Datenights in the OR

by lapoesieestdanslarue

Summary

Everyone has one night stands, right? It's a natural part of life. And hey, it's a one night stand for a reason- most of the time nothing comes of it.

Except for Bucky Barnes it comes around and bites him in the ass, coming in the form of meddling friends, Attendings with severe god complexes and a guy with blonde hair and blue eyes who has a habit of ruining Bucky's life- and that's just outside the bedroom.
A guy so fine (makes me want to scream hallelujah)

Chapter Notes

A/N: PLEASE note and heed the tags, they're not just there for the craic!

Okay so to say I'm nervous about posting this an understatement. But there is a ridiculous lack hospital AU's, so, I, being the amazing selfless person I am, stepped up to the challenge. And now we have this monster.

This will be following some of the main plot points of Grey's Anatomy, but I might change them around a bit, or add in my own.

I've placed a * beside some medical words that explain them, so they'll be explained at the bottom notes.

The chapter title is from Paolo Nutini's song 'Scream'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sunlight filters through the shutters, stirring Bucky from his sleep. He groans and burrows further into the cushion he was using as a pillow. After a few coherent moments, two questions form in his head- The first thing Bucky wants to know is why in the hell he's sleeping on his not too-comfortable couch, the couch he's always complaining about because there's still a peanut butter and jelly stain on the arm of it and it's such a boring, old fashioned couch it practically drains the life out of the room.

The second thing he wants to know is why an unfamiliar (though certainly not unpleasant) smell fills his nostrils. He takes a tentative sniff, and moves closer until his face is buried in the crook of someone's arm.

*Who the fuck- Oh.*

Through his heavily hungover state, Bucky somehow navigates his way through last night's events, and, within that, the guy he took home. Steve was his name, he recalls. (God knows he was shouting it so much last night.) He looked good at the bar, tall, abs of Jesus and face of Matt Damon's distant brother.

(He looked even better naked on top of Bucky.)

Bucky remembers looking at Steve's hands and feet and reminding himself that that whole thing is a complete myth, but after five seconds debating it, he figured it was a good shot anyway. (It was an amazing shot, as it had turned out.)

Sighing, he closes his eyes, looking forward to a couple more hours of sleep with Mr. McDreamy spooning him, and some peace from the headache that's creeping through his skull.

And then he remembers that he's starting his new job today.

His eyes fly open and he whips his head up to look at the clock hanging on the wall. Squinting through the sleep in his eyes, it takes him a moment to register the fact it's 6:00 am- meaning that
he has to be at DC SHIELD Hospital in half an hour.

It's a thirty minute walk.

"Shit!" He yelps, shrugging the muscular limbs wrapped tight around his torso off and picks up his clothes off the floor, throwing what's not his on the still sleeping Steve.

"Hey," he says. He hurriedly puts on a pair of boxers. "Hey," he says again, louder, as he nudges Steve with his foot. "You need to leave."

He runs past the couch to the laundry basket in the kitchen, and grabs a pair of track suit bottoms, managing to stick one foot in each leg and just about pull them up as he jogs back to the living room.

"Steve," Bucky hisses, shaking him with both hands.

"Mmmph?" Comes Steve's eloquent reply, his face still buried in the couch.

"Get up!" Bucky exclaims, shoving his clothes into Steve's face. When Steve doesn't reply, Bucky grabs the cushion from under Steve's head and hits him over the head with it.

"Ow," Steve groans, but there's no real feeling- it's more of a reflex. Bucky turns away and picks up his t-shirt.

"Okay, sorry, but you've really got to go."

"Alright, alright," Steve mutters, and with that, thank The Lord, Steve sits up and begins to put on his pants. "What's the rush?" He grins.

"You," Bucky grinds out as he searches desperately for his scrubs while getting his t-shirt on, "have to go. I'm starting a new job today and I can't be late."

"But c'mon," Steve draws, and Bucky's brain immediately thinks 'Brooklyn?' but he's too busy grabbing his scrubs out of the washing machine and shoving them into his backpack to find out if he's right. "I had fun, didn't you?" Steve continues, buttoning up his shirt.

"Of course I had fun," Bucky rolls his eyes, grabbing his bottle of water and putting that in there too. "But now I don't have time. And I can't be late." Slinging the backpack over his shoulder, Bucky stomps back into the living room.

"Hey, this is a really nice. Big- A little dusty," Steve comments, looking around the place as he does the button on his jeans. "But still," he flashes a smile at Bucky. "Nice."

"Thanks," Bucky breaths, running a brush through his unkempt hair. "I mean- I know it's dusty and all, but it was my moms and I haven't had time to, y'know," Bucky waves his hand around. "Clean it."

Steve stops buttoning up his shirt to look at him. "Oh, I'm sorry."

Bucky furrows his brow, and he can't understand why Steve's voice holds a note of sympathy. "You said 'was'," Steve explains.

"Oh! Oh no, god no. My mother- she's still alive, she's just not-" Bucky cuts himself off. If his ma doesn't even want his aunts and uncles to know about her condition, she probably won't want Bucky's one-night stand knowing all about it. "You know, we don't have to do this."
"Do what?"

"You know- exchange the details, pretend we care... Look, I really am going to be late."

"We're doing this again, though," Steve says, as Bucky all but hauls him off the couch. As Bucky continues to push him out the door, Steve goes on. "Really. I cannot believe you are just throwing me out to. Do you do this to all your one night stands?"

"You can do anything you goddamn want if you will just let me go to work," Bucky implores, giving him a gentle shove onto the porch.

"I'll be back, Bucky." Steve calls behind his shoulder as he walks across his lawn, hair messy and shirt rumpled, with his jacket held in one hand.

Bucky stops and allows himself to stare at Steve's retreating figure for a couple of seconds. Eventually, he shakes himself out of it, and, as much as he would love to stay and watch the view, he has to remind himself that's he's going to be late, and with that goes back in, grabs his keys and wallet and runs out again, sprinting down the path and into the city.

~*~

Bucky slinks quietly into the room already filled with twenty or so other interns, all standing and listening intently to Nick Fury, Chief of Surgery at SHIELD.

He stands at the top of the room, arms crossed. As Bucky slowly makes his way through the crowd, Fury's voice carries throughout the room.

"Each of you comes here hopeful," He begins. "Wanting in on the game. A month ago you were in med school being taught by doctors. Today, you are the doctors. The seven years you spend here as a surgical resident will be the best and worst of your life," With his long, black doctors coat (and leather, too. He's one of the few american surgeons to have been awarded one after a successful bladder cystectomy on the dutch ambassador) and black eye patch, Nick Fury is the word 'scary' personified. Not only that, but he is second greatest surgeon in North America. Second to Bucky's mother. And that's another thing- Bucky's ma. No doubt Nick's going to ask about her- and what the hell is Bucky going to say? How is he meant to look him in the eye and say 'Hey, boss, ma's just away travelling, not suffering from onset Alzheimer's at all!' And Bucky's not even that good of a liar. "You will be pushed to the breaking point. Look around you. Say hello to your competition. Eight of you will switch to an easier specialty. Five of you will crack under the pressure. Two of you will be asked to leave. This is your starting line. This is your arena. How well you play?"

His eyes scan the room.

"That's up to you."

'Well,' Bucky thinks. 'I'm screwed.'

~*~

The changing room is absolutely crazy. It's filled with loud chatter (which is not doing great things for Bucky's hangover) and it stinks of Linx and deodorant.

It quiets down, thankfully, when a nurse walks in with a clipboard.

"Alright, everyone, be quiet!" She yells over the din. When everyone eventually turns around and shuts the hell up, she waves the clipboard. "You see this? This is a list of the residents you're
assigned to. So let's try to get this over with quickly, you little blood thirsty machines."

Clicking her pen, she reads through the names. "Peters, Blake, Griffin, Hennessy, Coltarne, Jacobs- you're with McDonal," she drawls. Bucky chews at his lip and taps his foot nervously as he waits for his name to be called. Slowly people trickle out going to meet their Residents and start their rounds.

By fifteen minutes, it's only him and six other people left in the room.

The nurse turns to them and smiles- and it sure as hell isn't one of those nice ones you try give kids. "And you guys, Barnes, Barton, Foster, Lewis, Romanoff- you guys got lucky."

Bucky can tell by her smirk that he didn't get lucky. He bites down on his lip, so hard it begins to bleed.

"You're with Dr.Hill- the Nazi."

With that, she turns around and goes out the door- "Rounds start in five," she calls behind her- leaving Bucky with the other members of his group.

He looks around and takes them in- there's a medium sized guy with spiky blonde hair, a hearing aid and a shit eating grin. There's a small girl with long, straight brown hair and the girl beside her is a bit taller, certainly a bit bustier, and her hair is darker and more out of control, even in the messy ponytail she pulled it into.

And then there's one more girl- with short, red curly hair and a look in her eye that's probably good for her but bad for the rest of them.

His thoughts are cut off by the red-haired girl speaking up. "Well, I don't about you guys but I actually want to start on time." With that, she turns around and walks out, the two doors swinging behind her.

Bucky looks back and forth between his group and the door, shifting his weight from one foot to another for a two seconds before saying "Um, we will be late." With a final glance at them, he follows the red haired girl out. He jogs down the corridor to catch up with her.

"I'm Natasha Romanoff," she announces, holding out her hand for him to shake. "I graduated first in my class from Stanford." She looks at him, and it takes him a moment before he realises she wants him to reciprocate.

"I'm Bucky- Bucky Barnes," he replies, taking her left hand with his right. "Nice to meet you." She looks at him again, eye brows raised. "Oh- yeah I graduated from Dartmouth. First," he adds hastily when she shoots him another pointed look.

The other guys come up behind them, and blonde guy speaks up "Does anyone know who the Nazi even is? I'm Clint, by the way," he grins, looking at Natasha.

"And I don't care," she replies. Clint opens his mouth to say something else, but he's cut off by one of the girls speaking up.

"It's the fact that they're called the Nazi that freaks me," the petite girl says. "I mean- what did they do to get that nickname?"

The girl beside her snorts. "Probably some bad ass surgery or something."
They come to the end of the hall and turn the corner, facing the nurses lobby. It's already in full swing— with nurses in their pastel green and pink scrubs rushing around the oval reception desk, passing around charts and test results like they were nobody's business. There's only one doctor there—a relatively tall woman who immediately stands out in her white coat and bright blue scrubs with her dark hair in a tight bun—for a woman with the nickname 'The Nazi', she doesn't look particularly terrifying.

"That's the Nazi?" Natasha mutters.

"I thought the Nazi would be a guy," Clint mutters.

"I thought the Nazi would be...the Nazi," the other girl says.

"She doesn't look so bad, Darcy," the same girl says quietly.

"She hasn't opened her mouth yet, Jane."

"Well maybe it's jealousy," Jane says, trying to put confidence into her voice, but Bucky doesn't miss the way it quivers. "Maybe she's brilliant, and they're just jealous, and she's actually really nice."

They take the final steps towards the reception, and stand behind Dr.Hill. Bucky goes quiet, hardly daring breath, and everyone else follows suit.

Until—

"Hi, Dr.Hill? I'm Jane—" Jane cuts herself off as Hill stops writing in her chart, and goes still.

Slowly, she turns around, and her eyes focusing on each of them for a couple of seconds, and when they land on Bucky he can't help but squirm.

She sighs, and clicks her pen, putting it in her coat pocket. "Okay," she says, sounding almost bored, crossing her arms over her chest. "Who's who. Go."

"Natasha Romanoff."

"Clint Barton."

"Jane Foster."

"Darcy Lewis."

"Bucky Barnes," Bucky all but stutters.

She stares at them once again, before uncrossing her arm and leaning against the white marble surface of the desktop.

"I have five rules. Memorize them," She begins, her clear and loud voice hammers every word into Bucky's head. "Rule number one, don't bother sucking up, I already hate you, that's not gonna change."

She gestures towards the desktop, where light yellow trauma gowns with a two booklets on top of it, one large one small. And, sitting neatly on each pile is a small, black device. "Trauma protocol, phone lists, pagers. Nurses will page you, you answer every page at a run," She continues. "A run.
And that's rule number two. Your first shift starts now and lasts forty-eight hours," She checks her watch and whips around, making her way down the corridor. Hurriedly, Bucky grabs his gown and booklets, and follows- nearly tripping over his own feet in the process.

"You're interns, grunts, nobodies, bottom of the surgical food chain, you run labs, write orders, work every second night till you drop and don't complain!" She stops, and, luckily, Bucky stops himself in time before he can run into her. With one hand, Hill pushes open the door and flicks on the light. Craning his head around the door, Bucky peaks in. Two bunk beds line the walls, as well as a couch on the far corner and a tv on the wall.

"On call rooms. Attending's hog them, so sleep when you can, wherever you can. Which brings me to rule number three- if I'm sleeping, don't wake me, unless your patient is actually dying. Rule number four, the dying patient better not be dead when I get there, not only would you have killed someone, you would have also woke me for no good reason, we clear?"

They all nod their heads, before Jane tentatively raises her hand.

"What?"

"Um, you said there were five rules. But you've only said four," She says.

Before she can open her mouth to answer, Dr.Hill's pager goes off, beeping obnoxiously loudly. "Rule number five," she replies, already breaking into a run down the corridor. "When I move, you move!"

Holding onto his gown and flinging the rest of his stuff down on a bench, Bucky runs after her. "Get out of the way!" He yells at two nurses blocking the corridor, skidding as he takes a hard right and pushes the door of ER open, slowing to a jog as he shoves his arms through the sleeves of his gown, and manages to just barely tie the strings at the back. Continuing onto the emergency entrance, Bucky can hear the squeak of Clint's converse behind him. The doors are already open when he gets there, and he runs to help the paramedics move the stretcher onto the ground. On the stretcher is a young girl, unconscious, and convulsing.

"What's the story?" Hill asks, taking out her stethoscope and checking the girl's heartbeat.

"Amber Linklater, sixteen year old female, began to grand mal seize, cause is unknown," the paramedic says as they push her into the ER and then immediately into a medical room.

"All right get her on her side," Hill instructs. "Darcy, ten milligrams of Diazepam- also Barton give her a large bore I.V*, don't let the blood haemolyse, let's go!"

As Bucky, Natasha and Jane all struggle to keep Amber on her side, Darcy lifts a small vile and extracts exactly ten millimetres out with a syringe. As soon as she injects it, Bucky can feel Amber's muscles relax under his fingers and her convulsions stop.

The doors open to the medical room open, and a tall, black doctor walks in.

"Hill, I heard we got a wet fish on dry land?"

"Absolutely, Sam."

'Sam' approaches and checks her pulse and performs a retinoscopy.

"Shotgun her, Hill. It's probably neuro- so let Odinson know to keep his schedule free because he has a potential op."
"That means every test in the book," Hill explains, dumping her surgical gloves. "CT*, a tox screen- Romanoff and Barnes, do Amber's patient workups and get her in for a CT, she's your responsibility now. Jane, Clint, stay in the ER and do scut work."

As she's about to pipe up, Darcy pipes up "What about me?"

Hill turns, contemplating for a moment before, "You? You get to do rectal exams."

~*~

Bucky sits on a spare gurney in the dimly lit hallway with his head resting against the wall, his eyes closed. He's realised something in the past four hours, that, after four years of pre-med, four years of medical school, and tons of unpaid loans- he doesn't know jack.

Sure, you learn the procedures off by heart in college, and then practice on cadavers in med school, which seems huge at the time, but now he's doing the real thing. Real people, who don't stay still when you try to hook up their IV or suture their wounds.

"Hey," Natasha calls from the end of the corridor, breaking him out of his thoughts. She waves the chart in her hand. "Amber's labs came back."

Bucky slides down from the gurney and jogs towards her. As they walk down the hall to Katie's room, he takes the results from her, and frowns as his eyes scan the page. "Her toxicology report is clean, nothing showed in the CT or the CBC*."

Bucky shakes his head and snaps the binder closed. "So nothing's shown up, she doesn't have any external or internal wounds that could cause it, and there's no history of epilepsy in the family." He chews his lip thoughtfully, and snaps back to reality when Natasha hits his shoulder.

"We're here," she jerks her head towards a patient room. Inside, Amber is lying on the bed, looking bored.

"My arm hurts," she moans.

Bucky unwraps his stethoscope from his neck and goes over to check her blood pressure. "That's just because you fell on your side when you had your seizure." He goes quiet as he listens to her heartbeat.

"BP*s dropped slightly, Natasha," he says.

She nods and scribbles down the new reading on Amber's chart. "You checked into Xavier Hospital last week?" Natasha asks, her brow furrowing.

"Yeah, I twisted my ankle at rhythmic gymnastics. I'm the only one in my school that does it, which is like, really cool. And I tripped over my ribbon during my routine," Amber purses her lips. "You guys are like, new, right?"

"We're interns," Bucky corrects, as he fiddles with the IV.

"When I was in Xavier, they didn't put me with people as clueless as you. And that was a nurse."

"We're not clueless," Bucky defends.

"You don't know what's wrong with me!" She shoots back.

Natasha clicks her pen and looks at her, not cold, just neutral. Scarily so.
"James, I think we've got everything we need."

With that, she turns on her heels and walks out. Bucky sighs and follows her.

"How did you know my name is James?" He asks, hurrying after her.

"Oh I read your file," she says flippantly. Bucky's eyes bulge out of his head.

When they're out of hearing distance Natasha grunts. "That girl is a pain in the ass. I swear to god if it weren't for the Hippocratic oath, I'd strangle her with my bare hands."

When Bucky doesn't reply, she turns and upon seeing the shocked look on his face asks "What?"

"You read my file?!" He exclaims.

"Well, yeah," she replies as if it's perfectly normal. "I wanted to check out the competition. Oh- nice score with your mother being Winifred Barnes, by the way."

"Well it's not like I asked!" He implores. "God, what kind of sociopath are you?"

"A surgeon," she replies. They're quiet for a few moments before they both burst out laughing.

When they both quieten down, Natasha shakes her head. "I really can't figure out what's causing her seizures."

"Have you talked to Hill yet?"

"No, I've still got to get the test results to her."

"Okay, well how about we go for our lunch break then you go give them to her and I'll work the pit?"

"Sounds like a plan," she says, and Bucky thinks it might be the first time she's smiled at him.

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"You guys are not going to believe what happened!" Clint smiles as he joins them at the lunch table. Beside him Jane rolls her eyes.

"Enthral us," Natasha snipes sarcastically around a mouthful of her sandwich.

"Guess who's scrubbing in on an appendectomy with Wilson?" He grins.

Well, that's gets Bucky's attention. He lowers his forkful of ceaser salad, and stares at Clint.

"Not you," he says disbelievingly.

"Yes me," he replies with a shit-eating grin.

"How the hell did you get a surgery?" Natasha bites.

Jane stabs her salad with her fork. "It's ridiculous! This guy walks in, complains of abdominal pains, and this genius puts two and two together, and before I can ask a nurse to page one of the doctors- freakin' Florence Nightingale over here goes and tells Dr. Wilson! And Wilson just gives him the surgery!"

As Clint sits there, grinning like the Cheshire Cat and basking in his glory, Darcy sits silently down
beside them, staring at her food with some horror. While the others continue their banter, Bucky nudges Darcy gently with his elbow.

"Hey," he says. "You gotta eat. This shift is a marathon. Eat."

"I can't," she groans.

"Why not, Darce?" Jane asks.

"You try performing sixteen rectal exams and then eating!" She places her head in her hands. "Ugh, the Nazi hates me."

"That's not too bad- me and Bucky have the devil incarnate going on about rhythmic gymnastics and how great Xavier hospital was."

"Ugh, Xavier," Clint scoffs. "They think they're so great just because two of their doctors got the Parker Award."

"I dated a guy from Xavier," Darcy says absentmindedly.

"Oh yeah, I remember him," Jane wrinkles her nose and pulls a face.

"Don't they have, like, weird nicknames for each other?" Natasha asks.

"The guy Darcy dated called himself Iceman."

Bucky snorts. The one time he had gone to a bar on the other side of D.C, group of guys and girls from Xavier had been there.

"There was this one girl," he says. "She called herself 'Mystique'. And apparently they call Lensherr 'Magneto'."

"Lensherr? Who won the Parker award?" When Bucky nods, Clint shakes his head. "Weirdos."

"You know Dr. Wilson? The other Dr. Wilson? He's head of plastics- he did his internship and residency at Xavier," Jane says. "He says they called him 'Deadpool'."

"Why?"

Jane shrugs. "Dunno- Not even he knew. And it was his nickname."

"You've got to hand it to them, though. Not only do they have the best neurosurgeon in America, but they also have one of the leading orthopaedic surgeons."

"Not any more they don't," Bucky says before biting into his sandwich.

All eyes turn to look at him. He swallows nervously- "Didn't you guys hear? Loki Odinson beat him to the punch. Charles Xavier's second best."

Darcy clears her throat. "Well, yeah, we have that, and we've also got some new, kick ass head of trauma surgery starting soon. And we've got the two Wilsons- leading in Thoracics and Plastics."

"I'm sorry is anyone forgetting that Nick Fury runs this place? And that in these very OR's Winifred Barnes was creating medical history?" Clint says.

Bucky flames red at that, and lowers his head slightly.
"They ain't got a thing on us," Darcy grins. "Eat your heart out, Xavier."

"I'll drink to that," Clint nods.

"Hear, hear," Bucky backs up. Jane smiles and Natasha says something in Russian, and Bucky smiles- his guys aren't so bad after all.

~*~

Forehead creased, Bucky examines the wound. The entire lower forearm of the patients is red and swollen, with three nails stuck sporadically throughout.

God, Bucky hates scut work. Superficial or surgical? Shit, maybe surgical. But, if the nails were disinfected, then probably superficial. Shit.

Okay, okay, calm down and think. If you take them out then the worst that can happen is damage to the nerve endings and the muscle tissue. And maybe some damage to the bone- so he'll page Dr. Rhodes to take a look before they discharge him.

Bucky bites his lip- then grabs the forceps from the tray and carefully clasps it around the head of one of the nails and slowly pulls. "So, tell me again how you managed to get three nails stuck in your arm?" Bucky asks, as he concentrates on slowly pulling one of the three out. The man- Trent Maxwell- hisses in pain.

"Dude, I was trying to put together my damn shelf and I tripped over my freakin' screwdriver and landed on one of the boards- Ow!"

"Sorry," Bucky mumbles, focusing again on the remaining nails.

"Ow- fuck! Can't I get some kind of pain medicine?"

"I'll page the nurse for some pain relief," he sighs, breaking away for a couple of seconds to page one of the on-call nurses for some Tylenol and a tetanus shot, and then goes back to the nails.

With one nail down and two to go, Bucky slowly relaxes, the forceps slowly becoming almost a natural extension of his hand, and, steadily the other two nails come out easily.

"Dr. Barnes?" Bucky turns to see Sharon Carter- one of the head nurses.

"Hey, thanks so much," he says as he leans over to grab the needle and sachet of Tylenol. "Could you page Dr. Rhodes and tell him I've got a guy with a suspected splintered radius?"

She nods, and gives him a small smile. "Sure thing."

"Wait, what is that stuff?" Maxwell asks, confused.

"This," Bucky explains, holding up the needle, "Is an intramuscular tetanus shot. And this," he jiggles the sachet of Tylenol "Is your pain relief."

"Dude, what about morphine?" He whines.

Bucky chuckles and shakes his head. "Sorry, but unless you've got a nail stuck into your head you're not getting any morphine. But," he flashes him a big, shit eating grin. "You do get Tylenol and a tetanus shot."

"Where do I get the shot?" Maxwell swallows hard, beginning to look nervous.
Without looking up from mixing the Tylenol with water, Bucky answers "In your left butt check."

Maxwell groans, and Bucky can't help but think 'You and me both, buddy.'

~*~*

Having finally finished up with Trent Maxwell (who's radius was fine, Dr. Rhodes said, just a little bruised if anything), Bucky was back on the Amber Linklater case with Natasha, and they were drawing a blank.

For the life of him, Bucky could not figure out why this girl randomly broke out into a severe seizure. Even in terms of medical mysteries, nothing of the sort had ever occurred.

Sighing, Bucky scrubs his face with his hand.

"So, nothing came up in her CT scan," he says, again.

"Nada," Natasha answers, again.

"The same with her CBC and her tox screen. What about an MRI of her head?"

"She didn't have one," Natasha replies, bored.

But that- that catches Bucky's attention.

"Why didn't she have an MRI?" He asks.

Natasha looks up from her textbook. "Hill said only CBC and CT scan." Her brow is furrowed, and Bucky hopes that they're on the same page.

"So she's having seizures and we don't give her an MRI?"

"But she doesn't have an aneurysm," Natasha muses.

"Or maybe she does," Bucky says. "Didn't she say she had a fall? Off the beam, or something? A fall from that height, that could potentially cause some serious damage. So what if it did? What if they treated her ankle, but didn't bother with a brain scan?"

"Because you would assume that the headache was from the fall," Natasha cuts in. "Bucky Barnes, you brilliant bastard."

The metal legs of the chair scrape against the floor as Bucky stands up. "We've got to tell Odinson," he says. "C'mon."

Smiling, Natasha follows his lead, and they walk down the hall. As they walk, a flash of slick, black hair catches Bucky's eye.

"Crap," he mutters, breaking into a run. "He's getting in the elevator!" He calls back to Natasha. Immediately, she picks up the pace and before long they're both sprinting side by side down the corridor.

Halting just before he gets catapulted into the elevator, Bucky holds his hand out before the doors close. Loki Odinson, internationally renowned king of neurosurgery, stares at the pair of them, one eyebrow raised.

"Can I help you?" He asks in a clear British accent, lilted with something else Bucky can't put his
"Dr. Odinson!" Bucky pants, breathing heavily. "Amber does rhythmic gymnastics," he blurts out.

"We still have to save her, Dr. Barnes," he replies, uninterested.

"No-no! I mean, she was at rhythmic gymnastics, and last week she fell from the beam and hurt her ankle."

"It may have caused an aneurysm to form," Natasha continues.

Odinson turns to them, and shakes his head. "There are no indicators. Her CT's clean, no neck pain or major headaches."

"But she did fall, Dr. Odinson," Bucky implores. "It was no big deal- so minor not even the doctor thought to mention it when we were taking her history, but she did fall."

Odinson huffs. "The chances of bursting an aneurysm from a minor fall are one in a million!"

With that being said, the elevator doors close. Bucky sighs and runs his hands through his hair.

"I really thought we had it," Natasha mutters.

Not a second later the elevator dings behind them, and Loki speeds past them.

"Dr. Odinson-" Natasha begins, but he cuts her off as he briskly walks down the corridor.

"Well don't just stand there!" He snaps.

Bucky glances at Natasha, with his eyebrows raised and jerks his head towards Loki, before going to follow him.

"Let's see if Amber Linklater is one in a million," Bucky mutters.

~*~

"My god," Loki mutters, staring at the MRI.

"I'll be damned." Bucky breathes, as he stares at the brain scan with astonishment and pride- they were right. And it was a pretty damn good feeling. There, right smack dab in the middle of Amber Linklater's brain, was a dark blob.

"A cerebachnoid haemorrhage," Odinson says, holding it up to the light. "Minor, but still there."

"She's bleeding into her brain," Natasha says, forehead creased. "And could've gone her whole life without it being a problem. But one tap in the wrong spot."

"And explode," Bucky murmurs.

"Exactly, and now I have to fix it."

