My Ghost (Where'd You Go?)
by 3BeesAndCoffee3

Summary

HYDRA is being reborn and what better way to get things running again than to get their soldier back?

or: A group following in Hydra's footsteps kidnaps Steve and Bucky to attempt to get the Winter Soldier in their grasp and turn Steve into their personal test subject so that they can reconstruct the super-soldier-serum without any faults.

((Updates Mondays and Fridays.))

Notes

Here's a link to my tumblr if you wanna check me out there!
Tumblr: This lil link!

See the end of the work for more notes
Chapter 1

The screams reverberate off of the stone and metal walls, nearly deafening in the narrowness of the corridors. When there aren’t screams, there’s deafening silence. The rooms are supposed to be sound proof, aren’t they? How loud is he screaming?

Steve twists and fights against his binds until his wrists are raw and he’s panting hard, sweat sticking to his body. His sense of urgency and the sickening churning in his gut isn’t dulled much by the drugs surging through him. They were meant for him, strong enough to make his limbs feel like gelatin and his head swim a little, even with the serum. If it’s making his sense of panic dwindle any, it’s still not enough. Every time a wave of drowsiness washes over him and his eyes grow heavy, vision blurring and spinning, there’s another scream, piercing his ears and making him squeeze his eyes shut like it might make it stop.

There’s nothing he can do from his cell, locked up like an animal and drugged into a useless mess. No one is even checking on him, opening the doors to do so much as gloat, so he has no chances to escape or even get information. All he can do is sit slumped against the table, hands chained above his head and listen to Bucky scream and scream.

Half of the time, the noises don’t even sound human. They’re desperate agony, no words, just screams so loud they crack and come out I’m pained howls. It sounds remotely like a wounded cat Steve had found in the ally, back before the war. It’s legs had been broken and all it did was make horrible, gurgling hisses and whining sounds. He’d brought it back to the apartment but it died while Steve slept that night, sprawled in a cardboard box.

He grits his teeth, trying not to think about what might be happening to cause those noises. If his mind wanders, vague flashes of bloody instruments on steel tables, or purplish, misshapen limbs, would flood his head. He couldn’t handle that, especially knowing there was nothing he could do from here.

He doesn’t have an even remotely decent sense of time anymore, he lost that almost immediately after he lost consciousness the first time, but after what must be hours, the screaming stops. He holds his breath, waiting for another sound, and suddenly he feels desperate to hear it again, even if it’s awful and pained. Knowing he was alive was better than this endless not knowing.

He hates not knowing and being so utterly helpless.

He hates that the drugs make it hard to focus.

He hates these people.

Things had been nice before, almost simple. He and Bucky had been living together again like before the war, like before Steve had lost Bucky off a train, before Steve ended up in ice, before Steve woke up and everything had been some insane, impossible loop. None of it really mattered, because Steve was back with Bucky, no matter how fucked things had been, no matter how fucked Bucky was. Really, Bucky opened up again after next to no time with Steve, and everything fell into place, into a nice and steady rhythm. They cooked together, cleaned the house from time to time, slept in the same bed with their legs tangled together and their fingers intertwined on more than one occasion.

Things were the best that they had been in a very long time, and even now, Steve can’t quite grasp where they went wrong. He doesn’t understand how they found their location that was constantly
changing, constantly protected. He doesn’t understand how these people so easily ripped them apart. He shouldn’t trust anyone, he should know not to by now. he should have learnt that after S.H.I.E.L.D. but Steve never learns, apparently.

“Please, just be alive,” Steve breathes, hardly even aware the words come out. His throat feels like he swallowed lava, raw and hurting and burning. His own voice sounds strange in the silent confines of the room. His ears started ringing a while ago from the heavy weight of the silence around him, his breathing feeling abnormally loud.

He passes out eventually, too tired and weak to bother fighting. He doesn’t rest well, it’s cramped and fitful and he wakes up every few minutes, over and over again. When he wakes up again, it’s because there’s a sharp pain rupturing in his neck, sharp and like ice. His body jolts and instinctively fights it before he has a chance to register what’s happening, and a hand clamps down on his bicep, hard enough it’s meant to hurt and steady him.

“Alright, cap, calm down now, don’t want you hurtin’ yourself, do we?”

“Fuck, let go,” Steve spits, yanking away as best as he can. The voice is gruff and he can feel the breath of the man behind him hit his neck, he can smell the bitter whiskey.

“I was just makin’ sure you got your meds,” he says, voice snide. “No need to be so rude.”

Steve grits his teeth, a growl bubbles up in his throat. “What are you getting out of drugging me?”

The man walks to the side of Steve to dispose carelessly of the emptied syringe. He’s dressed casually, in some slacks and a t-shirt, just with a lab coat thrown on over it. He has a gun strapped to his belt, too, off to the side of his hip. “We get you here, and not out there,” he says, gesturing vaguely to the door. He looks bored and it pisses Steve off. Still, this is an opportunity to get information.

“Where’s Bucky?” Steve asks and it comes out sharp and more of a demand.

“You know where he is, Rogers,” he sighs. “He’s getting our special care, our very best hospitality.”

The next question rolls off of Steve’s tongue before he can bite it. It’s a stupid question, such a stupid question, and yet, “Why are you doing this? What’s the point?”

He sighs. He runs a hand through his hair, it looks greasy and unkempt. “Cap, let’s not play dumb, okay? It’s not appealing on you.”

“What are you doing with Bucky?” Steve grits out, the rephrasing just earns an amused chuckle from the doctor.

“The Winter Soldier is incredibly useful in both combat and in research, you know this. We can easily pick up where Hydra so pathetically left off.”

Steve’s stomach somersaults. “He’s not some fucking weapon.”

“That’s exactly what he is, and you have the original serum, so you’ll be rather useful yourself,” he says, simple and matter of fact.

Steve glares at him, even when his back is turned, like he might be able to burn holes into the back of the guys head. “You know this isn’t gonna work, right? Do you know how many people and how many times people have tried this shit?” Steve’s only half sure of his words. They were successful before, in ripping Bucky apart from the inside out. Steve couldn’t help him before, either.
“I suppose we’ll see,” he says far too smugly and places a small vile of the medicine just out of Steve’s reach. “Now, I must go tend to the soldier. Breaking him has been a hassle.” He leaves then, briskly, before Steve can scream at him and thrash uselessly. He hears the mechanics in the door click and lock behind him.

This wasn’t how it was supposed to go, and Steve feels his chest tighten. There’s a clock ticking, invisible and in the back of Steve’s head. Every minute he’s stuck here, he’s loosing his chance to get Bucky out.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Sorry it’s a touch short, but I wanted it played out this way and I wanted to post an update.

Time passes vaguely, slowly. He doesn’t know when it’s day or night, he just knows he’s constantly tired, kept too drugged to do anything but hang from his binds, laying back against the tilted lab table. He knows he’s been here too long, though. They administer the dose of whatever is in the vials, regularly, spaced out enough that around the time he’s coming to his senses again, they’re ready with another syringe. He’s only seen two people since his arrival at the base, wherever that is. He’s seen the doctor, who no longer gives him any information or even attempts to poke and prod with dry humor, he just drugs Steve and leaves again, silent. Then, there’s another man, who he sees less. They’re dressed more professionally, in a combat suit with several large weapons that Steve thinks he wears for show, more than anything. His face is tight and aging poorly, hair greying at his temples.

When that other man comes in, he’s there to feed him. Steve hates it, but he learned quickly enough it’s useless to fight him. He doesn’t get food often enough to be picky and fight him. He really found that out after he fought him too much and he was left for what must’ve been days without any food. The IV in his arm and neck, close to where they inject him (why they don’t add it into the IV is beyond him) keep him hydrated enough they don’t really bother with water, and it leaves Steve’s mouth stone dry and raw tasting.

As for Bucky, no one talks about him and Steve hasn’t heard anything in a very long time, not even a single scream. Sometimes he tries dragging something, anything, out of the doctor, but he just chuckles and shakes his head. He’s no longer so scared of Bucky dying, knowing they have use of him, now he’s terrified that the silence means they’ve got Bucky right where they want him, broken down and vulnerable. A weapon.

He’s been counting the amount of injections before each meal comes, and so far it hasn’t failed him. It’s become regular, uniform. He’s had time to plan, even if it’s a weak plan, it’s still a plan, and he’s taking his chances today.

Steve’s head isn’t secured down, not held in place, and that’s about all he has going for him, but it’s better than nothing, right? Even with his hands tied, his body stuck down against the table with metal bands and big, thick, leather straps, he has his teeth and the force of his head. He’ll do whatever he can. He’ll get something out of someone, at the very least.

When the door slides open, Steve’s head is slightly less foggy than usual, a little more alert, both from the drugs slowly wearing off after running its course (he’s due for more soon), and the adrenaline pumping through his body. The same man as always walks through, doesn’t even look at Steve as he grabs the tiny dish of whatever slop he’s going to shove down Steve’s throat.

“Quiet today?” He asks, glancing up briefly. Steve stays silent, just stiffens up a little, tries fruitlessly to look less weak than he feels. “That’s probably best, huh?”

Steve bites his tongue.
“You’ve got someone coming to see you.”

Steve’s body twitches and he feels his heart thump awkwardly in his chest, he can feel it in his throat. “What?” Steve asks stupidly, but he hasn’t ever had a ‘visitor’, not anyone but those two men, over and over. Steve’s whole plan, whatever it really was, suddenly seems too soon, too unplanned and unimportant. Maybe this is a chance to get information, maybe he can crank it out of some fragile, newbie.

“Don’t look so excited,” the man snorts, shoving the spoon past Steve’s lips abruptly. He chokes, spluttering momentarily before forcing it down his throat. It tastes bland, thick and a little sour at the end. He fixes the man with a stern, angry look, but says nothing. “You do know the guy, though. Maybe it’ll be a nice lil reunion.”

“Who?” Steve snaps, eyes looking directly at the man’s own. Steve never looks at him unless he’s forced, especially not in his face.

He laughs dryly. “Guess you’ll get to wait and see, you greedy pig.”

Steve stays silent for the rest of his meal and when the man leaves, Steve feels his body go slack. He wracks his brain instantly, trying to figure out who he might know. Steve doesn’t know many people, really. Outside of the Avengers, he tries to keep to himself, and he can’t possibly think of who might be here.

Steve waits in tense agony, minutes passing slower than molasses. He can feel his heart thundering in his chest, an echo in his ears. The drugs are tapering slightly still, but nowhere near enough that he could function right or even think about a fight. Eventually, when the door makes an automatic sort of humming noise, the clinking noise that’s grown familiar, Steve sucks in a breath, holds it subconsciously as he waits.

The door opens then, slowly and torturously, as it slides back into the panel in the wall. Steve stares down, like if he doesn’t look, maybe it’ll make it less real, but the corner of his vision still catches the toes of heavy, black, combat boots sauntering in and standing there, right in the doorway, not letting it close. Steve can practically taste the freedom from where he is, like it’s being dangled in front of him. It is being dangled in front of him.

“Hey there, soldier boy,” says the voice, gruff and smug. “Lookin’ good as ever.”

Steve’s entire body goes rigid.

“What? Didn’t ya miss me?” Rumlow asks from the entryway, stepping forward and into Steve’s view, letting the door slide shut behind him.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

non-consensual drug use this chapter.

Rage bubbles up in Steve’s chest, spreading hot and fast through his body. He’s seeing red, and any
fear he had or should have now are gone in a snap as he grits his teeth and pulls against his restraints.
“you piece of shit,” Steve barks, earning a wide grin.

Rumlow’s face is a mess, his hair is choppy and hanging in his face in places, not kept at all like
Steve remembered, and the scarring across his face is deeper, more angry than it was the last time
Steve had supposedly killed him. He thought that he’d looked insane before, face burnt and an ugly
red, a wide grin always playing on his face, manic. Now, he looks too calm, too composed, and
there’s a piece of his upper lip missing, exposing two, still unsettlingly white teeth. He can’t fathom
how he’s here, how he’s alive or even in one piece. Wanda had let himself blow himself to pieces
and then an entire burning building? It shouldn’t be possible.

“I know, I know, it’s crazy, isn’t it?” Rumlow said, throwing his hands up. They’re both metal,
wired and unpolished. They don’t look anything as close to the technology done in Bucky’s arm, but
they’re clearly functional. He grins, laughs loudly, voice cracking. “They fixed me up real good,
even after your shitty little stunts.”

Steve’s blood is rushing hard and fast in his ears and he grits his teeth, bites back the strange mixture
of fear and white rage that’s pulsing just under his skin.

“Technology these days, cap,” he sighs, shaking his head and says, “it’s amazing what they can do,
isn’t it?”

“Where’s Bucky?”

“I mean, these hands? Arms, legs... fuck, you name it, it’s all shiny and new, right? They work great.
Good as new. Better, even.”

Steve sucks in a breath. “Where is he?”

Brock doesn’t even bat an eye, doesn’t glance Steve’s direction, just keeps talking and taking. “Hurt
like hell, though. Probably ain’t ever gonna forgive you for that one. Oh well, I’m a little stronger
now, actually. I mean, metal,” he says, leaning to one side, like he’s weighing it as an option.
“Flesh... it’s not as good.”

“Where the fuck is he?!” Steve snaps, and he yanks hard against the restraints like he has a million
times before. Nothing happens of course, and Rumlow actually laughs.

“Calm down, Captain, sheesh,” he says, and he hops up on the one counter in the room, sitting
besides the syringes and other few things. He sits there, crossing his legs and leaning back. “We’re
gonna need him, can’t fuck’m up too bad. Well, I mean, we can, but you get the idea.”

“Where is he.”
“Here? What kind of question is that, I mean, you wanna fuckin see?” He snorts, picking at his fingernail on his partly flesh hand.

“Yes, fucking let me see him!” Steve barks. He can’t fucking believe this shit, none of it. They can’t take Bucky and do that to him, not again.

Rumlow groans and rolls his eyes. “Sheesh, fine.”

Steve watches him, breathing heavily. There’s always a catch.

“How ‘bout I jus’ take you to him?”

“Do it,” Steve snaps and Rumlow laughs again.

Rumow gets off of the counter and shrugs again. “Yeah, okay. We’re still stripping him down, getting him ready to get all that good information in his empty lil head, ya know?” Steve grits his teeth and he gets a toothy grin in return. “Anyways, guess you wanna see for yourself.”

He comes up close to Steve’s face and makes a weird little predatory noise. “Come on then soldier.”

Steve stays silent and Rumlow jabs a needle into his neck. He must have picked it up when he was on the counter. Steve grits his teeth; at least the doctor had known what he was doing and administered each dose with little pain. Rumlow just didn’t care.

Steve felt his body get heavy and fuzzy as he’d grown used to, everything going just slightly out of focus.

“Better?” Rumlow asks, sounding far too pleased. Steve didn’t answer, he refused to feed into his fucking ridiculous antics. If he ignored him, he would get tired of being ignored, like a child. “Huh? God, fine,” he hisses, grabbing another needle and stabbing it over the last injection site.

“Fuck! What’re you doing?” Steve hisses, tugging uselessly away.

“You didn’t answer,” Rumlow shrugs. “How was I supposed to know if that was enough?”

