The Long Way Round

by TheProperLexicon

Summary

He was supposed to return the stones to their original spots in the timeline, and he does. But he's been handed the answers to the questions he's always been afraid to ask. He's been offered the key to unlock possibilities he's never considered, even in his wildest dreams. His minute is up, he knows this. But when you have a suit made specifically for time travel, maybe you can make your own time.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
A United Front

Sunlight cast streaks along the files on her desk, files she should be reviewing. She wasn’t, at least not at this very moment. She had opened her drawer for a pen and the silver frame had slid out just a bit from under one of the folders there. Sometimes she could push it back under without looking too hard at the subject depicted, but sometimes she was driven to pull it out. Today was the latter sort of day.

She sat, looking at the image for a long moment before she pushed it closed again. Sousa’s desk phone rang, a soft trill that seemed out of place in the memories she had immersed herself in. She did not glance up from the papers on her desk as he answered, his voice fading into the ambience of the office around her. She was reading through the case files they had on Dottie Underwood. She had eluded them at the airport, and Peggy would be damned if she let it happen again. Too much was at stake, and she wouldn’t be caught unawares by the Russian spy again.

“Carter,” Sousa called, and not for the first time Peggy realized as she glanced up.

“Sorry,” she answered. “Yes?”

“There’s a guy from the Howling Commandos outside for you. Do you want him to come in?”

Peggy arched an eyebrow at him. She hadn’t expected any of the men to be in New York, they were all still overseas as far as she knew. “Are we sure he’s a Commando?” she asked.

Sousa turned back to the phone and repeated her question. After a beat, he laughed and turned to face her. “He says something about your 107 one-armed push-ups?”

Peggy fought a smile as she rose to her feet, straightening her dress. “Yes, yes. Send him in.” She came around the edge of the desk and started toward the door as it released the air lock. Her smile grew as the door swung open. “Dum Dum,” she began as the Commando came around the door and into view. Then she froze in her steps and her eyes widened in surprise.

The man that came around was taller than Dum Dum Dugan. He was broad-shouldered and blond, and wore a brown bomber jacket and black slacks. His jaw was tight with worry and his blue eyes shone with hope. His hands were tucked into his pockets in such a way that she could see the tension in his frame, but could also tell her was trying to look nonchalant. “Hey, Peggy,” he said, and his voice shook a bit on her name.

She gaped at him, unaware that the sounds of the office around her had stopped completely. Every man behind her, and every woman behind him, was watching in shock as Captain Steven Rogers stood in the center of the SSR war room. She stared in silence for what felt like an eternity. Then, he gave one of those half smiles, the one that tweaked up his lips just the slightest bit when he was nervous and her heart surged as though it had been electrocuted.

“You’re late,” she whispered in return, her voice weighted down by tears that she was holding back.

“Only a little,” he replied softly. She nodded, her eyes welling up. She forced herself to choke the tears back. She would not cry in front of the men, in front of these agents. She had worked so hard to earn her station among them, and she would not lose ground. But Steve was standing in front of her, not dead, not gone. Right there, in front of her, and she was shaking. “And I was thinking, maybe we could grab dinner, or go dancing or something.”

“I…” She trailed off, staring at him. “How are you here?” How are you not dead? She did not say
the words, but she knew he heard them. Understood them.

“It’s a long story, Peg. And I want to tell you all about it. But first I need to make sure you aren’t mad. Because if you are, I need to get my shield. Last time, you shot at me.”

She laughed, but it was waterlogged. The tears were still holding back, but she could feel herself coming undone. “Of course, I’m mad at you, Rogers. You stood me up!” The last bit warbled. He had crashed his plane into the ice. They all knew that. Everyone knew that. Searches had gone on for months, were still going on. No one could find that plane. But here he was, standing in front of her.

“Not intentionally,” Steve answered. “I was just worried I’d step on your toes.”

“Steve,” she whispered, finally losing the battle within and covering the distance between them. She flung her arms around his neck and felt his arms come around her waist. “I can’t believe this.”

“Me neither, honestly,” he whispered into her hair. “But it actually worked.” She let the comment pass without question, she would get her answers later, she knew. But for now, Steve Rogers was in her arms and she did not care that she was crying into his shoulder surrounded by the men she worked with. She’d fight her way back up the ladder if she had to, but for now he was there and he was safe and he was hers.

How long they stood there, she did not know, but it felt like too soon when Sousa cleared his throat. She pulled back a little, reaching up to wipe away the tears. Steve was watching her with soft eyes when she looked up at him. “Am I a mess?” she whispered only loud enough for him to hear where he was pressed against her.

“You’re beautiful,” he answered. She rolled her eyes. “Your mascara is running a little, though.” She snorted.

“Great,” she replied. “Just what I needed.” He reached up and rubbed his thumbs under her eyes, wiping away the streaks that she had created. She stared up at him in awe. “This better be one hell of a story, Rogers.”

“Oh, trust me. It is.” She nodded and turned back to the room full of men. Thompson and Sousa were in the forefront, while the rest of their men stood behind them. Thompson had his arms crossed as he stared, Sousa was leaned heavily on his cane as he took in Rogers.

“So, you’re the infamous Captain Rogers,” Thompson said, coming forward. He offered his hand and Rogers shook it. “It’s a real pleasure to meet you.” Peggy snorted again and Steve grinned at her.

“Didn’t realize how well acquainted you were with our Marge.”

Steve’s jaw tightened a bit at the condescension in Thompson’s tone and Peggy felt him step a bit behind her, pressing his shoulder against hers. A united front, she thought. “Agent Carter taught me everything I know about hand to hand combat, and I’m proud to admit I wouldn’t be the man I am today without her.”

“Everything you know, huh?” Thompson said, sizing him up. Steve was a whole head taller and twice as wide, and still the bravado did not leave Jack’s voice. “I’d like to see those skills in action.”

“Oh, I suspect you will. But you better hope it’s me and you and not you and her. Because I show mercy, son.” The last word was dripping with disdain.

“Ok, boys,” Peggy said, reaching up and putting a flat palm on Steve’s chest. “That’s enough now. Slow down, Cap.” Steve jolted as though he were poked with a cattle prod and Peggy’s eyes narrowed. “You ok?”
“Yeah,” he answered softly. “Just the way you said that. It, uh, it took me back to another time. Another place.”

“What? Cap?” He nodded. “Good or bad?”

“Uh, little bad, actually. Maybe we stick with Steve for a bit?”

“What about Rogers?” she asked, smiling.

“I’m good with that, too.”

Sousa cleared his throat again and drew Peggy’s attention away from Steve. “Sorry, yes. Steve, this is Agent Sousa. Daniel, this is Captain Rogers.”

Sousa reached out a hand, keeping himself steady on his cane. “It’s an honor, sir,” he said as Steve shook his hand. “I’m a real fan of any man who can do what you did for the 107th.”

“Thank you,” Steve replied. “I’m a real fan of any man who fought for my country, no matter what it cost.” Sousa’s cheeks flushed and he nodded, turning his head away.

He turned back to his desk and it looked like he was going to sit down. Before he did, he turned back. “Why don’t you take the rest of the day off, Carter?”

“But what about Dottie?” she asked, her shock at seeing Steve vanishing for a moment as she thought about their case.

But Sousa shook his head. “She’ll be here tomorrow, or even the next day. We aren’t going to have a break in the case as long as she’s underground. And if anything surfaces, I’ll call you.” He added the last bit as she opened her mouth to argue. “Go. Take the day off. Hell, take a few days if you need it.” He looked over at Steve. “It’s not every day that a damn miracle walks through the door, you know?”

“Thanks, Daniel,” Peggy answered. She turned back to Steve. “Let me get my coat. I’ll be right back.”

As soon as she vanished into the locker room, Thompson and Steve sized each other up. “So, you’re the Super Soldier,” he said. “You look pretty normal to me.”

Steve nodded. “I am,” he answered softly. “And she doesn’t need me to fight her battles for her, she never has, but I wouldn’t mess with Peggy if I were you.”

“Oh? Why’s that?”

“Because she’s the strongest person I’ve ever seen, and I fought Red Skull.” The door to the locker room opened and she stepped out wearing her coat with her purse slung over her shoulder. “Ready?” Steve asked as she approached.