Loki grabs Amber's chart from the desk and flips through it.

"I've got to tell her parents she'll be having surgery, but I'll schedule it for seven tonight. One of you can scrub in."

With that, he's out of the room and walking down the hall.
Bucky swallows, a bit nervous.

"Do you-" he clears his throat. "Do you want it?"

"Yes," she replies. "But you thought of it first- and you were right. You deserve it more than me."

"No, no, I mean-"

"If you give it to me just because you think I'm fragile or some shit I'll end you I swear to God."

Bucky's mouth twitches. "Okay then. Thank you. I'll make it up to you. Promise."

Natasha raises her eyebrow. "How do you think you're going to do that?"

Bucky looks around conspiratorially, feigning suspicion before he leans in and whispers "My mom has all her old surgeries on tape."

"Fair deal," she smirks.

~*~

Bucky walks out of the OR, a huge grin on his face.

"Thanks again, Dr. Odinson," He says to Loki, who just grunts in response.

As he walks down the hall, he can't help but do a victory dance. Everything about the past two hours was incredible. Bucky got to see a human brain, a real human brain, that feelings and emotions and thoughts in it, and got to fix it. Granted, he watched for the most part, but for the few minutes that he got to hold the aspirator*, he felt like...

Like he was doing what he was meant to be doing.

Adrenaline was still pumping through him, and he could feel the blood pump through his body as it returned to his face. Being there, in the OR, it was the best feeling in the world. Like the world's best and most addictive drug, and already at the back of Bucky's mind there was an itch to go again, to explore more, to open someone up and close them again.

'All in good time,' he told himself. Not that it helped.

"How'd it go, magic man?" Clint calls from the gurney they were all sitting down. Picking up his pace, Bucky went down and greeted them.

"Hey," He breathes, and flops down on the gurney.

Jane was sitting crossed legged, while Darcy had fallen asleep with her head in Clint's lap.

"How was it?" Jane asks excitedly. "Did he let you do anything?"

"Was the bleed as small as it looked on the scan?" Natasha asks as she chews on a twizzler.

"It was amazing," Bucky grins. "The bleed was a little bigger than it looked, but it was fine. And he let me do some suction."

The three of the broke out into applause. "Bucky that's so great!" Jane smiles, patting him on the shoulder.
They fell into comfortable silence, each of them of them chewing on a twizzler and lost in their thoughts. Natasha sighs and rests her head on his shoulder, and he shifts, so he can rest his head on hers.

"Today was a good day," Clint says.

"Not too bad for a first day," Bucky agrees,


"Pfft," Clint waves her off. "The point is, that in," He checks his watch. "Fifteen minutes we will have finished our first shift at this hospital, and, hey, we didn't kill anybody while we're at it."

"You came pretty damn close," Jane mutters.

"Don't even," Clint grits out.

"Your appendectomy not go well, Clint?" Bucky smirks.

"Oh shut up!"

~*~

The next day as Bucky walks to the nurses station after getting changed into his scrubs, the place is already in full swing. He smiles as he goes up to join Clint, Jane, Darcy and Natasha, waiting for Hill to come and give them their placements.

"Did you hear about that new trauma surgeon?" Darcy says, eyes wide.

Bucky shakes his head.

"We were talking to some of the nurses this morning and they told us that apparently this GI Joe type guy comes storming into the place and this guys started choking so he stuck a pen in his throat," Jane explains.

"Yeah, an emergency tracheotomy*!"

"An emergency tracheotomy?" Clint asks, disbelievingly.

"Uh-huh!" Darcy nods.

"That's a lie," Natasha scoffs. "No way would Fury let that happen. Nurses live for all that gossip crap. Besides, where's evidence?"

Before Darcy and Jane can answer, Hill walks up. "Okay people, today you'll be working with a surgeon to get a feel for their specialty. Don't get high and mighty about it- You won't be getting that much action. So, Barton, you're with Stark, the general surgeon," She explains when she see's the confused look on his face (but Bucky thinks that might just be his face). "Foster, you get Dr. Potts, she's waiting for you up at the children's wing, Lewis, you're with Odinson, Romanoff you're with Wilson- Sam Wilson, and Barnes, you're with Dr. Rogers"

"Dr. Rogers?" Bucky asks. He hasn't heard of a Dr. Rogers working at SHIELD.

"He's our new head of trauma surgery," Hill replies. She points with her pen to the left, and when Bucky turns his head, he nearly has a heart attack.
Because, standing there in all his glory, is Steve.

Chapter End Notes

IV- intravenous, a small tub that goes into your veins and carries fluid etc.
CT- Computed tomography, a medical test that produces images of inside the body.
CBC- A complete blood count. Used to evaluate your overall health and detect a wide range of disorders, such as anemia etc.
BP- Blood Pressure
Superficial- A wound that damages mostly the outside of the skin, and only does small internal damage.
Forceps- Like tweezers
MRI-scans similar to CT scans and can be used on a range of organs such as the heart and brain.
Aspirator- A small suction machine used to suck out fluids from the patients body.
Retinoscopy- eye exam

Alright! Chapter 1 done and dusted! I'll most likely be posting on a bi-weekly basis, so stay tuned :)

Also comments are great so be sure to leave a few :D
Chapter Summary

Does Bucky regret sleeping with Steve Rogers?
Kind of.
Will he do it again?
Probably.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2???? And it's relatively on time?? Wow.

It should be said that I am literally a piece of crap so we're probably looking at a three week wait for chapter 3 because oh my god Junior Cert is in 12 WEEKS and I have my art project due in six and wow this is real. it is happening. right now. to me.

Thank you so much for your incredible response- it's literally been amazing, you guys are the bomb dot com. Be sure to leave some more comments and if you guys have any ideas about where this story should go then definitely tell me!

Chapter title is from 'Novocine' By Fallout Boy.

3 rooms available for rent
2 bedrooms, 1 attic
34 Woodrow row
Contact Bucky Barnes for more details at:
0353475897
J_Barnes@gmail.com

Darcy smirks, taking a gulp of her coffee before placing the cup down on the bench and rooting around in her pocket for her lock key. Opening her locker, she hangs her coat up and quickly takes off her jogging pants, shoving into her scrub bottoms and top. She hears someone shuffle into the locker room behind her, and turns around to see Jane lugging a large wicker basket, followed by the mouth-watering smell of chocolate chips and muffin batter.

"What the hell is that?" Darcy asks, hurrying over to help her with it.

"I made Bucky muffins," Jane pants in response.

"Okay... Why?"

Jane looks at Darcy incredulously. "If we want him to rent out the two rooms to us, we have to give
"So you're bribing him with delicious baked goods?"

"It's the most powerful form of bribery," she replies matter-of-factly. "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Darcy snorts. "Yeah, well let's just hope they work."

"They always work," Jane protests as she shrugs on her scrubs. Rolling up the white sleeves under her own scrubs, Darcy goes over to the mirror to try to tame her wild hair into some semblance of a ponytail.

"How was working with Wilson?" Darcy asks, turning back to look at Jane shoving a pen into her bun.

"It was good," she replies."He's nice. He shows you how to do stuff and lets you try."

"What happened with Clint's appendectomy?" Darcy walks over to the bench and sits down, taking a long sip of her coffee.

Jane groans. "He got to the appendix and then messed up inverting the stump into the secum and ended up ripping it. Wilson had to take over before she bled to death. I told Clint I'd go over the procedure with him tonight."

Darcy scoffs. "You're too nice."

"No, you're too mean," Jane corrects. "None of us is going to pass without some help every now and then."

"Thanks, Ghandi, I'll remember that."

Darcy hears the door to the changing room open, and cranes her head around the lockers to see who came in. Clint trudges in tiredly, head hung low, with Natasha at his side.

"Hey," Darcy greets, and Natasha gives her a quick smile and a hurried 'hey' before flinging open her locker door and grabbing her scrubs.

"I want to inject myself with caffeine," Clint sighs, flopping down on the wooden bench, his limbs splaying everywhere.

"The perfect murder," Darcy muses. Clint jerks his leg out to try to kick her, but she dodges and sticks her tongue out at him. Because she is a mature adult.

"Oh hey, muffins!" Clint exclaims, jumping up and reaching across to get one, but Jane slaps his hand away.

"Not for you!" She scolds. "They're for Bucky."

Clint pouts. "How come you'll make Bucky muffins and not me?"

"Because Darcy and I need to woo him so he'll rent out his two rooms to us," Jane says.
"No way!" He grins. "I'm asking about a room too! Not with muffins though," the corners of his mouth turn down and a brief look of confusion flashes across his face, but it disappears within a second. "I'm just offering to buy his drinks next time he's at Rockets."

Rockets was the bar just down the street from SHIELD. It was run by two guys, Rocket and Groot. While Rocket had perfect (if not incredibly vulgar) English, Groot was a Czech immigrant, who had little to no English, apart from 'I' and 'am' and 'Groot'. Only in that order. (Though Darcy had her suspicions that he could actually speak English.)

"Well, good luck, I guess," Darcy offers.

"Thanks," Clint yawns. "You too."

"Are you thinking of asking for a room, Natasha?" Jane asks.

"Nah," she replies. "I managed to get a small apartment about ten minutes away, and I've already taken out a loan to pay for the rent."

Before anyone can say anything else, Bucky bustles in.

"Hey," he says breathlessly, and his bag makes a 'thump' as it hits the floor.

"You need to get an alarm," Natasha tuts.

"I have an alarm," he says. "I just don't listen to it."

Eventually, after much confusion (including Darcy's favorite moment - when he put his scrub shirt on backwards), he's ready to go and before he walks out with Clint and Natasha, Jane comes up to him with the basket of muffins.

"These are for you, Bucky," she smiles, all sunshine and light.

"Jane- uh, wow, thank you," he replies, clearly taken back. "Uh- why? If you don't mind me asking."

"No reason," Jane insists, wide eyed. "I just wanted you to know that myself and Darcy are interested in renting out two rooms of your house," she smiles sweetly.

"Oh," Bucky says, taken aback. "Well, I've already got a couple of offers- five of them from Clint offering to pay in beer and coffee- but I'll definitely think about it. Thanks again, so much. I really appreciate it," he gives her a smile and places the basket in his locker, then goes out the door.

Jane turns to Darcy and smirks, holding up her hand for a high five, the slap of their hands echoing around the room.

So far, the day had presented itself with all the ingredients for the worst day of Bucky's life. First, he out-slept his alarm, which gave him only ten minutes to get ready and out the door. But it happens, he could deal.
Then his shitty toaster broke and he forgot to get more milk so his breakfast was two slices of bread with jam.

Combined with cutting it close because his damn car is nearly out of gas, and then getting jam on the steering wheel, he was already is the world's shittiest mood.

But when Jane handed him that amazing looking (and smelling) basket of muffins, he can't help but smile and think, hey, maybe the universe doesn't have it out to get him.

Obviously, he was wrong.

Because Steve, the same Steve who was his one night stand, is apparently a doctor. A doctor who works at DC Shield.

A doctor who's his boss.

This was all kinds of wrong.

As soon as he saw Steve, he whipped back around and grabbed Natasha's elbow and dragged her around the nurses station to the hallway.

"Switch with me, please!" He hisses.

"Okay- what the hell's the matter?" She asks.

Bucky looks around, making sure that no one was listening, and lowers his voice. "I can't work with Rogers."

"Why not?" She demands.

"You can't react to what I'm about to tell you at all."

"Okay, fine, I won't."

Bucky takes a deep breath, and braces himself. "Before the first day, I went out with some friends to Rockets, and I met this guy, Steve, and we, y'know..." Bucky trails off, and bobs his head. He clears his throat. "And I slept with him. And now he's here. In the hospital. Working."

Natasha stays still for a second before her eyes widen and she bursts out laughing. Bucky glares at her. "You said you wouldn't react."

After a couple of seconds, she manages to stop.

"Oh my god," she wheezes, wiping a tear from her eye. "That is the best thing I've ever heard!"

"Natasha, I'm serious," he implores. "I don't even known how I'm supposed to look him in the eye, let alone work with him! And not to mention keeping my train of thought!"

"Aw Bucky," she smiles and pats him sympathetically. "You know that Hill wouldn't allow it. And I'm with Wilson, so I can't give that up." Natasha winks. "Besides, I'm sure Rogers would be more than happy-"
"Shut up," he mutters, cutting her off.

She slings her arm around his shoulder and gives him a quick, one armed hug.

"We have to go, Hill will kill us if we're any later," she says. Natasha gives him a light shove out of the hallway. Steve isn't there when Bucky goes back into the lobby, and Bucky feels himself begin to clam up. He wipes his already sweaty hands on his scrubs.

"Go get 'em, tiger!" Natasha whispers, giving his shoulder a brief squeeze before heading off to find Dr. Wilson. Bucky looks around, searching for Steve- sorry, Dr. Rogers.

This is going to be a disaster.

"Barnes!" Hill barks. Bucky stumbles around to face her. "Rogers has gone up to check on his patient. Follow him up there. Third floor, room forty-eight. Hurry." Bucky nods, his throat too tight to say anything, and walks toward the stairwell.

"I hope for your sake that isn't your idea of hurrying!" Hill calls, and Bucky picks up the pace to a jog, dreading the next twenty-six hours.

-------------------------------

To say that Loki Odinson was stressed was putting it in the lightest way possible. Sighing, he rests his elbows on the rich mahogany and places his head in hands.

He had a man with a tumor eating his brain and he hadn't a clue as to how to stop it, Fury pestering him about going for the Parker award (which he's almost tempted to take him up on just to spite Charles Xavier), his mother on his case about coming home, and deafening silence from his father and brother. (Which hurts more than he expected.)

And then this... Hurricane of a woman comes up to him, jabbering on and on about something Hill and god knows what else. She's such a force of nature- loud and wild in every way- her hair was all over the place and her eyes light up with every second that passes and her hands danced around, animating every word she spoke. Loki can only blink and stand in a stunned silence as she disrupts the order and calmness that previously graced the halls. She goes on for about a minutes before he comes back to his senses.

"Stop," he blurs out.

Mercifully, she does, and looks at him a little taken aback.

"I don't even- Who are you?" He enquires, his brain still muddled from the sudden disturbance to his thoughts.

"I'm Darcy Lewis," she says, as if she were talking to a child. "I'm an intern, I'm working with you for the day."

His brow creases as he searches his memory for any talk of interns shadowing him.

"Any of this ringing a bell?" She asks.

He sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. Of course, the interns. Hill had said something to him
last week, wondering if it would be alright if she put some interns with him. He had thought that Barnes and Romanoff were said interns.

Clearly not. Shutting his eyes for a second, he reopens them and stands up from the desk.

"Look, I think we can both get along perfectly well if I'll let you do your work in piece and you do the same for me," he says, picking up his files, about to hand them her when-

"Oh no," Darcy says, glaring at him and shoving the files back at him. "No. I'm not letting you jeopardise my education because you have some kind of god complex. I came here to become a surgeon and I won't let you stand in the way of that." Her nostrils flare. "If you think for one second that you're going to whole me up in a corner and do paperwork you've got another thing coming. You're letting me shadow you and you're letting me in the OR and I will get to be a part of a kick-ass surgery."

"I apologize," Loki relents. He takes an irritated breath. "And, if it's possible, if the patient is even surgical, I will see if I can get you into the OR. But I can't guarantee your involvement with any part of the procedure, and surely you must know that."

Darcy purses her lips and puts her hands on her hips. "When we do the surgery, you'll let me open and close."

Loki rolls his eyes. "I might let you close."

"You will let me close up," she counters.

Letting out an exasperated breath and throwing up his hands, Loki bites out "Fine."

Tucking the files under his arm, Loki begins to walk down the hall.

"Alejandro Hernandez, twenty-nine with a large tumour located in his parietal lobe. So we either attack it aggressively and do the surgery, getting rid of it that way, or we keep going with the chemo. I'm going to get his biopsy results now, you're going to get his MRI. Then we'll explain the course of action to him." He hands her his file. "This has all his current medical data. Look over it, if anything stands out to you, tell me. But, I highly doubt it, I've already read it three times."

"Okay," she replies curtly.

"Go check his vitals while you're at it," he adds after a seconds thought. "And I want his MRI scans by half past twelve."

She stops and gaps at him. "That's in fifteen minutes."

"Is it? I hadn't noticed. Well at least you're astute."

"Getting the scan will take at least ten minutes and then I have to get back up here and do his vitals!"

Loki grins at her and winks. "Walk fast."
Steve- *Dr. Rogers*- jogs up the steps of the stairs briskly, his white coat billowing out behind him like something from the movies.

Bucky follows the flash of white, taking the steps two at a time and cursing every step because god, how did this happen? Soon enough he's almost right behind Steve, and he takes a sharp breath to steel himself.

"Dr. Rogers?"

Steve stops and turns around, his expression confused, but the moment he lays those beautiful blue eyes on Bucky they light up like the sun and a big, smug smile widens across his face.

"Can I help you?"

Bucky freezes. Is he serious? The man is undoubtedly Steve. How could he not remember Bucky? Hell, he wasn't even drunk when Bucky brought him home, and he seemed pretty crystal clear on the details when they were talking the next morning.

So why was he acting like he didn't even know him?

"Uh, I'm Bucky. The uh, the intern," he manages between pounding heartbeats.

"Hey there," Steve smiles. "I'm Dr. Rogers. You can call me Steve, though." He holds out his hand.

Slowly, Bucky takes his hand and shakes it, willing himself to push away the memories that threaten to surface and consume his head.

"You don't- You don't know who I am?" Bucky stutters.

Maybe Steve wants it to stay professional too, and this is his way of going about it. Which is fine with Bucky.

"What did you say your name was?" He asks.

"It's James, but everyone calls me Bucky. Bucky Barnes," he explains.


Bucky swallows, unsure how to answer. What do you say to that? Luckily, he doesn't have to stumble around and find out, because a second later Steve shakes his head. "Okay, c'mon, our patient's waiting." With that, he turns around and starts climbing the rest of the stairs. Letting out a shaky breath, Bucky grabs the banister and follows his lead.

A couple of seconds later and they arrive at third floor, which is already full of action.

"At the moment, our guy, Gerard Lawson, has a tracheostomy due to a contraction of his airway as a result of a car crash," Steve explains. "So all we have to do is re-construct his trachea before any permanent damage is done."

Bucky can't help but remember what Darcy said- about an emergency tracheostomy being preformed with a pen by the new trauma surgeon, but he dismisses the thought. Steve doesn't really
"And how are we going to do that?" Bucky asks as they hurry down the corridor.

"We'll take the tube out and then preform a partial laryngectomy (procedure where all or some of the larynx is removed) and then connect the windpipe to a small opening in what remains."

Bucky's forehead creases. "Is, um, is that not, y'know.... Risky? I mean, there could be more damage than anticipated."

"Oh it's definitely risky," Steve answers in a heartbeat, and Bucky's honestly quite taken aback. A lot of surgeons act like they're god and that they can't do anything wrong, so it's somewhat reassuring that Steve isn't like that. "But, if worst comes to worst all we have to do is give him a permanent tube to breath through."

Bucky nods his head and busies himself with reading Lawson's stats, though, admittedly, nothing's going in.

"Okay," Bucky's head snaps up. "We're here," Steve gestures towards patient room 616, and Bucky follows Steve in.

"Mr. Lawson," Steve smiles stunningly as he walks over, unwrapping the stethoscope from his neck. "How're we feeling today?"

The man in the bed, about mid-to-late thirties, and presumably Gerard Lawson, gives Steve a small smile and thumbs up.

"Any pain?" Steve enquires as he checks the dressing around the tube for infection.

"Well it's a lot better than his life depending on a pen in his throat," the woman beside him jokes, and she leans over to squeeze his hand. Bucky freezes, and whips his head over to Steve.

Christ on a cracker.

It seems that every idea he has about Steve Rogers the universe tries to disprove.

This one is a kicker though. Steve, who looks like the living embodiment of sunshine and light and a no-rule breaker is the same guy having one night stands and doing emergency tracheotomies with a pen.

"I'm sure," Steve replies, but some of the life previously there is gone. "Bucky would you come over here and take a look at this?"

"Sure," Bucky says.

Getting a pair of latex gloves, Bucky bends down and slowly peels away one corner of the dressing, to reveal a raised, red abrasion underneath.

He frowns, and tilts his head.

"Is everything okay?" Gerard's wife asks, worry creeping into her voice.
Bucky looks up at her, and gives her his best 'don't-worry-ma'm-I-was-a-boy-scout' smile.

"No need to worry, ma'm, just a minor bump in the road," he reassures. Straightening up, he walks back over to Steve.

"Just an allergic reaction, I think," he says quietly.

"Alright. But to what?"

Bucky shrugs. "Could be anything. An antiseptic the nurses gave him, something in the bandages, hell it could even be the plastic in the tube."

Steve's forehead creases. "Okay. We'll get a biopsy to be sure nothing's going to affect him during the surgery. You get on that, I have another patient I need to check up on, I'll meet you in about an hour to get his results."

Bucky nods his head. "No problem."

Steve's pager goes off, and he grimaces. "Crap. I've got to take that. Can you explain the operation to Mr. And Ms. Lawson and then bring him for his biopsy?"

"Course," Bucky answers.

"Thank you." Steve smiles at him like the sun shines out of his ass and turns back to Mr. Lawson and his wife.

"I'm really sorry but I've been called to help out with another patient. Mr. Lawson you seem to have what we think is an allergic reaction on the skin of your neck, so we'd like to bring you for a biopsy to determine what is causing the reaction to make sure it won't affect your recovery. I understand you may have questions regarding the surgery tonight, so my intern James is here to answer them for you," Steve claps him on the back. "Trust me, you're in very capable hands."

Giving them one last smile and nod, Steve sweeps out of the room and down the hall.

Bucky tightens his grip around the folder and clears his throat. "Mr. and Mrs. Lawson," He smiles, and manages to get his voice to stop shaking. "The procedure involves..."

Having wheeled Gerard to and from the biopsy lab, Bucky was looking forward to couple of minutes of mindless, boring paperwork.

But, because the universe hates him, Nick Fury happens to be walking down the hall the exact same time Bucky is.

"Barnes!" He barks. Needless to say, Bucky jumps out of his skin. "My office, now!"

"Yes sir," He breathes, hurrying to catch up with his brisk pace.

They walk to Fury's office in complete silent, with Bucky's mind racing, and Nick being...Nick. Opening the glass door, Fury walks in and sits down in his leather chair behind the desk.
"Close the damn door and sit," Fury growls, straightening his leather trench coat.

Bucky slowly shuts the door, afraid the glass might shatter (It's an irrational fear, he realises. But he was five and he had smashed one of his mother's glass door panels, and she had instilled the fear within him), and went over to the desk where Nick sat, sitting in the chair in front of the desk.

"How're you finding it here?" Fury asks, his voice gruff, but laced with no coldness or malice.

"Just fine, Chief Fury. It certainly keeps me on my toes," he replies.

"Odinson told me about your work with the Amber Linklater case," Fury nods and scratches his chin. "That was... That was clever thinking. You're your mothers' son, that's for sure."

Bucky's heart twinges at the mention of his mother, and he gives a tight-lipped smile and nods his head. Silence settles between them as Fury sizes him up with his eye.

"How is Winifred?" He asks eventually.

Bucky clears his throat and shifts uncomfortably in his seat. "Um, she's fine." He scratches the back of his neck. "Still in denial that she's retired, but... you know," Bucky trails off, and Nick huffs out a small laugh.

"Couldn't expect anything less from Winifred Barnes," Nick says with a hint of fondness, maybe? in his voice.

"Certainly couldn't," Bucky replies softly.

"Where is she now?" He asks. "What's she doing to pass time?"

"Oh, um- She decided to go back to Russia for a while. Visit old friends," Bucky lies. It was partially true. After she retired she did go back to Moscow to meet up with friends.

After her internship at SHEILD hospital, Bucky's mother was offered a five year residency at a hospital in Moscow. While she was over there, she met Bucky's dad, they got married within four months and a year later Bucky was born. It was when the five years were up and they moved back to America that things got messy. While his mother had gone on to make surgical history in Hydra hospital in Brooklyn, his dad decided to up and leave. Which was fine with Bucky- all he lost out on was the guy who poured milk into his cereal every morning and took him to the park.

Then, when Bucky was twelve, his mother got offered head of general surgery at SHIELD DC, and that's where they stayed for the rest of Bucky's childhood.

But then of course, shit happened, and she came back here and now she's nowhere near Russia but she made Bucky promise that he wouldn't tell anyone. So he didn't.

Which is why he's here, lying through his teeth to his boss about his mother's whereabouts.

"Russia?" Nick raises his eyebrow. "Wouldn't have pegged your mother for the nostalgic type."

"I'm pretty sure she's just trying to convince them to give her a job," Bucky chuckles, and thankfully, Nick joins him, and his heart slows down its frantic beating.
After a minute their silence peters off, and once again silence wraps around them like a blanket.

"So she's okay?" Nick's voice is quieter this time, less booming.

"Yes, Dr. Fury. She's doing just fine," Bucky answers, and he tries to swallow the lump that forms in his throat, the truth slowly clawing its way up his throat and sitting in his mouth.

Fury gives him a small smile, so quick Bucky nearly misses it, and then his eyes and face harden and he's back to Chief Fury.

"You've probably got somewhere to be- go before you kill someone. Let yourself out," He dismisses.

"Thank you, Dr. Fury," Bucky says on his way out.

"Barnes!" He calls out, and Bucky turns around, his hand on the door handle.

Fury is quiet, looking unsure as to what to say. After a couple of seconds he settles on "You tell your mother I was asking after her."

Bucky gives him a smile. "I will do, sir."

As soon as Bucky shuts the door behind he lets out a huge breath that he didn't even know he was holding in. He's literally lying to his boss. That's probably on the grounds to fire him or something.

Crap.

Nick Fury is no stranger to Bucky; God knows this hospital was like a second home to him when he was in middle school, eating lunch and doing homework at the nurses station as he waited for his mother's shift to end so she could drop him home at least. (He's also no stranger to May, a nurse at SHIELD and friend of his mother who had to drop him home too many times to count, or helped him with homework or, picked him up from school when he got sick. He still drops in to see her every Sunday for dinner.) So he knows this for a fact- if Nick Fury finds out he was lying, he'll make Bucky's time at SHIELD a living hell.

Running a hand through his hair, he begins to make his way down the corridor to the nurses' station. Before he can even ask for Gerard Lawson's workup sheet, his pager goes off, obnoxiously screaming that his lab results came in. Sighing, he drums his fingers on the desk counter before twisting and walking over to the elevator. He taps his foot impatiently on the floor, and this elevator must know he's in a rush because it takes what feels like five years to come to his floor.

His plans to curl up into a ball on the floor of the elevator are ruined as soon as the door opens, because as luck would have it, Steve was there.

Oh yay. Exactly what he needed.

"Uh...Hey," He manages to choke out.

"Hey," Steve replies, scooting to the left so there's room for Bucky. Stepping in, Bucky can almost immediately smell Steve's aftershave, and his heart starts beating like a jackhammer in his chest. Bucky rams the number three button.
Steve looks over at him and gives him this sideways fucking grin, like he knows something Bucky doesn't, and it's so smug and infuriating Bucky just wants to wipe it off his face. With his lips.

"Gerard's biopsy results come back yet?"

"I'm just on my way to get them," Bucky replies.

"Great," Steve says, lifting his head from his pager to smile at him. "I'll come with you."