“You piece of shit,” Steve growls, squeezing his eyes shut to stop the spinning that had just taken over his vision. He’d never had two injections at once, one had been more than enough to get his body like jelly. If Rumlow has him spiraling into some super-soldier overdose, he’s going to drop another building on him.

“Oh come on, don’t be a baby,” Rumlow rolls his eyes and smiles, which is apparently his signature look. “Can’t have you pullin’ any stunts when I let ya down, right?”

Steve looks away from Rumlows face before he vomits. His head is thrumming dully, back behind his eyes. Everything sounds like it’s becoming steadily more dull, even as Rumlow continues to talk, he can’t really make out the words. It sounds like he’s underwater.

Rumlow steps in front of Steve, waves a hand in his face and grins. Steve would absolutely punch his face if he could. Steve almost missed when Rumlow released his restraints, his whole body feeling tingly, like when a limb goes to sleep. Rumlow lets him drop down, his knees cracking against the floor beneath him. He’s hardly even able to keep himself up and he hears him laugh above him.

Rumlow grabs him by his arm and drags him upright, letting him sway. The door slides open back into the side panel and Steve feels nausea sweep over him, body cramping from the drugs and being
released from a position he had held for days and days. He must look sick, because Rumlow growls clearly, right up in his ear. “You throw up, I’m gonna kick you down a fuckin flight of stairs, huh?”

Steve stays quiet, his tongue feels too big anyways. Rumlow drags him down several halls that all look the same and blur together as his vision fizzes. Steve stumbles along, though his feet drag half of the way and black is edging its way into his vision. Once they stop in front of a big, steel door that looks similar to the one that had held Steve in, he feels close to passing out.

“Alright, cap,” he hums, punching in a code on a side panel. “Have fun.” he lets the door slide open about half way before he shoves Steve forward.

He doesn’t catch himself, falls forward against the ground again, skin catching against concrete. The room is pitch black as the door slides shut again and the room spins for what feels like only seconds before unconsciousness leeches into his head and he falls back.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Bucky time...

Chapter Notes

WARNING: mute character, blood, non consensual surgical alterations

Steve’s ears are filled with ringing when he starts to come to again. He can feel cool concrete under him and it feels like the room is spinning at a hundred miles an hour. He feels a touch of strength coming back to his limbs, though everything still feels wobbly and out of practice. He groans and rolls onto his back, heaving out a sigh and breathing evenly for several minutes, trying to settle the nausea in his stomach.

Once he feels like he isn’t going to vomit the tiny contents of his stomach up, he works on getting himself sitting up, which takes much longer than it should. Every joint and muscle in his body aches and he can feel the little pinpricks of feeling coming back to his wrists and ankles. His eyes are one of the last things to adjust, even with the serum, the room is almost completely pitch black. There’s a dull, bluish light on one of the walls, but besides that the only other light is what’s creeping in through cracks in the doors and walls.

Steve sits up and leans back on his hands, trying to shake the leftover feeling of the drugs off, eyes still feeling heavy. Before his brain is even thinking properly again, there’s a sound from his left, over his shoulder. He would’ve missed it, if it weren’t for the deafening quiet of the room. It’s just rustling of clothes, or something, but it’s there.

Steve turns, still on his knees and looks at the mass in the corner. There’s chains visible around the floor and hanging from the wall, and the clothes look like scrubs or a hospital gown, he realizes. It clicks slowly into place and a knot ties itself in his stomach. His voice is gruff and cracks when he speaks, “Buck?”

He doesn’t get an answer but he can see the person, Bucky, shift, leaning flat against the wall. Steve moves across the room carefully, not sure he should stand. The closer he gets, the sicker he feels. He can tell it’s definitely Bucky, hair matted and messy. His cheek has a sickening bruise on it, purplish and swollen. The rest of him that’s visible doesn’t look much better, filthy and kind of bruised, bloody. Bucky doesn’t look at Steve in the eye, eyes flicking around anxiously anywhere but Steve.

“Bucky, it’s me,” Steve says, moving into his space. He reaches out and puts a hand on his knee. Bucky flinches and whines, curling into himself and trying to duck his head between his legs.

“Bucky.”

Bucky doesn’t say anything, just continues making little noises in his throat. His body is much thinner than it should be, it makes Steve feel sick. “Buck? You remember me, right?” Steve asked nervously, not sure he wanted an answer. Bucky didn’t budge or say a word though, so Steve had to
move back away from him with a tired sigh. “Gonna burn this fucking place down.”

They sit in a long, still silence for almost twenty minutes before Bucky starts to unfold himself, eyes tired and cast down. Steve hesitates before speaking up again. “Buck…”

Bucky flinches slightly before looking up at Steve. There’s a brief flash of confusion across his face before he looks at Steve with an almost questioning look.

“Yeah, hey, it’s me,” he nods quickly. “Are you okay?”

Bucky stares back at Steve, like he’s trying to place where he knows Steve from. Bucky squeezes his eyes shut then, shaking his head a little.

“Bucky,” Steve says softly, brows drawn together. “Buck, come on, you know me.”

He can see Bucky’s mouth moving, repeating something over and over but he doesn’t hear anything, even when he moves closer. A sickening noise rips it’s way out of Bucky’s throat, more like a gargle and Steve realizes in horror that there’s blood running down Bucky’s chin.

“Bucky, what did you do?” Steve asks frantically, grabbing Bucky’s face in his hands. Bucky whines, trying to pull away. His mouth is shut tightly but Steve can see dried blood on his lips and streaks where it’s run down his face before. “What happened?”

Bucky glares at him in a ‘you better let go, Steve’ face that he recognizes too well. It’s both a relief, knowing he knows Steve, but it’s also concerning, because he isn’t answering or letting him see.

Steve let’s go but he’s still hovering close. “What happened?”

Bucky keeps glaring at him in that same stubborn way he would when he and Steve were arguing about something stupid.

“Bucky, please, you’re bleeding,” Steve begs and Bucky looks at him tiredly and opens his mouth just a little. A mixture of drool and blood trickles from his lip and he wipes it away with the back of his right hand. It takes Steve a minute to realize what he’s looking at and when it finally clicks, he almost vomits. “Jesus christ, what the hell did they do?”

Bucky closes his mouth again and leans back against the wall, a bit of blood drips on his hospital gown. He won’t look at Steve, stares ahead blankly instead. He looks drained.

“Bucky,” Steve starts but he doesn’t know what to say so he closes his mouth again and Bucky just shrugs.

Steve feels sick to his stomach, palms sweating and everything. He suddenly thinks about the fact that Bucky’ll never get that back. He won’t ever see or hear Bucky talk again, no witty remarks or Bucky whispering his name at night in his ear when neither of them can sleep. Nothing. He won’t hear Bucky say another thing again because HYDRA took everything from Bucky and now, inside his mouth, he doesn’t have a tongue, it’s just gone, cut and sewn up towards the base.

Bucky has recovered from the trauma and the pain, he’s made it through, but Steve doesn’t think there’s ever real recovery from this.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

WARNINGS FOR VIOLENCE AND BLOOD

Chapter Notes

whoop, finally updating! sorry I've been so busy!

Bucky is disturbingly calm, considering. His eyes are foggy and he just stares ahead, making sure he’s looking off behind Steve so he doesn’t have to look him in the eye, see the worried, sad expression there. Steve isn’t calm at all, he’s shaking and he feels nausea rising up, up, up in his stomach. He feels dizzy, like it can’t quite be real. He suddenly realizes why Bucky stopped screaming.

“We’ll figure it out,” Steve says after minute after minute passes of silence, torturous and slow. It feels like a lie, it might as well be, because Steve sounds like he has a plan or a promise, and he has no idea what to do.

Bucky looks at him tiredly with a very displeased look. He would probably be giving Steve a earful right now, if he could.

“We will,” Steve says firmly. He doesn’t believe it anymore than before, though.

Bucky turns his head away from Steve again with a little headshake. It makes Steve feel worse, he feels his stomach physically clench. “We’re gonna get out okay? Fucking Rumlow was stupid enough to bring me in here, that’s all the leverage we need.”

Bucky tenses at his name and clenches his fist at his side. He looks at Steve, then, and his expression is anything but convinced as he shakes his head. He looks worn down and Steve doesn’t blame him, but it still makes him angry at everyone else, makes him want to shake him.

“What do you mean? Bucky, we can get the hell out of here before they do anything else, before it gets worse,” Steve says, exasperated. Bucky isn’t even trying. He has to want to get out, more than anything, he doesn’t understand why he just isn’t trying. This isn’t the end, not even close.

Bucky makes a noise along the lines of a scoff. He looks at Steve, gesturing to himself briefly.

“Bucky, we can figure that shit out once we’re out of here, okay? We have to leave.”

Bucky sighs and squeezes his eyes shut. He stays like that for a good two minutes, his eyes shut tight. He nods, eventually and looks at Steve. There’s certainly fear there, behind what Steve is pretty sure are tears.

“It’ll be okay, we’ll get out and figure it all out, it’ll be alright,” Steve says and Bucky leans against Steves chest, head pressed flat against him. “It’ll be okay.”
Bucky stays like that, so Steve strokes his hair gently, working his fingers through the tangles and smoothing it out. Steve doesn’t say anything, he isn’t sure what he would say that he hasn’t already. He thinks Bucky almost falls asleep like that, because his weight settles against Steve’s chest, but then he sits up and moves himself back against the wall again, looking at Steve with that same tired look as before.

“Get some rest, okay? We’ll work this out after.”

Bucky nods slightly and pats the spot besides him, which Steve moves into willingly. Neither of them actually get any rest, Steve’s positive, but the silence is almost welcome.

He watches Bucky’s chest rise and fall in the dim light, watches his fingers pick at the dirty and tiny rocks on the floor. Steve can’t tell if his eyes are open, but he doubts it. Steve tries to sleep, but his body won’t let him, still too wound up. He’s never been through a night (or is it day?) so torturously long. His neck stings, throbbing under his skin. His whole body aches and he tries to stretch and flex, working out the kinks in his stiff, unused body, but it’s hard to do without getting up, and he doesn’t want to disturb the peace they’ve made.

Steve gets the closest he’s been able to sleep right around the time there’s loud clicking, tapping, and the heavy door slides open. Bucky sits bolt upright and Steve follows in suit, moving himself consciously in front of Bucky as Brock enters the room.

“Sleep well?” he asks, walking over to them as the door slides shut behind him.

Steve is sure there’s a dozen people outside the door, guarding, waiting for a single sign to lunge in and assist Brock, but he’s still very aware that he came in alone. This might be the most vulnerable he’s going to able to find Rumlow. He has to take the chance, and he glances back at Bucky, but his eyes are wide and focused on Brock, his brain not working on the same track at all.

“Not feeling talkative, Barnes?” he sneers and Steve feels anger bubble inside his chest. “Well, that’s okay, we’re gonna throw your brain in a blender anyways.”

“Like hell,” Steve snaps. Any idea of staying under the radar until he struck was gone, but that was fine, he’d do what he had to. “Get the fuck back.”

Brock chuckles and shakes his head. “Cap, sweetie, you need to calm down,” he tsks. “There isn’t anything you can do.”

“Touch him and I’ll rip your throat out, Rumlow,” Steve snarls and Brock barks out a laugh.

“From where you’re sitting on the floor in a numb pile of weak muscles?” Brock asks and he’s right, to a degree. He knows they’ve been weakening him. “We’ve got a ton of shit on you and the serum now though, so thanks.”

Steve pales a little and he doesn’t look away from Rumlow, but he’s sure Bucky is sharing a similar look and train of thought. Bucky’s an attempt at copying the serum, and the last thing they need Rumlow to have is access to Steve’s serum strand, which is exactly what they’ve been able to do with Steve as he’s been drugged and chained up.

“That’s kinda what I thought, Cap,” he sighs, shaking his head. “So, let’s get this over with Winter, so we can get our soldier, huh?” he goes around Steve easily and grabs Buckys arm, yanking him forward. Even with Bucky thrashing wildly, he’s weakened too and he falls forward. Brock moves him around like a ragdoll and Steve forces himself up, even though his limbs feel heavy, and his head spins.
He’s sure he’s running purely off of adrenaline but he smashes himself into Brock’s side, yanking at his arm to try and get him to let go of Bucky, who has his fingernails of his flesh hand digging into Rumlow’s wrist.

Brock stumbles back and Bucky makes a strangled noise as he’s jerked forward, pain flashing over his face. “Christ, Rogers, you don’t ever just behave, do you?” Brock shouts as he kicks Steve in the stomach.

Steve grunts and doubles over as Brock pulls Bucky up, up, until he’s half standing, still struggling wildly, though it doesn’t seem to be doing much of anything. “Stop,” Steve spits.

“Or?” Brock asks boredly as he forces Bucky along by him.

Steve grabs at Rumlow in some kind of pathetic attempt and grabs at his shoulder, fingers grazing along his neck. His skin is flaky under his fingers, almost like tissue paper and it tears under Steve’s fingers, pussy and bloody as Brock yells, strangled. He thrashes and let’s go of Bucky, grabbing at Steve’s hand and ripping it away. Every bit of his damaged, scarred skin is flaking away where Steve grabbed, disgusting and painful looking.

Bucky scrambles back and Brock kicks at Steve again several times before Steve’s a heap on the ground. “Fucking pig,” Brock spits, his hand going to cover the weeping flesh. “You managaed to really piss me off, Rogers, congrat-ufuckinglations.”

Bucky makes a noise that sounds wounded and terrified and Brock chuckles, patting Bucky’s cheek with a few light slaps, Bucky flinches all the same. “I didn’t tell him to fuck you over, asset.”

Bucky glares and yanks against the grip Rumlow has on him, but he doesn’t get free. He’s glaring daggers but Brock looks more amused than anything. Steve tries to get himself upright when air finally comes back to his lungs but Rumlow side steps from Steve’s pathetic attempt and Rumlow kicks him, again, this time in the jaw, hard enough Steve’s head snaps back and his vision goes white-hot for a moment. “I already said you pissed me off, Rogers. Gonna have to get this shit touched up again,’ he snarls, jutting his bloody shoulder out in show. “So unless you’re going for ‘how much can we fuck up soldier boy’, I would fuckin’ stop.”

Bucky wilts, sagging against Brock’s hold and he grins. “See? He gets the idea.” he jerks Bucky up and Bucky stumbles, garbled noises forcing their way from his throat. “Let’s go. Now. or maybe we’ll do a little zappin’ just for the hell of it.”

Bucky stumbles along, his legs tripping over themselves as he looks back at Steve with wide eyes as hes drug from the room. The door slams shut behind him and Steve stares blankly for several long minutes, where he can’t quite seem to breathe. He just let Bucky slip away like it was nothing.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

They take Bucky away. there isn't anything anyone can do.

Chapter Notes

Minor blood and broken bones in this chapter.

Bucky thrashes as hard as he can as he’s drug down hall after hall, each one as blindingly bright and white as the last. Rumlow kicks the back of his knee at one point, while two stronger, armed men are dragging him along like a rag doll and Bucky grunts, going full weight fast enough that his face smacks into the floor before the men can get him up again. He hears Rumlow bark out a laugh as he continues along behind them.

His fighting is pointless, he’s too weak like this from all the medication and tests they’ve been doing for any of it to make a difference, but he struggles anyways, kicking his feet out and shaking his head wildly. At the very least, it wears him out before things get worse.

