seemed Steve’s small commotion didn’t stir her. “Buck, you know what’ll happen if you don’t get yourself some rest.” He didn’t need reminding. He was taking extra precautions. “You didn’t bring your pills either. What if it gets bad?”
“I’ll be fine, Steve.” Bucky hissed. He gave Steve a stern look telling him to drop the discussion. Steve sighed and shook his head.

“We’ll get you your own room for tomorrow.” Steve swore. Bucky shrugged again.

“Worst case scenario, I’ll go back to the Quinjet and catch a few hours. I’ve got a handle on it.” Bucky argued. Then amended, “Mostly.” Steve exhaled sharply through his nose.

“Yeah, it’s the ‘mostly’ that I’m worried about.” Steve let his leg fall until his toes brushed up against Bucky’s knee. It was a small and subtle gesture. Something to say, ‘I’m here no matter what’.

Bucky peeked back over at their sleeping companions before edging his way over to take Steve’s hand in his own. Steve tensed. Immediately on high alert, but he didn’t pull away. Bucky smoothed his thumb over the back of Steve’s hand over and over again. Shuri’s design had improved upon the old Soviet technology in a number of ways. Most importantly, the sensitivity.

Slowly. Gently. Bucky pulled Steve towards him until he was near enough to kiss. His right hand shot into his thick, blonde hair while his left never slowed in its soothing pattern over Steve’s hand. Bucky leaned in, his eyes fluttering shut. Just before he managed to capture Steve’s mouth with his own, Steve jerked away.

“We can’t.” He breathed though his eyes belied how much he wanted to. Bucky smiled softly at him, massaging his scalp.

“They’re asleep.” He reminded. Steve looked back at his friends over his shoulder. Bucky’s hand slipped from his hair to his stubble smattered cheek.

“They could wake up.” Bucky used his new grip on Steve’s jaw to force his head back around.

“They won’t.” He reassured. Steve wouldn’t look him in the eyes. Bucky relaxed his hold on Steve’s jaw choosing instead to pet his head over the stubble. “Steve,” he purred breathily, “kiss me.”

Bucky nuzzled his cheek peppering small, quiet kisses along the sharp line of his jaw. He reached his neck before Steve couldn’t take anymore. He hissed in a sharp breath and his big hands dropped around Bucky’s waist, tugging him in. Bucky delighted in the feeling of Steve’s breath on his tongue. Steve’s soft lips pushing against his alternating between firmness and gentleness.

A few minutes later, Steve pulled away again sucking in a breath and shaking his head slowly. “Enough, enough.” He whispered. Both of Bucky’s hands dug into Steve’s hair pulling him back against him.

“Not yet. Not yet.” He answered claiming his lips again. Bucky slid his hands down from Steve’s head. His neck, his shoulders, his back. Bucky tugged him flush against his chest and sighed into his mouth. He could feel how bad Steve wanted him though he didn’t need to. His own arousal was enough. He slipped his hands below the waistband of Steve’s jeans and snapped the final straw.

“Bucky,” Steve murmured against his hungry mouth. “Bucky.” He pulled his hands away firmly. “No more.” He pushed Bucky away and leaned back against the bed frame again.

Bucky pulled his knees up curling his arms around them and settled his chin between them. Steve frowned at him, wiping his hand over his lips. His thumb lingered on his lower lip, swollen from their kiss.
“Don’t pout.” Steve whispered. He pressed his toes down against Bucky’s, not hard, just enough to get his attention. “C’mon, Buck. You know how I feel.” Bucky tucked his thumb between his teeth and nodded, staring at the door.

“If her tracker keeps moving,” Bucky mused. “But she’s nowhere around when we get there….” Bucky lost himself in thought. The sooner they found Wanda, the sooner they could get back to Wakanda. Back to his farm.

“What’re you thinking?” Steve squinted at him as though he was trying to see Bucky’s train of thought for himself.

“You remember when we were pinned down in that warehouse hiding behind steel drums and just when the enemy got close to our position I threw that brick across the building and drew their attention away long enough for us to get free?” Steve nodded slowly, catching up.

“You think the tracker signals are a misdirect.” Steve concluded.

Across the room, Natasha sat bolt upright in bed. Steve and Bucky both started. Natasha whipped the blankets off and began tugging on her pants and boots. Bucky swallowed and dropped his eyes to Steve. Thankfully, the thought had yet to occur to him. He hoped it never did though he knew it was unlikely. Steve only needed time.

“That little witch!” Natasha hissed, pulling her stuff together. She turned and glared at Sam, still sleeping in his bed. She hurled her left boot at him and struck him in the head. “Get. Up!” She barked. Sam snorted and waved his hands around in front of his face haphazardly.

“Wha- What?” He demanded, but he was on his feet in the next second. Bucky hoped he was wrong, but Sam didn’t seem as out of sorts as a man waking up from a dead sleep should have been either. Steve and Bucky slid their boots on and grabbed their jackets before following Natasha out of the motel.

“Where’re we goin’?” Sam asked, stuffed in the backseat with Bucky. Natasha was staring at the tracker beacon on her phone snarling.

“Compiegne.” Natasha answered shortly. Sam rubbed his forehead where Nat’s boot had landed only fifteen minutes before.

“France?” Bucky clarified. Natasha nodded shutting off the phone’s screen and staring out the windshield. He had only gotten a quick look at the tracker location, but he was pretty sure it said Chisinau, Moldova. In the opposite direction.

“Yes. France.” She snapped. An awkward silence fell until Steve cleared his throat delicately and braced his hands on the steering wheel.

“Why are we going to France?” Steve asked carefully. He pulled the car into the lot behind the warehouse they had stored the Quinjet.

“Because that’s where the tracker showed up the first time, but it was only for a split second before it recalibrated to Eastern Europe.” Natasha banged her phone against the dashboard in irritation. “I thought it was a technology issue, but thanks to Barnes, I’m pretty sure it was Wanda.” Still fuming, she opened the door and started for the Quinjet.

“Why would she do that?” Steve continued. Sam took the pilot seat and started up the engines. “Nat, why would she purposely make it seem like she was in a different part of Europe? You’ve spent more time with her than anyone else.”
Natasha shook her head. “Not everyone else.” She muttered.

“What the hell does that mean?” Steve demanded. Natasha sighed at last and lamented to Steve’s questioning.

“Vision, okay? She’s been sneaking off and calling Vision.” Steve dropped their bags abruptly on the floor of the jet. He stared at her for a second before giving into his panic.

“What? Why would you let her do that? What the hell were you thinking? What the hell was she thinking? Vision would give us all up to Tony in a heartbeat!” Steve ranted. Natasha put her hands on her temples and groaned.

“No. No. She hasn’t told him where we were, she only calls him every now and again.” Natasha corrected. “They think they’re in love. I don’t think Vision could sell Wanda out even if he tried.”

“In love? Dude’s a walking computer. And that’s not a figure of speech.” Sam argued. “He’s literally a robot. Tony’s robot. I can’t be the only one that smells a rat.”

“No, you’re not. Natasha, we’re on the run for a reason. I know you don’t enjoy the cockroach infested motels in obscure European towns. Why would you condone something so foolish?” Steve demanded. Bucky took a seat back from the action. Physically distancing himself from the confrontation.

“You’re the one that was pissed at Tony for keeping her locked up in the tower and now you’re mad at me for not keeping her locked up? Am I the only one that sees the hypocrisy here?” Natasha demanded.

“That was before she was a wanted criminal.”

“She’s always been a wanted criminal. Between HYDRA, Tony, and now you, the poor girl’s never had much of a life outside of captivity. Believe me, I know what it’s like to live your life at the mercy of people that only want you when they have use of you.” Her eyes suddenly landed on Bucky who was keeping his eyes on the floor. “Barnes knows, too. Don’t you?”

Bucky’s head jerked up at the sound of his name. He looked between Steve and Natasha. “Maybe he won’t give up Wanda, but I don’t know that he has the same loyalties to any of us. Least of all me.” Bucky said slowly. Scrambling so as not to choose sides. Steve nodded and turned back to Natasha who narrowed her eyes at Bucky.

“What happened to the whole ‘Thor trusts him so we all do’ belief? Feud or no feud, when push comes to shove we’ll all have each other’s backs. No matter what.” Natasha argued.

“Hey, ya’ll this is a really interesting debate goin’ on here, but we’re not far out from Compiegne now. Like it or not this is the situation we’re dealing with.” Sam announced from the pilot’s seat. Steve glared at Natasha before tossing himself into the seat beside Bucky and crossing his arms over his chest.

“Deux chambres doubles, s’il vous plait,” Steve asked the hotel receptionist. Bucky watched the interaction from the stairwell. The receptionist was young and pretty as so many French women seemed to be. Her soft, blonde hair was swept back from her face though a few select strands were
free to curl around her face. The woman typed something into her computer and said something to
Steve who frowned briefly before shaking his head and smiling. “Ça ira. Merci beaucoup.”

Steve accepted the room keys from the woman and met Bucky, Natasha, and Sam at the stairwell.
He handed Bucky’s credit card back to him as the four of them started up the stairs.

“Fourth floor.” Steve told them, glancing back at Bucky. “We have two rooms.”

“Splurging tonight, huh?” Sam teased, opening the door to the fourth floor and holding it for the
rest of them. “Good. I’m tired of sharing a bed with you.” He told Steve. “You are bizarrely
cuddly for… well.” Sam gestured to all of Steve and shrugged.

“Ouch. Unfortunately, they only had one double room left. The other one is a single queen.”
Steve feigned a wince. Sam’s face fell and he looked between his three companions. He grinned.

“Sold. I’ll take the solo room.” Sam reached for the key in Steve’s hand and Steve pulled it away.

“Sorry, Sam.” Steve gave him a pitiable look and handed the single room key to Bucky.

“That’s not even right. You’re really gonna trust him in a room all night by himself?” Sam
argued. Steve frowned and opened his mouth to argue, but Natasha beat him to it.

“Sam’s right. I’ll room with Barnes.” She volunteered. “You’re okay with that, right Barnes?”
Bucky’s eyes went wide and he stared at Natasha once again struck with the feeling that he’d
known her for a very long time.

“Are you kidding?” Sam said.

“Nat, there’s really no need. Besides, Bucky actually has –”

“It’s fine with me.” Bucky said, cutting off Steve before he could give away more than he should.
Steve’s jaw snapped shut and he stared at Bucky for a minute. Uncertainty and desperation
glimmering in his eyes.

“Great.” Natasha said snatching the key from Bucky’s hand and opening the door to the room.
Bucky started after her. Steve’s hand snaked out and grabbed Bucky’s left arm stopping him.
Bucky looked back at Steve then over at Sam who had taken the other room key to open their
room.

“Bucky….” Steve shut his mouth around his next words and looked down between them. Bucky
tugged his arm from Steve’s hold and straightened his back.

“You’re the one that doesn’t want anybody to know.” Bucky reminded him. Steve winced and
kept his eyes on the dingy carpeting on the hallway floor. “Change your mind?”

Steve was frozen for a half second before he slowly shook his head. Bucky frowned at Steve’s
downturned head. He had a small hope that Steve would say yes and kick Natasha out to room
with Sam. He supposed he was just desperate for Steve’s touch. Bucky let out a deep breath and
continued into his room.

The bed was smaller than Bucky thought it would be. Or maybe it wasn’t and the thought of
sharing it with Natasha Romanoff, ex-Russian spy, had made it shrink in his eyes. Natasha had
already shirked her jacket and was setting up a wireless communications station on the tiny desk
shoved against the far corner of the room. Bucky pulled his jacket off and draped it over the
bedpost.
Natasha worked quickly. She had already obtained access to Compiégne’s CCTV cameras. The program started running facials on everyone in the city. This time, she was looking for both Vision and Wanda. While one of them had to hide from the public eye, the other was free to maintain a certain visibility. Hopefully it would make them easier to track.

“I’m glad we’re able to talk alone at last.” Natasha confessed, standing up from the computer chair and turning around to face him. She was speaking in Russian. Bucky wondered at the switch. Over the phone it made sense. If anybody was listening it would be harder to understand the information, but they were face to face in a hotel room. Bucky swallowed, suddenly nervous. His feeling of familiarity didn’t exactly leave butterflies in his stomach.

“I didn’t know that was something you wanted.” Bucky said carefully, leaving the width of the bed between them. Natasha smiled, but there was a novel’s worth of hidden depth to it.

“Steve says you’ve been getting your memories back.”

“Yeah. It’s more of an ongoing process. Shuri seems to think there are going to be some memories that won’t come back at all.” Bucky answered with a shrug. He kept his eyes on her. Waiting for any indication of a physical confrontation.

“Anything interesting you remember so far?” She continued. She took a small step toward him and Bucky eased back until his back hit the wall.

“I know I shot you back in D.C. and I have been meaning to apologize for that for a while. So… I’m sorry.” Bucky clocked the exits without taking his eyes off Natasha.

“And before that?” Natasha pushed. Bucky set his teeth against the inside of his lower lip. So he really did know her from before.

“Whatever you’re getting at,” Bucky said, “whatever I did to you, I’m sorry.” A curious look crossed her face. If Bucky had to guess he would say it was disappointment, but it didn’t make sense. Or maybe it did. How was he to know?

“What exactly are your triggers?” She asked, flopping onto the bed. Bucky’s mouth went dry. He hunched his shoulders up and crossed his arms over his chest defensively.

“No more trigger words.” He told her gruffly. “They don’t do anything to me anymore.” Natasha rolled her eyes in exasperation.

“That’s not what I meant.” She turned her back to him and set about taking off her boots. Bucky didn’t move from his place on the wall.

“What did you mean?”

Natasha scooched back on the bed and reclined against the pillows. She closed her eyes and sighed contentedly. “I meant am I going to wake up in the middle of the night with a knife in my chest or are we good?”

“Oh.” Bucky shifted uncomfortably and looked at the bed. “It’s fine. I’m going to take the floor anyway.”

“Why take the floor? Steve did get the room for you after all.” Natasha nudged. Bucky’s face paled.

“I come from a time before chivalry died. I don’t have it in me to make a woman sleep on the
floor.” Bucky said proudly. Natasha let out a loud laugh that startled Bucky. He didn’t even think she could laugh.

“Okay, how about neither one of us sleeps on the floor. The bed is big enough for two.”

Bucky eyed the bed again. It seemed to shrink even more with Natasha reclined on it. Bucky remembered how he had felt when Steve had shared a room with Sharon Carter. He wouldn’t dream of subjecting Steve to that same miserable feeling.

“I’m, uh, I’m sort of… seeing someone.” Bucky managed. He scratched the back of his neck and averted his eyes. Natasha laughed again.

“I’m not trying to seduce you, Barnes. Look, I’ll keep to my side. It’ll be fine.” She rolled over onto her stomach and reached out to him. “C’mon, Soldat. I don’t bite.”

“Stop.” Bucky told her, pulling away and fixing his eyes on his jacket at the end of the bed. His cheeks were on fire. Natasha pushed herself up onto her knees and moved closer to him.

“Look, it’s more comfortable than the floor and we both know you haven’t been sleeping very much.” Her fingertips brushed the back of his hand and he flinched.

“Stop, Natalia.” He said again. She froze.

“Natalia, is it?” She said quietly. Bucky wrinkled his brow at her, confused.

“What?”

She smiled at him and sat back on the bed. Her head tilted at him, the recently dyed blonde hair falling over her face. “I think you remember more than you’re telling me.” She moved back to her original spot and folded her hands over her stomach. “That’s the real reason you don’t want to share the bed with me.”


“How do your memories usually come about anyway? Do you see something or hear something that reminds you of something or is it something else?”

Bucky fidgeted against the wall keeping his eyes everywhere but on Natasha and the bed. “ Mostly it’s if I’m in pain, I guess. It’s worse if I haven’t slept.” He shrugged uncomfortably and glanced at the door.

“Interesting.” She unbuckled her belt and slid her pants down her hips, still lying on her back. “It’s late. Get some sleep.” She said, stuffing her bare legs under the covers and shutting off the lamp.

Bucky didn’t move for a long time. He watched Natasha from across the room, waiting for… something. He wasn’t certain, but a warning signal was going off in the back of his head. Her breathing slowed and Bucky was certain she was finally asleep. Even then, he didn’t move.

After an hour, he went to the computer to check the progress. It was late and if either of the lovebirds were going to venture out in the city he was positive it wasn’t going to be at two in the morning. Especially not when there was nothing stopping them from taking solace in one another’s arms. A solace he longed to take in Steve’s.

The hair on the back of Bucky’s arm stood up. He turned around just in time for Natasha’s foot to
connect with his jaw. He flew back and slammed into the wall. Before he could get his bearings again, Natasha shoved her knee into his gut. The air rushed out of his lungs and he batted her away. She was quick. Her legs wrapped around his arm and neck, her thighs squeezing his windpipe.

“Zapomnit' menya, soldat.” She hissed. Remember me. Bucky grabbed her by her shirt collar and flung her across the room. She hit the wall and was on her feet before she touched the floor. “Bespoleznaya sobaka!” She berated. Bucky’s breathing was coming shorter. He did remember her.

“Stop!” He yelped. He remembered her. He let her live.

“Meet the Last Resort.” One of his many owners announced. The Winter Soldier sat in a hard, metal chair. He was still defrosting. The chill of the cryofreeze still stuck in his veins. He hadn’t gotten his orders yet. They were introducing his new handler to him.

“Why the mask?” A girl asked. The soldier looked at her. It was a girl. Not a woman. The distinction was clear. She couldn’t have been more than seventeen with dark red hair and fearsome eyes. “Does it bite?”

“Just a reminder.” His owner announced. A reminder. The soldier was bad. He needed to be better.

“It doesn’t speak?” The girl asked.

“Only when spoken to. And only if it is necessary.” His owner yanked on the soldier’s hair, pulling a chunk from his scalp. “Isn’t that right, worthless dog?” The soldier gave an infinitesimal nod.

“What am I supposed to do with it?” The girl said. The soldier watched his master slide around her, his hands on her slim shoulders.

“It’s a gun, Natalia. Point it at the target and pull the trigger.”

“Bucky, stop!” Steve yelled, yanking his hands away from Natasha’s slim neck. The second he was pulled away, she took a deep breath and coughed life back into her burning lungs.

“I told you he couldn’t be trusted!” Sam told Steve, crouching next to Natasha with a glass of water.

“Buck, what the hell happened?” Steve demanded. Bucky balled his hands into fists. His jaw trembled so he clenched his teeth. “Bucky.”

“You owe me your life.” Bucky ground out in Russian. He glared at Natasha, seething.

“You owe you nothing.” She returned. “I was a slave to them just like you.”

“You were nothing like me!” Bucky shouted, lunging for her. Steve grabbed Bucky around the waist and shoved him back.

“Stop it now!” He ordered. “If either of you speak again it had better be an explanation and it had better be in English.” Steve warned.

Natasha downed the glass of water Sam offered her and stood up. Steve watched her, waiting. She licked her lips and shook her head, panting. Steve looked back at Bucky who hadn’t stopped
glowering at Natasha. He remembered her he just didn’t know why it was so important to her that he did.

“Somebody ought to fill the rest of us in on what the hell just happened before we get kicked out of the damn hotel.” Sam suggested.

Bucky sagged his shoulders and leaned against Steve. “It was nothing. I just had a nightmare.” He lied. Steve frowned down at him, but instead of pressing him he turned his scrutinizing stare on Natasha. She coughed again and leaned against Sam.

“Yeah, the second someone is left alone in a room with him, he goes murder boy assassin man and almost kills someone.” Sam said. “Maybe he should go back to his farm and stay away from civilization.” Bucky stared at Sam for a few heavy seconds.

“Yeah, well, maybe I never should’ve left.” He pushed Steve’s arms away and stood up. He grabbed his jacket off the floor where it had fallen during the skirmish.

“Bucky, stop. Where are you going?” Steve called after him. Bucky shrugged his jacket on and tripped his way out into the breezy, French night alone.
Bucky finds Wanda in Paris.

The soldier’s new handler was strange. At first, she behaved just as every other operative ever assigned to him. She kept an eye on him as she cleaned her guns. She sent coded relays back to headquarters at the preordained thirty minute intervals. She surveyed their target. All of this she did without uttering a single word to the soldier. Her gun.

The soldier played his part. He was determined to do a good job on this mission. If he was good, they didn’t hurt him so much. He didn’t like when they hurt him. The other soldiers weren’t hurt like him. He knew. He saw. He hoped if he was good enough, they might let him stay out of the box. Maybe even out of the chair.

On the third day of monitoring the target, the girl spoke. “Do you think this clown is going to stick to his schedule anytime soon?” The soldier figured she was speaking more to herself than him. Even if she were speaking to him, he doubted she actually wanted him to answer. He had made that mistake before.

She threw her head back and groaned in annoyance. Her dark eyes landed on him sitting in the darkest corner of the room. His long hair hung in greasy locks around his face. She scowled. “I know you can speak.” She announced. “Speak.” She ordered.

“Da, mem.” The soldier barked. She stared at him curiously.

“Natalia.” She said. “Call me Natalia. Ma’am makes me feel like an old crone.” The soldier gave a short nod of understanding. She sighed dramatically. “Say it.” She ordered.

“Natalia.” He obeyed. She smiled then and the soldier’s stomach turned.

“Good boy.” She cooed before giggling. She was very young. “Now, what are you called?” The soldier stared at her unsure. “Your name. You have to have one. You aren’t just Worthless Dog.”

The soldier fixed his eyes on the floor between them. A large, black rat skittered across the faded carpet. It was a strange green-grey color the soldier was certain it hadn’t been when new. Dirt, dust, and crumbs were ground into the fibers so much so that when somebody walked over it the particles leapt into the air and stained the air.

“My God! Just speak freely. For crying out loud. The silence is getting on my nerves.” The girl grumbled. The soldier’s heart was racing. He had never been put in this situation before. He couldn’t decide if it was a test or not. He was betting that it was, but he wasn’t sure how he should answer it. On the one hand, the masters hated it when he spoke. On the other hand, they hated it even more when he disobeyed an order.

“Soldat.” He answered. Beneath his mask, he pressed his lips together so hard he could taste blood. Natalia frowned at him and crossed her arms over her chest.
“That isn’t really a name, you know.”

The soldier kept his eyes on the disgusting carpet. He hoped he had made the right call. If not, he wondered how long the pain would last this time. It was one of the only things they let him remember. The pain. Everything else was taken from him. Maybe. Or maybe he never was anything else. He often thought that there was something he was forgetting. Something important. Then the pain would come again and he would remember. Remember that he was nothing else. That this is who he was. Not a person like the masters. A weapon. A dog. A soldier.

“Fine.” Natalia relented. She threw herself back into her chair, her arms still crossed over her chest and a deep frown on her face.

“I am sorry to disappoint you. I will do better.” The soldier said before he could remember to stop himself. He winced and put his gaze back on the ground. Natalia spun in her chair and face him again.

“Were you trained in one of the Academies?” She asked. The soldier kept his expression impassive.

“I have known only the Compound. No life outside.” He confessed. She frowned again and nodded, tilting her head this way and that as though trying to work him out like a puzzle.

“How old are you?”

“I have no age. I am only a weapon.”

Natalia scoffed. “Even weapons have ages.” She picked up her twin handguns and held them up for him to see. “For instance, these guns are three years old. I got them as a graduation gift when I graduated the Academy at sixteen.” She flipped the guns in her hands and set them back on the table where she had been cleaning them.

“I have no age.” The soldier asserted. He didn’t. Time didn’t exist for him. Faces came and went. A master could have the face of a boy on their first meeting and when next he saw him, that face was old and haggard. The soldier never changed. He was only as he was. Never different.

“Care to explain the arm?” She asked, deciding on a new subject. The soldier looked curiously down at both of his arms. He knew which one she was referring to. The painful one.

“A gift from the masters.” He told her. She blinked at him slowly, like a cat.

“Gift?” She insisted. “They took your arm off and replaced it and you call that a gift?” The soldier frowned. What did she call a gift?

“Does it bother you, Natalia?” He asked. His uniform covered every inch of him except the gleaming silver arm. The red star painted on his shoulder visible to all.

“Only if it gives away our position.” She grumbled. The soldier rubbed the metal with his leather gloved hand.

“I will take responsibility if it does, Natalia. I will await any punishment you deem necessary.” The soldier said solemnly. Natalia stared at him wordlessly for a long time. He couldn’t seem to get a read on her expression no matter how hard he tried. He hated it. If he were due for a beating she should just tell him. The suspense was beyond distracting and likely to get him killed.
“Oh, goodie!” Natalia squealed abruptly, turning her gaze back out the window. Their target had finally returned to his manse out in the Serbian countryside. She jerked her head out the window at the fleet of men below. By all rights a small battalion of armed guards.

The soldier opened a case and started assembling his rifle. Natalia tucked guns and knives into every possible hiding place on her body. Fully armed, the duo turned out of the musty apartment. The soldier went to the roof first while Natalia headed down the stairs. Her mission was different than the soldier’s. His were always the same. Eliminate the target and neutralize anyone that gets in your way. Both words meaning the same thing in HYDRA’s dictionary. Kill.

Bucky had gone to Paris. They were a short bus ride away and he desperately needed to clear his head. Sure, his first plan had been to head back to call Shuri or T’Challa and return to Wakanda, but he knew once he did there were slim odds of him ever leaving the country again. He hadn’t been to Paris since Nazis were marching in the streets armed with HYDRA weapons.

On his grand tour of places he could remember before he settled into Bucharest hadn’t included the city of love. Had had, however, found himself in the Alps for a week. Wandering through the snow like a mindless zombie. He didn’t know what he was looking for. Maybe he hadn’t been looking for anything. But when he didn’t find it, he made the decision to find a place to hide out. A place nobody would look twice at him. To disappear.

But he wasn’t disappearing now. Not really. He only needed to take a breath. Step away from memories he would prefer to bury. Especially when they involved one of Steve’s friends. Natasha. No matter what he did or how he said it, the name didn’t fit her. Not anymore. Natalia. Natalia Romanova. His hands curled into fists around the iron railing he was holding.

As if waking from a dream, he realized that he was hundreds of feet above the ground. He shook himself physically and looked around. It was barely five in the morning, the sun was creeping up over the Seine. Bucky stood at the top of the Eiffel Tower alone. Or. Mostly alone. A couple stood looking out over the horizon about fifty feet on his right. The woman had dyed red hair that reminded Bucky of young Natalia. The man was much older.

Something struck him as familiar about the couple. Something in the way they spoke. The sound of the girl’s voice. Bucky kept his eyes out at the scenery, but all his attention shifted to the couple. He watched them as they moved away to sit on a bench, the girl tucked into the man’s arms comfortably. A twinge of envy stirred in Bucky’s gut, but he pushed it away.

After an hour, the couple rose and made their way down the stairs. Bucky followed at a distance, watching the way they moved together. Their hands were clasped tightly together, the girl’s head rested on the man’s shoulder even as they maneuvered through the crowded Parisian streets. It wasn’t until they had made it eight blocks from the tower that the girl turned suddenly and looked back.

Bucky’s heart gave a small start until he realized she wasn’t looking back at him, but up at the tower. It gave him the opportunity to get a full look at her face. It was her. The one causing all the trouble. The reason he left his farm. Wanda Maximoff. The man with her wasn’t Vision. A bright purple robot would stick out like a sore thumb in normal society. He wondered who this new man was. And a little bit smug that Natalia had been wrong.

Bucky ducked into a bodega as Wanda’s gaze dropped from the tower and gave a cursory glance around the plaza. Searching for any eyes that might be hunting her. The man leaned down and pressed a kiss to her temple. The corners of her mouth bounced up briefly and she turned with her boyfriend to continue down the street.
By noon, they had returned to their hotel. A quaint little bed and breakfast set back a ways from the city’s bustle. Once he was certain they were sequestered in their room, Bucky went in search of a phone. He had abandoned his back in Compiegne when he had stormed out of the hotel in the dead of night not twelve hours ago.

“Bucky!” Steve screeched into the phone so loud Bucky had to pull the phone away from his ear. The woman Bucky had borrowed the phone from arched a perfectly groomed eyebrow at him. He smiled apologetically back at her and turned away.

“I found her.” He announced without preamble. He heard Steve sigh heavily on the other end.

“Do you have any idea how worried I’ve been?” Steve demanded. Bucky shook his head knowing Steve couldn’t see him.

“Did you hear me? Wanda. I found her.” Bucky repeated. Steve was quiet for a minute.

“Did she see you? Does she know you’re there?”

“No. She’s in Paris at La Bonne Nuit. She isn’t alone, but it doesn’t look like the robot guy.” Bucky explained.

“Give us an hour. Keep us updated.” Steve commanded. Bucky nodded and ended the call making sure he erased the conversation from the cell phone’s call log before handing it back to the woman.

Bucky climbed up to the roof of an adjacent building. While it was only two stories taller than La Bonne Nuit, it provided him with a near perfect view of the hotel’s exits. As a special bonus, he could even see partially into Maximoff’s suite. Out of hard borne decency, he kept his eyes averted from the pair’s private activities.

“Cap sent me over to keep an eye on you.” Sam announced from behind him almost two hours later. He peeked back through the window into Maximoff’s room to see the couple scrambling frantically for clothing. Steve and Natalia/Natasha barely waited for them to cover themselves before storming the room.

“I’m sure he did.” Bucky murmured distractedly. There was no time for small talk or argument whichever it was Sam had in mind. No time and no patience for that matter.

The only visible parts of Steve and Natalia/Natasha were their legs to just above their knees. There was a still moment. Two parties assessing each other and the situation. Three if Bucky and Sam were included. Suddenly, the middle-aged man changed. The purple laser robot had taken his place. Bucky had been wrong.

A movement on Steve’s part had Bucky’s hackles rising. For any normal person, simply seeing their legs up to the knee would have been able to tell them little. But Bucky knew Steve in his bones. Without needing to give it too much thought he could tell exactly what Steve was planning. And right now, that subtle twitch in his right calf told Bucky everything.

“Dammit, Steve.” He muttered softly. “I need my phone now.” Bucky told Sam coldly holding his hand out behind him. He kept his eyes trained on the altercation below. It wasn’t too far gone. Yet. Once it got there, Steve would either be killed or imprisoned and Bucky wasn’t keen on either notion.

“A ‘please’ would be nice, ya know.” Sam grumbled sliding the phone into Bucky’s outstretched hand.
Bucky turned the phone the right way in his hand without looking and dialed Steve’s number. He watched the varied reactions of the people in the room. Every last one of them was a ticking time bomb. Hopefully Bucky wasn’t too late to try and diffuse them. He watched Steve take a step back and all but disappear from Bucky’s line of sight even as his voice crackled in his ear.

“Busy,” Steve said.

“Don’t start a fight you can’t win.” Bucky begged.

“You know better than that.” Steve sighed. “And they aren’t really giving us much of a choice here.”

“What happened to the Steve Rogers that believed the right words could stop a fight. The right words at the right time and you might’ve gotten to know your dad. You remember that?” Bucky insisted.

“I don’t have those words. I never have.”

“They’re in love.”

“Buck….” Steve breathed his name into the phone. Begging.

“No. Hang on. Listen.” Bucky spoke as the thoughts came to him. “Wanda and the robot, they’re in love. That’s why they’re here and why they’re in hiding. You didn’t see them today, Steve. They would do anything to stay together. And that won’t be easy what with one of them being an international fugitive accused of various war crimes and the other being on the government’s payroll. Think about it, if I was able to track them today who can say how long it will be before someone else – someone worse – does the same?” Bucky watched Steve slowly come back into view through the window. “Just… reason with them, babe, work something out. Let them be together, but let it be on your terms. Or… I don’t know. Just make it safer for them. Not everybody has a farm in Wakanda.”

Steve ended the call and Bucky slid his phone into his pocket. He saw Steve approach Vision and Wanda with renewed calm. Bucky smiled to himself until Sam coughed politely behind him. Bucky’s heart stuttered. At some point during his conversation he had forgotten he wasn’t alone on the roof.

“So….” Sam drawled. Then stopped altogether.

“Yeah?” Bucky answered impatiently.

Sam cleared his throat again. This time it was out of nervousness and uncertainty more than manners. “I’m getting the impression that you and Cap are more than just…friends.”

Bucky licked his lips before pressing them together hard to keep from grinning. “Of course not. He didn’t tell you? We’re best friends.” Bucky told him earnestly. He could feel the pressure of a stifled laugh burning in his chest. Nothing amused him more than the simple joys of riling up Sam Wilson. And Sam didn’t disappoint.

