London, Still

by CaptainHoney

Summary

I can’t stop thinking about London. It feels like a lifetime ago now, but it’s the kind of memory that burns so bright in a place like this. I wish I could live my whole life in those few short hours, over and over again.

An incomplete collection of letters and journal entries from Bucky Barnes, 1943-194(?)

Notes

Please heed the tags, friends! It’s 1:30am so if I’ve forgotten to tag something I’m really sorry. As always, if you have any specific triggers you want to know about, please ask me either in the comments or over on tumblr (grandmastattoo).

See the end of the work for more notes

Hi Joan,
How’s progress? I’ve attached the transcriptions I’ve made so far. The military really did a number on this thing. Half the pages are missing or out of order and a lot of stuff has been blacked out, including - please don’t have an aneurysm - pretty much all the dates. I know that’s going to make your job a pain in the ass, so I’m working on some FOI’s to try and dig up a more comprehensive timeline. Maybe you can use Bucky’s journals more for flavour? As long as you don’t mind if the flavour is salt.

I agree that “Little Boy Blue” isn’t going to cut it as a title. Can we really not just go with “Bucky Barnes: A Life”? Think about it.

-Pete

We marched all day today and I swear we must’ve gone in a circle because everything looks exactly the same. War is fucking boring.

Thought I was used to the shelling already but I guess not. Can’t sleep for shit. It’s the middle of the night but something way-too-nearby is on fire and the sky is orange, like a sunset from a nightmare. Everything stinks like smoke. And someone stole the chocolate out of my rations.

The somethingth of fuck knows, 1943, Middle of Shit

I miss girls.

The day after the somethingth of fuck knows, 1943, Still the Middle of Shit

Not even girls specifically, just people who don’t smell like… that. And people with hair that goes past their ears. And people with tits.

Steve had better be getting enough tail for the both of us.

I found the shit who stole my chocolate and I took a dump in his helmet while he was sleeping. He doesn’t know it was me. He outranks me, so if he ever reads this I’m fucked. Asshole.

[DATE AND LOCATION REDACTED] [REDACTED] died today while we were out on patrol. Hell, died seems like too nice a word for it. He was obliterated.
In my mind I called out to him, tried to stop him, but that’s not what happened. I saw the Bouncing Betty as his foot was still falling and I hit the decks. He barely screamed. I was so terrified that he would scream and give up our location but the sound he made could have been a bird squawking. I want to make it sound better, more dignified, but there’s no dignity in any of this. At least his lower half was so shredded he couldn’t have shat himself if he’d tried.

I crawled up to him and he was just making these little bubbling, hissing noises, which was worse than any screaming. There was nothing left behind his eyes, so it was like he was dead but the rest of him hadn’t figured it out yet.

I tried to pull his body home and it all came apart in my hands.

[DATE REDACTED], Probably Italy but fucked if I know

It’s such a sweet fucking relief to be bored again.

[DATE OMITTED, LOCATION REDACTED]

Everything is still a little foggy. I keep forgetting what day it is. Some things are sharp. sharp like

I’m not ready to think about that yet. Steve’s asked, but I told him I can’t remember. I wish that was true.

And Steve. Fuck, Stevie. I told him not to do anything stupid. I guess I should’ve been more specific, although how could I? “Hey Steve, whatever you do, don’t let [REDACTED]”. I’d kill him if it wouldn’t kill me to do it. I hate myself for being glad he’s here.

We’re heading to London now. Shore leave for everyone rescued from [REDACTED]. Some of the guys I was in a cell with are talking about forming a team. They’re good guys, but I think [REDACTED] has plans for us.

[DATE AND LOCATION REDACTED]

I bought Steve a book of poems by an English poet, but I’ve been reading them more than him. The poor bastard died at 25, a week before the Great War ended. How many died the week before Armistice? A few days? One day? An hour? He published poems in a journal called Hydra. Go figure.