One of the big doors slides open as they approach it, making a hissing sound. Inside the room are tables filled with instruments, shining under bright lights, IV bags and a chair in the center that makes his blood go icy. Bucky makes a garbled noise, distressed. No words or distinguishable sounds will come out even if he tries. He tries to dig his heels into the ground, tries to go deadweight, anything to get away, but it doesn’t do nearly enough. The men give him a solid shove and he stumbles into the room, their grip on him is bruising and Bucky sags in horror and defeat.

“ Took us a while to get this up and running again,” Rumlow admits, walking over so he can kick the base of the chair. “But here we are.”

Bucky tries to fix Brock with a stern glare, angry enough to strike fear in the man like he had when he was the Winter Soldier. He looks terrified now, though, even as he tries to will the panic down-turn it into anger, he feels himself falter. He’s terrified.

“We still have a lot of testin’ we need to do on her though, before we can be sure it’ll really work straight,” Rumlow explains as the men drag him to another chair, this one just a regular, heavily reinforced chair with bolts and straps enough to hold him down. Bucky almost feels a wave of relief, even as they strap him down. He has time. They don’t have it in perfect condition yet. He has time.

“That’s why we got you though, right Soldier?”

Bucky’s blood goes cold again and there air feels punched from his lungs. He can’t-

Steve’s hands are bloody, broken skin and bruising just as fast as they’ll fade. He kicks at the door
again, where the control panel on the other side should be. His legs feel heavy and everything is
tilting- spinning. His heart is still hammering so hard he can hear it in his ears. He screamed himself
hoarse already and now he’s just beating uselessly at a door meant to withstand both he and Bucky at
their strongest. He’s at his weakest.

He isn’t sure anyone can hear him in here or if anyone is even listening. He’s sure there are cameras
but he isn’t looking, he doubts they’re looking at him either.

They’re going to strap Bucky up and their going to torture him again- again and again and Steve
keeps letting it happen. He thinks of the blank stare in Bucky’s eyes when he’d first brought him to
the apartment. The way he was quiet all the time, how he would have spasms and his arm would
twitch, how he would chew his lip bloody, how he’d scream when he woke up from a nightmare.
Steve thinks of how far he’s come, too. He thinks of how Bucky would tease him, punch him in the
arm and make snide comments. He thinks of the days they’d go to lunch after a run with Sam. He
thinks about how Bucky is having all of that stripped away again.

He lets his fist hit the door again, hard enough he feels his knuckle crack, along two of his fingers,
likely splintering bone. It dents the door, but it hardly makes a difference, not even enough to set off
an alarm. He shakes his hand off and hisses through grit teeth. It’ll heal. He’ll heal; Bucky might not.
The doors open, creaking in the way that heavy metal grinding against it’s joints sometimes do. White, artificial light floods into the otherwise dark room in a long beam, stretching across the floor and walls. Steve squints from where he’d thrown himself, up against the back wall. His eyes slowly adjust, the white spots disappearing from his vision as the black outline of several bodies cover the entrance way.

Steve’s knuckles are still bloody and sore, but healing, and he has to bite the inside of his cheek to stop himself from recklessly throwing himself at the men. It isn’t until the group of men, all in uniform, carrying belts equip with sprays and guns and batons, is Steve truly glad of his decision. They walk into the room while another few stand guard outside the door- far too many for Steve to take like this.

“Where’s Bucky?” Steve spits once they’re fully into the room. There are three men actually inside with Steve, several more outside the doors. The men in front of Steve have Guns in their hands, large and loaded. They’re wearing half masks too, that cover just over their noses, some cloth like material. Steve doesn’t quite recognize the guns, but there are a lot of things now that he doesn’t recognize.

None of them bat an eye at his half question, half demand. It isn’t surprising. “Stand up, Rogers.” The voice is almost familiar, maybe someone Steve used to know and work with.

“Where is he?” Steve says again, voice tight. He stays pointedly where he’s at, his heels digging into the ground.

“Christ, get up or we’ll make you,” the man says again, aiming the gun at Steve.

Steve stays where he is, raising an eyebrow in silent invitation to try. It’s stupid. In his state and surrounded by heavily armed men, he doesn’t stand a chance, but he’s not some pet for HYDRA to play with.

The man sighs heavily, in annoyance, Steve thinks. This is just an inconvenience for him. “Restrain him.”

The two other men walk forward briskly and Steve stands quickly. Steve’s bigger than them, in nearly every way, but they still have the upper hand. “Where is Bucky?” Steve spits again, jerking out of one of the men's grasp, right as he grabs at Steve’s wrist. He doesn’t get an answer and instead
one of the men elbows him in the side hard enough that Steve stumbles, his air knocked from his lungs. The other man successfully manages to wrench Steve’s arm behind his back, at an awkward enough angle that it pulls.

The other man, who had winded Steve moments before knocks him to his knees before he can get his gathering and he hits hard. Similar suit is followed, and his other arm is pulled and held behind his back, two distinct knees digging into his back to keep him bent slightly at his middle.

“I think I told you to cooperate,” the man says, the only one who’s done any speaking. He steps up to Steve then and withdraws a needle, shining and all too familiar by now. Steve still can’t put a name to it, fuck he has no clue what it is besides strong enough to turn Steve into jelly.

Steve grits his teeth and jerks his body up and away, trying to get his footing or rip his arms from the men grasps, but he isn’t having much luck. Every time he pulls or tugs, one of the men behind him knees him hard in the back, sending him doubling over again.

“You know this could have already been done by now,” the man says, pressing the air from the needle and watching a bit of the contents spray up.

Steve continues his struggle, even though it’s getting him nowhere. Adrenaline is pumping through his system wildly, his pulse thrumming fast under his skin. The man crouched down at level with Steve and his eyes crinkle, possibly grinning under the stupid mask guard over his face. “Let’s get this cell transfer over with, huh?”

Steve’s brain races to try and connect the dots. They’re moving him. “Fuck off,” Steve says and kicks out, managing to land a blow to the man’s stomach, just above his groin. Both the man and himself end up falling back awkwardly, the needle falling uselessly to the floor with a clink, rolling several feet behind the man— but it’s all just enough that the grip the other two soldiers have on him loosens and Steve wrenches away quickly.

“Grab him and restrain him!” The man says as he pushes himself back up, one arm over his stomach, teeth grit. The men from outside enter almost instantly, and Steve is easily surrounded both from the three men from before and now— five? More men. The syringe, at least, is easily forgotten on the floor, but one of the other men, stronger and considerably taller than the rest, grab Steve by the arm and pull him up like he’s a damn rag doll.

Even with Steve fighting, trying to pull away while simultaneously kicking and fighting back, they restrain him quickly— too quickly— and secure cuffs over his wrists. Steve tugs at it but it doesn’t budge, unsurprisingly. They’re more prepared to deal with Steve (and Bucky) than almost anyone.

“Where the fuck are you taking me, then?” Steve barks, still trying to break away. It wouldn’t do him any good now, even if he could. Not with so many armed men around him and not with cuffs on his wrists.

“Puttin’ you somewhere a little more permanent.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Steve growls, still thrashing against their hold.

The man bends down and picks up the syringe off of the floor cursing and flashing a glare at Steve. “He broke the damn thing,” he says, throwing it back onto the floor, a wet spray of whatever had been in it before, splattering across the ground by the man’s boots. He sighs, folding his arms over his chest, like he’s contemplating something before he snarks, “Don’t make us rough ya up, Cap’n.”

Steve glares. “Where are you taking’ me? How about you answer that and maybe we can come to an agreement.” Steve spit back.
The man barked out a laugh and crossed the small space between them and gripped his jaw. “How about you shut the hell up, Rogers?”

“Like hell.”

Steve’s vision went white, hot pain cracking across his jaw as the man lands a solid blow across his jaw. His head whips to the side and he feels blood and bruising blossom hot across his face and in his gums. It wells up quickly and he spits, letting it ooze from his lip. It takes a moment for his brain to catch up- his lip is split, at the very least.

The man laughs. “That’s a good look on ya, cap.” he says and they pull him up while his vision is still spinning, blood and pain spiking as his senses come back to him. “Let’s get him to a room before he gets his brain workin’ again.” he waves a hand and they do, pulling him up all at once, dragging him along even as he fights.

They take him down a hall, mostly dragging him while he grumbles and fights- and down some stairs that are too steep, too narrow for all of these men and it’s an awkward fumble of limbs all while Steve’s face is bleeding everywhere. Finally, at the base of the stairs, there’s a long row of cells, each dim and cramped, and he’s quickly tossed into one. Disposed of.

“How’s that?” the man asks, standing outside his cell as the other man disperse, going about whatever their next mindless order is.

“At least I can see,” Steve responds dryly. “Lack of hand movement is- less desirable.”

The man scoffs and shakes his head before he turns and leaves, leaving Steve alone on the floor. It doesn’t make sense, why they would move him somewhere so much more open. This looks worlds easier to escape, until the bolted doors start coming down, one after the other, and he’s left in a cage, inside a bigger, sturdier cell, and suddenly he understands. reinforcements.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Warnings for mild torture and brainwashing.

Chapter Notes

Comin' at you with those filler chapters. sorry, guys.

Bucky is lifted from the chair by strong, firm hands. His legs feel numb under him and his weight slumps forward involuntarily, even his head falls forward, still thrumming with electricity, every inch of him tingling and hurting. A fifth gloved hand grabs at his neck, turns his body this way and that like a doll, just inspecting. Behind all of the fog and the waves of pain, he hears talking. The voices aren’t recognizable, just orderly, mumbling things that he’s sure someone is writing down.

“Soldier?” Another voice says, the sound cutting through the fog with a piercing ring.

The gloved hand grabs his jaw roughly, forcing his head up. The lights are blinding, but he can make out a white jacketed figure several feet in front of him. “Fuck off,” Bucky forces to mouth out, even through teeth he can’t seem to stop clamping shut. One of the men still holding him grunts a laugh out, jostling Bucky’s already sagging, weak posture.

“Try again, perhaps?” The man says again, the one in the coat. Bucky thinks he’s met him before, he’s almost sure of it, but he doesn’t remember a name. He was probably never given one.

Bucky sucks in a deep breathe, the inhale and expand of his chest makes his head spin and sharp pain shoots through his head all over again. He tries to level his voice, his jaw still clamped and tight from biting down so hard when they’d fried him. No point in a guard if he can’t bite off his-- right. That. He tries something along the lines of a pout this time, which hurts where his fucking tongue should be much less.

“Prep him and wipe him again,” the man sighs, waving a dismissive hand in his general direction as he scrawls something on a clipboard. “You’re making this far more difficult than he needs to be, Barnes.”

Bucky tries to flash him a somewhat convincing grin before they push him back down into the chair, his hair falling back down into his face enough that his vision is heavily obscured, but still blocks the god awful lights. Bucky grunts when his back hits the hard material of the chair. He squeezes his eyes shut when they start to strap him down again. They aren’t even taking usual precautions; they know he’s too weak to do anything. They’re just mocking, rubbing it into his face.

Just hang in a while longer and he’ll be okay. Steve’ll come crashing in, have some big, dumb superhero moment and rescue Bucky like a damsel in distress for not the first time and it’ll be fine. He just needs to wait a while longer, he thinks again as the guard his force the straps around his wrists. Just a little longer.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Steve's situation isn't gr8

Chapter Notes

yeesh, Finally updating. I've been in a slump and then I got influenza, so blah. hope you guys enjoy!

Hours bleed into each other, slowly and painfully until the next passing minute blurs into the next several days. There isn’t a way to tell how long it’s been by now. It’s easier not to try and figure it out. His brain is too sluggish, too tired. Even a Super Soldier needs sleep, and Steve hasn’t been getting any. He’s punched walls and yelled and cursed Rumlow and every other HYDRA agents name under the sun, but it never helps and none of it brings Bucky back.

Morbidly, despite the fact he tries to push the thoughts out of his head, back into the furthest corners of his mind, he can’t help but wonder how much of Bucky they’ve taken apart already.

Bucky’s persistent and stubborn, but he’s not too stupid to see when the fight in someone is clean out. Steve wonders how much of that is his fault. Whatever they were able to extract from him while they held him up in a room, needle after needle flitting through his line of vision, they were able to get something, at least. They had a start if nothing else, and it was a start towards sealing the deal on getting Bucky tucked safely away under HYDRA.

It isn’t hard to assume the things they want to learn from Steve’s serum, in all of its glory, but he can’t begin to understand or even wonder the endless possibilities of what they find in his vials of blood might mean for Bucky. Stronger, possibly. Steve hopes secretly that it all backfires, that it only helps aid Bucky in this awful mental battle between his brain being wiped like a clean slate and staying himself, or what he’s rebuilt.

Maybe Shuri can help again when it’s all done. She can work whatever high tech magic she has up her sleeve and fix up Bucky again, good as new. The thought, as redundant as it is, gives him some peace of mind at least.

Steve gets up again, pacing the small space of his cell. His legs are sore and stiff and pacing is about the only thing keeping him from cramping up completely or at least going stir crazy. The bars hold strong, against Steve’s kicks and punches and whatever else he could possibly try. Even if they didn’t hold though, he’s surrounded by more bars and concrete thick enough he can feel the thick pressure of the room bearing down. Finally, the door out is wired up, humming with electricity in its deep cut out in the wall. Its well made, and they know it. They know it’s more than enough to hold Steve, it would hold Bucky too, no problem.

“Piece of shit,” Steve mumbles, kicking at the corner of the cell door. It doesn’t budge, doesn’t move an inch from where it’s so secure in the cement beneath it. He would sleep if he didn’t see the
desperate look in Bucky’s eyes or the hollowed out gape of his mouth every time he shut his eyes. Feeling sorry for himself isn’t getting him anywhere, but it’s easy to do, and as it turns out, one of the only things to do. So, he stays tired and sluggish in his holding cell, silent and infuriating.

Over what Steve can only assume is the next several hours to a day or two, men in tactical gear with guns slung heavy on their back trudge into his cell and drop food in small rations at his feet. It isn’t a lot, not nearly enough for Steve’s size, but luckily he has some familiarity with the feeling of an empty stomach. Unless Steve’s sense of time is slipping quickly away from him, there’s no real order to who or when or how they feed him. It’s all like an afterthought.

Still, Steve rations away bits of food and any plastic that comes off of or with his tiny meals and hides them back in one of the corners, just out of sight unless they’re looking for it. From what he can tell, they aren’t. He has no real plan, not even the beginning of an idea that could lead to a plan, really. He’s just collecting and waiting, hoping something comes along and that he gets an opportunity to strike, to do anything.

It’s a long shot, sitting and waiting, hoping for a miracle, but Steve isn’t sure there’s much left to do. He hasn’t heard from or seen Rumlow since he got dumped down here, and he wonders if he’s too busy with other things. Things like Bucky. He’s losing his fight, quickly instead of slowly, and he hopes he’s the only one.