“Cut the crap and tell it to me straight. Are the two of you… er… dating?” Sam managed.

Bucky swallowed hard. He had made a promise to Steve not to say anything about the nature of their relationship to his friends. At the time he had made it without hesitation, but he had never thought it would be so difficult. Bucky stared across the way to Steve still discussing the matter with the lovebirds.
“Is that why you attacked Natasha? She say something about it? Or say something suggestive about Steve? Or did you find out they kissed and wig out?” Sam continued in Bucky’s silence.

“What?” He shook his head. “No.” He told Sam firmly.

“No she didn’t say anything about it or no you and Cap aren’t bumpin’ uglies?” Sam pestered.

“Look, Sam, I don’t know you. And you don’t know me. You are friends with Steve so I deal with you, but we aren’t friends. We’re barely acquaintances. You aren’t entitled to my secrets.”

It was quiet for a beat.

“Wow.” Sam said dryly. “I’m touched. I never knew you cared so much about lil’ ol’ me.”

Bucky’s attention flew back to the hotel room and its sudden vacancy. He scanned the streets near the exits, but Steve and Company had yet to show. Sam’s foot landed squarely in Bucky’s ass shoving him face down on the rooftop. Bucky flipped over in time to see Vision floating overhead.

“Mr. Barnes.” The robot said. Bucky’s eyes went wide. “You are wanted for the assassinations of more than twenty-five influential persons including the murder of Howard and Maria Stark.”

“Hey, Vis, don’t do anything rash.” Sam said, holding a gun on Vision.

“Our past working on the same team spares you this day, Sam. Mr. Barnes has no such connection. Point of fact, Mr. Stark will be delighted to hear of his capture.” Vision moved toward Bucky.

“New plan, Winter Soldier, run!” Sam screamed at him, launching Bucky off the roof.

Steve, Natalia/Natasha, and Wanda were walking out of the hotel at that precise moment. Bucky scrambled for anything to slow his descent coming up empty. He let himself go into the fall, bracing for impact. Not braced enough, though. He slammed into the pavement in front of the trio like a ton of bricks. He let out a guttural moan as the tremors moved up his legs into his chest and stomach.

“Buck, what –?” Steve’s eyes went up landing on Vision.

“Tell me we can outrun him.” Bucky gasped. Steve’s hand shot up to his back and slowly moved back to his side clenched in a tight fist.

Something hot hit Bucky’s back searing through his leather jacket and melting his skin. Flashes of being chained on the hook, the cat o’ nine tails slapping against his flesh wet and sticky with his blood. Bucky screamed and crawled forward, away from the pain, but the pain followed.

“Vision, stop!” Steve screamed somewhere behind Bucky. “Wanda! Wanda, please!” Steve was begging now.

Then the pain was gone.

Steve’s hands scooped Bucky up under his arms, pulling him to his feet. Bucky was losing it. He could feel himself losing it. He was back in the chamber with a gun in his hand and fifteen year old Vito smiling up at him with a blood covered face. Then Vito switched and it was Steve and Steve was screaming at him, but there was no sound. Just screaming and Bucky could see his mouth forming the words, ‘don’t do it’ and Bucky knew he had no choice.
Bucky lifted the gun to his own head and pulled the trigger.

The scene shifted. A gun was still clutched in his fist, but he was no longer in the compound and Steve and Vito were nowhere to be found. He was in the desert somewhere and beneath his gun was a woman. No. Not just a woman. Natalia. She was shielding his target with her body. Her hands were empty, held up in surrender. No. Pleading. She was begging him to walk away.

“She’s a traitor. Working for the enemy.” His new handler hissed through his ear comm. But Bucky couldn’t see a traitor. He could only see his handler. The only one to show an interest in him beyond his use as a weapon.

Not killing the target wasn’t an option. Walking away wasn’t an option. He could not disobey. He was designed only to comply. He had promised compliance. He moved his gun over to where the man’s head was ducked. Just behind her hip. He wouldn’t hit any major organs or arteries. She would live, but it would look convincing. He looked Natalia in the eyes once more. Before he could betray to her his intentions, he pulled the trigger.

“Bucky, c’mon, buddy. Come back to me. You’re okay. It’s all okay. We’re going to drop Sam and Natasha and Wanda off in Norway and then we’re going to take you home and Shuri and the rest of the lab guys are gonna fix you right up.” Steve whispered. His large, strong hands pet his hair back from his face.

Bucky was lying on his stomach on the floor of the Quinjet. His head was in Steve’s lap, but the plane was moving. Who was flying it? Steve would never talk to him this way in front of people. Bucky started to move, but the strain on his lungs was too great. He fell back into Steve’s lap coughing.

“How bad?” Bucky croaked.

“Not bad considering. I do not think Vis was out to kill you. If he was, you would be dead.” Someone announced. Bucky pried his eyes open to see who had spoken, but whoever it was was hidden in the depths of the plane.

“Wanda, not now.” Steve hissed. Bucky turned his head in Steve’s lap and let out a heavy breath.

“Wanda,” he said with weak cheer. “We’ve been looking for you! I’m glad you aren’t dead or… or… hmm?”

“Is he on drugs?” Sam asked from the cockpit.

“Adrenaline, endorphins, or just plain shock. We need to land so they can get him back to Wakanda.” Natalia answered.

“Natalia!” Bucky cried, his lungs bursting with the effort. “Natalia, you remember that time I didn’t kill you?” The plane grew very quiet.

“Yeah?” Natalia said quietly.

“They told me to, you know.” Bucky closed his eyes again and gave a small nod. “Traitor they said. But you were just little Natalia.” Bucky sighed and then let out a whimper. “They woke me up after you recovered. They were so mad.” Bucky squeezed Steve’s forearm tightly as the memory of pain racked his already wounded body.

“Shh, it’s okay. You’re okay.” Steve soothed.
“I don’t want it.” Bucky whimpered. “Don’t want it.”

“What is he talking about?” Steve demanded. “Natasha!”

“He’s in shock, I doubt even he knows what he’s talking about.”

The plane was descending. Bucky could feel it in his gut.

“You two going to be alright to get back to Wakanda?” Sam asked quietly above him.

Steve shifted and disappeared from beneath Bucky replaced with a pillow. Someone pulled something off his back and the pain was renewed as the air hit the open wound. He heard Sam suck in air between his teeth at the sight of his wound. If it looked anything like it felt, Bucky imagined it looked like the fat kid that lived on Delancey with a penchant for knocking little Stevie around until his asthma kicked in. Covered in grotesque pimples and a unibrow.

“Doesn’t he have your same serum in him?” Sam asked. “Shouldn’t he be healing on his own by now?”

“I don’t know, Sam. But Vision hit him with a blast from an Infinity Stone. According to Thor those things are more dangerous than an entire army of Ultrons. Who’s to say it how it will affect him?”

Someone laid new bandages over his wound and Bucky allowed himself to succumb to the pain once more.
Bucky has to heal from a direct hit from an infinity stone which is a lot harder than it sounds. Even for a super soldier.

Sorry it's been so long. NanoWrimo takes a lot of focus. Hope you're still reading!!

The sun was beating down on Bucky’s face warming him inside and out. He yawned and stretched in the grass inadvertently knocking his book off his chest. He tucker his hands under his head and stared up at the sky contentedly. The branches of the old oak reached for the clouds, falling short but still trying.

Beside him, someone coughed. He turned his head and smiled at Steve. His eyes were rimmed with red that he persisted was only from allergies and not a sign of yet another oncoming illness. Bucky squinted at him in the light. Steve was focused on his sketchbook wearing Bucky’s second favorite expression. Whenever Steve was extremely concentrated on something the tip of his tongue would poke out the right corner of his mouth.

Steve lifted his pencil and squinted at his sketch. He frowned thoughtfully before looking up at Bucky. He jumped in shock when he saw Bucky staring back at him. Steve’s cheeks lit up a bright pink hue all the way to the tips of his ears. The embarrassment made Bucky curious. He rolled onto his belly and pushed himself up to his knees.

“What’s got you flustered?” Bucky asked reaching out for the sketchbook.

Steve snatched the book away and flipped it shut. He should have known better. Steve rarely hid things from Bucky. If they were any closer they’d be occupying the same body. Bucky got to his feet nonchalantly, letting Steve think he didn’t care anymore. As soon as Steve’s shoulders relaxed, Bucky dove down and snatched the sketchbook from behind him.

“No! Bucky!” Steve cried, jumping to his feet.

“Bucky?” He thought a woman’s voice said, but he passed it off on the kids running and playing down the hill from them.

Bucky held the book up above his head just out of Steve’s reach and started flipping through it. The sketches were remarkable by any standards let alone that of a fourteen year old kid. Bucky had seen most of the sketches before. Steve wasn’t embarrassed by them. Bucky was interested in the one he was embarrassed by.

“Just think of what you could accomplish if you could see in color.” Bucky muttered, flipping through.
“This isn’t funny, Bucky! Give it back!” Steve protested, ignoring the jab at his color blindness.

“I’m not being funny, I’m being nosy.” Bucky corrected.

“Bucky!” Steve whined.

“What happened to him?”

“He took a hit in the field. Please tell me you can fix him.”

“A hit from what? What is this?”

It was too late. Bucky found the sketch Steve had been working on. Unlike the rest of the pages, it was still half done. Bucky stared at the page in wonder. There, in finely practiced graphite, was Bucky. He was sleeping with the book still open on his chest looking better than Bucky thought he did which was saying something.

Bucky brought the sketchbook down, forgetting Steve for a second. In that second, Steve snatched the book back out of Bucky’s hands, closed it, and shoved it into his bag. Bucky scratched at his neck and swallowed looking for words. It was just a sketch so he wasn’t sure why he felt so flustered by it.

“You don’t normally draw people like that.” Bucky said at last.

Steve shrugged and refused to meet Bucky’s eyes. Bucky cleared his throat.

“It’s good.”

“It was just practice.” Steve mumbled.

“Aren’t they all?” Bucky nudged Steve’s arm until he looked up at him and gave a halfhearted smile. “Why didn’t you want me to see it?”

Steve shrugged again. “I dunno, Buck. Just felt embarrassing for me to show you a picture I drew of you.”

Bucky grinned and stooped to pick up his discarded book. “You can draw me anytime you want, Stevie.” He slapped the book against Steve’s arm. “Just don’t ask me to pose nude or nothin’.”

Steve flushed again and shook his head. “I don’t think I’m cut for that sorta art anyway.”

“Give it time.” Bucky ruffled Steve’s floppy, blonde hair before shoving his head away playfully.

“When do you have to be at work?” Steve asked, patted his hair back down into some semblance of order.

Bucky tugged the sleeve of his shirt up and squinted at the watch. Without saying a word, Bucky dropped to the ground with all the elegance of a coconut dropping from a palm tree. Steve feigned obliviousness as he pulled a pencil sharpener from his bag and set to work on his pencil. Bucky moaned with gusto in a pathetic plea for sympathy.

“Will you pass me the Coke?” Steve asked without looking up.

Bucky let out a whine like a police siren and threw his arms wide waving them up and down as though making a snow angel. He hunted for their shared bottle of Coca-Cola. Steve lifted his pencil into the light and squinted at the tip while Bucky continued in his noisy complaining.
Bucky passed the soda to Steve carefully so as not to spill it. Once the drink was secure in Steve’s hand, Bucky flopped back on the ground and continued his tantrum.

“You know what’s interesting?” Steve mused as he took a sip.

“What?” Bucky whined in a high-pitched child’s voice.

“You’re a year older than me, you look then years older than me, and you even pass for eighteen at your factory, but you act like a two year old that missed naptime.” Steve admonished.

Bucky rolled onto his stomach and grinned up at Steve. “It’s part of my charm.”

Steve kicked Bucky’s shoulder and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, sure, ‘charm’.”

“This isn’t working! Why isn’t this working?”

“Did you hear that?” Bucky asked, sitting up and looking around.

When Steve didn’t respond, Bucky turned back to get his attention. Bucky frowned at his friend. He wasn’t moving, but it was more than that. It was like the projector had jammed in the middle of the film reel. Steve’s eyes stared unblinkingly at the spot Bucky’s head had just been. Bucky’s stomach turned with terror.

“Tell me what he was hit with. The truth, Steve.”

“I don’t know. And that is the truth.”

“His body is rejecting the grafts and he keeps losing blood. I need to know more.”

“Oh my God. Is he awake?”

Bucky couldn’t keep his eyes open very long and he couldn’t focus on anything in the room. He could just make out the low timbre of Steve’s voice, but he couldn’t see him. Dark figures moved toward him against the blinding light. Shadows against the snow.

Bucky jerked away from them, but his body wasn’t cooperating. Tears welled up in his eyes and he could feel his whole body shaking violently. A low whining noise was coming from somewhere nearby. He couldn’t move. The figures reached out to him and he couldn’t get away. He couldn’t stop them.

“STEVE! STEVE, THEY’RE HERE! STEVE, HELP ME!” Bucky screamed at the top of his voice.

“Shh, shh, shh. Bucky, Bucky! It’s me, baby. It’s just me and Shuri.” One of the figures whispered. “You got hurt pretty badly so you gotta stay still until we can get you patched up.” The figure was petting his hair away from his face.

“What do you want from me?” Bucky croaked.

“He doesn’t know what you are saying. I don’t think he can see you.”

The shadow in front of him bowed its great head and trembled dangerously. It’s hand still rested on Bucky’s head. He wanted to pull away, but he still couldn’t move. His poor vision was getting worse. Splotches appeared at the corners of his eyes.

“Bucky,” the monster with Steve’s voice whimpered. “Bucky, please. Please stay with me. I
can’t lose you again. Serum or not, I won’t survive it.”

“’M still here, Steve.” Bucky said, his voice was softer this time. The energy was fleeing his body. “Didn’t kill me.” He let out a heavy breath. “Yet.”

“It’s the anesthetic I designed for him after he dropped his house on himself. He’ll be out at least until I can figure this mess out.”

“Please, please, baby, please.”

“Is that why Jessica Lisbon dumped you after two dates?” Steve teased.

Bucky felt like he was forgetting something important. Something life or death, but it felt so distant now. Like déjà vu.

“Jessica Lisbon didn’t dump me.” Bucky argued.

Steve gave him his ‘don’t bullshit me’ look.

“She didn’t. I just never asked her out again.” Bucky shrugged.

“Don’t believe me if you want. It’s the truth.”

“So you never said what time you had to leave for work.” Steve pulled out his pencil tin and selected an inch and a half long pencil stub.

“Probably fifteen minutes now.” Bucky dropped his arms over his head. “When will the sweet release of death come and take away my eternal suffering?”

“Pretty sure we’re both going to Hell, Buck. Eternal suffering has only just begun.” Steve announced sourly.

“I don’t know about you, Mr. Run-Off-The-Rails, but I’m an angel in waiting. Your rap sheet is longer than mine anyway.”

“I think you’re real charm is that you actually think that.” Steve decided.

“Oh that’s my real charm?” Bucky snagged Steve’s ankle and yanked him down onto his back easily. Steve never did weigh very much. Even at fourteen he was barely more than seventy pounds. Bucky lifted twice that in the factory daily.

Steve threw up his fists protectively. Over his face just like Bucky had been teaching him. Bucky jabbed him in the side. Steve kicked at his chest, but it wasn’t hard enough to deter Bucky. He grabbed Steve around the neck in a headlock and wrapped his legs around Steve’s immobilizing him. Steve slapped uselessly at Bucky’s arms.

“Tell me I’m an angel.” Bucky ordered.

“Never!” Steve gasped.

Bucky put a teensy bit more pressure on him. “Say it. Say you think I’m positively godly.”

“I’m gonna kill you.” Steve wheezed.

“You won’t be far behind. If it weren’t for me you would’ve been killed on your first day in kindergarten.” Bucky squeezed Steve’s neck as a reminder for him to do as he was told.
“Alright, you’re an angel. Just an absolute dream. What angel doesn’t strangle their friends to death?” Steve panted.

Bucky held the position a second longer considering Steve’s response. At last, he dropped his hold and let Steve go. “Angel of Death is the most powerful of the angels, you know.”

The diminutive boy rolled away coughing heavily ignoring Bucky’s boast. Bucky got to his feet and reached his hand down for Steve to take. After coughing a few minutes more, Steve accepted Bucky’s hand and let his friend drag him to his feet.

“The Angel of Death is dying.” Steve said, but his voice was strange. It wasn’t Steve’s voice, but it came from Steve’s mouth.

“What?” Bucky said cautiously.

“I asked if you were heading out now.” Steve said in his normal voice.

“Oh.” Bucky rubbed his eyelid. “Yeah. Yeah, it’s about that time I suppose.” He agreed.

Bucky always had a summer job. The only difference from when he was a kid was that he had to get the jobs himself. Sarah Rogers had actually helped him get his job that summer. At a refrigerator factor no less. Bucky’s mom had teased his dad about how Bucky had landed a cushier job than he did at more than half his age. Bucky had been quick to point out that while the factory might have its merits during the summer, those same benefits became hindrances come winter.

Even on a hundred degree day in the heart of summer, Bucky would leave the factory numb to his bones. But the work was simple if not tedious. All day and well into the night, Bucky would lug fifty pound boxes two or three at a time from one end of the factory to the other. The assembly area was always well below freezing temperatures. The Freon stained the air and sapped it of its heat. Bucky couldn’t imagine working at the factory in the winter.

There were four other men on his crew and thirty more men that worked assembly at any given time. Bucky’s shifts were somewhere between twelve and fourteen hours long six to seven days a week. Days off were rare and breaks were short and sparse. He kept to himself for the most part. The other workers thought he was eighteen and he didn’t want to give them any reason to suspect otherwise.

“Oh, Barnes, tonight’s the night.” Bill Burris said as they trudged out of the factory at two o’clock the next morning.

Bucky yawned and fought to keep his eyes open. He hadn’t napped long enough that afternoon. Roger Lawrence slapped him on his aching back and mussed his dark hair. The two men were in their early thirties. They were friendly enough, but Bucky still preferred to keep his distance.

“Tonight’s the night for what?” Bucky asked, stifling another yawn. He was supposed to see a movie with Steve tomorrow before he had to report in at the factory again. As tired as he was, it seemed likely he’d pass out before the studio credits finished.

“You’re coming out with us.” Roger declared.

“What?” Bucky shook his head. “No, fellas, I really can’t.”

“No excuses, Barnes! Are you a man or what?” Dallas barked slapping his hand on Bucky’s shoulder and practically dragging him down the street with them.
“Hey! What’s the big idea takin’ off without me?” Possum cried, running up behind the group.

Bill and Roger both leaned away from Possum as he approached and groaned in exasperation. Bucky wrinkled his nose as Possum’s overwhelming body odor. Dallas leaned in to Bucky’s ear, but spoke in his normally booming voice.

“You know why they call him Possum, dontcha?” He asked Bucky.

Bucky shook his head silently.

“Cause he always smells like roadkill.”

Bucky laughed along with Bill, Roger, and Dallas. Possum crossed his arms over his chest and glared at his coworkers.

“Hey, I work up a sweat unlike the rest of you!” He protested.

“Ya don’t sweat, Possum, you shit out your pores.” Roger countered to everyone else’s amusement.

“I don’t have to take this. Maybe I’ll just go home now.” Possum said it like a threat, but nobody really seemed to care.

“Auf wiedersehen.” Bill said easily.

“You know I’m the one with the password!” Possum complained.

“Password?” Bucky asked, letting his curiosity get the better of him.

“Ah, you’re in for a real treat, Barnes.” Dallas promised, slapping Bucky’s chest.

They arrived at an innocuous door on a quiet street. Possum pushed his way to the front of the group and knocked firmly. A square of wood slid back from its place and a pair of dark, beady eyes peered out suspiciously into the night. They landed on Possum and Bucky could have sworn they rolled.

“Password.” The door growled.

“Slim shaker.” Possum said proudly.

This time the eyes definitely rolled. “You are about ten marbles short of a set, Skunk.”

“It’s Possum.” He corrected as though that were any better.

“Not if I can smell you all the way through the door, for god’s sake.” The door refuted. Bucky and the other three men chuckled at the door’s wit. “And what the fuck is a slim shaker?”

“How should I know? It’s your password!” Possum argued.

“Salt shaker! The password is salt shaker, moron!” The door berated.

Bucky spluttered out a laugh at Possum’s expense joined by Bill, Roger, and Dallas. Even in the low light, Bucky could see Possum’s face turn about nine shades of red in a blend of embarrassment and rage.

“Are you gonna let us in or not?” Possum snapped. “My balls are starting to stick to my leg as hot
as it is.”

The lookout closed and a few minutes later the heavy door swung open displaying a steep staircase leading to another door. The second door was bright red. A large sign hung on the front that read, ‘Open your gab, end up on the slab.’ Dallas shoved the door open and loud jazz music erupted from within.

Even as late as it was, the place was filled to the brim with people of all walks of life. Most that Bucky could see were factory workers, but dotted here and there were men in business suits and women in short, shiny dresses. It wasn’t dim like Bucky always assumed speakeasies were. In fact, the number of lights nearly outnumbered the people.

Dallas grabbed Bucky by the arm and dragged him over to the bar still gawking at the elaborate décor. He slid onto a barstool beside Dallas and started reading the labels of the bottles on the wall behind the bar. The colors were bright and varied and the sizes and shapes of their containers were outrageous. Some of them looked like they were just repurposed flower vases with large corks to stopper them.

“Here, kid, drink this.” Dallas ordered, handing him a glass of amber colored liquid.

Bucky saw that Dallas, Roger, and Bill were all holding identical glasses. They hit their glasses against Bucky’s making a light clinking sound before tossing the entirety of the contents straight into their throats and swallowing. Bucky stared at his drink apprehensively, but refused to back down from the challenge. Steve would’ve been proud. Or not.

Bucky tipped the drink back into his mouth and tried to swallow quickly, but the heat of it filled his mouth, nose, and lungs. He coughed hard, spluttering the liquor all over the counter and down his shirt. The bartender picked up a rag without batting an eye and tossed it to Dallas who mopped up the liquid laughing as tears streamed from Bucky’s watering eyes.

“It’s alright, Barnes. Whiskey’s not for everybody.” He patted Bucky’s back.

“Here, Barnes, try this one.” Roger offered. The new drink was lighter in color from the first. It was more golden than amber. “Straight from the Southern Border.”

Bucky scrubbed his hands over his face before accepting the next drink. This one he threw back as quickly as he could and swallowed fast. Speed seemed to be the trick to getting the stuff down though it did nothing to prevent the awful taste from filling his mouth and churning his stomach. The men cheered as he managed to keep the drink down and prevent another mess.

“You always were a fast learner.” Roger praised.

“What the hell? You started without me?” Possum whined. Bucky was glad for the burning drinks for one thing at least. They seemed to have dulled his senses making Possum’s odor less potent even standing less than a half a foot away from him.

“You’re a big boy. You can get your own drinks.” Dallas retorted.

Three drinks later and Bucky was starting to feel woozy. When he tried to stand he fell over and only just managed to avoid the floor by landing neatly in Dallas’s oversized arms. The next thing he knew, he was outside in the hot, sticky air throwing up behind a dumpster.

“This your place?” Dallas rumbled in his ear two seconds later.

Bucky looked up at the house with bleary eyes. It was Steve’s house, but it was close enough.
Besides all that, he knew if he stumbled into his own house three hours late and smelling like a delinquent his mother would skin him alive. He nodded at Dallas and made his way carefully up the front step.

Dallas stood on the sidewalk and waited until Bucky dug his key out of his pocket and fit it into the lock. Once the door was open, Dallas turned for his own home with a wave. Bucky slammed the door shut and worked on getting his work boots off. It was an agonizing process and he was glad when it was over, but his stomach was turning dangerously again.

Bucky crashed down the hall toward Steve’s room and fell heavily onto the mattress. Steve let out a scream wriggled underneath Bucky’s heavy body trying to escape. Bucky giggled drunkenly and patted his own cheek.


“Bucky?” Steve said.

“The one and only.” Bucky said proudly.

“Bucky, what are you doing? Get off of me.”

Bucky rolled over and slid off the bed onto his butt on the floor. Steve sat up on the bed behind him and slipped his little feet onto the floor.

“Are you okay?” He put his hand on Bucky’s forehead. “You’re really hot.”

“You’re pretty.” Bucky told him with a wide, sloppy smile.

“You’re drunk.” Steve announced.

“You’re still pretty.”

Bucky’s stomach twisted again and he leaned forward as vomit tumbled out his mouth in a great waterfall of spew. Steve leapt up and away from him with a cry of disgust. When he was finished, Bucky leaned his head back against Steve’s bed and closed his eyes with a sigh.

“So sleepy.” He mumbled.

“Oh, no. Nope. You aren’t sleeping like that. Not in here.” Steve yipped. “Get up, Bucky. You have to take a shower.”

“NNnnnooooooo!” Bucky moaned.

“Yes.” Steve grabbed Bucky’s arm and yanked.

“No. No stand up.”

“Bucky.” Steve said sharply.

Bucky sighed again and let Steve help him to his feet. Together, they stumbled back down the hallway to the bathroom where Steve cranked the water on the shower and turned to Bucky who had sat himself on the toilet seat.

“Okay, do you need help getting your shirt off?” Steve asked in his no nonsense voice.

When Bucky didn’t respond, Steve set to work unbuttoning Bucky’s work shirt and peeling the
vomit covered clothing from his body. When he finished, he pulled Bucky to his feet again. Bucky leaned his head against the wall and stared down at the top of Steve’s head. Steve unbuttoned Bucky’s pants and Bucky snapped out of his unresponsiveness.

“I said no!” He cried, slapping Steve’s hands away. Steve rolled his eyes and took a step toward Bucky again. “Take them off yourself then.”

“No!” Bucky barked.

“They’re covered in vomit!”

“I said I wouldn’t pose nude!”

“What the hell are you talking about, Bucky? Get in the damn shower!” Steve went off into a spew of what Bucky vaguely recognized as Gaelic curses.

“Ooh.” Bucky said, putting his finger to his mouth. “Your mom’s gonna be mad!” He sang.

“My mom? You’re lucky my mom had to work a double shift or she’d be calling your mom to tell her you showed up at five in the morning drunk as a skunk.” Steve shot. “Although I’m thinking maybe I’ll call your mom myself.”

Bucky’s eyes went wide. “No, Stevie! No, you can’t tell Mom!” He begged.

“Get in the shower then!” Steve ordered.

Bucky yanked his pants off in a flash and threw himself at the tub. In his drunken state, he thought he picked his feet up higher than he really had. Instead of standing under the spray, he tripped and fell into the tub slamming his head against the wall. As he went down, his arms flailed out for something to save him. His hand closed around Steve’s bed shirt pulling the tiny blonde down along with him.

An hour later, Bucky woke up drenched and butt naked on top of a still unconscious Steve. He reached over and shut off the water. Bucky crawled out of the bathtub and went in search of spare pants and towels before returning for Steve.


“Depends.” Steve muttered.

“On?”

“Are you still drunk?”

“Sort of, but I think I’m better now.” Bucky explained.

Steve sighed and sat up in the tub, accepting the towel Bucky offered him. “Have you been to bed yet?”

“Aside from the hour I spent unconscious, no.”

“Go get some sleep. I’ll clean the rest of this up.” Steve said.

“I can help.”
“Go get some sleep.” He ordered. Then he smiled. “You can pay me back later.”

“How?”

“Next time you go out, you gotta take me with you.”
Bucky's recovery hits some unexpected speed bumps including a tired argument with Steve. Bucky learns about some interesting changes to his body in the aftermath of his injuries.

Bucky opened his eyes to the blinding lights of Shuri’s lab. He reached up with his right hand and rubbed his face. His body felt stiff and achy, but he was alive. Bucky pulled himself upright and looked around. Curiously, he was completely alone. Not even lab assistants milled about.

Bucky rubbed the metal stub of his left shoulder and swung his feet off the bed. His back twinged with pain. He felt like he'd been ground up and spit back out. Every step he took had his joints erupting in a symphony of popping sounds. Bucky shuffled down the ramp to the main lab.

Thankfully, there were actual human beings working in the lab below. They gawked at him with mixed emotions as he hobbled in. Bucky leaned heavily against one of the lab tables to catch his breath. One of the lab techs turned and hurried out the door for help.

“How long have I been out?” Bucky asked the audience.

The scientists all huddled together and eyed him warily. One brave soul walked around behind Bucky and stared at his back without saying a word. Bucky dropped his head in exasperation.

“Where’s Shuri? Or Steve, for that matter.”

“They are both under house arrest as decreed by King T’Challa.” Okoye announced as she strode into the lab.

Bucky smiled exhaustedly at the familiar face.

“Ingcuka!” Another voice cried enthusiastically.

Bucky’s eyes snapped to the small figure darting out from behind Okoye and racing over to Bucky. His eyes widened as he took in Bashira. Her hair which she usually wore braided tightly against her scalp was gone. Her face was clean of its usual paint and her robes had been exchanged for white training armor.

“Bashira?”

The little girl beamed at him and nodded.

“Is that… a spear?” He pointed to the weapon, noting that the tip was blunted for training purposes.

“I have been accepted as a trainee to the Dora Milaje!” She explained excitedly.

“Control yourself.” Okoye hissed in Xhosa.
Bashira locked her elbows and knees and pulled her shoulders back obediently. Her smile fell from her face and she took a small sidestep out of Bucky’s direct line of vision.

“Everybody thought you were good as dead, you know.” Okoye told him.

Bucky sighed and nodded. “Kind of feels like I was good as dead.” He agreed. “What happened with Shuri and Steve?” He asked, trying to hide the labor it took to speak.

“Shuri and Captain Rogers bickered constantly as to what the best course of action would be. Shuri insisted she had tried everything and that Captain Rogers was holding back vital information and Captain Rogers insisted that she hadn’t at that he had been truthful in his summary of your injuries. When the fighting turned physical, T’Challa was forced to step in and separate them.” Okoye relayed.

“Physical? Steve would never physically fight a teenage girl.” Bucky refuted.

Okoye arched one of her flawless eyebrows at him. “He would if that teenage girl had started firing a vibranium hand cannon at him.”

“Shuri tried to shoot Steve?”

“Captain Rogers did have it coming.” Okoye frowned and shook her head at the memory. “He said a great many things that would have gotten anyone else beheaded.”

“Oh, man.” Bucky put his hand to his head. He tried to pick his head up again, but his head spun. It felt as though all the blood had run out of him.

“Ingcuka?”

Okoye let out a curse in Xhosa and darkness washed over Bucky anew.

When he woke up again, he was back in bed. He didn’t try to move right away, having learned his lesson the first time. Instead, he stared up at the high ceiling and listened to the quiet whoosh of the train zipping by on the tracks below. He didn’t know why the vibranium trains didn’t induce the same panic that other trains did, but he figured it likely had something to do with the sound. Normal trains have a rumble to them when they go over tracks, Vibranium trains whisper over their tracks like knives slicing through the air.

Something stirred on his right and he felt someone squeeze his hand. Bucky rolled his head to the side slowly. Any sudden moves caused his head to spin angrily and dark splotches to appear behind his eyes. Steve’s eyes were ringed with dark shadows and a thick, dark beard had filled itself in across Steve’s jaw. His shoulders were hunched and both hands were clasped around Bucky’s right hand. Bucky thought he looked small. Not preserum small. Just… small.

“I’m so sorry.” Steve whispered.

Bucky’s brow crinkled together. “What for?” Bucky frowned at the sound of his voice. It crackled and hissed around his words. He cleared his throat noticing how dry it was.

“I should have stopped Vision. I should have done something. Jumped between you. Anything.” Steve said.

Bucky arched one of his eyebrows. “Is this gonna be the new thing?” Bucky coughed around his dry throat. “Water.” He coughed.
Steve stood, dropping Bucky’s hand and moved away to fill a cup with water. Steve scooped his thick arm carefully around Bucky’s shoulders and helped him sit up slowly before handing him his cup of water. Bucky noted that while his back still ached, it was considerably duller than when he last woke.

“What do you mean?” Steve asked, taking the emptied cup back from Bucky.

“I mean you blamed yourself for the train and now you’re trying to blame yourself for the killer robot incident.”

Steve refilled the cup and passed it back to Bucky.

“I should get Shuri to check on you.” Steve muttered.

“Subtle.”

“What?”

“I made a choice to go with you. I knew the risks.” Bucky told him. “Well, maybe I didn’t think the killer robot was going to be there, but I knew it was dangerous.”

“I should have turned that damn plane around the second I found you in the locker.”

“I’m not cargo, Steve.”

“No, you’re an ex-assassin wanted by nearly every government on the planet.”

