Don't You Worry About My Immortal Soul

by michaelandthegodsquad

Summary

It's 1945; Bucky comes home from the war to find his best friend pregnant with no husband in sight, and takes it upon himself to step in as partner/husband/father/whatever else Stevie needs to raise her kid in peace.

Things are great, for a while. Living in suburbia with Stevie, Bucky finds himself with a steady job and the family he never thought he'd have. But Bucky can only keep up the act for so long until buried feelings and newly discovered kinks weigh him down with guilt and a hefty dose of self-loathing that send him on a downward spiral and begin to threaten the life he's built with Stevie.

Luckily, Stevie recognizes what Bucky needs and doesn't mind giving it to him, no matter how taboo it may be.

Notes

This fic was supposed to just be some unapologetic porn. Instead it grew into 20k words of fluff, then angst, then porn, then more fluff. Many thanks to Vero and DD for the massive amounts of support, brainstorming help, and hand-holding whenever I made myself uncomfortable writing parts of this. (And also for the complete lack of judgment when I presented this idea in the first place.) [Special thanks to DD for the beta work as well!]

A word about historical accuracy: This fic grew quickly and suddenly, and while I did research to make this story as accurate as possible, there are still some topics that I simply did not have time to research thoroughly or questions that I just couldn't find answers to. Also, I know little to nothing about how the military operates today, and even less about
When Bucky wakes up, he’s in a hospital—an honest-to-god hospital, not a tent on the front—and Lieutenant Colonel Jack Fury is standing by his bed. He tries to sit up and salute but is instead met with a shooting pain down his shoulder, radiating to his arm. He lies back down and tries to blink the moisture away from his eyes. “Colonel,” he greets the officer with a grimace.

“You look like shit, Sergeant.”

Bucky wants to laugh but his head hurts too much. “I feel like shit, sir,” he says, taking a deep breath. “What happened?”

“You were ambushed. Your vehicle was overturned. Broke your collarbone and sprained a few other things. You’re lucky to be alive,” the Colonel says, pulling up a chair by Bucky’s bed and taking a seat.

Bucky offers him a tight lipped smile and an eyebrow raise. “So this is what luck feels like?”

The Colonel ignores him and continues. “You’re headed into surgery again in two hours and even then it’ll still be months before you’re better. Until then you’re useless to me as a sniper.”

Bucky sighs, closing his eyes as his head falls back on his pillow. “Great,” he says sarcastically. Desk job it was, then. He’d go crazy with boredom before the year’s end.

Colonel Fury doesn’t seem to notice or care about his crisis because he keeps going. “So how about I give you an honorable discharge and hand you over to the reserve until you’re feeling better?”

Bucky cracks one eye open and if he didn’t know better, he’d say that was a hint of a smile on the Colonel’s face.

The guys are all humming “Beyond the Sea” as the ship approaches the docks, giving Bucky a hard time because he’s the only one with a gal waiting for him. “She’s not my—” he tries to tell
them for the fifth time, but they’re still laughing when he turns around so he doesn’t even bother this time. None of them have ever been friends with a dame before in their lives without expecting something from her.

Still, his foot is tapping impatiently and he’s biting his lip nervously as the ship comes to a stop at the dock and they all wait to be let off. Bucky’s been overseas for almost two years now—a lot could’ve changed since he last saw Stevie. She could have a fella by now. She might not even be here to greet Bucky and welcome him home.

Bucky scoffs at the idea. Fella or not, Stevie’s his best friend and she wouldn’t leave him hanging at the docks after being at war for two years. When they finally disembark the other guys disperse, some stopping to meet the crowds of friends and family waiting for them and others walking on to catch a train. Bucky looks around the docks for a familiar face and sees it toward the back, behind all the other crowds.

Stevie doesn’t look much different from when he last saw her two years ago, standing under an umbrella in her blue sundress and sweater to keep from getting wet. Her blonde hair is styled a little different and maybe shorter than he remembers, but her smile is the same—wide and honest and genuinely happy to see him. He picks up his pace, trying to get to her faster while also trying not to seem too eager or jostle his arm in the sling too much.

When Bucky finally reaches Stevie she wraps her free arm around his neck and he wraps his good arm around her waist and he kisses her just like he did the night before he left, lifting her tiny frame with one arm and twirling. She laughs, breaking her mouth away from his and swatting at him good-naturedly. “Will you quit it, Buck?” she says, still laughing, and he complies, setting her back down.

He’s got butterflies in his stomach as he looks down at her, a stupid grin on his face. God, he missed her. “I gotta tell you somethin’,” he says, trying to will his nerves away. She raises her eyebrows to show she’s paying attention and he takes a deep breath.

“See, the thing is, I was thinking, and maybe…” he pauses, looking her over more closely. There is something different about her and he’s embarrassed at how long it takes him to realize. “Stevie, is this—” he begins, reaching out to touch her stomach, rounder where it used to be flat.

Stevie’s face sobers immediately as she looks down at her feet and shakes her head, swatting Bucky’s hand away before grabbing it and pulling him away from the docks, Bucky trailing behind her with a million questions and a heavy heart.

Some people might call Bucky and Stevie’s friendship weird, and they might be right. It wasn’t often you saw a guy and gal as close as they were who weren’t sweethearts, or fucking at the very least.

Stevie and Bucky grew up at the same orphanage, is the thing. A year older, Stevie had an overdeveloped sense of justice and zero tolerance for bullies that always got her into scrapes with other kids. The nuns got her with the ruler every time, telling Stevie that her behavior wasn’t ladylike and that if she ever wanted to get adopted she best learn to calm down, but it never
stopped her.

Between her behavior and her asthma, Stevie pretty much knew she wasn’t getting adopted. She had an attack every time the wind blew the wrong way and most people couldn’t afford to take care of a sick kid. Bucky, who’d barely left Stevie’s side after arriving at the orphanage when he was four, had been considered for adoption a few times but always knew the right thing to say or the right tantrum to throw to make sure he stayed there with Stevie, frustrating the nuns to no end.

Luckily as she got older Stevie outgrew her asthma and stopped fighting with other kids so much, taking up drawing instead. Bucky would sit with her for hours while she drew whatever she could see, and even some fantastical things she made up on her own. Stevie always had a story to go along with them, which she told Bucky while they sat under a tree in a park near the orphanage. She was good and he insisted she was going to be famous. When he told her as much, Stevie would laugh and tell Bucky to hold still so she could draw him again. Bucky would complain that she’d already drawn him a thousand times, though he never did mind sitting for her. He would watch the concentrated look on her face, like no one else was around, and blush at the intense way she’d study Bucky's individual features. When she was done Stevie would always tear the new drawing of Bucky out of her book and hand it to him, and he’d keep all of them in a box under his bed after he made her sign and date them.

The nuns kicked her out when she was eighteen. Bucky tried multiple times, after that, to run away and find her, but he got caught every time and found out that being seventeen didn’t mean he was too old for the ruler. Stevie came back to visit a few weeks after she left, telling Bucky she’d found a place to stay, a hostel for students and wayward kids not too far away. She was there on Bucky’s eighteenth birthday, ready to take him there when he was inevitably kicked out as well.

They were a family at the hostel, the ten of them: five guys and five gals on two separate floors. Even Talia, the landlady, who tried to pretend she was all sour all the time, had a soft spot for most of them. Bucky worked odd jobs down by the docks or wherever he was needed, and Stevie mostly did caricatures of people in the park to earn some money since she hated the kind of secretary work the other girls did, and the two were still as inseparable as they’d ever been. Those days, the only fights Stevie got into were with guys who catcalled her, and even those didn’t go very far. Only one guy had ever thought to fight her back, and Bucky diffused the situation pretty quickly, which Stevie scolded him for later as he cleaned up the cut on her cheek from the guy’s ring, ignoring the bruise purpling on his own face. No one tried to pull that sort of thing again and things were actually going pretty well.

That is, until the U.S. entered the war. Bucky was twenty then and knew his draft notice would be coming as soon as he heard about Pearl Harbor on the radio. He’d looked at Stevie, who was staring at him with a worried face as she tried to hide the way her hands were shaking.

It took longer than he thought it would, but as soon as he got his notice he sought out Howard, who was the only guy in the hostel not going to war, having gotten a deferment since he was in college, taking a couple of measly mechanics classes. “Y’know you need to look after her for me, right?” he’d told Howard in the hallway as he came back from getting the mail, unopened draft notice still in hand. Howard had nodded, his face serious, and Bucky pressed on. “If anything happens to her while I’m gone, I’m comin’ after you.”

There was a USO dance the night before he shipped out, and he managed to drag Stevie to it. The girl had two left feet and couldn’t dance to save her life, but she was tiny enough that she could stand on Bucky’s feet and he could do the dancing for both of them. He kissed her then like he would kiss her two years later when he got back, and then he wrote her damn hear every chance he got when he was away.
Bucky always got the same question when he told people about Stevie, whose picture he carried with him through the war, and while he always blew it off, the answer was clear: of course he loved her; he’d known he did since he was thirteen years old even though it started long before then. But for Bucky, being best friends, spending as much time together as they did—it had always been enough and it never bothered him that things had never gone further.

Then the war happened, and Bucky had a few too many brushes with death. He’d decided, once he’d been discharged, that as soon as he got back to Stevie he would tell her everything and see if she wanted to give them a try.

But when he saw Stevie there with that slight swell in her belly, already beginning to round out, all his plans went south.

“Who did this to you?” he demands as soon as she closes her bedroom door and they’re alone.

“No one did this to me, Bucky,” she says, not looking at him as she toes out of her shoes. “I was a willing participant as much as he was.”

Bucky’s stomach churns. “Okay,” he says, rephrasing, “who’s the father?”

Stevie walks over to her dresser, sighing as she takes off her earrings. “No one you need to concern yourself with.”

“Oh?” he says, growing livid. “So some guy’s making my best friend have his baby out of wedlock and I’m just supposed to be okay with that?”

“No one is making me do anything, Bucky,” she says, raising her voice as she finally looks Bucky in the eye. “You know for a fact if I didn’t wanna do this there were people who could help me.” The idea alone makes bile rise in Bucky’s throat. Half the girls who went to see those kinds of people didn’t make it back out. “And yes,” Stevie continues, her voice going softer, “I would like you to be okay with that. This’ll be a lot easier if you’re not fighting me the whole time.”

Bucky sighs, scrubbing a hand down his face and rubbing the back of his neck. Stevie clearly isn’t going to tell him who the father is; he’ll have to find out on his own. “Fine,” he says, taking a step towards her and wrapping her in a one-armed hug. “So I’m gonna be an uncle, then?”

Stevie smiles. “Yup. And now that you’re not being bull-headed,” she says, separating herself from him long enough to reach under her bed and grab a box, “I can give you these.” She holds the box while he opens it with his good hand and pauses as he takes in its contents. “A pipe burst downstairs a while back, so some of them got pretty wet, but I managed to save most of them.”

Bucky looks down at Stevie’s drawings of him that he’d been collecting before he left. Like Stevie said, some of them are crinkled and smudged from being exposed to moisture, but that doesn’t matter. “Thanks, Stevie,” he says, leaning down to kiss her cheek. He takes the box under his arm, yawning. “I’m beat. Gonna go take a nap.”

He leaves, Stevie promising to wake him up in time for dinner, and goes back to his old room. The guys’ floor had never quite filled up again since the war started; there’s only one other guy staying there besides Bucky and Howard, who’s now on the verge of graduating. He passes Howard in the hall on the way to his room, giving him a nod and a smile in greeting. “Hey Howard,” he says,
Howard looks up, eyes widening before he gives Bucky a crooked grin. “Oh, hey Buck. You’re back,” he says, glancing down at the floor. He doesn’t even give Bucky a chance to respond before he gives him a tight-lipped smile and says, “I gotta go to work, man. I’ll see you later.”

Bucky nods, watching Howard’s retreating back suspiciously.

Bucky keeps an eye on Howard for the next week; the other man rarely looks Bucky in the eye and usually has an excuse to get out of conversation with him. One night Bucky waits for him to return from work, following him quietly into his room and locking the door behind him.

The lock gives a quiet *snick*, and Howard turns quickly, looking alarmed at Bucky. “Hey Buck,” he says, sounding nervous as Bucky advances upon him. “I’m really tired so if you don’t mind—”

He’s cut off as Bucky uses his good arm to shove his back into the wall. “You did this to her,” Bucky growls, his forearm pressing against Howard’s chest.