The last thing he needs is for Bucky to be losing his own battle somewhere else in the giant expanse of the building.
There’s a loud guttural sound that rolls off of the walls in the small, dark space of the room. It’s pained and miserable, and it takes Bucky several seconds too long to realize he’s the one that made it. His body is still tingling, heavy as all hell and certainly too heavy to move or get any leverage, so he stays put without many other options. He’s on the ground, he can feel the coldness of the ground seeping into his skin and the hard and unyielding press against sore muscles and bones. His jaw aches most, he thinks, and he can feel the grit of the floor cutting into the tight skin. There’s a mix of bloody spit, thick and dribbling from his lips that feel wrong on his face, pooling under him without anywhere else to go. Swallowing now is too much of a feat, truthfully. It’s painful and haunting in ways Bucky can’t begin to describe, even after the fucked things he’s been through. There’s something worse about the empty hurt in his mouth.

The past several days (weeks?) are a grey blur, patchy, unfamiliar and wrong. That itself feels familiar, the feeling of time being eaten away, swept out from under Bucky’s feet. He hates it, but it isn’t new.

“Soldier.”

The voice is loud and close, close enough that Bucky wonders how the hell he didn’t notice someone standing there before. There’s a twinge in the back of his head, like muscle memory and it makes his mouth dry. Bucky doesn’t answer, out of spite and out of pain, because truthfully he doesn’t know how the hell he would answer anyways.

“Up, soldier.”

Bucky squeezes his eyes shut, feels his body jerk slightly to attention and it hurts too much to ignore, so he lets himself pull himself into a ragdoll sitting position, feeling heavy in all the wrong ways.

“That’s progress, huh?” The man barks and another man, standing behind him shakes his head.

“Yeah, right.”

“How’re we feeling, soldier?”

Bucky stares tiredly, unblinking. The men aren’t familiar, just suited up like everyone else he’s seen since he arrived here. He doesn’t answer, not that he doesn’t feel the pull to obey, but it’s distant enough that it’s manageable.

“Quiet today?”

“He doesn’t have a fuckin’ tongue, you idiot,” one of the men spits and Bucky just hardens his gaze.

The second man shrugs. “He can still answer.”

There’s a tense silence after that, thick with annoyance before the first man snaps his fingers outward
at Bucky like he’s a dog. “Come on, I said up.”

Bucky grits his teeth together and feels the hot rush of blood flood his mouth again and grimaces at the torn stitches in his mouth. He’s already sitting, mostly at least, and standing for the two men isn’t a top priority for Bucky, considering the way his legs feel like weights under him. Still, there’s the familiar tug to obey, buried not so far under his own will. He flips his middle finger up instead and the man snorts, shaking his head.

“Why aren’t we wiping it again?”

“Orders,” the man shrugs, watching Bucky with thin eyes and a greasy looking smile. “You think I know anything?”

Bucky figures neither of them knows jack shit about what’s going on outside of their tiny orders to play commander to the dog until they drag Bucky back under again. He doesn’t have time to consider why they aren’t still wiping him, over and over, because one of the men steps forward until his waist is at eye level with Bucky’s face and he nudes at him with a boot. “We said up, soldier.”

Bucky doesn’t look up to meet the man’s gaze, keeping his eyes fixed on the floor instead. He won’t give them any satisfaction, and Bucky doesn’t fully trust his expression not to falter. The man kicks out at Bucky’s knee, hard enough his reflexes jerk, but it isn’t painful, not really. Everything else already aches too much to really tell. “Up,” he snaps again, stomping his foot close to where Bucky’s hand is sprawled on the ground, a teasing threat that he’ll crush his hand under his boot. Bucky isn’t sure how hard the man will go, seeing the lack of knowledge and experience oozing from him, but he doesn’t doubt he’s sucked enough to cause a little pain.

“Here, I’ll help you,” he says finally and he grabs under Bucky’s arm, the metal one, and he pulls up. Bucky can’t help the bloody grin that spreads across his face at the mistake. He hurts, head spinning like the world might fly out from under him, but it’s enough leverage that Bucky can grab the man’s arm, seizing his wrist and jerking hard one way until he hears the satisfying and telltale *pop* that comes with bones snapping out of place. The men howl is nearly inhuman, his body twisting to grab at his arm from where he’s standing, stuck in Bucky’s grip.

“I’m gonna fucking kill you,” the man hisses, voice cracking as he thrashes out wildly. It isn’t hard to avoid his mild movement with the way Bucky has him, but the other man comes rushing to his side with his gun drawn and loaded and that could be an issue.

“Let him go,” the man says, pressing the gun to Bucky’s head. He can hear the tremor in his voice and feel the unsteady hold his has on the trigger, adrenaline rushing through his body. He’s a rookie, undoubtedly, he can hear it and see it in every action. It makes it easy to kick his foot out at the man and knock his balance. He curses as the gun scatters to the floor, sliding across the concrete. It’s too far for Bucky to get without putting himself in a more compromising position, but neither of the soldiers can reach it either, and that has to be enough of a victory right now.

Bucky wrenches the first man backward by his broken arm, efficiently slamming their two bodies together. Bucky hears the other man shout and blood puddles on his bottom lip at the collision, catching in his beard and dribbling down his tactic suit. Bucky moves on instinct, lets his arm lock around one of their necks while his metal hand clasps down hard on a broken wrist, holding him hostage there, unless he goes to break his arm further- something Bucky can already tell he won’t do.

“He broke my fucking nose,” the man shouts, struggling as Bucky’s arm presses into his windpipe until he feels each labored breath. He presses harder and harder, his fingers digging into the tender flesh of the other man’s arm until finally, he goes limp and drops. The room is spinning so fast by now that he isn’t sure if the man is dead or unconscious, but either works for now. Bucky redirects
his attention to the other man then, wrenching both of his arms tight behind his back and he gasps, the whites of his eyes wide.

“Stop, fuck!”

Bucky doesn’t, and instead, he pulls harder, fully aware of the blood running down his chin now. There are a million words spinning around in his head that he’s ready to spit out but he can’t, so he settles for snapping his hold down and letting the man's arms splinter instead. The sound of a scream is cut short and falls silent instead, even with his chest still heaving and his mouth still gaping. When he drops, his body is rigid and purpling. Bucky feels good.
His breathing is so loud that he can hear it echo off of the empty walls. He can feel his heart thudding in his chest, pounding in his ears with the rush of adrenaline still pulsing through him. It feels good, he feels powerful. Their both still alive, laying at Bucky’s feet like broken dolls, but the one man is still unconscious, blood bubbling in his mouth with his own spit. Bucky wonders if it’ll drown him. The other man is wheezing, arms mangled at his sides but maybe not entirely there.

It only takes Bucky a minute to come back to himself, still dizzy where he’s standing, but it’s enough to remind himself he needs to get out. It just takes a couple of seconds to confiscate the guns off of the men, grabbing their ID while he’s at it. He slips one of the guns under the band of his pants and holds the other at ready. The door scans the ID with a soft beep and slides open easily. Bucky’s almost dizzy with the ease of it all.

There’s no one waiting outside the door as backup, just an empty hall. Bucky’s still sure it’s only a matter of time before someone notices he’s running lose through the base though, either from cameras or from the next unfortunate man to stumble down the same hall. He doesn’t have long, but he thinks he might have long enough to at least find Steve if he can remember where they were being kept. The inside all looks very much the same, from the walls and doors to the indiscrete numbering by the stairs. He ends up choosing wildly and heading down one direction. He has to find it eventually.

He doesn’t see a single security camera along the walls or ceiling, but he isn’t stupid enough to think that means there aren’t any. HYDRA is cocky, but they aren’t stupid. It would be more than a rookie mistake to not have all of the security they could get their hands on. The halls wind on for what feels like ever and Bucky can feel his nerves starting to build. Everything seems too still and quiet, bright lights and empty rooms. It all feels wrong. Still, he continues forward until he finds a set of stairs at the end of the hall. They’re behind a closed and locked door, and Bucky actually has to remember he has access now with the men’s keycards. He swipes it across the scanner and it whirrs loudly for a torturously long second before beeping and flashing green, the door clicking unlocked.

He’s halfway down the stairs when there’s the sound of a buzz, like from over an intercom and Bucky halts, foot hovering over the next stair as he listens. There’s no other sound for several long seconds while he holds his breath and he’s about ready to get moving again when he hears it again, from the bottom of the stairs, curved out of Bucky’s sight.

There are two options that Bucky sees, and he doesn’t like either, truthfully. He could head back up the stairs, quiet as he can manage and hope he can find another way to get down there, or maybe just stumble across Steve somewhere else entirely. Or, he can force himself down the rest of the stairs and take on whatever and whoever is waiting, likely better armed and better trained than the last men. Bucky kicks himself mentally when he pushes on and grips his gun a little tighter to his side.

He rounds the corner as soon as he hits the bottom landing of the stairs and there’s at least five or more men standing there. They’re just standing around, likely just standing guard, but the second between Bucky seeing them and them seeing Bucky isn’t nearly enough time for him to react and it’s
only a moment before they see him. One of the men spins on his heels and aims his gun in a second
flat. “Fuck,” he hisses and the other men follow his actions in a similar fashion, quick and precise.

“Soldier,” one of the men says in what he thinks is supposed to be an an authoritative voice. He looks
about ready to shit himself though and it makes Bucky laugh in his throat. “Stand down.”

Bucky raises an eyebrow. Or what?

Bucky eyes his own gun and theirs teasingly. He’s outnumbered, especially in the state he’s in, he
doesn’t stand a chance, but they’re still terrified. It’s enough to tip the balance of the fight just slightly
in his favor. “Where’s Steve,” Bucky tries, though the words are barely there, just a garble of messy
syllables.

“Threatening, but I think you’re misunderstanding who’s givin’ orders,” the man closest says and
Bucky could scream sheerly out of frustration.

Still, no one’s shooting. There’s a silent standoff happening and it clicks that its all strict orders. They
can hurt him, he’s sure, but they can’t really hurt him. Damaging him at this point in their process
would be detrimental. They can’t test a broken machine. Bucky fires the gun into the first man’s
head.

The next minute whizzes by in a blur of shouting and bloodshed, Bucky’s fist colliding with the face
of the man who tries to point a gun at the base of Bucky’s skull, his gun fires off rapidly with
practiced ease and perfection, and soon enough, Bucky is standing around a heap of lifeless bodies.
The blood on his skin already feels tacky and cool and his hands feel stiff, finger bracing the trigger.

He shouldn’t be surprised when, after the commotion and bodies under his feet, when a red light
starts flashing above his head, a siren wailing in alarm. Of course, he’s been caught, too loud and too
rash. The invisible clock is counting down in Bucky’s head and he moves forward quickly. He just
needs to find Steve before they can stop him. He just needs Steve.
Steve’s heart sinks as soon as he hears an alarm sound, high pitched and wailing to catch everyone’s attention. There’s a light in the far corner of the room too, flashing red. It lights the room in an eerie glaze and all Steve can do is sit back and wait.

He already knows Bucky’s the cause. He can only hope that the alarm is because Bucky is out, and not that the Winter Soldier has gone haywire. The thought alone leaves a bad taste in Steve’s mouth. He stays leaning against the wall of the cell, fingers drumming anxiously, but the alarm doesn’t stop and Steve has no way of knowing what’s happening.

It feels like almost an hour of his ears ringing and the red flash creeping across the walls over and over before he finally hears anything. It’s gunfire, clear as day, even through the heavily locked down doors. Steve holds his breath, keeps his body tense and ready to react. Then, it stops and it falls silent outside and Steve is about ready to start slamming his body into things again when he hears footsteps outside, heavy and uncoordinated. It’s hard to gauge when there’s an alarm obscuring the sound, but Steve knows someone’s coming.

There’s another several tense minutes of waiting, holding his breath until his lungs burn and then, finally, the door whines and creaks and it starts to open, heavy hinges groaning in protest. When the door finally opens, Bucky pushes through, wide-eyed and bloody. His hospital-like gown is rucked up and the waistband of his thin cotton pants are holstering a gun.

“Bucky?” Steve asks, his voice scratchy from lack of use.

Bucky’s eyes meet Steve’s and he grins. Steve isn’t sure what blood is Bucky’s and what blood isn’t but he’s upright and he looks mostly okay, from what he can see. There’s dried blood on his lips and chin that’s clearly his own and it makes Steve feel ill, but otherwise, he looks okay. Bucky trudges over to the door of Steve’s cell, bare feet smacking against the stone floor.

“You okay?” Steve asks, voice unsteady.

Bucky glances at him momentarily, eyes hazy. He doesn’t make an attempt to answer or even nod his head. Steve can see a cut above his eye, across his eyebrow that’s matted thick with blood, the skin swelling and purplish. Bucky’s hurt, but he’s still standing, so Steve keeps his mouth shut.

Bucky yanks on the door but it doesn’t budge, unsurprisingly. Steve’s tried everything he could imagine. Bucky just grunts and tries several more times, chest heaving before Steve cuts in.

“There’s all sorts of shit locking the door,” Steve says as Bucky examines it, his silhouette harsh against the red light. He nods, pulls out several key cards and looks over the names, the clearance on the top corner. Eventually, he lands on one and swipes it across the tiny scanner on the outside of the bars. It beeps and whirs for a second before unlocking. There are still at least three locks left, some that clearly need a key neither of them have.

It doesn’t take long for Bucky to grow visibly impatient and he waves a hand at Steve to move back. “Don’t do something stupid,” Steve says, though he’s smiling. Bucky just raises an eyebrow at him.

The alarm is still wailing and they both know more men, likely better-trained men with new orders are on their way, and the tension in the room is thick. Steve steps back against the far wall, opposite where Bucky is right as he brings the butt of his gun down on the lock. It crackles with electricity and Bucky hisses with a sharp intake of breath as he shakes the electricity from his hands.
“You okay?” Steve asks anxiously, craning his neck to see. Bucky gives him a thumbs up, annoyed. “If it’s wired with electricity like that I’m not-”

Bucky aims and fires the gun several times into the locking mechanism with precision and Steve grimaces at the ringing left behind in his ears. The lock sparks and smoke spirals up from the box before Bucky knocks against it again with his gun and a hunk of the machinery falls to the floor with a clank.

“Okay, that works,” Steve says and Bucky smacks up against the door, shoulder first and the door cracks and swings open, finally. “Let’s get out of here?”

Bucky mouthes a grin and shakes his head, tossing his extra gun to Steve. They don’t even make it halfway out of the cell before there are men crowding in on them and guns cocked and ready to fire.

There’s a nakedness in not having his shield but Steve steps out in front of Bucky anyways, despite his protest. The men are positioned perfectly, cutting off any exits, guns drawn and ready. There’s more of them than Steve can count and certainly more than they can take.

“This is all, just really inconvenient,” Brock says, hidden amongst the sea of bodies. “You know?”

Steve’s fingers twitch around the gun. There are a dozen bullets in the chamber, each screaming to be embedded in Rumlow’s skull. Nothing would please him more, truly. The other times he’s come so close, even when he thought he’d ended his life before, none of that would be quite so satisfying as to do it now, with an audience. With Bucky.

Rumlow pushes through the men, geared up heavier than half of the people around him. He knows he’s a target, he isn’t so dumb as to waltz up to two supersoldiers and hope they don’t turn his insides to putty.

“How far did we get on your training, Winter?” he asks, fingers drumming on his hip, loaded with guns and grenades. “Not far enough, obviously, but that temper says otherwise.”