“You’re an internationally wanted war criminal now, too, Steve.” Bucky reminded him, though he knew that was mainly because of him.

“It’s different and you know it.”

“Why? Because you’re Captain America?”

“Yes!”

“And what am I?” Bucky cringed as the exertion made his muscles tense. He took a steadying breath. “You think you’d have ever made it out of those tights if I hadn’t spent every ounce of energy I had into making sure you could handle yourself in a fight?” Steve looked at the water cup clenched in his fist. “Maybe you’re Captain America, Steve, but I’m the guy that trained Captain America.”

“You know that and I know that, but the rest of the world doesn’t see that. They see the notorious HYDRA assassin responsible for the deaths of more than two dozen political figures. Vision sees you as the guy responsible for the death of his creator’s parents.”

“So maybe I should be in prison.”

Steve rolled his eyes and followed them with his head. “That’s not what I said.”

“Well, you obviously think I need to be locked up somewhere. Wakanda just happens to work for you because you get to drop in for a booty call every now and again. I doubt whatever prison I get locked up in won’t be so keen on conjugal visits.”

“Booty call?” Steve repeated. “You think I only stay with you for the sex?”
“Why were we keeping it a secret from your friends?” Bucky demanded. “They don’t really seem to care one way or the other so why?”

“What do you mean they don’t care one way or the other? Did you say something to them?”

“Of course I didn’t! How do you think I ended up sharing a room with Natalia in France for fuck’s sake?” Bucky winced again at the pain. “Your friends aren’t stupid, Steve. Natalia is a superspy and Sam is… well, I don’t know what Sam is, but I know he isn’t dumb.”

“I don’t want everyone thinking I led them into battle with their friends and teammates because of our relationship.” Steve said pathetically.

“They weren’t. They were fighting to stop a psychopath from releasing an army of crazier psychopaths into the world.” Bucky reminded him.

“Yeah, but with Tony it wasn’t about Zemo or the other Winter Soldiers. It was about you. I just don’t…” Steve stopped and sighed. “Why does everybody need to know anyway? It’s our business, isn’t it?”

“Why doesn’t it bother you that the Wakandans know then?” Bucky challenged.

“I never said it doesn’t bother me.”

“But they know and it hasn’t changed anything except we don’t have to pretend like we’re nothing around them. You can sit at my bedside and hold my hand while I recover and it isn’t strange or awkward.”

“It doesn’t matter if the team knows or not. It isn’t like we’ll be around them together again.” Steve crossed his arms over his chest defensively.

Bucky stared at his boyfriend wordlessly for a few long minutes. Weighing the words that hung in the air.

“I’m still not at a hundred at the moment, Steve, so I suggest we maybe drop this before you piss me off.” Bucky warned at last.

“You could never be more pissed at me than I am at myself over this whole situation.” Steve waved his arm over Bucky in the bed.

“I don’t think that’s a bet you want to make, Rogers.”

Bucky leveled his eyes at Steve. It was both a warning and a challenge. Steve’s face drained of color when Bucky called him by his last name in the heavy tone reserved only during extreme anger. It was something Bucky had only ever done a handful of times throughout their friendship. Most notably, when Steve had gotten himself into a fistfight with a boy twice his size while he was nearly dying from pneumonia.

“I’ll go get Shuri.” He mumbled, breaking eye contact to look at his shoes.

“Yeah, then maybe take a walk or something.” Bucky bit.

Shuri floated in bursting with energy. She brought out some strange new medical scanner that she passed over Bucky’s bare back. As she did, the pain lessened and his muscles relaxed. It took her barely a minute to run it over the entirety of the healed over wound. She brought the images up on a screen and pointed out the repaired tissue cells and Bucky’s normal tissue cells. Bucky assumed
she could see some difference he couldn’t.

“It’s perfect, you see?”

“Does that mean I’m good to go?”

“No. It’ll be another day or two before your body replenishes all the blood you lost. But look at this.” She pulled up another image. This was just skin. “This is your back. Do you notice anything?”

Judging by her gleeful expression, Bucky assumed he was supposed to be seeing something huge. He squinted at the image, but ultimately gave up.

“Your old scars are gone now!” She explained.

Bucky stared at the image with new eyes. The jagged, crisscross scars that once laced his back had disappeared. His back was smooth and mostly unmarred. He still had his other scars. The knife wound on his side, the mottling around his metal shoulder, even the edges of the lash wounds that still peeked out from the edges of his healed wound. But, those seemed insignificant now that his back was mostly clear of the gruesome grooves of his most brutal torture.

“How did you do that?” Bucky reached around and felt the soft, tender skin with his fingers.

Shuri frowned at him then the screen. “To be honest, I didn’t. I do not know how this happened. Captain Rogers has been a bit stingy with the details of your injuries, but once I jumpstarted your body’s natural healing process with a little V-Juice. Your skin healed itself immediately.”

“Would the V-Juice not cause this?”

Shuri shook her head. “It never has before, but it also hasn’t been used on a super soldier before.”

“Thank you, Shuri.” Bucky said in quiet awe. “Seems I’m always indebted to you somehow.”

Shuri shook her head. “You cannot be indebted to your friends. You can give us a little heads up the next time you decide to take a trip with your boyfriend.”

“I don’t know how much longer that’s going to last.” Bucky muttered.

“He is a bit difficult to deal with sometimes, isn’t he?” She agreed. “But he is a good man. And he loves you very much.”

“Love isn’t the issue.” Bucky sighed. “Control is.”

“I am the wrong person to come to for relationship advice. The only love I’ve ever been in is with technology and circuits don’t argue with you.” Shuri told him with a grin.

It was two days more of being overseen by Shuri at her lab before Bucky was finally released back to his farm. Steve showed up on the second day looking sheepish and uncertain. Clearly afraid Bucky was going to kick him out again.

“Bucky, I –”

“Not here.” Bucky said, cutting him off.

T’Challa had Bucky escorted back to his farm on a sleek hovership. Bucky had insisted that he was not above walking, but Shuri made it clear that if he refused or gave any indication that he was
aiming to do anything more than rest and rehabilitation, she would be chaining him to the bed in her lab until deemed completely fit. Of course everybody found it best not to argue with Shuri’s wishes.

Thomoza was at the farm waiting for him when the ship stopped around five yards from his house. The chickens and goats were in their designated enclosures save one. Dum Dum munched the grass near Thomoza’s feet. Her ears were pinned back against her head and her eyes held a look of distress.

“Ingcuka, you have at last graced us with your presence once more.” Thomoza said, walking toward the ship.

Steve put his arm around Bucky’s waist to help him down and Bucky let him. He enjoyed the comfortable feeling of Steve’s arms around him. It reminded him just how long it had been since Steve had last held him.

“Sorry.” Bucky said in Xhosa. “Thank you for overseeing things in my absence.”

Dum Dum’s head jerked up at the sound of his voice. Her ears pricked toward Bucky followed by her eyes. She bleated loudly and charged him. Steve lunged forward and snagged the goat out of the air before she was able to tackle Bucky.

“Hey!” Bucky protested.

He reached out and cupped Dum Dum’s thin face between his hands. The goat leaned her head against his palm and began nibbling gently at his wrist. Bucky scratched his knuckles over her hard forehead and cooed at her sweetly.

“Did my best girl miss me? Huh? ‘Cause I missed you. Yes I did!”

“Thank you, Thomoza.” Steve said, reaching a hand around the goat to shake hers.

Thomoza was watching the exchange with a reluctantly amused expression. She shook herself from her thoughts at the sound of her name and quickly fit her hand into Steve’s.

“I will return tomorrow to make sure everything is as it should be.” Thomoza promised before turning for the village.

“Should we talk now?” Steve asked, setting Dum Dum back on the ground.

Bucky walked stiffly into his hut instead of replying. He gave a start at the sudden change to his home’s interior. Aside from the slight difference in the floorplan, the house now held a striking resemblance to the apartment he had shared with Steve in Brooklyn before the war. His once barren bookshelves were now bulging with books of every kind. Some of his old favorites were mixed in with a legion of new novels and textbooks he had never heard of. The walls were covered with Steve’s sketches. Most were still graphite or charcoal, but a few were actually colored in.

“Did you do this?” Bucky whispered.

“Oh, I….” Steve looked around the room as though he was seeing it for the first time, too. “There was a bit of a scuffle while you were out and T’Challa may have banished me to the farm for a few days.” He explained.

“But you did this?”
“I can take it down.” Steve said quickly.

He moved to the nearest picture and reached for the pins. Bucky slapped his hand away.

“Don’t you dare.”

Steve’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. Bucky took advantage of his surprise. In his clear uncertainty. He pushed Steve back against the wall. Steve’s whole body was tensed up. He was bracing himself for Bucky to kiss him or kill him. It was a thrilling power he was giving Bucky. Too bad Bucky wasn’t in the right condition to take full advantage of it.

Bucky leaned his forehead against Steve’s. His breath was coming heavy from the excitement and the exertion. Mainly the exertion he was finding. He shut his eyes and focused on the feel of Steve beneath his hand. He tilted his head and kissed Steve lightly before pulling back and taking another steadying breath.

“You like it?” Steve asked.

Bucky nodded and sealed his lips over Steve’s again. Steve kissed him back now. His hands lighting on Bucky’s waist. It was good. Bucky needed something more to ground him. His head felt so light it could have floated right off his shoulders.

Bucky broke away and stumbled back from Steve. He crashed onto the bed and tried to get the dark spots to leave his vision. Bucky let out a pathetic groan as the pain eked its way through his body from landing on his back so harshly.

“Buck? Should I get Shuri?” Steve asked, voice full of concern.

“Whatever the hell was in that robot’s laser beam is doing things to me even Shuri can’t fix.” Bucky said keeping his eyes tightly shut.

“Maybe you should get some sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep.” Bucky argued.

“Well, what do you want then? You aren’t exactly in any condition to be out and about yet.”

“Twenty-one.”

“What?”

“It’s been twenty-one days.”

“Twenty-one days since what?”

“You know.”

Steve was quiet for a minute. Bucky wanted to open his eyes and look at him. See what sort of expression he was wearing now, but even the thought of opening his eyes at the moment seemed like playing with fire.

“I think that’s a bad idea right now.” Steve told him carefully.

“Baby.” He bit.

“Baby,” Steve said softly.
The bed dipped beside him and Steve’s hand appeared on his forehead. It was nice and cool. Like an ice pack. Bucky sighed contentedly. Steve’s lips roamed Bucky’s neck and jaw landing like a butterfly and flittering away just as fast.

“I’ll make you a deal.” Steve rumbled in his ear.

“Hmm?”

“You rest another day – maybe two – and when you can hold yourself up for more than a few minutes I will stay in bed with you as long as you want.”

Bucky considered the offer. “No clothes.”

“No clothes.” Steve agreed.

“As long as I want. No phone calls and running off to Bangladesh at the drop of a hat.”

“An alien invasion couldn’t drag me away.”

Bucky turned his head and Steve dutifully pressed his lips against his.

“Fine.” Bucky sighed. “Will you get me water and my sleeping pills then?”

Steve stood back up and Bucky listened to him moving around the house.

“Pain pills, too, please!” He called.

“I know, I know.”

Steve sat Bucky up again when he returned, water and pills in hand. Bucky took a drink of the water first before pinching the pills from Steve’s hand. He opened his eyes slowly and thanked every god he could think of when he didn’t immediately want to throw up. Bucky met Steve’s eyes with fiery determination.

“As long as I want. No take backs.”

“I promise.”

Bucky threw back the pills.
Pillow Talk

Chapter Summary

A deal's a deal. Bucky gets Steve back in bed. They also have a few much needed conversations.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone that has stuck with me and this fic so far! I would have stopped writing this months ago if it wasn't for your continued support!

Two days turned to three, then four, then five. Bucky spent most of the time unconscious whether from medication or his own body’s depleted energy. He was only awake around two hours a day at most making him feel utterly useless around his farm.

Out of sheer boredom, Bucky began watching *Spongebob Squarepants* as recommended by Shuri. He curled up with Dum Dum on the bed and watched apathetically as the yellow idiot tried to sell chocolate with his pink blobby friend. He dozed off in and out of the episodes, but made a note that the black splotches in his eyes had significantly receded.

Steve spent most of his time working the farm in Bucky’s stead. Occasionally, he would poke inside to make sure Bucky ate though he was a terrible cook. Thomoza came by to investigate the smoke rising from the farmhouse the first night they were back and subsequently barred Steve from any further attempts at cooking.

On the sixth day, Steve opened the door to the house covered up to his elbows in dirt. Bucky looked over at him and smiled. He was sitting up against a stack of pillows with Dum Dum’s head in his lap. Steve scowled at the goat.

“I thought we agreed she wasn’t allowed on the bed.” Steve grumbled, moving toward the bathroom for a shower.

“Did we?” Bucky asked innocently.

“Three goddamn times.” Steve retorted.

“I don’t remember that.”

Steve scoffed and rolled his eyes. “Funny how you keep using that excuse, but you remember when I mess up your episode order.”

The shower squealed to life drowning out the shrill voice of Spongebob on the screen. Bucky pushed himself up and nudged Dum Dum off the bed. The goat bleated her objection, but leapt down from the bed nonetheless. Bucky got to his feet and stretched. Every joint in his body cracked from disuse.
Steve was under the water already. He didn’t notice Bucky moving about the house. Bucky opened the door quietly and ushered Dum Dum back outside with the other goats. He relatched the door quietly.

Bucky returned to the bed and eased himself back down onto the mattress. He had taken a shower earlier that morning though he had to cut it short when the hot water started making him dizzy again. After a few minutes, he heard the shower stopped and Steve stepped out wearing nothing but a towel wrapped around his hips.

He scrubbed at his ear with a hand towel and looked over the bed at Bucky. He looked around the small living quarters then back at Bucky.

“Where’d she go?”

“Who?” Bucky asked innocently.

Steve pursed his lips and leveled his eyes at Bucky. “The goat. Did you put her outside?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Bucky shrugged, turning his gaze back to Spongebob.

“Dum Dum was on the bed. Did you get up and let her out?” Steve insisted.

Bucky turned back to Steve with his widest and most innocent eyes. “What do you mean Dum Dum was on the bed? We agreed she wasn’t allowed up on the bed, remember?”

Steve narrowed his eyes and scowled at Bucky. He could see there was a ploy going on, he just didn’t know what it was. He moved around to Bucky’s side of the bed in search of the goat. Bucky folded his hands over his stomach and watched him.

“Is she outside?” Steve sighed in exasperation.

“Maybe.” Bucky shrugged again. “Or maybe we never said anything about the goat staying under the bed.”

Steve put his hands over his face and groaned. He dropped to his hands and knees on the side of the bed and ducked his head down to check for the vanished goat. Bucky shut off the screen and in the same moment, he rolled over and shoved Steve over onto his back wasting no time in straddling his naked hips and pinning his arms above his head.

Steve stared up at Bucky in alarm and confusion. It took a few seconds for understanding to kick in. “Dum Dum’s outside.”

Bucky grinned down at him before pressing his lips against his. Steve wriggled his right hand free of Bucky’s one handed clutch and wrapped his arm around Bucky’s waist. He kissed him back forcefully, sitting up and holding him tightly. Bucky let go of Steve’s wrist and dug his fingers into Steve’s wet hair.

“You sure you’re up for this?” Steve murmured against his lips.

Bucky ground down against Steve’s lap and sighed into his mouth. “You and me, in bed, no clothes, as long as I want.” Bucky reminded him.

“Well, I hate to break it to you,” Steve said as Bucky moved to his neck. “We aren’t in bed.”

“Mm. So move us.” Bucky was concentrating on the task at hand, mouth, and crotch.
Steve shifted beneath him. He grunted as he got them to his feet, Bucky held securely in his arms. He took a step to the side and dropped them both onto the mattress. Steve lay back and let Bucky continue his kissing and roving to his heart’s content. Every now and again he would grab Bucky up to kiss him deeply before releasing him back to his self-appointed task.

“Oh, God, I missed this.” Steve ground out when Bucky had him in his mouth.

Bucky pulled back and looked up Steve’s long, toned body at him. “Really?” He asked skeptically.

Steve tickled his fingers through Bucky’s long, soft hair. “Yeah. Did you not think I did?”

Bucky moved back up so that he was face to face with Steve. Steve toyed with a strand of Bucky’s hair and leaned forward to kiss his neck.

“You’ve just made it seem like I’m forcing myself on you every time I try to start something up with you.” Bucky admitted. “I mean, I guess I understand the hotel room, but even when we got back you acted like touching me was the last thing you wanted to do.”

Steve was quiet for a moment. He twisted a strand of Bucky’s hair around his finger again and again. Steve inhaled sharply through his nose and dropped his hand to Bucky’s butt. He pulled Bucky’s hips against his and rolled him over onto his back, gently so as not to aggravate his wound.

Bucky hadn’t worn a shirt since vision had seared his from his body. It made it easier for Steve to undress him when all he had to worry about were his trousers. He slid them off his hips all the while smothering Bucky in kisses from his neck to his belly. Bucky clenched his fist in Steve’s hair. The black splotches were coming back so he squeezed his eyes shut. The last thing he wanted to do was give Steve a reason to stop.

“Can I ask you about something that’s been bugging me for the past few weeks?” Steve asked later. His fingers trailed gently up and down Bucky’s tender back.

“Hmm?” Bucky asked groggily. He wanted to sleep again as long as Steve stayed exactly where he was. “Ask away.”

“What was the deal with you and Natasha back in France?”

Every muscle in Bucky’s body locked up. Steve noticed immediately. His hand went to Bucky’s hair and he leaned over and kissed his temple quickly.

“It’s fine. You don’t have to talk about it.” Steve said quickly. “It’s okay.”

“Natalia – Natasha… she,” Bucky sighed. “She didn’t tell you anything?”

“I know bits and pieces.” Steve resumed his soothing trail around Bucky’s back. “She told me a bit about an encounter she had with you back in D.C. before your mask came off.”

“What did she say?” Bucky stared at the bookshelf across the room without really seeing it.

Steve sighed heavily. “She said you shot a target through her.”

Bucky swallowed hard and nodded. “Yeah.”

“Something about that story always seemed lacking to me.”
“Hmm?”

“Why didn’t you just kill her, too, if she was in your way?” Steve asked.

Bucky knew he wasn’t asking for a real answer. More like, mulling the question over out loud. Steve had never really been stupid. He was an idiot by far, but he wasn’t stupid. He saw more than he let on and knew more than he said. Something only a handful of people knew about him. And of that handful, only one was still alive.

“Then, there was what you said on the Quinjet on the way out of France.” Steve continued.

Bucky pushed himself up on his arm to look at Steve. “What did I say?”

“Do you not remember?”

“I remember very little after Sam chucked me off the roof in Paris.”

Steve pulled Bucky’s head back down to rest on his shoulder. “You said you had orders to kill Nat, but you spared her instead. That because she recovered you were punished badly.”

Bucky shuddered at the memory. Steve rubbed his shoulder comfortingly. He pressed his lips against Bucky’s hair and held them there while he worked on his next piece of evidence.

“Why would a brainwashed assassin risk torture to spare someone when so much blood was already on his hands?” Steve mused. “Sorry.” He amended.

“Natalia was my handler once.” Bucky admitted.

It was Steve’s turn to freeze up. No matter how close he had gotten to the truth, it was clear he hadn’t been expecting that.

“She was nineteen when I met her. Fresh from the Academy and quickly ascending as the top spy in Russian intelligence. We were paired up on three missions before she went rogue.” Bucky rested his chin on Steve’s shoulder. “She was nice to me. At a time when I didn’t really understand what nice was. She spoke to me like a real person. Maybe she even empathized with my situation in some way.”

Steve was still beneath him. He was listening, but Bucky could sense the fermenting rage just under the surface.

“When she switched teams, I was given to a HYDRA faction within S.H.I.E.L.D. My first mission was to assassinate some low level beaurocrat in a desert someone. That target was being escorted by none other than Natalia Romonova. Russian traitor.

“My handler ordered me to kill her, too. But I couldn’t. Standing above her with the gun, I couldn’t see a traitor or a threat. Not in her. So I executed the target by shooting through her somewhere I knew would look convincing, but not deadly. And it is only just occurring to me that the target was her all along. The escort was just an excuse.”

“I’m gonna kill her.” Steve rumbled.

“Why?”

Steve looked down at Bucky incredulously. “Are you serious?”

“She never beat me, Steve. She didn’t use a single control method on me on any of the missions
we were assigned together. She could have electrocuted me half to death if she wanted to. Other handlers had just out of boredom on long stakeouts.” Steve grimaced. “Natalia was kind.”

“Then why did you attack her in Compiegne?”

Bucky pressed his forehead against Steve’s shoulder and shut his eyes in shame.

“I still resented her.”

“For what? If you say she was so kind to you. Why would you resent her?”

“Because she got out. She got free and left me there to rot.” Bucky pushed his fingers into his temples. “Not that she owed me anything. She did what she had to. Doesn’t make the pain any less.”

“So the argument? What you were screaming at each other after Sam and I pulled you apart?”

Bucky chuckled softly. “I think I told her something along the lines of, ‘you owe me your life.’”

“She does, though. Doesn’t she?” Steve agreed.

“No. No, I made my choices when it came to sparing her. It wasn’t on her.”

Steve tightened his hold around Bucky’s shoulders and pressed a fierce kiss against his mouth. He pressed Bucky’s lips down against his lips hard enough to draw blood. Bucky didn’t mind so much, but his back was killing him. He pushed at Steve’s arm until he got the hint and let go.

“Sorry.” He murmured. Steve cleared his throat. “Natasha owes me something, though.”

“Like what?”

“An explanation for one thing.”

“She was a child soldier. It’s not like they gave her a choice.” Bucky defended.

“No, but when I asked her what she knew about the Winter Soldier she lied to me. She could have told me who you were from the beginning.” Steve argued.

Bucky laughed. “No. No, she couldn’t have.”

Steve looked down at Bucky curiously. “They didn’t….” He pointed at his temple and swirled his finger around.

“Not that I know of. She just never knew who I was. Especially in regards to you.” Bucky explained. “You don’t wonder why she only ever calls me Soldat? Maybe she’s called me Barnes a few times, but only in front of you.”

“But she knew more than she let on.”

“Shame makes liars of us all.”


Bucky grinned and pulled himself up to kiss Steve sweetly. Steve’s left hand worked its way into Bucky’s hair, his right hand gently rubbed Bucky’s lower back. Bucky pushed until Steve was flat on his back and Bucky was straddling him. He broke the kiss and moved down Steve’s stubbled
“Is it my turn to ask a question?” Bucky cooed against Steve’s skin.

“Is it about what I said in the lab?” Steve asked in a show of stupidity matched by no other.

Bucky sat back and stared down at him. “It wasn’t.”

Steve winced and settled his hands on Bucky’s hips. “Okay, what was your question?”

“No. Now I want to know about what you said in the lab.” Bucky insisted.

Steve rolled his eyes and covered his face with his hand. He didn’t look like he was about to answer any time soon so Bucky nudged him in the ribs with his knee. Steve dropped his hand and sighed.

“Is there any chance we could forget what I said? It was the heat of the moment and I wasn’t thinking things through.”

“So forget that in the heat of the moment you think you own me?”

Steve closed his eyes and shook his head. “No. No I don’t think I own you, Buck. I only wanted to keep you safe. Seeing you all banged up like this… I would do anything to protect you.”

“The things you said. The way you said them, you were like a child unwilling to share his toys which made me the toy.” Bucky pushed himself off Steve and laid on his back next to him.

“HYDRA’s pet, HYDRA’s dog, HYDRA’s toy, HYDRA’s weapon. These are all things that I was made because other people thought they owned me. Bad people.” He looked at Steve who stared down at the mattress between them. Bucky reached out and forced Steve to meet his eyes. “You can never become them, Steve. You’re the only one that pulls me out of the dark places they sent me. Don’t become them.”

Steve nodded silently and cleared his throat again. “I know it’s selfish. When I say I want to protect you it’s more than that. Protecting you is the same as protecting myself. If anything ever happened to you again I don’t know what I would do, but I know it wouldn’t be good.”

“You are incapable of being a bad person, Steve. Down to your very soul you’re a good person.”

“I wasn’t saying I would hurt anybody else.”

“Steve….”

“I don’t think I own you, Buck. I think you’re a part of me in a way that goes beyond ownership. You belong to me the same as my heart belongs to me. Seeing you in pain is the same as being in pain myself. Worse, somehow. Anybody else, sure I feel guilty about letting them down, but you? It’s not guilt. It’s agony.”

They were quiet for a long time. Bucky lifted one of Steve’s hands to his lips and kissed his knuckles. They were quiet long enough that Bucky was just starting to doze off again.

“Buck?”

“Mmm?”

“What did you want to ask me earlier?”
“Mm. Oh, that.” Bucky sighed against Steve’s bare chest. “Someone may have mentioned you and Nat kissed.”

Steve swallowed.

“Did you ever get around to kissing Peggy?” Bucky asked as the thought occurred to him.

“What?”

“Well, if you kissed Natal – uh – sha. Did you kiss Peggy first? Or was Natasha your first kiss?”

“It’s really amazing the things you remember and the things you don’t.” Steve mused, stroking Bucky’s hair lovingly.

“Shut up.”

“Do you remember Private Lorraine?”

“No?” Bucky frowned and picked at his faded memories in search for this ‘Private Lorraine’ Steve was speaking of.

“Private Lorraine kissed me in a show of gratitude.” Steve cleared his throat. “At least, that’s what she said.”

“You dog.” Bucky accused.

Steve laughed. “You know that’s exactly what you said to me seventy years ago when I told you about it the first time.”

Bucky grinned up at him before turning his head away. He knew there wasn’t much more he could do in terms of regaining his long forgotten memories, but he wished he could pull up moments like that as easily as Steve did. It was a sour feeling that sank all the way to his gut.

“Peggy was my last kiss before the ice, though.” Steve admitted. “Then, the… the, uh…. Well, you were hunting us down along with several S.H.I.E.L.D. embedded HYDRA operatives and… Natasha, she… she made it clear that most people found, uh, public displays of affection uncomfortable. Something I heartily agree with. Anyway, she, uh, pulled me down and… and kissed me and, uh, and it worked.” Steve stammered out pathetically.

Bucky was quiet for a minute. “You dog.” He accused again.

Steve laughed again. He grabbed a handful of Bucky’s ass and pulled him onto his back, kissing him. Bucky dug his fingers into Steve’s hair and wrapped his legs around Steve’s hips. Steve pulled back and nuzzled Bucky’s cheek.

“Buck?”

“Mmm?”

“I like kissing you best.”

“You fucking better.”

They laughed and Bucky pulled Steve back down to meld their lips together.
Bucky remembers something Steve kept from him. Steve plans a surprise for Bucky.

“MmBucky, you don’ hava care me.” Steve slurred against Bucky’s shoulder.

Bucky huffed and adjusted Steve’s little body into a more comfortable position on his back. Bucky wasn’t exactly sober, but he was nowhere near as drunk as Steve. Steve didn’t want to hear it, but Bucky was positive it was because of how small he was that he was so drunk. They had both had the same amount of alcohol after all.

“Shut up, Steve. Stop moving.”

Bucky had needlepoint focus. It was the only way to get around the slight tilt of the earth that came and went at varied moments. It felt like it took hours to reach Steve’s house, though according to the clock it had only taken twenty minutes.

Steve sat on his butt in the entrance and struggled with his shoes with no success until he gave up and flopped onto his back exhausted. Bucky leaned over after dealing with his own shoes and pulled Steve’s off for him. He stood over Steve and pulled him up by his arms. Luckily, neither of them had thrown up yet.

Bucky carried Steve down the narrow hallway to his bedroom and settled him on the bed. Bucky dropped to the floor beside the bed and slumped against it. He leaned his head back and shut his eyes. He thought Steve was asleep until he felt his fingers in Bucky’s hair. Bucky rolled his head back to look at Steve’s reddened face.

“Something wrong, Stevie?”

Steve shook his head before burying his face in his pillow. Bucky turned around and leaned on the bed so that he was less than an inch from Steve’s head. Steve mumbled something into the pillow.

“What?”

Steve repeated his mumble into the pillow again.

“I can’t understand a word you’re saying.”

Steve picked his head up just a bit before speaking again. “I’m never gonna find a girlfriend.”

“Where’d that come from?” Bucky asked, leaning back. “And of course you will!”

Steve shook his head again. “I wouldn’t even know what to do if I did find one.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve never kissed anybody before.”

“So what?”
“What if I get a girlfriend and I do it wrong?”

Bucky chuckled. “There’s not really a wrong way to do it. Long as you don’t bite her or somethin’.”

“Bite her?”

“Eh, it’s hard to explain.” Bucky put his hand to his head. “Or maybe it’s not. I feel like my head is full of radio static, ya know?”

Steve nodded and was quiet.

“Don’t worry, Stevie, you’ll figure it out.”

Bucky ruffled Steve’s floppy hair affectionately. Steve looked up at Bucky for the first time since they’d left the speakeasy. His eyes were a concerning shade of red along with the rest of his face.

“Show me.”

“What?” Bucky knew he was drunk, but he didn’t think he was that drunk.

Steve dropped his eyes and frowned. “Please show me?”

Bucky grimaced. His hand went to the back of his neck and he looked away. He couldn’t be sure if his face was hot from embarrassment or the alcohol. Steve dropped his head back down into his pillow and mumbled something else. Steve let out a whimper and started to say something more. Bucky grabbed his shoulder and pushed him over so he could hear what he was saying.

“-wrong with me. I don’t know. I like girls, but I keep thinking about stuff like that. I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s all wrong. I’m wrong.”

Bucky pushed Steve over onto his back and stared down at him for a half second before shutting his eyes and kissing him. It was chaste. Not really any different from the way he’d kissed his mother when he was younger. And in so many ways it was entirely different.

Bucky pulled back quickly and stared down at Steve again. Bucky hadn’t seen Steve’s face so red since he’d had scarlet fever three years earlier. Bucky put his hand over his mouth and stood up. Any hint of inebriation had fled.

“There, see? I kissed you. Can you stop blubbering now?” Bucky demanded.

Steve stared up at him with his wide, blue eyes. He opened his mouth to speak.

“BAAAaaAAAaaaAAAAHHHHH!” Dum Dum screamed in his face. Bucky jumped up in bed and looked at the goat first then at the open door.

Bucky got up and shooed Dum Dum back outside with the rest of the barnyard animals and shut the door firmly. He trudged back over to the bed groggily and dumped himself back onto the mattress. He sighed at the ceiling and turned his head to look at Steve sleeping soundly beside him. Bucky scowled at him. He reached over and shoved Steve off the bed.

Steve dropped to the ground with a weighty thud and shot back up on guard. His eyes tripped around the room quickly before settling on Bucky. Bucky adjusted himself on the bed and pulled the blanket over his legs. Steve frowned and dropped his fists crawling back onto his half of the bed.
“You okay?” Steve asked.

“Uh uh.” Bucky flipped his hand at him. “You can sleep on the floor.”

Steve wrinkled his tired brow. “What did I do?”

“Were you hoping I wouldn’t remember?”

“Remember what?”

“Our first kiss.”

Steve scratched his chin and squinted into the distance. “I thought we already worked through that.”

Bucky kicked Steve in the chest sending him backwards off the bed. Steve got up again glaring at Bucky this time. Bucky met his glare with one of his own.

“I know you know what I’m talking about.” Bucky said.

“Well that makes one of us.”

“Right before the end of Prohibition. Thirty-three, I think.”

Steve’s cheeks pinkened confirming what Bucky already knew. Steve looked down and crossed his arms over his wide chest defensively.

“Okay, but we never spoke of that night ever again.” Steve was looking everywhere, but at Bucky. “And it was barely two days later that you were going with Norma Jean.”

“What the hell does that have to do with right now?”

Steve shrugged.

“Just because I don’t have all my memories right now, doesn’t mean you have to hide all of yours.”

“Yeah, maybe, but you should see the way you look when I talk about something you don’t remember.”

“Okay, but not talking about things doesn’t help, Steve.”

“Alright.” Steve pulled his shoulders in and yawned. “Can I come back to bed now?”

Bucky shook his head. “Not until you tell me something from back then.”

“From the night we got drunk and kissed?”

“From any time before the war.”

“Uh,” Steve thought for a minute. “Something you should remember?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, how about the day you were scouted by that underground boxing guy after he caught one of our back alley brawls?”

Bucky pursed his lips thoughtfully and shrugged. “I remember doing the undercover boxing. I
remember training you in the gym. I remember a few of the fights, too.”