Howard swallows and sighs. “Look, Buck, it’s not what—”

“I told you,” Bucky continues, voice low and threatening, “to take care of her, not knock her up.”

“Buck, it was an accident, I swear!”

Bucky scoffs. “An accident? What, did she trip and fall on your dick or something? Try again.”

“Look, it was fine for a while, okay?” Howard says, sighing again. “I was keepin’ an eye on her and helpin’ her out when I could. Then she got real sick for a while.” Bucky pauses at that. Stevie was sick? With what? She never mentioned it in her letters. “Pneumonia or somethin’. I was there for her, day and night, just like you asked. Then she got better and—”

“And what? She was grateful and you took advantage?”

“No, Buck! She wanted it, I swear! She was lonely and—“

“You callin’ her some kinda whore, Stark?” Bucky says between gritted teeth, pressing Howard harder into the wall.

Tired of being cut off, Howard snaps. “I’m *saying* she needed someone and you weren’t here. *I* was.”

Bucky backs off at that, taking a few steps away from Howard. He already feels like shit for leaving Stevie that way but it wasn’t like he had a fucking choice. Deep down, though, he knows that the real problem here is that he’s at least partly jealous. If Stevie was going to get knocked up, especially like this, it should’ve been Bucky’s doing, not Howard fucking Stark’s.

Bucky bites his lip, looking back up at Howard, who’s still looking worried by the wall. “So what are you gonna do about it?”

Howard’s eyes snap up to Bucky. “What?”
“You know damn well what. Why haven’t you married her yet? She already,” he pauses, gesturing at his own stomach. “Y’know. You can tell.”

“Buck, I…” he trails off, looking out his window.

“You telling me you knocked her up and you’re not even gonna make an honest woman out of her?” Bucky is getting angry again, advancing upon Howard.

“No, Buck, it’s not like that. I really can’t. I’m,” he pauses, running a hand through his hair. “I’m engaged to my boss’s daughter. If I don’t marry Maria I’ll lose my job and Stevie will really be shit outta luck.” Howard pauses, looking up at Bucky. “If I could I would, Buck, but my hands are tied here.”

Bucky looks skeptically at Howard, not quite believing him but not wanting to start a fight for fear of upsetting Stevie. Instead he leaves, heading back to his room and thinking instead of sleeping.

“You know she can’t stay here,” Talia tells Bucky over cigarettes on the stoop one night.

Bucky nods, exhaling smoke through his nose. “Yeah, I know.” Unwed mothers aren’t a good look for hostels, many of which were now housing college students with protective parents. Having Stevie there would be bad for Talia’s business; they couldn’t do that to her, not after all she’d done for them.

“I’ll give her until the baby’s born,” Talia says, standing and stamping out her cigarette as she turns to head back inside. “After that she’s gotta find someplace else to go.” She closes the door behind her, the understanding that wherever Stevie went, Bucky would go with her.

Bucky stays outside a while, smoking a few more cigarettes and thinking. What’s holding him in Brooklyn, really, besides Stevie? Not a job, since he can’t work until his arm is functioning again. No other friends now that he and Howard are done. Sure as hell no family.

He finishes his last cigarette and leans back on the steps, going over his options despite already knowing what he has to do.

It takes him a few days to make arrangements, but he’s got a plan together before he even approaches Stevie.

Well, technically she approaches him, asking for help getting her shoes off. She’s six months along and already looking as big as a house, her belly a drastic addition to her tiny frame. Bucky looks at her sometimes and worries about how the hell something that big is going to come out of someone so small.

She sits on her bed with a sigh, hand automatically coming up to rest on her stomach. “Sorry about this, Buck,” she says apologetically. “Bending over’s gettin’ to be a real hassle,” she tells him with a chuckle.
Bucky smiles, slipping her shoes off, his bad arm still stiff but at least no longer in a sling. “You want me to…?” he trails off, gesturing to Stevie’s nylons.

“Oh,” she says, blushing. “Uh. If you don’t mind.” Bucky doesn’t. His hands slip up her dress just enough to grip the edge of her nylon thigh-high stockings and pull them down and off her feet. They’re worn thin like she’s had them for a while, which makes sense what with all the nylon going to the war. Stevie sighs as Bucky kneels by her feet, massaging at her swollen ankles.

“I’m glad you’ve got your arm back, Buck,” she says, a small, content smile on her lips. “Rumlow’s gonna fire me soon, I just know it. You’ll have to get a job for a while until I can find a new one.” Bucky smiles to himself at how he and Stevie have fallen back into a routine of taking care of each other, even after two years apart. He’d missed this in the war.

When Stevie’s relaxed, Bucky takes a deep breath, steeling himself before setting his hands on her knees. She opens her eyes and looks down at him with furrowed brows. “Why’d you stop?”

Bucky opens his mouth but flounders for a moment, trying to find the words. “I had an idea,” he begins, choosing his words carefully. “And I wanted to run it by you.”

Stevie chuckles. “That can’t be good,” she says, sitting up and folding her hands on her stomach. “Lay it on me.”

“I’m leaving Brooklyn,” Bucky tells her, watching her face fall. “And I want you to come with me.”

Stevie’s head jerks back a bit in surprise. “Where the hell are you gonna go?”

He takes one of her hands in both of his, looking earnestly up at her. “I was thinking maybe Tarrytown? You remember, we ended up there that one time we fell asleep on the bus. You liked it there. You said it was nice.”

“C’mon, Bucky, that’s crazy. We can’t afford to live there.”

“But we might. I’ve got some back pay comin’ in soon. We could maybe get a house.” Seeing Stevie’s eyes widen, he ploughs through. “I could get a steady job for once, and as long as I’m in the reserve the army’ll keep payin’ me. You could maybe do some tailorin’ from home once the baby’s born. It won’t be much but it’ll be enough to get us by.” Stevie doesn’t look convinced, and Bucky sighs. “Talia already said, Stevie. You can’t stay here once you have the baby. We gotta do somethin’.”

“C’mon, Bucky, that’s crazy. We can’t afford to live there.”

“Talia already said, Stevie. You can’t stay here once you have the baby. We gotta do somethin’.”

Stevie looks away, considering. “For some reason I never thought I’d leave Brooklyn.”

Bucky shrugs. “We’ll only be an hour away. We can come back and see Talia whenever.” He pauses, swallowing. “Or Howard. Y’know.” Stevie looks at him quickly, brows furrowed. “And anyway,” he says with a nervous chuckle, “we’ll have each other. I don’t know about you but I don’t need much else.”

Stevie doesn’t answer him right away, and when she does, it’s only to say, “I need some time to think.” Bucky nods solemnly, leaving her room and shutting the door behind him. He tries to keep himself occupied for the rest of the night, listening to the radio, picking at his dinner while Talia gives him a worried look before bringing some food up to Stevie, attempting to sleep but failing miserably.

The next morning he’s exhausted, sitting at the edge of his bed with his head in his hands, when he hears his door opening. When he looks up Stevie is standing there with coffee, offering him a smile
that’s just as tired as he feels.

She hands him the mug and sits next to him on his bed, not saying anything until Bucky gets through some of his coffee and wakes up a bit. “So,” she begins, leaning back on her hands. “What were you plannin’ on tellin’ people?” she asks nonchalantly.

It’s still too early for Bucky to know what she’s talking about. “What?”

She sighs, unconsciously rubbing at her belly with one hand. “Buck, I’m not lookin’ too good around here. Everyone knows I’m not married and they feel like that gives ‘em a right to judge me. Which I don’t give a shit about but I don’t need my kid growin’ up like that. So if we leave, what are we gonna tell people about this baby?” she asks, giving him a serious look.

Bucky gapes. He hadn’t quite thought that far ahead. He shrugs. “We can tell ‘em whatever you want. We can say your fella’s in the war or somethin’. No one’ll question that.”

Stevie nods, looking thoughtful. “Okay,” she says while Bucky is drinking coffee. “Let’s do it.”

Bucky nearly chokes on his coffee and Stevie gives him a cocky grin. “Yeah?” he says, happy and surprised and maybe a little breathless.

She shrugs. “Yeah, why not. I don’t have any better offers on the table.”

Bucky nods excitedly and hugs her, mindful of her belly, and kisses her cheek before dragging her to the kitchen with the offer of making her breakfast. She sits at the table and puts her feet up while barking instructions for cooking the perfect egg at him. He breaks the yolks but she eats them anyway.

Bucky receives his back pay soon after that; with it, he’s able to put a down payment on a house and buy some second hand furniture. Stevie sits on the porch swing and watches him do all the work, waving at him with a smile while she sips at some of the lemonade one of the neighbors brought over.

The neighbors seem to be an extraordinarily friendly bunch, visiting to welcome Stevie and Bucky to the neighborhood and bearing all kinds of treats, from casseroles to jello to pie, which makes Stevie’s eyes widen with excitement to the point of almost forgetting to thank the woman who brought it.

Everyone makes the easy assumption that Stevie and Bucky are married and Stevie surprisingly doesn’t try to correct them. At one point Bucky takes a break to join Stevie on the porch where she’s chatting with a couple from down the street, the husband holding a loaf of banana bread while the women talk, giving Bucky a nod that he thinks is meant to be a show of camaraderie. Bucky tilts his chin up in greeting. It’s unusually warm for early May and Bucky is sweaty and probably smells in his tank top, but Stevie puts an arm around his waist distractedly anyway, handing him her glass of water as she listens to her neighbor talk about some of the schools in the area. Almost a foot taller than her, he lets his arm rest across her tiny shoulders and drains the water in a few gulps.

“But you have some time before you have to start thinking about that sort of thing,” the neighbor says with a laugh. “So how long have you two been married?” she asks casually, leaning against
her own husband. The question throws Bucky for a loop and his eyes widen a bit, unsure what he’s supposed to say, if anything.

Stevie doesn’t miss a beat, though, smirking as she puts a hand on her rounded belly and says, “Long enough,” which makes the neighbor laugh and launch into another long rant about something or other. Bucky can’t be sure because he’s too busy looking down at Stevie in awe; she must feel it because she looks up at him with raised eyebrows and a knowing grin, winking. Bucky can’t help the way he probably beams at her, squeezing her shoulder and pressing a kiss to the top of her blonde head before giving a quick wave to the man with the banana bread as he heads back inside. He has to take a moment in the kitchen, leaning against the counter and biting at his own fist, unable to believe that this is his life.

It’s May 8, 1945. They’re just coming back from buying some kitchen utensils at a secondhand store, listening to the radio as they joke and try to figure out where they should put things in their new home. They go quiet for a breaking news bulletin about the German Instrument of Surrender, the announcer declaring that the war was almost over.

Stevie looks relieved at the news, shoulders slumping on an exhale. It’s only been just over a week since they heard the news about Hitler and Mussolini being dead, and she’d been worrying ever since that resulting turmoil in Europe might end up in Bucky returning to active duty. She tries to smile encouragingly at Bucky, but he’s not looking in her direction, instead glancing around their home, lips pursed in worry. How would this affect his military career? Could he still afford to live here and support the two of them (soon to be three, Jesus Christ) if the Army didn’t need him anymore?

When he finally looks up at Stevie, she seems to be beginning to wonder the same thing. Still, she smiles reassuringly at Bucky and pats his bad shoulder softly as if to say We’ll figure it out. He sure as hell hopes so.

Determined to find work before he gets any bad news from the Army, Bucky sets out asking for jobs all over town. Plenty of places are hiring now that dames are leaving their jobs to make room for the men who are slowly trickling back from the war; Bucky takes a job at a hosiery factory, which the boss swears up and down is about to boom now that all the nylon isn’t going to the war anymore. Bucky shrugs, knowing only that it pays eight dollars a week and the hours are surprisingly stable.

“It’s boss Erskine,” one of the guys says as he gives Bucky a tour on his first day. “He don’t like stayin’ here late and he don’t trust no one else with the reigns, know waddam sayin’?” he asks, elbowing Bucky in the ribs with a grin.