The shop I bought it from was at the end of a levelled street, and the shopgirl complained about the weather. Monty would deck me for saying it, but I don’t understand the English. If it was possible to complain the Nazis to death, they’d do it.

[DATE REDACTED], London

How many times will the world come out from under me? Everything I know, ripped away from me. I wasted so much time. Why was I such a coward? I feel so giddy and I want to be sick at the
Same time. I’m going to make up for it. I have to.

Same shit time, same shit place

Everyone on both sides apparently agreed not to use chemical warfare this time around but I swear to God Dugan’s ass must be a secret German weapon. If he farts in my face one more time I am going to kill him. And Steve, for laughing. Assholes.

[DATE AND LOCATION REDACTED]

They made an honest-to-God movie of us. Well, they’re making it. We’re in [REDACTED] where the fighting is less heavy, so there’s cameras following us around. I keep thinking about my sisters going to the movies and seeing me up there like I’m James Cagney or something. I know Rebecca will be tickled. Steve’s a natural in front of the camera, and I’m sore I never got to see him properly with the USO girls. Acting doesn’t feel like such a stretch to me, not these days. Feels like I’m always pretending.

[DATE REDACTED, LOCATION OMITTED]

I can’t stop thinking about London. It feels like a lifetime ago now, but it’s the kind of memory that burns so bright in a place like this. I wish I could live my whole life in those few short hours, over and over again.

[DATE REDACTED, LOCATION OMITTED]

I swear to God if it doesn’t stop raining soon I’m leaving the war.

[DATE REDACTED, LOCATION OMITTED]

[REDACTED] got shot today. I can’t stop shaking. He’ll live, no question, but I still have his blood on my uniform. I watched it happen through my scope. I want to tear them all to shreds. Oh God, I want to be sick. His blood is still in my knuckles, under my fingernails. I can smell it. If he dies, I’ll burn the whole world down. Please don’t die.

[DATE REDACTED, LOCATION OMITTED]

No one is admitting to letting Dernier cook. If I find out who it was, I’ll kill them. Here lie Captain America and the Howling Commandos, heroes of war. They shat themselves to death. Amen.
The following letters form correspondence from Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes to Captain Steven Grant Rogers. They are believed to have been written by Sergeant Barnes during his service, prior to his capture by Hydra, and were found among Captain Rogers’ personal effects. Some details have been blacked out, a common practice in case of mail being intercepted and giving away troop locations. Letters loaned from the Captain America Archive for Captain America: the Exhibition. Parents are warned that the following documents contain explicit language and imagery which may be unsuitable for minors.

Dear Steve,

We’re shipping out. Can’t tell you where. Gotta hope they have stamps there so I can send this. Not that you deserve it, you punk. Can’t believe you left me alone on my last day. Half of me hopes you got caught this time and you’re in a world of shit, but the rest of me hopes you’re not too sore about getting rejected again. I wish you could just let it go, but you can’t, not even for me. Asshole.

Yours,

Bucky

Dear Steve,

In answer to your question, the food in [REDACTED] is better than army rations, which is like saying getting shot in the dick is better than getting shot in the face. I’d even eat your cooking right now. Can’t believe you want to join this shitshow.

Thinking of you, from hell,

Bucky

Dear Steve,

You remember that time we sat on the roof and watched that massive storm come in, listening to the thunder get closer and closer? That’s what it’s like, listening to the shelling. Only I don’t have my best friend here, there’s no lemonade, no city all around us, and every strike means someone’s dead. Ok, so it’s not really like that at all. I’d give anything to be back on that rooftop with you. There’s a lot of things I should have said.

My first real battle is tomorrow. Hope you’re praying for me.

Yours,

Bucky
Dear Steve,

Why haven’t you written me? The other boys from New York are still getting mail from home. I swear to God if my legs don’t get blown off then when I get back I’m going to stick my foot so far up your ass you’ll be tasting [REDACTED] soil. Write me, punk.