Bucky slowly begins to zone out, only concentrating on Steve's breathing beside him. After what seems like longer than it probably is, the elevator arrives at floor three.

"So everything went okay when you explained the procedure to them?" Steve asks.

"Yeah it was fine," Bucky answers, choosing not to add in the fact that he was shaking so much he probably looked like a nervous chihuahua.

"And did you check his file to see if he has an allergy recorded?"

"I did, and I also asked him and his wife, but it was a dead end," Bucky shrugs. "I mean, if he's allergic to anything it's probably something he wouldn't have come into contact with everyday, like the Vaseline they put around his neck or the bandages."

Steve nods thoughtfully. "Well let's just hope we're on the right track."

Despite his nerves, Bucky finds himself able to let out a quiet laugh. "Oh man, don't jinx it."

They stop at the door to the lab and Bucky opens it, poking his head through.

"Hey Derek, you got my biopsy results?"

"Yeah," the man replies gruffly. "Come in."

Bucky shoves the door open and walks in, crossing his arms as he waits for Derek to get the results.

"Here they are," he says, pulling a brown paper file out of a large stack on his desk, and leans over to hand it to Bucky.

"Thanks, Derek."

He doesn't reply, just grunts, but Bucky will take it because it's probably the closest he's going to get to a 'you're welcome'.

Bucky steps back out to the hallway and waves it in his hand. "Got it."

"Well?" Steve asks, as Bucky skims through the paper.

"Yep, he's allergic to something alright," he looks up at Steve. "It's the bandages they gave him. The material is synthetic; it's giving him the rash." He lets out a breath. "So it's just affecting his skin."
Steve visibly relaxes, the tension in his shoulders dissipating. "Good. Just a matter of changing the dressing, then."

"Looks like. I can go to the nurses station, ask them to change it." Bucky says. He checks his watch. "Crap, it's my lunch break."

Steve cuts him off as they head back to the elevator. "Hey, it's fine. I'll go do it and make sure they include the allergy in his file. You have lunch, then start his patient work up sheet and meet me half an hour before the surgery to go over the procedure."

"No problem," Bucky replies as he presses the buttons to their respective destinations.

They stand in silence in the elevator, and Bucky feels surprisingly content, and not at all like he could die in a matter of seconds. It's almost nice, standing here beside Steve.

As the elevator begins to slow down, Steve suddenly snaps his fingers, eyebrows furrowing pensively.

"You know what? I just realized why I couldn't place your face this morning."

Bucky's eyes widen, his palms sweaty at his sides.

Steve turns to him, his face lighting up in this wide, gorgeous grin. "It's because I'm used to seeing you naked."

Bucky's eyes bulge out of his head and before he can say anything (though he's lost the ability to speak after that fun fact) the elevator stops at Steve's floor and he steps out.

"See ya later, Bucky," he calls as the elevator doors close.

All Bucky can do is stand tree and wonder when this became his life.

--------------------------------------

'It's because I'm used to seeing you naked.'

Those eight words rattled around his brain, blocking out everything else. So Steve obviously knows who he is. And what- he waited so that he could make a joke of it? He frowned down at his sandwich, replaying the scene in his mind again.

Until Natasha whacks him on the back of the head with her magazine.

"Ow!" He exclaims. "What the hell was that for?"

She tuts and rolls her eyes. "You haven't said a word so far. All you've done is scowl at your sandwich."

"Sorry," he snaps. He picks up his sandwich and takes a large bite.

"Dude, you thought any more about who you're renting the rooms out to?" Clint asks.

"No," he replies around a mouthful of bread, ham and cheese.
"Oh stop moping," Natasha reprimands. "Just get over it." Bucky can't find it in himself to do anything but glare at her.

"Get over what?" Darcy asks.

"Nothing," Bucky answers the same time that Natasha says "Boy troubles."

"Oohh, has Bucky got a boyfriend?" Darcy cajoles.

"No," Bucky blushes. 'I wish,' he thinks.

"Who's the lucky guy, Buck?" Jane asks.

"No one," he insists, and he can feel his face heat up. "I don't have anyone. I'm going to die alone because I'm a workaholic and I iron my socks and apparently that's weird."

Clint makes a face. "You iron your socks?"

"I like my feet to be warm," Bucky answers lamely. "You know what? I take it back. I don't want roommates. I want to live alone in my house and turn it into a pit of loneliness and despair." He's silent for a moment before adding "And I want to sleep in a blanket fort."

"Me and Darcy make really good blanket forts," Jane offers, and beside her Darcy nods vigorously. Bucky shoots them a wry smile and places his head in his hands. He sighs, and Clint pats him on the back.

"C'mon, dude, only ten more hours and then drinks at Rockets!" At Bucky's less than excited grunt, Clint flicks him behind the ear.

"What the hell was that?"

Clint rolls his eyes. "C'mon, dude. You're in a mood. Spill."

Darcy's eyes light up like she's just been offered spoilers to her favourite tv show while Natasha tries (badly) to hide her smirk.

"Is it your guy?" Jane asks eagerly.

Bucky sighs, too mentally tired to put up much more of a fight. Resting his head on the table, he mumbles "Yeah."

"Oh dude," Clint says sympathetically. "Do you need me to beat him up for you? I can do that, I know some guys-"

"What- No!" Bucky admonishes, lifting his head of the table for a split second to look at Clint.

"What is it, Bucky?" Jane asks softly.

Bucky lifts head to rest on his forearm. "I, um," He clears his throat and wipes his sweaty left palm
on his knee. "I brought a guy home the night before I started my internship. To celebrate, y'know?"
He can practically feel Clint nod his head beside him, and he takes a breath and continues. "And he
was really nice, and his name was Steve, and anyway I left for work the morning after and I was
pretty content to just let it be a thing of the past..." He licks his lips. "But, uh, he's here. He works
here."

Darcy's eyebrows shoot up to her hairline and Clint's jaw is practically on the floor. Jane, however,
just keeps a small, sympathetic smile on her face.

"Who is he?" Darcy asks, desperate to know.

Licking his lips, Bucky bites the bullet. "Steve Rogers."

He's meet with silence apart from Natasha's quiet snickers.

Jane blinks owlishly. "Steve Rogers."

"That's right."

"The..." Darcy trails off, looking shocked to her core.

"The trauma surgeon, yep," Bucky confirms.

"With the-" Clint begins.

"With the emergency tracheotomy. That's him."

To their credit, they keep quiet for ten seconds before they explode into laughter.

"Guys," Bucky groans, banging his head of the table. "It's not funny."

The laughter eventually peters out, and Clint lets out a low whistle. "I mean, good for you, you
know- hypothetically. He's good looking." As an afterthought, Clint adds quietly "I'd fuck him."

Despite himself, Bucky quietly starts laughing. "Ah," He says through his chuckle, wiping a stray
tear away. "My life is a mess."

"Not that much of a mess," Jane amends.

"Yeah, and hey, if you play your cards right, you could even have three awesome roommates by
the end of the night," Darcy beams.

Bucky smiles back at her as Clint slings his arm around his shoulders. "Think about it this way,
man, only ten hours left and then we're going to Rockets and you can drink your problems away."

"That's absolutely not the best way to deal with things but it sure as hell isn't sounding too bad right
now," Bucky admits.

Clint grins. "Course it's not! So you're going to eat your sandwich, go back out there, do some
badass paperwork followed by a kickass surgery, and then Rogers is going to be all 'this dude is
amazing I need to do him right now' and you're going to be all 'no way I'm better than that' playing
all hard to get, you know, and then we're going to get you shitfaced and it's going to be awesome!"
Bucky sits up and gives Clint a small smile. "Thanks, man. But you're not getting me shitfaced."

"Oh we're so getting you shitfaced," Natasha replies.

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The OR is very rarely quiet. With the sheer amount of machines and people in the room, it's rare that there would ever actually be a moment of complete silence.

But, Bucky was in the OR now, standing beside Steve as he very lightly began to open the skin of Gerard's neck. And it was quiet.

It made Bucky's skin crawl- even the beeping of the monitors and the breathing of the nurse behind him couldn't calm him down.

The scalpel cut through the skin quickly and neatly, and Steve quietly said "Clamps."

The nurse behind Bucky handed him the metal clamps, and carefully, he took them. Delicately, he grabbed the flap of skin and placed the clamp on it, then slowly pulled. It came easily, and eventually he and the nurse opposite him had opened it wide enough so Steve could operate.

Bucky craned his neck forward, and looked in. He didn't mean to say it aloud- really. He didn't. Nonetheless, "shit" flew out of his mouth.

The muscle surrounding the tube looked angry and red, with small boils scattered here and there.

"Shit is right," Steve snapped. "Dammit." He let out a loud breath. "He has air trapped in the muscle. That's why part of the reason his skin started to rash." Steve lets out another curse.

"All we have to do is drain the air," Bucky says.

Steve shakes his head. "We don't know how much air is trapped. If it's a lot, we might damage surrounding tissue by exerting that much pressure."

Bucky's brow creases. "It doesn't matter."

Steve's head whips up to look at him and his eyes narrow. "If the surrounding tissue is damaged then-"

"No, no, I mean, it doesn't matter how much air is trapped," Bucky explains. "It's like bursting a balloon."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Steve grumbles.

"Well, if you get a needle and just pop the balloon really quickly, then it's going to pop- and in this case cause damage. But if you get the needle and really slowly and gently press it through the skin then the air will come out slowly. Like deflating a tire," He adds.

The nurse opposite purses her lips. "I don't know-"

"Trust me, it works," Bucky reassures. "My mom showed me. I mean- it's the same with giving
someone an injection, right? If they're really tense, it's going to hurt. But if they relax, it doesn't."

Steve's brows knit together as he mulls it over. "You have a point. Do we have any sterilised needles here?"

"Yes, doctor," And a second later a thin, silver glint is being held up to Steve. "No," He shakes his head. "Dr. Barnes? It was your idea. I'm sure you can carry it out."

"I- um, okay," Bucky answers. He steps aside, handing the clamp to the nurse on his left, takes the needle from the nurse. Bending over, the needle hovers centimetres from one of the bubbles.

And again it's silent.

Slowly- so very slowly, he presses the needle on its side into the bubble, compressing it. And then he pushes in, and pulls it back.

He can see the tissue deflate from underneath his fingers, and lets out a sigh of relief. Steve relaxes as well- letting out his own breath.

"Good job, Dr. Barnes," he says. "Keep going."

Bucky's admittedly startled by that- most interns don't get to actually carry out part of a procedure until they're a good few weeks in- but he doesn't dwell on it, and after readjusting the needle, he starts on the other ones.

Time seems to stop as he works- for once Steve's breath isn't distracting him or the annoying hovering of the nurses- he just does it. The needle acts like a natural extension of his fingers, and it doesn't oppose him- it does exactly what he wants.

Soon enough the last air bubble is popped and Bucky straightens, his back tingling.

Steve nods his head and underneath his surgical mask Bucky catches the faintest smile occupy his lips.

Bucky hands the needle back to the nurse, and takes back the clamps, then watches in wonder as Steve quickly but precisely removes the tube then starts reconstructing his windpipe. He uses the forceps like a paintbrush- in one quick stroke he's connected one muscle to another, so fast Bucky doesn't even want to risk blinking. He sutures the two muscles together quickly- and Bucky now sees the trauma surgeon in him emerge. He's not interested in making it perfect or look good- he just wants to do a good job, save his life and get out of there.

In what feels like a heartbeat, Bucky's looking at Gerard Lawson's newly constructed airway and Steve's closing up, and not a second after the nurses are shooing him out of the OR and taking off his surgical gowns, mask and gloves.

And a minute after that, he's joined by Steve at the basin looking out at the O.R. His dark blue scrubs highlight his blonde hair and sky blue eyes, and Bucky has to look down at his hands to avoid gazing into them like some lovesick puppy.

Bucky shoots him a small smile and continues to let the cold water soak his arms.

"What you did in there..." Steve clears his throat. "It was really good, Bucky. Really good. I mean-
I probably wouldn't have thought of it. You saved his life."

Steve looks at Bucky, and gives him such a sincere it makes Bucky's heartbreak.

"What you're feeling now- the adrenaline, the rush of unbridled joy flowing through you right now, you have to stoke it," Steve explains. "Hold into it and don't let it go- and don't talk about, because the more you talk about it, the more you lose it, you know? Keep it to yourself but keep it all the time. Let that be your goal. Strive for it."

Steve worries his lower lip as he looks out at the now dark O.R. "I lose myself, sometimes," he explains. "I don't know if it's the remaining PTSD or what..." He waves his hand. "But I loose myself and I almost become like a ghost, you know? But that, that feeling. It brings me back. Every time." Steve gazes into Bucky's eyes with his soft baby blues. "Let it anchor you, is what I'm trying to say."

Bucky swallows the lump that's formed in his throat, and nods. "I will," he says, bobbing his head as he scrubs in between his fingers. "I will."

Steve throws his towels in the bin, and walks towards the doors.

"Wait," Bucky blurts out, and Steve turns back to look at him. "I- Thank you. For saying that, and, y'know letting me do that in surgery and not just discounting it as nonsense."

Steve smiles kindly. "Bucky, you could talk to me about paint drying and I'd still hang onto your every word," he taps the door. "Well, I've got to go tell Mrs. Lawson the good news. I'll see you."

"Yeah, I'll see ya," Bucky replies, and Steve gives him one last smile before he heads out, leaving Bucky breathless, and his heart skipping a beat.

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The minute Bucky steps into Rockets', it's already thrumming with people. The air smells comfortingly familiar- faintly like smoke and strongly of beer and scotch. It's dimly lit and he can just about here U2 play on the jukebox, lost within the loud chatter of everyone else.

"Hey Bucky!" Craning his head, Bucky can see Clint wave his arms in a booth in the fat corner. He grins and shrugs his coat off, walking over to them. Natasha was knocking back tequila like it was water, Darcy was sipping something very pink and both Jane and Clint were nursing a beer.

Bucky flops down on the leather seat, resting his head on Natasha's shoulder. Grinning, Clint slides a beer over to him.

Picking it up, Bucky takes a sip and relaxes as it starts to work on the knot that's formed in his stomach.

"So?" Clint asks, eyebrows wiggling quite impressively.

Bucky sighs. "You guys can move in!"

Clint and Darcy whoop and Jane leans over to press a kiss to his cheek and give him a quick hug.

Bucky smirks as Clint rambles on about how awesome it's going to be, when Natasha nudges him
in the ribs. She nods her to the side, and Bucky looks around and-

Oh.

Steve, dressed in a leather jacket, a tightly fitted white henley and jeans.

"Well if it isn't God's gift to man,"
Darcy mutters.

"What's he doing here?" Bucky asks.

"Having a drink like everyone else," Natasha answers. She nudges him again. "Go talk to him."

Bucky barks out a laugh. "Ha. No."

"Why not?"

"Yeah, Bucky go talk to him!" Clint encourages.

"No," he shakes his head.

"Yes," They say simultaneously. Natasha grabs him by his shirt and pushes his out of the booth. "Go," she demands.
"You can't kick me out!"

She levels him with a look, and he doesn't want to risk arguing with it. "Fine," he sighs, throwing his hands up.

"Atta boy, Barnes!" Clint cheers as Bucky walks over to Steve. Bucky gently taps him on the shoulder.

Turning around, Steve gives him a large smile.

"Hey."

"Um, hey," Bucky says nervously.

"Fancy seeing you here," Steve grins, and Bucky can't help but return it. "Ah, yeah. Clint dragged me out, said he wanted to get me out of my funk."

Steve quirks an eyebrow. "You're in a funk?"

"I am, actually," Bucky takes a sip of his beer and feels his nerves dissipate. "And I was hoping you might have the answer as to why."

"Well I'll certainly try," Steve says coolly.

Bucky takes another swig. "You acted like you didn't know me- which was fine, because, you know, professionalism and what not, so I could get over it- Then you pull that shit in the elevator and I'm left gaping like a fish because this dick has just revealed that he does actually remember me," he pushes Steve lightly when he starts laughing. "How the hell am I meant to work with you when everything you do reminds me of... You?" Bucky flounders.
"Okay, it was a dick move, to be fair," Steve admits, still chuckling. "But in my defence, it was at first my way of dealing with it professionally, admittedly, it was fucked up. And then the elevator, well, I just wanted to see how you would react," Steve shrugs. Bucky punches him lightly on the arm, but doesn't bother to hide his smile.

They sit and sip their beers, content in just being near each other.

"So, your mom sounds like a pretty clever woman," Steve says after awhile. "Was she a surgeon too?"


"What about your dad?"

Bucky shrugs. "Dunno. A salesman, maybe? A banker? He left when I was young, so."

"I'm sorry," Steve says.

"No need," Bucky replies. "What about your mom and dad? We're they both in medicine?" He asks, wanting to change the subject.

"Ma was a nurse," Steve answers. "My dad died in combat when I was young."

"Sorry, man. Is that why you decided to go into the army?"

"Kind of. I felt like that I had all this knowledge- I should put it to use, you know?" He smiles fondly. "I was stationed in Iraq. Some of the people there- they were really incredible. It was heartbreaking, because all they didn't have much apart from their home, food, their family and faith and they were being hated and judged because of what a couple of l extremists do." His fingers trace the beer bottle. "I'd give anything if everybody could see the side of those people I saw."

Bucky looks at him. "Hopefully one day they will," he says quietly.

They start talking again, about god knows what, but they're talking and laughing and there's a wonderfully warm feeling spreading through Bucky and it isn't the alcohol.

"You know," Steve says after a while. "What you pulled in the surgery really was great." He's quite for a moment before he adds, "I guess you're not just a pretty face."

Bucky gasps in mock offence. "Well thank you and fuck you, Rogers," he laughs along with Steve, and takes a gulp of his beer. "And you're right- I'm not just a pretty face. I've got a pretty damn nice ass too."

"I'll drink to that," Steve grins. "A pretty nice ass I wouldn't mind seeing again."

Bucky's eyebrows shoot up."Oh really? And what happened to professionalism?"

Steve leans into Bucky, his hand brushing Bucky's, his gentle blue eyes looking into Bucky's.

"I was never one to play by the rules," he says lowly, and Bucky doesn't miss how he licks his lips.
"That's some big talk. But I'm not convinced-"

Steve cuts Bucky off with a kiss, it's quick and chaste, but enough to leave him breathless, yearning for more.

It's ten seconds before Steve asks if he wants to go home, his lips brushing against Bucky's ear and he can't stop the smile that spreads across his face as he smiles.

It's twenty minutes before their ripping the clothes off each other and kissing feverishly until their lips bruise.

And in nine hours Bucky's going to have to do all this again, but he pushes the thought away and decides instead to concentrate on Steve's lips on his.
I don't want to follow death and all of his friends (So come over just be patient and don't worry)

Chapter Notes

So. I'm like, sorry??? I don't even know how this happened. Honestly I had a good 3,000 words that I scrapped and then the time I was meant to use to write this was taken up by studying for the JC and then I have like a thousand other fics that I'm writing so yeah. Super duper sorry guys.

Anyway I'm not going to give you guys a time frame for when chapter four should be up because I'm probably not going to stick to it, but it will be up as soon as I can!

Title comes from 'Death and all his friends' by Coldplay.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint woke up to a pillow whacking him across the face. (It's not the first time since moving into Bucky's house). Flailing, he lurches up, and is met with another pillow.

"What the hell?!" He exclaims, blinking blearily up at Darcy, her arms crossed and lips pursed.

Darcy rolls her eyes. "Are you not hearing that?" She asks, and points to his bedside locker. Only then does Clint register the incessant beeping coming from his pager- the screen lighting up with every beep.

Leaning over he grabs it and looks at what it's reading- code nine-one-one.

"Mass emergencies," he says aloud.

"Yeah, a collision on the highway involving a double-decker bus and three cars," Darcy explains. "They need all hands on deck." She flings another pillow at him, but Clint very narrowly manages to dodge it.

Clint lets out a groan. "Aw, work. I just got off a thirty hour shift."

"Get over it," Darcy replies. "So did everyone else."

"Let's go, Barton!" Jane calls from the bathroom which is opposite his room.

A loud yawn takes the place of an answer as he swings his feet around the bed and plants them on the cold wooden floor. He heaves himself off the edge of the bed and plods towards the bathroom, grabbing his toothbrush and taking his place beside Jane at the sink.

They scrub their teeth viciously and spit out the minty foam in tandem. During the week that Clint
has been living with Bucky, he's come up with a pretty solid routine. It's quick, leaves no space for cutting corners but still gets the job done well. He brushes his teeth, he runs a brush through his hair and at this point Darcy and Jane are usually out of the bathroom so he can go to the toilet, and then he runs back to his room. Now, usually, he would strip off his shorts and T-shirt on the way to his dresser (and usually falls over in the midst) and shove a pair of track ends and a shirt on, but today he needs to get into his scrubs, because as soon as they get to the hospital it's going to be nonstop action.

All this takes place in roughly around five minutes, and when he's ready, he runs downstairs ("With all the grace of a baby elephant," Jane mutters), and makes to the kitchen in time to grab a slice of toast and pour coffee into his thermos.

With half a slice of toast shoved into his mouth and enough coffee to wire him for a couple of hours, Clint follows Jane and Darcy out of the house to the car, and as he's locking the front door, he turns his head to look at the two of them.

"Is Bucky with Steve?" He asks over his shoulder.

Darcy smirks. "Probably."

Clint sighs. "Well at least one of us is getting laid."

~*~

Bucky, surprisingly, has had a really, really great week. He's woken up to Steve for the past two days, had amazing make-out sessions in the on-call rooms and feels more at home in SHIELD every day.

So when his pager goes off with him only having had four hours sleep (damn you, Rogers), he groans and smashes his face further into Steve's pillow, cursing the end to his happy streak.

"You should check that," Steve mumbles.

"Probably just Clint reminding me to get more coffee," Bucky replies, his voice still thick and heavy from sleep.

They lie there for a couple of seconds, Bucky's pager still going off before Steve huffs and heaves himself up, reaching over Bucky and fumbling with various items on his dresser before picking it up and squinting at the screen.

"Shit!" He suddenly exclaims. Steve throws himself off the bed and begins to throw on pants, all while muttering something along the lines of 'shit fucking fuck fuck'.

"What is it?" Bucky asks, stretching as sits up in Steve's bed.

"Nine-one-one," Steve says a little breathlessly as he yanks his scrub shirt on over head.

Bucky grabs his pager and curses when he sees '911' flash on the screen. He scrambles up from the bed and grabs his boxers from the floor. If the circumstances weren't so time sensitive, Bucky'd joke how it was funny how one of them always made the other late for work.
"You okay to get to work?" Steve asks breathlessly as he runs a brush through his hair, somehow already in his scrubs and ready to go- and looking *good* even though he's functioning on four hours sleep and had two minutes to get dressed.

"Yeah," Bucky answers, shoving his leg through his scrubs. "My car's parked outside."

"Good," Steve says, as he walks out of the bedroom and into the living area- the living area being a kitchen and sitting room all in one. It baffles Bucky how a man with a high paying job still lives in an apartment that reminds Bucky of his college dorm.

Bucky slips his ratty converse on and hastily ties the laces before running after Steve. He grabs his keys from the kitchen table, and quirks an eyebrow when Steve shoves a packet of gum into is chest.

"Thanks?"

"There'll be no time to brush your teeth when you get to the hospital," Steve explains as he pours coffee into two travel mugs. "But at least this way your breath won't smell horrible."

"Oh, well, then. Thanks," Bucky grins as he pops one in his mouth and takes the mug from Steve. He spins his keys around his fingers. "Well, I should probably go." He gestures towards the door.

"Oh, yeah, of course," Steve says as he places the pot of coffee down. He walks towards Bucky and follows him to the door.

"You'll be close behind, right?" Bucky asks. With a nine-one-one emergency and Steve as the head of trauma, he'll basically be running the show, ergo, he needs to be as soon as possible.

"Yeah just let me lock up and I'll be right behind you. Besides, Sam should be okay with taking charge for a couple of minutes."

"Okay, I'll see ya-" Bucky's cut off with a quick, chaste kiss from Steve.

"Go," Steve says, unlocking the door and giving Bucky a gentle shove out the door. "I'll talk to you tonight, okay?"

"Um, yeah, sure," Bucky answers dumbly.

"Till then," Steve smiles, and gives him another gentle kiss, before closing the door.

Bucky has to stand there in shock for a couple of seconds, because *fuck* this might not be as casual as he thought.

~*~

Bucky, along with Clint, Natasha, Jane and Darcy stand in the pit, waiting for the ambulances to arrive and Hill to station them.

"Interns! Trauma gowns on let's go!" Hill calls, already tying a knot on hers. Immediately they grab gowns and gloves, and when they're all ready, they join Hill outside at the emergency entrance.
"I know you all go jumpy and excited when you see blood, but I want no mistakes. Don't kill anyone and listen to your attendings. When the victims get here then you'll be assigned to a patient. And when they get here I do not want to see you all arguing over who gets who. Are we clear?"

In unison they all nod their heads.

Before anyone can say anything else, sirens cut through the silence, and it's all go from there.

Three ambulance round the corner and screech to a halt in the ambulance bay, and the doors fly open.

Bucky and Darcy rush for the middle one, and help the paramedics to lift the gurney onto the ground. On it, lies a young, blonde boy with third degree burns covering the left side of his face and travelling down to his chest.

"Luke O'Malley, ten years old, third degree burns on his left side," The paramedic says as they wheel him in. "As well as a suspected pneumothorax and various internal injuries, including a perforated bowel from debris. He was at the front of the train." He pauses. "I know his uncle- he was the bus driver. He's a good kid."

"Crap," Bucky mutters. "Okay, Darcy I'm going to wait with him in ER room three until Rogers, Quill and Wilson show up to take a look at him. Can you go up and book a CT scan and lung sonography?"

Darcy nods. "No problem. You want me to page Stark as well? If he does have extensive internal injuries, we might need a general surgeon ready."

Bucky nods. "Yeah, that'd be great. See you in ten."

"See you," She says as she takes off down the hall at a jog, making her way through the throngs of nurses and doctors rushing around the place.

"Hey, can I got an IV in here?" Bucky calls to a nurse as he and the paramedic roll Luke into ER three. Two nurses come in and begin setting up IV's and hooking him up to a heart monitor. "Two milligrams of morphine, for the pain," Bucky instructs.

He grabs his light and gently pries open Luke's left eyelid and moves the light from left to right and tracks his pupil dilation, and again with his right. "Pupil dilation seems fine," He tells the nurse. "Could you page Dr. Rogers and Dr. Quill, please? Also page Dr. Wilson- Wade Wilson. Thank you." He checks the heart monitor and clicks his tongue. Looking down at the young, thin boy, a sadness washes over Bucky.

"Hang in there, buddy," He says quietly, and then busies himself with checking his oxygen levels. "Can you run the name 'Luke O'Malley' through the system and try to contact his parents?" He asks a nurse.

"Yes, doctor," She answers. He responds with a 'thank you' and a small smile.

"Hey sweet cheeks, why'd you page me?" A loud voice comes from the door. Rolling his eyes, Bucky turns around.
"Dr. Wilson, I have patient with third degree burns on his face and chest which I need you take a look at," Bucky says.

"Ouch!" He says as he walks over. When he actually see's Luke, the playfulness on his face vanishes. "Ouch," He says, quiet and sombre.

"Yeah," Bucky breathes.