“Okay, do you remember what the brawl was about?” Steve asked. “The one that got you scouted?”

Bucky shook his head.

“It was one of the few fights you started yourself.”

Bucky shrugged.

“Rudolph Figgs, the big kid on Delancey.” Bucky nodded that he remembered. “Well, he was always picking on me about one thing or another. That day we were walking out of the movies and he happened to be nearby so he made some comment about you taking your girlfriend, me, to see a movie and mack in the back row. Then he told me I should wear dresses because –”

“Because the tomboy thing was getting old.” They finished together.

Steve nodded. “Rudy liked to insist I was a girl in boy’s clothing. My size was a big reason for it, but I guess I have girly eyes? A lot of people would tell me that. Long lashes like a doll.” Steve shrugged and wrinkled his nose at the memory. “Anyway, you slugger ol’ Rudy right on the chin and sent him flying even though he had a good four inches and a hundred pounds on you.”

“That’s when Goldie saw me fighting and asked me to do a couple fights for him.” Bucky nodded as his memory struggled hazily to the surface.

“So can I come back to bed now?” Steve yawned.

Bucky waved his hand out inviting Steve back onto the bed. Steve leaned over the bed and grabbed Bucky’s head in his hand. He kissed him hard. Bucky pushed back until it became a fight of sorts. A battle of teeth, tongues, and lips.

Eventually, Steve broke away and flopped back on the bed. Bucky scooched down and stared up at the ceiling as he tried to regain his breath. Steve’s fingers tickled through his hair, just like they had eighty years earlier right before their first kiss. Bucky shut his eyes and leaned into Steve’s touch.

“I have to tell you something else.”

Bucky opened his eyes and looked at Steve. “Another memory?”

“Not one you would remember.” Steve bit his lip. “At least, I don’t think you would.”

“What is it?”

Steve dropped his eyes in embarrassment. Bucky watched as he struggled for the words. Saw him war with the right thing to say. Bucky was patient. He always had been. He had to be to be friends with Steve Rogers.

“We stayed at each other’s houses a lot growing up. I mean, we shared an apartment when we got older, but we slept together a million nights.”

Bucky nodded. He may not have remembered every one of those nights, but he remembered enough to know. He hadn’t really slept in a bed alone up until his fall. Until sleep no longer meant a bed, but a cold, metal box. Now it took a strong sedative for him to be able to sleep with
somebody else. To let his guard down. To trust.

“That night we were drunk wasn’t the only time I’d kissed you.”

Steve cringed and covered his face in shame.

“What do you mean? I don’t remember kissing you any other time back then.”

Steve shook his head. “Sometimes when you were asleep and I wasn’t I would kiss you. I did it once when we were sleeping at your place and Becca walked in. I played dead and I don’t think she saw anything or I doubt our friendship would have been allowed to continue after that, but it was the last time I did it."

“So I didn’t remember our first kiss?"

An alarm started going off near Steve’s head. His hand slapped onto the nightstand and he switched off the alarm on his cell phone. He set it back down and turned his attention back to Bucky.

“You did.” Steve scrunched his nose up. “I think it got me addicted in a way. I just wanted to kiss you again, but I thought there was no way you’d ever go for that.”

Bucky blew out a breath of air through his lips and shook his head at the ceiling. “You’re probably right. Our restricted relationship was very much a product of our time. Just like your continued reluctance to share the nature of our relationship with your friends.”

“This is a little off topic, but I asked Thomoza to watched the farm for a couple of days.”

“Are we going somewhere?”

“Well, we have to be up at the palace in two hours for your checkup with Shuri and depending on what she has to say, I have a surprise for you.”

Steve gave Bucky a quick peck on his lips before rolling out of bed and tramping into the bathroom for a shower. Bucky waved the clock onto the screen across the room and sighed at the time. It was barely past four in the morning. He groaned and rolled off the bed to join Steve in the shower.

“Steve?"

“Yeah, babe?”

“Shuri hates waking up early. She has told me countless times that early mornings are for alcoholics and psychopaths.”

Steve laughed as the soap and water slid down his body and into the drain. Bucky massaged shampoo into his hair and switched places with Steve.

“What’s your point?”

“Why would she schedule a six a.m. appointment?”

Bucky pumped conditioner into his hand and ran it through the ends of his long hair careful not to get to close to his scalp where it would stick and weigh down his hair making him look like a greasy rat. He switched back with Steve to let the conditioner sit in his hair for a few minutes before he rinsed it out. Steve washed the rest of the soap from his body.
“I scheduled it. If all goes well, we have to be on our way by eight.”

Bucky wrinkled his face at Steve.

“On our way where?”

Steve smiled and shook his head. “I told you it was a surprise.”

Bucky groaned and switched places with Steve again to rinse the conditioner from his hair. Steve reached out to help him fan the ends of his hair out under the stream of water.

Cleaned, dressed, and packed, Bucky and Steve set off for the palace on their borrowed hovercraft. Steve had taken care to pack doses of Bucky’s medication in both their bags for emergencies. Bucky leaned his head back against Steve’s shoulder as they cruised through the Wakandan farmlands quickly.

The palace came into view within a few minutes just as the sun was rising over the horizon. Steve grabbed both bags from the hovercraft and followed Bucky to Shuri’s lab.

It was still empty when they arrived. Not even the lab assistants had arrived yet. Bucky hopped onto the exam table to wait for her. Steve checked his watch. It was a quarter after six. Bucky was patient. Steve, not so much. He began pacing. Crossing and uncrossing his arms. His eyes flicked back and forth like a wild animal.

“How are you doing, Bucky?” Shuri asked, wheeling over a cart with a computer screen on it.

“I feel better than I have in weeks.”

Shuri nodded and held a wand up to his back. Steve fidgeted nervously at his side.

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“What episodes?”

“Maybe one or two.”

Shuri gave him a stern look and Bucky looked down at his knees.

“Okay, four, but they weren’t too bad.”
“Managing your pain levels, then?”

“Only as best as I can.”

“Sleeping?”

“Somewhere around four hours, but I’ve also been taking short naps throughout the day.”

Shuri set the scanner down and stared at the screen. She yawned again and nodded more to herself than anyone else.

“Nap. Yeah. That’s a good idea.” She murmured.

“What’s the prognosis, Doc?” Steve asked, pulling Shuri from her daze.

“Excess physical exertion is still out of the question. Not all of your nerves, tendons, and muscles have completely repaired themselves. Too much strain may undo all of the progress that has been made.” Shuri typed something into the computer. “But I suppose I don’t see any reason why you wouldn’t be fit for travel.”

“Travel?”

Shuri raised her eyes to Steve. “He doesn’t know?”

Steve stooped to pick up their bags. “It’s a surprise.”

Shuri yawned and gave a halfhearted shrug. She walked across the room and picked up a silver case. She handed it to Steve and patted Bucky on his good shoulder before shuffling away to take a nap.

Before he could ask any more questions, Steve ushered Bucky out of the lab and toward the hangar. Steve was inside the Quinjet and flipping buttons before Bucky had even made it down the gangplank. He dropped into his chair heavily watching Steve flit back and forth at the controls. Suddenly, Steve spun on his heel and started back down the ramp.

“Steve?”

He screeched to a stop and turned back to give Bucky a wide smile. “It’s fine. I’ll be right back.”

“Okay.”

Bucky chewed at his lip a few minutes more. Steve was acting strange. Excited in a way Bucky hadn’t seen in a long time. He was glad to see it, but he was also worried. Leave it to Steve to go out and do something stupid and present it as a gift.

Bucky stood and began snooping through anything he could get his hands on. He touched something and a screen popped up.

“WELCOME! VOICE ACTIVATION REQUIRED.” Bucky leapt back in shock. Planes didn’t generally talk back. At least, not with actual words.

“Uh, open?”

“ACCESS DENIED.”

Bucky tried to think of a password that would unlock the jet. Something Steve would use.
“Captain America.”

“ACCESS DENIED.”

“The Avengers?”

“ACCESS DENIED.”

“Brooklyn?”

“ACCESS DENIED.”

Bucky stepped back and frowned at the computer screen. No doubt it held all manner of secrets from Steve and the rest of his friends. Possibly even the planet. Bucky sat back in his seat and scowled at the Stark emblem on the control panel. Wakandan technology was much friendlier.

Steve tramped back up the ramp hitting the button to close it as he went. He smiled again at Bucky and dropped into the pilot’s seat.

“WAITING FOR VOICE ACTIVATION.” The computer announced.

Steve paused in what he was doing at wrinkled his brow at the screen. He turned around to look at Bucky who turned his head and looked out the window. Steve laughed breathily and shook his head.

“WAITING FOR VOICE ACTIVATION.”

Steve cleared his throat and sighed.

“Rogers.”

“WELCOME, OLD MAN JENKINS!”

Steve winced and put his hands over his face. Bucky slapped his hand over his mouth, but couldn’t stifle the laughter erupting from his belly.

“Why?” He gasped. “Why is that your access name?”

“Tony.” He grumbled pathetically.

Steve glared at Bucky still laughing uncontrollably in his seat.

“Can you stop?”

Bucky shook his head, still laughing.

“We can just go back to the farm, then.” Steve threatened.

Bucky bit his bottom lip, still chuckling. “Doesn’t make a difference to me, Old Man Jenkins, when I don’t know what the alternative is.”

Steve crossed his arms and frowned at the floor. “It’s a surprise.” He narrowed his eyes at Bucky. “And you never would’ve heard that if you hadn’t been trying to snoop.”

“Worth it.”

Bucky sighed and leaned back against his chair brushing the tears from his eyes.
“Okay. Okay, I’m done.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. Yeah, let’s go wherever we’re going.”

“I have to say, I really am surprised you haven’t figured it out yet.” Steve said as the jet started to move out of the hangar.

“I’ve been preoccupied what with my back being seared off and all.”

Steve let it drop and focused on flying the jet to whatever destination he had in mind.
Surprises

Chapter Summary

Steve and Bucky get more surprises than they bargained for on their trip.

Chapter Notes

MERRY CRISIS!!!!!

It was dark by the time Steve landed the jet in a snow covered field. Bucky guessed they were in the Northern Hemisphere. They were near the coast, but the closest town was nothing more than starlights over the snowy hills. A small house was about a hundred yards away with low lights burning in the windows.

Bucky stretched and went for the ramp. Steve grabbed his hand to stop him, pulling out the silver case Shuri had given him before they left. Inside was a new arm. Snow white and simple in design. Bucky wrinkled his brow at it.

Steve untied Bucky’s stole and brushed his hair out of the way so he could attach the new arm to his shoulder. Immediately, Bucky understood why he had been given this arm in place of the reverse tiger that he had become used to. It was practically weightless while still retaining all the functionality of a normal arm. Less strain on his still mending back.

Bucky flexed the metal fingers experimentally. They did exactly what he wanted them to, but they still felt off. The best he could equate it to would be like when Steve had trapped his arm under his body and it had gone numb. It still worked, but it felt like a foreign object. The arm worked, it just didn’t belong to him.

“Is it okay?” Steve asked, concernedly. “Does it hurt? Should I take it off?”

“It’s fine.”

“Are you sure? Tell me now and I can take it right back off. Shuri worked it in with a quick release in case it didn’t work or started hurting you.”

“I’m fine.” He was. The arm worked fine. The rest, he would get used to.

Steve watched him for a few seconds longer warring between his eagerness to take Bucky to the big surprise and wanting to take Bucky home and care for him until he was one hundred percent healed. Bucky turned away from Steve and began folding up his discarded stole. Partially to make Steve stop staring at him and partially to practice using the odd arm.

“Here.”

Bucky looked back at Steve who was holding out a thick, winter coat for him. Bucky accepted it and noticed that Steve was donning its twin. Bucky zipped the coat up to his chin while Steve
pulled a secret third bag from one of the lockers. When he saw Bucky’s puzzled stare, he only smile and shrugged before collecting the other two bags and hitting the button for the ramp with his elbow.

The snow gleamed in the milky moonlight at the bottom of the ramp. Memories new and old came swirling into Bucky’s head. Steve and him standing at the top of the very same ramp looking down at the snow before Steve’s whole world was brought crashing down on top of him. Because of Bucky. The memory of the HYDRA base he was kept at. Even further back, the hurtling, stomach churning feeling of falling through the snowcapped mountains. Icy winds hit his cheeks and all he could think about was the box. The ice in his veins so cold it stopped his heart over and over again.

“Bucky?” Steve called from the foot of the ramp.

He hadn’t noticed until he was standing in the snow that Bucky hadn’t moved. He set the bags down and moved back up the ramp. His warm hands closed around Bucky’s face reminding him that he wasn’t in the box. Cold existed beyond his horrors. Not all of it was bad.

“Are you okay? Do you need your meds?”

“No, I….” Bucky sighed and shook his head. “Yeah, I should probably take something.”

Steve nodded and jogged back down to the bags and dug through until he found Bucky’s anxiety medication. He tapped out a pill and hustled back up the ramp to pass it to Bucky. He threw the pill back and swallowed quickly. It would take a few minutes for it to kick in. Until then, he was going to have to be brave.

Steve linked his fingers with Bucky’s right hand. The one that belonged to him. Steve’s fingers massaged at his scalp in the way that made his eyelids droop. He kiss him softly before resting his forehead against Bucky’s.

“Are you ready to go?”

Bucky nodded and let Steve lead him by the hand down the ramp. Steve hit a button on a remote and the ramp closed. He hit another button and the Quinjet’s camouflage kicked on making it invisible to the naked eye. Shuri’s tinkering had made it invisible to just about everything else.

Steve stopped them outside the door to the house and grinned at Bucky. His excitement had returned full force. Steve leaned forward and kissed him again, quickly, before knocking three times on the door, then twice, then three times again. Bucky squinted at his boyfriend.

The sound of a lock open turned his attention back to the house. Steve turned the handle and pushed the door in. He pushed Bucky in first.

“Ta-DA!” Steve cried.

The inside of the house was decorated with all manner of lighting. Red, blue, green, and yellow all twinkled in every corner of the room. In the middle of the far wall was an enormous fir tree also decorated with a thousand tiny lights along with other trinkets and a glowing star at the top. Beneath the tree were presents wrapped with varying levels of expertise. The house smelled of sweets and pot roast.

Sam, Natasha, and Wanda all stood around the room. Sam was eating something that looked like a cookie, but was covered in so much icing it could have easily been a cupcake. Bucky smiled politely at Steve’s friends before turning to look at Steve with confusion.
“Is it my birthday?” He whispered.

Steve’s enormous smile drooped. He set theirs bags on the floor and shut the door, keeping his eyes on Bucky’s face. Bucky winced at the disappointment he had caused Steve. He cast his eyes around the room again, searching for any tell of what the celebration was for.

“Buck, it’s Christmas.” Steve said. “You remember Christmas.”


Steve pulled his coat off and hung it on a hook.

“Is he serious?” Sam murmured to Natasha. She elbowed him sharply in the ribs in response.

“Yes. Of course I know. I know. The presents and… lights.” Bucky cleared his throat and forced a smile. “Christmas.”

“Alright. Tell me who brings the presents?” Wanda challenged.

“Wanda.” Natasha hissed.

Wanda waved her hand dismissively. Her attention was entirely focused on Bucky and his answer. Bucky glanced at Steve.

“Ah, ah. You can’t ask for help.”

“The guests.” Bucky said decisively. “As payment for the food.”

Wanda spluttered out a laugh and Sam choked down a giggle of his own. Bucky’s cheeks brightened. He pulled off his coat for an excuse to end the conversation.

“Don’t worry about it, Soldat, come eat.” Natasha offered, stepping on Wanda’s toes as she led the way into the next room.

“HYDRA did a lot to me and my brother, but never so much that I forgot about Christmas.” Wanda continued at the table.

“Wanda, let it drop.” Steve said firmly.

Wanda’s giddy smile faltered and she dropped her eyes to her plate. An awkward silence settled over the table that Bucky knew he had caused.

“Yeah, man, there’s a more important matter to deal with.” Sam barked. He leaned forward toward Steve and Bucky and smirked between them. “You, uh, you really….”

Steve cleared his throat and crossed his arms over his chest. Sam licked his lips, not dropping his smug smirk.

“You don’t know when your birthday is?” Sam finished.

Bucky glared at Sam across the pot roast. The table grew silent again.

“Buck?”
“July fourth.” Bucky said firmly.

Steve coughed and shook his head. “That’s… that’s my birthday, Buck.”

Bucky sat back in his seat and stared at his mismatched hands in his lap. As great as the pot roast smelled, Bucky had completely lost any desire to eat. He chewed at his cheek.

“March tenth.” Steve offered.

Bucky nodded in his chair. After a while, conversation drifted away from him. He heard Steve compliment Sam and Wanda on the food. Natasha commented on the difficult time she had in procuring some of the items without blowing her cover. Wanda said more than once how glad she was to be in her home country again. All the while, Bucky tried to squash the pitching feeling in his gut. The feelings that generally accompanied his feeling of hopelessness.

There were things he remembered that he wished had stayed buried. His escape and recapture that ultimately led to Vito’s death at his hands. The feeling of Steve’s face crunching until his knuckles. Fragmented memories of his torture and subsequent brainwashing. All things he remembered so vividly that if he just reached out, he could touch them through time. But the good things, celebrations, laughter, happiness all seemed to fade before him. He knew he had a mother and a father, siblings, a home. None of them stayed with him long. Everything good in his life had been savagely ripped away and he didn’t think he would ever get any of it back. No matter how many remedies Shuri tried or how many surprises Steve showered him with to remind him of the good ol’ days.

“Presents tomorrow.” Wanda said, rubbing her full belly and smiling contentedly.

“Weren’t you the one insisting we open them tonight?” Sam challenged.

Wanda shrugged and stood up. Everyone else followed suit. Bucky looked down at his plate still mostly untouched. Fleetingly he hoped Steve hadn’t noticed, but he knew he had. Sam patted Steve on the shoulder before turning for the stairs behind Natasha and Wanda.

“Good night, guys.” Steve called after them.

Once everyone was safely away in their rooms, Steve took Bucky’s hand and led him to a bedroom in the back of the first floor. It wasn’t as luxurious as the Wakandan Palace and it wasn’t as quaint as his farmhouse, but the bed looked to have clean sheets. Bucky fiddled with the quick release at his shoulder. His back ached fiercely.

“Are you alright?” Steve asked.

Bucky focused on the finding the latch.

“Here.” He pressed at his shoulder and the arm dropped off Bucky’s shoulder.

Bucky shut his eyes and sighed in relief. The arm may have been as weightless as a feather, but the circuit nerves still worked. The ache in his back went all the way down to his artificial fingertips.

“Buck, you gotta talk to me. I can see you’re not happy, but I can’t fix it if I don’t know what’s wrong.”

Bucky dropped down onto the bed and shut his eyes. He didn’t know how to explain it to Steve. Or how he was going to keep up the charade that not knowing meant nothing to him. Not that he thought he was doing a particularly great job in that department in the first place.
“I don’t remember Christmas.” He sighed at last.

“Buck, it’s fine.”

“Steve, you were so excited.”

“Hey, you don’t have to worry about me.” Steve lay down on the bed beside Bucky and put his fingers in his hair, massaging his scalp in the way that always made Bucky turn into pudding. “I just want you to be happy.”

“I only remember bad memories.”

“That’s not true.”

“It is. Why do I remember Vito in crystal detail and I can’t remember something nice like Christmas.”

“I don’t know.”

“And you gave me the engineering book on Christmas, but I only remember reading it in Prospect Park under our tree.”

“Okay, okay.” Steve adjusted himself on the bed and pulled Bucky up until he was sitting against his chest. “You want me to tell you about Christmas?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Our families were small. On my side it was just my mother and me. On your side it was your mom and dad, your sister and brothers, and you. You had more family, but they lived in Shelbyville, Indiana. So come Christmastime, we would all pile in to one of our houses. It was different each year. Some years, my mom had to work at the hospital so I would stay with you and your family. Then, whenever my mom was off next, she would make us her pot roast with fresh cut potatoes and we would stay up listening to the radio and dancing.

“Most years, we got each other gifts. Even if we could barely afford it. I remember one year you worked after school for weeks just so you could afford to buy me these really nice charcoal pencils. I hunted down every recyclable I could get my hands on so I could buy you that engineer’s book. Of course, we also got gifts for our families. We bought my mom, Becca, and your mom matching lace trimmed handkerchiefs one year. Cost an arm and a leg, but they were happy. My mom actually cried. Said it was the nicest thing she had ever owned.”

Bucky reached up and massaged the tender flesh at the seam between his skin and the metal of his shoulder. Steve was running his hands down Bucky’s hair absentely. He could tell from the distant sound in his voice that Steve was reliving those far away memories as he told them.

“When it snowed, we’d build snowmen and snow forts and have snow ball fights. If we were really lucky we’d get hot cocoa to warm us back up. It was the only time of year that we didn’t mind your siblings playing with us. Three of them against the two of us and they still always lost.” Steve laughed. “It was less fun after the twins passed. We didn’t play so much around the holidays.”

Steve was quiet for a minute. Bucky thought maybe he had grown tired of recanting the past. That is, until he heard Steve clear his throat and sniffle back tears. The idea that happy memories like those could make Steve cry startled Bucky. He sat up and turned around to face him.
“No, it’s nothing. Uh, where was I?” Steve said waving away Bucky’s concerned look. “Later on, after my mom died and we moved in together, the holidays were a lot simpler. We went over to your parent’s place for a few hours and had dinner and spent the rest of the evening at home. We gave each other presents which only got more creative the tighter money got for us. Every Christmas, we pulled our mattresses off our beds and laid them side by side in the living room to sleep. Sleeping next to you like that was the only time I forgot just how much I missed my mother.”

Bucky leaned forward and touched his lips lightly to Steve’s. “Thank you.”

“Do you remember it now?”

Bucky shook his head. “I might never remember it myself. Christmas might be one of those memories I am doomed to forget forever. But you remember it. You remember everything. So whenever I can’t remember anything good happening to me, you tell me something good that you remember. Tell me something good so that I know that I wasn’t always bad.”

“Oh?” Steve shifted until he was up on his knees. “But maybe I like you bad.”

Steve kissed Bucky, pushing him back onto the mattress. Breaking for a second, he ripped his t-shirt over his head before finding Bucky’s mouth again. Bucky locked his legs around Steve’s hips and clawed at his shoulder. Steve moved his hands down to the hem of Bucky’s shirt. Bucky stillled him and looked at the door. Suddenly remembering the other occupants in the house.

“Wait. What about your friends?”

“What about them?” Steve replied, yanking the fabric up out of Bucky’s hands.

“A house this size, they’re sure to hear something.” He argued even as he was relieved of his shirt. Steve kissed his way down Bucky’s chest and started at the buckle to his pants ignoring everything Bucky was saying. Bucky pushed his hands away and sat up again.


“What?”

“I’ve been rejected a million times by a million girls. Never felt so disappointing before.” He put his finger to his lips. “I did the same thing to you in Stryi, didn’t I?”

“Just realized that, huh?”

“Sorry.”

“Forgiven.” Bucky laid down and shut his eyes. He sighed and shucked his jeans anyway. He couldn’t sleep with the button digging into his gut the whole night. Steve pulled his off, too and settled down beside Bucky in bed.

It was a few minutes of peacefulness. Bucky listened to the sound of the wind slamming against the house. Sounds of Siberia. The whisper of hissed Russian began to creep into his brain. Bucky took a deep breath and tried to ignore it. He knew it wasn’t real. The wind began howling. It was getting harder to ignore and his back was killing him.

“Steve?”
“Hm?”

Steve pet his hand over Bucky’s bare stomach sending goosebumps tickling over his skin. Bucky cleared his throat and gently pushed Steve’s hand away again.

“Steve, where’re the bags?”

“By the door.” He mumbled sleepily.

Bucky got up and went to the door. There were no bags. He turned back to Steve.

“Steve?”

“What?”

“They aren’t here.”

“What’s not?”

“The bags.”

“Other door, baby.”

“The front door?”

“Mm.”

Bucky opened the door and padded through the quiet house in search of their bags and, more importantly, his medications. The lights on the tree lit the otherwise dark room. Bucky found the bags buried under their coats and began rifling through them for his meds. He stood back up victoriously catching sight of the tree’s reflection in the window. He didn’t think he’d ever seen anything as beautiful as the cavalcade of colors dancing on the glimmering snow.

He tore himself away and made for the kitchen in search of water. Bucky set his pills down on the counter. He wished he had just left his arm on for the extent of the trip. He could do everything with one hand, but he couldn’t deny that it was much faster with two. Bucky opened and closed the mostly empty cabinets in his hunt for a glass.

“What are you doing?”

Bucky jumped and spun around. He hadn’t heard Steve creep up behind him. He cleared his throat and went back to his searching.

“I need some water, but I can’t find a glass.”

Steve stepped behind him and pressed a bottle of water into his hand. His chin rested on Bucky’s good shoulder, his hands around his waist. Steve kissed his neck lightly, brushed his hair back, and kissed it again. Bucky sighed and leaned his head back, giving Steve better access to his neck. Steve’s hand dipped below the waistband of Bucky’s boxers.

Sudden laughter sounded from upstairs jerking Steve and Bucky away from the moment. Bucky looked up the stairs and found them empty, but the giggling continued.

“Stop! Stop!” Bucky could hear Wanda laugh.

Slowly, Sam and Natasha emerged from their respective rooms with curious expressions on their
faces. Steve started up the stairs to join them and Bucky made a quick stop back into their bedroom to grab his arm before joining the trio at the top of the stairs. Sam looked him up and down, frowned, and looked away.

“Shh, they’ll hear.”

Steve crept toward Wanda’s door and grabbed the doorknob. He looked back at his team. They each gave him a nod and he shoved the door open. Bucky followed them all inside, knife in each hand. Wanda gasped and sat up wide eyed and clearly flustered. Vision jumped up and stood at the end of the bed. Curiously, the robot also seemed embarrassed though Bucky didn’t know how that was possible.

“Vision.”

“Captain.” Vision’s mouth hung open for a second. “Merry Christmas.”

“What are you doing here?” Steve’s eyes turned to Wanda. “What is he doing here?”

“Relax, he isn’t going to attack anyone.” Wanda groaned. “Right, Viz?”

“Ah, right. I only came to celebrate the season with Wanda. And besides all that, Accords or not, we are all friends.”

“No, we’re not.” Steve growled. “Do you have any idea what you did to Bucky?” Steve swung his head back to check on Bucky. Bucky had a sickening feeling in his gut from the second he laid eyes on the robot. “Where’d you get knives?”

Bucky looked down at his hands and back to Steve. He shrugged. Steve looked like he wanted to question it further, but decided the other matter was more important.

“And I do apologize for that. It was wrong of me. Wanda has told me about what you did for us, Mr. Barnes.”

“Hey, he don’t like that. Call him Bucky or don’t call him anything.” Sam interjected to Bucky’s surprise.

“Forgive me. I was careless.” Vision stepped toward Bucky and Bucky stepped back. Sam and Natasha stepped in front of him forming a protective barrier.

“Look, you can be mad at him all you want, but you said it yourself, Steve, Christmas is a time to be with loved ones. I don’t see why you get to bring your boyfriend, but I can’t bring mine.”

“Because your boyfriend tried to kill mine!”

“Oh, he didn’t try to kill him!”

“Alright, Wanda, tell that to the two and a half weeks he spent on the brink of death in the most advanced hospital in the world.” Steve snapped.

Bucky was stuck at the back trying to settle the buzzing in his ears. They were all arguing over whether Vision should stay or leave and who was going where and why. Bucky could only focus on one thing.

“They know about us?” He piped over the shouting.

Steve stopped to meet Bucky’s eyes. He let out a huff and looked at his feet.
“You two are about as subtle as a brick through a window.” Sam berated, slapping Bucky on his bare back.

Bucky winced and let out a small whimper of pain. Sam reeled back with his hands up. Bucky grimaced and shook his head to dispel the pain.

“C’mon, Soldat, you really think we didn’t hear you two making out in the hotel room?”

“But you told them?” Bucky insisted to Steve.

Steve glanced up at Bucky and gave him a shy little smile.

“Okay, hello? Where do we stand?” Wanda called.

“Let ‘em stay.” Bucky said.

“No. Buck –”

“Let them stay, Steve.” Bucky said again, more firmly.

Before Steve could argue further, Bucky turned and headed back down the stairs to the kitchen. He was tired and just wanted sleep. The day had been long and full of surprises. He heard them chattering above him, but focused only on getting the water and his pills. He stowed his knives away before tucking himself into bed and promptly falling asleep with the knowledge that everyone knew Steve was his at the forefront of his mind.
Breakfast and Robots

Chapter Summary

Bucky gets up early and decides to make breakfast for everyone. Vision attempts to build trust between them failing miserably at every turn.

Chapter Notes

Finished at 2 in the morning so likely rife with spelling and grammar errors, but I'm exhausted so here!!

“Evil Bucky.”

Bucky woke in the early morning light with Steve wrapped around him tighter than the blanket. Steve breathed the words into his ear making Bucky’s heart squeeze. He tried to disengage his boyfriend from the stranglehold he had on him, but even with the extra arm, it was a fruitless effort.

“Evil,” Steve mumbled again.

“Steve?” Bucky asked quietly.

It couldn’t have been more than a few hours since they had all stood in Wanda’s bedroom debating what was going to be done about Vision’s sudden appearance. He didn’t know when Steve had finally come back to bed, but he knew he’d likely be out a few hours more.

“Buck.”

“Yeah?”

“Evil Buck.”

It took him a few seconds longer to realize that Steve wasn’t calling him evil. He was warning him about something that was.

“What’s evil, Stevie?”

Steve moaned and shoved his face into Bucky’s good shoulder. He let out a small whine and his monstrous body constricted around him. Bucky winced as his back screamed in pain at the pressure.

“What’s evil, Steve?” Bucky insisted.

Steve let out a rumbling growl then sighed. “Robots.” He grumbled.

Bucky wanted to laugh at first until he remembered why Steve was dreaming about evil robots. One such robot was sleeping in the room upstairs. Bucky stopped on that thought. Vision may not
There have been like any robot he knew about, but he didn’t think sleep was something it could do. It was wire and metal and electricity. None of those things needed sleep.

“I broke the microwave.” Steve announced beside him.

“Oh?”

“Tony and Bruce are making more.”

“More microwaves?”

“Ultrons.”

“What?”

“Vision’s on their side.”

“Whose side?”

“Tony’s on their side.”

“What? The robot’s side?”

“Tony’s a robot.”

“Yeah, that tracks.”

Steve shouted suddenly and scrambled out of bed as though he were lit on fire. Bucky stared wide eyed at him. Neither of them moved. Neither of them spoke. Something had clearly terrified Steve beyond imagining.

“Are you alright?”

Steve’s breath gradually slowed down and he answered Bucky with a tight nod. Bucky rolled out of bed and put his arms around Steve’s waist. Steve did the same, but his eyes were faraway. Bucky could have been on another planet at the second and Steve wouldn’t have noticed.

“Was it the robots?” Bucky asked, calling Steve back to him.

“Robots?”

“Yeah, Vision, Tony, Ultron? All the evil robots?”

“You know about Ultron?” Steve asked, carefully.

“Only the name.” Bucky admitted. “You said it while you were sleeping.”

Steve brought a hand to his head and nodded absently. “I hoped I would grow out of that.”

“So what did Ultron do that made you jump out of bed like that?”

Steve was quiet. Now that he had calmed down, the exhaustion was coming back to him. Bucky could see it in his eyes. He had barely slept a wink and it didn’t help that they were both jetlagged.

“No, it wasn’t…. ” Steve shook his head. He disentangled himself from Bucky and sat back on the bed. “Okay.” He huffed and shut his eyes. “It started with Ultron and Vision, but they took over
everyone else. Turned them all against me. Sam, Nat, you, everybody turned on me. Bruce and Thor, too.”

Bucky looked down at Steve. His broad shoulders were hunched over, his head cradled in his hands. Bucky recalled his own nightmare. The eternally twisting memory of him beating Steve to a pulp on the floor of the helicarrier. The way his flesh and bone ground against his fist. He knew the empty feeling. The shame and loneliness. He crouched in front of Steve and forced him to meet his eyes.

“I love you.” Bucky said, firmly. “Barring a really bad episode or some hidden HYDRA programming that gets activated mysteriously, I will never turn on you. Okay, babe?”

Steve gave him a tight smile and nodded. Bucky gripped his chin between his flesh and bone fingers and pressed a hard kiss against his lips.