“Yes,” she answered, pausing to take Thompson in. He was pale, and gaping at Steve. “What’s wrong, Jack? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Thompson startled, as though just realizing she was there. “What? No. I’m fine. Uh, have a nice night, Carter.” He turned and abruptly left them to head back to his office.

Peggy stared after him, stupefied for a moment. “What did you say to him?” she demanded, spinning on Steve. He hitched a shoulder in a shrug. “Did you defend me?” Her tone was cool.
“What? No. You have that guy handled. I just reminded him that I’ve faced down the head of Hydra and even I wouldn’t mess with you.”

Peggy grinned up at him. “You always know just what to say, Steve.”

“We both know that’s not true at all.”

Peggy laughed, looping her hand into the crook of his arm and leading him toward the exit through the locked door. “You’re right. It’s not. But there is something different about you. Something that I can’t quite put my finger on.”

The door swung closed behind them as he said, “I’ll tell you everything. But you have to keep an open mind. Are you hungry?”

“I know a great diner.”

“Perfect.”
“So, this Underwood woman was trained in the Red Room Academy?” Steve asked, his hands wrapped around his coffee mug as they sat across from each other at a worn table top in the automat down the street. Angie was behind the counter, and she had been sliding looks their way ever since Peggy had gone up and asked for two coffees, but the patrons around her had not let her escape long enough to pepper them with questions.

Peggy nodded. “Yes. Are you familiar with it?” she asked, though she had no idea how he would be. It was new to the scene, and SSR had only just gotten wind.

To her surprise, he nodded slowly. “Yes, I, uh, I worked with a young woman who escaped them,” his voice was soft. “Nat was a great friend, a true hero.”

“Was?” Peggy asked, reaching out for his hand. He spoke of her with a gentleness that she had not anticipated, and she felt the harsh pang of jealousy. “What happened to Nat?”

He shook his head, looking away to where his reflection stared back at him. His eyes were dark, haunted. He had seen far worse things since last she saw him. “She gave her life to save the world, Peggy.” His voice broke. “We were her only family, and she gave everything for us.”

Peggy sat in silence for a long moment, watching him. She had been giving him space, talking about her current status with the SSR, and her case involving Dottie. And he listened, as he always had, with rapt attention. As though there were no one else in the whole world. Every time she looked up and saw him sitting there, she felt that thumping of her heart grow faster. He was actually here. But he was so changed.

“Steve,” she whispered, leaning forward on her elbows. “Tell me what’s happened? Please? How are you here?” He sighed, closing his eyes for a moment. Then he nodded.

He pulled his hands away for a beat, and then he slid them back, as though he needed the contact. “Ok, yeah. I will. But you have to keep an open mind. A lot of this is just… Well, it’s bizarre.”


Across from her, Steve leveled his gaze at her and nodded slowly. “Yes.”

Her heart slammed harder into her ribcage. “Ok,” she breathed. “I’m listening.”

“Ok.” He took a deep breath, and he began to speak. From the few first words, her mind repelled what he was saying. It was too much, too unbelievable. It could not possibly be true. But he was sitting in front of her, and he was speaking so earnestly. Her mind could not wrap itself around the concepts he was murmuring to her in a busy diner, but her heart knew it was true. She listened for what felt like an eternity. She heard science fiction the likes of which would rival Orson Welles’ War of the Worlds, but unlike that radio broadcast, this was real. She knew it all in her heart as she watched him.

She learned the names of his fellow heroes, the Avengers. She learned of Hawkeye and Scarlet Witch. She heard stories of Iron Man and the Hulk. She learned of Bucky’s fate, what awaited him on the other side of his own time gap. She listened, transfixed by the story. It poured from him like a sieve, and he could not stop it. By the end he was shaking, his hands, his whole body. It had emptied from him like water from a dam, held back by years of dealing with it all alone.
When he was done, when he had reached the part about keeping the last vial of the serum that would take him home, he extracted it from his pocket and held it up. “This is it?” she asked, softly. “This will take you away from me again?”

“No,” he answered, staring at it. “I have no intention of using this, Peggy.”

“You don’t?”

“Of course not.” His gaze switched from the vial to her own eyes before he tucked it back into his pocket. From a loop on his belt he pulled the compass he had carried with him since she had last seen him. Age old and rusted. She was sure it did not work anymore. But he flipped it open to show her a picture she had never seen before, a picture of her. A little older than she was now. It had been cut from a newspaper. “I won’t leave you again. My whole life, I’ve been heading toward you. It just took a bit of a loop to come back around.”

She took a deep, steadying breath before she spoke again. She framed her words carefully, keeping her emotions pushed down. “But what of your family? What of the Avengers? You can use that vial to save Nat. To save them all.”

Steve stared at her, those blue eyes big and warm and wet as they took her in. Then, he shook his head. “No,” he replied. “I can’t save Natasha. She’s gone now. She chose her path willingly. She gave her life so that we could have a second chance at ours. I won’t take that away from her.” He reached out and placed his hand palm up on the table, waiting for her to slide her fingers into his. When she did, he wrapped them in his and held her gaze. “She gave her life so that I could be here. With you. The only place I’ve ever wanted to be.”

Peggy felt the tears burning again, and she looked down at the table beside their hands. Her mind struggled to keep up. This was not a dream, it was not a fantasy. This was real. Steve Rogers was sitting across from her, and her best friend was shooting daggers from her eyes as she watched from across the busy room. Finally, Peggy lifted her gaze. “Where are you staying?”


Peggy laughed, throwing her head back. “Yes, it’s 1946, Steve. And I’ve got a place for you to stay.” He arched an eyebrow and she swatted at him playfully. “Now, don’t get any ideas!” He chuckled, grinning at her. “No, you remember Howard, don’t you?”

“Stark?” he asked, and his voice caught a bit. “Uh, yeah.”

“Excellent. I think he’ll have a place for you to stay.”

Steve nodded, his bottom lip jutted out as he considered it. Then, he leaned in and lowered his voice. “Do you think he’ll want to… fondue?” Peggy burst out laughing, earning an even larger laugh from Steve.

Stark’s house was larger than Steve was anticipating, but not nearly as large as the Stark places he had known before. His heart ached as he approached, knowing what their final battle had cost the Stark family. He thought of Morgan, growing up without a father. He thought of Pepper without a husband. He knew there were people waiting for him back in the future, that his minute was up. But he also knew that he would be back there. He was just taking the long way around.
Peggy pushed the door open, not bothering to ring the bell, and Steve’s brow furrowed for a moment. Were they really that close since he left that she could just walk into the man’s house. She led the way in, moving through the foyer as though she owned the place. A voice came from above them, startling Steve where he stood just inside the door.

“Ah, Ms. Carter. I was wondering when I might see you again,” he spoke. Steve turned to glance up at the man that stood on the landing of the stairs before him. “And you’ve brought a friend. How wonderful!” The man that descended the stairs was dressed in an immaculate three-piece suit. His brown hair was perfectly combed and his face was long even as he smiled at Peggy.

“Jarvis, hello!” Peggy greeted, spinning to him. “I was hoping you’d be here! Is Howard still out of town?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Jarvis answered. Steve regarded him closely. This was the man that Tony had modeled his first AI after, and he looked nothing at all like he had been expecting. He turned to Steve and took him in for a moment, as though trying to place him. Then it all seemed to snap into place and his eyes widened. “Oh my!” he exclaimed. “This is… This is… Captain Rogers?” he stammered, his hands wringing in front of him. He turned to look at Peggy for confirmation. She nodded. “Captain Rogers! What an honor to meet you! Mr. Stark speaks so highly of you! And Ms. Carter, of course. Well, it’s truly an honor.” He reached out a hand and Steve shook it heartily. “I’ll send a telegram to Mr. Stark immediately. I’m sure he’ll be thrilled to know you’ve made your way back to us.”

“That would be most helpful, Jarvis. Thank you,” Peggy said, reaching out a hand to his arm. “But I actually brought him here for another reason.” Jarvis turned to look at her expectantly and Steve got the impression that Peggy could have told his man that she wanted to go skydiving over the Indian Ocean, and he would arrange it for her. “Steve needs a place to stay. He’s only just arrived back in town, and frankly I believe you might be looking at everything he owns.” Steve smiled sheepishly at her. “I suspected as much.”


“I will arrange a room immediately, and I will have Mr. Stark’s tailor come over and see about having a new wardrobe tailored for Captain Rogers.”

“Please,” Steve said, holding up his hands. “Don’t go to any trouble on my account.”