He shows Bucky to his area and, just before leaving, leans in and lowers his voice. “Oh, and uh, you didn’t hear it from me, but,” he looks around to make sure no one is listening in, “every once in a while ya supah-visah might look the otha way if ya need somethin’ special to take home to ya lady.” He gives Bucky a lascivious grin and wiggles his eyebrows. “Know waddam sayin’?”
Bucky glances at some of the product lying around and yeah, he definitely knows.

Two weeks into the job, Bucky has to head out of town for a drill weekend to stay in the reserves, which sucks a little because he basically works for two weeks straight, but also doesn’t suck because he gets a little extra cash.

It’s his first monthly drill weekend since his clavicle healed, so naturally he panics about leaving Stevie alone. “What if you have the baby while I’m gone?”

“I won’t, Bucky, I’m only seven months in,” she says with an eyeroll, going back to her newspaper.

“Yeah, but what if—”

“Bucky,” she cuts him off, putting her newspaper down and tilting her head back to look up at him where he’s leaning against the back of the couch, “if I go into labor while you’re gone, I will do everything physically possible to hold this baby in until you get back. M’kay?”

Bucky smiles sarcastically. “Thank you, that’s all I ask.”

Stevie makes a face at him. “No problem, sweetie,” she reassures him, patting his cheek and picking up her newspaper again.

The Friday afternoon that he leaves, he slips something from work, the packaging feeling heavy in his pocket as he walks home. Grabbing his pack and leaving it by the front door, he corners her in her room where she’s knitting something for the baby.

“You should teach me how to do that,” he says, standing in her doorway with his hands behind his back.

Her eyebrows shoot up to her hairline. “You wanna learn how to knit, Bucky?”

Bucky shrugs. “Why not? More clothes we make ourselves, the less I have to buy.”

She continues knitting as she tilts her head, considering. “Can’t argue with that logic.”

He steps into her room, hands still behind his back. “Gotta surprise for ya.”

She doesn’t stop knitting when she grins up at him. “Yeah? What’s that?”

Bucky grins mischievously and tells her to close her eyes and put out her hands. She rolls her eyes at him, putting her knitting needles down and holding her hands out. Bucky puts the package there and watches her face go from amused to shocked to almost awed.

“Shit,” she says under her breath. “These are for me?”

He chortles. “They sure as hell ain’t for me.”

“These are beautiful, Buck,” she says reverently, taking the stockings out of their packaging. She touches them, gaping. “Wait, are they—they’re not—they can’t be…are these silk?” When Bucky nods, she begins shaking her head and putting them back. “These are too much, Bucky, you gotta bring ’em back.”
“Don’t worry so much, I got ‘em at work. S’no problem.” Stevie asks if he’s sure three times before she finally accepts them, thanking Bucky.

“You’re too good to me,” she says, rolling them up and putting them in her drawer.

“I know,” he says with a shrug, laughing when she swats at his good shoulder and calls him a jerk. He calls her a punk and looks at the clock. “I gotta go catch my bus. I’ll see you on Sunday night, yeah?” he says, kissing her cheek and heading out the door.

They quickly fall into a routine, Bucky working while Stevie makes preparations for the baby and steadily makes their house a home. They get invited to a few parties where people continue to assume Stevie and Bucky are married. Neither of them ever corrects anyone, which Bucky is completely okay with.

Bucky keeps expecting Stevie to wake him up in the middle of the night to send him on a mission for some weird craving food, but it never happens. When he wakes up one morning to find her chopping an onion to put in her cereal, he’s kind of glad it doesn’t.

When his monthly drill weekend comes up, he tries to bring Stevie a present just before he leaves. After the stockings it’s a pair of shoes, and Stevie laughs at the thought of fitting into them any time soon before begging Bucky to stop spending money on her. Maybe next time he’ll buy her some lipstick in that sort of mauve color she likes so much.

One day Bucky comes home from work to find Stevie nearly surrounded by bits of baby clothing that he knows he didn’t buy, using her belly as a platform on which to fold them. He’s not even quite sure how to ask, but as soon as she sees him Stevie throws her arms up excitedly, a hat in one hand and a bib in the other, and says, “The girls in the neighborhood threw me a surprise shower! Imagine that!” Bucky’s exhausted from work but he smiles anyway and lets Stevie show him all the things she got.

Stevie tries to teach him how to knit but he fails pretty spectacularly, usually ending with Stevie having to unravel whatever he’d done to redo it correctly.

Occasionally, as he falls asleep, Bucky can hear Stevie moving upstairs, her steps staggered as she tries to compensate for the weight of her growing belly, and he falls asleep smiling.

Stevie’s well into her eighth month when they start looking for baby furniture, though she insists that they paint the nursery before they move any furniture in.

“You mean I should paint the nursery before I move furniture in,” he says, chuckling. Stevie grins at him and punches his arm.

Bucky doesn’t dare say it to her face, but she’s almost comically huge by the time he does paint the nursery, her belly looking like it’s trying to take over her tiny frame. She can’t stand for very long anymore without her legs or her back getting sore, so Bucky’s been giving more frequent massages
lately.

“I swear I’ll return the favor when I’m not as big as a whale,” she’ll sometimes say, already drooling into her pillow as Bucky works out a knot in her back.

At the moment she’s sitting in the rocking chair she’d picked out when they moved in, alternately watching Bucky paint three walls of the nursery green and sketching ideas for a mural on the fourth wall.

“Remind me why we’re painting now if you don’t even know if it’s gonna be a boy or a girl?” he asks for probably the third time.

Stevie doesn’t even look up at him as she says, “Because I want this room ready long before we see the baby. I’ve got other stuff to paint in here so get to it!” she tells him, waving her pencil in his general direction.

Bucky rolls his eyes, taking a break to rub at the soreness in his bad shoulder. “Any clue what you’re naming it yet?” he asks as he begins painting again.

“I was thinking Sarah if it’s a girl,” she says, still sketching furiously. “Y’know, after my mom.” Bucky nods, sweeping a brush along the windowsill. “And James if it’s a boy,” she throws out nonchalantly.

Bucky pauses momentarily at that but doesn’t stop painting, clearing his throat before he just says, “Nice,” because he doesn’t want to be a sap about it even though it’s kind of a big deal. He doesn’t see Stevie give him a fond look out of the corner of her eye, knowing he’s freaking out a little bit on the inside, but she doesn’t call him out on it because she knows he’ll just get embarrassed and deny it.

Bucky’s at work when his supervisor comes rushing at him, insisting that he leave right away. “Just got a call from the hospital,” he tells Bucky, sort of out of breath. “Stevie’s in labor, you gotta get going.” Bucky drops what he’s doing and rushes for the door, heart pounding because he swore Stevie wasn’t due for another two weeks. He only vaguely registers some of the guys patting his back on his way out.

He arrives at the hospital and finds things a bit…anticlimactic. He gets stuck in a waiting room and alternates between pacing and fidgeting in his seat and dozing restlessly. At least three separate nurses tell him to just go home and get some sleep because “the first one always takes the longest, dear,” but he knows he’ll just be doing the same thing so he figures he may as well just stay here. No one will tell him what’s happening when he asks questions—“Don’t worry, Mr. Barnes, your wife is in good hands, now please sit down,”—and every time he just slumps down in his seat with the rest of the expectant fathers, who just shrug at him, apparently fine with being deaf and dumb and blind in the waiting room. Most of them leave once it starts getting dark.

Finally, after sixteen hours of worrying and waiting, a nurse taps on Bucky’s shoulder and wakes him from his restless nap. He blinks up at her a few times until she comes into focus and just catches her saying, “Mr. Barnes, would you like to see your son?”

He’s still bleary-eyed when she walks him to the window of the nursery, but his eyes come into focus and he sees Stevie’s baby, asleep in a blue blanket. He doesn’t look much like Stevie—or anyone for that matter—but god help him, he likes the kid already, likes the way he's already got
his little fists in the air like he's ready to take on the world, but mostly probably just because he’s Stevie’s.

“When?” he asks, looking down at the card on the baby’s incubator, which is blue and just says “Baby Boy Barnes,” and that makes Bucky’s breath catch because shit. He’d forgotten the kid would need a last name and he and Stevie hadn’t talked about it yet.

“About an hour ago,” the nurse says, smiling at the way he presses his nose against the glass.

He looks at her quickly, brows furrowed. “Where’s Stevie? Is she okay?”

“You’re wife is fine, Mr. Barnes. She’s just sleeping. She had a hard go of it.” Bucky purses his lips, concerned. “You can see her as soon as she wakes up, but in the meantime, would you like to hold your son?”

He’s a tiny little thing and Bucky is half afraid he’s going to crush him or drop him or something equally disastrous, but he doesn’t. He tells himself this is Stevie’s baby so he’s going to try his hardest not to fuck things up.

They tell him that Stevie’s probably going to be asleep for a while, so maybe he should go home and get some rest himself, and bring back something for Stevie and the baby to wear. It’s only a little bit easier to leave now that he knows she’s okay. He finds a phone and calls Erskine, telling him he won’t be at work, and Erskine kind of sputters at the idea that Bucky was even thinking of coming in to work. Bucky hangs up, shaking his head. Erskine’s a weird boss.

Getting a shower and putting on something nicer than his work clothes doesn’t seem like too bad an idea; he gets dressed and packs a bag for Stevie. By the time he gets back to the hospital, she’s awake and a nurse is brushing her hair. She looks tired but still pretty damn gorgeous for someone who just spent sixteen hours pushing a person out of them. Bucky grimaces at the thought.

She reaches a hand out to him and Bucky moves to take her hand in his, but instead she flexes her fingers and says, “Did you bring my lipstick?” Bucky laughs and digs it out of the bag, tossing it to her and calling her a punk. She smiles at him, her nose scrunching up before she begins applying her lipstick and Bucky just kind of stares.

“You were early,” Bucky tells her a little while later, after the nurse has gone.

Stevie shrugs, her hospital gown slipping off her angular shoulder as she munches on hospital graham crackers. “What can I say, James is an eager beaver.”

Bucky flushes a bit at that and hides his smile behind his hand, clearing his throat. “So when can we leave?”

“Soon, I hope,” Stevie says. As if on cue a nurse walks in with and lays a blank birth certificate down on the table by Stevie’s bed.

“Okay,” she says, taking out a pen. “We just need a name for Baby Boy Barnes for his birth certificate.” Bucky’s eyes widen and Stevie maybe gapes and blushes a little. The nurse laughs and says she’ll give them some time, leaving the room.
It’s quiet and a bit awkward for a minute before Bucky exhales, chuckling nervously. “Guess we probably shoulda talked about this at some point,” he says, scratching at the back of his neck awkwardly. “Did you ever talk to Howard about this or…”

Stevie shakes her head, looking down at her hands. “No. I knew James wasn’t gonna be a Stark. I don’t wanna make problems for Howard.” She presses her face into her hands, shaking her head. Bucky rests a hand on her leg, trying to be comforting but not sure if he’s doing it right. He’s never seen Stevie like this, like she has regrets. He tries to get her to stop thinking about Howard. “Might be kinda awkward, everyone thinking we’re the Barnes’s and having a kid named Rogers.” He tries to gauge her reaction but can’t with her hiding her face like that.

Stevie nods, dragging her hands down her face. “I know. I’ve been thinkin’ about this a while.” She sighs, folding her hands in her lap and looking down. “Bucky, I know it’s a lot to ask because he’s not even your son, but…” she trails off, shaking her head and trying to find the words.

“Hey, hey,” he says, trying to sound reassuring as he takes her hand, kissing the back of it. “As far as I’m concerned, that wrinkly little brat you got out there is my son, okay? Don’t even worry about it.”

Stevie’s smile is relieved when she finally looks up at him.

A few hours later they’re dressed and ready to leave, Stevie in her favorite sundress holding a bundled up James. Some of the nurses come in with a camera and ask if they can take a photo of their favorite patients, and Stevie and Bucky happily oblige, Bucky with an arm around Stevie’s shoulder while she holds James. The nurses snap a photo and it occurs to Bucky that he never imagined he’d ever have this, a real family and all. The thought makes him so deliriously happy that he can’t stop himself from leaning down and kissing Stevie, who laughs as the nurses coo at them and take another photo.

They get copies of the photos in the mail a few weeks later; Bucky frames them and puts them on the mantle.