Yours,

Bucky

Dear Steve,

You still haven’t written, which means you’re still going to get your ass kicked. I hope you’re getting my letters.

They’re not letting us write much, in case we give something away that could get us all killed. I don’t think the Germans can do much with the fact that you’re a little shit who doesn’t know what’s good for him. If I write anything too revealing they’ll probably just black it out anyway.

The food’s [REDACTED].

Affectionately Yours,

Bucky

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Thinking of You, From Hell: Personal Correspondence of The Howling Commandos

Chapter Six: Love on the Front Lines

While none of the Howling Commandos were married during the war, they, like many soldiers, often exchanged letters with sweethearts back home. Most of these letters are sweetly romantic, indicating a melancholy longing that was as much for home as for their girlfriends. Some of the letters are sexually explicit, hardly surprising given the long stretches of time between shoreleave.

Several unsent letters were found among the effects of Sergeant Barnes, addressed only to ‘S’. There is much speculation among historians over the identity of S. Surviving members of the Howling Commandos have refused to provide any information. The most popular theory is that S was Stella Reinhart, the wife of prominent New York businessman Frank Reinhart. Stella grew up in Brooklyn and went to school with Barnes and Rogers, and “went steady” with Barnes for several months in 1941 prior to her engagement and subsequent move to Manhattan. While she never hinted at a continuing relationship during her lifetime, descendants of the Reinharts have actively promoted this theory, providing letters sent from Barnes to Stella during the time of their relationship. The fact that Stella kept these letters certainly seems to suggest that there may have been something between them even after she was married. Certainly it seems to heighten the tragedy of Barnes’s life to imagine him writing letters he could never send to a sweetheart he could never have.
Dearest S,

I never said it to your face but I want to say it now: Jeeze, your face. I’m lying here in the mud and the shit and I keep thinking about your lips and your big blue eyes and your lips. Jesus, I wish I could taste you. I want to feel that mouth on mine. I want to feel that mouth everywhere. If I get shot because I’m thinking about fucking your mouth instead of the fighting, I hope I come back to Brooklyn to haunt you.

Love,

B

Dear S,

Thinking about you is all that keeps me going. I wish you were with me, but really, I wish I was there with you.

I wish I could send this letter, and I thought I really might, but I promised in these I’d tell you how I really feel so I have to sign it ‘love’, and that’s something you don’t know about.

Love,

B

My Darling S,

Almost stepped on a landmine today because I was thinking about your ass. The good news is, all the showers here are cold ones.

Love,

B

My Darling S,

I’m sick of shooting Nazis. I want to shoot my load in your ass.

Love,

B
Dearest S,

I’ve got a fucking cold and I feel like shit. I keep thinking, what if this becomes pneumonia and I die? Plenty of people die of pneumonia in war. Embarrassing. What if I die and you never know how I felt about you? I guess you never will. Even if I make it back in one piece I’d still be too chicken shit to tell you. And if you did know, somehow, I’d be too chicken shit to do anything about it. Sometimes I like to imagine I’m a braver man and I could sweep you up and carry you away. But where would we go? You know I like to think about the future but right here, right now, there’s no place for us. I wish there was. I wish for a lot of things, like that you could know how I feel and everything would still be ok.

Love,

B

Dearest S,

I love you, body and soul.

I will never sent this letter.

Yours always,

Love,

B

My Darling S,

I’ve been marching at attention all day, imagining holding you up against a wall and fucking you. You don’t weight much more than this pack or this gun that I carry. I think I could hold you up with just one arm. Sorry, that’s the tactician in me talking. I want to hear you moan. I want to hear all the sounds you make when someone’s inside you, when I’m inside you. I want to see the face you make when you come. I want you so much.

Love,

B

Beloved S,

What a strange place to be so happy. The snow is beautiful, but not as beautiful as you. I look forward to giving you this letter, and every letter I’ve written to you.