But Jarvis was already gone, climbing the stairs like a man on a mission. Steve turned back to where Peggy waited next to him. “Thank you, Peggy.” She nodded, smiling up at him. “What can I ever do to repay you?”

The smile that tilted up the edge of her lips was mysterious and warming all at once. “I can think of a few things.” Then, she had her arms around his neck and her lips were pressed to his. It took only a split second for him to lean into it, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her like a drowning man given air. The Steve she knew barely knew the first thing about women, but he had lost everything he had ever loved multiple times over the last decade. He would not waste a minute being uncertain again. He held her until she broke away and, even then, it was only to gaze up at him, her smile still fixed into place.
Steve was pacing in his room. It was well-appointed, he had to note. It was spacious, wide enough for two beds, and long enough to easily house a sitting area at the foot of the king-sized bed. Natural light spilled through the windows that looked out over an unimaginable garden. In the distance he could see the buildings of New York looming over them, but they seemed so far from where he stood. He turned his back to the windows and paced back toward the door as his brain filtered through a million things.

He had not really thought this through when he used one of his extra vials to bring him here. Bruce had made sure he had enough in case something went wrong, but when he had made this decision it had been impulsive. It had come to him after he spoke to The Ancient One when he returned the Time Stone to her hands, moments after Bruce had leapt off the roof with it.

He had swung down from the siding slope behind her and slid down to land on the concrete. She turned, peacefully, as though she had known he was coming. And maybe she had. He reached out and handed her the Time Stone soundlessly, having explained too many times at this point what he was doing in places he should not be. She had regarded him as she moved the stone back into the necklace around her throat. Then, she closed her eyes. He turned to go, but her voice stopped him.

“You have given up much, Mr. Rogers,” she said, and goosebumps rose on his flesh. “More than even you know.”

“Oh, trust me, ma’am, I know,” he asked, looking over his shoulder at her.

But now her eyes were open, and she was watching him again. “No, I’m afraid you don’t. You know what you gave up to begin with, but there is so much that comes after a missing dance.” His heart skipped a beat. “Perhaps you just need a little more… time.” She moved her hands apart, palms out, and in the air before him a mirror portal opened. Not one he could walk through, not one like Strange had opened to bring them help as they battled Thanos. This one was a one-way. He could see, but he could not touch. And what he saw was him and Peggy, slow dancing in a living room. The furniture had been pushed against the walls and they were barefoot.

“It’s too late,” he whispered. “She’s gone.”

The Ancient One shook her head. “No, she’s not. Not as long as you have time.” Then, she was gone, through her own portal, to continue her own fight. Steve stood there on the roof for what seemed like forever, thinking about what she had said. Then, he decided. He did not give it too much thought, he had never been known to if you asked Bucky, anyway. Then he activated his suit, and he jumped.

Now that he was here, though, he realized he probably needed to do a bit more thinking before just arriving in 1946. He was a super solider without a war, a man out of time, even if he had been born here. He had dates and times and knowledge swimming in his brain and it would take a while to quiet it so that he could speak without considering what he might accidently say. He would have to get used to not having a cell phone again. He laughed a bit under his breath as he thought about that. How he had hated that stupid machine when Tony gave it to him. He hated that it could find him anywhere, that Natasha would get annoyed when he did not text back. He hated not understanding computers. And then, he had gotten accustomed to it. When you lived in Tony’s world, you had to. And now it was all gone.

He stopped in the middle of the room, looking around. Had Tony grown up here? In this mansion?
Had he spent his childhood in these rooms? Would Steve meet Tony as a child? Would he know him his whole life? Would he be able to stop what had happened? He reached out and sank into a chair at the foot of the bed and dropped his head into his hands. Had he created an alternate reality coming here? What would happen to the Tony in this timeline? The Natasha? If they could shut down the Red Room Academy now, would Natasha even be kidnapped? Trained? Would she be saved? There were too many questions, and there would not be any answers for decades. But for the first time since Peggy had asked him where he was staying, he felt like he had a direction. He had come here just wanting to be near her, but maybe there was something more here for him to do. Maybe, just maybe, this was not about him and Peggy. Maybe this was about having enough time.

Steve was sitting deep in the couch by the fire, one leg slung over the other, when there was a knock at the door. He turned toward it, his chin resting on his hand. “Come in!” he called, preparing to rise. Jarvis bustled in with several brown paper packages. He was wearing an apron over his vest and pants, his shirt sleeves rolled up to show his arms.

“Forgive me sir, but these were just delivered from Mr. Stark’s tailor. I wanted to make sure you had them and deliver a message from Ms. Carter.” He set the packages on the bed and kept going. “She would like for you to join her at her home for dinner tonight.”

“Oh, thank you, Jarvis,” Steve said, rising to his feet. “If you can give me directions to her place, I’m sure I can find it.”

Jarvis smiled at him, and it was warm and welcoming. Nothing like the AI that was named after the man. “Oh, no sir. I’ll be driving you. Ms. Carter would be cross if I didn’t.”

“I really don’t think that’s necessary, Jarvis. I can handle Peggy being a bit cross.”

Jarvis sized him up, raking his gaze up and down Steve’s tall, wide, muscular super soldier self and shook his head minutely. “With all due respect, sir, I’m more afraid of her than I am of you.”

Steve fought a smile back and replied good-naturedly, “What if I told you I once fought off a dozen men in an elevator then jumped 20 stories, through a plate glass window onto a concrete floor, and walked away?”

Jarvis considered this for a moment, regarding him in silence. Then, he bowed his head slightly and replied. “I’ve seen Ms. Carter in far worse predicaments, sir. And I stand by my original statement. I’ll meet you downstairs in the foyer at six, sharp, to take you to her home.” This time he sounded exactly like the snarky, sassy robot that had lived in Stark’s Malibu home.

Steve nodded in return. “See you at six, Jarvis.”

Peggy’s home was nothing like Steve was anticipating. Firstly, it was one of Stark’s houses. And it looked nothing like he would have expected for a home she lived in. It was clear it was just a place she lived. She opened the front door and beamed at him. “You made it,” she said, stepping aside. She waved to where Jarvis was waiting in the car. He waved back. “I’m glad you found it all right.”

“Jarvis was very helpful,” Steve replied, taking off his bomber jacket. He was wearing a new shirt, a bit more of the current style, and new slacks. “He really seems to like you.”

Peggy nodded. “The feeling is mutual. Mr. Jarvis and I have been through a lot together the last few months.”
“He mentioned that he had seen you in action a few times,” he continued, following her through to a kitchen in the back of the house. It was huge, with a massive island in the center. On the island were the makings for dinner, some fresh herbs on a cutting board, a pot boiling away on a stove. “What can I do to help?” he asked.

“Would you mind cutting some more parsley and oregano? I need to stir the sauce.”

“Absolutely,” he said, unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt. “What are we having?”

“Spaghetti?” Peggy asked, turning to cross to the stove. “If that’s all right?”

“Sounds perfect,” he answered, reaching for a knife. “So, this is Stark’s place?”

Peggy made a scoff noise. “Yes, we’re tenants, apparently. It’s the least he could do after getting us kicked out of Griffith House.” Steve arched an eyebrow at her as she turned to smirk at him. She read it well. “For months, I was trying to prove Howard’s innocence about something that’s irrelevant now. And the investigation got my team thinking that I was in on it. So, I got kicked out of my boarding house. Howard decided to make amends by putting me up here. But he didn’t want me to live alone, so my friend Angie came along.”

“Angie? The woman from the Automat?”

“That’s the one. She’s also an aspiring actress. She’ll be home later, probably after dinner. She works the long shift today.” Peggy put a lid on the pot she had been stirring and turned to look at him. “I’m excited for you to meet her, but not quite yet.”

“Oh?” he asked, scooping up the herbs he had diced into a small bowl. He picked it up and carried it toward her. “Why’s that?”

Peggy took the bowl and set it on the counter to the side of the stove before turning back to him. She slid her arms up his chest and rested her hands on his shoulders. “Is that all right with you, soldier?”

He nodded, bending a bit as though to kiss her. But he held off, an inch or two away, letting her come to him instead. And she did, her body pressing against his so well that it seemed like they were made to fit together. He lost himself in her for a long moment, but too soon she broke away and smiled up at him. “The water is going to boil over,” she said softly. “And if I ruin this dinner, Ana will murder me.”