With James home, they fall into a slightly different routine, Bucky still working while Stevie tries to figure out what the hell she’s doing. She looks so frazzled the first few days he gets home from work and finds her in the nursery with James; Bucky knows it’s wrong but sometimes he can’t help but laugh, taking James into his own arms while Stevie lies down for a while before getting started on dinner.

(It should be noted that, upon Bucky’s return to work after James was born, the guys all greeted him with wide smiles and pats on the back and for some reason they even sing “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” which still makes Bucky laugh because of the irony.)

Sometimes James wakes up crying in the middle of the night and Stevie just sighs exhaustedly, ready to feed him again, but when she gets to the nursery Bucky has beat her there and is already
rocking James soothingly, getting him to stop crying with just a few bars of “Beyond the Sea.”

“You’re gonna spoil him,” she tells Bucky one night after he’s put James back in his crib, “if you come runnin’ every time he cries.”

Bucky shrugs, leaning against the railing of the crib and watching James sleep. “Can’t stand the sound.”

Stevie nods. “Believe me, it’s no walk in the park for me either. But you’ll learn.” She pats his shoulder. “G’night Buck.”

“Night, Stevie,” he says quietly. As Stevie turns to leave the front of her pajamas brush against his back and he could swear they feel damp. For some reason it keeps him up for a while.

James is three weeks old when Erskine calls Bucky into his office. He tells Bucky to have a seat and leans forward against his desk, speaking quietly in his strong accent. “How is fatherhood treating you, Bucky?”

Bucky shrugs, not sure what Erskine wants. “S’kinda tirin’, Mr. Erskine, but Stevie’s doin’ most of the work so I can’t complain too much.”

Erskine nods and takes off his glasses, cleaning them. “Well, I’ll get right to the point, Bucky. You haven’t been with us long but I like you. Veteran. Good work ethic. Family man.”

Bucky nods, still uncertain. “Thank you, Mr. Erskine. I appreciate that.”

“I’d like to promote you to supervisor, Bucky,” Erskine says once he gets his glasses back on. “Edgar will be leaving us soon and someone will need to take his place.”

Bucky pauses. “Sorry, sir?”

“Don’t look so shocked, Bucky. You’ve worked hard. The job pays eleven dollars a week. Will you take it?”

Bucky’s still trying to process this but he nods, says “Sure, Mr. Erskine,” and shakes his boss’s proffered hand.

“Good,” Erskine says, getting some paperwork together. “Take the rest of the afternoon off and celebrate with the missus. I will see you tomorrow.”

Bucky walks home in a daze, after all this time still unable to fathom that this is his life. After fourteen years in an orphanage, two in a rundown hostel, and two in the trenches of war, he now has a home that’s his own, a steady job that sometimes gives him raises, a family with his best friend. Still on cloud nine, he almost walks past a flower shop before saying fuck it, and buys Stevie some flowers, swaggering the rest of the way home.

He’s home an hour earlier than usual, checking every room for Stevie until he finds her in the nursery with James.

Bucky stops in his tracks at the sight before him and he drops the flowers in his surprise. Stevie is sitting in her rocking chair, the neck of her blouse pulled down over her shoulder as she nurses
James. “Oh hey Buck, you’re home early,” she says, smiling as though there’s not someone suckling at her breast.

Bucky’s frozen in place, unable to process what’s happening in front of him. Sure, he knew it was something some dames still did with their babies, and he must’ve known somewhere in the back of his mind that Stevie did it too since they never bought formula, but that doesn’t prepare him for seeing it happen firsthand. “Yeah,” he says absently, still staring. “Erskine gave me the afternoon off.” Stevie raises an eyebrow at him and Bucky shakes himself out of his reverie, flushing as he picks up the flowers. “Sorry, I should leave you to that,” he says, but can’t seem to move his feet.

Stevie’s face falls. “Oh, okay. I mean, you don’t have to. Y’know. It’s not a big deal. But okay.” She shrugs and gives him a half smile before Bucky books it out of the room, down the stairs two at a time, dropping the flowers on the kitchen counter before holing up in his own room.

Bucky sits on the edge of his bed, elbows on his knees and hands cradling his face as he tries to ignore the way his cock presses insistently at the front of his work pants. The thought of rubbing one out to the image of Stevie feeding her son makes Bucky feel all gross inside, so he has a long, cold shower instead, avoiding leaving his room until Stevie knocks quietly on his door to tell him dinner is ready.

Dinner is rice and tiny roasted tomatoes from the garden out back, still green because Stevie got a bit too excited about something growing out there and picked them too early. Bucky maybe eats a little too quickly to avoid having to talk, which backfires when he’s sitting with an empty plate and Stevie raises her eyebrows at him.

“I would’ve made more if I’d known you were that hungry,” she says with a fond grin, and Bucky looks away, flushing. The flowers he bought are in an old coffee can on the mantle. “I put James to bed a little early,” Stevie says quietly, picking at her food. “You seemed like you wanted to talk.” Bucky doesn’t look at her right away and she sighs. “Is everything okay, Buck? You’re actin’ kinda weird. Is this about earlier?”

Bucky shakes his head as if clearing it and tells himself to stop being an idiot. “Maybe a little. I guess I am feelin’ kinda weird. S’like walkin’ in on someone in the bathroom, y’know?”

Stevie chuckles. “Really, Bucky, don’t worry about it. I’m not embarrassed and you shouldn’t be either.” Bucky doesn’t look totally convinced and Stevie’s face falls a little. “Unless, y’know,” she says, looking down at her plate and shuffling her tomatoes around. “I mean, if it’s too weird I could try to be a little more discreet I guess. If it makes you uncomfortable. Or whatever.”

Bucky sighs. He doesn’t want to make Stevie feel like this is something she should be ashamed of or do in hiding, but popping wood every time he sees her feed James is problematic and not something he particularly wants to deal with, at least until he figures things out. He shrugs and gives her a self-deprecating smile. “What can I say, I guess I’m just old-fashioned,” he lies. Stevie gives him a tight-lipped smile that doesn’t reach her eyes.

“So what’s up with the flowers?” she says, quickly changing the subject as she scoops more food into her mouth. “I mean, not that I don’t like ‘em. Just seems a little outta nowhere.”

Bucky rubs at the back of his neck. “Oh yeah. I meant to mention that. Uh. Erskine promoted me today?” Stevie’s eyes widen as she gestures with her fork for him to go on. “Gonna be supervisor I guess. S’why I got home early.”

“Well shit, Bucky, that’s great,” Stevie says, beaming, then looking concerned down at their plates. “I wish you woulda told me, I woulda made somethin’ better. Y’know, somethin’ special.”
Bucky waves her off and stands, casually touching her shoulder as he passes to take his plate to the kitchen. “Don’t worry about it,” he says, even though he can tell, even just noticing the way her shoulders slump, that she’s worrying about it.

Their routine changes again but only slightly, and even then Bucky is pretty sure most of the changes are all in his head. It’s just that he notices things now, things that he probably should’ve noticed before. Like the way Stevie’s clothes fit differently, her fit-n-flares flaring out more at the skirt than they used to, the way the buttons on her blouses seem to pull at the buttonholes more. She’s started wearing her old clothes and shoes again now that she can fit into them and objectively he knows that nothing’s changed about the way she walks but for some reason he can’t stop staring at the way her skirts sway side to side each time she takes a step, can’t stop listening for the click of her heels.

Bucky’s been through this before with other dames but it doesn’t quite feel the same. Being attracted to someone should be exciting but Stevie is his best friend and wondering what she looks like in nothing but her nylons and shoes just feels wrong, makes Bucky feel dirty in a not-so-good way.

He finds a small, dark glass bottle in the trash one day and picks it out, examining the label curiously. It says it apparently used to have penicillin in it, which makes Bucky pause. They used penicillin on guys with open wounds in the war; what the hell was it doing in his house? He turns the bottle and finds the name of the hospital where Stevie had James on the other side before throwing the bottle back in the trash, going outside for a smoke (his first in weeks) and to think about how long he’s been ignoring any signs that maybe things weren’t as perfect as they seemed.

James is only five weeks old when Stevie decides that she’s ready to start working again. Bucky furrows his brows and tries to ask how the hell she’s going to manage that when she still has a newborn but she does that thing with her face where she raises her eyebrows and purses her mouth and whatever Bucky was going to say dies on his tongue.

The answer is surprisingly simple and one he thought up months ago, when they were still in Brooklyn, but had forgotten about.

When he gets home from work one day, one of the neighbors is in the dining room standing on one of the kitchen chairs, chatting away while Stevie pins the hem of her dress, a look of concentration on her face. Stevie’s brows are furrowed and she’s got at least three or four pins between her lips. She hums distractedly in response to something the woman says, then grunts and tells her to stay still while she adds another pin. Bucky clears his throat in the doorway; the neighbor turns to wave at him, making her skirt move again, and Stevie rolls her eyes before looking at Bucky, her eyes lighting up.
“Hiya Bucky!” the neighbor says cheerfully while Stevie takes the extra pins out of her mouth. “Good to see ya! I heard about ya promotion, congrats!”

Bucky nods, “Thanks, Connie,” then moves to kiss Stevie’s cheek and tell her he’s going to shower. On his way to the bathroom he hears Stevie say “You’re a shit model, Connie,” then Connie gasp like she’s scandalized and ask if Stevie kisses her baby with that mouth. Bucky laughs to himself and turns on the water.

When he gets out Connie is gone and Stevie is upstairs in the nursery with the door closed. Bucky frowns, feeling sort of guilty, and tries not to think about what she’s doing. Connie’s dress is on the table, along with Stevie’s extra pins, and some of them still have her lipstick on them. Bucky tries to ignore the strange, heavy feeling in his stomach.

The promotion couldn’t come at a better time, really. Learning the ropes and becoming familiar with his responsibilities distracts him just enough that he’s not constantly thinking about this weird thing he’s got going for Stevie lately.

It’s not like Bucky’s never thought about this sort of thing before. Stevie was there with him all through puberty; it’s sort of impossible for a thirteen-year-old boy not to wonder what it would be like to reach out and touch the way his body had been urging him to do.

But things had changed since then, or at least Bucky had thought they did. He thought he’d matured and begun to understand that he could love his best friend without needing it to go any further than that, that they could be together without being together.

Now, with the way he’s been feeling, he’s not so sure of that anymore and it’s driving him crazy, making him feel like some sort of pervert who leers at his friend when she’s not looking. His friend who he has a responsibility to take care of now, whose son he’s helping to raise as his own. He thought just being with Stevie would always be enough but apparently that’s not the case anymore, and any attempt at doing something about it might just seem like Bucky did all of this under false pretenses, like he only volunteered to take care of her and James to get something in return.

That thought is particularly disconcerting because Bucky probably would’ve throttled anyone else who tried to do that, and he can’t shake the feeling that maybe that was his goal along, that maybe in the back of his mind, without being aware of it, everything he’s done for Stevie has been done with ulterior motives. The thought makes him feel sick.

So the promotion is helpful and he throws himself into it, giving it 110% to keep his mind off his situation. But after a few days even that becomes routine and it’s hard not to think about going home and touching Stevie the way everyone thinks he does.

Still, Bucky would have to say, his life is going pretty well—better than he expected it would, at the very least.

Things don’t start really going downhill until one evening after work when Bucky is keeping an
eye on James while Stevie showers. Bucky enjoys his time alone with James, especially lately, probably because he knows where he stands with the kid. He doesn’t end up questioning his own feelings or intentions because he already knows he loves James like his own son, which for all intents and purposes, he is.

Bucky is sitting in Stevie’s rocking chair with James sleeping in his arms, the sound of the shower droning distantly, and for a moment his mind is blissfully blank of everything outside of this moment—he’s not thinking about work or the war or his recent preoccupation with Stevie. Just him and a sleeping James rocking slowly and steadily, back and forth. James kicks absently in his sleep and Bucky smiles quietly down at him.

Then James’s tiny little mouth quirks up on one side in the beginning of smile and Bucky can’t stop himself from recognizing it, remembers Howard’s face too well not to. That’s Howard’s smile and it kind of makes Bucky’s stomach turn. He frowns, moving James back into his crib and staring blankly at the sun setting through the window until Stevie gets out of the shower.

And the thing is, Bucky really had no right to react that way—he knew what he was getting into, raising another man’s kid; he’s fully aware that James isn’t actually his son despite sharing a name with the kid and he really can’t hold it against him if he looks like his father sometimes.