Bucky is rigid beside Steve, just tucked back enough Steve can’t see his face. Steve keeps his eyes locked on Rumlow as he moves through the mass of soldiers. It’s hard to gauge how Bucky is mentally when he can’t talk, but Steve hadn’t even thought they’d had a chance to wipe him even once, he’d seemed okay- it makes guilt well inside of his gut.

“Come on soldier,” he hums, flicking a finger out in a beckoning motion.

Steve almost chokes on a laugh, gun ready at his side before he sees Bucky’s stiff form jerk two steps forward, eyes wild. There’s less Bucky in his face now than before- more terror, something raw and awful.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.”
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

YOOO, this chapter has a brief mention of suicidal thoughts. stay safe everyone. <3

Chapter Notes

sorry for the late update, writing this much makes my brain leak out my ears sometimes.

Bucky’s knees shake under him, head buzzing. Everything feels heavy. He takes a couple steps forward before he notices and before he can stop himself. It’s automatic like his brain is running on autopilot. In a way, it is. He grits his teeth and digs his fingers into the meat of his arm, the metal hard and grounding. There were no trigger words, not even when they were wiping him. It’s wrong and there’s something terrifying about having his brain and body working against each other.

“Progress,” Rumlow shrugs, clearly amused with the way he’s grinning ear to ear. It’s beyond aggravating and it only makes Bucky angrier, shaking with rage as he balls his hands into tight fists, the metal plates of his arm clicking and sliding into place. “See? Our Soldier is still in there!”

“No, he isn’t!” Steve spits, words like venom.

“What, you think that he breaks his programming a couple of times and suddenly over sixty years of programming and training is just gone? It’s still there, Cap, it never really left. We had nice trigger words, but that’s alright.”

Bucky feels sick deep in his stomach, twisting and churning like there’s something alive in his gut. Everything Rumlow is saying is ringing too loud in Bucky’s ears and he can’t protest, can’t deny it because he knows it’s true. It’s all true. He feels it lurking somewhere in the back of his mind, even after the therapy and after Shuri, after everything, the Winter Soldier is always there, is always him. It’s easy to ignore most of the time, just something he can shake off, and God knows he’s got his fair share of PTSD to blame for it too, but sometimes after waking up from a nightmare, sweaty and shaking, he almost forgets who he is.

“He’s not a fucking game and he’s not a weapon,” Steve growls. Bucky can’t quite bring himself to look at him. “What’re you gonna do with all of these guys, Rumlow? Kill us? And then what? How’ll you fix the serum, how will you get your soldier back, huh?”

Bucky wishes he’d stop talking. He’d rather die here than go back into a room with any of these men, he doesn’t need Steve edging them closer to that defeat.

“Shoot to wound, not to kill, Captain,” Brock hums simply, voice gruff.

Bucky wants to die. They’re never getting out of this, not alive, not with half of his mind. He just wants to shoot himself on the spot, he would if it meant not having to go through all of this again. He could. He thinks about it. Finger hovering over the trigger.
Steve breaks Bucky’s train of thought when he fires his gun twice into Brock’s shoulder. Brock shouts out some strangled, awful noise that makes Bucky giddy. “Fucking hell, Rogers! You don’t stop!” he shouts. Several men step forward, ready for instruction. “Soldier, knock Cap down a couple notches, will you?” he says confidently, grinning, blood seeping through his fingers as they clutch at his shoulder.

Bucky doesn’t even notice the seconds that pass between standing there and clubbing Steve over the head with his gun.
Head ringing, loud. It’s all too loud. Focus.

Focus.

He’s following the men down the hall, one foot after the other. He doesn’t have to think to move or to follow, his body does it automatically, anyways. The path isn’t familiar to him but the atmosphere is. It’s dense, strict. It’s familiar.

“We’ll wipe him again, just to be safe,” says a voice that he’s heard a million times before. He doesn’t know the name or the face but he knows the voice. “I have no fuckin clue how far under he is or how tight to programming is.”

Someone agrees, but the voice isn’t important like the other one was, so he tunes it out.

Head is so loud, too much noise. There’s ringing, screeching in his ears.

He’s not walking anymore. walk.

He should move forward-

His head is spinning faster and faster, it’s so loud now.

“Soldier.”

His eyes snap up. They’re stopped too, looking at him.

respond.

“Problem?” he asks. He looks bored.

He can’t speak, his mouth is dry, there’s something wrong, something not right. He’s not how he’s supposed to be. He opens his mouth but the words don’t come out as they should, nothing comes out at all.

The man laughs, shaking his head. “Right. A shake or nod of your head will do fine, huh, soldier?”

He nods. That he can do. That isn’t wrong.

“Let’s go then.”

He nods again, moving forward. His head isn’t so loud anymore. It’s ringing in his ears still, softer now. Background. Manageable.

They step into a room. It’s dark and it smells like metal and antiseptic. It smells hot. It’s mostly empty inside. There’s a metal stand with a tray on it and a chair in the center, it’s large and metal and familiar. His gut twists and everything is still moving on autopilot but his legs feel stiff.

Don’t. Bad.

Worse if you don’t.
“Alright, Soldier. Take a seat, you’re the lucky winner.”

The soldier. Right.

Don’t.

He crosses the room and takes a seat in the chair. It’s stiff and cold to the touch under him. His head rests against the headrest like it was made for it. Maybe it was. Was he worth that?

The next men that he sees aren’t familiar either but they’re wearing white coats that look too familiar. His blood feels icy hot in his veins.

Get up. Stand up.

He doesn’t move, even if something is itching to.

They move his arms for him, resting them on the arms of the chair. They strap them down then, one man on either side of him. It’s metal and rough, digging into his skin from the tightness. He still doesn’t move.

The man to his right readies a needle with an IV drip.

Bad. wrong. It’s very wrong.

The ringing is so loud again, it’s all he can hear. They’re talking now, but it’s so muted. It’s like he’s underwater. He’s drowning.

The man slides the IV into his arm and it feels like only seconds after that, that everything starts to slow down. Everything feels heavy, he slips down in his seat a little. They’re moving around him in blurs of color and movement. Everything sounds like TV static.

They place something over his head at his temple.

Then there’s just white hot. His vision is white, head is blank. Hurts.

It hurts so much.
Chapter 15

Steve skids down another empty hallway, body off-balance, and his head throbbing. There’s the taste of copper heavy in his mouth, sliding down the back of his throat as his nose continues to bleed. The men unconscious or dead several floors back aren’t even on his mind anymore, the second he’d regained consciousness he’d bustled away however he had to and now his attention was on finding Bucky.

There’s still blackness edging at his vision with every step he takes, unusually out of breath, but he can’t stop. Not right now, anyway. Even as he continues on, there’s no sign of a fight, no sign of Bucky. He knows, deep down that Bucky isn’t who followed them so willingly, but he still can’t quite wrap his head around it all. It had been so easy, hadn’t it? To turn Bucky against him again, a simple order from fucking Rumlow and everything was blown to shit again.

He wonders how many times they wiped him before Steve ever got to him, or before Bucky rescued Steve. Too many.

He can’t tell how long he was knocked unconscious by the blow Bucky had dealt him but even five minutes is five minutes too long. Five minutes for them to drag Bucky somewhere and worsen what they’ve already done. He wonders how much Bucky tried to resist, but he can’t tell. Everything in his face had done blank, paled.

Steve physically shakes his head as he slips down another hall, just as blindly white and long as the last seven, he’d been down. There just weren’t any signs of Bucky and without a password, even the codes off of several of the guys’ badges wouldn’t suffice that kind of level clearance. He was ready to tear through doors barehanded if he had to, rage boiling inside of him. They never quit, they never lost sight of their asset and Steve let him get yanked away from him, again.

He kicks in door after door, shoots locks off of more heavily secured ones. It’s a rush he hasn’t felt in years. There’s an urgency and determination in every single movement he makes. No Bucky, move on. HYDRA agent, shoot them, move on. He continues in robot-like fashion for a while, never slowing. Always precise. He won’t fuck around when there’s so much on the line, it’s like everything is black and white.

It’s awful, makes Steve’s stomach sink low and heavy, but there’s no mistake he’s close when he hears a distant sort of howl, pained and uncensored. It’s Bucky, he already knows. The voice alone gives it away, no matter how inhuman it sounds, twisted with pain, it still sounds like Bucky. Maybe that’s the worst part of it.

He sprints down the hall and takes a couple of sharp turns around a corner or two and then he finds himself in front of a big, metal door. He almost starts firing off the gun. Blow out the hinges or whatever he can- but he risks hitting Bucky then, and that isn’t an option. He tries almost ten pin numbers, none of them work. He throws the cards aside, frustration welling over. “Bucky!” he shouts, loud enough his voice cracks. If he hears, if anyone hears, he has no sign of it.

He backs up, gives himself enough momentum and slams into the door, shoulder squared. The metal dents on impact but it doesn’t break the code and it doesn’t break the door. He kicks it as hard as he can, one, two, three times. Nothing works. He shoots the keypad but it does nothing, the bullet ricochets off like nothing. It doesn’t take long for the screaming to start up again and even though it’s more than enough to get Steve’s blood red hot under his skin, he still hardly makes any progress at all. The noises from the other side of the door grow steadily worse and at a quick pace. The screams become broken off and wounded, wavering in and out. There’s a couple of sounds that sound almost
like words, but through the door, Steve can’t tell.

“Rumlow, I swear to God, I’ll cut your fucking throat!” Steve roars, his voice bouncing off of thick walls. It doesn’t ease the tight feeling growing in his chest, and it doesn’t help Bucky, but it feels good just to yell.

Through the thick of the wall at some point between screaming and Steve’s maddened pounding on the door, he hears a particularly broken sound, picks up on Bucky’s voice. “Stopp, please-” and if he says anything else, he doesn’t hear it. Steve squeezes his eyes shut.

Steve selfishly wishes for Sam, who’s always so level headed. He’d know what to do and he’d fucking do it, instead, Steve is practically on his knees in front of a door. A single door keeping him from what he needs. “Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Steve curses, letting his head fall against the door with a solid thud. “Sorry. I’m sorry.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Some Bucky oomphy-oomph

Chapter Notes

I'm on a roll rn with this story and I'm really excited to do these next few chapters...
Kinda tempted to post another on Sunday too

His limbs are heavy. His mouth is full of something, something dry, wooly. His head is tilted awkwardly away from his body like his neck forgot how to hold it up. His whole body is fizzing with electricity, little currents still running hot through every nerve ending.

There’s an awful noise, long and pained, it’s him. His mouth is just kind of hanging open, his teeth ache and he can’t quite find the strength to close his mouth, the long stream of unending whines falling from his throat.

_Do it again. Yes. wipe it. Morning soldier._

_Good morning Soldier._

He groans even though his throat is dry. His head is getting loud again, even with how heavy he is, how sated. He just needs-

Needs an order, needs for his thoughts to become white noise again, dismissable. Empty, safe.

Who--

Soldier.

Good morning soldier.

_Remember me?_

His head is swimming. He doesn’t remember, but he knows his handlers voice more than he knows anything. He tries to look up but his head doesn’t comply. That’s okay.

“Do it again,’ he hears his handler bark from somewhere so close and very far away. “Wipe him.”

“We should wait for his levels to even out a little, sir. He’s still mostly unresponsive.”

“Mostly?” he scoffs, he can hear the spit. “Fuck, I’ll get him responsive if that’s what you need.”

He hears no reply but he feels when a strong hand grabs his chin, fingers digging into his skin. He forces his head up, still so heavy. His vision dances, spots of black and color dotting his line of
vision. Everything hurts. The light is so bright, even through eyelids that won’t open all the way.

“Hey there soldier,” he snaps, grinning ear to ear.

good morning soldier.

“Awake in there, huh?” he asks, slapping Bucky’s left cheek a few times, hard enough he feels the impact and the heavy sting after, cutting through the static left over in his body. “Yeah, you’re there. Look at me.”

His eyes are slow, it’s a physical struggle to look up, even when he isn’t moving his head.

“Yeah, that’s it. See? He’s responsive,” he hollers over his shoulder at someone he can’t focus on from the chair. “You know who you are, soldier?”

Who he-

right, right, come on Buck, you know me-

-is.

“Huh? Come on, yes or no.”

He tries to talk, it comes out a long groan and a string of saliva. Why can’t he talk? Why-

His handler laughs, it makes shame coil in his gut. “Nod or shake your fuckin’ head, Jesus,” he grits, jerking Bucky’s head up and down harshly and then side to side. “You got that? Who’s fuckin’ idea was it to make him mute, this is gonna be obnoxious as shit.”

There’s silence in the room but he nods his head a little, very stiffly.

“God, you don’t even know what you’re saying.” he lets go of his head and it falls forward again, limp without anything to hold it up and in place. “Go again.”

Again? What is he supposed to do?

Soldier.

He’s a soldier- that-

Someone else grabs his head, differently, and he feels a pinprick in his neck. “Sir, I think any more today could-”

“Oh, my god. For the mother of God, just fucking do it! I know the thing, I’m who you take orders from, alright?” he snaps, Bucky recoils at the familiar sounds of his handler, angry.

There’s some shuffling, he hears a strange, loud bang from across the room and his handler chuckles and curses under his breath. “Cap’s back.”

Who? Why does he know-

They flip the switch and his vision goes white and a scream pierces his ears, it’s loud and raw and his, but he can’t make it stop. Nothing makes it stop until everything goes hot and heavy and muted again.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Warning for gore and violence in this chapter!

Somehow, though for the life of him, he couldn’t begin to explain how, he does break inside. Later, rather than sooner, but he wipes his eyes and he gets back up, and he tries again and again until it’s all a blur and the door caves in with a loud crash.

There’s a loud shout from one of the techs, a metal tray skidding across the floor and Rumlow curses, throwing his hands up. “Are you fucking serious? Who built this place?” he says, annoyed as he grabs for a gun, holstered at his side. Steve can see the blood soaked into his shirt from where Steve shot him, but he somehow seems incredibly well off.

“Get the fuck away from him!” he screams back, his own voice ringing in his ears. He can see a lifeless looking body lying limp in the chair, only held up by restraints. His face is drained of color, pasty and sweaty. His hair is too matted in his face for Steve to really see, not quite sure if he’s awake or not. The two techs slip out a back door before Steve can really react, all of his attention focused on Rumlow. The smug look on his face has him seeing red.

“What? Him?” he asks, kicking lightly at one of Bucky’s legs, strapped down tight.

Steve makes a strangled sound, just holding back a scream and he shoots for Rumlow again, just missing.

“Careful, Rogers, it’s a real pain to heal all of these bullet wounds, you know?”

“Heal?” Steve spits, both their guns were drawn now. They’re just tiptoeing around each other, neither shooting yet.

“What? Do you think I would waste all of this research? Cap, your tests alone have been, mm, detrimental to the process. I’m givin’ the new and improved serum a little test run, nothing too permanent. Certainly not fatal, but God, it feels good, doesn’t it?”

Steve feels himself go white. “You what?”

“Oh don’t worry, we’ll have a much higher success rate with this serum. We’ve gone through enough test dummies, and now we have a winning lil mixture, like it?” he asks, pulling back his combat clothes enough Steve can see thick veins throbbing and pulsing around fresh skin, already healing and puckering with scar tissue where Steve had shot him.

“You’re sick- he’s not one of your test dummies!”

“No, you’re right, he’s better than that, he’s the base of all of this.”