“You need to sleep.” Bucky told him.

“You, too.” Steve hooked his fingers through Bucky’s and pulled him onto the bed with him.

Bucky knew better than to argue with him. He stayed put, draped across Steve’s body in lieu of a real blanket until Steve fell back into a deep sleep. Once he was certain Steve was completely asleep, Bucky slithered off the bed and draped the blanket over Steve before pulling on his pants.

His back was aching so he moseyed into the living room after his pain killers. Their bags hadn’t moved from the spot by the door Steve had dropped them when they first arrived. Bucky rifled through his duffle after his medication when the mystery of the third bag slowly became more and more alluring. He peeked over his shoulder at the cracked bedroom door where Steve slept. He tugged the zipper down and poked his hand inside.

Bucky stared at the small box in his hand wrapped messily with bright red paper. He picked up the small, paper tag hanging from the top. To: Natasha, From: Steve was written in Steve’s careful hand. Bucky dropped the box back into the bag and pulled out another box, slightly larger than Natasha’s for Sam. Bucky’s own present wasn’t a box at all. If he had to guess, it was a piece of wood wrapped in paper. It was weighty with sharp edges and about the size of a book. Before he could be caught snooping again, Bucky returned all the presents to the duffle bag and closed the zipper.

Bucky collected his pain pills from his travel container and headed into the kitchen after water. His water bottle was still sitting on the kitchen counter where he’d left it hours earlier before the Vision fiasco. A clock on the stove announced that it was five fifteen in the morning.

Bucky’s stomach gurgled. He had barely touched his dinner from the night before and had only had a bowl of oatmeal for breakfast. He opened the refrigerator that looked exactly like the ones he remembered making in the factory when he was fifteen. Leftovers from the previous night’s meal were arranged in plastic bowls. Beside them was a carton of eggs, butter, and a gallon of milk.

Bucky opened the cabinets he remembered having food in from his raid the night before and found a bag of all-purpose flour, three types of sugar, and baking powder. Bucky smiled. He didn’t have presents to give everybody, but he did have an interesting skill set which included a wide range of culinary skills. He rolled up his metaphorical sleeves (since he had forgone a shirt in favor of his aching back) and washed his hands.

“I’ve tried my own hand at cooking a time or two.” Vision announced behind him.
Bucky yelped and spun around. The robot was levitating barely three feet away from him. He swallowed nervously and took a step back. Bucky could admit he was petrified of the robot. He really didn’t want to die. He wanted to be with Steve. He wanted to be happy. Vision seemed to be just about the only real thing that could very likely take all of that away from him again.

“I have made a vow not to harm you in any way, Mr. Barnes.” Vision said, holding up a hand.

“Do robots have the moral capacity to uphold a vow like that?”

Bucky had argued for Vision to stay out of compassion for Wanda. He had seen how in love the pair were, but it didn’t mean he trusted the robot by any means. In fact, sharing a house with the same being that had caused him such great pain that persisted even two months after the incident was a challenge. It reminded him of his time spent under HYDRA control. Abused, but made to obey and tolerate his abusers.

Vision frowned. “I am not going to hurt you.” It repeated. “Though I must tell you, I do hate that word.”

“What word?”

“Robot. I don’t like to be called a robot.”

“I don’t really like to be called Mr. Barnes.”

“But you are Mr. Barnes, are you not? James Buchanan Barnes. That is your name.”

“And you are a robot.”

Vision paused as he considered the logic before nodding. “I see. May I call you James, then?”

“Bucky.” He cleared his throat. “Everyone calls me Bucky.”

“Very well, then I shall call you Bucky as well.” Vision smiled in a way Bucky was certain was meant to be reassuring, but there was still a ball in the pit of his stomach that refused to let him relax around the robot.

Silence dragged between them and the robot looked about the room uncomfortably. Bucky’s eyes remained trained on the threat before him. No one else was awake yet which meant the only thing standing between Vision activating his skin melting laser and doing away with Bucky was Bucky’s quick reflexes.

“Could I be of any help in the cooking?” Vision offered.

“What?” Bucky had almost forgotten they were standing in a kitchen.

“I’m not very good. I don’t necessarily have taste buds, you see. I am, however, fascinated by the practice.”

“Oh, well, uh… you know the thing about too many cooks in the kitchen,” Bucky replied with a half shrug.

“They spoil the broth, yes. Are you making broth?”

“For breakfast? No.”

“Then I do not understand the use of the idiom in this instance as there is no broth to be ruined.”
“If I had breakfast sausages I’d make gravy.” Bucky mused, frowning at the ingredients on the counter.

“Would you like me to get some for you?” Vision offered.

Bucky narrowed his eyes at the robot in suspicion. Vision pulled its face back into one of the most awkward attempts at a smile Bucky had ever seen.

“Do you know what breakfast sausage looks like? And where to find it?” Bucky asked hesitantly.

“I have the entirety of the internet composed inside my mind, I think I can work it out.”

Bucky grimaced at the knowledge. Vision had meant it as reassurance, but the fact only served to further creep Bucky out. Instead of voicing these apprehensions, Bucky nodded.

“Well, as long as you’re going, would you mind picking up two more dozen eggs, another pint of milk, and some sliced bread?”

Vision nodded, looking excited at the thought of the errand. He floated away toward the door silently before disappearing through the wall of the house and outside. Bucky paled at the sight.

“What the hell?” He muttered to himself.

Desperate to get past the unsettling feeling Vision gave him, he started work on making biscuits. Before he could, he had to clean the dishes used the night before as there were no more dishes in the house. It took longer than he thought it would mostly because the other houseguests seemed unfamiliar with the concept of rinsing their dishes before placing them in the sink.

Finally finished with the dishes, Bucky turned to oven on to preheat and started on making the biscuits. He remembered helping his mother knead the dough when he was still too small to see over the table without standing on a chair. When the Depression hit and his dad had hit the bottle forcing his mother to take on more work, Bucky had done a lot of the housework in her place. Bucky had found he really enjoyed cooking and Steve had enjoyed eating whatever Bucky had made.

“Is the dough humorous in some way?” Vision asked.

Bucky’s heart clenched up and the bowl of half mixed dough flipped over dumping flour and water on the counter. Bucky cursed and fixed the bowl upright before mopping up the mess on the counter with the rag he’d used for the dishes.

“My apologies, Bucky, I do have a nasty habit of not announcing my presence properly. Wanda berates me on it constantly.”

“Maybe you should wear a bell.” Bucky suggested through clenched teeth.

Vision smiled. “You are not the first person to suggest that.”

He held out a bag for Bucky to take. Inside, sausage, eggs, milk, and bread had all been packaged together. Bucky frowned in distaste at the smooshed bread as he pulled it from the bag. Vision frowned at it, too.

“It didn’t look like that when I bought it.”

Bucky gritted his teeth and nodded. He continued through the bag and withdrew the sausage to
inspect. It was surprisingly good quality. He settled it on the counter beside the frying pan and pulled the other items from the bag before folding it up and setting it beside the mixing bowl of future biscuits.

He fried the sausage first so he could use the fats for gravy. Once the sausage was finished, he transferred the grease into a saucepan and added flour, salt, and pepper. Vision watched from a corner of the kitchen driving a pit of unease to settle in his gut. Out of desperation to get the robot’s eyes on something other than him, Bucky decided to give it a task.

“Would you mind scrubbing the frying pan clean while I finish mixing up the biscuits?” Bucky asked as easily as he could manage.

Vision jumped at the task. He took the still hot frying pan from the stove with no protection and started to clean it noisily. Bucky was comforted by the noise the robot was making. It made Vision more human. Less threatening. Bucky kneaded the biscuit dough until it was good and firm and began forming them into ideal biscuit shapes on a baking sheet. Once they were in the oven, Bucky continued with the gravy.

Vision set the newly washed frying pan on the stove beside him.

“Is this alright?”

Bucky looked at the pan and nodded. “Thank you.”

Vision stood at his side awkwardly, watching him stir the flour and grease together with strange fascination.

“Could you hand me the milk?”

Vision passed him the pint before the question had completely left his mouth. The pit in his gut grew.

A few minutes later, Bucky turned the gravy burner down so that it was kept warm, but not cooking. He opened the first container of eggs and was unsurprised to see that three of the twelve had already cracked. If the state of the bread had been any indication, Vision had no idea how to grocery shop.

With everything else finished, breakfast was waiting on only the biscuits before being completed and ready for consumption. He chugged down his water bottle and found another. Vision had resumed his place at the far side of the kitchen, quietly watching him. As long as he stayed on that side of the kitchen, Bucky’s unease was mildly alleviated.

Bucky set his water down and went to the oven grabbing a towel with his left hand and opening the oven door with his right. The biscuits were a perfect golden brown. Probably the best he had ever made. He set the biscuits on the stove and tossed the towel away before reaching down for the oven door.

“Those look beautiful,” Vision commented in his ear. Bucky shouted and laid his right hand flat on the inside of the oven door. He yelped again at the pain and ripped his hand away. Bucky held the wrist of his burned hand and kicked the oven door shut more forcefully than he should have.

“Oh, dear. Are you alright?”

Bucky didn’t respond. The all too familiar white flashes were going off behind his eyes. He stumbled for the living room. For his PTSD medication. The white flashes grew more intense
until he couldn’t see. He pitched forward and caught himself on his hands igniting further pain in his burned hand and still recovering back.

“Bucky?” Vision called out.

He crawled across the living room floor until he saw that he wasn’t in the living room at all. He never had been. The cold, wood floor he thought he’d been dragging himself across had been the cold, steel floor of the HYDRA compound. The burns hadn’t come from a kitchen mishap. They were electrical burns from his torturers.

One of the aforementioned torturers reached down and grabbed Bucky by the shoulder. His back was ignited with a fresh dose of agony. Bucky did the only thing his scrambled mind could think to do. He screamed. He screamed for his mom, his dad, and Steve. He screamed even after he heard the hissed voices in his ear telling him there were no such people. No one would be coming for him. Then he just screamed.

Agents flooded the room from all sides. They shouted at each other in a language he knew, but couldn’t decipher. The hand pulling at his shoulder disappeared. Before he could think of escape once more, another hand touched his cheek. Bucky bit at the hand savagely. He pushed himself up on his injured hand and lunged at the agent, teeth bared.

“Bucky!” Steve’s voice shouted, kneading at hidden memories.

They were trying to trick him. He knew they were trying to trick him. They had done it before. Used what he thought were memories against him. Bucky wouldn’t let them trick him again. He knew better now.

He lunged and tackled the HYDRA agent pretending to be someone he knew. Bucky didn’t know anybody. This agent was strangely stronger than any other that he was used to. He held Bucky at bay while still managing to hold back. Bucky twisted his left arm free and fit it around the agent’s throat.

“I won’t go back there.” Bucky hissed at the agent. “You can’t make me go back there.”

Another agent charged from behind and grabbed at the Winter Soldier’s metal arm. The agent tried to pry it from around the first agent’s throat.

“Sam, no!” The first agent gasped just before Bucky flung the assailant away with all the ease of tossing away a ball.

The action caused a terrible tearing sensation to start in his back. A sensation blown into full, head splitting agony as a third agent grabbed his outstretched arm and wrenched him back. Bucky was bewildered. What was this agent that could pull him around like a rag doll and if HYDRA had him, why did they need the Winter Soldier? There wasn’t much time for him to dwell on those questions as his back felt like it was splitting in two. Every muscle in his body screamed at him until the strangled sound finally escaped his mouth.

“Vision!” An agent bellowed.

“Settle down, there, Soldat.” A woman ordered in a language he could understand.

“I won’t go back in the chair.” The Winter Soldier insisted. “I won’t go back in the box.”

“Wanda, I need you to go to my bag and get one of the green pills and one of the orange pills.” The first agent rumbled unintelligibly.
Bucky’s arm disappeared. He glanced down at the spot his arm had been only seconds before. In that time, the first agent wrapped his body tightly around Bucky like a boa constrictor and held him down.

“Open your mouth, Bucky.” The agent ordered. His breath was hot and heavy in his ear. The Winter Soldier twisted away from it and sealed his lips shut.


“Never again.” The Winter Soldier retorted through clenched teeth.

“Steve needs you to open your mouth,” she insisted. “You’ll feel better.”

“I’ll feel better when I’m dead.” He growled. His jaw was locked. It would take the jaws of life to pry it open.

“You wouldn’t do that to Steve, would you, Soldat?”

Steve again. Who was Steve?

“Oh. That Steve. Bucky forgot about HYDRA trickery. He always trusted Steve. Even when it made no sense. Bucky opened his mouth just a bit. Just enough for Steve to shove the pills into his mouth and snap his hand over his mouth forcing it shut again.

“You gotta swallow them, Buck. They’ll make you feel better, I promise.”

Steve’s hand was still clamped down over Bucky’s mouth. It made sense. Some vague part of Bucky’s mind recalled spitting the pills out on more than one occasion and forcing Steve to spend the next hour restraining Bucky until he came to his senses on his own.

His mouth was dry. It took effort to choke down the pills, but he did it. Steve had asked him to. He would walk off a cliff if Steve asked him to. Anything for Steve.

The room had gotten hauntingly quiet. There were more people than just Bucky and Steve in the room. He knew it, but nobody spoke. They barely breathed. A few minutes passed and Bucky’s vision cleared.

Natasha was half crouched beside him, a baton clenched in her fist. Leaning against the wall behind her was Sam. His left eyebrow and the left side of his bottom lip was split open. The wounds didn’t seem to be bleeding badly, but Bucky knew he had caused them. If not by the distinct memory of having thrown someone, then by the apprehensive look in Sam’s eyes as he regarded Bucky. Vision and Wanda stood together in the kitchen watching through the archway.

“Oh.” Bucky mumbled against Steve’s hand.

“Bucky?”

Steve lifted his hand from Bucky’s mouth and bent his head to catch his eye. Bucky dropped his eyes to the floor in shame. As far as his episodes went, this one was up with some of his worst. It had been what Shuri called a ‘total disconnect from reality.’ On her scale of one to five in terms of his episode chart, this was a five. Not only did it cause the most severe response in his nervous system, it also posed the biggest risk to those around him. Case in point, Sam’s injuries.
“Sorry. Sorry, Sam.” Bucky’s head lolled back against Steve’s shoulder.

Every bone, muscle, and tendon in his body had turned to pudding. His eyelids turned to lead, making it difficult to hold them up. He tried to shake his head, but even the smallest movement proved impossible.

“Just forgot….” There was more to his sentence, but it had escaped him. Everything escaped him.
Bucky cracked his tired eyes open and looked around, vaguely confused by his surroundings. It took him a few seconds to remember where he was. The short answer was in bed. The longer answer was a holiday getaway in a remote house somewhere in the North. The clock on his phone said it was just after noon.

Bucky sat up and immediately regretted doing so. His and Shuri’s worst fears seemed to have been realized. All the progress Bucky’s back had made in regards to healing had been undone. The simple act of sitting up had made the blood drain from his head and caused the room to spin. Bucky pushed his hand over his eyes tried to focus on anything other than the pain.

The fabric on his hand made him pull back. A thick, white bandage was wound tight around his hand looking more like a mitten than anything else. Bucky stared until he remembered breakfast and the oven. He started to use his teeth to unravel the bandage, but it was slow going and the bandage seemed never ending.

Across the room, resting on top of their three duffle bags, was his arm. He knew it was a bad idea to put it back on. Not with his back as mangled as it was. Not after all the stress he had already put himself through. He wanted to take the bandage off. He weighed his options.

Bucky carefully eased himself to the side of the bed and pushed himself up. Standing was no easy feat. As soon as he was upright he wanted to lay back down. His head spun angrily demanding he do just that. Instead, Bucky crossed to the door and leaned heavily on the wall beside it. He could just make out the voices of Steve and his friends on the other side.

“He can’t cook! The man can’t even use a microwave. You ever hear the one about Steve calling me while I was in the middle of an extraction mission just so I could tell him to go get take out?” Natasha laughed.

“Are you for real? You know all you have to do is press a couple buttons, right?” Sam said.

“Didn’t Tony have a special SWAT team of maids to take care of all your cleaning and pampering at the tower?” Wanda asked. Her voice was more muffled than the others which meant she was further away.

“He claimed he never learned the basic cleaning skills though his files indicated that he was a meticulously neat individual. Mr. Stark thought the maids would embarrass Captain Rogers into admitting his lie.” Vision reported.

“Okay, okay, are we all done ganging up on me?”

“My head still hurts, man. I plan on nagging you until your head hurts at least as much as mine.”

“Fine. Just… remember not to say anything about it to Bucky. He punishes himself enough as it is.”
“You should’ve told us how bad it was.” Natasha said.

“He didn’t want anyone else to know. He doesn’t tell me half the time. But this one was pretty bad. He usually still recognizes me.” Steve was quiet for a few minutes. “It pisses me off.”

Bucky rested his head against the door jam and closed his eyes. He knew his episodes weighed on Steve. He could see it every time he came to after one. Steve would have this look about him. Something hovering between fury and pity. And Bucky couldn’t even blame Steve for his anger. God knew Bucky deserved it. He could count on both hands the number of times one of his episodes had ended with Steve hurt or bleeding.

“Is his back going to be okay?”

“I don’t know, Sam. It took a lot to get him where he was yesterday. I’m scared how far this morning set his recovery back. I mean, you saw it. It went from slightly red to black in a matter of minutes.”

“Perhaps I could take a look –”

“No.”

“Steve, he’s only trying to help. You know he feels bad about what he did.”

“And I’m trying to prevent any more accidents.” There was a pause. “I know you’ve apologized, Vision, but you have to see that the damage you did is beyond just physical.”

“I understand, Captain.”

“Does he ever remember these episodes?” Sam asked.

“What?”

“I mean, he said he didn’t remember going crazy at the U.N. Kicking me into a wall, throwing you down an elevator shaft, strangling the life out of Natasha. Memory erasing magic words or something crazy like that, but does he remember what he does when he has a freak out like that? ‘Cause he did say sorry to me before he passed out. I’m wondering if when he wakes up, he’ll remember throwing me into the Christmas tree.”

“I don’t know. He always remembers something.”

“So if he asks how I hurt my face I’m supposed to say, what?”

Steve sighed loud enough that Bucky could hear it through the door. “If he asks, tell him the truth. He’ll know if you’re lying anyway.”

“Hundred bucks says he can’t tell when I lie to him.” Natasha boasted.

“Really?” Steve replied, sounding annoyed.

“Hey, it’s what I do. If I can’t get one over on Scruffy, I don’t deserve to be a spy.”

Bucky snapped his eyes back open a few seconds later and noticed their voices had dropped off. Music was playing from somewhere. Bucky pulled his phone from his pocket and checked the time. He’d been standing at the door for over an hour. He was just lucky he hadn’t toppled over after he’d fallen asleep leaning against the wall.
Bucky used his mittened hand to open the bedroom door and take a half step out into the living room. Wanda and Vision were in the corner doing magic tricks. Bucky tried not to look or think too hard on how they were levitating the decorations the way they were to keep himself from passing out again. Natasha and Sam were reading books. Sam was balled up in one of the armchairs while Natasha was outstretched on the couch. Steve occupied the last armchair, his legs were pulled up to give him something to lay his sketchbook on.

Steve looked up when the door opened and was out of the chair and at Bucky’s side in the next second. Everyone else looked up when Steve moved. Sam and Natasha visibly braced themselves. Bucky noted that it seemed to be more based on Steve’s swift action than in reaction to Bucky’s appearance.

“You shouldn’t be out of bed.”

“I’m fine.”

“Shuri is going to murder me when she sees what happened to your back. Don’t push yourself any further.”

“If she’s going to murder you anyway, we may as well make the most of whatever time you have left.”

“Bucky,” Steve warned.

“Steve,” Bucky replied.

His exhaustion seeped into the word. He really couldn’t argue with Steve in his condition and Steve knew it. Begrudgingly, Steve conceded and led Bucky to the armchair, forcing him to sit down.

“How’re you feeling?” Natasha asked, her book was closed around her finger as she watched him.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine. You look like a raccoon I ran over.” Sam quipped.

“Thanks.” Bucky said, dryly.

“Do you need anything?” Steve asked in a hushed tone Bucky knew meant he was asking if he needed any of his medications, but didn’t want to ask blatantly in front of company.

“Actually, I’m starving.” Bucky confessed.

He hadn’t eaten in almost thirty-six hours. Steve sprang into action. Bucky watched him dart into the kitchen. He chewed at his cheek as he fixed Natasha and Sam with a hesitant stare.

“He’s not about to try to cook anything, is he?”

Natasha and Sam shared a look before both casting their eyes toward the kitchen. Natasha turned back first and gave Bucky an indifferent shrug. Sam stared a minute longer. Slowly, he turned back around and shook his head in uncertainty. Bucky tapped the arm of the chair with his bandage mitten waiting for Steve to reemerge from the kitchen.

“Steve?” Bucky called when he could take the anxiety no longer.

“Couple seconds!”
“Steve, what are you doing?”

Steve didn’t answer. Bucky leaned to his right and struggle to push himself out of the armchair. He barely made it halfway up when dark blotches overtook his vision and he teetered forward. Several hands were on his bare chest easing him back into the armchair carefully. Sam and Natasha towered over him, concerned looks on their faces. Vision and Wanda had stopped their magic and watched him from across the room.

“Oh, shit,” Bucky cursed as he saw the white butterfly bandage closing the split over Sam’s eyebrow. “Did I...? I did that, didn’t I?”

Sam reached up and touched his temple.

“You caught me off guard.”

“Liar.” Natasha accused.

Steve returned to the living room carrying a plate of steaming food. He dragged a foldable table over to Bucky’s armchair and set the plate in front of him. Bucky sighed with relief. It was leftovers from the breakfast he’d made that morning. Steve had only reheated it. Still risky as far as Steve’s culinary capabilities, but not ‘burn the house down’ risky.

“There’s leftovers from dinner last night if you’re still hungry when you get through that.”

Steve held out a fork for Bucky to take. Bucky held up his thickly bandaged hand.

“Can you take this off?”

Steve frowned at the hand. “You burned it pretty badly.”

“It’s fine.”

“That’s what you said about your back.”

“Steve!”

“Okay!”

Steve set the fork down beside the plate and started unraveling the bandage. Once he could down to the last layer he pulled the gauze up more slowly. Bucky’s palm was still a deep red color and the lines had been smoothed over by the repairing skin, but the burn wasn’t bad anymore. Nothing that required a bandage.

“Hey, what kind of biscuits were those?” Sam asked casually, watching Bucky start in on his food.

Bucky chewed and swallowed before answering. “What do you mean? They were just normal biscuits.”

“I mean what brand were they?” Sam clarified unhelpfully. “I couldn’t find the can or label.”

“What can? They’re biscuits.”

“Preprocessed food is a big thing these days, Buck. You didn’t notice?” Steve explained.

“I didn’t really spend a whole lot of time browsing in the market while trying to be invisible.”
“Hold on, are you telling me you made those biscuits from scratch?” Sam demanded.

Bucky rolled his eyes. “I made them mostly from flour, water, and milk, but sure.”

Sam tossed himself back in his chair and settled his hands on the top of this head. He started at Bucky with awe. The look made Bucky uncomfortable so he turned his attention back to eating.

“Steve can’t boil water and you’re practically Gordon Ramsay. How the hell did you two become friends?” Sam mused.

“Steve’s got a big mouth.” Bucky answered.

Steve scrunched his face up and crossed his arms defensively. Bucky took a bite of his sausage and grinned up at Steve.

“I was five.”

“You were stupid then and you’re stupid now.”

“I am not.”

Bucky arched a brow at him.

“What do you mean he had a big mouth?” Wanda asked. “What did he do?”

Bucky finished his plate and sat back in his chair before answering.

“On Steve’s very first day of kindergarten, two fourth – maybe fifth – grade kids were shaking down the new blood for their lunch money. Steve,” Bucky pointed at him lest his audience forget who he was talking about, “told them he wouldn’t give them his lunch money and topped it off by calling them fat.”

“I did not!”

“You said they could afford to skip a few meals.”

Steve grimaced, “Oh, yeah.”

The room filled with laughter taking Bucky back to a crowded Parisian bar during the height of the Third Reich. He leaned to his right and started to struggle to his feet again. Steve’s hand settled in the middle of his chest and pushed him back down.

“Where are you going?”

Bucky huffed and gritted his teeth. “Water.”

“I’ll get it. Don’t get up.” Steve warned.

Bucky glared at him with all the animosity he could muster. He didn’t feel any better, but he hated being waited on like he was an invalid. Even more, he hated being ordered around again. It was too close to trauma.

“Please.” Steve amended, reading his thoughts like always.

Bucky sagged against the chair and nodded. Vision appeared in front of him just as Steve was picking up his emptied plate holding his water from that morning. Bucky stared up at the robot
reservedly. The room was quiet enough to hear the low hum of electricity running through the strands of decorative lights. Bucky took the bottle from Vision, careful to avoid any actual physical contact with the robot.

“Thank you.” He mumbled.

Bucky sat the bottle on the table. Using his palm to keep the bottle steady, he unscrewed the cap with his thumb and forefinger before tipping it back and downing the contents in one great gulp. He sat the bottle back down and worked at screwing the cap back on the now empties plastic bottle.

“Why don’t you put the other arm back on?” Wanda asked, coming to stand beside Vision.

Bucky reached up and pressed down at the fleshy parts of his destroyed shoulder. Even as gently as he was pressing, the pain was nearly unbearable. Even as weightless as the temporary arm was, it would still pull on his tender muscles. He sighed.

“I can’t.” He confessed.

“Did we break it earlier?” She asked, slight panic rising in her voice.

Bucky laughed. “No.”

“It’s made of Vibranium, Wanda. Same stuff as my shield. The only way anyone would be able to break it would be with an even bigger Vibranium arm.”

“Just because it’s from Wakanda doesn’t necessarily mean it’s made of Vibranium.” Sam argued.

Bucky smiled at the man’s naivety.

“You might think that, but it came out of Shuri’s lab which means it is absolutely, one hundred percent Vibranium.” Bucky explained.

“I don’t know a Shuri.” Sam said defensively.

“She’s who fixed up the Quinjet.” Steve explained.

“So?”

“So, she once made Avenger’s themed stickers and stuck them all over Steve one night while he was sleeping and in the morning Steve took a shower, but the stickers stayed where they were. Even after he scrubbed at them until his skin was lobster red. Then he tried to peel them off with his fingers, but they still wouldn’t budge and the harder he tried the more they started to tear the skin around them. Steve had to walk all the way through the palace covered head to toe in stickers with all of your faces on them just to get Shuri to remove them with this special spray she’d made. All because the stickers and the adhesive used were Vibranium based.” Bucky regaled.

“She did what?”

“Thanks, Buck.” Steve grumbled.

“No. I don’t believe that.” Natasha shook her head firmly.

Bucky grinned madly. He shoved his hand into his pants pocket to retrieve his phone. Steve made to grab for it, but Wanda held him back with her freaky, red magic. Bucky pulled up his photo gallery and searched through until he found the picture he was looking for. Triumphant, he held
the screen out so his audience could see firsthand. Steve’s face was a brilliant red. A sticker bearing Thor’s face was stuck under his left eye. His forehead had three stickers; Steve in his Captain America getup, Tony in his Iron Man suit, and the green monster whose name Bucky couldn’t recall.

Steve was a near perfect mimicry of the picture on Bucky’s phone. His cheeks were red and his eyes burned with rage, embarrassment, and indignation. Bucky felt a little ashamed of himself. He turned his phone screen off and stuck it back in his pocket.

“As far as Christmas presents go, that was the best one I’ve ever been given.” Sam declared solemnly.

“That picture is the true meaning of Christmas.” Natasha agreed with equal solemnity.

“I want to meet this Shuri. She is my new hero.” Wanda decreed to a murmur of agreement.

“I hate you all.”

“Why let him take your picture then?”

“I didn’t let him do anything. Shuri gave me an ultimatum which basically amounted to me ripping my flesh off to get rid of the stickers or taking a couple photos and her taking the stickers off painlessly.”

“Photos plural?” Natasha said, curiously.

Steve glared at her. She nudged Bucky’s knee and raised her eyebrows at him.

“Plural?” She mouthed.

“I only have the one. Most of the other photos are of my goats. There’s a couple with Bashira and Addo and some of the other kids, but Bashira’s training in the Dora now so I don’t see her so much anymore.” Bucky pulled the phone from his pocket again and swiped through until he found the pictures he was after. “This is Shuri.”

He showed them pictures of him and Shuri in her lab wearing her special laser tag gear and holding the guns. She had insisted they pose like Charlie’s Angels and Bucky didn’t know what that meant so he just copied what she was doing. It must have been right because Shuri was positively delighted with the outcome.

While they ooed and ahhed over the pictures, Bucky looked apologetically at Steve. Bucky was relieved to see that Steve didn’t look so upset now that he’d successfully changed the subject. For the next hour, Bucky flipped through his photo gallery showing off his goats and the village kids. Every now and again a photo would come up that Bucky had to quickly swipe away before the rest of the viewers could see.

“Can we open these now?” Wanda called a while later.

Everyone looked up to see her holding a decoratively wrapped box in her hand. There was a murmur of agreement and everyone’s attention turned to the wrapped gifts under the flashing tree. Natasha took the present Wanda was holding and flipped it around to read the name.

“Sam!” She called before she chucked the present at him.

Sam caught the box easily. He scowled at Natasha.
“You aren’t supposed to throw presents at people.” He grumbled.

“Boo hoo. Open your present.”

Sam looked like he wanted to say more, but he shook his head and turned his focus on tearing the paper from the box. He popped the tape holding the flaps of the box down and stuck his hand inside. He pulled out a small flip phone. He gave a small smile.

“Just in time. I needed to switch out my burners. Thank you.”

“C’mon, gimme some credit, Sam.” Natasha whined.

Sam looked at her curiously. “Am I missing something?”

“I did a little tweaking in the hardware and now that baby’s good for one five minute untraceable phone call.” Natasha announced proudly.

Sam’s smile pulled back to cover his whole face. His eyes lit up with excitement.

“You were saying about how you wished you could check in with your grandmother and let her know you’re alive. Just make sure to actually burn the phone when you’re finished.” Natasha elaborated.

“Aw, Nat.” Sam set the phone back in its box and pulled Natasha into a tight hug. Natasha looked awkward in the big man’s embrace.

“She doesn’t like to be touched.” Bucky murmured from his armchair, unaware that he was saying it out loud until he found all eyes on him.

“What was that?” Steve asked.


“I believe he said, ‘she doesn’t like to be touched’ in reference to Miss Romanoff.” Vision supplied.

Bucky scowled at the floor and mentally cursed the robot.

“You don’t like to be touched either, Soldat.” Natasha replied in Russian.

“Nat, we talked about this.” Steve hissed.

Natasha rolled her eyes at Steve and turned back to fetch another present from under the tree. Bucky looked at Steve curiously.

“What did you talk about?”

Steve’s face went white and he shook his head in an effort to brush off the question. Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve. He had remembered enough to know what Steve looked like when he was caught doing something he knew he shouldn’t. Bucky stared at him long and hard, waiting for him to break.

“Steve, next one’s for you.” Natasha said, interrupting the wordless battle.

“Thanks.” Steve mumbled, accepting the odd shaped gift.
He pulled the paper off and stared at the bottle in his hand. Both the bottle and its contents were clear, but Bucky couldn’t read the label from where he sat across the room. Steve’s face turned eleven shades of red and his big body trembled slightly. Natasha grinned devilishly. Not unlike when Becca had filled the sink with tadpoles and blamed it on Bucky.

Steve walked away from the group with a dumbfounded expression. Bucky watched him disappear into the bedroom with whatever Natasha had given him. Natasha whispered something in Sam’s ear and he broke out in loud laughter.

“What was it?” Bucky asked.

Natasha and Sam looked over at Bucky. Their faces turned red and sheepish briefly until they burst into giggles all over again.

“Bucky, this one is for you.” Wanda told him, handing him a gift wrapped in blue paper.

Bucky accepted the present with an air of confusion. He hadn’t expected any of them to get him anything. Especially not after all the trouble he’d caused them. If it weren’t for him, they likely all would have been celebrating the holiday with their friends and family. Sam would have been able to visit his grandmother in person instead of getting one five minute phone call after seven months of being on the run.

Steve reappeared as Bucky carefully opened the present addressed to him from Wanda. The book inside was bright red and the word ‘memory’ was repeated from top to bottom, the letters getting bolder as they got lower. He flipped through the pages interestedly.

“It’s, um, it’s supposed to help people with memory problems remember things better.” She told him.