But Bucky couldn’t help it because things had been going so well that he must have actually managed to delude himself into thinking he had a real family, that somewhere along the way Stevie actually became his wife and James his son. Somehow he managed to fool himself into thinking this was really his life and not a charade they’re all putting on just so that Stevie can raise her kid in peace.

But Stevie’s not his wife and James isn’t his son and Bucky’s not finally part of a real family like he thought he was. Hell, between the three of them he’s even the outlier, the one who doesn’t have a real connection to either of them, be it by blood or by marriage or whatever. He’s just some guy who was stupid enough to take on some other guy’s responsibilities.

It’s all bullshit, and nothing is a better reminder of that than the sick thoughts he’s been having about Stevie lately, the way it all started when he saw James suckling at her swollen breast and ended up with a hard-on he could beat drums with. What kind of sick fucking pervert gets off on that kind of shit?

And the worst part, the part that Bucky tries not to think about or even acknowledge, is the way he looked at James and felt something that he can really only describe as jealousy. Jealous, of a fucking baby, because of where he gets to put his fucking mouth while Bucky has to watch from the sidelines. No decent guy reacts that way to something as natural as a mother feeding her child, and the jealousy and perverted feelings that he can’t act on are the clearest, most gut-wrenching reminder that this isn’t a real family and Bucky’s just been kidding himself this whole time.

And that’s how things start spiraling downward.
Bucky lets himself have all the thoughts he’d been trying to avoid the last few weeks because why the fuck not. If he’s going to be a hell-bound pervert he may as well take the scenic route. He openly leers at Stevie when she’s not looking and “accidentally” passes her room when he knows she’s getting dressed to get a glimpse of her slipping her nylons up her legs. One night he rubs one out thinking about what he’s starting to call “The Incident” and imagines that instead of James he’s the one mouthing at her areola and he wonders what her milk might taste like, flushing dark with shame the whole time. For one brief moment that he thinks might be a new low, he justifies his actions with the thought that he may as well get something out of this arrangement but he immediately feels guilty and disgusting for it and scowls as he shoots his load, getting some in his eye for his troubles.

He buys a bottle of Cream of Kentucky on his way home from work the next day with the intention of maybe getting just drunk enough to fall asleep without tossing and turning until 2 A.M. when Stevie walks into the kitchen in her nightie and catches him, raising an eyebrow at the bottle and one glass.

“Have a rough day at work, Buck?” she says, passing him on her way to the cabinets.

“Could say that,” he says, having already had a glass or two. He sighs, feeling guilty. “Sorry. Shouldn’t’ve bought this without tellin’ ya.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it,” she says casually from behind him, and Bucky imagines she’s probably shaking her head. “Just wish you woulda invited me to the party,” she adds as she sits at the table with him, empty glass in hand. She holds it out toward him expectantly and tips her chin. Bucky pours her a couple fingers and she sips at it slowly, closing her eyes and sighing contentedly. “S’been a while,” she hums quietly.

Bucky nods, draining his glass and pouring himself another. They’re quiet, Bucky drinking steadily and Stevie swirling her glass between sips. She perks up, eyes lighting up, “Hey Buck, remember that time we got sauced and you lost my shoes in a goddamn mailbox?”

Bucky chuckles. “And you made me carry you all the way back to Talia’s? Yeah, I remember.”

Stevie nods, looking excited. “Why the hell’d you do that anyway? I liked those shoes,” she mumbles as Bucky takes another swig.

“Didn’t feel like carryin’ ‘em. Don’t know why you got your unmentionables all in a bunch, you were walkin’ home barefoot anyway,” he replies, beginning to slur just a bit.

She punches him in the arm, laughing. “It’s the principle of the thing!” And Bucky laughs along with her and they talk and laugh and drink and Bucky can pretend for a little while that they’re back at Talia’s, before the war and all the changes it brought.

Bucky’s got a drill weekend and he almost feels guilty for looking forward to it, for wanting to get out of the house and not be so close to Stevie and James. He doesn’t have a chance to get Stevie a
present the way he usually does before a drill weekend, so instead he slips her a couple bucks and tells her to take James out and buy herself something nice. Stevie gives him a look like she’s studying him but Bucky doesn’t meet her eyes, leaning down to kiss her cheek before he grabs his pack and leaves.

The weekend away turns out to be good for him, allowing him to clear his head and think about things a little more objectively. The first thing he decides is that maybe he needs to get over himself and stop with the pity and self-loathing because real or not, he still has a family to take care of.

And that’s another thing, he realizes as he’s completing some menial task a superior officer gave him—who really gave a shit whether he had a “real” family or not? He of all people, having grown up the way he did, should know that there are different kinds of families and you didn’t need a “real” one to be happy. Not that it mattered either way, because he knew nothing would change; biological or not, he’d still treat James like his son. That was never in question and never would be, so Bucky made the decision to stop worrying about it.

Stevie, on the other hand, was a slightly different issue. Bucky isn’t sure he’d be able to squash down his desires or outgrow them like he did when he was younger—something, whether it was in him or in her, had changed. Maybe it was just the way he saw her now; before she’d been a friend, a girl he loved, a companion. Now that she was a mother, though, he was finally recognizing her as a woman, as a sexual being who could feel desire and bring forth life as a result.

He thinks about what she said to him, his first day back from the war—“I was a willing participant as much as he was,” —and he flushes, ducking his head down so no one else sees. However temporary it was, Stevie had wanted Howard, and had acted on that want, and Howard had wanted her right back. And Bucky knows that’s probably not something she just switched off upon having a baby; she’s still capable of wanting and being wanted, and Bucky’s not sure why it took him so long to realize that, but his mind seems to be having a hard time processing it where his body’s going full speed ahead.

Still, it’s something he can deal with, he realizes as he gets off the bus and begins his walk back home.

The sun’s just starting to set as he walks, but it’s still hot and humid. Bucky undoes the top two buttons on his shirt as he walks, already beginning to sweat. He’s feeling lighter now, not weighed down with quite so much guilt or self-loathing. He’s beginning to feel a bit more optimistic about his situation, thinking that maybe he can finally start thinking again about telling Stevie what he’d meant to tell her when he got back from the war. The timing is all wrong now because what they’ve got going is still so new, but maybe a couple years down the line, when it’s clear Bucky’s in this for the long haul no matter what she says.

He’s got a bounce in his step that hasn’t been there for a while as he approaches the house, even whistling to himself while he looks for his key. There’s music coming from inside, Lena Horne from the sound of it; he lets himself in, dropping his pack by the door before strolling into the living room. Stevie is on the couch, her blonde curls pinned up, the back of her neck exposed; the radio is playing softly and yup, definitely Lena Horne, singing something about stormy weather.

“Hey,” he says, approaching the couch.

Stevie looks up at him quickly, swearing under her breath as she stands, cradling James in her arms, and Bucky sees that the shoulder of her blouse is down again. “Sorry, Buck, he just wouldn’t stop crying and I tried singing to him but you know I can’t hold a note to save my life and just—I’ll go upstairs,” she rambles, still not facing him, her shoulders slightly hunched to hide what she’s
doing. Bucky can already see James start fidgeting as she moves toward the stairs and he sighs, feeling awful for interrupting James’s feeding.

“No, don’t,” he tells her, gesturing for her to sit back down. “Don’t stop on my account.” He turns the volume down a little more on the radio while Stevie sits again, settling back against a throw pillow.

“Thanks, Buck,” she says quietly, adjusting herself to get James back into position. Bucky stands dumbly in the middle of the living room trying not to stare and Stevie kind of just sighs. “Do you wanna talk about it? I know you have questions. Might make it less awkward if we talk it out.”

Bucky hesitates for a moment and then nods, slowly taking a seat at the other end of the couch, not daring to get too close. Stevie doesn’t say anything, doesn’t push him to say anything either, just watches Bucky patiently until Bucky figures out what he wants to say. “Does it,” he pauses, clearing his throat when his voice comes out too thick, “What does it, uh. Y’know. How’s it feel?”

Stevie takes a breath, looking up at the mantle and pursing her lips in thought. “Well, it was sorta weird at first. Kinda hurt actually. First time, in the hospital, I swore I wasn’t gonna do it ever again, but they taught me how. Turns out he wasn’t doin’ it right,” she tells Bucky with a quiet laugh, looking down at James with a smile. “Anyway, I was kinda sore the first few weeks but it’s okay now. Doesn’t hurt or anything. Just feels like pressure. Tugging, sorta.” Bucky nods, trying to listen and not react inappropriately. “Makes my stomach hurt sometimes but they say that’s normal.” She tilts her head, staring blankly ahead with what looks like the beginning of a smirk on her lips. “Feels kinda good sometimes, actually. I dunno. S’hard to explain.” She shrugs, jostling James where he’s latched onto her and the baby gapes for a moment, trying to find his grip again.

Bucky’s breath hitches and he looks away quickly as Stevie helps James latch back on, desperately wanting to look but managing to restrain himself. “Does that…help at all, Bucky? I know it’s probably still weird. I just thought, y’know. Maybe if you knew more about it, maybe it might help.”

Bucky nods as he gets up, still not quite able to tear his eyes away. “No, yeah, that uh. That helps. I’m beat. Gonna go to bed.” He walks back to his room, ignoring the quietly disappointed way Stevie says good night, and closes the door behind him, leaning against it as he takes deep breaths in an attempt to will away his erection, already leaving a damp spot on the front of his pants.

Acknowledging the way he wanted Stevie was one thing, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that this was still taking it too far.

Bucky tries to work through this the way he worked through everything else, but he can’t seem to do it. No matter how he rolls the dice, getting off on watching a mother feed her child still feels wrong.

He thinks a lot about what she said that night and feels even guiltier at the thought of being aroused by something that hurt Stevie, past or present; but then he starts wondering what she meant when she said it feels good and that just brings up more questions. Good how? Good like having a stiff drink? Good like laughing? Good like finally being able to fall asleep without listening for gunfire? Good like…like sex? If that’s the case, where does that leave Bucky?
He’s thinking about it at work which is already bad enough, but then one of the guys is trying to get his attention and Bucky doesn’t even notice him until fingers are being snapped in front of his face, breaking him out of his reverie. The guy doesn’t seem upset, just chuckles and says, “Where the hell were you, man?” And Bucky kind of panics a little bit and looks around to make sure Erskine didn’t see because getting distracted like this in a factory job was a sure way to get fired.

That, above all, is what makes Bucky worry. If he couldn’t get this thing under control enough to stay focused on his job, his primary means of taking care of Stevie and James, then he was in deeper shit than he thought he was.

He thinks if he could just get away again, even for a few hours, to sort this shit out, then everything might just go back to the way they were, but his next drill weekend isn’t for another three weeks.

That Friday, he showers as soon as he gets home and gets changed into something nice. He’s tying his tie when Stevie appears in his doorway, chattering away.

“Hey, so I was thinkin’, it’s a Friday night and we haven’t seen a movie since you got back. I know Connie said she wouldn’t mind babysitting for a few hours if you wanna—” she trails off when she sees that Bucky is already showered and dressed. “Buck?” she says, tilting her head curiously.

Bucky tries not to look guilty. “I think, uh,” he says, picking up his can of pomade, “Think I’ll pass. M’gonna go out.”

Stevie’s face looks carefully blank. “Oh, okay. Where ya goin’?”

“Not sure yet,” Bucky replies, slicking his hair back.

Stevie nods. “Alone?”

Bucky doesn’t answer, grabbing his jacket and kissing her cheek on his way out instead.

He takes a bus back to Brooklyn; going anywhere in Tarrytown would just raise too many eyebrows now that people know him and Stevie, start too many rumors about why Bucky Barnes was out on a Friday night without his wife. The bus ride is a little over an hour long, and things are already in full swing when he arrives at his destination, a bar he used to frequent before the war. He sits at the bar and has a couple of drinks, trying to clear his head while he surveys the crowd.

There’s a girl at the other end of the bar who keeps looking his way, blonde with bright red lipstick and what seems like permanent bedroom eyes. Bucky hasn’t been with a dame since before his injury but he knows the look she’s giving him; he sends a drink her way and when she smiles at him, he makes his way to her to strike up a conversation and turns up the old Barnes charm.

She doesn’t seem too interested in talking, though, especially once he tells her he’s a soldier. She says she doesn’t live too far away and her roommate’s out of town for the weekend.