Love,
Dear Rebecca Barnes,

You don’t know me, but I knew your brother James. He was a good man and, I like to think, a friend. I mourn his loss, as I know you do too.

I’m sorry for not writing to you earlier, but I confess I wasn’t quite sure what to say. I believe you’re the last person living who truly knew James. You may be angry with me, which you are entitled to. I made an impulsive decision, but I hope you can understand why.

Enclosed are a number of pages which I tore from your brother’s journal. I found it among Steve Captain Rogers' things, put aside to go to some museum. I couldn’t stand the thought of the government and a bunch of stuffy historians deciding what to do with the personal lives of our boys. Please keep them safe.

Destroy this letter once you've read it.

Warm regards,

Peggy Carter

September 20th, 1943, Middle of fuck-knows-where

I woke up with his name on my lips. It took me a long time to realise he hadn’t just left, that I hadn’t been holding him, that my little Stevie is safe miles and miles away and I’m stuck here, full of want. If I ever make it home I’m going to sew us together, skin to skin. Steve, Steve, I love you. I’ll see you in my dreams.

September 25th, 1943, Italy??

It’s only been a few months, but it feels like a lifetime. After a few weeks it felt this way, and after a few hours, and after he walked away from me for the last time. The men were singing last night, Vera Lynn: We’ll meet again/Don’t know where/Don’t know when/But I know we’ll meet again some sunny day. It made me cry. I know where we’ll meet, because Steve is still safe at home in Brooklyn - if he knows what’s good for him - but I don’t know when I’ll be there again, or if. I pray every night that he’ll be just the same, because I’m not. Only a few months and I’m not the same person that fell in love with him, but I still love him just as much. I hate the idea that he might be changing where I can’t see it. I don’t want to be in love with someone who doesn’t exist anymore. I want him just the same, always, and I want him, always. My little Stevie.

November 15th 1943, Still not the hospital, fuckers
I want Captain America’s dick in my ass.

I thought it was bad enough, the things I used to imagine when he was smaller, but there’s men out there straighter than the stick up Colonel Phillips’s ass who can’t help but stare at him now, and he keeps fucking hugging me. Goddamned giant, muscular, beautiful asshole.

Last night I dreamed I was still strapped to that table and he came in to rescue me and just, fucking gave it to me while I was tied down. I woke up sweating like I’d run ten miles and covered in cum like I was fucking fifteen again. How can I want that? Not the part where Steve gives it to me, because that’s pretty obvious, but the other part, with the table. I must be some kind of sick pervert.

I used to fantasise about fucking him up against the wall but he could probably hold me up now. I swear I’m going crazy. I’ve got other shit to think about, like what they’ll find if they ever get me in front of that doctor. I’m supposed to be having proper soul-crushing nightmares, not ridiculous wet dreams about my best friend.

On the bright side, if I keep jerking off this much it can’t be long before my hand cramps up so bad they have to send me home.

November 20th 1943, London

I was vague before but I decided I want to preserve everything that happened last night as well as I can, in case a building falls on my head tomorrow and I forget.

I don’t know where to begin. I don’t know where we go from here.

I left after the whole thing with Carter last night. I know I should’ve stayed to celebrate but I’m a bitter son of a bitch and a real asshole to boot. But hell, I guess Steve likes that about me, or something.

He came and found me, holed up in my room sulking. Didn’t even knock, just came in and shut the door. I must’ve been crying, because he walked over and hugged me before I could even say anything. I must’ve been in more of a state than I thought because I just grabbed him and started sobbing. He kind of tensed up but then he started stroking my hair and saying “I know, I know…” and I said, well, how the hell could you? You’ve got no idea. He gave me that whole wounded puppy look and I guess I must’ve punched him. Well, ok, I know I punched him, right in his stupid, beautiful face.