She fidgeted with her fingers at her sides. Small wisps of red whispered around the tips of her fingers. Bucky smiled up at her.

“Thank you.” He said earnestly.

Wanda smiled then. Almost relieved at his thanks. “You’re welcome.”

“Here.” Steve handed Natasha her gift gruffly. “Not sure you deserve it anymore.” He mumbled.

Natasha rolled her eyes as she started at her gift. She pulled out a fist full of small, silver spheres. Bucky recognized them from Shuri’s lab. He wondered what Steve had done for her to get so many. Knowing Shuri, it was likely something that made Steve miserable.

“A box of marbles?” Natasha dropped them back into the box. “You shouldn’t have.”

Steve reached over and plucked a bead from the box and held it between his fingers. He started to reached up with his other hand and Bucky’s stomach flipped.

“Hey! Not in the house!” He cried.

Steve frowned at Bucky.

“I wasn’t going to blow it up.” He argued.

“They’re sensitive, you know. People blow them up by accident all the time. You have to complete four years of mandatory training in the Dora before you’re allowed to carry them.”
Bucky pointed out. “They’re dangerous.”

“What are they?” Natasha asked, interest piqued.

“For you? Smoke bombs, tasers, or small explosives depending on how you decide to use them. But Bucky wasn’t exaggerating when he said they were dangerous. Touch has to be precise when you determine which feature you want to use.” Steve explained.

“My favorite kind of presents.” She smiled down at her new arsenal.

“Man, you couldn’t have given that to her after she opened mine?” Sam whined.

“Don’t feel bad, Sam, I’ve got something for you, too.”

Sam’s eyes lit up again as Steve passed the larger box to him. Sam ripped through the paper eagerly, flipping open the lid and looking inside. He stared down at the contents expressionlessly. Slowly, he withdrew a smooth, metallic object from the box to look at it.

“Is this?”

“Made to match.” Steve agreed.

Bucky recognized the object as vaguely similar to Sam’s flying robot. He tried to remember the name, but could only think of Robin, which he knew wasn’t right. Sam turned the robot around in his hands, examining it closely.

“Redwing’s got a buddy.” He sang happily.

“Wanda.” Steve handed her her present.

“Thank you.”

She unwrapped it and held up a wrist communicator. She pouted at Steve.

“Nat and Sam get cool, Wakandan gadgets and I get a bracelet?” She whined.

“It’s a communicator.” Bucky told her.

“Like a phone?”

“Shuri doesn’t like them to be called that. They’re communicators.” Bucky tried to think of how Shuri had explained it to him. “Like a supercomputer you can wear.”

“A supercomputer?”

Bucky shrugged. “I don’t really use mine. They’re hard to operate one handed even with all the modifications Shuri made to it. I have the screen at home that does the same things. Video calls, movies, Google.”

“So, it’s a smart phone?” Wanda said.

“I still wouldn’t call it that. Shuri will cut your hand off and take it back regardless of whatever unspeakable thing Steve did to get it for you.” Bucky warned.

“Unspeakable thing?” Sam asked.
“Bucky, open your present and shut up.” Steve huffed, putting the box in his lap.

Unwrapping presents was significantly harder to do with only one hand than he thought it would be. The book Wanda had given him had been barely wrapped. Only two pieces of tape kept the paper from falling off. Steve had used around ten pieces of tape to secure the wrappings. Bucky turned the package over and over in his lap looking for an edge to pull at. With a sigh of defeat, Bucky lifted the box to his mouth and used his teeth to start a tear in the wrapping.

What Bucky had assumed to be a piece of wood was actually a small, wooden box. Two hands clasped together was engraved on the lid. It was much smaller than his old time capsule. Maybe a third of the size. The contents were no less significant. Bucky lifted out the first photograph in the box. Steve and Bucky stood side by side in their uniforms. They weren’t looking at the camera, something out of frame had their attention. Bucky moved to the next photograph. Steve, Bucky, and Dum Dum were looking at a map. Steve was in the middle of saying something.

The others continued in their gift giving while Bucky focused on the photos. So many moments frozen in time. So many he couldn’t remember. He picked up a folded piece of paper and smooth it out. It was a sketch Steve had drawn all those years ago of Bucky, Peggy, and the Howlies. Bucky folded it back up and put it back in the box with the photographs.

“Sergeant James Barnes, three-two-five-five-seven.” He said quietly. Some impulse made him repeat it. Then again and again.

“Bucky.”

He shook himself and blinked over at Steve. He was holding a sketchpad and a box of drawing charcoals. The others were occupying themselves with their new presents. Sam was pacing and staring at the burner Nat had given him, Natasha was marveling at her new weapons, Vision and Wanda were trying to figure out the communicator, only Steve had his attention firmly centered on Bucky.

“Is there any more food?”

Steve was quiet. He squinted a bit at Bucky, trying to read his mind again. At last, Steve gave a small nod and went off to fetch a plate of leftovers for Bucky. Sam stopped his pacing when Steve left the room and came to sit beside him. He set the phone down on the coffee table to resume staring at it.

“Are you gonna call her?” Bucky asked.

“It’s two in the morning for her.”

“Right.”

“Not to mention I have no idea what I’m going to say to her.” Sam laced his fingers behind his head and huffed. “Hey, Gran, it’s been over half a year since you’ve seen or heard from me and the whole world has branded me as a terrorist, but I just wanted to say Merry Christmas. Sorry, can’t chat or I risk the government finding me and my friends and tossing us back in the super super max in the middle of the ocean.”

“Straight to the point.”

Sam smiled wistfully and shook his head. He dropped his hands and threw himself back against the couch. Bucky envied him his easy mobility. Staying upright was agony and leaning back was torture. He knew he’d be back to sleeping on his belly for at least another month.
“It’s alright, I guess. Makes me relieved that my mom and dad aren’t around anymore. Never thought I’d say that.” Sam shut his eyes. “At least they can’t see me now.”

“Doesn’t feel right, does it?” Bucky asked.

“Hm?”

“Doesn’t feel right to remember them so well and not be able to talk to them. To see them.” Bucky put his hand in his hair and tried desperately to ignore his aching back.

“Steve said you had siblings, you ever think about looking them up?”

“Becca was the only one to make it past childhood. She died a few years ago.” Bucky had to force the rest out. “Before I…remembered.”

Sam nodded in understanding. “Tough break.”

“Bon apatite.” Steve said, setting his freshly filled plate before him.

Bucky was glad for the excuse to stop talking. He didn’t want to reminisce anymore. Sam moved over on the couch to clear a space for Steve next to Bucky. He wished he hadn’t. Steve was sure to notice how Bucky winced every time he lifted the fork to his mouth.

“Someone’s gonna need to make a food run either tonight or tomorrow. We got whatever’s leftover from last night and a ham I was planning on saving for New Year’s.” Sam reported.

Steve nodded. “Yeah, okay. We should go to the next town, though. Just to be safe.”

“I could get the groceries,” Vision offered.

Steve pressed his lips together and crossed his arms over his chest, hiding his fists. Bucky licked a dribble of gravy from the corner of his mouth, watching Steve carefully. Steve was still defensive toward the robot. Even more so after that morning’s incident.

“Wanda should go with him.” Bucky said.

All eyes landed on him. He swallowed and looked down at his plate, regretting having opened his mouth at all.

“You think Wanda and Vision should make a food run on their own?” Steve repeated.

Bucky cleared his throat and tried to sit up straight. He winced and leaned onto his right arm instead, looking Steve in the eye.

“Last time Vision went for groceries alone, he smooshed the bread.”

“I didn’t know it was so fragile.” Vision explained.

“You don’t see why that’s dangerous?” Steve asked.

Bucky shrugged. “They managed to stay under our radar for two weeks. An hour or two isn’t going to hurt them. Besides, it’s not like they can’t defend themselves.”

Steve clenched his jaw and shut his eyes. Preparing for a verbal battle. Bucky wrinkled his nose. He knew he shouldn’t have started this.
“Barnes is right.” Natasha said. “They’ll be fine as long as they stay together and stay out of trouble. Besides, Vision can carry a lot more than any of us can. They could probably stock up for the rest of the week.”

“So it’s settled, then? Vision and I will go for food.”

“Yes, just give us a list of items you wish for us to collect.”

“Now, wait just a minute.” Steve said, standing up and moving to the middle of the room. “Nothing is settled.”

“Why not?” Wanda demanded. “I thought you didn’t agree with me being locked up.”

“I don’t. Which is why I don’t think this is such a good idea.”

“Steve?” Bucky called.

“Just listen, alright?” Steve told him, holding up a finger. “We’re in Russia. Yes, maybe it’s a tiny, southeastern town nobody’s heard of, but you could still get made. Tony could be looking for Vision as we speak.”

“Steve, it’s cold.” Bucky said.

“Hold on, Buck.” Steve continued, likely assuming Bucky was talking about his food. “We can’t be sure that you won’t be made the second you step out of the house.”

Bucky’d cleaned his plate minutes before. The cold was creeping into him like death. He watched as the room began to shake. It was so cold. He was buried in snow and he was only getting colder.

“I wear a disguise when I want to be anonymous in public, Captain. It has not failed me as of yet.”

“Except when Bucky tracked you down in Paris.”

“Yes, a trained assassin and soldier. Common civilians are another matter entirely.”

“Steve, I need my meds.” He managed through his chattering teeth. He wasn’t listening.

“Hey, Steve!” Sam shouted.

“What?”

“He said, he needs his meds.”

“I don’t like the cold, Steve.” Bucky announced.

He didn’t like laying in the snow.

“Okay, I got it. Here.” Steve handed a pill to Bucky along with a new bottle of water.

Steve’s hands suddenly closed around Bucky’s cheeks. He ignored it and tossed the pill back before downing the entire bottle of water.

“Shit!” Steve cursed. “Buck, you’re burning up.”

Bucky shook his head, sluggishly. “No, I’m freezing.” He corrected.
“Yeah, that’d be the fever.” Steve grabbed Bucky’s could shoulder and put his other arm around Bucky’s waist. “C’mon, we gotta get you in bed.”

The world tilted as Steve pulled him to his feet. He squeezed his eyes shut, thinking that would stop the spinning, but it only made it worse. He had nothing to focus on. He felt everything he had just eaten making its way back out of his stomach.

“Bucket.” Bucky managed.

“What?”

“Bucket. Need a bu–”

It was too late. He threw up onto the floor. Some splashed onto his feet and pants. Steve redirected them around the pool of vomit and continued into the bedroom.

“Sam, can you give me a hand?” He called as they went.

“Have you seen his back?” Sam whispered.

“I know.”

Steve turned Bucky around, keeping him standing. He leaned Bucky against Sam before disappearing.

“Steve?” Bucky called out, leaning heavily against Sam’s shoulder.

“I’m here. Just getting a change of pants for you.”

“Can’t change my pants.” Bucky mumbled.

“You can’t sleep in them. You have puke up to your knees.” Steve came up behind Bucky and reached around his waist for the fastenings.

“Sam’s here.” Bucky argued.

“Sam’s not gonna look.” Steve promised. “Right, Sam?”

“Hey, I closed my eyes the second you said you were planning on changing his pants.”

“See?”

Unwilling to take the risk, Bucky waved his hand around blindly until he found Sam’s face. He slapped his hand over Sam’s eyes and held it there. Bucky’s head still resting firmly on Sam’s shoulder.

“Really not how I thought I was going to spend my Christmas.” Sam muttered.

Steve undid Bucky’s pants and worked them down his legs. He lifted Bucky’s feet one by one and wiped them off with a damp cloth before slipping his feet through the leg holes of his clean pants. They were his soft pants he had worn under his robes. Though he no longer wore the actual robes anymore, he did still wear the pants on occasion and the stole was handy for concealing his metal shoulder. Steve tied the drawstring at the front and gently pulled him away from Sam.

“Thank you.”
“No problem. Is he gonna be okay?”

Steve pushed Bucky facedown onto the bed. Bucky let out a whimper of pain and tried to shift into a more comfortable position. He reached around him, searching for the blankets.

“I don’t know.” Steve was already across the room again.

“Blanket!” Bucky said as loudly as he could.

Steve covered him with a thick, wool blanket. The last thing Bucky remembered hearing was the door closing.
Chapter Summary

Steve calls Shuri for help bringing Bucky's fever down and repairing his back. Wanda does something risky to try and fix Bucky's mind. Sam makes a frozen pizza.

Chapter Notes

These last few chapters have really gotten away from me. It's all gotten messy and way outside the realm of canonical possibilities which was absolutely not what I was going for and for that, I apologize. I hope you all still enjoy reading it anyway! I love you all!

“Still reading one-oh-five. That’s good. At least it’s going down.”

Bucky let out a whimper. He was face down on the floor of the bathroom with a towel bunched up under his head in lieu of a pillow. Cold water was dripping down his face. He couldn’t move, but he could make out Steve’s bare feet padding back and forth between the living room and bathroom.

“What if he gets too cold?” Steve rumbled. If he listened carefully he could just make out the high voice of Shuri through the phone. “He wasn’t exactly stable when I flew him back the first time.” He paused to listen. “Yes, I gave him the penicillin. His back looks….” Steve came back over to him and pulled something from his back. “Not better.”

“Steve.” Bucky gasped through his chattering teeth.

“Hold on, Shuri, he’s awake.” Steve dropped down beside him and pet his hair from his face. “Hey, baby, it’s going to be fine.”

“Why’m I so cold?”

“Your fever skyrocketed. We have to force it down.”

Bucky sniffled. Bucky was vaguely familiar with the concept of forcing down a fever. He’d had to do it for Steve a couple of times and for the twins right before they passed. Bucky never thought he’d ever be on the receiving end of a fever reducing ice bath. He didn’t like it. Now he understood why they had screamed the way they did despite their respective illnesses sapping their energy.

“Sorry, Stevie.”

“What for?”

“Ice baths.”

Steve laughed lightly and stroked Bucky’s cheek. “A necessary evil, believe me.”
Bucky zeroed in on Steve’s laughter. He needed to focus on something real. Between the cold and the pain, he was teetering on the edge of another five. As it stood, the only thing standing between him and a full, black-out episode was his own will.

There was chattering on the phone and Steve brought it back to his ear. Bucky watched his black splotches float around his line of sight. Penicillin meant infection. Bucky didn’t think he could get infections anymore. Not since Zola’s experiments.

“Dropping something that will fix him?” Steve asked Shuri.

“Alright, we’ve got more.” Sam said, waddling into the bathroom. Natasha followed him in, waddling the same way. A weight dropped onto his back and the cold got worse. Bucky gasped in shock. “Oh, shit! Why didn’t you say he was awake?”

“Fucking bastards!” Bucky spit. “I’ll kill you all!”

“Hey, Soldat, you know Steve doesn’t like when you speak Russian, right?” Natasha asked, crouched down to look him in the eyes. “Makes him all antsy.”

“Ruski?” Bucky said, confused.

“Yeah, well, I don’t like the German either, but at least I can understand that one.” Steve grumbled.

“What’d she say?” Sam asked.

“Said she’d be dropping something by our coordinates in a few minutes that should have him on his feet again by tomorrow. At the very least make him stable enough to travel.”

“Travel? Travel where?” Bucky demanded from the floor.

“Back to Wakanda, Buck. Where Shuri can look after you and do whatever needs to be done.”

“How long’ve I been out?”

“Couple hours. Why?”

“We’re supposed to be here all week.”

“Bucky….”

“I get on my feet again, we’re staying.” Bucky said into the floor. “I’ll keep my meds on me at all times. Take something even if it’s only a one.”

“What’s a one?” Natasha asked.

“Innocuous episode. No harm. Little reality distortion.” Bucky answered.

“I really think we should get you back to Shuri ASAP.”

“I’m never talking to you again.” Bucky groaned. To prove his point, he turned his head in the other direction. It was a petty move and one he made at great personal cost, but he was determined.

He heard Sam laughing behind him. Bucky gritted his teeth. He didn’t hate Sam anymore. In fact, he kind of liked him. At that moment, Bucky didn’t really feel bad about having tossed his
happy ass across the room.

“What are you still in grade school?”

“More snow, please.” Steve said quietly.

There was a pause then Sam and Natasha’s boots clonked across the floor and the front door opened and shut. Steve crouched down next to Bucky and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Why do you want to stay so badly? I thought you liked Wakanda? Your farm?”

“Can’t explain it, Steve.”

“Can you try?”

Bucky sighed. “I love my farm. I love how safe I feel in Wakanda. I love Shuri and Bashira and Addo and all of the goats. Just… it’s not…” Bucky couldn’t finish. He didn’t know what it was Wakanda was missing. Couldn’t explain the peculiar emptiness he felt when he thought about it. And he definitely didn’t know how to explain that to Steve. Luckily, Steve already knew.

“It’s not home.” He finished for him.

Bucky let out a breath and nodded. “For you, too?”

“You know me, Buck. Brooklyn is always going to be my home. No matter how much it changes.” He was quiet. Steve’s hand stilled on Bucky’s neck. “I thought so, at least. But when I was back after the ice it didn’t feel right. I didn’t feel it. That homey feeling I left behind when I joined up. It was just… gone.

“I moved around after that. I lived uptown in Stark Tower for a while and it felt alright. Then I moved to D.C. and felt worse. Moved to upstate New York when Tony moved the compound out there after Ultron –”

“Still haven’t told me that one.” Bucky murmured.

“Another time.” Steve resumed petting Bucky’s hair. “The compound was the first time I’d felt it in a while. Not the same as Brooklyn. Not home like I was expecting, but like my army days. I felt the way I did when it was you and me and the Howlies all together. It was as close to home as I was gonna get. Took me a lifetime to find it again and I found it in New York.

“New York’s home, Buck. For both of us. For all of us, really.” Steve paused for a long time. “I took home away from everyone.” He said in his quiet, haunted voice.

“No. That was me. I did that.”

“You were framed.”

“I still killed Howard.”

“HYDRA killed Howard, Bucky.”

“Used me to do it.” He grumbled.

Steve groaned and threw himself back against the bathroom wall. His head made a solid thunk as it landed.
“Buck, stop. The Avengers’ break-up has nothing to do with you. It was coming down before Zemo even started to frame you.”

“Just a little spat. You guys would’ve been fine.”

“Bucky, listen to me.” Steve insisted. “We splintered at our core. The Accords were just the final split. It was me. My arrogance. I thought we would fare better if we were the ones deciding when to intervene. Tony thought we needed,” he sighed heavily, “supervision.”

“Hm.”

“You get it now?” Steve used his thumb to stroke Bucky’s cheek. “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay.” Bucky wanted to be done arguing.

He was in all kinds of hell and keeping himself out of an episode was taking everything he had. Focusing on Steve usually worked for a while, but Bucky could feel himself slipping. He heard Natasha and Sam marching back inside.

“Natasha and Sam.” He said out loud to himself. “Natasha and Sam.”

“Is he talking to us?” Natasha asked.

“How bad, Buck?” Steve asked.

“Steve.” Bucky told himself.

“It’s me. Can you tell me how bad?”

“Three.” He said through chattering teeth.

More weight was dropped onto his back. He let out a gasp and tried to force himself to calm down.

“I think this is what Shuri said she’d be dropping.” Natasha said.

“Good.” Something clicked and the heavy, cold, wet thing was pulled from his back. Steve’s hand settled on Bucky’s tender shoulder. “This is going to hurt, Bucky, but then you should feel better.”

“Worse than I already feel?” Bucky asked dismissively.

“Maybe I should.” Natasha murmured.

“You know where?”

“Yeah, I got it.”

Bucky honestly didn’t believe them when they said it would hurt. Or maybe he just underestimated how badly it would hurt. He didn’t mean to start his flailing. It had been instinct. Get away from the thing that was hurting him so badly. Steve’s knees dug in to the back of his legs, his hands held down his arm and shoulder to keep him still.

“STOP! STOP! I’LL BE GOOD! I’LL BE GOOD! PLEASE!”

“Oh my god!” A new voice exclaimed.

“Do you need any help?”

“We’re good, thanks.” Steve grunted. “Almost finished?”

“Done.”

“I’ll be good.” Bucky sobbed. “I’ll be good.”

“What’s he saying?”

“Please, no more. I’ll be good.” Bucky whimpered.

“Natasha, what’s he saying?”

“I’ll be good. Please, no more. I’ll be good.” Wanda answered, in English.

It was quiet save for Bucky’s pleading. Something was stuck in his ear until it beeped loudly and was removed. There was a murmur of discussion he couldn’t focus on and then he was pulled off the floor and dragged into another room. A warmer room.

“Shh,” someone pet his head. “It’s okay. Just sleep right now and you’ll feel better in the morning.”

Bucky was covered in a thick blanket and the lights went out overhead, but Bucky couldn’t sleep. He was in so much pain. He just wanted out, but he couldn’t move. Whatever they had done to him had paralyzed him. He couldn’t move so much as a finger.

He lay face down on the bed for hours before the door opened. The footsteps were unfamiliar, delicate little steps. Bucky swallowed nervously. He had gotten feeling back in his fingers, but not enough to fight. Someone crouched in front of him. He saw the red hair and relaxed.

“Natalia,” He sighed. “They gave me something. I can’t really move. You gotta help me. Get me out of here.”

“Your accent is horrible.” Natalia berated. “And I am not Natalia.”

“Not?” Bucky wrinkled his brow and squinted at her, trying to make her out.

“Not!” Natalia answered. “Your accent is terrible.”

“Your accent is horrible.” Natalia berated. “And I am not Natalia.”

“No, but I think I can help you. Is that okay?”

Bucky nodded. He wasn’t about to turn down any offer of help. The woman lifted her hands to Bucky’s temple. Something red flooded his vision briefly before he was taken away.

“Bucky! Give me your hand!” Steve screamed at him.

Bucky was clinging to the side of the train. To the handle that he knew was about to snap. He couldn’t hesitate. Bucky jumped toward Steve. Hands outstretched. Steve almost missed, but his hand clasped around his arm at the last second. Steve hauled Bucky back into the train safely.

He patted Steve’s shoulder in gratitude. He sucked in air to his starved lungs. Steve put his hands on Bucky’s hips and rested his forehead against Bucky’s. It felt good, but it didn’t feel right.

Something was off, but Bucky couldn’t put his finger on what it was. Bucky pulled back to look at
Steve only to notice that they were no longer on the train.

“Where are we?”

Steve smoothed his hands down Bucky’s arms and picked up his hands. He pressed a kiss to Bucky’s knuckles. Normal knuckles.

“What happened to my hand?” He wondered aloud.

“What do you mean?” Steve asked. “Your hand is fine. We’re home, Buck.”

“Home?”

Bucky broke away from Steve and looked around. They were back in their Brooklyn apartment. Everything was exactly the same. Frozen in time as though they had never left. The writing desk in the corner was still littered with the empty bottles Bucky had drained just before he was shipped out. Crumpled pieces of paper were scattered around the floor. Discarded drafts of his final letter to Steve.

“Are you okay?” Steve asked concernedly.

“How did we get here?” Bucky’s throat felt tight.

“Same way we left, Buck. War’s over. We won.”

Bucky shook his head. It didn’t make sense.

“It’s not real.” Bucky said.

“What?” Steve slid behind him. His hands moved over his hips and stomach.

Bucky’s eyes felt hot.

“This isn’t real. You’re not real.”

Bucky opened his eyes back on the bed. Fresh tears were pouring from his eyes. Wanda was crouched in front of him still. She frowned.

“It’s not real. None of it’s real.”

The door popped open behind him and Wanda jumped to her feet. Bucky turned his head into the pillow and screamed into it. If that wasn’t real, was any of it real? Everything down to the way it smelled had been replicated. Did that mean he wasn’t really in a cabin in southeastern Russia with Steve and his friends? Did that mean that all of his episodes weren’t really episodes? That he was actually still locked inside HYDRA?

“What the hell did you do to him?” Steve demanded. Or fake Steve. If there was a Steve at all.

“I was trying to help. I thought maybe if I replaced the bad memories with good ones, he would feel better.” Wanda explained. Who the hell was Wanda anyway?

“Bucky?” Steve called.

“You’re not real.” Bucky accused. “Get away from me. You’re not real!”

“Bucky, I’m real!”
“I’m not Bucky! I’m not Bucky and you’re not real!” Bucky sat up and swung wildly at the imaginary man.

“Wanda, what did you do?” Someone asked in a small, disbelieving voice.

“Buck, take this. I need you to take this.” Imaginary Steve told him.

“No more drugs!” Bucky bellowed.

He bounced off the bed in the direction of the door, but it was blocked. He was trapped. He bared his teeth and threw up his fists. Ready to fight.

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I didn’t know!” A girl sobbed.

“No! You promised no more children!” Bucky screamed.

“That’s right. That’s right, no more children!” His handler said.

Bucky stared at her. She looked different. Her hair was white now. Aged like all the rest. Only the Soldier lived forever. He breathed. Natalia was real. The terrible things they had done together couldn’t be faked and they were beyond imagining. She had to be real.

“Natalia?” The Soldier took a deep breath. “You’re real?”

“I’m real. I’m real, we’re all real.”

“We have a mission together?”

Natalia nodded slowly. She looked wary of him. She should know he would never hurt her. He couldn’t. It went against his programming.

“That’s right, but I need you to sit down first.” She stepped toward him carefully.

Bucky turned and looked around for a seat. Just a regular chair, but he didn’t want to sit down. Couldn’t afford to as surrounded as they were. He looked back at Natalia desperately.

“Please don’t make me.”

“Okay. Okay, you don’t have to.” Natalia reached out and touched him, gently. The Soldier took a deep breath through his nose. “Can you relax? Nobody here is going to hurt you. Wanda is very sorry for confusing you. She didn’t mean to.”

“Confusing me?”

“She wanted to help. She thought you were in pain.”

Bucky nodded. “I always hurt, Natalia.” He brought his right hand up and touched Natalia’s cheek. “But you don’t hurt me.”

“Of course not, Soldat. We’re friends. You don’t hurt friends.”

The Soldier nodded. Focused on Natalia’s soft eyes. There was something strange about his left arm. It didn’t seem to be cooperating with him. That must have been why they wanted him in the chair.

“Can you open your mouth for me, Soldat?” Natalia asked, sweetly.
“We can’t kiss here. They will see.” Bucky told her, quietly.

Natalia blushed beautifully. She looked over at the other agents almost, fearfully. He wouldn’t let them hurt her. She didn’t have to be afraid.

“No, I didn’t mean it that way.” She gave a weak smile to the big, blond agent across the room. “He’s kidding.”

“Wait,” the Soldier dropped his hand and took a step away from her. “You aren’t here.”

“I’m here!” She cried.

“No,” the Soldier shook his head. “You left. They said you were a traitor.”

“Alright, enough of this.” The blond agent stomped over the bed and grabbed the Soldier’s face between his hands. The Soldier pushed at the man’s chest without much success. He pressed his lips against the Soldier’s with startling gentleness. It was little more than a peck as far as kisses went. Reminiscent of Bucky’s first kiss when he was in sixth grade.

“Real enough?” Steve demanded, pulling back.

Bucky frowned. Over Steve’s shoulder he could see his friends all standing awkwardly. They were all avoiding looking at the couple except Vision who stared openly. Bucky looked down between them. At his hand fisted in Steve’s cotton shirt. He shook his head.

“Steve would never kiss me where others could see.” Bucky argued.

“I couldn’t count the number of indecent things I would do for your sanity.” Steve said. “And you did say that if I had planted one on you back in D.C. you would’ve snapped to immediately. Figured I’d test it.”

Bucky fought a smile. Steve patted his cheek once before covering Bucky’s hand, still fisted in his shirt. Bucky relaxed.

“It was so real.” Bucky told him. “It felt so real, but it wasn’t. And I wanted it to be.”

“I know. I’ve been there, remember?”

Bucky nodded. “But we were home.”

Steve pulled Bucky into his arms, tucking him into his chest the same way Bucky used to do to Steve when they were kids.

“We should take you back to Shuri.”

“I want to spend New Year’s with your friends.” Bucky argued. “I’ll be good.”

Steve’s body locked up around him. After a few minutes, Steve released him and stepped back.

“Can I see your back?”

Bucky turned around and faced the wall. He had forgotten about his torn back. He didn’t feel it. Steve’s fingers whispered over his skin, pleased to find it didn’t hurt.

“What the hell is Wakandan medicine and where can I get some?” Sam demanded.
“It looks almost as good as new.” Natasha said.

Bucky blushed furiously as he remembered what he had said to Natasha. Remembered having actually done it all those years ago. And he’d said it in front of Steve.

“Okay.” Steve turned Bucky back around. “You hungry?”

“Starving.”

Steve nodded and nudged Bucky toward the door. “There’s food in the kitchen.”

“You’re going to have another one of your private meetings, aren’t you?” Bucky said at the door.

Steve huffed. “Not necessarily.” He nodded at Sam. “Sam’ll go with you.”

Sam rolled his eyes and trudged over to Bucky, ushering him out the door and closing it behind them. Bucky stopped a few feet away and listened. Sam pulled at his arm uselessly.

“Never pull a stunt like that again.” Steve was saying.

“Captain, she was only –”

“I know what she was trying to do. I get it. You think I wouldn’t take away his pain if I could? But he’s had more than enough people poking around in his brain. When I told you not to do anything, it wasn’t to be mean. All the research I’ve done have all shown that the mind is fragile and I’ve experienced your magic first hand.”

“I’m sorry. I really thought I could help.”

“I know. Just, next time, listen to me. Please.”

“Hey, Bionic Man, you like pizza?” Sam asked from the kitchen archway.

Bucky wrinkled his brow and wandered over to him.

“Is that a yes?” Sam insisted. “Everybody likes pizza.” He sighed ducking back into the kitchen. Bucky followed him, finding him just in time to see Sam sliding something into the oven. Sam pulled out his phone and hit a few buttons before jumping up on the counter and sitting down. He looked over at Bucky and frowned.

“You good, man?”

“Yeah. I’m just wondering how different everything would be if I hadn’t gotten on that train.” He confessed.

“That what Wanda showed you?”

Bucky shrugged with his good shoulder. “Who knows? Might’ve just been what I imagined happening.”

“You go into those episodes often? You only had the one those two weeks.”

“I actually had a few back then. They weren’t bad, though, so I don’t mention them.”

“What’s that mean? They weren’t bad?”
Bucky sighed and put his hand on his forehead. “I dunno, man. Sometimes it’s just forgetting little things. Where I am or how I got there. I mostly orientate myself around Steve and ignore the rest.” Bucky shook his head.

“So why the huge freak out with Nat in France or Vision yesterday?”

Bucky dropped his hand and looked at Sam. “Pain. If I get hurt bad enough, my mind goes back to my torture days. When I was… less obedient.”

“Order only comes through pain, yeah?” Sam said.

Bucky’s heart dropped into his gut. He stared at Sam apprehensively. His hand curled into a fist at his side.

“How do you know that?” He demanded.

Sam threw up his hands in surrender. “Whoa, hey, that’s what Rumlow said to me in D.C.”

“Rumlow?”

“Yeah, mean, Terminator lookin’ kinda guy? Liked cattle prods until Wanda blew him up?”

Bucky gave a slight nod. “Crossbones.”

Sam dropped his hands and sighed in relief. He looked over Bucky’s shoulder and nodded. Bucky turned and looked up at Steve. A chime went off on Sam’s phone. He jumped down from the counter and pulled the pan from the oven. The smell of melted cheese wafted over to Bucky.

“You’re gonna hate that.” Steve murmured in his ear.

“I like pizza.” Bucky argued. “Or I did. The two times I had it.”

Steve nodded. “Yeah, but you’re not gonna like that pizza.”

Sam left out through the other archway on the opposite end of the kitchen muttering something about things not being where they’re meant to be. Steve took advantage of their sudden solitude. He grabbed Bucky by his hips and pulled him against him. His fingers dug into Bucky’s hair as he slanted his mouth over Bucky’s, kissing him deeply. This was no grade school kiss. This was needy. Hungry.

“You know who you are?” Steve rasped in his ear.

“Yes.”

Steve kissed him again, softer. “Tell me.”

“Bucky.” He answered, desperate for another kiss. Steve obliged.

“And me?” Steve continued.

“Mm, Steve.” Bucky kissed along Steve’s jaw as he nibbled at Bucky’s ear.

“Promise me that someday you’ll stop forgetting me?”

“I’d make you any promise you asked for, but I don’t know if I could keep any of them.”
Sam tapped the wall outside the kitchen before reentering. Steve and Bucky took a step away from each other. Sam was holding a tool with a smooth, round blade at one end. He used an oven mitt to hold the pan steady while he rolled the blade back and forth across the pizza, cutting it into six pieces.