Bucky’s familiar with this routine and he lets himself fall back into it. Once they get to her apartment he knows just the right things to say, the right places to touch to get her to take off her shoes, her nylons, her dress. Things don’t get weird until she takes off her bra, her breasts swaying with the movement of throwing it across the room.
Without even thinking about it Bucky descends upon them, cradling them in his hands while he licks at her nipples. She’s into it at first, whimpering while she tangles her fingers in his hair, but after a time Bucky knows he should stop, move on to getting her panties off, but he can’t seem to stop. He wraps his lips around her nipple and sucks, tongue laving on one while his hand massages the other, nipple hard and pressing against his palm.

He starts using teeth and she chuckles awkwardly, hands moving from his hair to press lightly at his shoulders, trying to tell him that he should move on but Bucky can’t seem to stop his mouth and his hands from doing what they will. She starts talking—“Hey, come on, I got other stuff to show you,” with a breathy laugh—but Bucky keeps going, until finally he bites down a bit too enthusiastically, and she shrieks a bit before pushing him off and telling him that maybe he should leave. Looking down at her, he sees that her once pink and dusky nipples are flushed red from overstimulation and the guilt and disgust wash over him again. He grabs his jacket and shirt from their place on the floor and leaves immediately, not even bothering to put them back on until he’s already out on the sidewalk.

He finds another bar and has a drink, then another, and a few more until the next thing he knows it’s last call and he’s sure he’s too drunk to make his way back to Tarrytown, if the bus is even still running. He thinks if he can just find his way back to Talia’s, she’d let him sleep this off in his old room and he could get back to Stevie in the morning. Bucky doesn’t make it that far, though, instead passing out on someone’s stoop until an old landlady with a broom starts shooing him away at 6 A.M.

Bucky wanders around the old neighborhood, exhausted and still pretty sauced as he ponders why his perversions have to continually go and fuck things up. As soon as his watch tells him it’s noon he finds the nearest bar and has yet a few more drinks, the bartender scrunching his nose at him in disgust because he probably smells just as bad as he feels.

When he eventually makes his way back to the bus station it’s already nearing 2 P.M. and the next bus back to Tarrytown doesn’t leave until three. He dozes while he waits and nearly misses his bus.

He staggers his way from the bus station to the house, just reaching into his pocket for his keys when the door swings open and Stevie is on the other side, face red with anger as she grabs his tie and pulls him into the house.

The first thing she does after closing the door behind him is slap him across his cheek, which he supposes he deserves. “Where the fuck were you?” she demands, seething.

Bucky shrugs, looking down at his shoes. “Out.”

Stevie huffs, fuming. “You were gone for almost a whole fucking day. I was worried sick, I was gonna find a phone and call the cops. I thought you were…I didn’t know what the fuck I thought.”

Bucky looks up, staring past her shoulder. “Well, I’m fine, so.”

She sighs, closing her eyes in frustration. “Yeah, I guess you are. Jesus fucking Christ, Buck,” she says, extending her arms to come up around his shoulders in a hug. He leans down into her, his nose at the crook of her neck, smelling perfume he doesn’t remember buying. “I still have questions,” she mumbles into his shoulder, “but for now I’m glad you’re okay.”

For a moment Bucky thinks he’ll be okay, considering the way hugging Stevie is more comforting than any of the drinks he’s had. Then James starts crying from upstairs. Stevie holds on, clinging to Bucky for a few more moments; James starts wailing and then Bucky feels it, the moisture seeping through Stevie’s blouse and into his, and he whines in his throat.
This isn’t fucking fair. Every time he starts thinking he can get past this it somehow gets worse. Stevie pulls away from him, giving him a curious look. “Buck? Are you okay…” she trails off, as if noticing for the first time the way Bucky can’t look her in the eye, as if only just now seeing the way he’s pressing against his slacks. She keeps her hands on his shoulders and studies him; Bucky still won’t look at her, but he can almost hear the gears turning in his head.

Finally she tells him, “You stink like booze. Go shower and get some sleep.” She turns on her heel and heads upstairs to tend to James. Bucky doesn’t even try to argue, shrugging off his jacket as he follows her and heads straight to the bathroom.

He’s swaying on his feet when he gets out, the warm water having relaxed him enough to make him realize how exhausted he really is. Stevie apparently doesn’t trust him to make it down the stairs because she emerges from the nursery, placing her hands on his shoulders and steering him into her own room. She leaves, returning a few minutes later with clean clothes and telling him to put them on and go to sleep before she exits the room again, closing the door behind her. Bucky can only manage to get the pants on before he can’t resist gravity anymore, head falling onto the pillow that smells like Stevie’s hair.

Bucky doesn’t open his eyes right away when he wakes up, preferring to take in the pleasant stimuli. He can smell dinner cooking downstairs, and the radio is on, too, playing Billie Holiday this time. There’s a hand carding gently through his hair, nails occasionally scratching on his scalp. Bucky moves into the touch without thinking. The moment he opens his eyes, Stevie is going to have a lot of questions and he’s not sure he’s ready to answer them. He tries to feign sleep.

“I know you’re awake, Bucky,” she says, voice quiet but firm and not conveying what she might be thinking. He hesitates but inevitably opens his eyes, which widen when he takes her in. Her hair and face are done up like she’s going out. He drags his gaze down to her outfit, which isn’t much—a dark green slip with black lace along the bust and the hem; the silk stockings he’d brought her from work that first week, held up by garters that disappear under her slip; and the black shoes he’d given her before leaving for a drill weekend, the ones she insisted she’d never fit into again. Her legs are crossed at her knee and she looks relaxed.

He opens his mouth to ask her what’s going on, but she places a hand over his mouth and gives him a stern look. “Not yet. I’m gonna ask you some questions and you’re gonna answer them. You’re not gonna lie and you’re not gonna leave anything out. Got it?”

Bucky nods, a warm feeling settling into his stomach. Stevie’s fingers resume their stroking through his hair as she asks her first question. “Where did you go last night?”

He’s hesitant and tries to leave things out, but Stevie seems to sense when he’s lying; when he tries to avoid telling her about the girl he met, she tangles her fingers in his hair and pulls back firmly. Bucky’s breath hitches and she asks, “What aren’t you telling me, Bucky?” And he does tell her, after a little more coaxing. She goes still, her expression blank as he tells her what happened. She nods, running her fingers through his hair again, and asks a few more questions.

Finally she says, “Bucky, what is it that you’re running from exactly?”

It’s at that moment that Bucky realizes how tired he is of carrying this with him, the guilt and the shame, and he tells her everything. What he’d been planning to tell her when he got back from the
war, his devastation at her having Howard’s baby and not his own, how he secretly enjoyed going along with what everyone thought of them, liked this game of house they’d been playing because sometimes for a few blissful moments he’d forget that he was only pretending. He tells her about his reaction to “The Incident,” the guilt and the shame and the disgust that followed because “here’s this beautiful, natural thing between a mother and her child, and instead of appreciatin’ that I get so turned on I can hardly think straight and all I wanna do is take his place and give you the time, Jesus fuckin’ Christ, what kinda sick fuck am I, Stevie? Who gets off to that shit?”

She stays quiet through the whole thing, nodding only when Bucky seems to need reassurance, and by the end of it she’s holding his head to her bosom while he sobs into the lace edging her slip, so relieved to have told her everything while simultaneously terrified of how she’ll react.

Stevie waits until he calms down, still stroking his hair as she pulls him in closer. “Y’know what it sounds like to me?” she asks when he goes quiet. He hums to tell her he’s listening, and her voice is even as she tells him, “It sounds like maybe you’ve been takin’ care of other people for so long—or with the war, and then comin’ home to me—that maybe you forgot to make sure someone was takin’ care of you.”

Bucky pauses at that; could it really be that simple? But Stevie doesn’t give him too much time to think about it. “I’ll fix that,” she says, resting a hand on Bucky’s cheek and kissing the top of his head. “Sit up Bucky,” she tells him, and he does, rubbing at his eyes. She looks him in the eye when he’s done and says, “Now, tell me what exactly it is that you want.”

“I…” Bucky’s mind goes blank then, not sure how to articulate it. “I want you, I guess.”

Stevie nods. “Okay.”

Stevie herds Bucky downstairs for dinner then—literally herding him, keeping a hand on his back or on his shoulders, guiding him downstairs and into his usual seat at the table. She pets him—honest to god pets him—when she sets down a plate full of food in front of him, and Bucky’s just so tired so he leans into the touch and tries not to think about how much he enjoys it.

Bucky looks down at his plate and his eyes widen. “Is this chicken?” Stevie nods, sitting down with her own plate, and Bucky shakes his head in disbelief. “How the hell’d you swing this?”

Stevie’s looking down at her plate but she spares him a cursory glance as she begins to eat. “Don’t worry about it.”

Bucky gapes. With the food rations that started with the war, it’s been hard enough to afford eggs, let alone actual chicken. “But Stevie, how—”

“I said,” she cuts him off, her tone firm and her face stern when she raises her eyebrows, assuring he won’t ask again, “Don’t worry about it. I got it and that’s all you need to know.” Bucky swallows, returning quietly to his food; truth be told he’s starving and hasn’t had chicken since he was in the war. He tries to keep his head down despite desperately wanting to look at Stevie and try to figure out what she’s thinking.

Stevie sighs, putting her fork down. “I’m sorry, Bucky. I didn’t mean to snap at you. I just—I’m tryin’ to help you and the only way I can think to do that is to, y’know. Maybe take over worryin’ about things.” She pauses, taking Bucky’s hand and squeezing it. “I just think maybe you need
someone to take care of you and I think I can be that. Does that…make sense to you?”

Bucky nods slowly, still a bit apprehensive. He’s a grown man, he shouldn’t need anyone to “take care” of him, whatever that means. But when he looks over at Stevie, all dolled up just for him but still the bossy little punk he’s always known her to be, he thinks he’d be willing to try anything she wants. “What if it doesn’t work though?” he asks, watching her brows furrow. “What if we do this…thing, and I’m still like this?”

Stevie looks down for a moment, leaning back in her seat and keeping her grip on Bucky’s hand. “Then we try somethin’ else. And we keep tryin’ until we get it.” She must see the way Bucky doesn’t look convinced. “I just want you to be as happy as I am, Buck. Not much I won’t do to make that happen.” She lets go of his hand and picks up her fork. “Now finish your dinner, I wanna try somethin’. And don’t ask because I’m not gonna tell you,” she warns with a smirk, face still stern as she points her fork at Bucky.

Bucky lets out a dry laugh as he resumes eating, mind still reeling. “I can hear you thinking from here,” Stevie says, not even looking up. “Seriously. Stop it. Turn off and let me pick up the slack for a while.”

“I just got one question,” Bucky says, then adds, “…if that’s okay.” Stevie nods and Bucky takes a deep breath, steeling himself. “You’re not…doin’ this ‘cause you feel like you have to, are you? Like you don’t feel obligated or nothin’ like that.” Stevie raises her eyebrows, looking incredulous. “I just…What I mean is, do you…y’know…want me, like I want you.” He can feel his flush all the way down to his chest and he stares down at his plate, afraid to look at Stevie again.

He hears her scoff, though. “Seriously Barnes, you blind or somethin’?” Bucky looks up at that, and Stevie’s smirking. “You think I let just anyone kiss me? I barely even kissed Howard. You got nothin’ to worry about.” She smiles at him and Bucky can’t help but beam back, laughing as she kicks him under the table.

They’re standing outside of Stevie’s bedroom; the door is closed and Stevie is talking to him in hushed tones to keep from waking James. “Okay,” she whispers, taking a deep breath. “Here’s how it’s gonna go. Once we get in there, things are gonna be a little different, okay? You’re gonna do what I tell you and you’re not gonna question me. But if I tell you to do somethin’ and you don’t wanna do it or it makes you uncomfortable you tell me, okay? You got all of that?”

Bucky nods; he’s nervous as all hell and not completely sure what they’re doing but he trusts Stevie, so he just nods and she keeps going.

“If you need to address me, you can…” she hesitates and Bucky thinks she might be just as nervous as he is. She’s not even looking at him, not really, just kind of staring out over his shoulder. “You can call me ma’am,” she finishes, exhaling.