“Who’s Ana?” Steve asked, releasing her so that she could step back to the stove.

“Ana Jarvis. She’s the one who gave me this recipe. She’s an amazing cook, a better seamstress, a pretty good fighter, and a very good friend of mine.”

Steve grinned, leaning against the counter behind him casually. “She sounds amazing. I can’t wait to meet her.”

“She wanted to come over and cook for us, but I told her I wanted to try my hand at it. It’s been awhile since I cooked.”

He cocked his head. “How long is a while?”

Peggy pursed her lips as she considered it. “1940?” Steve choked on nothing, coughing as he startled. “What? I’ve been fighting a war!”
“Nothing,” he said. “But, maybe, I mean. Maybe I can help?”

“Oh,” Peggy joked. “You’ve been cooking?”

Steve shrugged. “Well, yeah. Yeah, I have.” She turned to look up at him. “At least a lot more recently than 1940.” He reached for the pasta that was in a bowl behind him. “I’m happy to help, Peggy. In any way I can.”

Peggy considered him for a long moment, as he held the bowl of pasta in his hands. Finally, she nodded, smiling. “Yes, all right. I’d love some help.”

He stepped up beside her at the stove and leaned down and whispered in her ear, “Why do I feel like that might be the first time you’ve ever said that, Agent Carter?”

“Don’t get any ideas, Captain Rogers. I’m only asking for help with dinner. If there are any battles to be fought or guns to be shot, I’ve got that handled.”

“Yes, ma’am, Agent Carter. I’m just here for back up.” She bumped him with her hip and he grinned at her. Then, he poured the pasta into the boiling water. “Have you salted this?”

“What do you take me for?” Peggy scoffed. A moment of silence hung between them. “Ugh, no. Grab the salt, Rogers.” He laughed as he followed directions. They laughed and cooked and carried on like no time had passed, like they had done this a hundred times, like it was not a miracle that that stood in the kitchen together years later, and years before.
The remains of the meal sat around them on a table far too large for two people. Steve and Peggy were sitting directly across from each other, an empty seat on either side. The bowl of pasta was half gone, with plenty of leftovers for Angie if she was hungry when she came home. Which would be any minute now, if the clock had any say about it. Steve was leaned back in his chair, his arm thrown up on the table as he watched her. She smiled at him. “What is it, Steve?”

“I just…” he trailed off for a moment, tapping his fingers on the table once, quickly. “I never dreamed we would be sitting here, like this. After all this time.”

Peggy glanced down, her eyes drifting over his fingers before lifting up to look at him again. “It hasn’t been that long for me,” she whispered. “But it’s still been long enough.” She leaned forward and rested her forearms on the table. “I thought you were dead, Steve.” He nodded slowly, watching her. “I thought you were dead for years.”

He leaned in, holding her gaze. “I thought I was, too,” he continued. “For decades, frozen in that ice.”

Peggy’s next words were soft. “Are you still down there?”

He blanched. It was another thing he had not considered. Somewhere out there, he was frozen in an ice flow, waiting for S.H.E.I.L.D. to find him, for Peggy to find him. “I, uh, I guess I am.” He answered. He rubbed his hands down his face and groaned under his breath. “Well, that’s a bit heavy.”

Peggy nodded, her eyes wide and unblinking as she processed. She finally spoke. “Steve, how did they find you?”

He shook his head. “I wish I could answer that, but I just don’t know. I woke up in a hospital room and an old game was playing on the radio. I don’t remember anything before that.”

“Do you remember the crash?”

He shook his head slowly, lifting his gaze to the ceiling. “I remember talking to you. I remember… I remember the Stork Club. I remember, I looked at my compass. Then, everything is a blur. The doctor’s called it acute memory loss, said I’d probably never get it back. I just know I don’t like to be cold, and I can’t sleep on my back.”

She nodded, pushing the dregs of her pasta around on her plate. “When do they find you?”

He frowned. “2011,” he answered softly. Her jaw went slack as she stared at him. “I know. It’s almost 70 years.”

Peggy nodded, watching him. “Did you…” she trailed off, swallowing. “Was I…”

“You were there,” he answered her unspoken question. Her eyes widened. “You never gave up on me, Peg. Never once.”

She shook her head, watching him. “And I never will.” She leaned across the table, her palm open and up, and he reached out as well. Their fingers met, and held fast. Just as she squeezed his hand, there was a key in the tumbler. Peggy sighed, pulling back. “That’ll be Angie. Brace yourself.” Steve grinned.
“Peg, I’m home!” The woman who came through the dining room was heading to the kitchen, but she stopped abruptly when she saw Peggy and Steve at the table. She was wearing her teal Automat uniform and her coat had been hung up already. “Oh!” she stopped abruptly. “I didn’t realize you had a-” She stopped abruptly as recognition blazed across her face. “Holy smokes! You’re Captain America!”

The title gave him another jolt as memories of another time and place overlay the years he used the moniker here. “Uh, yes,” he said, rising to his feet. “And you must be Angie. Peggy has told me a lot about you.” He offered a hand, but she stood gaping at him a moment longer before she moved forward. “It’s a pleasure.”

“Gee, you’re much bigger than you look on your posters!” Angie barked before her hand flew to her lips. “Sorry! That was rude!” She took his hand, shaking it strongly. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.” Her gaze drifted to where Peggy had risen to start clearing the table. As soon as Angie released his hand, Steve moved to help.

“I’ve got this, Steve,” Peggy said as he lifted a plate. He opened his mouth to argue but one look from her silenced him. She was trying to get Angie into the kitchen alone.

He lifted his hands in surrender. “Of course, yes.”

She gestured behind her vaguely. “Why don’t you have a seat in the living room? I’ll join you in a moment.” He nodded, pushing his chair in and coming around the table. He paused, wondering if he should say anything more.

Then, he turned to where Angie was standing, still staring and smiled. “I’m glad to meet you, Angie.”

“Uh, same, Mr. America,” she stammered.

“You can call me Steve,” he replied, the same, kind smile in place.

“Steve.”

Then he was gone, out into the living room. As soon as the door closed behind him, he heard their voices explode into chatter, but he could not make out the words. He grinned to himself as he crossed to the sofa in front of the window and sank into it. He would not have to wait long, he suspected, until they arrived back in the same space as him. So he occupied his time by taking in the décor in this, Howard Stark’s other home.

Alone in yet another sitting room, he thought of when Natasha would fall asleep on her end of the sofa in Avengers tower and her feet would drift over to his leg to keep them warm. Sometimes he missed her so badly it ached like a fire in his chest, his best friend, who fired missiles with her words and shot daggers with her looks. Peggy was different, not more, not less, but different. He had felt almost paternal with Natasha, even though they were physically the same age. Not counting the time in the ice, he thought ruefully. She was hard and jagged, her history had to be extracted slowly and with precision. But under all that stone and masonry, she had been soft. A glass ballerina encased in concrete. He sighed, leaning his head back.

It was barely ten minutes before Peggy returned to his side. She sat on the sofa with him, but kept a respectful distance. He longed to have her pressed against him, but he knew that these times were different. “Angie will be joining us shortly,” Peggy said, leaning toward him ever so slightly. “I’ve
told her not to pepper you with questions, but I can’t make any promises. Answer whatever you like, and tell her the rest aren’t her business.”

“What did you tell her about my absence?”

“Well, your disappearance was classified, so she doesn’t know much. I told her that you can’t talk about your work in the military, and I think she just assumes that you’ve been doing that for years,” she whispered, leaning in further. He was tempted to lean in and kiss her, but he held back.

“Honestly, that might be the best cover, now that I’m thinking about it. I bet Howard could help.”

Steve shook his head. “I don’t want to impose on Stark too much,” he whispered. Not after everything that I’ve done already.

But Peggy waved her hand dismissively. “Trust me, it’s the least he could do, given what I’ve done for him the last few years.” Steve arched an eyebrow. “Saving his reputation, protecting his fortune, keeping him alive. He owes me.” She held his gaze as she slid slightly closer. “I’ll trade in all my favors for you.”

Steve reached out and brushed his hand along her cheek, holding her there. “Peggy, I-”

There were footsteps on the stairs and Steve and Peggy pulled away as Angie appeared in a regular day dress. She practically danced through the door before sinking in to a chair across from them. “So,” she began cheerfully. “Steve. What are your intentions with our Peggy?”