He handed Bucky a slice on a paper plate and picked up one for himself. Steve’s gaze was trained on his face. Bucky bit off half the pizza slice in one bite. He chewed slowly, his face contorting into disgust as he processed the taste. He swallowed what was in his mouth, but couldn’t bring himself to take another bite. He tossed it in the trash, barely keeping himself from throwing out the rest of it.

“That’s not pizza.” Bucky explained to Sam’s look of offense.

“I told you so.” Steve gloated.

“Picky grandpas.” He grumbled.

“I think you might’ve used bad cheese. And what did you put in the dough? Why is it so… sweet?”

“It’s premade.” Steve told him.

“Premade?”

Steve held up a box with a picture of a pizza on it. He stared at the box wordlessly. Steve shoved the box back into the trashcan. Bucky sighed in defeat.

“Am I the only one that knows how to cook?” He demanded.

“Hey! I cooked dinner just the other night!” Sam protested.

“And how much of that was ‘premade’ food?” Bucky countered.

“The roast was fresh.”

“Access to damn near unlimited food and resources and they settle for canned biscuits.” Bucky complained.

“Hey, didn’t y’all used to boil everything?” Sam challenged.

“Yeah. And it still tasted a hell of a lot better than that crap.”

“Arrogant cyborg.” Sam muttered into his pizza flavored cardboard.

“Steve,” Natasha hissed, creeping into the kitchen.

“What?”

“Wanda and Vision were just whispering about taking off somewhere alone.” She whispered. “She feels guilty about what happened. You need to talk to her.”

“Or I could talk to her.” Bucky offered.

Natasha looked at him for the first time since entering the kitchen then back to Steve. Steve looked over at Sam then back to Bucky.
“You?” They all said in unison.

Bucky gritted his teeth and shook his head. “Thanks for the vote of confidence, guys.”

“What’re you going to say?” Steve asked.

“That’ll be between Wanda and me.” Bucky edged his way around Steve and out into the living room. Wanda was creeping up the stairs toward her room and Vision was nowhere to be seen. Bucky gave a silent thanks for small mercies.

“Hey, Wanda?” Bucky called out to her.

She froze like a cartoon villain in midstep. She turned slowly to face him. A heavy look of guilt was etched on her face. She clonked back down the few stairs she had made it up and sat down at the bottom. Bucky walked over to sit beside her.

“Were you going to bed?”

Wanda nodded mutely.

“Sorry.”

“There’s no reason for you to apologize to me.” Wanda said, glumly.

Bucky sighed and looked up only to see Steve, Sam, and Natasha peering out from the kitchen. He glared at them until Steve and Natasha hid away. Sam continued staring, unbothered.

Bucky switched to Russian for privacy. “You didn’t do anything you didn’t have permission to do.”

Wanda squinted at his sudden language change. “You were too out of it to know better.”

“You said it was risky. You just didn’t know how risky. I didn’t know how risky.” Bucky rubbed his left shoulder. “I just wanted to thank you for trying. Even if the results weren’t ideal.”

“Thank me?” Wanda repeated.

“Yeah. You tried to help. You’re a good person.” Bucky got back to his feet with a small groan.

“I was HYDRA, too.” Wanda said. Bucky stilled and turned back to her.

“You?”

“My brother and I volunteered for these…experiments. They gave us these powers. Said we would make the world better. Give us orphans a purpose.” Wanda put her hand in her hair and looked down in shame.

“Where’s your brother now?”

“Dead.” Wanda sniffled and used the back of her hand to wipe her nose.

“I had a sister.” Bucky confessed. “She thought I died in the war. I guess she was right in a way. She died before Steve broke me out of my programming. I never got to see her again so in my head, she’s still about your age.”

“What was her name?”
“Rebecca. Becca.” Bucky smiled at her memory. “And your brother?”

“Pietro. Peter.”

“I miss being a brother and I’ll bet you miss being a sister. So how ‘bout we fill in for each other. You be my sister and I’ll be your brother. Your much, much older brother.”

Wanda smiled. A big, wide smile that Bucky hadn’t seen on her since the top of the Eiffel Tower. He smiled back, holding out his hand for her to take. She took it and he hauled her to her feet.

“Steve says holidays are for family anyway.” Bucky joked.

Wanda buried her face in his chest and hugged him tightly. Bucky locked up for a split second before relaxing again and hugging her back. He could still hear her sniffling, so he rubbed her back soothingly. It hadn’t been his intention to make her cry. He’d only wanted to reassure her that he didn’t hold her accountable for what happened to him.

Movement at the top of the stairs caught Bucky’s eye. Vision was standing – not floating – at the top of the stairs. The android looked relieved to see them embracing. He gave a small nod of understanding to the robot who smiled hopefully in response. A hopefulness echoed in Bucky’s own chest.
Bucky stared down at the letter in his hands. His mouth was dry and he couldn’t remember the last time he had taken a breath. The words went in and out of focus, but there was no denying what they said. *ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION.* The letter was signed by the president himself.

He wasn’t stupid. The war was all over the news. The body count was skyrocketing and when bombs were dropped on American soil, he had all but expected this day to come. He thought he’d be able to take it with a level head. To brush it off with a smile and head off to duty with his head held high. His only solace was that Steve hadn’t been sent a similar letter.

The front door opened and Steve came in carrying a bag of groceries. “Hey, Buck.”

Bucky folded the letter up carefully and tucked it back inside its envelope. He needed a drink.

“What’s that?” Steve asked, nodding to the envelope.

Bucky dropped it onto his writing desk nonchalantly and strode over to help Steve unpack the groceries. “It’s nothing.”

“Becca trapped me in front of Homer’s. Guess Rob got a draft letter last week. Now she’s in a tizzy over you. Says your mom’s just as worried.” Steve reported.

Bucky held three cans of beans in his hands and stared at Steve. He could tell him. Now would be the perfect opportunity. He opened his mouth, but the wrong words came out.

“Why the hell did you buy six cans of beans?” He demanded.

Steve looked over at the cans in Bucky’s hands. He shrugged. “You’re not always home and they’re easy to make.”

Bucky wanted to tease him. Mock his cooking skills like usual, but it seemed cruel. Steve was going to have to learn to fend for himself soon enough. Ten days from now, Bucky’d be dragged off to training.

“So I told Becca she’d be the first to know when we get drafted and do you know what she said to me?” Steve continued, not noticing Bucky’s strain.

“I could guess.”

“She said, ‘Oh, Steve, no one’s worried about them drafting you.’ Like I’m not soldier material.” Steve folded the newly emptied paper bag up and stowed it under the sink.
“You want to be drafted?”

“Of course not, but I don’t like your sister implying that I’m not good enough for the American Army.”

“I don’t think that’s what she was saying.”

“What else was she saying?”

Uh-oh. Bucky let out a heavy sigh and shook his head. “Steve, you wouldn’t pass the physical. I know it’s tough to hear, but your medical history alone leaves you out of the running.”

Steve clenched his jaw and looked at the floor. Bucky tossed himself onto the couch and covered his face with his hands. He’d give his right leg if Steve would just accept that he was going to remain safe at home and out of the war. But he knew better. The second Bucky told him he’d been drafted, Steve would stop at nothing to enlist himself.

“I don’t see your draft letter coming in the mail.” Steve grumbled.

Bucky groaned and reached his hands over his head to grab Steve’s sketchbook off the end table. A picture of the two of them dropped out of the cover onto Bucky’s chest. They had their arms slung around each other and were grinning at the camera like mad.

“Here’s a cheerful thought, with all the other men being shipped overseas, we’re just about the last two eligible bachelors left in New York. What say we go out and see if we can’t find ourselves some beautiful dames?” Bucky tossed the sketchbook and picture back down onto the coffee table and stood up.

“I could be the last man on the planet and the dames would still never go for me as long as they’ve got you to compare me to.” Steve grumbled.

He walked toward the writing desk and reached for Bucky’s draft letter curiously. Bucky threw his arm around Steve’s scrawny neck and yanked him back toward the bedroom. Steve pushed at Bucky’s chest pathetically in an attempt to escape Bucky’s clutches.

“Go change your shirt. We’re going to Marge’s.” Bucky ordered, shoving Steve into the room.

“You change your shirt.” Steve retorted, but began sorting through his nice shirts obediently.

“Hurry it up, it’s already after six.”

Bucky went back to the writing desk and shoved the draft letter into the drawer and away from prying eyes. He knew he shouldn’t be hiding the news from Steve. He knew, but he couldn’t help it. As soon as he told Steve, the letter became real. Inescapable.

“I thought you had a fight tonight.” Steve said as he came back down the hall trying to tie a blue tie around his neck.

Bucky reached out and yanked the strip of fabric out of Steve’s hands. Steve looked up, his mouth open and ready to argue. Bucky shook a finger at him.

“It’s bad enough you’re short, you want the foxes thinking you’re square too?” Bucky demanded.

Steve pursed his lips and crossed his toothpick arms over his bony chest. He shook his head.

“What about the shirt?” Steve asked with a small tilt of his head.
Bucky grinned and reached out to pinch Steve’s cheek. “Well, now, you’re just cute as a button!” He cooed.

Steve slapped Bucky’s hand away. Bucky laughed and tossed him his jacket from the hook at the door before grabbing his own.

“Hey! You never said about the fight. You know we gotta give Sanders the rent at the end of the week.”

“Don’t worry about it.”

In truth, Bucky had promised Goldie he’d do a couple fights that night, but that was before his draft letter had come in the mail. He’d stop by sometime tomorrow and explain himself to Goldie. For now, all Bucky wanted to do was forget.

Of course, with Steve, a fight was never far away. They’d only been at Marge’s for an hour when Bucky left Steve to chat up a couple of girls across the dance floor. By the time he turned back around to wave Steve over, the bastard had disappeared. Bucky gave the girls a polite smile.

“I’m sorry, ladies, could you excuse me?”

“Oh, but you’ll come back, won’t you?” A beautiful brunette asked.

Bucky gave her his best smile. “I’ll do my best, doll.”

Bucky found Steve out in the alley. He let the big brute slug Steve twice more before he stepped in and dealt with it. Steve’s lip was split and blood was dripping down from somewhere on his head that Bucky couldn’t see in the low light.

“What’d he do?” Bucky asked, tiredly, handing Steve his handkerchief.

“He was getting handy with a broad. She asked him to stop. He didn’t.” Steve wiped the blood from his nose and held the cloth to his lip.

“Alright, c’mon.” Bucky grabbed Steve by his arm and dragged him down the street to the liquor store.

Bucky bought three bottles of whiskey before shoving Steve back outside and ushering him down the street.

“I can walk, Buck.” Steve argued.

“Every time I turn my back on you, you get yourself into trouble. I’m not letting you out of my sight until we get back home.”

Steve crossed his arms and planted his feet firmly on the sidewalk. Bucky didn’t bat an eye before he grabbed Steve around the waist and hauled him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

“I hate you.” Steve declared to Bucky’s back.

“Yeah huh.”

Bucky set Steve down at the top of the stairs in front of their apartment door. Bucky pulled out the key and unlocked the door. Steve stayed put on the landing, still fuming from being manhandled. Bucky grabbed Steve’s arm and dragging him into the apartment.
“Put on the radio, will ya.” Bucky said, grabbing two glasses from the cupboards.

Steve flicked the radio on to a crackly station. Bucky finished filling both glasses with whiskey. He took a deep drink before fiddling with the dial until smooth jazz rang out through the speaker. Steve picked up his glass and took a sip.

“Are you mad at me?” Steve asked after Bucky’s third glass. Steve was almost finished with his first.

“Course not. Why would I be?” Bucky stared at Steve, memorizing every aspect of his delicate features. Of course, he would never call his features delicate to his face. Or mention that they were at all. He’d made the mistake of comparing Steve’s eyes to his sister’s doll’s years before and had vowed never to make the mistake again.

“You’ve been acting funny all day. Was it the beans?”

Bucky finished his fourth glass and leaned his head back against the couch cushions. Steve’s legs were draped over Bucky’s knees. His head was propped up on the arm of the couch and a bag of frozen peas was draped over his left eye. Even laying down, Steve didn’t touch both ends of the couch. Bucky patted Steve’s shins affectionately.

“No, I just got some news about a job. I’m just distracted.”

“Bad news?”

“The worst.”

Steve drained his glass and leaned back, humming along to the song on the radio. They were quiet for a while. Bucky must have dozed off for a second because the sound of the bag of peas hitting the floor had him jumping out of his skin.

Bucky looked around the room in confusion. Steve had rolled onto his side in his sleep, knocking the peas down. Bucky’s head spun violently. He picked up Steve’s legs and stood. The walk to the bathroom took an eternity. He was just in time to reach the toilet to throw up the half bottle of whiskey he’d drank in under an hour.

Exhausted, Bucky leaned his head against the bathtub and closed his eyes. When he next opened them, the sunlight was streaming in through the window. Bucky struggled to his feet and turned on the sink to rinse his mouth out. One look in the mirror told Bucky he looked exactly as terrible as he felt.

Bucky sniffled and trudged out of the bathroom and back into the living room. Steve was standing at the writing desk looking no better than Bucky did.

“Mornin’.” Bucky mumbled, heading for the kitchen. Steve didn’t respond, but Bucky assumed he just hadn’t heard him. Hungover Steve was even harder of hearing than sober Steve. “Eggs?” Bucky called, loudly.

Steve twitched at the sound of his voice, but didn’t respond. Bucky shrugged and set about making the eggs anyway. Steve usually ate whatever Bucky put in front of him anyway. Unless he was allergic, but Bucky had gotten pretty good at avoiding the things Steve was allergic to.

A few minutes later, Bucky set two plates of eggs on the kitchen table and sat down. Steve was still standing at the writing desk with that dazed look on his face.
“Steve, breakfast is ready, come eat.” Bucky took a great bite of his own eggs and moaned at how nice food felt to his ailing body.

Bucky finished his plate in less time than it had taken him to make it. He looked up at Steve again. Still unmoved. Bucky stood up and walked over to him curiously. He was staring down at something in his hands. Bucky caught sight of the familiar words. The ones burned into his brain.

“Shit!” Bucky snatched the letter out of Steve’s hands and folded it back up. “What’re you doing going through my desk?” Bucky demanded.

Steve swallowed. He was paler than normal. “Were you going to tell me?”

“What? Of course I was.”

“When?”

Bucky elbowed Steve out of the way so he could shove the letter back into the desk drawer. He put his hand to his forehead and squeezed his eyes shut.

“When were you going to tell me? Five minutes before you took off? Were you hoping I wouldn’t notice you left? Or were you just worried I’d be jealous?”

“Jealous?” Bucky stared at Steve. “Are you jealous? Jesus, Steve, what the hell do you think I’m being forced into? You of all people should know the dangers of war. At least I don’t have a kid I’m leaving to grow up without me.”

“So why didn’t you tell me yesterday? Why keep it a secret at all?” Steve demanded.

“DAMMIT!” Bucky slammed his fist into the desk hard enough to crack the wood. “This is not your pity party! Can you stop and think for just one second that maybe this isn’t about you?”

Bucky took a deep breath and dropped into his desk chair. He buried his face in his hands and tried to calm himself down. He knew Steve wouldn’t see the big picture. He always thought he was missing out on things because of his size or illnesses no matter what Bucky did to try and remedy that.

“You’re right.” Steve set quietly. He sat down on the couch across the room. “You’re right, this is your business.”

“God, I still have to tell my mother.” Bucky uttered.

“Do you want…. I could come with you,” Steve offered carefully.

“I can just call her.”

Steve jumped to his feet and started straightening the living room. Bucky watched him curiously. Steve picked up his plate of eggs and stuck it in the oven and stuck Bucky’s in the sink.

“What are you doing?”

“Your mom’s coming over.” Steve explained, pulling the broom out of the closet.

“No she’s not. I just said I would call her. As in I’m going to tell her over the phone.” Bucky said in a loud, clear voice to make sure Steve heard him.

Steve nodded, but didn’t stop cleaning. “Yep, and what do you think she’s going to do after you
tell her?”

“Cry.”

Steve paused his sweeping to roll his eyes at Bucky. “Okay, Buck, but I’m going to finish tidying up to try to keep her yelling to a minimum.”

Bucky reached for the phone, thinking he would prove Steve wrong. The operator’s high voice chirped into Bucky’s sensitive ear. He was really regretting how much he’d drank the night before.

“James Buchanan Barnes!” His mother crowed when she answered the phone. “What do you mean by not visiting your mother for two whole weeks?”

“Sorry, Mom. You know I been busy.”

“Well, Rebecca told me she ran into Steve just yesterday evening. Did he tell you what happened to poor Robert? Drafted into this terrible war. Can you even imagine what your poor sister is going through? Right before they were set to be married. This war couldn’t happen at a worse time.” His mother rambled.

“That’s actually why I’m calling, Mom.” Bucky said, his throat tightening.

“I see. You couldn’t come over to console your sister in person now, could you? Think just a few kind words over the telephone would make it all better?” He groaned as his mother leaned away from the receiver and shouted into the house for Becca.

“No, Mom. Could you just listen to me, please?” Bucky cried. He met Steve’s eyes across the room who gave him a knowing look. “I got one.”

“Got one what?” His mother snapped, irritably.

“A letter, Ma. I got a draft letter. Came in the mail yesterday.”

The line was silent for a long time. Too long.

“No.” His mother said in a clear voice. “No, they must’ve made a mistake. You were probably just tired from working so long at that factory so you read it wrong.”

“I know how to read my own name, Mom.”

“No. You made a mistake.” She insisted. “Now, I need to go. I have biscuits in the oven.”

She hung up before Bucky could insist further that he hadn’t misread the letter. That he was due to report in at Camp Lehigh in Wheaton, New Jersey in nine days’ time. That he had read and reread that letter over and over for thirty minutes hoping as she had that he was mistaken. That he wasn’t about to be sent into the fray with a rifle thrust into his arms. Sent to his death.

Steve was right. Bucky’s mother showed up on their doorstep barely an hour later with his father and sister in tow. They were seated on the couches in the living room when Bucky emerged from the shower. He padded down the hallway wearing nothing more than a towel tied around his waist.

“Steve, you seen my –” Bucky froze at the sight of his family waiting in his living room. “Mom. Dad. What are you doing here?”
“For God’s sake, son, go put some clothes on!” His father barked.

Bucky spun on his heel and hurried back to the bedroom to do as he was told. He couldn’t find his boxers so he pulled his pants on Commando. He used the towel to dry his hair as best as he could before heading back out to greet his family.

Bucky scanned the apartment for Steve, but didn’t see the bastard anywhere. Bucky cursed his friend leaving him alone to deal with his family’s ire.

“Well? Let’s see it.” His father ordered before Bucky could get a word out.

“Well?”

“The letter, dammit. Show us the letter.”

“George, there’s no need for that language.” His mother reprimanded. His father scoffed in response.

Bucky went to the writing desk and pulled out the weathered letter. He held it out to his father stiffly. It was uncomfortably silent as his father read the letter. His family wasn’t known for silent contemplation. That scared him more than anything else.

George Barnes folded the letter up and got to his feet. He was an inch or two shorter than Bucky now, but no less formidable in his son’s eyes.

“I thought I taught you better.” His father said gruffly.

“Sir?”

“You should be proud to serve your country. I never expected you to get one of these infernal letters and not because I didn’t think you were fit for the army. You should never have been drafted because you should’ve enlisted the minute those bombs dropped in Hawaii.” His father berated.

“George!” His mother cried from the couch.

Rebecca was sobbing into their mother’s dress.

“When are you going to get it through your head, Winnie? We go over there and kick the Germans and the Japs into submission or they come over here and kick us.” His father snapped. “You know why he didn’t enlist, right?”

“Daddy!” Rebecca sobbed.

“Quiet! He didn’t enlist because you were too soft with him. Let him waste time on schooling when he could’ve been earning his keep. Shoulda never let him keep hanging out with that scrawny little kid.”

“C’mon, Pops, you like Steve.” Bucky argued.

“I do, but there’s no denying he made you soft.”

“You’re wrong.”

His father slapped the letter against Bucky’s chest and held it there. “Then prove me wrong, boy. You report in and then you be the best damn soldier this nation’s ever seen. You hear me? You
be a proud soldier so you can make *us* proud.”

Bucky reached up and took the letter from his father’s hand. His father scowled at the letter once more before opening the front door.

“Let’s go. We can’t stay here all night.” He growled.

Bucky’s mom bustled over to him and squeezed him tight. Bucky held her back, burying his face in her hair. She released him and turned for the door without looking back. Rebecca threw herself into his arms. She hadn’t stopped crying since she saw him pull out the letter. She had obviously recognized it from the one she’d seen Rob open.

Bucky followed them out and watched as they descended the stairs. He stared after them until they rounded the corner and disappeared from sight. The sun was already going down. He stared at the orange sky and wondered how many sunsets he had left. Wondered if those were the last hugs he’d ever get from his mother and sister.

“You can stop hiding, Steve.” Bucky said.

Steve clambered down the ladder from the rooftop. He dropped the last few feet to stand beside Bucky on the landing.

“So, your dad seemed upset.”

Bucky let out a wry chuckle. “Yeah, he thinks I should’ve enlisted before the war even started.”

“Well, maybe I’ll enlist.” Steve said. He shoved his hands into his pockets and stared out at the sky.

Bucky’s heart sank into his gut. He comforted himself with the knowledge that there was next to zero chance of Steve Rogers being accepted into the United States Army.

“You do that.” Bucky nodded, turning back inside.

“You really think I should?” Steve called after him, a little lift in his voice belying his hopefulness.

“I think you should live a long and happy life here with two kids, a dog, and a picket fence. I’m just smart enough to know that you’re going to do whatever you want anyway.”

“Hey, I can always do the long, happy life when the war is over.”

Bucky scoffed. “War is never over.”

Chapter End Notes

I'll get back to the cabin in the next chapter!!!
Bucky woke up feeling better than he had in weeks. Whatever Shuri had worked up was like magic in a bottle. He knew she had been working on something for him. He couldn’t really expect any less. Her usual methods hadn’t worked on his back and none of her other go-to remedies had been useful which, in Shuri’s eyes, meant a challenge. And Shuri took her challenges very seriously.

Bucky lifted his hand and ruffled Steve’s floppy hair. He was snuggled against Bucky’s chest, his big head tucked right under Bucky’s chin. Bucky pressed a kiss against the crown of his head before disentangling himself from Steve’s clutches. Steve moaned into the pillow and reached out for Bucky.

“Wait, come back.” Steve mumbled into the pillow.

“You better be dreaming about me.” Bucky warned Steve’s sleeping body.

“I’m not.” Steve replied, groggily. “But that’s only ‘cause I’m awake.” To prove it, Steve pushed himself up and turned around to face Bucky.

“And before noon. I’m impressed.” Bucky teased.

“Ha ha.” Steve retorted dryly. “I don’t sleep that late anyway.”

“Sure you don’t.”

Bucky crouched down next to their bags and started his search for clean pants. He felt Steve come up behind him. Anticipated the feel of his touch against his bare skin. Steve wrapped his arms around Bucky’s waist and pulled him up and away from the duffle bags to the bed.

“I gotta start breakfast.” Bucky said.

Steve had sat back on the bed and was holding Bucky on his lap. Steve brushed Bucky’s hair out of the way to kiss his neck. Bucky tilted his head to give him better access. Steve nuzzled the spot just under his ear.

“Someone else can make it.” Steve assured him.

“After what he made me eat yesterday, do you really think I’m going to trust Sam Wilson to cook anything?”

“It’s barely five in the morning. You have time.”
“And cooking takes time.”

Steve sighed and pressed his forehead against Bucky’s good shoulder. Steve mumbled something inaudibly against his back.

“What?”

Steve moved Bucky over to sit on the bed beside him. “If you’re trying to get back at me for Stryi you’re doing a great job.”

Bucky reached over and tugged at the beard growing on Steve’s chin. He’d stopped shaving when Bucky was holed up in the lab teetering on the edge of life and death yet again. He seemed to like the new look or at least like that he could grow a full beard so Bucky kept his mouth shut about missing the clean shaven Steve. The one that echoed in his memories.

“I’m not getting back at you. I’m not mad about it.” Bucky promised.

“We’re behind closed doors, no one is going to just walk in here. It’s as private here as it is at the farm.” Steve reasoned. “I’d actually argue it’s more private since we don’t have to worry about Addo or Dakari or any of the other kids bursting into the house unannounced.”

“The walls are a lot thinner here.”

Steve flopped back on the bed with his arms spread wide and groaned. Bucky laughed lightly. He swung his leg over Steve’s hips to straddle him. Steve looked up and pressed his lips together. He watched and waited for Bucky to make a move one way or the other.

Bucky leaned down slowly and pressed a kiss to Steve’s chest just over his heart. He moved up and sealed his lips over Steve’s. Steve’s hands gripped Bucky’s hips. He sat up, tugging Bucky closer and deepening their kiss. Bucky pulled back and gulped in a breath of air.

“You know, you’re usually better at holding yourself back. What gives?” Bucky asked, breathlessly.

Steve didn’t answer. He recaptured Bucky’s mouth and slipped his hands under the waistband of Bucky’s pajama pants. Bucky moaned into Steve’s mouth as his hand closed around his cock. Steve released him for a split second to yanked Bucky’s pants down his legs. Bucky went boneless as Steve’s mouth closed around him. Any thoughts that Steve was behaving erratically dropped from his head. The only thing he could focus on was the feel of Steve’s skin on his.

“Ah, shit. I’m going to have to shower before I start on breakfast.” Bucky complained though he wasn’t really mad about it.

“Such a crybaby.” Steve berated. “Like you didn’t know what you were getting yourself into.” His hand idly pet Bucky’s sweaty hair.

“You’re right. One of us was a twenty-four year old virgin and if I’m remembering correctly, it wasn’t me.”

Steve didn’t fire back. Bucky looked over at him curiously. Steve stared up at the ceiling with his jaw clenched tight. Bucky sat up. He didn’t think Steve would get so touchy over something so insignificant as how old he was the first time he’d been with someone sexually.

“What’s going on with you?” Bucky asked.
“Nothing’s going on with me.”

“Liar.” Bucky accused. “Was it something I did?”

“I’m not lying.” Steve leaned up and gave Bucky a light peck as if that proved it. “Nothing’s going on.”

“You know I can still kick your ass, right?” Bucky warned.

Steve pulled back and arched an eyebrow at him. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that just because you’re over six feet and two hundred plus pounds doesn’t mean I can’t toss you into next week and the next time you lie to me, that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

Bucky swung his legs over the side of the bed and went back to the bags after his shucked pants. Steve stared after him.

“That’s not nice.” Steve told him after a second’s contemplation.

Bucky worked his pants up his legs and loosely tied the drawstring. Once they were up on his hips and tied, he reached back down into the bag and fished out a clean change clothes. Arm full, Bucky turned back around to face Steve.

“I didn’t become the world’s deadliest assassin by being nice.” Bucky put his hand on his hip holding the clothes in the crook of his arm. “Now are you going to tell me what’s really going on or do I need to put my arm on?”

Steve was quiet for a full minute. Bucky could almost see the gears turning in his head as he contemplated the threat. Tried to determine if Bucky was bluffing or not. At long last, he sighed in defeat and hung his head.

“I was jealous.” Steve told him quietly.

Bucky scrunched his face up in confusion. He couldn’t recall anything he’d given Steve to be jealous about. Whatever it was seemed serious. Steve couldn’t even look at him now.

“Jealous of what?”

Steve glared at Bucky. “Don’t pretend you don’t know.”

“Not pretending. I have no idea what I said or did to turn you green, honest.”

Steve covered his mouth with the palm of his hand and looked away again. “You had some sort of relationship with Nat.” He mumbled into his palm.

“I told you she was my handler – oh.” Bucky stuck his thumb through his belt loop and blew a breath out through his lips. “It probably doesn’t help that I don’t actually remember anything of the other aspect of our relationship other than that we have kissed before.”

“And Nat’s not exactly one for disclosing personal details.” Steve added.

“She’s a vibranium vault of secrets.” Bucky agreed. “Her words.”

“And I know I don’t have any reason to be jealous.”

“Or any right to be.” Bucky pointed out.
“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Bucky scowled. “You’ve kissed Natasha, too.”

Steve scoffed. “As part of a cover. And it was one kiss.”

“We don’t know that it was more than one kiss for me either!”

“The way you were acting and the way Nat looked says it was definitely more than a kiss.” Steve accused.

“What do you want from me here? I can’t defend myself. I can’t tell you you’re wrong. I can’t tell you you’re right. I don’t know.”

“But you know something happened.”

“Maybe subconsciously.”

“Consciously, subconsciously you were practically ready to mount her right then and there in front of everyone.”

“I wasn’t in my right mind!”

“So I’m not allowed to be jealous when I see you kissing someone else? I shared a hotel room with a woman and you punched me in the face and chucked an axe at my head.”

“I didn’t kiss Natasha. You kissed Sharon in Berlin seven months ago while I watched from the backseat of a clown car. I can’t even remember my last relationship, but because it might have been with a teammate of yours you get to be pouty and jealous.” Bucky looked down at the glimmering white arm laying on top of one of the duffle bags in the corner. “Man, I wanna kick your ass even more now.”

Steve dropped his head and laced his fingers over the back of his neck. Bucky stared at him, waiting for him to say anything to dissolve the tension. When he didn’t Bucky scoffed and opened the door.

“I’m going to take a shower and start on breakfast.” Bucky said, opening the door.

“Sure you don’t wanna punch me again? I’d hate to think I’d got off easy.” Steve sneered throwing himself back on the bed and covering his face with his arms.

Bucky bit his tongue against any further retort choosing to stomp to the solitude of the shower instead. Showers had to be quick since there was no water heater in the shabby house. Bucky wondered how long it had sat abandoned before Steve and company stumbled across it.

The communal shampoo was runny. Barely a step up from when they would use bars of soap to clean their hair eighty years before. Bucky wished he had had the foresight to pack his conditioner. Just one wash with the crummy shampoo was turning his soft locks brittle. Bucky shut off the frigid water and got dressed. He was freezing, but it wasn’t anything that an hour in front of a warm stove wouldn’t fix.

Sam and Natasha were in the kitchen when he walked in. Natasha was sitting on the counter throwing peanuts at Sam’s open mouth. They both stopped what they were doing when he walked in.
“Morning.”

Bucky nodded at Sam and walked straight for the cupboard with the cooking supplies. Vision and Wanda had successfully stocked the cabinets with everything Bucky would need to feed an army for a fortnight. Or Steve for a day.

“What’cha makin’?” Natasha asked from her seat on the counter.

“You know we have chairs, don’t you?” Bucky asked sharply.

Natasha’s thin brows shot up in surprise. She squinted at him curiously before slowly sliding from the counter and moving to stand beside Sam on the other side of the room.

Bucky pulled out a pan and dropped a dollop of butter in the center to melt. He scooped flour, sugar, and butter into a bowl with two eggs and a splash of milk. He started to mix it all together but the bowl kept tipping. When some of the batter splashed out of the bowl, Bucky growled in frustration and slammed the side of his fist onto the counter.

“Whoa, hey, how ‘bout I mix that for ya?” Sam offered, taking the fork and bowl from Bucky and blending the ingredients together. “Your back still too sore for accessories?”

“What?”

“Your arm. Is that a back thing or did you just forget to equip the rest of your gear this morning?”

“I don’t wear it if I can help it.” Bucky fiddled with the burner under the pan as he waited for Sam to finish mixing the batter.

“Sounds unnecessary.” Natasha said. “Trying to do everything like that.” She nodded at his metal shoulder hidden under the sleeve of his shirt.

Bucky took the bowl back from Sam and poured a circle into the pan. He could hear them hissing at each other behind his back. He flipped the pancake over and reached into the bag of paper plates that served as their dining wares.

“Ooh, it smells good in here!” Wanda said, cheerfully. She skipped over to Bucky and looked over his shoulder. “Pancakes? Do we have syrup?”

“If not, I can whip up a substitute for you.” Bucky assured her.

“Really?”

Bucky nodded.

“We should wait in the living room,” Vision said. “Bucky does not like ‘too many cooks in the kitchen.’”

“I’m not cooking, Vis, I’m watching.” Wanda clarified.

“Yes, well, I would hate to see another accident befall our friend.”

“I don’t mind.” Bucky said. He was already up to four pancakes. He figured everyone would eat at least two which meant he needed twelve. A third of the way there. He stopped and looked at Vision. “Do you eat?”