Bucky wants to laugh at that but can’t seem to find the breath to do so. He tries to make a joke to ease the tension. “So you’re like…what? My mistress or somethin’?” He chuckles a little but there’s no conviction behind it.

Stevie nods slowly, now staring blankly at his chest. “If that’s what you need me to be.”

It’s not the answer Bucky was expecting. He swallows and asks her, “So then who should I be?”
She looks up at him then, right in the eye, and puts her hands on his face when she tells him, “Whoever or whatever you wanna be, Buck.” Bucky pauses at that, struggling to think of what that might be. Stevie kisses his cheek and tells him to take off his clothes and come in when he’s ready before going into her bedroom and shutting the door quietly behind her.

Bucky takes his clothes off agonizingly slowly, going so far as to fold them neatly even though he’s shit at folding clothes, and he knows he’s stalling. He’s this close to bolting and just going back to his room and pretending this never happened because he’s not sure what to expect once he walks into Stevie’s room and that kind of scares him. But then again, it’s Stevie; she’s trying to help him and Bucky knows he trusts her.

So he hugs his clothes to his chest and turns the doorknob.

Bucky shuts the door behind him and stands there feeling sort of awkward. Stevie’s at her vanity, reapplying the lipstick that came off during dinner. She doesn’t look at him, just says, “Put those on the dresser and sit on the bed.”

He obeys, sitting at the edge of her bed in his underwear, twiddling his thumbs awkwardly as he waits for something to happen. He hears the quiet snick of Stevie capping her lipstick, followed by the click of her heels as she makes her way to him, stopping to loom in front of him, her fingertips brushing against the top of her stockings.

“Take off my slip,” she orders him, voice soft but authoritative. Heart hammering in his ears, Bucky complies, gripping the lacy hem of Stevie’s slip and pulling it up slowly, over the garters attached to her panties, over her hips and over her stomach, still sort of soft after the pregnancy. He probably presses in with his hands a little too much, running them up her sides as he drags the slip up, because sure, he touches and hugs and is generally more tactile with Stevie than friends usually are but never anything like this, and Stevie doesn’t say anything so he figures he’s allowed this.

She raises her arms a little when she needs to, allowing Bucky to pull the slip off and over her head, gently placing it on the bed, the whisper of the fabric against her sheets so loud in the quiet of her bedroom. Looking up at her, he maybe salivates just a bit; the bra she’s wearing must be from before she had James—it doesn’t fit quite as well as it probably should, Stevie’s breasts beginning to spill out over the top.

The next thing Bucky knows, Stevie is straddling him, knees pressing into the mattress as her silk stocking brush his thighs and her shoes knock against his knees. He hesitantly and very carefully puts his hands on her waist, telling himself it’s to steady her and not to stroke the lace trim of her panties with his little fingers.

Looking down at him, Stevie fists a handful of hair at the back of his head and pulls his head back, lowering her lips to his. Bucky briefly thinks of the way her lipstick tastes kind of waxy, though that stops mattering quickly because she’s kissing him, and not like any of the other kisses he’s given her, before the war and when he came home and in the hospital; she’s taking her time, moving her lips against his agonizingly slowly like she’s got all the time in the world and Bucky realizes for the first time that maybe they do. There’s a quiet scratching sound when his stubble brushes her chin and he thinks maybe he should’ve shaved but Stevie doesn’t seem to mind, disconnecting her mouth from his to bite at his lower lip in a way that makes him shiver down to his toes before she drags her teeth down his jawline, stopping to nibble at the curve of his jaw where it meets his neck.

When she pulls away she takes a deep breath but still looks totally composed (unfairly so, Bucky thinks). He tries to chase her lips with his but is held back by the hand in his hair, which she then releases to rest her hands on his shoulders.
“Unhook my bra,” she tells him, and Bucky’s eyes widen as he hesitates, but she gives him that stern look again so he has no choice but to do what she says. He reaches behind her and unhooks her bra with an ease that makes her raise a suspicious eyebrow at him. He can only offer her a crooked smile as he slides the straps down her arms, placing the bra gently on the bed with her slip.

She gives him a moment to take in the sight before him; Stevie’s breasts aren’t much different from others he’s seen, save for maybe the way her areolas are a bit darker than he expected they would be, and perhaps a bit bigger too, her nipples protruding more than he’s used to seeing. She has light, barely there stretch marks along the curve of her breasts, and Bucky finds himself wondering if this is what they’ve always looked like, if they changed much with the pregnancy.

He decides that he really doesn’t care, still sort of mesmerized by them as his hand reflexively reaches up to touch. Stevie slaps his hand away. “Uh uh,” she chides quietly, voice more firm and less teasing. He looks up at her, arousal and confusion clouding his face. “You wanna touch, you have to ask first. Slip up again and we’re stopping.”

Bucky licks his lips and takes a deep breath. “May I, uh,” he begins, voice hoarse. “May I please touch them?” he asks, quickly adding, “Ma’am?” with surprise at the warm curl of arousal that the words ignite low in his stomach.

Stevie nods, an approving little smile on her lips as Bucky reaches up with both hands this time, fingers curling around the curves of her breasts. Her skin is softer than he imagined, for some reason, especially at the lines of her stretch marks, and they feel so full in a way that Bucky’s never felt before. He watches the goose bumps that rise around her areolas as he touches them with fleeting fingertips, awestruck.

There’s a hand in his hair again, and another on the back of his neck, pulling him in closer. He sighs, eyes falling shut as he presses his mouth against the curve of her breast in a soft kiss, moving up to her nipple and hearing her breath catch just slightly. He keeps moving, peppering every area his lips can reach with feather-light kisses.

Bucky’s back to kissing her nipple when Stevie presses closer against him, whispering, “Open up, Buck,” so quietly and so soothingly that he can’t help but obey.

It only takes him a moment to come to his senses, to realize what he’s doing (what she’s telling him to do) and he pulls away abruptly, looking off to his side with a whine to avoid looking at her, ashamed at having almost crossed that line. It still felt so wrong to him, and the guilt was returning, coiling in his chest.

“Is something wrong, Bucky?” she asks him, a flippant lilt in her voice as though she was expecting this reaction, not sounding too concerned at all.

Bucky swallows, then, “I shouldn’t,” he grumbles as though trying to tell himself more than Stevie. Those aren’t—it’s just—it’s not for him, okay, that’s for James and he shouldn’t be doing this, shouldn’t be taking something from a mother that should be reserved for her child.

“Do you wanna stop?” she asks softly, sounding quite a bit more concerned now, and the thing is, she knows he doesn’t. She’s almost sitting in his lap at this point, feeling the way he’s pressing insistently against her panties, and she obviously knows how much he wants to not stop, but Bucky’s too ashamed to tell her he wants to keep going as his face flushes a deep red.

“Hey,” Stevie whispers, pressing a kiss to his temple, a hand on his opposite cheek, “hey, no, it’s fine, it’s okay.” She tries to turn his head back toward her, kissing his temple again, then his forehead, then the space between his brows. Bucky follows, closing his eyes as she assures him,
“It’s okay, c’mon baby.”

For some reason that Bucky’s not yet ready to consider, that’s what gets him; he leans forward, fitting his lips around her protruding nipple, and hums, beginning to suck.

“You gotta open up a little wider than that,” she says with a chuckle, coaxing his mouth open with her thumb. He complies, opening his mouth wider until he can fit his lips over her whole areola, and beginning to suck very hesitantly.

Stevie’s milk is warm when it hits his tongue, sweet like the rice milk they sometimes gave him for breakfast in the war but still like nothing he’s ever tasted before; he immediately craves more.

Groaning, he cups his hand around the curve of her breast, holding it steady as he craves more. Stevie gasps, not used to his larger mouth drawing out more milk than James usually does. She grabs at his hair again while Bucky gets a rhythm going, sucking and swallowing, sucking and swallowing, and she presses into him just a bit more, tells him “That’s it, baby, take what you need.”

And Bucky does; he keeps going because it’s addicting and he doesn’t think he’s ever felt closer to another person in his entire life and he relishes the feeling, lets it wrap around him like a warm blanket and bring him a sort of comfort he’s never known before. He keeps suckling while Stevie hums above him; it may or may not be “Summertime,” and if Bucky could pay attention to anything else he might recognize her humming as the part of the song that says ‘So hush, little baby, and don’t you cry,’ her hands stroking his hair all the while.

He’s compliant when she tells him to switch to her other breast; she sighs softly and he looks up at her from under his lashes, which he’s only just realizing are wet with unshed tears, never disconnecting his suckling mouth as she smiles down at him fondly. Bucky realizes, in that moment, that this isn’t wrong in the slightest; it’s not a perversion or something he should be ashamed of because Stevie loves him and wants to do this for him and if Stevie wants to be a part of it, how bad can it really be?

The relief washes over him in a sudden wave and Bucky has to pull off for breath, almost panting as he looks up at Stevie with love and awe.

He’s still got some milk at the corner of his mouth and Stevie wipes it off with her thumb, pressing it to his lips. He closes his lips around the digit and sucks on it, eyes closing as Stevie chuckles breathlessly, “Such a hungry baby,” before she pulls her thumb away and kisses him again.

Bucky wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her closer, can’t help the way his hips move on their own, pressing against Stevie’s panties which are so goddamn wet, when the hell did that happen?

He presses his cock more insistently against the moisture and Stevie gasps into his mouth, making a sort of mewling sound. Bucky’s never heard Stevie make a sound like that in the nearly twenty-one years he’s known her, but he’s declaring it his life’s mission to draw the sound out of her as much as he possibly can.

She pulls her mouth away from his, shaking her head as if to clear her thoughts, and stands. Bucky immediately mourns her warmth but waits patiently for whatever comes next.

Stevie clears her throat and takes a deep breath. “I think you should take off your underwear,” she tells him. “Mine too, while you’re at it.”
Bucky acts quickly, his own underwear around his ankles and on the floor in one fell swoop, his reddening cock bobbing with the motion. Stevie’s, on the other hand, are a different story. He knows he has to unfasten the garters holding her stockings up, but usually dames do that themselves while he gets undressed, so he’s not complete sure how to do it. It takes a few minutes of fumbling with no instruction from Stevie, Bucky swearing under his breath because what are these, a goddamn jigsaw puzzle? But Stevie is ever patient with him, watching him fondly, and when he finally gets them undone he beams up at her, delighted by her approving grin. He slips her panties down her legs, careful not to bring the stockings with them because she didn’t tell him to take those off. When they’re on the floor Stevie toes out of her shoes, balancing herself on Bucky’s shoulders, which she then pushes back until they’re pressing into the bed.

Stevie straddles Bucky’s hips again, her hands on either side of his head as she leans down to kiss him. He raises his head into it, pressing his lips more insistently into hers and opening passively when her tongue swipes at the seam of his lips. He settles his hands very tentatively on the smooth skin in her hips, taking the way she hums into his mouth as permission. He can faintly feel her muscles moving as she lowers her hips onto his, both of them parting mouths and gasping at the contact.

Her lips are wet where they part and slide against Bucky’s cock, incredibly hard and settled against his stomach. Bucky watches her shiver when her clit catches on the flared head of his cock, his hips bucking at the contact. She mewls at the pressure and drops down to her elbows, curled blonde hair forming a curtain around their faces as she kisses Bucky again, less coordinated and more messy than before. He bucks up again, his cock growing wetter as it presses up along the length of her moist lips and Stevie groans, sitting up and resting her hands on his chest.

Stevie moves her hips slowly, back and forth as she grinds against him, brows furrowing in pleasure at the friction on her clit. The head of his cock catches on her hole and she stops suddenly, eyes widening. Bucky, panting and desperate to push into her, licks his lips and swallows. “May I, Ma’am?” he pleads, biting his lip.

Stevie groans again, shaking her head, frustrated. “Not for another two weeks, I’m afraid,” she says breathlessly, readjusting herself and resuming her rhythm, picking up speed as she slides on Bucky’s cock again. Bucky nods, not understanding but not questioning out of turn, making a mental note to ask her about it later. He relishes in the friction on his cock instead, the moisture and heat of her lips, and watches the way she moves, her hair falling into her face as she pants more frantically, her breasts swaying as she rolls her hips back and forth, one hand supporting herself on his chest and the other pressing into his stomach, softer since he got back from the war.