"Well, the burns I can definitely do something about," Wilson puts on some latex gloves and begins to inspect the burns. "Have you paged Quill?"

"Yep," Bucky answers. "And Rogers, just in case."

Wilson hums, and goes back to the burns.

Wade Wilson is part two of the Two Wilsons, a club consisting only of him and Sam Wilson and also part of the 'young, hip, cool attendings of SHIELD DC' (Darcy's words) which involves the Two Wilsons, Odinson (who is only young, and not hip or cool, also according to Darcy), Peter Quill, Pepper Potts, Tony Stark (who is hip, cool but not so much young) and, of course, Steve.

"He's going to need skin grafts," Wilson's voice cuts through Bucky's haze. He gestures to the burns. "The skin is too damaged, and without them his face would be severely mutilated- he'd probably end up not being able to fully control the left area of his mouth."

"Where are you going to take the skin from?" Bucky asks.

Wade shrugs. "That's the million dollar question. He's so thin, it doesn't really make it easy for me to find an area. I suppose it really depends where the surgery is happening, because that skin will be too weak. So maybe I could take some from his back, maybe his back thighs if I'm desperate."

Bucky chews his lip. "Okay."

"Hand me the Vaseline, would you?" Wilson asks. Bucky rummages through the drawers of medical supplies for a couple of seconds before grabbing the Vaseline and handing it to Wilson.

The next few minutes pass in silence, with Wilson applying Vaseline to Luke's burns and then covering them in dressings. It's broken with Steve rushing in.

"Hey," He greets breathlessly. "What's the problem?"

"Suspected collapsed lung along with other internal injuries and a third degree burn on his face and chest that needs a skin graft," Bucky explains.

"Damn," Steve mutters as he walks over. When he sees Luke, he curses. "How old is he?" He asks as he checks his heart rate.

"Around ten," Bucky answers. "Nurses are trying to get in touch with his parents as we speak."

"Poor kid," Steve sighs. "Is he at all responsive?"

"Well his pupil dilation is good, at least. Book a CT and a MRI."
"Darcy's doing that," Bucky explains. "And I've paged Quill."

"Great, good job," he says breathlessly, and flashes Bucky a quick smile. He turns to Wilson, who's nearly finished dressing Luke's burns.

"Wade, what's the story?" Steve asks as he walks over.

Wilson flashes Steve a Cheshire-cat grin. "Hey there, Dr. McDreamy." While Steve rolls his eyes and chides Wade, Bucky makes a mental note of Wade's nickname.


"Well you know how I am with the elephant in the room," Wade says as he peels off his latex gloves and bins them. "I climb aboard and ride it around. Now as for the patient-" He gestures to Luke, and pulls a face. "He's got severe third degree burns. Because he's so skinny, it'll be hard to get a skin graft, but once you and Quill figure out where you're going to go in, I can find an area to take skin from."

Steve's eyebrow furrows, and his hand rubs his mouth.

"And do you think you'd be able to do it after we've finished up with whatever we need to do?"

Dr. Wilson shrugs. "It depends how invasive the surgery, and how long he'll be on the table for. Although, ultimately, it depends on what shape he's in after the procedure- if he'd be able to handle it."

Steve nods and worries his lower lip, looking at Luke.

"So we're just going to have to play it by ear?" He asks.

"Pretty much," Wilson answers, standing up. "I've dressed the skin lightly, so if it needs to come off for surgery it won't be a problem. Keep me updated on his condition, and I'll see you guys later." He flashes them a grin before leaving, whistling Bob White as he goes.

"I see a lot of weird on a day-to-day basis," Steve says as he unwraps his stethoscope from his neck and leans over Luke's chest. There's a brief pause as he checks his heartbeat, and then stands back up straight, and looks at Bucky. "But Wade Wilson surpasses whatever crazy surgery I do that day every time." Steve returns the stethoscope to his neck and flashes Bucky a fond smile. "His heart's doing okay," he says. He lets out a breath- heavy, weighed down with an undeniable sympathy for the young boy.

"But it's all circumstantial."

Before Bucky can say anything, Darcy and a tall man with coppery brown hair followed her- Peter Quill. If the circumstances were different Bucky would probably be pumped, as Quill would play music from the 80's during routine surgeries, and was a pretty good guy in general.

"Peter," Steve nodded.

"Hey, Steve," He replied, a small smile on his face. "Who's our guy?" He asks as he examines Luke.
"Luke O'Malley," Steve answers. "Around ten or eleven- nurses are still trying to pull up his file. Heart is okay, pupil dilation is good, but bp's low."

"Okay," Quill says quietly, more to himself than anyone else. "What're we talking here, a collapsed lung, shattered rib cage?"

"All suspected," Steve says, and turns to Darcy. "Did you book the CT?"

She nods. "Yeah, and a lung sonography. They're ready when you are."

Steve quirks an eyebrow at Quill. "You ready to wheel him down or do you want to check him?"

Quill shakes his head."Nah I think you covered it all. Let's get him to the CT theatre."

~*~

They stay, all four of them, quietly in the CT theatre while they wait for the results to come back. It's tense, and everyone seems to be in their own minds. At this point Bucky has chewed his nails down to a stub and Darcy has examined every split end in her hair, Quill is sitting in a chair leaning on the desk with his chin in his hand and Steve- well. He's standing slightly hunched over, forehead furrowed and absentmindedly biting the nail of his thumb. Seeing him like this- the man who's constantly standing tall and proud and always has a slight air of confidence that is never overwhelming but somewhat comforting- it's discerning.

When the computer suddenly beeps and signals the lung sonography results, they all jump at the sudden interruption to the quiet.

The black and white image slowly comes up on the screen- a plethora of violent white bulges where there should be grey.

"What do you see, Darcy?" Quill asks, turning in his seat to face her.

She leans closer to screen, her eyes narrowing. "Hyper-inflated lungs," she says certainly after a second. "Clouded with bullae*, and seriously diminished capacity. He must be having serious trouble breathing."

Quill turns to Bucky. "What course of action?"

Bucky presses his lips together before answering "A bullectomy procedure, we remove the bullae and reduce the pressure. But you see that?" He points a small, jagged like on the screen. "I think that's a piece of his rib cage. So we need to get in there as fast as possible or else it's going to puncture one of the bullae."

Quill and Steve lean in, with Steve resting his arm on the desk, examining the sonography.

"Looks like it," Steve says, sounding resigned. He looks down at Quill. "We're going to have to get in there fast."

Quill nods. "Damn right. Can you pull the CT of his bowels?"
With a couple of clicks the technician sends an image of Luke's internal organs to the computer. Bucky lets out a small sigh of relief when he sees it.

"It's not too bad," He says. "A couple of incisions from debris, a little internal bleeding, but we can always do a minor surgery on that after clearing up his lungs if the bleeding is still a problem."

Quill nods. "With the way his lungs are that's probably how it's going to have to be," He checks his watch. "Book the O.R for seven tonight. It'll give his body enough time to process whatever food he might have had." Standing up, he hands Bucky Luke's chart. "You guys stay with him. I want him monitored every minute. As soon as you wheel him out of here, get him on oxygen and IV fluids. Get in contact with a guardian as soon possible to tell them what happen and where he is- If he wakes him page me and Rogers, and keep him awake and stimulated until we get there, okay?"

Bucky answers "Yeah." While Darcy nods.

"See you tonight," he says as he walks away. Steve follows him and claps Bucky on the back.

Darcy turns to him. "I'll wheel him back to his room and start getting him set up if you go to book the O.R?"

"Sure," he answers and hands her the file before turning to walk down the hall.

As he walks down the hall, he lets out a large sigh and runs a hand through his hair. The adrenaline that had previously fueled his body at the admittedly morbid excitement of a mass emergency was wearing off, and he was starting to feel the effects of only four hours sleep and not enough coffee.

As he neared the nurses station in the West Wing of the hospital- which contained a huge whiteboard scheduling all the surgeries for the day- he can already hear a quiet cacophony of voices, no doubt other interns trying to get their surgeries scheduled.

Rounding the corner, he can see Sharon standing behind the desk, arms crossed and looking unimpressed as people clamor to get an O.R booked.

He stands on the fringes of the crowd, catching her eye and offering her a sympathetic smile and a shrug.

She returns it with a wicked grin and suddenly slams her hand down on the table. "Okay!" She yells over the din and after a couple of seconds silence ripples through the crowd.

"We can't get all your surgeries scheduled in the next twenty-four hours with the sheer amount of patients we have from the bus crash and our available operating theaters," Sharon's voice is loud but not yelling, definite and calm. "So we'll be going on priority. Who has a obstetric* or pediatric patient?"

Bucky's hand and another shoot up.

Sharon nods to another intern, "Who's your patient?" She asks.

"I've got a mother expecting twins with severe burns and a superficial wound to the stomach," he replies. "And she's about to go into premature labour, which will nearly certainly cause internal bleeding."
"Who's your attending?"

"Dr. Potts."

"When do you need a theater?"

The guy (George? Geoff?) shrugs. "As soon as possible."

Sharon nods and hands a whiteboard marker to another nurse. "O.R five, it'll be ready in ten minutes, get in there as soon as possible."

She turns to Bucky. "And what about your guy?"

"A ten year old with a hyper-inflated lung and a shattered rib cage which might perforate the bullae," He answers. "At this rate his lung capacity is decreasing nearly every time he takes a breath. We need an O.R for around seven."

Sharon hands another marker to the same nurse. "Okay, done. O.R one will be ready for you at seven- tell Quill to page me his surgical team so they're not double booked."

"I will," He answers, already beginning to walk away. "Thanks!" He calls over his shoulder.

~*~

Bucky returns to Luke's room to find Darcy sitting beside him reading a book and eating a bagel most likely from the canteen.

She mumbles a 'hello' from around her food and hands him a paper bag. When he opens it he finds a bottle of coke and another bagel.

"Thanks so much," He says, flopping down into a chair the opposite side of Luke.

"It's fine," She answers, waving him off. "You're the one who's writing his chart, so."

He quirks an eyebrow. "Am I, now?" He asks, and when she looks up from her book with a smile he can't help but grin back. "That's okay I'll do it. It's only fair."

He unwraps his bagel and takes a bite. They eat in comfortable silence for a few minutes before Bucky breaks the silence.

"What're you reading?" He asks.

She holds the book up and he can see 'The anatomy of the human lungs' clearly printed across the cover.

"Last minute revision," Darcy admits.

"Hey," Bucky says determinedly. "You got this, okay?"

"Thanks, Bucky." A shy smile flits across her face as her eyes return to the book.
"O.R's booked for seven, by the way," He says as he leans over to grab Luke's chart.

"Great," She says, not looking up from the textbook. "His parents have been contacted. They were in Chicago for their anniversary, they'll be here soon." She pauses, and looks at Bucky. "Puts things into perspective, doesn't it?" She jerks her head to Luke's sleeping body. "Putting a life to the face."

A small, sad smile tugs at Bucky's lips. "It sure does. I don't know if it makes it easier or harder. Because in one sense you have this drive to do your best so this person," he gestures to Luke. "Can see their parents again, or, I don't know, go to college or whatever- you see a little bit of their life and you want them to live it, you know? But then, you know, because of that motivation, if you lose them, it's..." He trails off.

"It's heartbreaking," Darcy continues for him. She nods with a sympathetic smile, her head leaning on her hand, her book forgotten. "I have this patient with Odinson, Alejandro. He's got a large tumor eating his parietal lobe. And he's...He's just lovely. I go in to check up on him and he greets me with a smile and asks me how I am... And he's got a wife, Amy, and she's four months pregnant." She pauses and chews her lip. "But the chemo isn't working, the tumor's just getting more aggressive."

"Well why haven't you considered surgery?"

She gives him a watery smile. "We have. But the only way Odinson can think of doing the surgery would involve literally just opening his brain and taking it out. But because of where it's located, there's a ninety-nine percent chance that some kind of damage would be done. And that damage involves severe memory loss.

"He would lose all his past memory. So tomorrow I have to go in and watch Loki tell a man that he can either have a chance of living a long life but run the risk of ruining every happy memory he's built over the last thirty years, or he can have another two years tops with his wife, but ultimately he's going to die." Darcy rolls her lips. "And, I just- I don't know if I can do it, you know? I don't know if I could do the surgery and not try to talk them out of it- I don't think I could be objective."

Bucky shakes his head. "No one is. How can they be? I see my patients more than I see you guys. You learn more about them in a minute than you would on a first date. No one's objective- some are just better at hiding it than others."

"I guess I-"

Darcy's cut off by a sudden string of jerky beeps from the heart monitor and a choking sound coming from Luke.

His eyes are wide and open- terrified, even- and he's lurching around on the bed, coughing against the intubator*.

Bucky jumps up from his chair and leans over the bed, so he's eye to eye with Luke. "Hey, hey, buddy," He soothes. "Luke, calm down. I need you to calm down, okay? The tube in your throat is an intubator," Bucky explains. "It's helping you breathe because your lungs aren't doing too well. I know it doesn't feel great but I need you to calm down so it can do its job. Can you do that for me?" Bucky watches closely as Luke relaxes slightly and his breathing returns to normal. "Page Steve and Quill," He tells Darcy, and returns to Luke without checking for a reply. "Good job, buddy. That's real good. My name is Dr. Barnes, you were involved in a bus crash and you're in
Luke opens his mouth and makes a sound before spluttering again.

"No- Luke, you can't talk, okay? I know it sucks, but if you speak or cough you could suffocate, okay?"

Slowly, Luke nods, and Bucky gives him a small smile. "Your parents are coming as soon as they can, they're on their way from Chicago now. You've got two great doctors working on you, I promise. Dr. Quill and Dr. Rogers- best surgeons in the house if you ask me. They'll be here in a minute to explain everything to you."

He stands up and takes his stethoscope from around his neck. "I'm going to check your lungs and heart now to make sure they haven't gotten worse. It might be a little cold." Very gently, he lifts up Luke's gown and places the cool metal on his skin. He can hear a faint rattle and bubbling, and withholds his wince. Bucky moves the stethoscope to his heart, and takes some comfort from the slow, but somewhat steady beats.

When he comes back up, Steve and Peter are already walking through the door.

The frowns that had graced both their faces before they walked through the door diminished and gentle smiles took their place.

"Luke, it's good to see you awake," Steve says. "I'm Dr. Rogers, I'll be helping Dr. Quill here with your operation. You're lungs are a bit banged up from the crash, but we're going to do our absolute best to fix them, okay?"

Luke gives a jerky nod, and Steve gives him another smile. Before Quill walks over and sits down on the foot of his bed, and begins to explain what exactly is going on with his lungs and what's going to happen during the procedure.

Steve walks over to Bucky, arms crossed. "Was he awake for long?"

Bucky shakes his head."No, Darcy paged you as soon as he woke up."

He nods absentmindedly. "Good. Did you check his lungs?"

"Yeah. The lungs aren't doing so well, I can practically hear the bullae, and his ribs are pretty fractured because there's a distinct rattling. Heart rate is good though, slow, a little erratic but mostly steady."

Steve bites his nail, and lets out a breath from his nose."You booked the O.R?"

"Yes."

"You get in contact with his parents?"

"They're on their way now."

Steve runs a hand through his hair. "Okay," he says. "Okay." He repeats it quietly, more to himself than anyone else. Bucky hears how scared he is, though. He can hear the hidden prayer laced within it and can feel the tiredness that resonates from the words.
The four of them, Bucky, Steve, Darcy and Peter, stand at the sink and scrub their hands in tandem.

"We're taking our time in here," Quill says. "I don't want sloppiness. We'll take our time removing the bone fragments and we'll take our time with the bullectomy and the lung reduction- I don't care how long it takes."

"Which procedure are we going to use to reduce the volume of the lungs?" Darcy asks.

Quill shrugs. "We'll find out when we get in there and see how bad the damage is, but I want to be as minimally invasive as possible."

Bucky grabs a paper towel and begins to dry his hands, and the others follow suit. They're all quiet, all in their own minds.

And then they're in the operating room and Bucky's sure as hell isn't calm. He's in a horrible state of being nothing more than a ball of nerves and he hates it. Usually, his mind is occupied with excitement at the prospect of a surgery and he doesn't have time to actually think about anything else.

But now his mind isn't occupied with the surgery, so it's filling up with memories from his childhood and rocks are settling in the bottom of his stomach because

Because Luke is ten. He's ten and he's only in the fifth grade and he hasn't even begun to live his life yet and what if Bucky is the one that causes him to die? What if his nail pierces the glove and he accidentally cuts the lung? What if he picks up a piece of the rib cage and then drops it and-

"Bucky." Steve's hand claps his back as he stands at the entrance to the O.R, where Luke lies on the operating table, not yet brave enough to enter.

"What happens happens," Steve is saying. "But we're all going to do our best, and if we're lucky, that will be enough today."

Taking a shaky breath, Bucky nods, and he opens the door.

The beeping of various machines and the quiet chatter of nurses as they make the final adjustments are a sound that Bucky has become accustomed to and immediately it's a comfort.

Quill and Darcy are already at the operating table, ready to go. Bucky walks over and takes his place at the right of Luke, with Quill at his left and Steve at his right.

"Alright folks," Quill says. "It's a beautiful day to save a life."

~*~

It doesn't happen until it does.

Quill opened the chest cavity and when Bucky leant forward to look in the blood drained from his face.
Luke's rib cage was non-existent. In its place was shattered and jagged pieces of bone, like jigsaw puzzle pieces scattered on the floor. But that wasn't the only thing.

The bullae weren't big.

They were huge.

Large and white, they looked like pimples that hadn't been popped. The tissue around them—though there was little left—had turned grey.

"His lung is nearly entirely de-oxygenated," Darcy said in shock.

"We're going to have to reduce the air in the lung first," Steve said.

Before Quill could have done anything, the first bullae exploded. It wasn't particularly big but nonetheless water and blood went everywhere.

Quill let out a string of expletives as he tried to control the leak. "Is the liquid just in the bullae?"

"I- I don't know, it didn't show up on the sonography," Bucky answered.

Quill looked up at Steve. "How much do you want to bet that his lung isn't just filled with air but water too?"

"Goddammit," Steve cursed. "How do you want to go about this?"

"The lung is the main problem right now- it'll keep expanding with air," Quill sighed. "We'll deflate the lung first. Bucky, Darcy, you guys on suction. As soon as I make the incision I need you guys to get the liquid that escapes, he doesn't need anymore water in his system."

Quill turned to Steve, and Bucky remembers seeing the determination in his eye and thinking that might be enough to save Luke.

"Then Steve, me and you are going to make sure his lung doesn't collapse and when we've got that under control we'll deal with the bullae."

Steve nodded, and with that confirmation Quill lowered the scalpel to the side of the lung.

In a quick, clean moment Quill had made the incision and as predicted, an alarming amount of water rushed from the cut.

As quick as possible (but maybe he was too slow, maybe he had been too late) Bucky began to suction but there was so much-

"Quill, he's deflating pretty damn fast!"

"Get the chest tube in here now!"

"Crap another bullae-"

"Doctors there's a rupture in his vena cava."
"Crap! Rogers get the tube in, Lewis over here with me to rope the bleeding- Someone help Barnes with the suction for the love of god!"

"Quill there's too much water I can't find it-"

"He's bleeding out-!"

"BP's dropping, Dr. Quill."

"Someone get another damn suction and get the water out of his chest!"

"The tube isn't taking and more bullae are exploding-"

"I can't find the damn rupture-"

"BP's down to sixty!"

"I think there's bleed coming from his stomach!"

"Christ, someone get in there and stop it!"

"There's too much blood and water I can't get it all-"

(But you could have. You could have if you were better.)

"Dr. Quill I found the rupture but I can't-"

"Tube isn't working, Peter!"

"Wait wait I nearly got it-"

"BP's down to thirty."

"Push three of epinephrine*-"

"There's too much blood-"

"Start massaging the heart!"

"I can't find the goddamn-"

When Bucky heard the sound of Luke flatlining it felt like the weight of the world crashing into his heart.

He can't really remember the rest-

Quill pushing him out of the way to try to massage the heart into starting again, and then silence.

"Time of death eight thirty p.m."

~*~
Darcy sits, forlorn, on a spare gurney in the hall.

Footsteps pass every now and then but she pays them no attention, to consumed by replaying the frantic search for the bleed and the sudden cease to Luke's heartbeat.

"Lewis?"

Darcy looks up to see Loki standing in front of her, still in his scrubs.

She sniffs and wipes the tears from her eyes. "Yeah?"

He blinks, not expecting to have gotten this far in this conversation, if he's honest. "Are you alright?" He settles on.

Another treacherous tear wells in her and she quickly brushes that one away as well.

"I'm- I lost a patient. A ten year old boy. So. I'm not great."

"Is it your first time loosing a patient?"

She nods.

His hand softly brushes her knee before he retracts it, as if it burned him to touch it.

Loki leans forward. "You're going to hate this job. You'll hate what it's going to make you do and witness, and the people who make you do and witness those things." He pauses. "It hurts and you will care even though they tell you not to- But one day you'll look back and know that it made you a better surgeon. Empathy isn't a bad thing. But you have to know when and when not to let it influence your work."

He straightens his back and his face slips back into the neutral mask he wears so often, and this, Darcy thinks. This is the Loki Odinson she knows.

"So leave the past to the past, Dr. Lewis, and get some sleep. We must let sleeping dogs lie where they will, and you still have to this all again tomorrow."

As he turns to walk away, Darcy calls out to him "How do you do it?" She asks. "How do you pretend not to care?"

His lips curl into a sad smile. "An unfortunate amount of practice."

And maybe she doesn't know Loki Odinson that well at all.

~*~

Bucky's sitting in the changing room, the lights are off and it's still and quiet- all the other interns are most likely still working with their patients or catching a few minutes sleep.

But Bucky is sitting with his fingers intertwined as if he was praying and he is desperately trying not to dwell on the fact that right now Quill is telling Luke's parents that their child is dead.
Dead.

And if he had only been faster-

Someone pushes the door open and Bucky turns his head to see Steve.

He walks over and kneels down in front of him, taking his hands in Steve's own.

"He was only ten," Bucky says quietly, trying not to be discerned by the wobble in his voice.

Steve presses a kiss to the knuckle of his thumb.

"And I tried my best," Bucky doesn't bother to brush away the tears welling in his eyes, not wanting to rip his hands away from Steve's. "I tried my best I promise-"

He's but off by something in his throat and he doesn't realise until Steve lurches up and wraps him in a hug that it's a sob.

"I tried my best," he cries, digging his fingers into Steve's shoulder blade, burying his head in his neck. As he weeps, his cries wrack his body, sounding less like a cry and more like a scream.

"I know, Buck, I know," Steve murmurs, and Bucky doesn't miss the tears in his voice.

~*~

Chapter End Notes

*pneumothrax- a collapsed lung.

bullae- dilated air space on the lungs measuring more than 1 cm. essentially dead space and compress surrounding normal lung tissue.

Obstetric- medical speciality that deals with with pregnancy, childbirth and the care of the child post-partum

intubator- A tube inserted through the throat to lungs to help you breath

epinephrine- essentially adrenaline, used to get the heart started again.

Comments are the best so if you want to leave one berating me for how long this took, go ahead.
Does it ever drive you crazy just how fast the night changes? (Reminds me of the piece of innocence I lost)

Chapter Notes

Chapter 4!! Finally!!
To be fair, I've been completely bogged down with exams but tomorrow is my last one so you can expect somewhat quicker updates!

I also neglected this chapter a bit because myself and my friend finally finished our fic Nuremburg 29 which I'm super proud of so if you want to check it out you most certainly can.

The comments and support I got from chapter 3 was AMAZING so thank you guys so much for that you do not understand how much it means to me.

Chapter title is from 'Night Changes' by One Direction.

Again, complicated medical terms are explained at the bottom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"And this when you brought me to Coney Island, do you remember that?"

He's seated in a large armchair, with his mother opposite him, and a photo album opened on the coffee table in between them shows a glossy picture of a seven year old Bucky with wind-swept hair and gap-toothed smile standing with his mom staring up at them.

She doesn't reply, her mouth pressed into a firm line.

Winifred Barnes, at only sixty-five years old, is suffering from progressing Alzheimer's disease, and while it's killing him to watch her like this and be completely helpless about it, if she can at least remember his name today he'll count it as a win.

"It was for my seventh birthday, remember? You let me ride the cyclone and then we got cotton candy?" He reaches out and takes her hand. "Mom?" He asks gently.

Nothing. Her eyes remain locked on the fire burning in front of them.

"Mom?" He asks again, and nudges her hand.

She turns to look at him, confusion distorting her face.

"Who- who are you? I don't-" she yanks her hand back and looks at him with her brow furrowed.

"It's me, Mom. It's Bucky, remember? I'm your son," he explains for what must be the thousandth time.

The hard creases in her face relax, and her mouth curls up into a smile.

"James," she sighs happily, placing a hand on his cheek. "My darling boy." Her eyes search his...
face, and a small frown comes onto her face. "You look so much older..." She trails off, and Bucky takes her hand.

"Yeah I've..." He clears his throat. "I've grown." Bucky gives his Ma a rueful smile. "How are you feeling today?"

"I'm good," she answers. "I've got a surgery booked for seven--"

Bucky's heart crumbles, but he wills his face not to show it. This is the hardest part, he thinks. Watching her speak so happily of things that won't happen- watching her live in memories, permanently stuck in her mind.

"-- A gastric bypass, so I'll be a long while in there, and I'm going to stay a while post-op to do his paperwork. I've left some pasta in the fridge, you can heat it up when you get home. I want you in bed by ten at the latest young man, you hear?"

He smiles tightly and nods his head. "No problem, mom," he says, and hates the way his voice cracks.

"Sweetheart," she says, concerned. "What's wrong?" Before he can answer, she continues. "Oh I know what it is-- you're worried about that test you have tomorrow, right?"

He lets out a breath through his nose as he nods. "Yeah, yeah that's it."

She smiles kindly. "Biology, right?" Her eyes narrow playfully. "You thought I'd forget, didn't you?" She cajoles. "Not me, James Barnes. Still sharp as a tack."

"Yeah, mom."

"Sweetheart, it's always been your best subject," She says finely. "You have nothing to worry about. And if you do, then... Then I might try to take some time off work to help you with anything your stuck with, okay?" She asks, and there's a warmth in her voice that he hasn't heard for at least two years and honestly it's nearly enough to make him cry because this is her- this is his mom.

She must notice the look on his face because she asks him again, "What's wrong, darling?"

He gives her a wide, honest, genuine smile. "Nothing, Ma. It's just... It's been a while since I've seen you, is all."

~*~

"Romanoff and Barton, you're with Dr. Potts today. Foster, you're with Dr. Rhodes. Lewis, with Odinson and Barnes with Stark," Hill barks. "Go!"

As they scatter out of the changing room, Natasha jogs up beside Bucky.

"I'd better get good patients today," She mutters. "Yesterday I had two guys with colostomies who needed dressing changes every 15 minutes. Do you know how soul destroying that is? And it's not even like I'm bad intern. Wilson loves me. I mean, giving something like that to Clint, I can understand. But me?"

"You know, Nat, it's nice that you manage to stay so humble and modest all the time- Ow!" She hits him hard in the shoulder, but there're smirks on their faces, and Nat has had a pretty bad run of it, so he can forgive her.
"Anyway," She continues. "I'm gonna be in surgery. I can feel it. Today's my day."

"On what?" Bucky asks.

Natasha scoffs. "Like I'd tell you."