Vision brought its hand to its mouth briefly. “I often wish I did. Or could. No digestive system
I’m afraid.”

Bucky looked into his bowl of batter. He’d made a lot. At some point he had stopped thinking of Vision as a robot and started counting him as just another mouth. He frowned deeply.

“You sure you have enough?” Sam asked. “I mean, I can eat a mountain of pancakes on my own and I’ve seen Steve put it away like a starving orphan at an all you can eat buffet.”

Bucky relaxed marginally. Comforted to know that the food wasn’t likely to go to waste. He continued cooking wordlessly.

“You sure you’re alright, man? You're in, like, a funk.” Sam announced.

“Yeah,” Wanda agreed. “Grouchy.”

“I’m not –” He sighed at Wanda and Sam. “I’m not grouchy. I’m fine.”

“You seem pretty grouchy to me.” Natasha grumbled under her breath.

The bedroom door opened. Bucky clenched his jaw shut tight until he heard the bathroom door shut and the shower crank on. He relaxed briefly until he felt a gentle tugging at the ends of his hair. He turned and looked down at Wanda who dropped his hair and took a step back.

“Sorry.” She murmured.

Bucky frowned and shook his head. “It’s fine.”

“You’re angrier than usual.” Wanda observed.

“I’m not usually angry.”

“But you’re angry today.”

“No.” Bucky shook his head and added the fresh pancake to the stack.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Bucky sighed and looked at Wanda. Her wide, brown eyes were full of empathy. He gave her a half smile. He flicked his eyes over to Natasha who was staring at him, hard. Bucky’s jaw locked up again.

“No.” He told Wanda, firmly.

She stood motionless for about ten seconds before shrugging and starting a search through the pantries. She held up a bottle of maple syrup victoriously. A smug smile smeared across her face.

Bucky finished the last of the pancake batter and set the mixing bowl in the sink. He ran some water over it so that it would be easier to wash later. Sam grabbed the plate of pancakes, Natasha grabbed six more paper plates and a fistful of plastic forks and followed Sam and Wanda into the dining room.

No sooner had they sat down, than Steve appeared in the archway fresh from the shower. Natasha sat at the seat furthest from Bucky, obviously sensing his animosity toward her. Wanda sat directly across from him beside Vision and Sam sat between him and Natasha.

“Pancakes?” Steve said, quietly.
“They’re delicious!” Wanda announced around a mouthful of food.

“Come eat.” Wanda beckoned. She waved her hand at the empty seat frantically until Steve sat down beside Bucky.

“What was it really like growing up a hundred years ago?” Wanda asked, around her food.

“Hmm? Oh, it wasn’t a hundred years ago.” Bucky said dismissively.

“It’s 2017 in four days. It’s a hundred years.” Wanda argued.

Bucky took a bite of his pancakes, chewed, and swallowed. “Noisy, I guess.”

“Noisy?”

“Yeah, well, it was Brooklyn. There were cars backfiring and trains and stuff. Just noise.” Bucky shrugged.

Wanda rolled her eyes. “I’m asking what you used to do as kids. Did you guys play different games?”

“Different games?”


“Boyars?” Steve asked.

Wanda looked over at him with a huge smile and nodded excitedly.

“I don’t know Boyars.” Buck said.

Wanda’s smile fell. “It’s… Boyars….” She said, weakly.

“Is it Russian for something?”

“No!” She turned to Natasha. “You grew up in Russia. You know Boyars!”

Natasha frowned. “I grew up in the Academy. The only childhood games I’m familiar with are unassembling and reassembling every make and model of gun and target practice.”

Wanda deflated.

“The kids in Wakanda play tag and hide and seek.” Bucky offered.

Wanda nodded and stabbed at her breakfast morosely.

“What are the rules for Boyars?”

Wanda brightened immediately. Like a puppy. “There are two teams and they link hands and then they walk toward each other and the say something like ‘Boyars, we come to you. Now give us the bride,’ and then you say the name of someone on the other team and they run for the other team and try to break through. If they do not break the chain they have to join the other team.”

“So… Red Rover?” Bucky supplied.

“What’s Red Rover?”
“Exactly what you just said except instead of the Buoy whatever you said, you say, ‘Red Rover, Red Rover send yadda yadda right over.’” Sam explained.

“And that is something you played?” Wanda asked Bucky.

Bucky cleared his throat and nodded, avoiding eye contact. He remembered the game which surely meant he’d played it at some point or another. It didn’t really matter that he didn’t remember actually playing it. He had a reference. That was what mattered.

“What else did you play?”

Bucky leaned back in his chair and massaged his shoulder where flesh became metal. He tried in vain to dredge up some distant memory of playing as a child. Something beyond his memories of working in factory after factory. He stuck his tongue in his cheek and stared at the table. After nearly five minutes of silence, Bucky looked up and shook his head.

“I don’t know. Sorry.”

“Not at all?” Wanda asked. Her brows were drawn up in concern as she stared at him. Bucky smiled reassuringly.

“It’s fine. Some things just haven’t come back to me yet.”

“Like your birthday.” Sam supplied.

“Or Christmas.” Natasha added.

“Hey, okay. I worked a lot as a kid so maybe I don’t know because I never played them.” Bucky suggested.

All eyes swung over to Steve for clarification. Steve scrunched up in his seat, crossing his arms over his chest defensively and staring down at the table. He cleared his throat and shuffled a bit.

“Tag was a big one, I guess. Uh, we played Capture the Flag a couple times and, uh, Mother, May I?” Steve shrugged. “Just a few.”

“Let’s talk about something else, maybe?” Bucky begged.

“What do you do in Wakanda?” Wanda asked.

Since their heart to heart the evening before, Wanda had attached herself firmly to Bucky’s side. She peppered him with all the superficial questions up until he announced it was past his bedtime. Things like his favorite color – blue – to his favorite food – chips. Bucky had preferred those questions. He knew what he liked and what he didn’t. They were things based in opinions not fact. Not memory.

“I’m growing wheat right now. It’s cool, actually. And I raise goats, I have three right now. I used to have four, but…” Bucky frowned at the memory of Jack. Of her untimely demise. He smiled and gave his head a little shake. “Thomoza, my neighbor, she’s supposed to be working out some sort of deal with a goat herder to breed two of my older goats at the start of February.”

Steve stood up and started clearing the empty plates away.

“I’m going to head out to the Quinjet for a bit. Check in with T’Challa, ya know?” Steve told everyone.
“Hey, Vis, I wanted to ask about Clint.” Natasha said, standing up.

“He’s doing well from what I can tell.”

“From what you can tell? I thought he was only banned from contact with us. Figured Tony’d be outfitting his farmhouse as a circus or something.”

“Ah, well…. Clint is… there is residual anger from the fallout. The farmhouse and the Barton family were meant to stay out of public record until Tony’s minor slip of the tongue at the Raft.” Vision explained.

“Yeah, I don’t really blame him. Laura and the kids were off the grid for a reason.” Natasha shoved her hands into her pockets. “Would you mind taking some stuff to them for me when you go back?”

“Of course. I can’t say I’ll be welcomed with open arms, but I’m certain he will be delighted to hear from you.”

“Ah, shit.” Bucky cursed, dropping his head into his hand. “We did, didn’t we?”

The room fell silent. Bucky shook his head. It wasn’t a memory in the same way he remembered things like Vito or his assassinations, more like a feeling. Something strong that caused a stir in his chest. He picked his head up and met Natasha’s eyes.

“Didn’t we.”

Natasha swallowed and looked down. He hadn’t asked a question. He knew it. More than subconsciously. There was no denying he and Natasha had had an affair. One that was burned out of his mind. It was why he’d spared her. Why he’d taken the abuse when news came through that she’d recovered. Why they’d reverted back to old torture methods from years before. He’d gotten attached to her emotionally.

“Dammit!” Bucky got to his feet too quickly, sending his chair clattering to the floor. “Why’s everything have to be such a goddamn secret with you? Why can’t you just come clean about anything? Vibranium vault? More like frigid bitch!” Bucky berated.

“Okay, hold on. I don’t deserve that. It was a personal matter. I’ve never demanded to know all your sordid secrets.”

Bucky rolled his head back. “My god! You know what? You and Steve are fucking perfect for each other. I don’t know my sordid secrets.” He yanked the chair up from the ground and pushed it under the ground. “You sure as shit do.”

He went to the bedroom before anyone could find their voices again. He took a few minutes to put his arm on since he had to take his shirt off first. Everything was easier after that. He pulled on socks and boots, stopping by the front door to pull on his coat.

“Hey, man, don’t just leave!” Sam cried as the door slammed behind him.

Chapter End Notes

If I weren't so focused on canon compliance, Clint would make an appearance. Like
showing up and eating all of Bucky's pancakes before anyone else got any.
I might do a drabble or something on Clint's house arrest.
Hawkeye deserves his own movie.
Vive le Clint.
What We Were

Chapter Summary

Bucky has a few much needed conversations.

Chapter Notes

I'm very sorry it took me so long to write/post this chapter. I've been dragging myself through an MDE which made doing absolutely anything extremely difficult. I hope you enjoy this chapter, though!

The small town of Kiyevka was a small farming town just north of the Sea of Japan. Everyone knew everyone else and new faces were welcomed with skepticism and apprehension. Bucky was no exception. Luckily, their collective reserve seemed exclusive to the fact that he was an unfamiliar face. That meant they didn’t recognize him.

Bucky had walked for ten minutes before he found the road from the house. It had snowed overnight and it didn’t look like anyone was planning on coming through with a plow anytime soon. Bucky may not like the cold, but he was long used to it. Hiking through two feet of snow was a snap.

A group of children were playing in the snow when he passed the first house. They paused to gawk at him. He watched one turn and run into the blue house and tugged the hood of his winter coat down over his face. He kept his left hand hidden in his pocket. He didn’t have gloves and the white metal was a glaring indication of who he was.

Bucky found a market five miles into town. He shuffled into the warmth of the shop. The woman behind the counter flicked her eyes up from her Dostoevsky novel and back down. Then, realizing she didn’t know the man who had just entered her store, looked up again. Bucky sniffled and shoved his hands deep into his pockets as he perused the shelves.

Bucky reached out and picked up a red and white bar to read the label. Russian candy. He frowned inwardly. Not everything that came out of Russia was HYDRA related. Most Russians likely had no clue that HYDRA’s Winter Soldier compound was in the Siberian wasteland. Case in point, nobody seemed to recognize him.

“Privyet, Soldat.”

Bucky looked down at Wanda. Her hair was tied back and mostly hidden beneath a stocking cap. She was wearing an insanely thin jacket for how cold it was outside. If she had walked like he had, she should be frozen in an embankment somewhere ten miles away.

“Privyet,” he mumbled back. He cast his gaze over her head, hunting for Steve, Sam, or Natasha.
“It’s just me.” Wanda assured him. “Cap and the others are still bickering over who gets to leave to track you down.”

“You just left?”

Wanda shrugged and picked up a jar of pickled anchovies. She wrinkled her nose at the little fish faces and set the jar back where she’d found it. She shoved her hands in her pants pockets and turned to face him.

“I think you need to talk to someone.”

Bucky scoffed. “My therapist is in Wakanda, thanks.”

Wanda wrinkled her brow. “You have a therapist?”

Bucky picked up a bag of potato chips. “Sort of. She’s not a professional or anything. She’s just….” Bucky gave a shrug. He’d given up trying to define Shuri months ago.

“I didn’t mean talk to someone like that. You’re angry. Sometimes the best thing to do is let it out.”

Bucky smiled at her tenacity. Becca would’ve loved her. Becca would’ve loved a lot of the new people in his life. She would have loved to know that he was alive to find new people in his life. He soured.

Bucky eased around the shelves and made his way to the counter with his chips and candy bar. As he passed a fridge, he pulled out a bottle of cola. “You want anything?” Bucky asked Wanda.

She picked out orange soda from the cooler and slapped a pack of gum on the counter. The woman rang up the items. Her eyes were trained on the curious pair. Wanda gave her a warm smile. The woman returned a forced smile of her own.

“You will be owing six hundred rubles.” The woman told Bucky in English with a heavy Russian accent.

“Shest’sot?” Bucky affirmed holding up six of his fingers.

She nodded and Bucky pulled out his wallet to hand her his card. She stared at the card curiously for a moment before sliding it through their card reader and handing it back to him. Bucky scribbled on the slip of paper she offered him and he and Wanda collected their goods.

“You have such a bad accent that even if you speak only Russian in front of people, they still think you are American.” Wanda teased.

“It’s not that bad. Nobody’s ever said anything about it before.” Bucky grumbled.

Wanda bumped her shoulder against him as they walked. “Maybe they have and you just don’t remember.”

“That’s… possible.”

“Sorry.”

Wanda jumped up onto a wooden fence lining the road and walked along the wood beam for a ways. Bucky watched her, waiting for any potential misstep that would send her tumbling. They reached a bridge and Bucky stopped and sat on the cement ledge. He opened his chips and shoved
a handful into his mouth. Wanda sat down beside him and took a few chips for herself.

“What did you and Nat do?” She asked.

Bucky shoved another handful of chips into his mouth. He’d walked over a dozen miles through two feet of snow in freezing temperatures to forget what he and Natasha had done. He sighed and dropped his head.

“Was it… I mean, you’re gay.” Wanda said.

“I’m not gay.”

“You and Steve are dating, right? Because he never actually got around to saying those exact words.” Wanda giggled. “Here’s the thing, guys, gang, uh, everyone, Bucky is… I, we, uh, it’s not just… Bucky is, that is to say, we’re, I guess, more than just childhood friends. We, uh, well, you know?” She said in a low voice. She laughed. “Sam actually had to come out and say, just say you’re dating the cyborg!”

“Steve babbles when he’s nervous. If he can get a word out at all.” Bucky smiled.

“Right, so if you’re gay then you and Nat didn’t, like, date or anything, right?”

Bucky’s smile fell. “I don’t think dating is the right word for what we did.”

Wanda’s eyes went wide as saucers. “You slept with Natasha?”

“I would love to say no, but I have enough lies in my life right now.”

“What do you mean?”

“My memory isn’t great. I wish there were a magic fix. I wish I could remember the day of my high school graduation or my sister’s wedding day, but if I’m lucky I get to remember nightmares from my life as the Winter Soldier. When you asked me about childhood games I used to play, I wish I could bring up a memory of my childhood that was good and happy. I wish I had answers to all the questions I get asked. But I don’t. And I know that it breaks Steve’s heart that I don’t remember. So I lie sometimes. And then, when I think I am remembering something, I find out Steve lied. That I remembered wrong and that he didn’t tell me. Or I find out that the woman I’ve been sent to kill twice has known me for decades and decided to play dumb and see if I ever figured it out.”

“Did you love her?”

Bucky looked up at the sky. He took a deep breath so that the cold air filled his lungs. He exhaled slowly. “I might love her still if HYDRA hasn’t completely wiped her from me.”

“They wiped Steve from you completely.” Wanda said. “You remember him.”

Bucky shook his head. “They tried.”

“What do you mean they tried? You nearly killed him on that helicarrier.”

Bucky swallowed hard. He didn’t need reminding. It was his constant nightmare. “Every time I botched a mission, Steve was somehow at the cause of it. When I ran away in Brazil, it was because Vito had a slight resemblance to Steve when we were kids. I remembered Steve before I remembered my own name.” Bucky brought his hand to his temple. “There were times I swear I
could hear him as if he were standing next to me. I remembered him long after I’d forgotten my family. When they would torture me it was Steve I would scream for, begging for help.

“The helicarrier… I remembered him long before I smashed his face in. But I knew I wasn’t supposed to. I admitted I remembered him to my handlers the day before and they put me in that fucking chair way longer than a normal brain fry.” Bucky covered his eyes with his right hand. “I was terrified that admitting I remembered Steve, that doing anything except completing my mission, would result in extensive torture.”

“I knew you were tortured. We all knew. I think it was a special article in the New York Times at one point. Steve defending your honor from his hospital bed after all HYDRA’s secrets were dumped onto the internet. I just never imagined it was so bad. I don’t think anyone did. Or could. Normal people can’t withstand that much abuse without dying.” Wanda explained.

“Believe me, I wanted to.” He twisted the cap off his cola and downed half of it before holding out the bottle to Wanda wordlessly.

“No, thank you.”

Bucky looked over at her and down at the cola in his hand. He hadn’t really thought about the action. He’d drank half and held the other half out to his companion. He pulled the bottle back into his chest and stared down at it.

“You buy the chips and I’ll by the drink.”

“No fair, Buck! You drank almost all of it!”

“I’m bigger than you. I need more to sustain me.”

“I hope you get fat and go bald.”

“Awww! You’ll still look better than you.”

“Asshole!”

“Oooh! Your mom’s gonna kill you now!”

“Bucky!”

“Bucky?”

“Hmm? What?”

“You think we can head back, now?” Wanda asked.

Bucky looked around. The sun was starting to go down and snow was in the air again. Bucky stood up and followed Wanda back up the road. He glanced over at Wanda a time or two to make sure she wasn’t turning blue. Interestingly enough, she barely seemed to register the dropping temperature. It was more than three miles of walking in silence before Bucky saw why. In the low light, he could just make out a hazy, red glow just under her skin.

Vision met them just outside the cabin. He made the movements with his legs as if he were walking, but Bucky saw that he left no foot prints in the snow. Bucky frowned. He knew he hadn’t exactly been discreet about how unnerved he was by Vision’s hovering, but the knowledge that the robot was going through the motions to make Bucky more comfortable left him feeling…
touched.

Wanda left Bucky’s side the second she saw him and folded herself into Vision’s arms. Something Bucky was wishing he could do with Steve at that very moment. Vision pressed a kiss to Wanda’s dyed red hair before looking up to meet Bucky’s eye.

“There is someone waiting for you in the Quinjet. If you feel up to it, that is.” Vision told him.

Bucky’s heart flipped with nerves. He hoped that Steve waiting in the Quinjet didn’t mean he was planning on dragging him back to Wakanda. Especially not if it meant he wouldn’t get the chance to say goodbye to Sam or to apologize to Natasha for biting her head off. He gave Vision a sharp nod and shuffled his way through the snow to the lowered gangplank of the Quinjet.

“Hey, sorry I just took off like that, I just –”

It wasn’t Steve waiting for him. His mouth went dry and his hands curled into fists. Natasha glanced down and tucked her bottom lip between her teeth. Slowly, she stood up and gestured to an empty seat.

“Can we talk?”

Bucky swallowed. He couldn’t decide if he was angry with her or not. He definitely wasn’t happy with her, but his anger felt like it was directed more at himself than at her. It wasn’t her fault his memory was jacked to nine hells. She hadn’t even been born when HYDRA had captured him. But his memory was jacked and if he could remember things he wouldn’t be in this situation.

Natasha was still standing near the controls. She had started to fidget in the silence and Bucky realized she was waiting for him to give her permission to speak. He didn’t trust his voice, but he took the seat she had offered and unclenched his fists.

Natasha relaxed marginally. She took a deep breath and opened her mouth to speak, but stopped before a sound came out. She huffed and shoved her hands over her face, digging them into her hair in a way that had to be painful.

“This would be so much easier if you could just remember it.” She said quietly.

“Welcome to my life.”

Natasha’s head snapped up at the animosity in his words. He hadn’t meant it to come out with such hostility, but she was saying exactly what Bucky already knew. Natasha let out a slow breath and nodded.

“But you do remember me? At least a little?”

“Not enough apparently.”

Natasha nodded. “Do you remember anything about… about the children’s hospital?” Her voice had gone so soft that if Bucky hadn’t been a super soldier, he never would’ve heard it.

Bucky’s body locked up. His hands curled back into fists.

“What did I do?” Bucky asked, his throat thick with fear and grief.

Natasha shook her head. “It wasn’t you.”

“I don’t care if I ‘wasn’t in control’ or whatever. It was my body. They were my actions. I did
them!” Bucky snapped.

“No.” Natasha insisted. And before he could argue further, she continued. “I meant it literally wasn’t you.” Her jaw clenched and she swallowed hard.

“Oh.”

“I knew,” she said, “of course I knew I wasn’t one of the good guys. You don’t do the kinds of things I did and still think you’re a good guy, but after that it was… different. I started to second guess every order I received, but couldn’t talk myself into walking away. The Agency was my whole life. If I walked away, my actions would never be justified and I would die some horrible person. The only way through was forward, you know?”

She stopped and scratched at her temple. Bucky watched her carefully. He wondered if that’s what he looked like when he was in the middle of an episode. Closed off, distant, lost in his own head. In his own fucked up memories.

“I asked you about it, on one of our missions together. I asked if you thought I was a good person. You didn’t say anything at first. That always annoyed me. I was at the end of my rope, but then you stood up and pulled me into a hug. I didn’t even know you knew what a hug was. I didn’t know if I knew what a hug was. But you did. You hugged me and you pet my hair so gently. You were the first person to ever touch me so gently.” Natasha’s voice is growing thick and she stops herself.

Bucky doesn’t say anything. He watches her, but he doesn’t comment. He feels a spell has been woven between them. The moment he speaks, the spell will be over.

“You said I was the only good person you knew and it was exactly what I needed to hear. You knew what a hug was, but the kiss, that threw you off. You were shaking like a leaf and that made me feel worse. I let go and sat down and you just stood there making me feel like the scum of the earth until you grabbed my face and kissed me back.” Natasha’s hand drifted along her cheek absently. Tracing the places Bucky had touched her all those years ago. All those times he couldn’t remember.

“We did sleep together.” Natasha told him, though it wasn’t hot news anymore. “I guess that’s not the right phrase since we never did sleep. And never in the same bed. But we had sex. Pretty regularly after that. Then it took a turn. I had to come in to the compound where they kept you. I guess you’d started acting unusually and they wanted to get to the bottom of it. And they did. There was talk of castration and I had to convince them that it was my fault. That I had done everything against your will. And maybe that wasn’t a lie. It’s not like you could really consent in your condition, but you seemed to… enjoy it?” Natasha swallowed again, she couldn’t meet his eyes.

“They erased you. What one of the white coats called a ‘hard reboot’ and they made me watch. I can still hear that screaming. I could hear it in the desert when you shot my client through me. I could hear it on the bridge in D.C. I could hear it when I shot a rocket launcher at you to protect Steve before I found out who you really were. Clint got me out. About a year later, he was supposed to take me out. Those were his orders, but he offered me a way out of the Agency instead. It was a good deal. It was a deal I knew I was probably never going to get again, but I knew if I left, my plan to break you out of the compound would never come to a close and I turned him down.”

“Break me out?” Bucky said, forgetting himself.
“I had a plan. A bad one. One that was going to get us both killed, but I needed to try.” Natasha sighed, “But Clint was relentless. More than relentless, he was kind. Like he understood why I was doing what I was doing. And I finally agreed, but I didn’t forget about you. When you showed up in D.C. and shot Fury, I wanted to be pissed. I wanted to hate you, but I couldn’t. So when Steve asked if I knew anything about you, I lied. I knew Steve would try to kill you. Hell, I was pretty sure he’d succeed if he was given the chance and I wasn’t about to hand him that chance.”

“After Steve told me who you were. Who you really were before HYDRA and the Agency. I’ll say I was jealous. But I was also terrified. Steve would never hurt you and I know that now, but from what I could see it looked like he was ready to die with you.” Natasha looked at her hands on her knees. “He never told any of us what really happened on the helicarrier that day. The way he looked in the hospital, I can kind of figure that when it came down to it, he couldn’t hurt you. And you couldn’t kill him.”

“He was gonna let me.” Bucky confessed on a whisper.

“You never would have.” Natasha said. But she didn’t know. She hadn’t been there. She was saying what he wanted to hear.

“I thought I did.”

“Was that why you took off?”

Bucky shook his head. “I pulled him out of the water. Took about everything I had since Steve’d dislocated my shoulder and half a plane had been dropped on my ribs, but I pulled him out after shooting him and stabbing him and punching him in the face until it looked less like a human face and more like something you’d see on the side of the road. And he wasn’t breathing and I thought I did it. I thought I killed him and I didn’t know what to do. Then he coughed up a bunch of water and started breathing again and there was something in my brain that was telling me to put my hand around his throat and I didn’t want to so I left.”

“You ever tell him that?”

Bucky shook his head. “You don’t have to worry about whether you forced yourself on me or not. You didn’t.”

“You don’t remember it.” She accused.

“Doesn’t matter if I don’t remember the actual relationship. I wouldn’t have pulled my punches the way I did if I thought you had. You’d’ve been dead in a desert ten years ago instead making out with my boyfriend on mall escalators.”

Natasha frowned. “Steve told you about that?”

Bucky nodded.

“He did say it was for a cover, right?”

Bucky nodded again.

“He told me it wasn’t his first kiss since the ice, but I’m about ninety-eight percent sure he was lying.”

“We should get back in to him. He’s probably having a fit.”
“Yeah, I kinda wish Thor was here with his Asgardian brew to get him drunk and make him relax.” Natasha joked.

“Steve can’t get drunk.” Bucky said automatically. “Our bodies’ metabolisms work too fast.”

Natasha laughed and shook her head. “I saw Thor drink twenty tequila shots in under five minutes and act like it hadn’t phased him in the slightest and I’ve also seen him take a small swig of his personal stash of Asgardian liquor and struggle to stand up. Just imagine what the stuff does to Rogers.” Natasha reminisced.

They had reached the cabin door. Natasha gave the special knock and waited for it to be opened. Steve looked frantically between the two of them before taking a breath and stepping back to let them in. Natasha glanced over at Sam who gave a small nod before standing up and stretching.

“Okay, Cap, he’s back. He looks happy and healthy and undamaged. So I’m going to bed now.” Sam shuffled towards the stairs grabbing Natasha by the elbow and tugging her along with him. She let him guide her for two steps before she yanked her arm away from his grip. Bucky watched them walk up the stairs. They disappear into their respective bedrooms and after a few more seconds, he pulls his gaze away to look at Steve.

“C’mon,” Bucky murmurs, leading the way to their bedroom.

Bucky peels off his winter coat and drops his hat, scarf, and gloves in a heap beside their duffle bags. Steve kicks his shoes off beside him before shoving his hands into the pockets on his slacks and looking down at the floor between them.

“Sorry.” Bucky says, softly.

Steve’s head snaps up. “What?”

Bucky frowns at the floor. “You heard me.”

“No, I meant, what do you have to be sorry for?”

Bucky sat down on the edge of the bed and linked his hands on the back of his neck. He stared at Steve’s feet. The socks on his feet were wet.

“I didn’t know. When you asked about Natasha and me I wasn’t intentionally lying to you or trying to keep it from you. I just… I didn’t know.”

“I know that.”

Bucky scoffed.

“You don’t have to apologize for that, Buck. I should be apologizing to you.”

“You were jealous. It’s okay.”

Steve’s feet moved until they were right next to Bucky’s. They turned and Bucky felt the weight of Steve sink into the bed beside him.

“I think there was a little more to it than just jealousy.”

Bucky looked up at him curiously. Steve was staring at the ceiling and chewing on his thumb.
“Okay?”

Steve sighed heavily and dropped his hand onto his lap. “Buck, there used to be nothing we didn’t know about each other. No secrets we didn’t share, no girlfriends I didn’t know about. I knew everything about you and you knew everything about me. I mean, you knew the day I got my first erection for crying out loud.”

“Did you know about…?”

Steve blushed and nodded. “Everything, Bucky. But now there’s this distance between us. There are things that happened to you that I don’t know anything about and there are things I’ve done that you don’t know about. I never thought that would happen to us. I guess I’m just a little worried that we aren’t as close as we used to be. That we’ll keep getting further apart and I don’t want that. I really can’t lose you again, Buck. Erskine’s serum didn’t make me that strong.”

“Maybe we have a lot to catch up on with each other in some things, but, Steve, you can’t think that we aren’t as close now as we were in the past. We might even be closer.”

Steve scoffed and shook his head. “Definitely not.” He muttered.

Bucky scowled. To prove his point, he rolled over until he was straddling Steve’s lap. He brought both hands up to cup Steve’s face. He dropped his left hand immediately after seeing Steve wince at its touch. Steve reached down and pulled it back to his cheek.

“Just cold, Buck.” He reassured him.

Bucky leaned forward and pressed his lips against Steve’s. It took a minute for Steve to settle into Bucky’s kisses. Bucky pulled his shirt off and gave Steve another lingering kiss before tugging the tight t-shirt up over his smooth chest. Steve was letting Bucky take charge again. Completely at his mercy.

“See?” Bucky murmured against Steve’s hair. Steve hummed sleepily against Bucky’s bare chest.

“What?”

“Much closer than before.” Bucky declared.

Steve snorted out a laugh and shook his big head. He sat up to look Bucky in the eyes.

“I love you.”

“I love you.”

Steve leaned forward and kissed him softly.

“On a more serious note, I need you to stop coddling me.” Bucky told him.

Steve leaned back and looked down between them. Dejectedly, Steve started to shift away from Bucky. Bucky grabbed him around the waist and tugged him back down.

“Not what I meant.”

Steve huffed. “Well, what did you mean?”

Bucky stroked the fingers of his right hand softly through Steve’s hair. “You don’t correct me when I’m wrong about something.”
“What do you mean?”

“Like the Pee Wee Reese thing. I told Shuri I enlisted after I got that card signed, but I didn’t enlist. I was drafted. I came home that day and opened my draft letter.”

Steve was quiet. He turned his head slightly and pressed a kiss to Bucky’s chest.

“I don’t like remembering that day.” Steve murmured.

“You were so fuckin’ eager to get yourself in that war. Pissed at me for getting a draft letter when you didn’t. Like I wanted to go and was purposely leaving you out of it.”

Steve wriggled his arms around Bucky’s waist and gave him a squeeze. “It wasn’t really about the war, Buck. I just didn’t want to be away from you like that. I didn’t want to know you were in danger and be completely incapable of doing anything to stop it. Not getting a draft letter was more like the government was telling me I would never be able to protect you the way you always protect me.”

Bucky considered him for a minute. “Nah, I think you just didn’t want to be left out of a fight.”

Steve sank his teeth into Bucky’s side making him yelp in surprise and a little bit of pain. Not too much. Not enough to send him spiraling. Steve seemed to have learned some of Bucky’s limits even when Bucky had no idea what those limits were himself.

“You know I asked to be in your unit.”

“Yeah, right, you didn’t even know my unit until the day before I left.”

Steve nodded. “One-oh-seventh.” Steve agreed. “Didn’t tell ‘em about you, though. Said my dad was in the one-oh-seventh and I wanted to serve where he served.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“Takes one to know one.”

“Punk.”

“Jerk.” Steve replied, fondly.

Bucky could feel Steve’s tears on his chest. He rubbed Steve’s back soothingly.

“Did I ever thank you?”

“Thank me?” Steve asked, voice full.

“For the rescue. Uh, the first one. When they were doing the first… those… uh… you know?”

“You don’t have to thank me for anything.”

“I just don’t remember being very grateful at the time.”

“Yeah, ‘cause you were tortured.”

“I was also pissed off.”

“At being tortured.” Steve said decidedly.
“At you, idiot.”

Steve sat up again and looked at Bucky bewildered. “Me?”

“I said don’t do anything stupid. That meant not going through some crazy medical experiments just so you could join the deadliest war in history.”

“Get over it.” Steve grumbled.

“I’m gonna kick your ass in the morning.”

“Oh, good. Didn’t get enough tonight.” Steve said pleasantly.

“Excuse me?”

“If you’re lucky, I’ll kiss your ass, too.”

“Kick.” Bucky said with emphasis.

Steve turned his head and kissed Bucky’s belly.


“Nah, kisses are enough. Don’t need all that.”

“I hate you.”

“Mhm.”

“I’m going to make you sleep on the couch.” Bucky warned.

In response, Steve tightened his hold on Bucky’s waist and snuggled into his chest. Bucky tried not to smile at it.

“Steve,” he insisted.

Steve let out a loud, fake snore. Bucky dropped his head onto the pillows heavily and flicked the lamp off. Steve was clinging to him like a spider monkey and he knew he wouldn’t be able to sleep like this, but seconds after the light went out, he felt Steve’s breathing even out and listened to him sigh.

He couldn’t believe Steve had ever thought they’d grown too far apart. Here they were, a hundred years later, and they were still sleeping in each other’s arms. Still screwing around as much as ever. Maybe he was right. Maybe they didn’t know absolutely everything about each other anymore. But maybe it wasn’t a bad thing. It gave them more to talk about at the very least.

Chapter End Notes

Hey! 330 notes!! That's incredible! I've never gotten that many kudos on anything before!! Thank you so much!
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