He just kind of blinked at me like the world’s handsomest owl and asked me what the hell he’d done and I just laughed and laughed until I was bent over double. When I could finally breathe again I couldn’t help it, I kissed him. Well, I say kissed. I guess really I kind of grabbed his shirt and smashed our faces together for a second.

I know him better than to think he’d punch me but when I moved away from him I was still pants-shittingly terrified. “You changed, asshole. That’s what you did”, I said, and I was too scared to look at him. “You changed when I wasn’t there.”

He was quiet for a long time. A lifetime. But he finally told me he wasn’t ever going to not be there again, not ever, then he wrapped his arms around me. Part of me was screaming at him another fucking hug? Are you serious? But then his hands found my face and he kissed me. He fucking kissed me, so soft and nervous. It was the best kiss of my life. It felt like the only kiss of
my life, the only one I’ve ever wanted. He whispered my name into my mouth and kissed me
again, a little firmer this time.

I whispered that I didn’t know he’d wanted it, and he said the same thing back, and we’re both the
stupidest, sorriest shits who ever lived, but god it felt so good to kiss him.

I’ve written so many filthy fantasies about Steve in this journal and this wasn’t like any of them. I
fucked him quickly on the thin mattress and he went back to his room, but when I made him come
he called my name and told me he loves me. I said it back.

How many years have I been wanting to say it? As many years as I’ve known him. I’ve said it to
him over and over, in my dreams and my fantasies and in letters I never sent, and thought that was
all I’d ever get. I never, not once, dared to imagine him saying it back, let alone saying it first.

We said it again at the door when he left and he smiled at me, so shy, like he hadn’t just been
panting my name and coming all over a perfectly nice English bedspread. God, I’m really in the
shit now. Oh, Steve. My Steve, who love me.

March 11th 1944, somewhere in the South of France

Well, the cat’s out of the bag. The Commandos know about Steve and I. Guess we weren’t always
as quiet as we thought, because Morita says they’ve known for ages. How can they have known
for ages when it feels like we’ve only been together all of five minutes? Now they know that we
know that they know they won’t stop asking me questions about Steve’s dick.

I’m glad they know. I wish everyone could know. I’m in love with Captain America! If they put us
in the history books I hope they remember me as my country’s truest patriot.

May 7th 1944

Steve gets grumpy with me any time he thinks I’m writing anything even remotely related to tactics
or our location, so I guess this journal is just going to be about the weather and Captain America’s
incredible ass.

May 23rd 1944

I’ve seen and done so much and I want to write about it but I can’t. Writing makes it real. There’s
enough blood on my hands to ink words on a thousand pages. What have they made me? And my
Stevie, he’s a killer now. I’ve done that to him. If I hadn’t been captured, he might never have seen
an actual battle. At least I watched him change this time, but part of me wishes he was still safe and
small back home in Brooklyn. But I hate myself because that part isn’t as big as the part that’s so
fucking glad he’s here, and I get to hold him in my arms every night. I can’t write about all the shit
I’ve seen and done anymore, but I can write about that. I can write about how much I love him,
same as I always have. I hope I never change too much for him to love me.
July 4th 1944

None of the others believe it’s really Steve’s birthday. I wish I’d had a chance to buy him something, but it’s good enough to have blown him so good I’m pretty sure he forgot his own name. God Bless America.

October 3rd 1944

All I do anymore is fight and fuck. It’s exhausting. When will this goddamned war be over so I can quit the army and just fuck Steve full time instead?

December 25th 1944, as far as I’m aware

I tried to explain to Steve that mistletoe is parasitic and kills its host plant and he told me to shut up and let him kiss me in the grove of dying trees, all choking to death under swathes of white berries. God, I love him.

January 31st 1945, Some big fucking mountains somewhere

We just hiked up a mountain. I’d follow Steve anywhere he asked, but I’ll be damned if I’m not giving him shit about this. Asshole.