"C'mon, Nat. What'd you know?" He pleads.

"I know that I was here at 4:00 and you didn't get here till 4:30," She grins.

"Tell me," Bucky implores.

"No way," She shoots back.

"C'mon. You'll make a name for yourself as the mean intern," He warns. "Don't be the mean intern, Nat. Nobody likes a mean intern."

Natasha laughs. "I'm not the one who'll make a name for themselves- you're the one who's screwing an attending."

Bucky opens his mouth, ready for the same argument they've had countless times. "It's not like that-"

"Oh!" Natasha's lips quirk up into a smirk. "Speak of the devil."

Bucky turns his head to see Steve rounding the corner. Steve's face perks up and he gives Bucky a warm smile.

"Bye Bucky," Natasha purrs.

"You're here early," Bucky blurts out as Steve comes up to greet him. "Why are you here early?"

"I had a chordotomy at five, I'll be out of here by six. I thought I might buy you breakfast before your rounds."

"I've already eaten," Bucky replies, because he is a professional and professionals don't go for breakfast with their boss.

They don't sleep with them either.

He gives Bucky a placating look. "What'd you have?"

"That's personal."

Steve quirks an eyebrow. "C'mon, Bucky, just tell me." Bucky juts out his chin and crosses his arms, defiant.

"Do you like cereal?" Steve asks. "Fruit and fibre? Pancakes?" He leans in close and whispers "I've seen you naked we've kind of passed professionalism," when Bucky doesn't answer. This, in turn, makes him turn red, and he eventually grits out "Left over mac and cheese. Happy?"

"Really?" Steve gives an almost comical frown. "That's... Disgusting. It's sad. Pathetic. A good day starts with a good breakfast. Let me take you out for breakfast, Buck."

"No," Bucky insists. "Look, I'm not going to be the intern who everybody thinks sleeps his way to the top. I'm also not going to risk losing my job. Look, I'm not going to be seen with you here
unless I'm on your rotation, okay? It's unprofessional.

Steve gives Bucky a look of pure innocence. "I'm just an attending getting to know one of his interns."

Now it's Bucky's turn to raise an eyebrow. "By sleeping with them?"

"Okay, fine," Steve relents. "You want me to be professional? I'll be professional."


"Then that's what you'll get," Steve smirks.

Silence hangs in the air for a few seconds with Steve looking positively radiant before Bucky says "You're going to be late for your chordotomy."

Pushing himself off the wall, Steve makes his way down the hallway. "Thank you, Dr. Barnes," He calls over his shoulder.

Before Bucky can so much as take a step, Hill's voice is calling him. "Barnes! Time for rounds."

He turns to look at her, and she holds out a chart. "You and I will be working with Dr. Stark today."

"Great," He says, absently flipping through the chart. "Are these all his patients?"

"Yep," Hill replies. "Tori Stewert has a surgery scheduled for today- she's got an abdominal leiomyosarcoma*. George Steiner is post-op, so his stitches need to be checked every four hours, and Richard Webber is on the waiting list for a heart transplant, so he's unstable."

"How unstable?" Bucky asks, and then his pager goes off- Richard Webber's BP is dropping dangerously low. Walking briskly down the room filled with other patients, Bucky stops when he gets to bed 204, with an old, wizened man unconscious on the bed, and a goateed man- presumably Dr. Stark- standing over him.

"Seriously?" Stark whines. "He does this every day. Is it so hard to stay alive until my shift's done?" He flips through Richard's chart. "Or at least until I've checked the stats on the-" he stops and glances over the top of the clipboard at Bucky. "Can I help you?"

"Me? I'm your..." Bucky gives a vague wave of his hand.

Stark gives Maria a look which seems to say 'are you kidding me?' and 'make it go away' all at once and she snorts out a laugh.

"This is Doc-," she starts, but he shuts the chart and tucks it under his arm with a roll of the eyes.

"Yeah, they all have names. It's wonderful. HI'm thrilled about it. Really," he says, brows rising in mock earnest before he turns to Bucky again. "New kid, IV. Now."

Bucky startles and fumbles around a bit, willing himself to recall the one thing he should be able to do like the back of his hand but the whole presence of the guy is throwing off his confidence. Not to mention there's that constant nagging in the back of his head that flares at times like these and threatens to knock him off his feet or out of his head. The death of Luke is still hanging over him, making him second guess everything he's doing.

"Are you trying to get to know each other? He's not going to be offended that you didn't buy him dinner first," Stark says from beside the monitors, and Bucky tries not to glare, he really tries.
"Christ, come on..."

"Should you really be talking like that in front of him?" Bucky spits out, because apparently he has a death wish. Stark blinks, seeming offended that Bucky would even answer him.

"Listen..."

"Bucky," he supplies meekly, and Stark's head jerks back.

"Don't lie to me. That's not a name."

"Um, yeah it is," Bucky nods defensively. "It's my name."

Stark rolls his eyes. "That's not a name."

"It's my name!"

"Is it?"

"Well, it's a nickname..."

"Because it's not a name," he finishes, and despite the bland expression on his face, there's a slight note of triumph in there. "Anyway," he squints at Bucky's ID, "'Barnes'... You're parents named you Bucky Barnes? God, even worse- did they get it from a comic strip from the 1940's?" Stark rolls his eyes. "Look, kid. This man is a vegetable. A potato. He's on another plane of consciousness. He's not going to care what I say about him, or how I say it, now can you please replace his damn IV so I can get back to my other patients?"

Bucky glares, but does it - out of sheer frustration - and promptly stands upright, not even looking at Stark. He can't remember the last time someone got his hackles up so effortlessly - and he met that dick, Brock on the first day, and that kind of set the bar for douchbaggery, but alas Tony Stark has successfully beaten Brock at his own game. Stark leans across the bed slightly to get a look at the IV, gives a satisfied little, hmph in thought, and leaves.

With an annoyingly smug smirk, Hill jerks her head and turns on her heel.

"Come on, Barnes," she says as she follows Stark. "Tony doesn't have great patience."

Clenching his teeth, Bucky follows them, trying not to snap the clipboard in his hands.

~*~

"Would you say that your health had been good up until your diagnosis, Mr. Hernandez?" Darcy asks, briefly looking up from the clipboard where she was scribbling down his answers.

"Dr. Lewis," He smiles tiredly. "How many times do I have to tell you? Call me Alejandro. And it was fine- great, even. I was running marathons and everything. Maybe a couple of headaches."

Darcy grins. "Okay, Alejandro. How bad were they? Mild, intense?"

Alejandro considers this. "Mild at the start, got worse as they went along- What's with the twenty questions, Dr. Lewis?"

"Mr. Hernandez, the tumour in your brain isn't reacting with any of our treatments, so we think it
may be because we don't understand what type of tumour it is. If we can figure out how it got there, then that will narrow it down and we might be able to figure out what course of treatment works best."

Alejandro nods, and as he does so, Loki walks in. "Mr. Hernandez," He greets with a small smile. "How are you feeling today?"

"Good," He replies genially. "Dr. Lewis and I have been play twenty questions for the last few minutes."

"Well in the name of fun let's continue, shall we?" Loki asks as he takes the file from Darcy and quickly scans through her notes.

"Were the headaches relatively recent? Did you get them soon before the diagnosis?"

"Yeah, yeah. I had them right up till then for a couple of months."

"Do you still get them now?" Loki asks, brow furrowed.

"Yeah, but not as frequent- maybe one every two days or so."

"Is there a focal point to them?" Darcy asks. "Is the pain mainly the area between the eyes, the centre of your head...?"

"The centre, mainly, but it spreads out to the middle of my eyes."

"Have you experienced any dizziness or disorientation?" He asks, the scratch of his pen against the paper providing a backing track for the moment.

"Yes. Just moments when I'd stand up and my vision would go cloudy- stuff like that."

"Had that been recent also?"

He nods. "Yes."

Loki scribbles something down on the page before lifting his head up to give Alejandro another smile. "Mr. Hernandez, had you experienced any vertigo or light-headedness?"

"Mm-hm. I'd sometimes have to brace myself to get out of bed."

Loki nods his head, before clicking his pen and giving Alejandro a tight smile. "Mr. Hernandez, I'd like to do one more MRI to see how the tumour is progressing before deciding the next course of treatment, if that would be okay?"

"That's fine, Dr. Odinson," Alejandro smiles.

Loki hands the chart back to Darcy, and together they walk out of the room. However, they're met with Alejandro's wife, Amy, wringing her hands together. "Dr. Odinson?" She asks tentatively.

"Mrs. Hernandez," He says gently. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, it's just..." She grapples with the words. "Alejandro," She says eventually. "How is he? Better?"
When Loki doesn't immediately answer, Amy swallows thickly. "Worse?"

Loki takes a breath and bows his head for a second, before looking up at her. "Mrs. Hernandez," He leads her over to some chairs lining the wall. "For us to continue with your husband's treatment, we need to have a better understanding of how the tumour came to be, and thus what kind of tumour it is. Once we have that information, we can decide a suitable treatment course." He places an ivory white hand over her tanned one. "We're doing our absolute best, Mrs. Hernandez. And I know it's hard to sit around and wait, but I promise after this MRI if the results are substantial, we will come to you with a treatment plan. A solid one, this time."

"Thank you, Dr. Odinson," She says through a watery smile.

He offers her a sympathetic smile, and gently squeezes her hand, before standing up and leading Darcy over to the nurses' station.

"Book the MRI for as soon as possible," Loki grunts lowly as soon as Amy goes into Alejandro's room.

"Okay," She breathes.

"I want it within twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes? Are you crazy? There's no way-"

"That man might not have twenty minutes," He hisses as he shuts his chart closed. "Get it done."

"Fine," She fumes, and takes out her pen to scribble down a few notes on Alejandro's patient workup sheet.

"Does everything still stand?" She asks quietly, unable to resist asking, despite how angry she is. "Is there still a chance he'll lose his memory if we try to remove it surgically?"

"Yes," He sighs. "Tell me when you've got the MRI booked. Keep your evening shift free," He says as he walks in the other direction.

Darcy nods. "Okay," She repeats. It wouldn't take a genius to decipher the hidden message in his words- "We're not going to find anything good from the MRI."

"Okay." Because there's a man in the room opposite who shouldn't be alive but he is, and there's really nothing else to be said.

~*~

"Well?" Jane asks as sits down beside Clint. "What's this kick-ass surgery Bucky keeps complaining about that you have?"

Natasha practically preens. "There's a baby with his heart outside of his chest," She grins.

The fork that was halfway to Jane's mouth drops back to her plate. "What?"

Clint beams. "And it's still inside the mom."

"How- I- And you're scrubbing in?" She asks, incredulous.

"Yep!" They chirp together.
Jane shakes her head. "No. I don't believe you."

"Don't believe who?" Bucky asks breathlessly as he plops down at the table with his food.

"Tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee over here get to put a baby's heart back inside its chest," Jane explains bitterly.

Bucky snorts a laugh. "Sure."

Jane turns to look at him with a grimace. "I'm serious."

The smirk that Bucky had been wearing drops and is replaced with a look of utter disbelief. "What?" He blurs. "No." He shakes his head and stabs his fork into his salad. "No. There's no way. They wouldn't let first year interns scrub in on something like that."

Natasha smirks. "Deny it all you want, but at seven tonight we'll be in there performing a kick-ass surgery and you two-" She flicks her fork between Jane and Bucky. "-Will be performing kick-ass scut work."

"Fuck you," Bucky scoffs. "I have a kick-ass surgery. I have to take out a girls organs to get a tumour out and then put them back in. That's pretty badass, right?"

"Not as badass as putting a heart back in a nine-month old baby," Clint fires back as he slurps his noodles.

"Oh that's right- I forgot! Forgetting how to do a basic appendectomy is badass, right, Clint?" He asks innocently.

Clint flips him off and Jane lets out a low whistle while Natasha snickers. Bucky shoves him in the shoulder as a 'We good?' and when Clint elbows him in the ribs, Bucky knows he means 'Yeah we are'.

Before anyone can say anything else, Darcy arrives and slams her tray down on the table. "Let's play a game," She says. "It's called 'who has the worst attending'." She frowns into her pasta. "I'll win. I have Dr. Freakin' Odinson. I'll always win."

"At least you'll get some rewarding surgery out of it," Bucky gripes. "I'm stuck with Stark."

"Yeah but doesn't he use loads of cool, fancy tech? That's cool," Clint says, ever the optimist.

"He's a pain in my ass, that's what," Bucky snaps. "I swear I'd strangle the guy if it wasn't for the Hippocratic Oath. You should hear how he talks in front of one of his patients- Richard Webber- He's in a medically induced coma, and while he was coding Stark's just there talking about him like he was a vegetable... Like he was just another body."

Jane pulls a face. "That's..."

"...Shitty," Clint supplies, and Jane and Natasha nod their heads. "That's one word for it."

"What's so bad about working with Odinson?" Natasha asks.

Darcy rolls her eyes. "What isn't? He's snarky and sarcastic and thinks he's the only person capable of doing a good job- Like he's the smartest person in the hospital or something." She spears a carrot with her knife and chomps on it angrily. "And then he has me running all these tests that we've already done and we're just getting worse results- I mean the tumour isn't going to shrink by itself
and we know that his health is deteriorating- what the hell does he expect?"

Natasha shrugs. "It's not uncommon for doctors to become attached to their patients, I don't know- maybe he's desperate."

Bucky remembers nights spent alone at home because his mom was trying another surgery, another course of action in an effort to save a patient, or staying by their bedside so she could be there if they coded and keep an eye on their stats.

"I know," Darcy says quietly, resting her head in her hand. "It's just hard to watch, you know? The most renowned neurosurgeon in the country, and not even he can fight this horrible disease for a man who deserves to live more than anything."

The table goes quiet, weighted with the horrible realisation that still hit them every day and never got any easier every time it kicks them in the stomach- that they couldn't save everyone. Doesn't matter how hard you try or how invested you are or how deserving they are, nature is relentless.

Clint clears his throat. "Maybe... Maybe we could order pizza? We'll all be home at the same time tonight, right?" He says, looking at Bucky, Jane and Darcy. "It could be like an unofficial house warming party." He smiles. "And hey- Nat could come too. That sounds good, right?"

Bucky's eyebrows shoot up at that statement, and it puts into perspective how hectic his life had been so far- that him and his three roommates hadn't all been in the house at the same time since they moved in last week. Granted, a lot of his was his fault, because of, well. Steve.

A chorus of approval rouses from the table, but then Darcy groans. "Crap, I might have Alejandro's surgery tonight," She groans. "But you guys have fun. Don't watch the new Game of Thrones episode and save me two slices of something without olives on it and I'll be happy."

"No, no," Bucky protests softly. "We have tomorrow off- We can wait up."

"Of course we can," Jane smiles.

"Yeah, yeah, 'course," Clint says. "Wouldn't be a house warming without part of the house."

"Aw, you guys," She coos. "You're the best roommates a girl could ask for. And Natasha," She adds after a second. "But you're like, an unofficial roommate so."

"And for the low price of $98 you can become an official roommate," Bucky jokes.

"Aw gee, thanks for the offer," She snipes.

"So, any of you guys going to come watch our badass surgery?" Clint asks, which earns him a light punch in the shoulder from Jane, a glare from Bucky and a high five from Natasha.~*~

When Darcy sees the MRI, she sucks in a breath.

"It's-"

"Grown," Loki spits.

She stands in awe above him, her eyes fixed on the screen. At the front of Alejandro's brain, where his parietal lobe should be, is covered nearly all by a white mass.
"There's no way about it now," Loki fumes. "No matter where it's originated from, we're going to have to do surgery." He chews the nail of his thumb for a second before bolting up from his chair and yanking the MRI from the screen.

As he stalks down the hall, anger practically rolling off him, Darcy grabs his notes and Alejandro's chart and follows him.

"Dr. Odinson."

Nothing.

"Dr. Odinson."

Nothing and then-

"Loki!"

He turns to look at her, his face set like stone. "You're about to go in there and tell Amy that her husband has to have a surgery that could potentially make him lose his memory to date," She snaps. "They don't need to hear that from an angry doctor. I know you're pissed and angry and sad but think about them." She softens her tone and pokes him gently in the chest. "So, just. Pretend. For them, if anything."

Instead of, you know, firing Darcy, he drags a hand down his face and lets out a heavy breath. He rubs his eyes, and when he takes his hands away from his face, the angry that previously coursed through him vanished, and was replaced with a sad hopelessness.

"Let's just try to make it as easy for them as possible, okay?" She asks gently.

He nods. "Okay."

Okay.

They walk down the hallway in a subdued silence, and knots in Darcy's stomach form. Eventually, they reach Alejandro's room.

Darcy pokes her head in and knocks lightly on the door. "Mr. Hernandez?"

His head swivels from where he had previously been looking at Amy, and smiles. "Hello, Dr. Lewis, Dr. Odinson," He says by way of greeting.

"Do you have the MRI results?" Amy asks, worry colouring her words.

Loki clears his throat. "We do," He answers. His voice is solemn, calm. "I'm sorry to say, Mr. Hernandez, that tumour has grown-"

"Grown?" Amy says disbelievingly. "How much so?"

"Much larger then we had expected," Loki confesses.

"But... But it's only been what, a week since my last MRI?" Alejandro says.

"It's growing at a much faster pace than we had originally anticipated. Which is why we need to get as much of the tumour out as fast as we can," Loki says. "I can schedule a surgery for tonight, if you'd be willing to go ahead with it."
"Will it cure Alejandro?"

Loki takes a breath. "There's so much tumour, we won't know until during the surgery how much we can take out. There is one very important thing about this surgery, and I'm sorry to spring it on you like this, but the sooner that we have this surgery if you'll allow us the better." He lets it out. "If we were to do this surgery and attempt to remove the tumour, you have to understand the risks. Because of where the tumour is situated, on your parietal lobe, there's a chance that removing it could damage nerves, and, in turn, induce memory loss."

"Well, how much memory loss?" Amy asks.

Loki shrugs. "We can't say for certain, but it would most likely be nearly all of his memories gone."

Tears well in Amy's eyes as she gasps, and Alejandro breaks the heavy silence. "Would it be temporary or...?"

He swallows. "Nearly definitely permanent."

The sob that tears from Amy's throat makes Darcy's chest seize, and she has to close her eyes for a few seconds.

"Could we..." Alejandro struggles with keeping calm. "Could we please have a few minutes to discuss this?"

"Of course," Loki answers, and Darcy practically runs out of the room. She bites on her lip to stop her tears from overflowing and leans against the hospital wall. Loki joins her, and tips his head up to look at the ceiling.

She takes a shaky breath, and quietly, so quietly that no one else could hear but her, he says "I know."

Time slows to a nauseating crawl as they stand together, taking a few moments to gather themselves before having to go in and asks for a definite answer.

"Dr. Odinson?" Amy's shaky voice disrupts their quiet, and when Darcy looks at her, she sees a shadow of the women. Gone is the smiling, warm woman, replaced with a drawn, sullen face, eyes red rimmed and hands clenched so tight her knuckles are white.

Loki pushes himself off the side of the wall, walking towards her.

"Yes, Mrs. Hernandez?"

"Alejandro wants to do the surgery."

~*~

"Hey, Barnes."

Bucky turns from where he was washing up after a successful surgery where Toni's tumour was removed.

"Dr. Stark?"

Tony comes up beside him and turns on the tap.
"I, uh, I heard you were Quill and Rogers team. With the young boy."

Bucky swallows the lump in his throat. "I was."

Stark viciously scrubs his hands until it's covered in white foam. "I didn't know," he says quietly. "And I understand that I was maybe a little brash to you today, and, uh. I'm sorry for that."

He turns his head to look at Bucky. 

"Losing your first patient is always hard," he explains earnestly. "Not that it ever gets any easier, but the first time is a shock to the system. Because we're surgeons- we have severe god complexes. And it's always a shock when you get slapped in the face with the reminder that you're not a god. You don't get to control everything- you don't get to save everyone." Stark pauses. "And kids- Jesus," He sucks in a breath. "Losing a kid is tragic."

Bucky turns the tap off and grabs some paper towels from the dispenser. As he dries his hands, keeping his eyes on them, his anger towards Stark slowly dissipates.

"So I know why you hesitated before giving Richard his IV, and snapping wasn't the right thing to do, so. I'm sorry."

Stark walks toward Bucky as he grabs some paper towels. "But, you're always going to lose a patient. There's always going to be a recent death. I need you to deal with this, because you can't let it affect your work." Stark has wry grin on his face."So, y'know, if you're having any problems, I have a couple of therapists on speed dial."

Bucky clears his throat. "Thank you, Dr. Stark. I, uh. I appreciate it." He looks up at Tony and gives him a small smile. "And I will."

Stark claps him on the shoulder, and then brushes past him out the door.

As Bucky walks down the corridor to the locker rooms, he starts re-evaluating Dr. Stark. He's an asshole, sure. But maybe not 100% of asshole.

~*~

"Mrs. Hernandez," Loki says gently. "The removal of the tumour was successful- we managed to remove nearly all of it, and the rest can easily be removed with a few more treatments of chemotherapy."

"So he's okay? Alejandro's okay?" Relief floods Amy's features as she smiles hopefully at Dr. Odinson.

"In that regard, yes. However..." Loki sighs. "A bleed in his optic nerve manifested during the surgery. We managed to stop it, but there may be damage done."

Amy's face turns white. "What are you saying?"

"Mr. Hernandez's vision may be affected-" 

"But it was his memory. You said it was his memory that would be affected," Anger laces her words.

"I understand that but-" Amy yanks her hand back as Loki reaches over to take it.

"No. No. What kind of Doctor are you if you just keep making problems for my husband?" She
Loki bows his head. "I understand your frustration but-"

Amy jolts up. "I'm going to see Alejandro."

"Mrs. Hernandez-" Darcy says quietly.

"I don't want to hear it!" She demands. "I've heard nothing but bad news since we got here and I don't want hear anymore!"

She walks away, and Darcy feels the blood drain from her face.

'007,' she thinks wryly, remembering Luke and now this fiasco. 'License to kill.'

"Pizza!" Clint exclaims when Jane walks back in the kitchen with two large, greasy boxes and Bucky's pretty sure his mouth starts watering.

Pizza.

Greasy, fatty, cheesy pizza.

He can't remember the last time he's had something that could constitute as a full meal.

"Yum," Natasha says gleefully.

Bucky stands up and takes the boxes from Jane and sets them down on the table.

A loud chorus of 'mmmhs' rouses from the four as Bucky opens the boxes, and a delicious whiff of cheese, tomatoes and meet wafts up.

"Okay." Bucky says while Jane sets out napkins. "Darcy wants two pepperoni and two spicy American so we'll put them aside for her," he carefully takes them out and places them on a plate, before shooting a glare at Clint. "Before someone eats it all."

Clint grins sheepishly as he takes a slice. The rest of them follow, all digging into the pizza and wow Bucky thinks he's in heaven.

It's so domestic it's... It's almost familiar. The four of them, seated around the old wooden table in the kitchen with fluorescent lighting shining down on them.

"Anyone any idea when Darcy'll be back?" Natasha asks through a mouthful of pizza.

Jane shrugs. "She texted me a few minutes ago- she just got out of surgery. Patient's not doing great, she wants to hang around a bit, make sure the family will be okay."

Bucky pulls a face. "Fuck," He mutters.

There's a brief silence before-

Clint clears his throat. "So, our surgery was pretty badass, right Nat?"

Bucky snorts. "You have fun watching, Barton?"

"Fuck you, Barnes."
It's nice, the four of them, minus, sadly, Darcy. Banter flows easily between them and the support is rock hard and, well. Though most of Bucky's family is gone, he figures these guys are be a pretty good substitute.

He feels light. It's nice.

What's that saying? Heaviness is worse after a light load?

Chapter End Notes

*colostomy- is a surgical procedure in which an opening (stoma) is formed by drawing the healthy end of the large intestine or colon through an incision in the anterior abdominal wall and suturing it into place.

Abdominal leiomyosarcoma- A rare type of cancer that develop in the supporting or connective tissues of the body. Leiomyosarcoma occurs in the soft tissue of the body, in Tori Stewart's case it was in her abdominal region.

You can find me on tumblr here!

(Again, comments are the BOMB so if you want to leave one feel free to do so!)
"Hey, you wanna go on a date?"

The question takes Bucky by surprise. And he's a surgeon- he's all about surprise. Doesn't mean he likes them, but he's trained to handle them. But Steve's questions throws him completely off course, rendering him literally speechless.

They're lying, tangled up in each other, in a bed in a dark on-call room. Steve's just come back for some 'shut-eye' (read as: sex) after a bowel obstruction, and Bucky's just about to start his rounds. It's sometime early- too early- in the morning, four am, maybe five? He doesn't know.

But Steve's baby blue's are staring at him so intently, and he's got that smug grin on his face- and Bucky doesn't even know what he's got to be smug about because this is the same guy that got puked on a couple of hours ago at the E.R- and he looks so innocently happy and Bucky is completely taken aback.

"I- What?" He asks incredulously.

"Dinner. With me. There would be wine and nice food and we'd go home to my place maybe," Steve says. "So? Dinner?"

'No,' he thinks. 'Absolutely not.' Because it's the worst idea ever. He can't risk going on a date with Steve.

"C'mon," Steve cajoles. "It'll be fun. I know a place. It does the best well-done steak you've had in your life. So. Will you?"

"I- Um-" By some miracle, Bucky's pager goes off, and he knows for a fact that it will be Hill telling him to get his ass to the nurses' station.
He scrambles up from the bed. "I have to get that," he says hurriedly as he fumbles with the strings on his scrubs.

He shoves his runners on and grabs the pager from the bed.

"Um- I'll see you later, I guess," he manages, before bolting out of the room

Steve waves him goodbye, and then collapses back on the bed, trying not to take it as a complete rejection.

~*~

It's not that Bucky doesn't want to go out on a date with Steve. It's the opposite, really- He'd love to go on a date with Steve.

But if he goes on a date with Steve, then they'd be running the serious risk of someone seeing them. Or worse, someone not seeing them, and Bucky falling even more under Steve's spell.

(Steve's not even that great of a guy. He's smug and cocky and has a terrible sense of humour. He's also noble and charismatic and hilarious and every time he walks into the O.R he says "It's a beautiful day to save a life, folks.")

And Bucky can't fall deeper into Steve's spell. He just can't. He's already stolen one of his t-shirts to wear to bed on nights that they can't get together because it smells like him and finds himself laughing at some horrible joke he'd made the night before during work or thinking about how it feels when he runs his fingers through Bucky's hair when Bucky eventually crashes on an abandoned gurney in the hall.

Steve Steve Steve. All the time. Like a continuous loop through his head, never stopping.

Going on a date with Steve would give Bucky even more things to think about, would highlight even more amazing things about him. And where would that leave Bucky?

Certain in the fact that he was in love with his boss, probably.

Which he's not.

Going on a date, seeing Steve somewhere other than the hospital-

It would make their relationship- whatever class of a relationship they had- real.

It would make Bucky's feelings real. And he can't fall in love with Steve. Couldn't do it to Steve, wouldn't do it to himself.

That being said, he can't pretend that he's not in love with Steve, either.

Sometime he has to laugh when he thinks about this. Because, honestly. His life.

~*~

"Am I boring you, Dr. Barnes?"

Bucky opens his eyes to see a very scary Hill looking at him with an eyebrow cocked and her arms
"Oh-no," he answers, shutting his mouth.