Steve coughed in surprise, not anticipating such a forward question right off the bat. Peggy looked mildly murderous, but Angie did not flinch. In fact, she did not even glance to her friend. She folded her hands in her lap and stared hard at Steve. “Well, uh,” he stammered. “I-”

“Well, spit it out, soldier. I won’t allow anyone to dillydally with my girl’s heart. You understand?”

Steve cleared his throat, then leaned forward and braced his elbows on his knees to meet Angie’s gaze levelly. “Forgive my surprise. I wasn’t expecting such a straightforward approach. That was my mistake, I should have known better. Anyone who can keep up with Peggy Carter would obviously be as straightforward as possible.” The corners of Angie’s lips ticked up, but her gaze remained severe. “If I may be frank, Angie,” he continued. She gestured for him to continue. “I have every intention of staying as close to Peggy as she allows, for as long as she allows. And if that takes us through the next 80 years, I’ll be a very happy man.”

Tears sparked in the corners of Angie’s eyes and her jaw slackened for only a moment before she got control over her emotions and nodded at him. “That was a very acceptable answer, Steve.” He smiled at her. She took a breath, as though regaining her composure, even though she had not lost any of it. “So, what do you do for work?”

Again, the question caught him off guard. He blinked at her for a moment as a million thoughts ran through his head. He had spent so long working for S.H.I.E.L.D., volunteering with veterans, leading the Avengers. He had no marketable skills outside of a warzone. He was Captain America. He was a soldier, had always been one. What was he without war?

“Uh, I work with Stark,” he fibbed. It was not a total lie, he acknowledged. Just the wrong Stark.

“Oh, you’re a scientist?”


“Like what?” Angie asked, eyebrow arched.
“I’m afraid that’s classified, Angie,” he answered, earning a grin from Peggy. But a thought had started to form in Steve’s mind, an idea for his future. He might not be a scientist, but he was a strategist, and he knew that sooner or later, Stark would need a man like him to help him start up a very important government agency. A government agency that would end up saving everyone he ever loved, at least once.

It was dark as Peggy stood with him on the front steps of the townhome, waiting for Jarvis to come back by to get him. He stood one step below her, their eyes evenly matched. She had her hands resting on the lapels of his bomber jacket. “Did you mean what you said in there?” she asked.

He knew what she was talking about, and he nodded. “Yes,” he answered, softly. “I don’t want to scare you. I don’t want to pressure you. But I meant every word. I’m happy to take the long way around, though. We’ll go at your speed, I’ll take all your cues. But I meant it all.” She leaned into him, letting his arms wrap around her waist as she slipped closer

Stark’s car pulled up in the street, and Jarvis got out of the driver’s seat. Peggy sighed and pulled away, Steve’s heart sank. “What time do you work til, tomorrow?” he asked softly.

“Usually until six or seven, but I’m considering taking the day off,” she whispered in return. “I was thinking we could go to Central Park, or something.”

He smiled. “I’d like that,” he answered. “If you don’t mind taking the time off.”

She shook her head. “Can I tell you something strictly off the record, Steve?” He nodded. “I’m pretty sure we’re going to have the next 80 or so years to catch up, and I’d like to start tomorrow.”

“Well then, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I’ll come to you.”

“I’ll be ready.”

She leaned back over and pressed herself against him, their lips meeting softly at first. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into him, his hands spanning her back as her own came up into the hair at the base of his neck. When she pulled away, he was short of breath. “Steve,” she whispered, leaning her forehead against his. “I…” She trailed off. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He nodded, his heart thumping so hard he knew she could feel it. The words were on the tip of his tongue, but he swallowed them. “See you tomorrow, Peg.” He pulled away, leaving her on the steps of the townhouse and jogging down to where Jarvis waited. He opened the door as Steve approached. “Thank you, Jarvis,” he said, sliding in.

“My pleasure, sir. I trust you enjoyed dinner?”

“Yes.” Jarvis nodded and closed the door before coming around the vehicle and climbing into the driver’s seat. “You must give your wife my compliments on her spaghetti. Peggy definitely did it justice.”

Jarvis smiled at him in the rearview. “I will, sir. Thank you.” Steve nodded and settled back into the seat, but turned to watch Peggy disappear as Jarvis drove into the night. She lifted her hand in farewell and his heart panged painfully and hopefully at the same time. One night he wouldn’t be driving away from her anymore.
The door to the bedroom swung open. It was barely dawn, and Steve had been fast asleep. Of course, he was also Captain America, so the moment the knob turned, he was fully awake and out of bed. He stood there in a new pair of pajamas that had been included in the brown paper packages that the tailor had sent over, a plain cotton like he asked for. He was barefoot and without a shield, but he took a fighting stance anyway.

There, framed in the backlit doorway was the form of Howard Stark. He was frozen in place, staring at Steve. “I don’t believe it,” he muttered as Steve relaxed his form. “When Jarvis said you’d returned, I’d assumed you were dead.”

Steve shrugged, sinking back down to sit on the edge of the bed. “Not for lack of trying, Stark,” he answered, sighing. “It’s good to see you.”

“Good to see me?” Howard barked, stepping in. “It’s a damn miracle, man! You crashed into ice. My men have been searching for years!”

“Don’t stop now,” Steve replied, running his hand through his hair. Howard tilted his head quizzically, taking him in. “The jet’s still down there, Stark.” Howard came closer, reaching out a hand as though to touch him. Steve batted his hand away gently. “It’s too early to be touched. Let me wake up.”

“Right,” Howard said, stepping back. “Sorry. What do you mean the jet’s still down there? How’d you get out if not with the jet?”

Steve sighed. “Can you get me some coffee or something? If I’m going to launch into this story, I’m going to need caffeine.”

“Yeah, yes. I’ll call Jarvis over. He can be here in about twenty minutes.”

Steve groaned, lifting his eyes up to the cherubs painted on the ceiling. “No, I’ll do it. Take me to the kitchen. I’ll tell you everything there.”

“Oh, sure,” Howard said, turning toward the door. Steve followed. They got to the top of the stairs and Howard paused, glancing around. “The kitchen is traditionally downstairs, right?”

“Stark,” Steve growled menacingly.

“Kidding! Kidding!” Howard joked, starting down the stairs. “Mostly.”

Steve rolled his eyes and followed. He really was so much like Tony that for a moment Steve almost forgot they weren’t the same person. He wanted to punch them both most of the time.

It had taken Steve more than a few minutes to figure out Stark’s coffee machine, but when he did it was the best damn coffee he’d had in forever. Howard sat across from him, his own coffee untouched, as he gaped at Steve. “So, you’re from the future?” he asked, his chin resting on his hand. Steve nodded. “Specifically 2023? Like, almost 80 years from now?”
“Yes,” Steve answered evenly, and not for the first time since they started this conversation. “I left 2023 on a mission to return items we took from other times and places, and when I was done… I came back here.”

Howard nodded like he understood then he looked down at his coffee. “So, you know, like, everything that happens? To me? To Jarvis? To Peggy? To the SSR? You know it all?”

Steve chewed the inside of his mouth for a moment, considering what to say. “I know most of it,” he answered. “Look, Stark-”

“No!” Stark said, holding up his hand. “Don’t tell me anything!”

Taken aback, Steve stared at him. “I… I wasn’t going to. I was going to say I can’t tell you anything.”

“Good, good. Let’s keep it that way. I don’t want to know anything that might change the future. Nothing.” Howard pushed himself up off the chair and paced for a moment. “Ok, so you’re still in the ice. Ok. So, we still need to find you. In, what?”

“Not for a while, honestly. It’s going to be decades. But I still need you to find me. There’s a lot that happens that I need to be there for.”

Stark nodded, his fingers dancing in the air like he was doing calculations. “Ok. Fine. Yeah, we’ll keep looking. We need to find the jet anyway. And the Tesseract is still with you. That needs to be safe.” Steve pressed his lips together to prevent himself from telling Stark that the Tesseract was safer at the bottom of the ocean then it ever would be on the surface. But he didn’t. He couldn’t. Howard was still pacing, running through a million options in his head. “You’re obviously welcome to stay here as long as you like. That room is yours, indefinitely.” He paused, glancing to Steve before adding, “But I suspect you have other plans for where you’re going to lay your head.”

“Watch it, Stark,” he warned and Howard grinned at him. “I have only honorable intentions, I assure you.”