“You have what you need then!” Steve says, edging on desperate. “Let him fucking go or I’ll blow up this whole fucking place and take you with it!”

“Have what we need? Don’t play dumb, Cap, you know this is stage one, we’re just starting up
again. We’ll have more than one soldier, eventually, but not without our original work. You understand,” he says with a sheepish grin, like a fake apology.

“No, you won’t,” Steve says, teeth grit.

“If you shoot me, you think you’ll make it out of here? You know how many trained people I have in here?”

“I think my chances are good, considering how it’s gone so far,” Steve spits.

Rumlow chuckles. “Ouch.”

Steve crosses the room, closing the space between them in two quick steps, Brock just grins, pressing his gun into Steve’s chest, Steve does the same. “Think about it, cap, how long until our perfect soldier and it’s copies can’t die, can’t get hurt.”

“he’s not your soldier.”

“That’s what you think? Still your precious Bucky?” Rumlow asks, grinning. His breath is hot against Steve’s face, their so close. “He’s not anymore, you know it.”

“That’s what you said last time, too.”

Brock chuckles dryly, unamused. “Last time was last time.”

Steve shakes his head, grimacing. “I’d rather die in here knowing you went with me than let you touch him again,” he says tightly.

“What, and leave little old Bucky behind?” he gasps in mock surprise.

Steve tilts the gun just slightly, moving at the same time as Brock, he fires the gun, the bullet embedding into his neck just above the jugular. Blood blurs from his skin in a thick spray, running down his throat as he makes a wet choking sound, eyes wide and white. “You-” he chokes on the words as blood bubbles past his lips. Steve feels a rush of something, not quite adrenaline rush through him. He watches him stumble back, falling into a large glass cabinet, the contents falling and breaking or scattering across the floor. “Stupid,” he manages before he fires his own gun, just a handgun, still heavy in his hand.

Three times.

It all kind of happens in slow motion, Steve’s ears ring. He feels dizzy but it’s just adrenaline- just-

Blood soaks through his shirt, hot. He feels too cold to be producing anything that hot.

“Oh.”
Lights flash by overhead, the sound of voices distant like he’s underwater. He feels numb, all the way from the top of his head to his toes, but mostly he’s just tired. His eye’s flutter open and closed inconsistently, vision unfocused and bleary. It isn’t hard to slip from that into a heavy kind of sleep, one with just dark and no dreams.

When he opens his eyes again, still a little unfocused, his head aches. Everything feels sluggish, even his breathing, his body stiff and aching too. It takes him a while of just staring up into nothing, eye’s trying to focus like a camera lens before everything floods back. He can still hear the gunshots, distantly, ringing in his ears like he’s still in the confined place. He can see Rumlow perfectly in his head, stumbling back, blood dribbling down his scarred face.

He’d been shot. Rumlow had shot him. He looks down, quick enough his head spins, but what he’s seeing isn’t quite right. He’s laying down, in a hospital bed. He’s wearing a gown and none of it is soaked with blood, though he certainly feels the effort and tenderness behind moving at all. There’s an IV in his arm, dripping fluid into his system. He almost relaxes, brain too tired to lace it all together, but then he remembers Bucky, and his heart rate goes through the roof, apparently enough to alert a nurse or two, because some machine to his left starts beeping like crazy.

He hadn’t even looked around fully, he certainly hadn’t noticed anyone by his bedside until the beeping jerks them awake. “Steve? Steve, hey,” Sam says with a little urgency, sleep lines on his face from falling asleep in the chair. He leans forward and waves a hand around Steve’s general line of sight, which catches his attention fine and feels just a little better.

“Sam?”

“The one and only,” he says, eyebrows furrowed in concern.

A nurse comes in then, right through the door and past the curtain that Steve’s behind and she smiles gently, hair in a mild bun. “Morning, Mr. Rogers. Good to see you up,” she says and Steve doesn’t have the energy to say anything back, he just gives a forced half smile. “How are you feeling? Any pain?”

“Uh, no,” Steve says, though his brain is hardly even running yet.

“He just woke up, can I talk to him for a minute, I’ll call you in, in a minute, yeah?” Sam asks and she seems to understand and she nods, leaving quickly. “Sorry.”

Steve shrugs a little, which does hurt. “What happened? Where’s Bucky?” Steve asks almost instantly, he can feel anxiety welling up quickly, like a rising tide.

“Calm down, I got everything under control, man,” Sam assures. He looks tired. It didn’t take long for people to know you went missing.”

Steve nods and resists the urge to correct Sam with ‘we.’
Sam gets out of the chair and makes his way across the small room, bringing back a paper cup of water which Steve takes gratefully, taking long sips. “It was actually finding you that was the hard part. We had Jarvis searching for everything we could, Nat was off the walls lookin’ for you.”

“How did you find us?”

Sam shakes his head, taking a seat on the edge of Steve’s bed. “I don’t even know, it was almost completely luck,” he says with a long sigh. “Jarvis picked up on something, I’m not even sure what it was, really, Tony said that was the closest thing to a lead, so we took it.”

“And it was us?”

“I mean, yeah. After that, we geared up and stormed the place. I wish I could tell you it’s been burnt to the ground, but Stark wanted to look at some things before we do anything. Everyone that was in there though, everyone affiliated with whatever the hell this was, they’re dead.”

“HYDRA,” Steve says easily.

“What?”

“We knew they weren’t off the map, all it took was one person and they were up and running again like nothing ever happened.”

“Rumlow?”

Steve grimaces, tastes bile, even. “Yeah. well, he’s dead too, so-”

“Yeah, I know. We saw.”

“What about Bucky?” Steve urges again. They have all the time in the world to talk about what happened with the base, it’s not high on Steve’s list of priorities.

Sam looks a little weary and he shifts where he’s sitting. “Should I get the doctor, make sure you’re doing okay? You got shot in the stomach, Steve, you’re lucky to be alive.”

“I’m fine, what about Bucky, Sam? Where is he?” Steve presses, a little angry. He hurts more now that he’s fully awake, but that’s being dealt with, he can deal with a little pain.

Sam sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “When we found you, you were half dead. I thought I was gonna lose you, man. We all did. We had no idea how long you’d been there, but it was bad. You’d lost a lot of blood, it was a race just to get you back to somewhere with medical help.”

Steve looks down at his abdomen, shrouded by his scrubs and a couple of white cotton blankets. He’d been willing to die, to die for Bucky, and what would it have done except leave him to rot? To be HYDRA’s fist again? He’s stupid.

“Bucky was- he was pretty unresponsive when we got to him, I don’t know exactly how it went down, I went with you, Nat got Bucky,” he explains, staring down at his hands, resting anxiously in his lap. Otherwise, he seems collected. “When we got you both on the helicarrier he was kind of awake if you could call it that. He kept opening his eyes, but he wasn’t there, ya know? He couldn’t focus on anything, we tried. It was like he was somewhere else.”

Steve’s stomach twists. He had been someone else. Steve still has the bruised head to remind him.

“He kept making all kinds of noises, I mean, I’m sure he was in pain, we gave him as many
painkillers as we could but I don’t think that shit even made a dent, truthfully. Steve, he doesn’t- he
doesn’t have his tongue- I mean, it’s all-”

“I know, Steve says, voice soft. “I know.”

Sam sighs again, longer this time. “It’s so fucked, all of it.”

Steve doesn’t answer. He doesn’t want to think about the dried blood on Bucky’s face or the
emptiness inside his mouth. He can’t, even if it’s selfish, he just can’t.

“Anyways,” Sam says, finally. He visibly shakes himself, like he’s trying to get the image out of his
head. Steve can’t blame him. “We tried to get him to just- respond. He wouldn’t even look at us like
we weren’t there. He didn’t have a physical reaction to anything.”

“He was in shock, right? I mean, he had to be after everything,” Steve manages.

“Yeah, probably, but Steve, it’s been two days and honestly he’s not any better.”

“Two days? That’s how long I was out?”

“About, yeah,” Sam nods and Steve rubs a hand over his face.

“So where is he now?”

“He’s in a psych ward,” Sam says hesitantly, searching Steve’s face for a reaction.

“What? Alone? Are you kidding me?” Steve asks seriously, starting to force himself up into a sitting
position.

“Calm down, we have our best people working with him and Nat has hardly left his side, okay?”

Even though it should, it doesn’t make Steve feel much better. His brain won’t let him relax or
believe Bucky’s home safe until he sees for himself.

“So, how is he doing?” Steve asks with a heavy sigh.

“Not great, Steve.”

“Winter Soldier, not great?”

Sam shakes his head which allows some of the tension to leave Steve’s shoulders, at least. “No,
somewhere in between I guess,” he says, shaking his head. “He’s showing signs of severe distress
but he’s otherwise unresponsive to pretty much everything we’ve tried. If he understands us, he
doesn’t seem to be recognizing his name.”

“But- You know about this stuff, right? It's just shock, right?”

“Steve, I don’t deal with brainwashed super soldiers regularly, or at least I didn’t use to.”

“It’s something else?”

Sam nods a little solemnly. “Yeah, it’s something else.
Chapter 19

The same day Steve wakes up, he eats his first real meal in far too long. He also gets up and takes an agonizingly slow walk around the hospital floor with Sam and a nurse at his side. He’s certainly sore, the kind of sore he would have expected from being shot a couple of times, but he feels better than someone without the serum would and the babying and constant monitoring is wearing on Steve’s nerves.

When he gets back to his room, laying carefully back down into the bed, Sam is already on him. “Any pain? Lemme check for bleeding.”

“Sam, I’m fine.”

“I’m just making sure,” Sam counters, not at all affected by Steve’s stubbornness. “You were shot Steve, serum or not, you’re not immortal.”

“Yeah, I know, I know,” Steve sighs. “But really, I feel fine. You heard the doctor earlier, I’m already healed to the point someone would be after a week.”

“Yeah. show off.”

Steve grins and Sam surrenders and flops down into the chair he’s basically taken up residence in.

“Sam, why don’t you go home? Get some rest. You look ready to drop.”

“Nah, I’m good,” Sam responds easily and Steve raises an eyebrow at him. “I’m serious.”

“Yeah, so am I,” Steve counters. “You’ve been sleeping in a chair for three days.”

“I’ve slept on worse,” Sam reminds.

Steve shakes his head with a fond little smile. “You call me stubborn?”

Sam shrugs, smiling too. “We should both get some rest.”

“You know I’m going to see him tomorrow no matter what, right?” Steve says, staring up at the ceiling, though he knows Sam is already looking at him.

“Yeah, I know.”

Steve nods slowly. “G’night, Sam.”

Sam grunts back a wordless response and somehow, even with the loudness of the hospital as a whole, Steve sleeps like the dead. He dreams a little, vague and almost soundless like always. He floats through them one after the other, like a slideshow.

He sees himself like he’s watching a movie. He’s standing over a drop-off, staring down, toes practically dangling over the edge. When he goes to look at what Dream-Steve is looking at, there’s just a big empty hole of nothing. It drops off into blackness. Steve almost turns to leave, but then waves rise out of the nothingness and they crash against the edge of the chasm and they lash at Steve’s bare feet like whips.

“He’s drowning,” Dream-Steve mumbles, voice monotone.
Steve stares down at the waves and rising water. He doesn’t see anything else, though. “Who?” he asks, though he can’t hear his own voice.

“Bucky.”

Steve looks back at the water just in time to see the tips of metal fingers slip under the crash of a large wave and Steve snaps awake with a start. The hospital is mostly calm, aside from the shuffle of nurses outside and beeping from other rooms. The sun is just coming up, from his bed he can see the soft pink glow of the sky.

His body is sweaty, nerves still running high stung through his body. He’s mostly just tired now though, mentally. He’s tired of seeing Bucky’s face, (or not seeing it as it may be) every time he closes his eyes. “God,” Steve mutters softly. At least when he looks over, Sam is still fast asleep, slumped across his chair, legs dangling out awkwardly.

Sleep doesn’t return quite as easily the second time and Steve finds himself just staring up at the ceiling for a while, thinking. He thinks about Bucky, mostly. How many times he’s let him slip away. But, the damage is done, he supposes. Eventually, he reaches into the bedside cabinet and fishes around until he finds his cellphone. It’s charged, only a thin crack across the screen, but he hasn’t touched it once since he got here.

On a whim, he texts Natasha.

Hey. he sends, which is stupid, but he isn’t sure what else to send. He doubts she’s even awake, let alone sleeping over at a psych ward with Bucky.

There’s almost an immediate response, though.

so it lives. Good to hear from you, Cap.

Steve smiles a little and types back as quickly as he can, thumbs fumbling over each other. how’s Bucky?

Yeah, I missed you too. He’s okay, but it isn’t great.

That’s the memo I got, yeah.

Nat sends back an emoji with a tiny snot bubble. At least he’s asleep rn

Steve only prides himself a little bit that he doesn’t have to look up the abbreviation. Has he not been?

It’s hit or miss. With everything.

I’ll be there tomorrow.

You’re being released?

I’ll be there is all Steve texts back and Nat stops responding.
Steve falls back asleep at some point after texting Natasha and he sleeps pretty soundly until around 10 AM when he hears Sam coming back into the room, carrying a foam cup of coffee in one hand and a scone in the other. He nods his head at Steve when he sees him and Steve smiles around a yawn.

“Morning,” Steve says, stretching a little.

“Morning, sleepy head,” Sam chuckles and Steve glances at the clock.

“Guess I’ve been needing that.”

“You’re fine, man,” Sam chuckles, taking a bite out of the scone, crumbs scattering everywhere. “How’re you feelin’?”

“Fine, I’m okay. Better than yesterday.”

“Good,” Sam nods, mouth full of food. “I talked to the doctors this morning.”

“And?”

Sam shrugs, swishing back a drink of coffee which he makes a face at. “And they said you can go, so long as there’s no tearing and you take it easy. They mean normal person take it easy, not Captain America take it easy, okay?”

“Okay, yeah, that’s fine,” Steve agrees immediately. “When can we see Bucky?”

Sam sighs, taking another drink of the coffee that must be pretty bad because he grimaces again. “Is that really the best idea?”

“What? Why not?” Steve shakes his head. “I’ve been released, Sam, I’m not gonna sit around any longer. Not while Bucky’s sitting somewhere alone.”

“And what if he attacks you?”

Steve scowls. “He won’t.”

“You can’t be sure!” Sam says, throwing his hands up, the coffee sloshing over the edge. “You don’t know that Steve, he’s completely unstable right now and completely unpredictable. I’m not going to risk you getting hurt again just because you wanna rush into everything head first, alright? You’ve gotta think about what’s best for you and for Bucky, and I don’t know if this is best.”

Steve stays quiet for a while, staring down so he doesn’t have to look at Sam, who’s probably right and probably looking at him with a soft understanding look that Steve can’t take right now. “I need to see him, Sam.”
Sam sighs and takes a seat again, eating the rest of his scone. “Yeah, I know,” he says, defeated. “It was worth a shot, though.”

Steve smiles a little.

“I’ll grab some clothes for you, yeah?” Sam asks, brushing the crumbs off of himself. “I brought some from your apartment a couple of days ago.”

“Real clothes would be much appreciated,” Steve agreed.