"Then don't yawn when I'm giving you your assignments," she snaps. "I don't care how tired you are," she says to the whole group. "Don't come in here and let it affect your work. If it does, you're out. If you don't let it get the better of you-" Hill narrows her eyes at Bucky. "- Then congratulations. You're one step closer to being a surgeon a hospital like this needs.

"Now," she says abruptly, flipping through the chart in her hands. "Barton and Romanoff, you're with Wilson- Sam Wilson. Foster and Barnes, you're with Dr. Rogers and Lewis, you're with Dr. Potts. Go, quickly. Scat!"

Bucky can't help but roll his eyes. He's with Steve. Bucky knows that his blunt anger towards Steve right now is completely irrational- Steve didn't ask to have Bucky on his rotation, and Jane would probably act as a catalyst. Still doesn't stop him damning Steve seven ways to Sunday, though.

There's the usual clamour for various patient files as they all descend to the nurses' station, and Jane returns with the files, a smirk on her face.

"Don't say a word," He warns as he takes a file from her and scans through it.

"I wasn't going to say anything!" She protests. There's a beat of silence before- "Maybe I was going to comment on the fact that we're going to spend the day with your boyfriend-"

"He's not my boyfriend!"

"Then what is he?"

"He's..." Bucky searches desperately for the word in his head, but nothing comes to mind. "We're just... we just are."

Jane snorts. "Yeah, 'cause you're not at all completely smitten with him."

"I am not smitten," Bucky snaps.

"Deny, deny, deny," Jane sing-songs.

"You know what? Think what you want. Plan our imaginary wedding, for all I care," He says as they climb the stairs. "But it's not going to change the fact of the matter."

"And what is that?"

Bucky sighs. "That I thought that it was casual, but it clearly isn't because he wants to go on a date- a date, can you believe that guy?- and I have to say no because if I do then I might, you know..." He trails off.

"No, I don't. What?"

"Well, I might-" He makes a vague hand gesture, as if it would help, and then relents. "If I saw him outside of the hospital, then I might, like. Fall in love with him. I don't know."

"Bucky," Jane sighs, exasperated. "You are such a child. You're not going to fall madly in love with
Steve from one date. Just go. You'll get good food and probably for free and great sex afterwards- why would you not?"

"I mean, when you put it like that..." Bucky considers it dubiously as they climb the stairs.

"Look, Steve's a nice guy. So maybe do it for him."

"But what if someone see's us?"

"Then go somewhere out of town! Honestly, Bucky," She implores. When she glances over at him and see's the doubt on his face, she puts a hand on his arm. "Look, feelings don't just manifest themselves, okay? So don't freak out about that."

Bucky lets out a breath. "Yeah, okay, fair enough."

He doesn't tell Jane that he's not worried about suddenly getting feelings for Steve, he's worried about the ones he already has.

~*~

Clint watches as Natasha examines the patient- Ashley Seaver, only seventeen- while he jots down the results.

As he looks at her- really looks at her, at her gentle curls that fall in her face, her porcelain skin seriously how is it so soft- he's like. Ninety percent sure he's in love with her? Yeah, ninety percent.

It's not a new thing- he didn't just decide today that he was in love with her. He's been stewing over the thought for the last few weeks, and he first started to fall her around... The first time he saw her? Yeah, the first time he saw her.

It was at the party the hospital threw the night before they started their internships, and he saw across the room in a little black dress that made her fiery hair and bright green eyes pop and he remembers saying to the guy beside him- who turned out to Bucky, of all people- 'I'm gonna marry her'. He, of course, chuckled, and then walked away, but she hasn't left Clint's mind since. And ever since then the flame he carried for her grew.

She's terrifying though. Everything a surgeon should be- stone-cold and relentless.

(And let's face it, her and Bucky are the one vying for the best surgical intern, but Clint'll happily let her climb over him if it means she'll be the best. He'd do anything for her.)

So he didn't think he'd ever come near to getting to be close with her, because she always kept her guard up, and her heart was never anywhere near to her sleeve. But then last week, they got to work together with Dr. Potts, and something shifted. She laughed at his jokes and didn't tell him he was an idiot like she usually does every day. Hell, he got to see a little bit past her stoic veneer.

He's brought out of his thoughts by Natasha asking "So you just had a root canal?"

Ashley nods. "Yeah and I like, couldn't stop the bleeding after."

Before Natasha can ask any more questions, Wilson walks in. "What's the story?"

"Seventeen-year-old female with hospitalized for excessive bleeding, status post root canal. She had a significant heart murmur which caused a fever, but it's gone now with antibiotics," Clint
offers.

"Alright, well, you're in excellent hands here, so Dr. Barton and Dr. Romanoff are going to bring you for tests okay?" He says to Ashley. When she nods he turns to Clint and Natasha, who was now standing beside him. "Page me when you get the results."

"If you find out I die can you page my parents?" She asks as Clint begins to wheel her bed outside to the hall.

"You're not dying, and you'll see your parents soon- Hey, nice skirt," He says, nodding his head to her long, denim skirt that ends at her ankles. "What are you, Amish?"

Natasha fixes him with a glare, but Ashley scoffs. "No way. Haven't you ever seen an Orthodox Jew?"

As she walks up to the paediatric ward, her thoughts are completely consumed with Alejandro. He still hadn't woken up from his medically-induced coma, and she was at her wit's end worrying about what the effects of the surgery would have on him when he wakes.

Although, she clearly wasn't the only one stressing. She had bumped into Loki a couple of seconds before hand, and he looked tired, with angry, purple bags under his eyes.

"Um, listen, I know I'm not on your service now but if you could keep me updated on Alejandro, I'd really appreciate it," she said.

He blinked, and then nodded his head jerkily. "Yes, yes, of course" He answered. "There's no change at the moment, but the medicine should wear off by tonight, so." He trailed off quietly before he cleared his throat. "I must be off."

And now Darcy was stressing because what if Alejandro did wake up blind? Or with no memory? How would Mrs. Hernandez react then? If Loki had taken her hatred the first time around so badly the first time... Darcy didn't want to know what it would do to him.

She tries to ignore the thought as she pushes through the doors to the ward and walks over to Dr. Potts.

"Dr. Potts," She greets with a small smile.

The tall, strawberry-blonde woman turns around. "Hi there," She says warmly as she holds out her hand. "Call me Pepper, please. Dr. Lewis, right?"

"Yeah," Darcy answers as she shakes her hand. "And you can call me Darcy."

"Well alright then," She smiles brightly. "I've heard such great things about you. Peter really admired your quick thinking during Luke O'Malley's surgery." She gives Darcy a sympathetic smile when her face drops at the mention of Luke O'Malley. "You know, unfortunately, sometimes patients die and it's not up to us. But that doesn't mean that our best wasn't worth anything."

Before Darcy can even process or respond to Pepper's words, she hands Darcy a file and starts walking down the hall.

"Anyways, we have an... Interesting patient today, to say the least," She explains.
"Kyle Jordan, aged twelve," Darcy reads, and then stops. "Swallowed someone's *keys*?"

Pepper gives her a look that says 'I know, right?'. "Yep. So as soon as we pick up the results which will show us the location of the keys, we can decide how to proceed from there."

"Why the hell would you swallow someone's keys?" Darcy asks, incredulous.

Pepper shakes her head. "In the name of love, apparently."

"*What?*"

"Yeah, that's why he did it. His 'girlfriend' was over at his house and she tried to break up with him, so to stop her leaving, he tried to swallow his mom's house keys."

It's just such a *stupid* reason to do something, Darcy can't fathom it.

"That's... idiotic."

Pepper shrugs. "Well, I can understand the grand gesture part of it. Men do stupid things for love. Tony bought me six foot rabbit once when he was still trying to get me to go out with him."

"Yeah but at least he didn't swallow your keys so you couldn't go on a date with a different guy," Darcy argues.

Pepper lets out a small laugh. "That's true."

If she's perfectly honest, Darcy's still a little bewildered that Pepper and Dr. Stark are together. Pepper's so nice and helpful, and Stark's so... Not.

"We're here," Pepper says kindly as she walks into the X-Ray room.

On the light board, the scan of Kyle's trachea is hung up, and lo and behold, three keys on a ring are splayed awkwardly in his throat.

"Ouch," Darcy says. "Kid must be in a lot of pain. I almost feel sorry for him."

"How do you think we should extract it?"

"He needs a bronchoscopy*. Once we see inside, we can take the keys out."

"Excellent," Pepper grins. "Have you seen one done?"

"Yeah, with Dr. Rogers when I was on his rotation."

"Seen one, do one, teach one. Time for you to do one," She grabs the films down from the board and hands them to Darcy. "Schedule it for 4:00 pm. By then his lungs will have had time to digest any liquids. Now-" She opens the door and walks out, and Darcy hurries after her. "- I have a surgery scheduled for then as well, so page me if you have any questions about the procedure, but the nurses will help you if you need it."

"Oh, wow. Thank you so much, Dr. Potts."

"My pleasure," She smiles, and then it turns into a slight grimace as her pager goes off. "I'm
"Sorry," she says as she takes a look at it. "That's another patient of mine—would you mind talking to the parents about the surgery?"

"Not at all," Darcy answers, and takes down off the hall.

~*~

They're all splayed out on two gurneys in the hall, eating their lunches and trying to study for whatever surgery or patients they have.

"How's working with your boyfriend, Bucky?" Clint grins around his sandwich.

"Fine," he bites, not lifting his eyes from the chapter of the anatomy of the vascular system.

Jane frowns. "All we've been getting is *scut work." But after a second, her face lightens up, ever the optimist. "But he did say to meet him after lunch, so maybe he's got us a patient." She shrugs.

"Or just give me one hundred more stitches to do," Bucky grumbles.

"You've gotten all the better patients!" Jane argues. "You got the guy with the bullet up his ass, what do I get? A screaming toddler with a fever."

"Oh come on," Natasha scoffs. "Even if he does, he'll just make up to you later." Beside her Clint wiggles his eyebrows and winks.

"Not the time or the place." He flicks a chip at the two of them.

"I bet this is all because of you," Jane accuses. "You blew him off so now he's pissed off and won't give you—and also me by association—any good surgeries." There's no real heat in her voice, just teasing, though she does swat the back of his head with her rolled up copy of *The Medical Journal of America* with some force.

"Wait, wait, wait," Darcy holds up a hand. "You blew what off?"

Before Bucky can say 'nothing', Jane cuts in. "Steve asked him if he wanted to go on a date and Bucky didn't even give him an articulate 'no'."

There's a chorus of something around the lines of 'What the hell is the matter with you?!' from Clint and Darcy, but he gets a punch from Natasha. Which is nice.

"Well, what if someone see's us?" He says, defending himself. "Or what if he turns out to be a creep or a jerk and then I have to break up with him? What if he refuses to have him on his rounds or won't let me scrub in on a surgery?"

Natasha scoffs. "Oh please. You really think McDreamy would do that? He's a decent guy."

"He could jeopardise my education! Have me taken off the internship! You don't know what he'd do! He could tell the board and it would be some big, national scandal."

She rolls her eyes. "Bucky, you're in one of the most elite medical internship programmes in the world, and you're sleeping with your boss. It would be as much of a potentially career-ruining scandal for him as it could be for you. He wouldn't risk it."

"You have to go out with him," Darcy says.
"Why?" He huffs.

She throws her hands up. "Because you're not only sleeping with the guy and you clearly have some kind of feelings for him, but he's never even been over to your house! You've gotta give the guy something before he loses all hope and just gives up."

Clint nods in agreement. "She's right dude."

Bucky narrows his eyes. "You know, I don't know why I should be taking your advice considering that you're all single."

Jane snorts. "Because you're the only one with any kind of love life so we're forced to live vicariously through you."

Conversation picks up again, about God knows what, but Bucky doesn't participate as he frowns into his book, thinking about the fact that every time Steve's name comes up his heart seems to skip a beat.

It's probably just a heart murmur.

Not.

~*~

"So?" Ashley asks expectantly. "What's wrong with me?"

"You need a valve replacement," Wilson explains. "The tests we ran indicated that you have Von Willebrand's disease*, which caused such excessive bleeding after the root canal."

"And how would you replace the valve?" Her father asks worriedly.

"Well, because of the disease, Ashley can't take blood thinners to maintain a mechanical valve," Wilson says gently. "So we're suggesting a porcine valve."

"...Porcine?" Her mother asks. "As in... pig?"

"It's standard for someone in Ashley's position."

"Whatever you have to do to save my daughter's life," Her mother says firmly.

"Um, no," Ashley cuts in. "No. You know how important this is to me!"

"This is about saving your life, darling-"

"And you're not respecting it! You want me to put a pig- a freaking non-kosher animal- into my heart, the very essence of my being!"

"It's a porcine valve, actually," Clint says awkwardly.

"I don't care what the hell it is!" She shoots back. "I'm not having something non-kosher in my heart. I may as well be dead."

"Honey," Her father says gently. "This Orthodox thing is a mistake. What's wrong with being plain old Reform like the rest of us?"

"You guys don't even light candles' Friday night, or know all the Passover plagues."
"Boils, vermin, pestilence," Clint scoffs. "Even I know that. Fire, hail..."

Wilson gives him a look that very clearly tells him to shut the hell up, and turns back to Ashley. "I respect your religious convictions, but without this surgery, you will die."

"You're hot-shot doctors, come up with something else," She implores. "As long as it doesn't answer to Wilbur and say 'oink', I'm happy."

As they walk out, Sam hands Natasha her files. "Would you start her work up please? Thanks."

Then he turns to Clint. "Are you religious, Barton?"

Clint shrugs. "My mom used to pray to St. Jude for me."

Sam barks out a laugh. "The patron saint of lost causes, of course... Anyway, look, that girl in there seems dead-set on not getting a porcine valve, but it's the only option."

"You want me to look up other options?"

Sam screws up his nose. "More like try to highlight why the porcine valve is the only safe option."

He claps Clint on the back. "I'm counting on you, Barton."

~*~

Just as she had predicted, Steve did have a surgical patient for them to work on. A hiker had got his stuck in a bear trap after his phone had dropped in the middle of it. So, while Bucky was down waiting for the X-Ray scans to return and the man was waiting for the morphine to kick in, Steve is watching as Jane successfully intubates the esophagus of another patient. After a whole day of being neglected- Bucky dressed the hand, Bucky brought him down to get his X-Ray- Steve was finally helping her.

"Incredible," He smiles as she slowly takes the blade out of the mouth and places it down. "That was really good, Jane. The best intubation I've ever seen an intern do." He grins.

"Thanks, Dr. Rogers- Hey, if the hand injury of the hiker is severe enough, do you think I'd be able to scrub in on the surgery?"

"I certainly think that's something I can cater to," He says.

"Great, thank you so much," She beams.

Just then, Bucky pokes his head around the door. "Hey-" He holds up a folder. "-I got the results."

Steve looks up from the surface where he was signing off on Jane's intubation, and smiles. "Great." He turns to Jane and hands her the file. "Would you get him back to his room and start his patient work-up?"

"Yeah, sure."

Steve peels off his latex gloves and bins them, and then walks out to Bucky. Taking the file from him, he opens it up and flicks through it. "Ouch," He sucks in a breath. "The guy's index bone is nearly entirely shattered."

"Yep," Bucky says, as they round the corner, coming up to the room where the hiker- Gerard Murphy- is staying. "His veins are savaged too. It's going to be a surgical job."

"More like an excavation." Steve shakes his head. "Honestly, it's going to be like doing a jigsaw."
As soon as Bucky opens his mouth to reply, a loud beeping coming from Gerard's heart monitor inside cuts through the silence, and they rush in.

Steve curses. "He must be bleeding badly internally." He grabs the IV bag and injects something into it. "Page the nurses and tell them to prep O.R 2," He instructs hurriedly. "Meet me there in five." And then he's away, rushing down the halls while pushing Gerard on a gurney.

~*~

Clint walks briskly down the hall, a large smile on his face as he clutches Ashley's chart.

A bovine xenograft. It essentially worked the same as a porcine valve, except it was cow, not pig. He had stumbled across it while trawling through all the medical databases he could find on alternatives to using a porcine valve. Sure, it was a little riskier, but it would work all the same, if not better.

He sees Jane coming down the hall and waves to her. "Hey," he greets.

"Hey! I can't talk I-"

"Did you hear that your hiker guy coded and then Steve went all G.I Joe?"

A look of confusion passes on her face. "I- No. What?"

"Yeah. His heart gave out- an internal bleed, apparently, and Steve just rushed him to the O.R."

"Who's with him now?"

"Uh...Bucky, I think?"

"No!"

He nods. "Yeah."

"No!"

"Yes. Wait, are you looking at this from a different view point or are you just contradicting me for fun?"

"Different view point," she snaps, then grits her teeth. "I'll kill him."

"Kill who?" He asks, but she's already halfway down the hall. Clint watches as her figure retreats for a second, before turning around and continuing on his way to Ashley's room.

"I've found another transplant option," He grins as he walks in, and both Ashley and her parent's heads snap up when he enters. "At first, I thought maybe a cadaver, but they're really hard to find. And then I realized Dr. Burke can transplant a bovine valve instead of a pig one."

Behind him, Dr. Wilson comes in. Ashley's father's eyes bulge. "She can get a cow valve?"

Her mother turns to Wilson."Dr. Wilson, why weren't we told about this?"

Wilson looks at Clint. "Dr. Barton-"

"-The bovine valve has only been an option the last few years," Clint says.
"And it's a much more complicated procedure," Wilson cuts in.

"But the best part is it's actually superior to the pig," He smiles. "It lasts longer."

"Dr. Barton." Wilson's voice is hard and firm and when Clint turns to look at him, he can tell by the look on his face that he's in trouble. Wilson jerks his thumb over his shoulder. "A word."

"What incredibly small fraction of your brain were you using in there?" He hisses once they're out of the room and out of ear-shot.

"What?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but did you not present an alternative procedure without consulting your attending first?"

"I thought you'd be..."

"What, impressed?"

"No, glad that there's an alternative!" Clint blurts out. "I mean, that's what we're supposed to do right? Help people? Ashley would have rather died than get the porcine valve- you heard her! And now instead you can give her a bovine replacement that will last longer instead of being a temporary fix-up job. We get to save that girl, and she gets to keep her faith and live. We're doctors. Isn't that what we're meant to try to do?"

"We have to help her, yes. By saving her. I can't do that if I can't preform the procedure."

Clint swallows. "I'm sorry..."

"We're finished here, Barton. You're off the case."

Clint gives one jerky nod, turns and begins to walk away.

Sighing, Sam turns around, and leans against the desk of the nurses station.

His few moments of peace are interrupted by Hill sliding up beside him and asking "Which one of my interns do I need to smack around?"

He lifts his head from his hands. "Hmm?"

"I've seen three of my interns walking around- Barton just now looking like a kicked puppy, Foster looking like she could kill a man, and Romanoff looking severely pissed off. Though, I think that's just her resting face." Hill leans against the desk so she's face to face with him. "So I'm asking you. What did you do to my interns and which one?"

"I didn't do anything," Sam levels, but then Maria replies by raising a sculpted eyebrow, and he relents. "It was Barton. There's an Orthodox Jew who needs a valve replacement, but she's refusing to take a porcine one. So Barton decides to go in there without consulting me and tells them about using a bovine valve instead."

"Okay..." Hill draws out. "I can understand why you're mad about him going behind your back, but what's the problem with the bovine valve as a replacement?"

Sam stands up. "It's a completely different procedure," he says incredulously. "It's a lot riskier and-"
"Doesn't the bovine valve last longer?"

Sam huffs childishly. "Well, yes, but-"

"So research the procedure and do it. Easy."

Sam narrows his eyes. "But big of you to talk to me like that when I'm your boss."

Hill barks out a laugh. "Pulling the rank card, are you?" She waves a hand like the notion was utterly ridiculous. "I'm not scared of you." With that, she picks up her charts and pushes through the doors to the stairs.

~*~

Clint is stretched out on a spare gurney, his head beside Natasha's knee where she's sitting cross-legged.

"You can't be angry with him," Natasha chides as she pops a crisp into her mouth, but it lacks her usual venom. "You brought it on yourself- honestly, what were you thinking? Going behind Wilson's back and telling them about a procedure he hadn't approved." She tuts and flicks him gently on the back of the head.

"Idiot."

"I was only trying to do what was right!" He moans. "Being a good and empathetic doctor and whatnot."

"Sometimes you've got to ignore your empathetical side and go with what will be best for the patient."

"But that's the thing!" Clint lurches his chest up so he's almost level with her face. "The bovine valve is better! Everyone would have been happy." He drops his head back down to gurney. "But now it's all gone to shit," he mutters sadly.

"Barton!"

Clint scrambles up from the gurney until he's standing, and see's Dr. Wilson approaching.

"How fast can you get me a bovine valve?"

"Um... 60 minutes by messenger," Clint answers.

"Great, get onto it now. You're back on the case."

"Thank you, Dr. Wilson," he smiles.

Wilson waves his hand. "Yeah, yeah. Since you came up with the bright idea, you can scrub in. Romanoff, I'll see you there too- Oh! Also, Ashley wants a Rabbi to bless her before the surgery."

"Are you kidding me?"

"Hey, if you can get a bovine valve, you can get the girl a Rabbi."

"I'm on it!" Clint calls over his shoulder as he jogs down the hall.

~*~
Darcy races down the stairs, nearly colliding into Dr. Stark as she skids and turns a corner.

No sooner had she taken off her surgical gloves, after having removing the keys from Kyle's throat, then her pager went off. It'd been Loki, telling her that Alejandro had woken up from his coma. The lack of information made her heart race.

Her chest was tight and a ball of nerves fizzed in her stomach as she arrived at the ICU.

Loki was in the hall, arms crossed and face straight, waiting for her.

"How is he?" She asks as she comes closer.

She lets out a breath of relief when he cracks a smile.

"You'll want to see this," he grins.

Taking her arm, he leads her over to the room, and she takes a tentative step inside.

There, sitting up in bed, is a smiling Alejandro, and beside him, Amy, in a red dress.

"Alejandro," she says gently, squeezing his hand. "Tell them about the dress I'm wearing."

He chuckles. "It's red. I got it for you our first trip to Spain," he says fondly.

Amy and Alejandro are beaming, and beside her, the stiffness in Loki's spine and shoulders ebbs out as he watches the couple- he looks so relaxed and for perhaps the first time Darcy knows of, looks genuinely happy.

She likes him better like this, she thinks.

And Darcy?

Darcy's just enjoying the feeling of weightlessness that comes with this burden finally being lifted off her shoulders.

~*~

Bucky shuffles into the house, dropping his bag at the door.

He hears Jane before he sees her, hears her pottering around in the kitchen and the clanging of pots.

"Hey, I, uh, I thought you'd be asleep by now," he says as he walks in.

"Yeah, well, I'm not," she say, anger lacing her words. Before Bucky can ask about her mood, she continues. "Want a slice?" She gestures to the cake cooling on a stand. "Made with love and affection- well actually, all consuming rage and hostility, but still. It's tasty."

Bucky sighs and drops his head to the kitchen counter. "Jane. What happened? Whatever it is, I'm sorry."

"No!" She slams down the bowl she was washing in the sink. "That's just it. You're not, because you don't even realise you're doing it. You went to Dartmouth. You're naturally brilliant, you walk into the room like wonder kid and everyone trusts you. You're Winifred Barnes's kid for crying out loud- don't look so surprised everyone figured it out- when you walk into the O.R, people breath a sigh of relief because they know that you'll be able to handle it. But me? I walk in and they hope I'm a nurse. And that hiker- Gerard comes in and starts coding and Steve just trusts you to handle
and ugh!" She slams a hand down on the counter. "I mean... Bucky you have the respect of every single person in that hospital. And you're throwing it away for what? Good surgeries and hot sex? Bucky, what the hell are you doing?"

"It's not about the surgeries," he insists. "It's not about getting ahead."

"Then what?!" Jane exclaims, and then- "Oh. Oh, my God. You're falling for him."

"I am not."

"Oh, you so are."

"No, I'm not!" He demands.

"You so are. Damn it, you poor boy."

"You know, it's just that he's just so...And I'm just...I'm having a hard time." He runs a hand through his hair. "He's so perfect, and I'm so not."

"Wow, you're all, uh, mushy and...warm and full of secret feelings. Here," she pushes a plate of cake towards him. "Eat your feelings out."

"I hate you," he says around a mouthful of cake and wow that's good. "And your cake."

"Don't lie my cake is good." There's a beat of silence before- "So is he like. Romantic?"

Bucky gives her an unimpressed look. "Jane."

"What? Come on, I'm not getting any. Help a girl out with a few details ”

Chapter End Notes

*Bronchoscopy- Bronchoscopy (bron-KOS-ko-pee) is a procedure used to look inside the lungs' airways, and thus remove any objects etc.
Von Willebrand's disease- A condition that can cause extended or excessive bleeding
Scut Work- work in A&E, doing stitches etc.

Kudos's are great but comments keep me going so if you want to leave one that would be amazing!

You can find me on tumblr [here](http://example.com).
I threw my hands in the air and said 'show me something' (he said if you dare come a little closer.)

Chapter Notes

WOOO I'm going to France tomorrow hell yeah B)

Honestly guys I'm so excited this is where PLOTS start and things start and ugh. I'm just pumped for this fic and I'm so glad you're all enjoying it! And you get 7,000 whole words this time!

Trigger warning for negative discussions of body weight and size, etc. So if you're sensitive to that sort of stuff, I'm putting a line of stars ****** at the beginning and end of each passage :) It's only one, however. There's also a brief description of an anxiety attack, and that will be marked with a * at the beginning and end also.

Title is from 'Stay' by Rhianna and Mikki Ekko.

All medical terms are noted with a * and will be explained in the end notes!

CHAPTER 6 WHERE YA AT

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky walks briskly down the hall, jaw clenched, ignoring the raised eyebrows of some of the nurses.

Finally, he sees Steve come out from behind a corner. He lifts his head from his chart, and when he looks up he see's Bucky.

"Hey, Dr. Barnes, could you-"

"Dr. Rogers, could you take a look at something I found in Gerard's notes?" Bucky cuts him off.

He looks around quickly, and the hallway is for once, thankfully, empty.

"Um, sure. I-" Steve doesn't have time to finish that sentence because Bucky is dragging him by the arm into the on call room.

"You can't do that again," Bucky says to a very confused Steve.

"Do what?" He asks incredulously

Bucky huffs. "Give me a surgery you promised to someone else!"

Steve's eyebrows knit together. "When did I- oh shit. Crap!" He runs a hand through his hair.
"Jane. Bucky look- I completely forgot."

"She's so pissed- and rightly so. You said you'd keep it on the down low. What were you thinking, Steve?"

"I wasn't! I'm a trauma surgeon. I had a guy that was coding and you were there so I just ran with it. You can't think in trauma surgery, Buck. You've just got to look at what you have and work with it and don't ask questions."

Bucky lets out a breath, and deflates. The anger and adrenaline that had previously fuelled him slowly ebbed out of him, and really, Steve had a point. "Yeah, I- okay."

Steve takes a step towards him and tilts his chin up so their eyes are locked. "Hey, Bucky," He says gently. "I'm not doing it to get in your pants if that's what you're worried about. It just happened. If I had even a second to think I would have asked for Jane." He licks his lips and looks away. Grabbing his chart, he flicks through it and stops. "Look, I have her on my rotation again today. I'll apologise, okay?"