“Oh, don’t I know it, Cap,” Howard said and the inflection was just enough to send a zing into Steve’s heart. “It’s really quite depressing, how honorable your intentions are.” The way he said it was so like Tony that Steve had to take a breath. It was like he’d been stabbed. “You all right, man? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Steve cleared his throat. “Yes, yeah. I’m fine. Just… a memory.”

“A memory? Of the future?”

“Stark!”

Howard waved his hand dismissively. “Yeah, I know. It’s my rule too, no talk of the future. Got it.” He stopped. “Ok, so, reality here. What are you planning on doing for work? You don’t really strike me as the type who’s gonna sit around and retire.”

Steve swallowed, his jaw clenching as he turned away from Stark. He had an idea, but he needed Howard to get to it first. “Well, I figured I’d see if there was anything I could do for you.”

“Like, hired muscle?” Howard’s eyebrow arched and Steve laughed. “No, that’s not right at all.” He trailed off, watching Steve not look at him. “No, I think you’ve got a plan but you can’t tell me because it has something to do with something I don’t know about yet.”
“You’re smarter than I remember, Stark,” Steve replied jokingly.

“So are you.” Stark stood in the middle of the kitchen for a long moment, regarding him. Finally, he nodded. “Ok, I’ll bite. I’ll put you on my payroll as a consultant for now. You can see all my experiments, and I’ll work more actively on the ones you suggest. Maybe one day, we’ll get to whatever is mulling around in the super-sized brain of yours.”

Steve nodded, liking the way it was sounding. “Sounds good to me. But let’s get one thing straight,” he added. Howard arched an eyebrow. “Your serum did nothing to my brain.”

“You know that for a fact?”

“I’m from 2023, Stark. You think you know something I don’t?”

“I think I know a lot that you don’t,” Howard joked, grinning at him. “But I think we’re about matched at this point.” He reached for his cup of coffee, but it was cold. “Ugh. If only there were a way to warm this back up without watering it down.” Steve arched an eyebrow at him as he picked up his empty cup. Howard froze, watching him. “You don’t say!” he exclaimed. “Well, well, looks like I’ve got some work to do.” With that he was gone, disappearing into the house, heading to heaven knew where. Steve stood in the kitchen in the silence for a moment, then he turned and set his cup in the sink. He had to get ready for the day, now that the sun was fully up over the horizon. Peggy was coming over.

They had been sitting on a bench in Central Park for over an hour now. His arm was thrown over the back of it, and Peggy was leaned casually against it. She maintained a few inches of distance for appearance sake. He was wearing his bomber jacket again, the collar turned up against the wind. Peggy was dressed in a navy sheath dress with a red coat over it, and he had to admit, the color combination looked amazing on her.

They had talked a bit of the gap between his disappearance and reappearance. She had shared what it was like working for the SSR, and how she had been investigating right under the noses of the men she worked with. He laughed as she explained how she had used their own sexist views against them, eavesdropping while she was collecting lunch orders, leaving with files since they gave everything to her to file. She told him about the one time that Souza tried to stand up for her, and he scoffed. “I bet you shut that down real fast,” he replied. She grinned at him. “You’ve never needed a hero, Peg.”

“And you’ve never needed a damsel,” she answered.

Now he was talking, and she was listening raptly. He explained what it was like waking up in this very city, decades later. He talked about how alone he was, how he had felt like he was in a foreign country without the language skills. He talked about how he had barely gotten his feet back on the ground and his brain out of the ice before he had been given another team, another mission. He had lost everyone, and he had been handed new lives to protect.

“That must have been just awful,” Peggy whispered.

“At first, it was. I was angry. Angry at everyone. At everything,” he answered, just as softly. “But then I made a friend.”

“Nat?” Peggy asked.

Steve nodded. “Yeah. You would have loved her, Peggy. She reminded me of you, a little.
Everyone underestimated her because she was a woman; soft, pretty. They all looked through her. But she was so much more than all that. She was a weapon.

“I think I would have liked her,” Peggy answered. “Did she feel the same about you?”

Steve paused, looking at her quizzically. Then it snapped into place. “Peggy, nothing ever happened with Nat, you know that, right?” She flushed pink, turning her gaze away. “No, seriously. She was like my little sister. My best friend. I’m not just saying that.”

“It would be ok, Steve. It was seventy years in the future. I was, what, ninety-something?”

But Steve shook his head. “I didn’t care, Peg. You were still my best girl.”

“Did you date anyone at all?” she asked.

“Date? No,” he answered, tentatively. “There was one girl that I asked to coffee. She turned me down.” She arched an eyebrow. “It was too strange anyway, I’m from here,” he continued, gesturing. “And she wasn’t.” He leaned back, looking at her. “What about you, since you brought it up?”

She grinned at him. “I’ve kissed a few men,” she retorted. “Most of them fell asleep right after, though.” He arched an eyebrow. “Howard made me lipstick that puts men to sleep.”

“He didn’t!” Steve laughed. She nodded, beaming at him. “Hmmm, you’re not wearing it right now, are you Agent Carter?”

“I am not,” she whispered, leaning in a bit. He smiled as he leaned down to kiss her gently. He broke away, well aware that they were in public. “Wouldn’t it be funny if I was, though,” Peggy added, in a whisper. Steve laughed, throwing his head back.

Peggy could not go a full day without checking in at the office, Steve learned as she brought him through the front doors of the phone company that served as a headquarters for the secret agency. She led him into the phones room and chatter stopped the moment he stepped in. A sea of women stared at him as he stood there. “Uh, hello,” he greeted, smiling. He turned to Peggy and dropped his voice. “I’m going to wait outside.”

“No, no,” she said, nodding to one of the women closest to them. “Just come in with me.” He nodded before turning and tipping his head to the women around them. More than a few of them flushed pink at his attention. He quickly followed Peggy into war room.

Men were everywhere here. It was obvious that Peggy was either the only woman, or at least the only agent. Souza glanced up and his eyes widened. “Peggy!” he greeted, rising to his feet. “What are you doing here? I thought you were taking the day off.”

“Just in the area and wanted to swing by, check that nothing came in about Dottie.”

Souza’s eyes softened and Steve fought the urge to smile. He was about to say something that was going to get him in trouble. “I told you I’d call you if something came in. Don’t worry about it.”

Her eyes narrowed and Steve tucked his hands into his pockets, leaning back to brace for it, the smile still in place. “Don’t worry about it?” she replied, incredulously. “Don’t worry about it? An assassin is loose in my city, she almost killed me, and you, and Howard. And you want me not to worry about it?” Souza’s eyes widened and he frowned at her. “If it’s all the same to you, Agent Souza, I’ll
worry all I like. And when she reappears, I’ll take her down. Because Dottie Underwood is my responsibility. Is that understood?”

“Now, Peggy,” Souza began.

“It’s Agent,” she replied coolly. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need to get some files.” She moved around Souza where he stood beside his desk, and marched to hers.

Souza turned to look at Steve, where he stood casually waiting for Peggy to return. “Has she always been like that?” Souza asked. “Or is this a new development?”

Steve shook his head, grinning at him. “She’s always been like this,” he replied, his eyes sparkling.


“Well, get used to it, Agent Souza,” Steve answered. “Because I don’t plan to stop.”

Souza nodded, turning back to where Peggy was collecting items from her desk, a few files, and some personal items that she was tucking into her purse. She turned back and paused as she saw them both watching her. Then she slammed her desk drawer and stormed back over. “I’m done,” she said.

Souza nodded, leaning heavily on his cane. “I really will call you if anything comes in, Peggy.” He paused for emphasis. “Agent Carter.”

It took a moment, but Peggy nodded in understanding. “Thank you, Daniel. I appreciate it. Ready, Steve?” she asked, turning to him. He nodded.

“Hold up a moment,” Souza said, leaning in slightly, his weight on his cane. “Captain Rogers, have you considered working for the SSR? We’re always looking for a few good men.”

Steve shook his head without giving it a moment’s thought. “I’m not sure it’s the right fit for me, Agent Souza. But I appreciate the consideration. Maybe we’ll work together somewhere else, some day.”

Souza nodded, holding Steve’s earnest gaze. “Maybe we will,” he answered as Peggy slid her arm through Steve’s. “Have a nice rest of the day, you two.”

“Thank you, we will,” Peggy said, her voice less strained than it had been before. She pushed the button to open the inner door once more and they were gone, leaving Souza to wonder after them.