After Sam brought the bag stuffed with clean clothes, he took a shower in the tiny hospital room bathroom and washed the grime of too much time in bed away. He spent a little too long with his eyes closed, head tilted back under the spray of warm water, the smell of soap light. He felt clean, finally. The wounds on his stomach were already scabbing over, just angry and red, the skin puckering where it would likely scar. He ran his fingers over the damaged skin, still feeling bruised and tender. He could move freely outside of a little soreness when he stretches too far or bends over hastily. It’s not half as bad as Sam insists on making it seem, though.

He can appreciate the worry, though. Steve knows all too well what it’s like to almost lose someone to a gunshot, and he knows Sam does too.

Steve eventually pulls himself from the warmth of the shower and steps out onto the grippy bath mat, grabbing the nearest towel to dry his hair off with. The bathroom is still steamy, warm from leaving the fan off. It feels like a sauna and Steve doesn’t even hurry to towel off, feeling some stress bleed out of his neck and shoulders.

When he emerges from the bathroom, dressed with his hair brushed and teeth clean, finally feeling more than half human, Sam is also dressed in clean clothes, milking a new cup of coffee. “Hey, look at you,” Sam says with a smile. “You don’t look like shit.”

Steve chuckles. “Yeah, I feel good.”

“Good, we’ve got a bit of a car ride ahead of us.”

“How far?” Steve asks, grabbing his phone from his bedside table.

“Not too far, about an hour with traffic,” Sam says, making a so-so motion with his hand. “You gonna be alright to sit for that long?”

Steve nods, checking his phone like he’s expecting a stupid text or picture from Bucky, how it was just a couple weeks ago. “Yeah, I’m good to go.”

Sam hesitates before nodding. “Okay, let’s go.”
Chapter 21

Steve half expects a cab when they finally get out of the hospital, but instead, they’re ushered into a black vehicle with heavily tinted windows and an unfamiliar driver that already knows where they’re going.

“After HYDRA, we can’t be too careful,” Sam offers after they leave the parking lot.

Steve nods in understanding, even if the extra security makes him feel like some kind of movie star.

“Stark is already updating and installing new security protocol at your place. It’s still up for debate as far as live security goes, though.”


“Essentially, yeah.”

“Who’s idea was that?”

Sam shakes his head, looking out the window. “I don’t know, everyone’s kind of up in arms, no one’s decided what precautions are too much and not enough.”

“Well, whatever we had set up before wasn’t enough,” Steve says bitterly. “So Stark can chew on that.”

Sam snorts. “Whatever they did when they entered the building, all of Starks security went offline, even the backup.”

“So what can they do?”

“I’m the wrong guy to ask about technical shit, but they’re fixin’ it up so it can’t get knocked down again, I guess it’s some top tier Stark-Tech, so take that how you will.”

Steve nods, resting his head back against the seat. The drive is otherwise pretty quiet, never once hearing from the driver. Sam points out a grill he ate at recently and it makes Steve wish he’d eaten before they left, but is otherwise just all nerves. He knows where they are until he doesn’t and the roads become less familiar, mostly small businesses and law firms. It’s a strange end of the city he’s in now, he’s never had any real reason to go here before.

“Is it well known?”

“Huh?”

“The ward Bucky’s at, is it good?” Steve asks, chewing at his lip.

“Yeah, the very best. Wouldn’t have taken him to anything less,” Sam confirms and Steve wishes it helped him relax any.

“They’re equipped to deal with…”

“Brainwashed super-soldiers?”

“Yeah,” Steve says, the words feel bitter in his tongue.
“We have some specialists in there too, someone that knows what’s goin’ on, knows about Bucky’s files.”

Steve isn’t sure he likes the idea of people becoming friendly with Bucky’s past, it seems too private to be sharing with a doctor or therapist. Anyone that isn’t Steve, really. Still, he guesses he can be glad that they aren’t going in blind. Whatever is best for Bucky.

The driver takes a couple turns until their mostly off of main roads. There’s a doctors office, just a tiny local branch, a department store, a gas station. It’s a weird scatter of things and Steve’s feeling steadily less confident in the place until he actually sees it.

It’s huge. Steve isn’t sure how he didn’t notice it before. There are big and beautiful trees and flowers all around the front of the building and an entire section dedicated to a Chapple. It looks to be at least five stories, maybe more, Steve can’t quite tell from where he’s craning his neck in the back seat. The walls of the building are white and surprisingly clean. He can see blue curtains in some of the windows, and the parking lot is fairly full. There’s a woman walking with a couple of nurses, pointing at something in a tree. She seems happy, she’s not dressed in a thin sheet of cloth, she’s in sweats and a t-shirt, and her hair is even in a nice bun.

“I told ya, the very best,” Sam says, punching Steve’s arm.

Steve smiles. “It looks nice.”

“It is, there’s a cafe inside too, it’s real nice. It’s not like he’s in prison, okay?”

“I know,” Steve says quietly. He wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting, honestly. “I just don’t like the idea of him being somewhere that isn’t home, I guess.”

“I know, I know, but recovery is important, Steve. He needs real treatment, you can’t fix everything with a smile and a cup of coffee.”

Steve doesn’t respond, but he knows it’s true.

When the car is parked, finally, Sam and Steve both get out and head towards the entrance with a little bit of hurry. Inside is even nicer than the outside, marble floors and all. It smells clean but not like a hospital, Steve notes. There’s a woman waiting at the front desk, all smiles and she even waves as they approach. “Welcome back,” she smiles and Sam nods at her.

“Hey, thanks. We get clearance to see him?” He asks and he doesn’t even have to give a name before she’s typing away at her screen.

She nods slowly, eye’s scanning over the screen. “Yeah, yeah, sure. You should be good, Mrs. Romanov is up there now, too.”

“Great, thanks a ton, Dolly,” he says and she nods with a smile.

Steve follows Sam towards an elevator, feeling kind of lost already. “You know her?”

“Yeah, she’s uh, she’s a friend.”

Steve raises an eyebrow at him and Sam just grins as they step in the elevator.

“I’m not sure if we can go in his room once we’re there, but I’ll see what I can do,” Sam says, pressing a button for the fourth floor. “There’s one one-way glass in there, so if nothing else-”
“Sam, I didn’t come here to look at him like a zoo animal, I’m here to talk to him and get him home.”

Sam just sighs, stuffing his hands in his pockets. “Man, I don’t think you get it.”

“You don’t think I get it?” Steve asks, a little astonished. The elevator makes a noise when they reach the floor but neither of them steps out. “I get it better than anyone, Sam. I’ve known him since I was a kid. I’ve been there every night when he wakes up screaming because he can’t close his fucking eyes without seeing what they did to him! I know!”

Sam just stares. He doesn’t look particularly upset or even surprised but the lack of expression is somehow worse. The silence carries on much longer than is at all comfortable and Steve takes a step back to lean against the elevator wall. He rubs his hands over his face but it doesn’t make him feel any better. “Sam, I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, I know,” Sam says and he steps out of the elevator, not looking to see if Steve follows.

Steve does follow, but only because he doesn’t really want to get lost in a big psych ward and he wants to see Bucky too. He doesn’t know what to say, there isn’t a way to take what he said back. Sam’s hurt, even if he’s trying to stay understanding and straight-faced. Steve feels a wave of guilt in his gut.

“Hey, Tasha,” Sam says as he approaches a bench just a way down the hall. Steve can see Natasha sitting there, her hair tied back. She looks good for spending day in and day out here. She’s just dressed in leggings and a long sleeve black shirt, but there aren’t evident bags under her eyes like his and Sam’s. He’s pretty sure she’s mastered some skill they’ll never even comprehend in the means of meditation and good rest. Maybe it’s magic.

“Good to see you both,” she says with a subtle smile, standing up to meet them. “How’re you feelin’ cap?”

Steve stands to the left of Sam and nods. He’s glad to see her again. She’s a warm and familiar presence when all is said and done. “Good. I’m fine.”

She chuckles, shaking her head like she doesn’t quite believe him. “Glad to hear it,” she says and gives him a hug. It’s firm and she’s warm. He smiles tiredly.

“How’s Bucky doing?” he asks when they part and she wrinkles her nose.

“I mean, you can see for yourself but honestly he’s not much better than when he got here.”

Steve feels the urge to place blame on the ward itself like they aren’t all doing their best for Bucky, even if he knows it’s selfish and untrue. “He hasn’t made any progress?” he asks hesitantly.

Natasha sighs and gives a half shrug. “I don’t know. It doesn’t look like it and I haven’t heard good things from the doctors, Steve.”

“It’s only been a few days,” Steve reminds sharply. “He’s been through enough to last five lifetimes.”

She holds her hands up defensively. “I know, I’m right there with you, Steve, really.”

“We all are,” Sam says and Steve feels guiltier than before.

“I know,” Steve says softly.
Nat claps him on the shoulder. “We’re all doing what we can for him, but Steve I was there the first time too, and this is different.”

“Everyone keeps saying that,” Steve sighs. “What? Different as in he’s not on a murderous rampage? That sounds like a win to me.”

“Steve, he’s not attacking anyone but he’s not eating, he hardly sleeps, he doesn’t respond in a verbal or physical way to anyone. The doctors have had almost no luck getting him to even express anything.”

Steve looks down at his feet. “Let me talk to him.”

“Right now?” Natasha asks.

“Yes, now. Let me talk to him.”

“I’ll have to talk to his doctors, Steve. They’re being pretty particular about who and when and how anyone gets to see him. They’re worried about getting a bad reaction, I guess.”

“I’m the exception,” Steve argues. “I’m all he has, Nat. I was there with him, let me talk to him.”

She sighs and turns on her heels. “Okay, aright. I’ll go talk to his doctor.”

“Thank you,” Steve says, rolling his shoulders back. “Thank you.”
Natasha is gone for a while, long enough that Sam and Steve have to sit in awkward silence on the bench outside of a set of rooms. The few times one of them says something, it’s brief and Steve can feel the tension behind Sam’s smiles and chuckles. When she finally comes back there’s a doctor in tow who asks Steve about a million questions that Steve doesn’t know how to answer.

He’s serious, each question is asked very sternly and Steve feels a little intimidated, honestly. He’s a big guy, too. His shoulders look twice the size of Steve’s and he has a thick, dark beard on his face. His eyes are honey brown and stark against his charcoal black skin. He’s kind too, though. He even asks how steve’s doing, offers him to come to an open therapy session, which Steve refuses but still offers the gesture. If nothing else, by the end of the conversation, Steve at least feels like Bucky is in good hands.

“He’s very afraid, I think. Which frankly, after everything your friends here have told me, is completely reasonable and expected. But otherwise, he shows no real expression, no emotion. He’s quiet, carries a very blank expression and has little interest in food or sleep. His instinct for basic human needs isn’t kicking in as it should, I think,” The doctor explains coolly after drilling Steve on a list of questions about Bucky and his health that must’ve been a mile long. “So, you can understand why my team and I are hesitant to letting new people into his room right now.”

“I understand,” Steve says around a big deep breath to try and school himself. “But if you haven’t made any progress yet, I don’t think my presence will have a negative effect.”

He drums his fingers on his arm, his arms folded over his chest as he looks over Steve. “And what if your presence does affect him?”

“Honestly, that’s what I’m hoping for. I’m hoping to see me and hearing me will bring him out of whatever it is he’s stuck on.”

The doctor nods slowly. “And what if it’s a negative reaction?”

Natasha and Sam are both standing by Steve’s side now, listening but not interjecting, which he’s secretly grateful for. “Then I’ll remove myself from the situation,” Steve says, though that thought alone makes his stomach clench. He isn’t sure what he’ll do if Bucky can’t trust him, can’t stand to be around him.

The doctor is quiet for a while, thinking. Steve can practically see the tiny gears turning. “Okay, you’ve got a deal.”

Steve tries not to grin ear to ear like a total dumbass but he’s not sure how well he manages to suppress it. “Thank you.”
“You’ll be supervised from the observation window in the room at all times by at least two nurses and myself, do you understand?”

Steve nods, even if he thinks it’s almost laughable that they’re the ones shielding Steve out now when all he’d have to say is two words and Nat would have Bucky moved to another facility. He respects it though, all the same. “I understand.”

It must be good enough because the doctor nods and pulls out his keys. “Okay, let’s go.”

He’s ushered into the back room, Sam and Natasha in tow. The room looks like a nicer, cleaner interrogation room, really. There are soft lights and a table, a couple of chairs and a couch. He can’t imagine that normal hospitals or hospital rooms have these, but he thinks this is likely a special enhancement for Bucky’s specific case. Steve won’t question it much beyond that.

He approaches the big one-way glass window in the room while the nurses file in too. He can see the room, big and blindingly white. There’s a sink and a toilet in one of the corners and it reminds Steve vaguely of a prison cell. There aren’t any windows beside the one Steve’s looking through and there’s not even anything on the walls, no paintings or photos. It’s just endless white. Even the floor and ceiling are white. Steve spots the bed next, low to the ground. It’s just a basic cot, metal and cheap with a mattress on it and some white cotton sheets. On the other side of the bed, just where it ends and the sheets drape over the edge, Steve can see the crumpled mess of Bucky there, legs sprawled out in front of himself. He’s dressed in clean scrubs, Steve notices, but they’re still white like everything else. He’s looking down, as far as Steve can tell, though his hair is in his face and his body is turned away from Steve.

“Is he asleep?” Steve asks after watching him for a while. He’s not moving, though he can see his back rising and falling a bit, enough to know he’s breathing.

“Maybe,” the doctor says, looking over Steve’s shoulder. “Probably not. That’s where he’s been since he got here.”

“He hasn’t moved?” Steve asks, gut twisting. There’s something borderline inhuman about seeing Bucky like this, caged and unmoving.

“We’ve moved him a few times, to clean him, mostly,” one of the nurse’s chimes in. “but we let him rest in the same place after, to make sure it doesn’t upset him.”

“Right,” Steve frowns.

“Remember, when you go in there, treat the situation delicately, this isn’t like how he was before, he’s in a deep state of psychosis. If he has any reaction, we’ll be in very shortly for tests, but if he happens to turn violent-”

“He won’t,” Steve says, cutting off the doctor.

The doctor just fixes him with a very stern look before resuming. “-If he gets violent, do not interact and remove yourself from the situation immediately.”

Steve feels Natasha rest a hand on his shoulder, gentle. “Steve,” she says, a gentle warning.

Steve caves, sighing. “Alright.”

They let him in through a big door, the only entrance or exist in the room he notices. When they shut it behind him, he also notes that there isn’t a door handle on the inside and the door fits neatly like a puzzle piece into the equally as white wall. Even though the door makes a relatively loud sound that
makes even Steve flinch, Bucky doesn’t budge or even seem to notice.

He waits a second before taking a couple of steps forward, towards the edge of the bed where he can see Bucky, sitting against the wall like a rag doll. Steve tries to keep his breathing even and calm even though he can feel his anxiety increasing rapidly.

“Bucky?” Steve asks very gently. His voice is quiet even in the empty room. There isn’t a reaction. He takes a couple more steps forward, taking it slow. “Hey, I’m here.”

There’s a long silence. Steve takes a deep breath and takes a couple more steps forward until he’s standing just off to the side of the bed, perfectly in range for Bucky to see him, even where he’s staring ahead.