"Thank you, Steve," He says. Having his friends on board with him and Steve would, admittedly, make things a lot easier. And he didn't need to be on Jane's bad side.

He turns to unlock the door and go on about his day, when Steve reaches out and stops him.

"Do me one favour?"

Bucky narrows his eyes, and he already knows what Steve's going to ask. "What?"

"Give me an answer about whether or not you'll go on that date with me?" He grins sheepishly.

Bucky rolls his eyes, but can't help but smirk. "I'll go on your goddamn date, okay?"

He's out the door before Steve can say anything, but he doesn't miss the huge smile that spreads across Steve's face, and he certainly doesn't miss the way his heart skipped a beat when he said that he'd go on the date.

Fucking Steve Rogers. What was a guy going to do?

~*~
Darcy's day is the same as every other one. She comes in, gets into her scrubs, and then works on her patient charts for a while before she's put on whoever's rotation.

And today was no exception. She came in, got into her scrubs, and was currently leaning on the nurse's desk filling out Kyle Jordan's patient work up. But it's completely different, because there's a cup of coffee beside her. That was given by Loki.

"It's just coffee," He says defensively when she looks up at him with a frown. "For helping with Alejandro. I..." He clears his throat. "I don't think I could have done it without you. So. Thank you."

"Oh. Yeah. Of course," She answers dumbly.

"It's black. Is that how you like it?"

"Um. Yeah." Because Loki Odinson has literally rendered her speechless.

"Good," He answers, taking a sip of his own.

"Okay."

"Okay," He smirks, and then turns on his heels, walking away.

She stares at the coffee for a couple of seconds as if it had sprouted two heads. This wasn't the Loki that people spoke about. That Loki was snarky and sarcastic, with a sharp tongue but a brilliant mind. And sure, she had seen a little bit beneath that veneer, she had seen a man who really, truly cared about his patients, and would run himself ragged if it meant that he would come closer to helping them. She had seen a man who wasn't all biting comments and condescension, had instead seen a man who's frustrations came from his own personal battles, which included his anger at not being able to stay completely detached from his patients. It didn't make his actions or what he said excusable, but it made them understandable.

"Darcy." She's brought out of her thoughts by Natasha's voice and charts slamming down beside her on the desk.

"Morning to you too, Natasha," She grumbles as she stands upright and hands in Kyle Jordan's chart to the nurse on duty and takes some of the charts Natasha had brought, and without really thinking about it grabs her coffee as well.

"We're on Dr. Rhodes service," She explains as they start walking towards the elevator.

"Oh fun," Darcy exclaims falsely. "Breaking bones and putting them back together all day. Woohoo."

"Orthopaedics not for you?" Natasha teases.

"Not at all."

Suddenly, Natasha frowns. "What?" Darcy asks. Crap, did she have remnants of the poptart she ate this morning on her scrubs? She looked down to quickly scan her clothes, but didn't see anything.

"No, no it's just-" Natasha shakes her head. "I thought you didn't like the coffee from the cafeteria here."

She shrugs. "Eh. It grew on me."
This is really and truly just Jane's luck. First of all she was on Dr. Rogers' rotation again. It was one thing to have been on and be blown off in favour of the guy he was sleeping with—her friend and roommate—but it wasn't Bucky's fault so she couldn't hold it against him.

She did worry, though. Sure, Steve seemed like a really nice guy. But what was he doing sleeping with an intern? He knew how dangerous it was to both his and Bucky's career. And if even Fury found out... In the least, Bucky would be kicked out of the internship programme.

But now she had a man at the hospital admitting station who was bleeding all over the desk. He was clutching at his left bicep, and despite the pain on his face, he was smiling.

'Digby,' He was saying to the nurse. 'Digby Owens. I have an appointment.'

'Sir, you're bleeding. I need you to let me take a look at your wound.' She was already prying his fingers away from where they were grasped.

As soon as she did she saw blood, lots of blood and—"Gunshot wound! We've got a gunshot wound—Page Dr. Rogers, I'll get him down to the pit," She says to the nurse, and quickly leads him over to a wheelchair.

'Sit, Mr. Owens,' She says as she helps him to sit down.

'Nah, Doc. You can call me Digby,' He says breathlessly. 'Hey, where're we going?'

'The pit,' she answers as she wheels him to the elevator.

'Alright,' He says dubiously. 'But it's not an emergency. I scheduled it.'

Well, if there's anything to make her stop in her tracks, it's that. "You what?"

'Yeah, yeah! I got my buddy to shoot me.'

'What—Why?'

'Oh, I like the scars,' He explains.

'And your buddy did this?' She presses the buttons for the ground floor quickly.

'Yeah, as a favour. He didn't mean to hurt me or nothin', I asked him.'

'Wow, what a great friend,' Jane mutters. The elevator dings and the doors open. She wheels him up to the next spare gurney she can see, and with all the strength she can muster (which is actually a lot, shut up, Darcy, just because she looks like a twig doesn't mean she is one) hauls him onto so he's lying down on his back.

She puts on a pair of surgical gloves and cuts off the sleeve of his flannel, revealing the wound. It's messy but clean, and she can see a handful of other bullet-shaped scars littering his body.

'Remind me again why you wanted to do this?' She asks as she puts some antiseptic on a cotton ball to clean the wound, and it'll give her a better view of the bullet. 'This might sting a bit.'

'Oh, I-' He cuts himself off, hissing in pain. 'Damn, girl, 'a bit'?'

'Sorry,' she shrugs, not really sorry at all because he's the idiot that willingly wanted to get shot.
"Anyway, I like the scars," He says. "It's like my art."

She raises an eyebrow. "Couldn't have just gone with a tattoo?"

He waves his hand. "Nah, everyone in town's got tattoo's. But my art? It's about commitment."

"A real artist, huh? You could practically hang it in the Louvre."

"Damn straight," He smirks.

She narrows her eyes, looking into the wound. "Damn stupid. The bullet is completely lodged in your muscle but it's still travelling. She shakes her head. "How are you not screaming in pain? Why do you put yourself through this?"

"It's my ethos. Why do anything unless you're willing to go further than everybody else. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

"Well, please. Don't do this again. It's so dangerous." She shudders. "Okay, well, I'm going to dress this quickly and lightly, and then bring you down for an X-Ray."

~*~

Bucky was on rotation with Stark and Clint. Things were significantly better between him and Stark. Of course, Stark was still Stark, snarky and acting on a severe god complex, but he was less of a dick in general, which was nice.

Clint and himself were currently waiting for the abdominal CT's for one of the patients they were assigned to- Alison O'Brien, 20, and in her second year of college- had come to the hospital after passing out in the shower. Her parents thought that she had picked up an infection after her summer vacation to Mexico, but after examining her abdomen, Bucky had an inkling that it wasn't going to be that straightforward.

Bucky gently pushed down on Alison's abdomen to test for hard lumps, when Alison yelped in pain. "Ow! Don't push down so hard," She snapped.

"Sorry," He relents. "Can you lift your shirt higher so I can examine your stomach?"

Somewhat reluctantly, Alison lifts her shirt. On her stomach are four pink, fresh scars.

"...You've had surgery recently? Alison, where did you get these?"

"Don't tell my parents," She pleads.

"You got this done in Mexico so your parents wouldn't find out? Alison, what did you have done?"

Tears well in her eyes, and she turns her head to look out the window. From the way her teeth are clamped down on her lip, Bucky knows he's not going to get much more out of her.

I think she had some kind of illegal surgery done in Mexico," Bucky mutters to Clint, who's chewing on his pen like a rabbit with a carrot.

The pen drops out of his mouth. "Why'd you think that?"

"When I was examining her stomach she had four fresh scars on her stomach. She won't say how she got them and the parents are clueless."

"Botched abortion?" Clint suggests.
Bucky shakes his head. "They were *laparoscopic."

Clint's mouth pulls down to a frown. Before he can open his mouth to say more, Stark walks in. "Boys, whaddya got for me?"

Bucky turns around. "We're waiting for Alison O'Brien's abdominal CT results, Dr. Stark."

"Why a CT? She passed out in the shower right?" He picks up her chart from the desk and flips through it. "Why not test for infection instead?"

"She was complaining about a pain in her stomach-"

"Appendicitis?"

"No, because I did an exam on her abdomen and I saw four laparoscopic scars on her stomach. She got a surgery done in Mexico so her parents wouldn't find out, but I couldn't find out what."

Stark nods his head pensively. "Well, fair enough, Barnes. And you-" He turns to Clint. "-What were you doing?"

"Um I was discharging Gina Anderson."

"The one with the...?"

"Tumour in her lungs."

Tony clicks her fingers. "That's the one."

The rest of the wait for the results to come back is filled with small talk about the patients, like 'did you know that Mrs. Aplin plays the bongos?' which, no. Bucky did not. Soon enough, though, the computer beeps, and the image of Alison's abdomen comes up. Four white lines are on her stomach, put throughout her abdomen there are large white circles.

Stark frowns. "Is this girl fat?"

"No, not at all," Bucky answers, confused. "She's a normal college kid."

Stark turns to Clint. "What do you see?" He asks, jerking his head towards the scan.

Clint leans in, squinting, and then- "These things-" He points to the four white lines. "-Are staples. She's had a gastric bypass."

"And a bad one, at that," Stark says.

~*~

"Wait, so he got his friend to shoot him?"

"Yep," Jane answers.

"You're making that up," Darcy scoffs.

"I'm not! Digby Owens, he's in the E.R as we speak, go check for yourself if you want."

"Why would anybody even do that?"
Jane rolls her eyes. "He likes the scars. Apparently it's his 'art'."

"Idiot," Natasha mutters throughout a mouthful of salad.

A buzzing cuts through the quiet, and they all instinctively grab their pagers. Jane groans. "Never mind, it's me. Digby's X-ray came back, I've got to get it to Rogers before he decides to shoot himself again." She stands up and catches the packet of crisps that Darcy throws her. "Thanks. I'll see you guys tonight."

"Will she?" Natasha asks, looking at Bucky.

"Will she what?" He says, spraying his sandwich everywhere because he's hungry and he's tired and his manners go out the window. Sue him.

"Will she see you tonight?"

He swallows. "Why is that any of your business?"

Darcy flicks him behind the ear and he can't help the yelp of pain he lets out. "Are you going on your date with Steve or not, Barnes?"

"Fine, fine!" He sighs. "Yes, I'm going out with Steve. Happy?"

Natasha and Darcy practically squeal and wow, that's piercing.

"I don't know why you're so excited," he grumbles. "It's just dinner."

Natasha tuts. "It's never just dinner, you moron."

"Yeah but if you're bringing him home just try keep it quiet, okay?" Clint says. "I need all the sleep I can get."

"Wait, wait, wait." Natasha stops him. "You haven't brought Steve back to your place yet."

Bucky starts to chew on his lip, like he always does when he feels awkward.

"Um... No."

Natasha leans over the table and slaps his arm. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Well- I just- The opportunity never arose!" He splutters.

"You go over to his place all the time," Darcy points out.

"Yeah but- That's just because it's closer," he defends.

"You're the worst boyfriend in the world," Natasha rolls her eyes.

"Not his boyfriend," Bucky says, almost on autopilot. It's not, admittedly, entirely true. They're not exactly something, but they're not nothing either.

"Where'd you say his apartment was again?"

"Wickfield apartments on fourth street."

Natasha frowns. "You'd think the head of trauma surgery at a world renowned hospital could afford something better."
Darcy shrugs. "Maybe he's saving up- maybe he's saving for a ring." She wiggles her eyebrows at Bucky.

"Shut up," he mutters.

"Why did Steve even come here in the first place?" Clint asks.

Bucky scrunches up his nose. "Um... I'm not too sure, actually."

Bucky looks up from his lunch to then stare at their confused faces.

"What?"

"You've been screwing this guy for over a month and you don't even know what brought him here?" Natasha admonishes.

"Well, I mean, it never really came up in conversation." The tips of his ears are already going red.

"Wait. How much do you actually know about Steve?"

"I- I know loads," he manages, but as he navigates his way through his brain he's finding it difficult to actually find information on Steve.

"Where did he work before this?" Natasha quizzes.

"Uh- Another hospital."

Her eyes narrow. "Where did he grow up?"

"Um... I don't..." Finally, he gives up, sighing. "I don't know."

"How much has he told you?" Darcy's brow furrows.

Bucky tries to think about conversations they've had, but he can't pinpoint facts about Steve in any of them. "I... Nothing, I think. Not that I can remember." He's silent for a second and then slaps his hand down on the table when the light switch in his brain goes off. "Oh! His mom was a nurse and his dad was in the army."

"Wow, you could practically write his biography," Natasha deadpans.

"Hey! That's information!"

"Yeah information that you get on a first date," Darcy laments. "Bucky. This has got to raise alarm bells for you. I mean sure you're not meant to know the guys life story, but you should at least know where he grew up."

Natasha nods. "He's withholding information. That's stuff that slips out, and he's made sure it hasn't."

"You guys sound like you're on Criminal Minds," he scoffs. "Look, sure. We don't know a lot about each other. That's fine! It makes what we do have a lot easier. Okay?"

Natasha studies him for a couple of seconds before responding. "Okay," she says.
The subject changes then to something else, but Bucky doesn't pay attention. He's too busy dealing with the knot coiling around his stomach, tightening as he realises with every passing second that Steve is as good as an acquaintance to him.

Shit.

~*~

"The hell is that?" Dr. Wilson asks, pointing to one of the many white blobs scattered in Digby's chest cavity. Because the bullets were in the chest area, Sam had been asked to do a consult. Him being the head of thoracic's and all.

"That would be a bullet from a previous gunshot," Jane says.

Steve's eyes budge. "A previous gunshot?"

She nods and lets a breath out through her nose. Sam turns to Steve. "No reason to take it out."

Steve nods his head in agreement. "No, the guy likes pain."

"It's his ethos," Jane supplies.

Sam raises his eyebrows. "Wait- Pain as an ethos?" He snaps his fingers and grins. "I knew it sounded familiar."

"You know him?" Steve asks.

"The hell I do," Sam snorts. "If 'knowing him' means performing multiple surgeries on this guy since I was a resident then yeah, I definitely know him."

At that moment, Hill swings in to hand something to Sam, presumably, and stops dead when she sees the X-Rays.

Sam points to them with a quirked eyebrow. "You remember our friend here?"

Hill smirks. "The masochist guy is back already?"

"You bet. Had himself shot again and everything."

"Glad to see he's still stupid," She walks towards them and hands Sam a patient work up file.

"It's his ethos," Jane says, again.

Sam claps Steve on the back. "Well, it's nothing you can't handle. I don't think you'll need me in there."

"The procedure okay?" He asks.

Sam nods. "Only safe way you could go about something like this, if I'm honest."

Steve lets out a breath and uncrosses his arms to take down the scans. He turns to Jane with a smile. "Let's go tell him what he gets to do today."

They head out the door, and walk to the E.R in silence, Hill with them. As soon as Digby sees them, a large smile grows on his face.

"Doc!" He exclaims when he lays eyes on Hill. "How you doing?"
"I'd prefer we stop meeting like this, Mr. Owens," She deadpans.

Digby waves his hand. "Every time, doc. Call me Digby. But really- how are you?"

"Very safe, compared to you. Unlike you, I realise the risk of getting shot."

"But that's the point! The risk!"

She rolls her eyes. "Goodbye, Mr. Owens. Please don't get shot for a while."

"I'll do my best, doc," He grins.

"He's running a fever," Steve says to Jane.

"Due to the extra stress on his body from the gunshot?" Jane asks.

"Precisely." He turns from the monitor to Digby. "Digby, the impact of the bullet damaged your chest and fractured a rib which caused a *hemopneumothorax.

Digby's brow furrowed. "Is that... Bad?"

"Well, there's blood in your collapsed lung," Jane explains. "So yeah, as far as things go, that's pretty bad."

"This enough to put the breakers on your body art?"

Digby barks a laugh. "Ah, no pain, no gain, right?"

Steve gives him a resigned smile, like he was expecting it. "That's one way to look at it."

Digby clears his throat. "So, what are we gonna do about this, um...hemopneumo-Jurassics?"

"We're going to insert a chest tube to drain the blood, then re-inflate your lung," Jane says.

Digby's eyes widen like a kid at Christmas. "Oh, please...tell me I get to watch. "

Steve stops, stock still, and stares at him. "Are you kidding me?" He says flatly.

"No, man! I watch all my surgeries if I can. So?" He asks expectantly. "Can I watch?"

Steve pinches the bridge of his nose. "I'll try, alright?" He adjusts Digby's IV. "You really don't do the adrenaline-junkie thing half-assed, do you?"

"You know it," He smirks.

Steve shakes his head, but there's a small smile on his face. "Dr. Foster would you come with me to book the O.R?"

"Uh, don't you want me to start on his patient work-up?"

"No, no, it'll be fine." He motions for her to follow him as he starts to walk out of the E.R and down the hall.

Jane walks somewhat nervously behind him, twisting her pen in her hands. She's not taking anything good from the way that Steve's head is swivelling around, scanning the hall for people. He stops abruptly, and Jane, ever the very essence of grace, slams into his back.
"Oof!"

"Sorry, sorry," he stammers, and huffs out a breath. He lightly takes her elbow and brings her over to the corner, beside a gurney. "Look Jane, I - I'm so sorry. About forgetting to let you scrub in on the surgery. It wasn't a reflection of what I think of your skills as a surgeon, or what I think of you personally- you're a lovely girl- It was just the heat of the moment, you know? Unfortunately trauma surgery doesn't allow a lot of time for pre-planning. It's just- the guy was coding and I did what we're trained to do in trauma, I looked around, I saw what I had and I worked with it, I didn't have time to think about or second guess it. Bucky was there and I barked some orders at him without thinking about it. I'm not trying to excuse my actions, but, I just thought that maybe it would. I don't know- make them understandable? I am really, genuinely, sorry Jane. If I had even had a second I would have paged you, but that's just the way the dice fell." He shrugs with a grimace on his face. "Medicine isn't exactly the fairest profession."

Jane is, admittedly, taken aback by Steve's apology. "Um- Yeah, no- I mean. It's fine. It's completely fine." She swallows. "I understand where you're coming from, and I- I over reacted a bit. Thank you for your apology, though. I really appreciate it, Dr. Rogers."

He gives her a kind smile. "It's no problem, Jane. Water under the bridge, yeah?"

She returns his smile and nods her head. "Yeah."

They continue on to book the O.R then, a silence settled between them, and though she can see that Steve's heart is in the right place and that his intentions are good, it still doesn't change the fact that Bucky is sleeping with their boss.

******************

"A gastric bypass is a procedure usually done on obese patients to help them lose weight," Bucky explains.

Her parents faces dissolves into a look of disbelief. "Alison?" Her father breathes. "But- Look at her! She doesn't need to lose weight."

"Before you guys start, I know you're mad," Alison says sullenly. "But I just-"

"Disbelief, Alison. How could you? Surgery in Mexico? I thought you were smarter than that!" Her mother is standing ramrod straight, like a ruler, her mouth pursed in a thin line.

"But it is so typical of you to take the easy way out. You've done it with everything since you were a little kid."

"Mrs.O'Brien, nothing about this is going to be easy," Stark says, a hard mask on his face. "She's going to face a lifelong struggle with malnutrition unless she has surgery to reverse the procedure."

"I'm just concerned," Mr. O'Brien says. "Where did you get the idea to do this?"

Alison shifts uncomfortably. "The internet."

"But, honey, there is a healthy way to lose weight. I told you to follow that diet I gave you. I mean, really. It's easy, Alison. Don't eat junk, exercise. What were you eating? And how much had you been working out? I mean, you know, most of the time, when people hit their target weight, they have to work to stay there."

"Yeah, I tried that, but...it doesn't work for me like it does for you."
"Hey, you don't need to lose weight," Mr. O'Brien says gently, rubbing her hand.

"When she came home Christmas, who had to take her out and buy her a brand new pair of size 6 jeans because she couldn't get in the ones I got her last summer?"

Alison's eyes fill up with tears, and she struggles to keep her voice steady. "Everyone gains weight in college, Mom. It's...it's stressful. There's...there's not enough time for exercise. I just thought if I wasn't worried about my diet, then...I could focus more on my studies."

"So you took another shortcut? Life doesn't work that way, Alison," she snaps.

"Tina!" Mr. O'Brien barks.

"What? You want to argue that?"

He takes a deep breath. "You know, she tries, Tina. She gets good grades, she got into a great college."

"-She had illegal surgery in Mexico!"

"Unfortunately, there were complications with the bypass," Stark cuts in. "She has what looks like an abscess under her diaphragm, and edema, which is a swelling of the bowel wall. I can't say for certain she'll recover completely."

"Just do whatever you have to do to make her well, ok?" Her father pleads.

"No, no!" Alison protests. "I do not want surgery again."

"Alison, there were serious complications," Clint explains gently. "This is about your health."

"But I'd rather be thin," She says, her voice shaky.

"Well, I'm afraid the choice isn't up to you," Her mother says firmly. "Do the surgery."

*******************

"Dr. Barton, book the O.R. Dr. Barnes, get the team together and get Alison prepped. I want to start this in an hour and be done in two, understood?" Stark says as soon as they're outside.

"No problem," Bucky says as he takes the chart from Stark and Clint goes to book the operating theatre.

"Oh, and Barnes?" Stark says, and Bucky turns around to look at him. "Call social services," He says lowly. "No kid needs a mother like that on their plate."

Bucky nods curtly and turns on his heels and sets off to the nurses' station. Something had tugged at Bucky's heartstrings in there, watching Alison's mother talk her down- perhaps it's memories of his mother pushing him and pushing him to be something he's not.

To be extraordinary when he's only ordinary.

He sighs. He shouldn't even be that concerned by it. Sure, it's not nice and he'll ring social services, but she's just his patient. She's just his patient. It's getting harder to remember that, though.

He stops when he sees Steve walking towards him. He lifts his head up and smiles like the fucking sun and-
"Hey there, Dr. Barnes."

"Dr. Rogers could I borrow you for a minute?" He says quickly.

"Uh, what-" But he doesn't get time to finish because Bucky's already shoved him in a broom closet.

"Bucky, what's with shoving me in small, confined places today?" He demands.

"What's your favourite colour?" He blurts out.

Steve looks at him, looking deeply, deeply worried and confused that Bucky would ask him such a thing. "Bucky what."

"Well, it's just- I mean it's nothing really-."

He's cut off by Steve grasping him by the shoulders firmly. "Bucky, what's wrong?"

He takes a deep breath. "Well I just kinda noticed that I don't actually really know anything about you at all and you know we've been sleeping with each other for like two months so like we should know more about each other, right? But like. You already know stuff about me but I- I don't even know your favourite colour!" The words come spilling out all at once and he runs a hand through his hair and shit is it hot in here? "I mean, that's not normal, Steve. What we have isn't normal we're sleeping together and I don't even know where you grow I mean what even is this?" His vision is starting to fray at the edges and his breaths are coming faster and oh my god he's having a panic attack. He's having a panic attack in a broom closet in front of Steve. Because that is something that would happen to him.

"Bucky- Bucky," Steve says firmly. "Listen to me. You're okay, alright? You're with me and you're okay. Here, sit down, and put your head between your legs- good, good. Now breath with me, Bucky." He takes his hand and places it over his heart. "Breath with me," He says again, softer, gentler. And he does. He concentrates on his slow and steady heartbeat, thrumming through his chest, radiating life and vitality and with each beat Bucky feels himself come back to himself, feels his heart slow until it's beating in tandem with Steve's.

He lets out a loud and heavy breath. "I- Thank you."

Steve gives him a kind smile. "Any time," He says gently.

They stay that way for a few seconds, Bucky sitting hunched up on the floor, and Steve perched on his knees, hovering near him. It doesn't last long enough, it never does, because Steve's pager goes off, the obnoxious beeping filling the room and cutting through their silence.

Steve lets out a string of curses as he searches through his pockets for it (surprising but impressive) and when he finally gets it his face falls slightly. "Crap, I have to take this."

He scrambles up from the floor, and as soon as his hand touches the doorknob he turns back to look at Bucky.

"Would you- Would you just please trust me?" He implores.

Despite himself, Bucky nods, and he can see some of the tension dissipate from Steve's shoulders.

"Great," He breathes. "Gino's on 42nd street at 8:30. I'll meet you there, the reservation is under
Steve Rogers. He gives Bucky a final nod before he rushes out the door, leaving Bucky alone, in the dark and the ball of worry he's been carrying around all day still nestled nicely in his stomach.

"What is it?" Steve asks as he enters Digby's room. And Digby... Well, he looks like hell. He's curled up in a blanket on the bed, sweating and shivering.

"Doctor," Jane greets. "His post-op CBC* showed a severe spike in white blood cells." Her calm facade falters. "I- I can't figure it."

"Okay, what were the actual results?" He asks.

"It's 27, with 16 percent bands."

"You were right to page me, something else is wrong. That's way too much for simple stress. Did you test for any sources for infection?"

She nods. "I checked all his piercings, his IV's... I can't find anything."

Steve shakes his head. "He's got to have something. Digby," He says as he walks over to him. "Have you had any recent illnesses, piercings or tattoo's?"

"I got a new tattoo on my calf," He answers, and when Steve flips back the bed covers and lifts up Digby's leg he finds a disgustingly infected tattoo of a spider placed neatly on his left calf. It's horrible- big blisters filled with puss bubble up all around the place. Jane can't help but let out an involuntary 'ew'.

"Oh jeez," He gapes. "It was nowhere near this bad this morning."

"But it was infected?" Steve demands. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"I thought I just had to work outta my system!" He says defensively.

Steve rolls his eyes. "The infections grown because of the stress put on you due to the procedure earlier today. Get him to ICU," He instructs Jane. "Get him on antibiotics right away."

"You guys know what we're doing?" Stark asks as he presses the scalpel into Alison's skin an starts to open her up.

"We need to free the bowel from the adhesions caused from the abscess," Clint replies.

"Good, Barton. And why do we need to handle things with care, Barnes?"

"Because it's full of gunk," Bucky answers.

Stark lets out a chuckle. "Yeah, that's one way of putting it." He works in silence for the next few minutes as he opens Alison's abdomen and locates her stomach.

Clint hisses when he eventually finds it, and even Bucky flinches. Her stomach is swollen, and true to Bucky's word, filled with a horrible grey-white gunk.

Tony, however, just has a look of pity on his face. "Poor girl," He shakes his head. "What the hell was she thinking?"
Bucky shrugs. "Ah. You heard the mother- she just wanted to please her."

"Yeah but at what cost?" Clint interjects. "Look at the damage it caused."

"I'm with Barton on this- Here resect* this," Stark points to an area of Alison's stomach.

"Ten blade, please," He asks the nurse. He works quietly, making sure not to mess up, and the straightens up again, and hands the scalpel back to the nurse.

"Good job, Barnes," Stark says absently as he works. "Barton, now you," He says as he points to another section.

Things pass in relative peace for a few seconds and then-

Alison's bowel bursts, spraying Bucky and Clint with her toxic waste. Quiet laughs and giggles fill the room, complete with the nurse beside him sniffing loudly and saying 'ew'.

Stark sighs. "Well, Dr. Barton, now that you've drained the organ, we can attempt to repair it."

"Now my day is perfect," Bucky says.

~*~

Steve sprints through the ICU, not even bothering to apologise to the nurses' glares.

"What happened?" He breaths as he skids to a stop in front of Digby's room.