She mewls as she picks up speed yet again, now rocking against Bucky wildly, her only words a litany of swears and his name, all uttered breathlessly, her eyes fluttering shut with pleasure. Bucky watches in awe, having never seen this side of Stevie before but enjoying it thoroughly. The sounds she makes become increasingly higher pitched until all movement stops suddenly, Stevie’s mouth open in an inaudible gasp, her hips stuttering as moisture floods Bucky’s cock where it’s still positioned between her lips.

It seems to go on forever, Stevie riding out her orgasm while Bucky takes in every sight and sound, committing them to memory. Finally he can’t stand the distance anymore and he sits up suddenly, arms wrapping around Stevie’s waist as his lips crash into hers. She welcomes it, arms coming up around Bucky’s neck, pressing her torso against his as they kiss, wet and messy and wonderful.

Stevie pulls away, panting, her legs shaking as she dismounts, dropping herself unceremoniously onto her back on the bed as she catches her breath. Bucky watches her, absentmindedly stroking his cock, Stevie’s fluids still warm and wet on him. She looks down at him and raises a mischievous
“Get up here,” she says playfully, helping Bucky maneuver until he’s straddling her waist. Her grin is impish when she looks up at him, licking her palm thoroughly before wrapping it around his cock and stroking.

Bucky throws his head back, moaning at the friction, not expecting (or needing) much more until Stevie releases him. He looks down at her, confused, as she rests his cock between her breasts, raising an eyebrow as she uses her hands to push them together, surrounding his cock. Bucky’s eyes widen and he groans at the sight of his head peeking out from between Stevie’s breasts.

“You gonna move, or you just gonna sit there?” she says playfully, gliding her breasts down Bucky’s cock and back up to encourage his movement. Bucky groans again, beginning to move his hips and easily falling into a rhythm, falling forward onto his hands as he fucks frantically between Stevie’s breasts, Stevie moaning softly as she watches him. Bucky’s eyes close in pleasure, already so close, relishing the friction on his cock.

His eyes snap open again when Stevie lets out a particularly loud moan; he looks down at her and immediately knows what caused it. Where Stevie presses her breasts together, her nipples have begun to leak, dripping down the curve of her breasts and onto Bucky’s cock. He groans at the sight, his pace quickening as he nears orgasm, biting his lip and whimpering as he watches Stevie’s breasts continue to leak all over his cock.

He comes moments later, body going still as he spills over Stevie’s chest and neck, his come mixing with the milk from her breasts. He shuts his eyes tightly, unable to quite handle the image, and collapses on the bed next to her, breathing heavily and shaking with aftershock. He’s still catching his breath, eyes closed, when he hears Stevie get up, padding down the hall to the bathroom. The faucet runs briefly and she returns, already using a wet towel to clean off her chest before tossing the towel to Bucky. He wipes his cock clean and watches Stevie saunter over to her vanity, looking for a hair tie. She’s gorgeous this way, comfortable and quietly sexy in even the way she walks, and Bucky finds himself staring.

“Should I keep calling you Ma’am?” he asks as she ties her hair into a ponytail. She shrugs, watching him in the mirror.

“You don’t have to, but I won’t stop you,” she says, smirking as she sprints toward the bed and jumps onto it, curling against Bucky’s side and pressing a sloppy kiss to his cheek, smiling and looking happier than he’s ever seen her. “How are you feeling?” she asks him, propping her head up on her hand.

Bucky takes a moment to consider his answer; at the moment he feels amazing, but he knows Stevie’s asking about something less fleeting.

Still, Bucky feels on top of the world; the guilt and shame and disgust at his own desires have melted away (at least for now), replaced by the love and care Stevie has given him. The opportunity to let go and have someone else make decisions for him, if only for a little while, is simultaneously exhilarating and comforting, has Bucky feeling renewed and relaxed at the same time. He looks over at Stevie’s expectant face and smiles.

“I feel…good,” he says simply, and Stevie beams.

“Good,” she tells him, leaning over to brush his hair back and kiss his forehead. “You did so good, Buck,” she says quietly, hugging him. “M’so proud of you.”
Bucky flushes at the praise but enjoys the warm feeling it gives him, likes knowing he’s deserving of praise and capable of making Stevie happy.

“You’re sleeping up here tonight,” she tells him definitively, pulling a blanket up over them and pushing Bucky onto his side. She presses her front to his back, draping an arm around his waist and brushing her nose against the back of his neck, spooning him despite being so much smaller. Bucky doesn’t complain, enjoying the feeling of being held and protected by another person. He’s drifting off to sleep, coming down from his high, when he says it: the words are quiet and slurred with sleep but are still somehow clear as day.

“Love you,” he mumbles, burrowing his face further into Stevie’s pillow. His eyes snap open, wide as he registers what he said, and he freezes, hoping Stevie is already asleep.

She’s not. She chuckles, patting Bucky’s stomach and kissing the back of his neck. “Love you too, you big sap. Now go to sleep,” she tells him, smile in her voice, and Bucky obeys quickly.

Their routine changes yet again, for the better this time. Bucky returns to work on Monday with a new spring in his step, and the guys give him knowing winks and nudges despite not knowing anything at all. He whistles on his way home, content despite the almost oppressive heat, and even stops to buy Stevie flowers, which he intends to give her properly this time.

Every day he comes home from work, and his first act upon walking in the door is getting an arm around Stevie’s waist and kissing her simply because he can. (She smiles and sighs against his lips on some days; on others she bites him and raises an eyebrow, letting him know they’ll be playing again later.) Then he finds James and gives him a kiss too, on top of his head where a crop of thick black hair has already begun growing, because they are his family, and he knows now that no amount of trouble or inner turmoil or pure stupidity on Bucky’s part will change that.

Stevie continues doing tailoring work for the ladies in the neighborhood; on nice days she’ll take James to the park and make some extra cash drawing portraits and caricatures and that sort of thing, folks always willing to tip a little extra when they get a look at James.

(They do eventually make it to the movies, Connie babysitting while they see *Ziegfeld Follies* and sing the songs all the way home.)

Bucky starts putting money away, telling Stevie it’s just for a rainy day and shrugging when she gives him a playfully suspicious look; he figures in a few months he might have enough to get them a couple of rings and make it official. He tells James about his plans one night while Stevie is in the shower and makes the kid promise not to tell.

“Guess you fixed me then, huh?”

Stevie’s face is still carefully blank as she unties Bucky’s wrists, the fabric of his tie whispering against her headboard as she slides it off. As their scenes become more intense she gets like this, sometimes, afterwards, still so composed and quiet even after they finish; it takes her a while to
stop being so serious, to lose that calculated look in her eye and start to see Bucky as her equal again. It would frighten Bucky, or at least worry him a little more, if he didn’t still see love there the entire time, ever present behind the stern and authoritative demeanor even before it fades back into something softer.

Bucky brings his hands down once they’re free, wincing slightly at the stiffness in his bad shoulder. Stevie’s brows furrow and she looks guilty for a second as she takes his hands in hers and massages at his sore wrists, shrugging. “Don’t think there was anything to fix in the first place,” she says quietly, concentrating on Bucky’s hands.

Bucky pauses at that, frowning. He still feels it, sometimes, the guilt, the disgust, like the things he wants make him some sort of deviant. He finds himself prickling with shame when the guys at work brag about their exploits, staying out of the conversation and instead turning away as his face flushes. What would they say if they knew what he and Stevie get up to? Would they understand why he needs this? Would they still look at him the same way if he told them about the way he sometimes needs to just hand over the reins to Stevie, to turn off and give her control before he buckles under the weight of his own over-thinking? Would they still rib him in that friendly way if they knew how Bucky needs to be nurtured, suckling at Stevie like his life depends on it while she just runs her hands through his hair and calls him her baby?

Bucky already knows the answers and sometimes the thought still makes his stomach turn. But knowing he can have this, that Stevie lets him have this, helps more than he’s willing to admit. Knowing that she understands what he needs and isn’t too repulsed to give it to him—it does a lot to quiet his mind and make him feel less like a deviant, and while Bucky knows he’s a long way from making the bad feelings go away completely, he feels like he’s getting there, and he has Stevie to thank for that.

He huffs quietly. “I guess,” he mumbles, looking away.

Stevie pauses her massage of Bucky’s hands where she’s been working out the pins and needles and looks up at him sharply. “Hey,” she says, quietly but firmly, making Bucky look back at her. “Ain’t nothin’ wrong with you, Buck, you hear me? There are people out there who want way worse than you do. People who like smackin’ their girls around or ambushin’ good soldiers. Those are the guys who need fixin’. You, you just,” she pauses, sighing and looking down guiltily again at Bucky’s hands. “You just need more care than some people. Nothin’ wrong with that,” she murmurs, pressing a soft kiss to Bucky’s sore wrist, her eyes closing.

Bucky opens his palm and cups her cheek, thumb brushing against it as she moves into the touch. “Nothin’ wrong with you either, y’know,” he says quietly.

Stevie’s eyes open and she huffs, giving him a sad look. “Yeah? Whatta you know about it?”

Bucky shrugs, looking her in the eye. “I know I asked for this. All of it. And I know you’re good enough to give it to me.”

She snorts then, looking down at his wrists again, which already show signs of bruising. “Y’think good people do this to people they care about? Think they…” she trails off, looking away. “Think they like doin’ it?” The tone of her voice, the set of her brows...Bucky knows what shame looks like.

“Dunno,” he answers after a few beats. “Can’t say for other people. Guess all I can tell you is I liked it. I wanted it.” He scoots closer to her on the bed, dipping to press a kiss to her bare shoulder. “I want you.”
“Still?” she asks him, still sounding unsure.

“Yeah,” he says quietly, hugging her to him and kissing the top of her head where it rests against his chest. “Course I do. I always do.”

The sun is setting on a Tuesday night, Bucky and Stevie enjoying the view from the porch; Stevie sketches the scene with her new colored pencils, trying to get the right combination of orange, yellow, and red. Bucky suggests maybe adding a little pink and Stevie looks skeptical but tries it anyway, elbowing Bucky in the ribs when he turns out to be right. Bucky laughs and tries not to jostle James, who’s napping in Bucky’s lap.

The three of them are on the porch swing, one of Bucky’s legs propped up against the railing of the porch, pushing to swing them back and forth, Stevie’s legs tucked beneath her. There’s a surprisingly cool breeze coming through, keeping them cool while they watch neighbors—adults and kids alike—dance and celebrate in the streets.

It’s August 14, 1945; Japan has officially surrendered and the war is finally over.

Bucky had heard the news at work, one of the guys running through the factory and shouting at the top of his lungs. Erskine had shut down for the rest of the day, telling everyone to go home while he poured himself schnapps from the bottle in his desk. Bucky had rushed home, bursting in the door to find Stevie sitting by the radio.

Stevie had shrieked, jumping into Bucky’s arms and kissing every part of his face she could reach, Bucky laughing and twirling her. She claimed that she wasn’t crying when she turned and walked off, saying there was just something in her eye and telling Bucky to shut up when he followed her and jokingly offered to fish it out. Bucky played it off, but he knew he was just as happy as Stevie was that he wouldn’t be heading back to the war.

There are plans for fireworks in the town square later that night, after dark. Stevie and Bucky will go and celebrate with the rest of the town, drawing straws to see which of them would be drinking at the party and which would have to keep an eye on James and wait until they got home. Bucky would draw the short straw and Stevie would laugh at him while accepting a bottle of Schlitz from one of their neighbors.

For now, though, it was just Stevie and Bucky and James on the porch swing, enjoying the mild weather and looking forward to being a family in a world not ravaged by war.

They’ve left the door open and the radio on, celebratory music playing all afternoon. Stevie’s halfway through her sketch when, wouldn’t you know it, “Summertime” starts playing. Stevie looks up and raises a playful eyebrow at Bucky, who grins and leans down to kiss her, nice and slow because now he knows they really do have all the time in the world.

Billie Holiday’s voice filters in, fuzzy, through the speaker:

One of these mornings you’re gonna rise up singing

And you’ll spread your wings and you’ll take to the sky

But ’til that morning, there ain’t nothin’ can harm you
End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! This is actually the first fic I've finished in over three years (and the first I've ever written of this length). I'd really appreciate any feedback you may be able to give me!

Come harass me on Tumblr or Twitter and let's cry about stuff

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