Still, I’m so happy I could burst. It feels sick and wrong with everything that’s going on but I won’t stop. I deserve to be happy, don’t I?

—

Today we found a bundle of letters in Barnes’ cell. He fought aggressively upon their discovery, which I initially assumed was due merely to the discovery of his transgression. His theft of pen and paper was swiftly punished. Upon perusing the contents of these letters, however, it became clear his distress was due to their contents. I feel justified in my decision to delay telling Barnes about the death of Captain Rogers, and look forward to utilising this new information during training.

AZ

Dearest Steve,

Do you remember that Owens book I bought you? When I was lying there in the snow after I fell I remembered something from it with perfect clarity, and it just came back to me now. Everything is so fuzzy, but sometimes little things break through.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
—Is it that we are dying?
I see your face, always.
Love,
James Buchanan Barnes 32557038

My Darling Steve,
It’s so hard to be me. I hardly remember who I am. They’re doing such awful things to me. I’m scared, Stevie. I wish I was far away, with you.
Love,
James Buchanan Barnes 32557038

Dearest Steve,
Last night I dreamt you came to rescue me. I dream it all the time. It’s just like in Azzano, but I’m here in this cell, or in that chair they’re building, or lying on the floor of the room where they make me fight. You come in and sometimes you’re you the way you came to me then, like a beautiful angel in an M1 helmet and sometimes you’re like you were, a tiny asshole with the spit and rage of a mountain lion, and sometimes you’re something else. Sometimes you’re nine feet tall, or you pull your face off and there’s a red skull underneath. I wish I knew you were safe. I wish I knew you were the same as when I left you. Please don’t change, my love. Please come save me.
Love,
James Buchanan Barnes 32557038

Dearest Steve,
In my heart I am in London, still, with you. It was the best night of my life, and too short, and if I’d known this was where I’d end up I would have fucked you so hard we’d have brought the building down and then I could’ve been court-martialed and shot instead of this. Maybe I did, and maybe I was, and maybe this is Hell. Sometimes I think I must be dead, because how could I still be alive after everything they’ve done to me? I’ve been in so many bombed out buildings, surrounded by the stink of burned bodies and I always told myself, it’s not me. But now it is, Stevie. I know the smell of my own flesh cooking. I’ve seen my own veins hanging out of my arm like wool hanging out of Rebecca’s knitting basket. Or have I? Is it all in my head? I don’t know what’s real anymore, a lot of the time. Did London even happen? I hope it did, because it’s all I’ve got.
Love,
Dear Peggy,

Hope you and the children are well. I know I haven’t written in a while. Ben’s work is having us relocate, and I’ve barely had a moment to myself with the move.

I found the enclosed when I was packing, and I thought it ought to be with you. It’s a page from my brother’s journal, one of the ones you sent me so long ago. Can I ever truly express how grateful I am at the risk you took to send them to me? I hope very much that they can be published one day, or at least the more tender ones (Bucky could be truly filthy when he wanted to).

I still miss them both terribly, don’t you?

Fondly,

Rebecca

November 19th 1943, London

The way he looks at Carter makes me sick. I hope they get married and make scores of disgustingly beautiful children. I hope he’s happy. I know she can make that happen. I’ll even be best man, when he asks me. If she loves him half as much as I do, that’s enough.

End Notes

My housemate was listening to London Still by the Waifs this afternoon and now suddenly it’s 1:30am and nearly 5000 words later? Weird. I have work tomorrow lol help.

The poet Bucky references is Wilfred Owen and the poem he quotes from is called Exposure. Owens is one of my favorite poets. He was gay, and experienced PTSD and was hospitalised before going back to active duty. He wrote during the First World War and was one of the first to write about the horrors of war instead of glorifying it. I can't help thinking about Bucky shoving Dulce Et Decorum Est under Steve's nose every time he does something stupid and patriotic.

A Bouncing Betty is a really awful type of landmine.

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