Seeing Bucky close up like this now is harder than looking through a window, though. Steve can see how weak he looks, looking a little thinner than he had just a month ago. His skin is sickly pale and his eyes are so unfocused it makes Steve paranoid he’s dead, even though he can see his breathing. His left arm is stiff at his side and his other arm is laying limp in his lap, legs outstretched and awkward. It looks uncomfortable but it also isn’t anything like Bucky’s usual posture. He doesn’t look like Bucky at all like this.

“Buck? You with me?” Steve asks, which he gets no response to, not even a twitch. His eyes don’t move either, staring ahead at nothing at all. Steve crouches down, still off to Bucky’s side so he isn’t crowding him or blocking his view. “Bucky?”

Bucky doesn’t move an inch. Steve feels frustration bubble up. Bucky had come so far, he’d been himself again and now he’s so far back he isn’t even recognizable. Steve wishes he’d been able to crush Rumlows windpipe with his hands.

“You’re safe now,” Steve says, though he sounds stupid even to himself. His words don’t mean anything. He’d promised Bucky was safe before too, and yet, here they are.

“Bucky, do you hear me?” Steve asks, but he receives no indication one way or another. Steve sighs and moves to sit, legs crossed, trying to ignore the pinch of healing wounds in his stomach. “I need you to snap out of it, okay?”

Steve tries to ignore the thought that everyone is watching him, can see him sitting there, can probably hear him too. “We can get through this, yeah? You just need to come back to me.”

They sit in silence. Steve hardly even sees Bucky blink. Eventually, he rests his head in his hands and just stops. When the silence becomes too much for Steve to bare, he tries again.

“Remember that cat at the shelter, that big ugly one?”

He gets silence in return. its

“The one with all that matted fur? It loved you,” Steve says, staring down at the floor through his fingers that are parted over his face. “ Couldn’t stop rubbin’ up against you.”

“You said you hated it, but you let it sit on your lap for an hour. What was its name?”

Steve doesn’t remember, but he doesn’t get an answer either. Steve feels a little bit of sadness well up in him, the sadness he was trying to ignore.”-it was good for you, I think. I think you really liked having it to love on,” Steve smiles a little. “Reminds me of when we used to feed that skinny one
behind our place, in the ally?”

“I think it ate better than us, most days.”

Steve can’t stand the silence but he can’t look at Bucky either, so he just talks, eyes closed and his head in his hands.

Eventually, they pull Steve out of the room. He lost track of time too quickly in there with Bucky, talking just to fill the void. He felt like he’d run a couple of dozen miles and he was tired.

“Don’t beat yourself up, Steve,” Sam says seriously almost the second he sees Steve come back into the observation room. “You’re not the first person to try.”

“But I should mean the most,” Steve says, rubbing his eyes to try and erase the tiredness there. “He didn’t even notice I was there.

“It’s going to be a process, doing what you just did was actually pretty good,” the doctor says, still watching through the glass at Bucky’s unchanged form. “If you’re willing, I think having you do this regularly could help.”

“How?” Steve asks, flopping down onto the couch where Natasha is standing.

“Having a familiar voice, familiar stories- it might help to draw out memories or a response.”

“Okay, yeah,” Steve nods, he can understand that.

“Are you willing to try again? Maybe today, even?” the doctor asks, turning to look at Steve.

“Give him a rest, he’s tired too-” Sam starts, brow furrowed in clear concern.

“I’ll do it. Whenever you need me to.”

“Steve, are you sure? I saw how you took that, I can still see how that affected you. Think about yourself too,” Sam reminds, knitting his hands together.

“I can do it, I’m fine,” Steve nods. “I’ll be better once Bucky’s better.”

“Okay, glad to hear it,” the doctor nods along.

Chapter End Notes

I promise Bucko is in the next chapter lmao
Hey everyone! It's been... almost two months since I was last able to update, so I'm super sorry about that. I've been super sick, again, and then with work being absolutely insane and taking up all of my time, I just haven't had a chance to even open my laptop. Hopefully I can start managing my time better and get back to updating regularly!

Steve follows Sam and Natasha down to the little cafe, stuffed away in the corner of the large medical building. There are a few people in there with them, mostly nurses on break or elderly patients that are likely sick of eating the same four things from the wards cafeteria. For the most part, it’s quiet, though. There’s distant music playing from a speaker, some song Steve doesn’t recognize.

Steve picks apart his scone, popping little bits into his mouth. As starving as he is, he still finds it hard to stomach. Natasha and Sam are sitting at the round little table with him, Natasha sipping at her coffee and Sam scrolling through his phone. It’s quiet and a little tense, no one seems to know what to say and Steve can’t blame them because he doesn’t know what he would say if they did.

“So how are you recovering?” Natasha asks eventually. She’s weighing her plastic cup in her hand, letting the liquid slosh around a bit. She’s eyeing him carefully but not with any venom. Steve appreciates the attempt at non-Bucky themed conversation.

“Good, fine,” Steve says, nodding along. He sees Sam peer at him from over his phone screen but he doesn’t say anything. “Almost completely healed again.”

“Interesting,” she comments before shrugging and continuing. “That’s good. I didn’t realize how the serum would effect everything.”

“Yeah, me either,” Steve says.

“Full of surprises,” Sam hums, eyes still focused down on his phone screen. He’s smiling, at least so Steve doesn’t think he’s upset anymore, or at least not as much.

“You know me,” Steve says with a small smile as he pops more scone into his mouth.

Natasha shakes her head fondly and returns to sipping at her coffee. The quiet between the three and the subject of Bucky being avoided at all costs is a little tense. Steve isn’t sure he can take it, honestly.

“Are we just pretending it didn’t happen?” Steve asks after several more agonizing seconds. They both look up at him, they share a look even, but no one says anything. “Really?”

“We aren’t pretending it didn’t happen, Steve,” Sam says delicately, chewing on his thumb. “We just aren’t drawing more attention towards it.”

“What’s the difference, Sam? You’re ignoring the problem, we have to talk about it,” Steve says, crumpling his napkin up as he finishes his food.

“I think Sam just means that he doesn’t want to overwhelm you,” Nat says calmly. “You have to
focus on yourself before you can focus on Bucky.”

“Well, too late,” Steve mutters, pinching the bridge of his nose in silent frustration. “I’m here and so is Bucky and that’s all I can think about, so we might as well deal with it.”

Sam tosses his hands up a little, resigned. “Okay, then let’s deal with it.”

Natasha doesn’t seem to share Sam’s same willing expression but she doesn’t say anything regardless, just takes another drink, eyeing them from her seat.

“He’s not responsive and if that continues there’s going to be ugly consequences, and I’m talking bigger than Bucky not coming home, I’m talking starvation and worse, okay?” Sam says seriously and Steve appreciates his honesty, despite the lump that forms in his throat.

“So what can I do? I feel like no one’s doing anything,” Steve mumbles, leaning back in his chair.

“Well, that’s the big question, right?” Sam says with a sigh. “If human contact and solitude don’t work, then they’re going to have to step up their game.”

“By doing what?” Natasha asks, eyebrow raised.

“I don’t know,” Sam admits. “There are maybe medications they can try, therapies, but those are only so helpful when he’s in this... vegetative state?”

Steve wrinkles his nose. “Great.”

“I’m less curious about their techniques and more interested in what you think might help, Sam,” Nat says, tying her hair back out of her face. “You’re probably the most educated in this grey area. Super soldiers and PTSD, right up your alley, right?”

Sam lets out a soft laugh. “Yeah, something like that. Anyways, I’m not sure what to do, honestly. This isn’t like before. As you said, it’s a grey area.”

“What are my options then?” Steve asks.

“Look, I’m not a doctor and I’m not his doctor, but I would try a few things before they take any of the measures they’re talking about taking.”

“Let’s do them then,” Steve says quickly. “If there’s a chance of helping him without stuffing him full of more meds, God, let’s try.”

“Their ways might have faster results, types of shock therapy and sound therapy have been found effective in cases like his, that’s what his doctor said.”

Steve gawks. “Shock therapy? What the hell are you talking about, he just had his brain fried, no one is dragging him off to have him strapped down and put into more wires and chairs, okay? I won’t let them.”

Sam puts his hands up quickly and Steve bites his tongue. “Okay, okay, I know. I wasn’t thrilled with some of their options either, that’s why they’re holding off, but they can only hold a patient with no results for so long. So, if we’re gonna do my plan, we have to start now.”

“Do you think it’ll work?” Natasha asks, setting her empty cup onto the table.

Sam nods slowly. “I hope so, I’m out of ideas if it doesn’t.”
“Okay, let’s do it then, I’m serious,” Steve says.

“Alright.”
They start early that next morning. They arrive almost before the sun is up from a dingy hotel across the street. Steve doesn’t feel very refreshed, but his abdomen is considerably less sore and he has a certain determination in him now. Steve isn’t wearing anything with strings or buttons, just like Sam suggested, which feels alien when it comes to Bucky, but he isn’t going to take any chances and half-ass his requests.

“Okay, when you get in there, your main goal is for eye contact, even if it seems distant, okay? Eye contact is a good sign of some kind of registry,” Sam explains as they head into the ward. It’s just as big and impressive as before but a little quieter with a different woman working the front desk. “Understand?”

Steve nods. “But how do I get him to look at me? I didn’t have much luck last time.”

“I want you to speak clearly and a little sternly, okay? Authoritively, if you will,” Sam says with a wave of his hand. “I want you to speak directly to him, use his name, use eye contact at his face and eyes if possible.”

“What do I say to him?” Steve asks. There are a million words he wants to tumble out of his mouth the second he sees Bucky again but he won’t let himself do that- not right now.

“Talk to him like you would normally, talk to him like before all of this, back in your apartment when he was doing better, okay? It’s a more subtle way to ease into a memory slash cognitive state without digging up the bad stuff, alright?”

“Right, okay,” Steve says and he’s ungodly nervous. He feels stupid, pulling at his sleeves nervously as he follows Sam and Natasha up the stairs towards Bucky’s floor.

“You’ll do fine, Steve,” Natasha comments, glancing over her shoulder to give him a smile and a wink. “Just sweet talk your way into this too.”

Steve glares daggers at the back of her head but his face heats up anyways. “And what if I can’t get a response, what do I do?”

“Well, I don’t want you to switch to this right away if talking isn’t working, okay? I want to give him time and patience and security, I don’t want to jump into anything,” Sam says and Steve nods in understanding. “If there’s no sign of change and I mean none, after at least ten minutes, if not more, I
“want you to try some subtle contact.”

“Touch him?”

“Yeah, but while talking. Only make it a very slight movement and touch, soft, easy, slow, in his line of vision.”

Steve nods. “I can do that.”

“Okay, good.”

When they arrive at Bucky’s room, Steve’s a little surprised to see Sam open up the door to the observation room inside without a doctor or nurse.

“I have the room with nothing but video surveillance or almost five hours, but they will review the tape,” Sam explains once they’re inside, Steve and Natasha giving him a look.

“How’d you manage that?” Natasha asks, folding her arms neatly over her chest. “They wouldn’t let me anywhere near him without at least three people in here with me.”

Sam shrugs. “I know people.”

Steve grins. “Right, okay.”

They huddle up around the window and Bucky’s disturbingly, still in the same place, unmoved. His position hasn’t changed at all as far as Steve can tell and he’s certainly not looking anywhere new.

“God, he looks like a statue,” Steve says softly.

“This is what it’s been like the whole time,” Natasha says gently and Steve can only grimace.

“But we’re going to change that, Steve, get your head on straight before you go in there, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Steve nods and turns away from the window until he doesn’t feel so dizzy with guilt and anger anymore. “I’m ready.”

“You sure?” Sam asks and Steve nods. “Okay, remember, take your time.” Sam opens up the door for Steve and he walks through before he can overthink it.

Sam shuts the door behind Steve and he’s left in the eerie quiet again, Bucky’s stiff form just visible from the other side of the bed. “Hey, Buck, It’s me,” Steve says. He feels strange walking in and saying nothing. Unsurprisingly there’s no reaction. “How’re you feeling?”

Stupid question.

There’s no answer and Steve is left in another long, awkward silence that Steve doesn’t know how to fill. “I missed you last night,” Steve says truthfully. “It was weird not being with you.”

Steve hates not waking up to him anymore. One bed used out of the two in their apartment. Their secret, and no one else’s. He knows Natasha and Sam are just on the other side of the glass, and he knows they can hear him but he can’t find it in himself to care. Honestly, the way Bucky used to sass Sam about being closer to Steve than anyone, he’s pretty sure they already know.

“Are you sore from sitting like that on the floor?” Steve asks, taking a couple of careful steps towards Bucky, trying to move where Bucky might be able to see him. “You could move up onto the bed. It might be a little bit more comfortable, at least?”
Bucky stays the same, unmoving and stiff on the floor. Steve has to crane his neck to tell if Bucky’s eyes are even open or not, and they are, from what he can see, but just barely. They’re hooded with fatigue and they seem somehow even more unfocused than before.

“Here, want help?”

“Bucky?”

Steve sighs and rubs at his eyes with the palms of his hands. “Bucky, can you look at me? Can you just show me you can hear me, even?” Steve asks and even as he does he feels steadily stupider.

Steve sits right in front of Bucky, so close their outstretched legs can almost touch. “Bucky, hey,” Steve says sternly, just like Sam said. There isn’t any kind of response though like he didn’t even notice Steve move and sit right in front of him. “I need you to look at me.”

“Bucky.”

Nothing.

“Bucky.”

The silence stretches on and no one moves or talks.

They took him away.

“Bucky, come on,” Steve says, a little gentler and he slowly reaches out, an inch at a time. “Just look at me. You’re alright,” he says, fingers brushing along Bucky’s thigh. Bucky doesn’t even seem to notice. “Bucky, look at me.”

“Bucky will you just fucking look at me!” Steve shouts, fingers grasping at the thin cotton pants Bucky’s wearing and just as soon as he does it, his vision bleary with tears, he regrets it.

Bucky does respond and he flinches back, some inhuman noise bubbling up from his throat as he attempts to curl tighter into himself while also simultaneously not moving his limbs, like they’re weighed down.

“Fuck,” Steve manages, putting his hands out with nothing to do. “Bucky, Bucky look at me- hey, I’m sorry- I thought I lost you- I just-”

Bucky manages to clasp his arms around himself as he sinks lower onto the floor, his whole body shaking feverishly, that awful noise unending as he pulls from Bucky’s lips.

Sam and Natasha are in the room beside Steve only a moment later. “Okay, come on,” Nat says, pulling Steve back from where he’s still sitting.

“No, let go! Natasha!” Steve tries to push her off but she locks herself on tighter and pulls him until he’s standing.

“You’re going to make it worse,” she says coolly.

Sam is already crouched beside Bucky, talking in a soft and calming manner. His hands are less than an inch from Bucky’s skin but not touching. Sam’s positioned away enough that Steve can’t make out what he’s saying, but he can see his expression and it isn’t a good one.

“Let me help him,” Steve gasps, his chest aching with how heavy his heart is beating.
“You did this in the first place, Steve. You’re the last person he needs right now, come on,” Natasha says as she tries to direct him to the door and Steve just chokes on his words eye’s wide as he’s steered out of the room and away from Bucky.

End Notes

leave a comment and lemme know what you thought! hopefully I get the next chapter up soon, I try and post regularly with my two jobs.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!