There was something about Steve that he could not put his finger on; he was wise beyond his years and Souza could not help but wonder what he had seen in war that had been so different from his own experiences.

Chapter End Notes

And let the "Sharon Carter" jokes begin! Yes, fine he kissed her great niece. Blah, blah, blah. BUT, canonically Sharon shouldn’t exist because in the MCU Peggy only had one brother (Michael) and he died before she went to war. He had no family. Soooooo, there. My fic, my rules, I suppose.
In which Peggy and Steve explore New York, Steve and Howard may or may not start a secret government agency while drinking, and Peggy insults Howard's Aunt Mildred. There's a bit of Souza and some Jarvis thrown in for good measure.

After leaving SSR headquarters, Peggy and Steve walked from the offices in Manhattan down to Times Square. As they stepped between the buildings and into the open air, Steve was thrown into a strange mental dysmorphia. The space before him was overlaid with the memory of another Times Square, one filled with neon signs and loudly honking yellow cabs. He had a sense of Director Fury standing behind him as he processed everything around him, but when he turned to look there was nothing to process. Times Square stood around him, no neon, just the regular lights of the world he was born to. Peggy paused beside him as he turned to look over his shoulder at no one.

“Are you alright?” she asked, turning to look as well.

“Yeah. Yes,” he answered, clearing his throat. *Nick Fury hasn’t even been born yet*, he realized with a sinking feeling. No one he knew from 2023 had. No one except Bucky, and he was lost somewhere in Russia at the moment. He took a deep breath and faced forward again. “What did you want to do?”

“Well, I didn’t really have a plan, if I’m honest. Is there anything you want to see? Or do?” She gestured. “You’re the one who hasn’t been here since the war ended.”

Steve considered it. There was little that he had done in Manhattan to begin with, having been a Brooklyn man, born and bred. But he was familiar enough with the skyline and the must-see sights to know what he could choose from. That all being said, there was only one place that he wanted to go.

“Do you mind if we go to Park Avenue?”

“Of course. Any particular place?”

He nodded. “200 Park?”

She nodded in return. “Yes, sure. This way,” she said, as though he had not lived in New York his whole life. He let her lead him, her arm looped casually through his. They turned down 44th and headed for Park.

As they got closer, more and more of the buildings began to look familiar. That was one thing he liked about New York. It stayed standing, even after everything that had happened between when he disappeared and thawed, the city still felt the same.

They turned onto Park and there it was. Grand Central. In the future, it wouldn’t be there, of course. In the future, this is where Tony would build Avengers Tower. This is where Steve would come to work every day for years, until an argument split him from the best partner he had ever had. Until he lost the first partner who wouldn’t treat him like he was going to break at every turn. He stopped,
staring up at the building before him and he felt the years expand between them. He carried the curse of knowledge with him, and in the past few days he had wondered how he would keep a hold on it. How he could live this life in this time and not change everything?

“Steve?” Peggy whispered, looking up at him. He realized he was just standing on the sidewalk, staring up at the building. “What is it?”

He shook his head. “I lived here,” he answered just as softly, his gaze blurry. I lived here. “Sorry,” he continued, his voice hardening to keep the emotions down. This felt too much like what it felt like to turn around on the platform and realize that Nat was not next to Clint.

“Steve,” Peggy whispered, reaching up and brushing her hand along his cheek. “I can’t pretend I understand what you’re going through, seeing the world two different ways. All your memories are jumbled up and it’s hard to reconcile them. But I will always be here to help you through them.” He nodded. “Do you want to talk about it?”

He shook his head, slowly. “Not right now, no,” he answered. Mainly because he didn’t know how to explain Avengers Tower without talking about Tony. And he couldn’t talk about Tony, at least not yet. He didn’t think he could explain him without talking about what had happened. And Peggy could never know what happened.

“Ok,” she replied. “Should we go? Or do you want to go in?”

He shook his head again. “No, we can go. Do you want to grab something to eat?”

She grinned. “Do you mind if we go to the Automat again? It’s kind of my thing with Angie, after work.”

He served up a real grin as he looked down at her. “Sounds perfect,” he replied. She nodded and turned to lead him away. With one last glance over his shoulder at Grand Central, he followed her.

Peggy returned him to Stark’s house just after dark and Steve let himself in the front door. Jarvis was not there to greet him, but he hung up his coat in the closet and turned to the kitchen for a glass of water. As he passed the large sitting room, he spotted Howard sitting in a chair before the fire. He had a glass of caramel colored liquor in his hand, and he was staring into the flames. Steve moved past him and into the kitchen, finding a growler of beer in the fridge. It was clearly labeled with his name. He smiled, grateful that Howard remembered that he preferred beer over hard liquor. Even more since Thor had shared his own unique drink with Steve years before. Ever since, he had a hard time stomaching the stuff.

He poured a glass and moved back out into the sitting room. There was an empty chair across from Howard and Steve approached carefully. “Care for some company, Stark?” he asked, managing to keep his voice from cracking on the last word.

“Been waiting, actually,” came the reply. Steve nodded and sank into the seat that waited. “How was your day with Peg?”

“It was good,” he replied softly, taking a sip. “Thank you for the beer.”

Howard nodded. “You’re welcome. I remember you drank only that when the Commandos were out.” Steve nodded. “I was thinking, tomorrow maybe you could come out to the lab and see what I’m working on. You know, see if there’s anything that strikes your fancy.”
“Sure,” he replied, taking a sip. “Anything in particular you want me to look at?”

Howard hitched a shoulder in a shrug. “Honestly, no. Nothing really seems promising at the moment. I’m hoping you can point out something that I should be working on.” Steve nodded, his eyes blurring on the flames before them. “Phillips approached me about heading up the scientific side of the agency, but honestly, I’m not feeling it. They’ve got too many regulations.”

“The SSR?” Steve asked, trying to keep the interest out of his voice. Stark was already more perceptive than he remembered. “For what? You’re not an agent.”

Stark shook his head. “No, I’m not. And I have no interest in being one. Peg doesn’t make it look very glamorous. Always coming around with bruises and singe marks. Not for me, no thanks.”

Steve fought the urge to laugh, the idea of Howard fighting anyone was enough to make him smile. He hid it with his beer. “No, the SSR was originally created to be the scientific side of things; it’s called the Strategic Scientific Reserve, for crying out loud. But they’ve fallen away from that in recent years, with the emergence of HYDRA and now the Red Room Academy. I think Phillips wants to move it back toward the science and create a new agency as an umbrella to cover it.” He shrugged. “I don’t know, it doesn’t really seem like something I’d be interested in.”

Steve leaned forward a bit. “Ok, let me see if I’ve got this right. Phillips wants you to be the head of the scientific division of a new agency devoted to stopping powers like HYDRA and the Red Room? And you don’t think you’d be interested?” Stark arched an eyebrow at the fire as his own words were repeated back to him in a different voice. “Why, exactly, did you start working with Doctor Erskine?”

“Well, because I wanted to make a difference in the war.”

Steve nodded. “Exactly. Why not continue?”

Howard looked at him like he was crazy. “The war is over, Steve.”

But the man in the other chair shook his head. “This one is, but trust me when I say, the world may have called this the war to end all wars, but it definitely won’t. There will be other wars, bigger wars.”

“Bigger?” Howard murmured, staring at him with wide eyes. “How big?”

“Big enough that I’ve been to space, man.” Steve leaned back into the chair, suddenly worried that he had said too much and also concerned that he had not said enough. What if the thing that he changed by returning was that S.H.I.E.L.D. was never created? He forced himself to exhale slowly. “I can’t tell you more, Stark. We both know that. And I’m not going to make this decision for you. Only you can. I’m not even sure that what you’re talking about will be what I know of the future,” he added the lie even though he knew Stark didn’t believe him. “But I want you to think long and hard about what is being offered to you. And if it really doesn’t fit your vision then don’t do it. I’m beside you all the way.” _Til the end of the line_, he thought ruefully. It was a line that he had shared with Bucky a million times, but the last time it popped into his head was as he stood over the body of this man’s son.

Stark was silent for a long moment, twirling the glass of amber liquid in his fingers and watching the light dance through it. Finally, he lifted his gaze to Steve and held it. “If I do this, if I join Phillips, will you and Peg go in with me? Be the strategic side of it?” Steve pressed his lips into a thin line. “I was going to talk to her tomorrow, anyway. But I want you there, too. If we do this.”

It all snapped into place for Steve in that moment. It wasn’t just him that would talk Howard into this.
Peggy was the one to do it. She was the one that would found S.H.I.E.L.D., with or without him or Howard. Peggy Carter would do it all, all alone if that was what was needed. He nodded. “If Peggy signs on, I’m in,” Steve answered. “But it’s you and Phillips pitching it to her. I’m waiting in the wings on this one.”

Howard nodded, turning back to the fire. “That’s a good plan, Cap,” he said, sending that pang of sadness resonating through Steve’s chest. “Better let the big guns handle Peg.” Steve scoffed as he lifted his beer to his lips. *Big guns, sure,* he thought, smiling.

Peggy returned to work that morning, her brief respite highlighted by the sheer number of files on her desk and coffee mugs in the sink. She ignored the mugs and rifled through the files in search of something useful. She found a few dead ends that had been recorded on Dottie, some old aliases that had been uncovered but had given very little information when the men reached out. Of course, that didn’t surprise her in the least, men had no idea how to get information on a woman from another woman.

She set those slips of paper aside to follow up on later, and continued stacking the files into piles. Souza appeared in the door, shuffling his way over to her. He was getting better with his crutch, she noticed as she nodded to him. He nodded in return and smiled as he stepped up to his desk near her. “How was the rest of your day?” he asked.

“It was lovely, thank you,” Peggy answered. “It’s been a long time since I was able to enjoy a day off like that.”

Souza nodded. “I bet it’s just great having Rogers back in the States,” he slid in, watching her. “The news made it seem like he was killed in action, so I bet it’s nice to finally be able to stop keeping that secret.”

Peggy flushed pink. She knew what Souza was getting at, trying to get her to admit she had been keeping some sort of secret about the whereabouts of Steve Rogers. But she hadn’t. He had been killed in action, or at least mostly. This Steve was different than the one she had lost in that plane, but he was still also the same. She lifted her eyes to look at him.

“Actually, until he walked in here the other day I thought he was killed in a crash,” she answered softly, so that her voice did not carry. Souza’s lips pressed together and his eyes widened. “I thought I’d never see him again. He was dead, to everyone, including me. For a very long time.”

“You mean to say,” Souza whispered, leaning in on his crutch. “He actually survived a plane crash? The work that Stark has been doing to recover the plane, that’s real?” She nodded. “Peggy, he’s been searching the Arctic circle! No one could survive that! Not for two years!”

“Steve can, Daniel. He’s the real thing. A super soldier. He was the real thing even before Erskine’s serum. I’ve seen him do things that most people would never dream of doing, save people who he should have never been able to save. He walked all the way back from the Alps, with a hundred something men in tow, after saving them from HYDRA. He’s not about to let a little ice and snow destroy him.”

“A little ice…” Souza trailed off, his eyes wide as he stared at her. “I’ve seen the reports. After dark it gets into the triple digit negatives where they’re searching! No one can survive that!”

But Peggy shook her head. “He can. And he did. I know, because he told me. He told me everything, Daniel. And so much of it is classified, and I can’t share it with you. But I promise you,
he’s the real thing.”

“He could be lying, Peg,” the words were a whisper, as though the man himself did not want to believe them either.

Her eyes widened and then narrowed. “Don’t you dare,” she hissed. “Don’t you dare say that. Steve Rogers has never lied, not once. Not about anything that matters. Never about the things he’s done. How dare you?”

“Whoa, whoa, I’m sorry Peg. I didn’t mean to insult the man. I’m just saying, it’s a bit far-fetched.”

She tucked the slips of paper into her handbag and rose to her feet. “Stick around, Daniel, and you’ll get to see exactly what Captain Rogers can do.” He nodded as she moved around him, heading to the locker room to get her coat. She re-emerged with it on and headed for the door. “I’m going on a lunch run.”

“It’s nine in the morning, Marge!” Thompson called from where he was seated at his desk across the room. Peggy ignored him as she left the chamber, the door sealing loudly behind her.

When she appeared on Howard’s doorstep, Peggy was more composed than she had been when she stormed from the war room. Jarvis opened the door and his beam immediately brightened. “Ms. Carter, hello!” he chirped, stepping aside to welcome her in. “What a pleasure, in the middle of the day! Shall I call for Captain Rogers?”

“Yes, please, Jarvis. And Howard, too, if he’s available.”

“Certainly, miss,” Jarvis replied, closing the door behind her. “Allow me to take your coat.” Peggy shrugged out of it and he stepped back with it draped over his arm. “Won’t you wait in the sitting room?”

“Thank you, Jarvis,” she replied, stepping into the room that Steve and Howard had sat in just a few hours before.

She only waited a few minutes before she heard Steve’s familiar footfalls on the stairs. He reached the bottom and turned into the room, pausing in the archway. Peggy turned to take him in. He was wearing a new outfit, one of the many that the tailor had constructed in a flash. This one was comprised of khaki slacks and a blue plaid button down that set off the blue of his eyes and contrasted the blonde of his hair.

“I wasn’t expecting to see you so early,” he greeted, smiling. “What brings you by?”

“I have some leads on Dottie and I wanted to see if Howard could help me out.”

Steve nodded just as Stark pushed into the room from a swinging door on the westward wall. “I hear that a damsel needs some assistance,” he cried, arms out like a depiction of Christ. Peggy’s hands flew to her hips and he promptly dropped his arms. “Oh, it’s you,” he continued in mock annoyance. “And here I was thinking it was Rogers.” Steve hid his smile by turning away and moving to the couch on the far side of the room.

“I need a recording device small enough to fit in my lapel, Howard,” Peggy said without any pretense whatsoever. Steve’s lips dipped down in an impressed grimace.

Howard turned away from her and moved toward the now-cold fireplace. “What makes you think I
have such an item, Peg?’”

She kept her gaze on him. “You’re Howard Stark, aren’t you?” She glanced around the room suspiciously. “Ornate furnishings, gilded banisters, ugly paintings, clearly this is Howard Stark’s home. Are you not Howard Stark?” Howard scoffed, but Peggy was on a roll. She turned to where Steve was sitting. “Are you Howard Stark?”

“Definitely not,” Steve answered quickly. “Most definitely not.” Peggy smiled at him and turned back to where Stark was glaring at her.

“Do you have it?” she asked.

He waited a beat, his glare holding, before finally answering her. “Of course, I have it, you wicked woman. No need to be rude.” He turned on his heel and headed for the archway that Steve had entered through. “Wait here. I’ll get it.”

She waited til he was past her and then asked, “And what was rude?”

“You called my paintings ugly!” he cried as he passed.

“That one most definitely is,” Peggy replied, gesturing to one along the wall.

Stark glanced over his shoulder at what she was pointing to. “That’s my Aunt Mildred, Peg!” Peggy turned to Steve and made falsely mortified a face, he hid his laugh in his hand. After a beat, and a moment after Stark had vanished completely they heard him shout. “Although she was an exceptionally unattractive woman, so you win this round, Carter!” They both burst out laughing.

Once he was gone for certain, Peggy crossed over to where Steve was seated and sank down next to him. “I wanted to see you, too, you know,” she whispered.

“I was hoping.”

“Annnnnnd, I kind of wanted to ask you to help me with something.”

“Help? You? Twice in three days, Peggy Carter is asking for help? Really?” He teased, leaning in. She leaned toward him as well, brushing a kiss along his lips and sighing. The edges of his lips tweaked up at the touch, but they pulled apart before either of them were lost. “What sort of help do you need, Agent Carter?”

“I need a cover,” she replied, softly. “For an undercover mission.”

“Really?” he asked, an eyebrow arching. “What sort of undercover mission?”

She glanced at the door for a moment and leaned in, as though to kiss his cheek, but instead she whispered. “One of Dottie’s aliases was working as a cigarette girl at a dance hall. And I need a date.”

Steve’s heart raced a bit in his chest. “Well, I think you’ve found your man, Agent.” She nodded. “Which establishment will we be attending?”

She leaned away, holding his gaze. “The Stork Club,” she answered, smiling. His grin widened. “Are you in?”

“Completely.”
Hiiiii! Trying this one out. Ever since I watched Endgame I've been thinking about what life for Steve and Peggy would be like, since he knows all about what happens in the future. If you guys want me to continue, slap a comment on here!

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