"He went into multi-system organ failure," Jane says, flustered.

"Fix his BP," Steve instructs, going over to do a quick exam, unwrapping the stethoscope from his neck.

"I can't he’s maxed out on pressors*," She replies, her voice strained.

"He's looking bad," Steve jerks up. "Put the defib pads on him and give him 150 of ammiodarone*.""I lost his pulse!" Jane yells over the din of nurses coming in and the heart monitor going flat.

"Get me the defib!" He takes the paddles from the nurse and leans over Digby. "Charge at 200. 3, 2, 1...Clear!" Digby's body lurches up, but his heart makes no movement. Steve lets out a frustrated growl. "Again at 300. 3, 2, 1... Clear!" Again nothing, and within the next five minutes Jane's pretty sure she will have bitten her nails down to a stub. "Dammit! Again, 300, 3, 2, 1...Clear!"

It happens almost in slow motion-

Steve presses the paddles down onto Digby's chest-

Digby's upper body thrusts up-

It rises-

It falls-

And then his eyes fly open and he's gasping for breath.

Jane doesn't ever think she's let out a sigh of relief so big.
She looks up in time to see throw his head back as he hands the defibrillator to a nurse, breathless as well. He looks down at Digby, pretty pissed off.

"Don't ever," He snaps, his voice ragged, "Do that again."

~*~

Bucky straightens his tie once more as he checks his reflection in the car mirror. Steeling himself and taking a deep breath, he quickly gets out of the car and walks hurriedly to the restaurant straight across from him. Rip the plaster off fast and it hurts less, right?

Gino's is small and cozy, radiating warmth and life in a dreary, bleak street. It's not surprising that this would be the place that Steve's chosen.

He shakes off the rain that lightly dusts his hair and jacket as he enters, glad for the break from rain as he steps inside.

"Hello, sir," A man greets. "Table for how many?"

"Oh no, I'm here with someone already. Uh- Steve Rogers?"

The maître d' smile widely. "Of course, sir. This way." He gestures Bucky down a set of stairs, and down there, in a table on the far left, is Steve, who's standing up and thankfully looking half as nervous as he does.

"Bucky," He breaths, and he looks like a goddamn god in this soft lighting.

"Hey," He replies, a little breathlessly.

"I'm really glad you came," Steve grins, as he pulls out Bucky's chair. "I was a little worried you'd bolt last minute."

"Yeah," Bucky jokes, a coy smirk on his face. "Not going to lie I was thinking about it."

Steve pretends to look hurt, putting a hand on his heart. "I'm wounded."

Bucky smiles, and as he opens his mouth to speak, Steve cuts in. "No, me first. Okay. So. I'm from Brooklyn, born and raised. I'm conditioned to hate everywhere else, as a result. Honestly, it's a wonder I'm here now. My middle name is Grant. My mother's name is Sarah O'Connoll, and when she met my dad- Joseph- she became a Rogers, obviously. Mom was from Ireland- a place called Kerry- and she came to America for temporary work but, obviously that changed when she met my dad," He smiles, and Bucky can feel his blood rush through his body as he sees how happy Steve is. "Dad wasn't Irish, per se, but his parents were Irish too, so." He thinks for a second before continuing. "I went to Stanford, and straight after I got my M.D degree I signed up for a tour and that's how I found myself in Afghanistan. I, uh..." His brow furrows and something flashes in his eyes that Bucky can't quite catch but decides not to dwell on it. "I've been working in London for the last few years."

That makes Bucky's eyebrows shoot up. "Why'd you leave?"

Steve waves his hand. "Ah. Wanted a change- Needed one, even. Something came up, and I..." He shakes his head. "Anyway. Nick was a friend so he offered me a place at SHIELD and that's how I got here. My favourite colour is blue- indigo, not light blue. Eh..." It's amazing, really to see Steve like this. Rooting through his memories and searching for something to say.
"Oh! I love New York pizza, it's my favourite. Favourite alcoholic beverage is really old, strong scotch. The guys in my unit used to call me Captain America, I have no idea why. First concert was U2 in '97..."

"Favourite memory?" Bucky prompts when he trails off.

"Oh, when my mom brought me to Coney Island, hands down. It was the first, you know, 'fun' thing we had done since she had to pick up another shift at the hospital to pay for rent and stuff, so we didn't have much money left over for other stuff, if at all. And she brought me out, and we rode the cyclone and..."

Bucky can't really concentrate on what Steve's saying, not right now anyway, with the realisation that yes, he is absolutely, one hundred percent in love with Steven Grant Rogers.

It's... oddly not as daunting as he thought it would be. It keeps spinning around his head, I love him, I love him, I love him. He wants to shout it from the rooftops and breath it against Steve's skin. But instead he'll just smile and keep it to himself for now. He'll tell him soon- But this moment is his.

And he's pretty sure of it with the leap his heart does when Steve looks into his eyes and says "...And when I saw you at the bar I felt as though I'd miss you if I didn't talk to you."

~*~

Darcy rubs her eyes blearily as she walks down the hall. It's already 10:45 and she stupidly signed up for the 3 a.m shift. She's not bothered to go home (because effort) so she decides instead that she'll crash in an on call room instead.

She opens the door and instead of finding a nice, comfortable bed waiting for her, she finds- Loki. Who is shirtless. And toned- surprisingly so.

"I-" He begins, but cuts himself off, and they're staring at each other. And Darcy is definitely not as tired as she was a minute ago.

"Thanks for the coffee," She says softly, and takes a step closer. He walks over and closes the door behind her.

They're close, very very close, his head is bent down so their noses are brushing, and breathes mingling.

"Of course," he answers and-

His hands are running through her hair and he's kissing her and his body is pressed against hers and she locks manages to lock the door but all she wants is for Loki to keep touching her.

Judging by the way his hand grip her waist, he'll oblige her.

Chapter End Notes

*Laparoscopic- A laparoscopic surgery is a minimally invasive surgery, which means an abortion couldn't have been preformed through the keyhole incisions. Hemopneumothorax- accumulation of blood in the chest cavity.
CBC- a total blood count which counts your red and white blood cells.
Resect- to remove something with a scalpel
Pressors- a drug used to raise blood pressure
Amiodarone- used when the heart has an arythmia

If you guys could leave comments that would be great!

You can find me on tumblr [here](http://example.com)!
This is us, this is love, and this is where I sleep

Chapter Notes

Title from Emeli Sandé's 'Where I sleep.'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

An introspective first person interview, with James Buchanan Barnes, part the first.

Here's the thing about love- you can call me Bucky, by the way, Jesus, don't call me James- anyway, the thing about love. The thing about love is, is you don't really know what it is until you know what it is. You know? And it's in one of those things where you're out or you're in and there's no in between. You're never maybe in love with someone, you either don't love them- in which case you probably just feel bad about having to break up with the fella, or some other horrible shit you do. But the thing is. The thing is- and I had never really got this until now is- love is it. As in, all your other relationships, some that were fun and some that maybe weren't that much and some that left one of you with a broken heart, (I got around in college, okay? So sue me. Jeez.) they all seem grey in comparison. Just. Nothing, I guess. A practice for this time, because this time you know it's the real thing.

I've loved people before- I'm talking romance here, I'm talking about my ex Shaun (who was a total dickbag), another ex Kyle (he could pull some pretty shitty moves) and my other ex Chris (a pretty decent guy, actually, all in all. Yes, let the choirs sing out, my taste in men isn't actually that atrocious.)- but here's what's funny, what fucking tickles me pink.

It wasn't really love.

Not really, not when I got right down to it. Infatuation, sure, attraction, definitely. But love? Not in a million years. I mean, I can't blame myself. And I don't regret thinking that it was love, because at the time it was the closest thing I had ever come to tasting what love was, and if I had denied myself that then I'd probably be miserable because I couldn't figure out what this thing was that I was feeling for Steve.

It's love, by the way.

Yeah. It's some time early in the morning still- I dragged Steve back to my place after the restaurant, loved him hard and loved him raw, and now he's sleeping soundly beside me.

He had blinked groggily at me before he dozed off, smiled and murmured something I couldn't quite catch, but. But I looked at him and I thought about my life- my shitty life that's left me high and dry too many times to count- and it's worth it. Everything I've ever done, every mistake I've made, every horrible and wonderful thing that's happened to me, it's worth it. It's worth it, because it still brought me Steve.

It's worth it because it made me into the man I am today- and I'm not great, trust me on that, I'm probably a therapists wet dream- and where previously I would have seen the me who I am and the me who I wanted to be, and spiralled down, down, into the rabbit hole that is anxiety because I just didn't know how to get there, how to become that man.
But now? Now I'll smile into Steve's blonde hair, and hold him close and hold him tight, because I think what I was missing all that time, was Steve. Not him, exactly but. You know- love. I guess. With him, with what I feel for him, I feel like I could do anything. Climb Everest in a day, that sorta stuff.

And I'm looking at myself in the mirror, and I'm seeing myself, and where I would have scowled at the way my hair stands up in all manor of weird ways, now I'll grin a little because I remember how Steve likes to run his hands through it.

There's a one sole reason I became a doctor and not a writer, and that is because I'm the least articulate person you'll meet- but I digress. Anyway, I guess what it is, is that I love Steve- I do, God, I do love him and I feel fucking free- and by loving him I'm starting to love myself.

I think that's what love is, isn't it? It's not selfish, it's all about the us.

I love us.

I really do, Steve.

Chapter End Notes

So this is I thing that will be happening at intervals throughout the story- we'll have Bucky's reflections on big events, moments in his life that lead him to some big choice etc. Let me know what you guys thought of it! If you hated it, tell me! If you loved it, tell me! If you think there's anyway I can improve this fic, tell me!

Chapter 8 is posted as well so check that out!

I'm here! on tumblr so you should come talk to me there!
Don't want to give you all my troubles, don't want to give you all my demons
(But tonight, I need you to stay.)

Chapter Notes

Two chapters in a day?! I'm spoiling you. And this is a non-medical chapter! (Kinda.)

Idk how this happened, tbh, but it did.

Title is from The Run and Go by Twenty One Pilots. I've just gotten into them and I am IN LOVE with their music it really suits the fic in so many ways.

Anyways, here! Have some fluff!

Haha it's not going to last.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve's breath is hot against the skin on his collarbone, and his fingers dig into Bucky's hips.

"Bucky," he rasps, reverent, as if he's something to be worshipped.

Steve lifts his head up from where he had been sucking the skin on Bucky's neck.

He cups Bucky's face, his own a mask of sincerity-

"Bucky, I love you."

Bucky's eyebrows shoot up. "I do," Steve continues. "I love you so so much-"

He goes on, but Bucky can't concentrate because he can't open his mouth to answer he can't speak-

"Bucky? Bucky-!"

He's shaking, he can't help himself, his body betraying him-

"Bucky!" Another sharp jolt and-

His eyes snap open, and looks over to where he sees Steve lying propped up beside him. He takes a deep breath in, rubbing his eyes.

Ah reality. A heartless bitch.

"Bastard," he mumbles sleepily, his body still not fully alert. "Woke me up from a damn good dream."

And what a dream it was. So vivid, so perfect. That, admittedly, should have been his first clue that it wasn't real. Bucky's life is far from perfect.

(Then again, Steve is proving to be an exception to this rule).
"Sorry," Steve says apologetically, but there's a serene smile on his face. "Not the best wake up call, I know, but I actually have to get to work on time today."

Bucky takes another look at him, and he nearly wants to let out a sigh of disbelief. It's pretty much accepted by every human on the planet that everyone looks their worst in the morning. For example- when Bucky wakes up, he tends to look like he's just crawled out of a trash can after night partying.

But Steve? He looks like a freaking bunny. His hair is fluffy and his eyes are bright and blue. He looks perfect.

He's well aware that Steve is gorgeous nearly all of the time but even in the morning? Really?

Like Bucky said, he's an exception to the rules.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Steve says, wrapping an arm around Bucky's waist and pulling him to his chest, their noses brushing gently and their legs entwined.

"You're too handsome," he pouts. "Way to give a guy a confidence booster."

Steve chuckles, leaning down to give him a tender kiss.

"Should see yourself," he mumbles against Bucky's lips.

Bucky grins, and wraps his arms around Steve's neck.

It's a blissful few minutes, Steve's hands roaming Bucky's body and tongue promising something more when-

BEEP! BEEP!

Steve breaks away and sighs, head dropping on Bucky's chest in frustration. His arms only tighten around Bucky's waist as he twists to turn the damn alarm off.

When Bucky flops back down onto the bed, facing Steve, he can't help but smile.

"What're you smiling about?"

Steve grins.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," He answers loftily, as he plays with the hair on the nape of Steve's neck. And then- just because he can- he wraps his arms around Steve's back, pulling him in for a hug. "Have a good day at work today," he whispers into the side of his throat.

"You too," Steve replies quietly against his jaw, pressing a chaste kiss there before rolling off of Bucky and grabbing his boxers from the floor and putting them on.

While Steve goes about getting ready and dressed, Bucky allows himself a few more lovely seconds lounging in his comfortable, warm bed watching as Steve gives him a lovely show of his ass.

Steve flicks a dirty sock at him, landing square on his face. "C'mon, Buck. Up and at 'em."
Plucking the sock up and flinging back in Steve's direction, Bucky let out an over-exaggerated sigh and heaved himself off of the bed.

"I literally don't have the mental strength for today," He mutters as he shoves his scrub bottoms on.

"You have a bad surgery?" Steve asks as he sprays on deodorant.

Bucky shakes his head. "No, I just-" He catches himself, and just in time. He doesn't know why, exactly, he's still so freaked about the possibility about someone finding out his mother, but. He is. So Steve isn't going to find out for as long as Bucky can manage.

(Deep down, he thinks it might be the perfectionist she instilled in him- Get good grades, get better grades. Get into a good school, get into a better school. Mother knows best, and all that. And he doesn't like to remember the disappoint looks and the despairing speeches about how he was better than this- "You're better than a C, James! A C in biology? What is it about my teaching that's not getting across to you? How are you going to get into a good medical school with a C?"- and the weight on his chest to not fail. And he won't. He hasn't so far. He went to Dartmouth, and then Stanford, he graduated both first times, and now he's in SHIELD DC Hospital, which has one of the best internship programmes in America. He's not going to fail her on one trivial thing- to not tell anybody about her current disposition. He won't.)

"I just have a thing," he smiles, a little tightly, but it's enough to put Steve mostly at bay.

"Oh?"

"Yeah, yeah," Bucky waves him off as he shoves his sneakers on. "It'll only take an hour, max. I took the mid-morning shift, so."

Steve considers this for a second- and Bucky knows he's not stupid, knows Steve doesn't believe him completely- but nods his head anyway. "Okay, well, I hope it goes well for you."

"Thanks," he breathes, getting up and shrugging on a hoodie.

"You ready to face the firing squad?" Steve asks as he comes over, slinging his messenger bag over his shoulder. "Follow me into the jaws of death?"

Bucky huffs out a laugh. "You mean my friends? Never. But if the jaws of death have food, then I guess it's a sacrifice I'll just have to make," He says with mock-sombreness.

Steve's warm chuckle fills the room as he leans in to give Bucky a peck. "I knew you had your priorities straight."

Opening the door, the begin to walk to the stairs in silence nearer to the noises coming from the kitchen, but when they get to the top of the landing, Steve stops Bucky, catching his wrist just before he begins to walk down the stairs.

"Buck... You know you can tell me anything, right?" He asks, concern in his eyes.

"Yes- yeah. I do," He studies Steve for just a second, titling his head to the side. "You know the same goes for you, yeah?"

Something flashes in Steve's eyes so fast Bucky can't catch it, but he knows it was there. "Yeah, 'course," he answers, but Bucky's smart too. And he doesn't miss the way Steve's shoulders tense.

(They both have skeletons in their closets, he had guessed at the time, and let it go. He just hadn't
thought they'd come out to play so soon.)

"Okay that," Darcy says breathlessly as she re-does the clasps on her bra for the second time today. "Was definitely worth being late."

"Would you like some coffee?" Loki asks as he rolls out of the bed, shoving on his boxers that hang loosely from his hips.

"Yeah sure, if you're making some." With her answer, he nods his head, and as he walks over to the coffee maker in the corner of the on call room, Darcy notices how ramrod straight his back is, how his jaw is in the constant motion of clenching and unclenching, how tense he is. And he sure as hell wasn't that tense ten minutes ago when his tongue was exploring her mouth.

She does get it, though. He's her boss, she's his intern. There was no accidental misunderstanding beforehand like with Steve and Bucky, there was always, always a professional relationship between them, and Loki was damn sure to remind her of it.

("I don't do this-" he breaths as he presses fleeting kisses down her stomach.
"I know, I know-" Darcy begins, but she's cut off by a gasp escaping her lips.
"No, really, I've never done this before with an intern-"
"Oh my god it's fine just shut up and-")

And she can't say she's thrilled about it either. Don't get her wrong, the sex is amazing (otherworldly, even), but honestly. Of all the guys she could have slept with, she chose Loki? The same asshat who'll have her running around the hospital trying to finish forty three tasks in under twenty minutes and spin some plates while she's at it? (She hates the work he gives her, sure. But she'll still go home and know it was worth it. Know that it was horrible while doing it, but she did it, and she's saved lives because of it.)

She chose the doctor who she will bitch about relentlessly? She had to chose that guy?

Of course she did. Because Darcy Lewis does not ever take the easy route. It's not voluntary, she just realises half way through that she has made this twice as hard as it needs to be. Like the way that she woke up last night, tangled up in a mess that consisted of her and Loki's limbs, and was greeted with the sudden shock of 'shit, I've slept with Loki'.

In her defense, she was completely prepared to wake up in the morning and have the polite-but-awkward conversation about how, well, this was lovely but let's never speak of or do this again, and all would have been well. But no, instead of waking up to the alarm on her phone, like she had planned, she woken up to Loki slowly dusting kisses down her spine. And that was that plan out the window.

But now only the coffee maker provided a soundtrack to the moment, and a heavy, awkward silence settled between them.

Darcy tied the laces on her shoes as she debated something to say. Does she wham-bam-thank-you-ma'm him? Do they have a deep personal discussion about their true feelings like something from Dr. Phil? Does she say "Thanks for the sex! It was really great!"? 

She could always lie. Lie and be done with it. A swift, somewhat clean break that, let's face it, would leave no one heartbroken over. (Maybe a little mournful over the loss of admittedly mind-blowing sex). She could tell him she actually has a boyfriend in Canada. That sleeping with him will mess up her aura, or that she's actually just a ghost, or something else so ridiculous it would
leave him speechless long enough for her to slip out and never come back. Maybe she just shouldn't say anything. If she walks out right now, that would most likely put an end to it. He'd get the message, he's smart like that. She could even-

"I think it's safe to assume that this shouldn't happen again." The words are cold, like the first time she had met him, and they cut through her thoughts like a scalpel through skin.

It almost made her want to laugh, how simple he put it. And yet. The more he pulled away- and she could see it, right now, as his eyes glazed over and his arms crossed tightly over his chest- the more she wanted to pull him back. Her point remains- she doesn't make shit easy for herself.

"I- Okay," She answers, for some reason taken aback by his abruptness, and not sure why. (It's not like she wants to deal with all the secretive shit Bucky has to put up because of Steve. That being said, she wants amazing sex, too. Because if she's honest? The universe kind of owes her one. It's the least it can do in return for her, you know. Saving it's only known inhabitants).

She looks up at him from where her eyes had been focused on her shoes, and he cringes after a second.

"It's not you- I mean, that was- You know. Really good. But I," He sighs and scrubs his face, looking utterly done with life and this shit. "I have to still be able to teach you," He enunciates as he rubs his eyes. "Do you- Do you understand? It's not personal, really. If this-" He waves a hand between them. ":- didn't get in the way of our professional lives, then I'm sure the outcome would be different." He's giving her a look laced with a distant pitied.

"It's fine," She says, a little curtly. "It'll mess with the whole teacher-student thing, I get it." She wants say that it doesn't mess with Steve and Bucky, that it doesn't mess with them. But she doesn't, of course she doesn't, because it's a horrible thing to do and her mouth feels like it's stuck together with glue, but if she keeps her eyes focused on the door she's walking to and her mind on moving her feet, that should stop her from doing something. She's not sure what.

"You're coffee isn't finished yet," He says softly, as she strides towards the door.

Hand on the doorknob, she turns to look to look back at him. "I don't think I need it anymore."

~*~

The kitchen, as always, resembles a zoo. Loud noises and foreign sounds, but on the plus side, today the kitchen is filled with the delicious smells of eggs and toast and bacon. Bucky takes a tentative sniff as he walks in. "Why are we cooking breakfast? We've never done that before." He slings his backpack down at the door frame and Steve follows suit while Bucky goes over to inspect what Jane is frying in a pan.

"Because for the first time maybe ever, we have a good chunk of the morning off. And a good day starts with a good breakfast. Now. How do you want your eggs?"

"Fried," Bucky answers, tacking a 'please' at the end, and Clint answers the same.

Jane looks at Steve. "How would you like your eggs?" She's still not sure what to call him- Steve? Dr. Rogers? She just won't call him anything for now and hope for the best.

"Uh, scrambled, please? I understand if it's a hustle."
"No, no, that's fine. I was going to have mine the same," she re-assures him cheerfully, because in the morning Jane is the only living one of them, while Bucky, Darcy and Clint trawl around like zombies until they've been filled with appropriate amount of caffeine. Jane and Steve should get on great, then, he thinks absently, and then hones in on the feeling that something is missing... Of course, once he scans the kitchen he notices it immediately. Darcy isn't standing at the coffee machine arguing over who gets the first cup like she usually does with Clint.

"Where's Darcy?" He asks as he pops a blueberry into his mouth.

Jane shrugs. "She texted and me said she had been roped into a shift till 3 a.m, and decided to sleep at the hospital instead- Here take your eggs."

Bucky nods, and then gives Jane a kiss on the cheek as he takes the plate from her. "Thank you, I love you."

He and Clint sit at the table, piling toast and bacon onto their plates, while Steve watches as Jane prepares their scrambled eggs, to which Bucky wrinkles his nose at the prospect.

"You like scrambled eggs?" He enquires distastefully.

"You don't?" Steve answers, and when Bucky shakes his head 'no', Steve's eyebrows shoot up.

"But how can you not? They're the prefect, all round food. You can have them for breakfast, lunch, dinner. I had this every morning when I was in basic training."

"And you didn't get bored of them?" Clint asks.

Steve grins. "Hell no. You can have them with, toast, ketchup, avocados..."

"Okay, no. Seriously, Steve, that's disgusting I can't believe I let you kiss me." Bucky twists up his mouth into a sour line because eggs and avocados? Disgusting.

"You just have uneducated taste buds, is all- Thank you," He says as he takes the plate from Jane and sits down beside Bucky at the table.

"I still can't believe you like scrambled eggs," Bucky mutters as he sips his coffee.

"I still can't believe you sucked me off twice last night," Steve deadpans.

Clint sprays his coffee everywhere.

~*~

Bucky finally pulls up at Knights Bridge home for the elderly, having said goodbye to Steve with a chaste kiss and telling Jane and Clint that he'll see them tonight.

Having the morning off with Steve had been wonderful and warm and cosy, but now, staring at the large, red brick building, a familiar knot of nerves settles on top of his chest, and the remnants this morning fled from his mind.

Sighing, he gets out of the car and locks it behind him, hands shoved into his jeans as he walks. It's still early, only 10:00, and Bucky's not due in until 12, so he won't be in much of a rush. Which, depending on his mother's state of mind, can be a blessing and a curse.

The automatic doors open for him, leading him into the reception area and up to the desk.
“Hey, Beatrice,” He greets the receptionist, a middle-aged women who's convinced that he makes up his stories about not being able to come in due to surgeries or work. She peers at him from under her glasses a little disapprovingly, and hands over the visitor register.

“How is she today?” He asks as he scrawls his signature.

“I haven't seen her today yet, so I couldn't tell you. But she was lucid last night, and it can sometimes carry through to the morning,” she answers.

Bucky puts the pen down and gives her a polite smile. "I'll see you later," He says as way of a goodbye, and starts to make his way through the familiar maze of corridors to his mothers' room. A familiar weight presses down on him, his serves frayed as he wonders if she'll remember him, or if she'll be her usual self.

Her usual self.

That alone is enough to make him want to turn and run.

Truth be told, the last time he visited his mother, had been one of the first times he had really, truly seen her.

When Bucky was twelve years old, his mom had been asked by SHIELD to be their head of surgery. This, of course, came burdened with all kinds of responsibilities that had previously never touched her- such as scheduling each surgery, overseeing each of them, filling out file after file after file, upon other work. It was only a matter of time before his mother's work began to eat and eat away at her, till her soft edges became hard. Six months in, one failed attempt at heating up leftover spaghetti and one burnt microwave later, Bucky was sent off to be cared for by his ‘Aunty’ May, who a nurse at the hospital, and had a nephew, Peter, only one year Bucky's junior so they got on like a house on fire. When his mother first started out at DC SHIELD, her and May had become fast friends. So when work got too much, as it nearly always did, that meant there was no one to take Bucky home, or feed him something relatively healthy, or hell, even check on his homework, so his mother enlisted the help of May. She was paid $20 a day, in return for bringing Bucky back to her house after her shift was done at the hospital, feeding him and then dropping him back to his house at 8:30 every night. Eventually, he stared seeing more of May and less of his mother.

He still remembers the dread that pulled in the pit of his stomach as she approached his house in her beat-up car, remembers how he would shudder each time he entered the house, hit by the coldness that lived within his house compared to the warmth that seemed to be built into the foundation of May's. He remembers the despair that would wash over him when his Mother was free to take him home, and that meant no playing with Peter, or May's casserole for dinner. It meant his mother leaving him to his own devices to ‘play’, and microwave-warmed, lumpy leftover lasagne.

And the more he grew, the more his mother pushed. Pushed him into become a surgeon, pushed him to impress her time and time again, pushed him to be extraordinary. And the more his mother pushed, the more he retreated into May, and realised one day after his mother had given him a stiff, awkward hug, that May was more of a...someone to him than his mother had ever been. And it broke his heart, but it was true. It was May who made all his dinners, who helped him through algebra and got him that damn A in biology, who brought him to the cinema on Saturday evenings and helped him write his college entrance essays. It was May who was there, front and centre on his graduation day, smiling widely as if he were her own son, and his mother who sat beside her, a tight smile on her face, but never breaking the mask that she wore so well.

(So, his mother pulled away. So did Bucky. And it's okay, it's fine.)
It defined Bucky. It destroyed him.

When he sees his mother, she'll break his heart in one of three ways- she'll remember him, and grill him to no end about school, she won't remember him, and he'll have to spend the visit putting up with suspicious glances and terse conversation, or she will remember him. She will remember him, and she'll be herself, warm and affectionate, and everything that he loved about her that her work fed off of, that ebbed away slowly until Bucky comes home one night sixteen years old and realises as they're eating that his mother, the same woman who tucked him in at night and had the patience of a saint is well and truly gone.

She'll break his heart in one of three ways, but she'll still break his heart no matter what.

As that thought flies through his head, he arrives outside her room, the door ajar. He inhales a deep breath, and then gently knocks on her door, peaking his head in to try to gauge her reaction.

"Mom?"

Her head whips up, eyes razor sharp.

"Who are you?"

He lets out a quiet but heavy sigh, trying to cushion the blow of the punch to his heart.

He takes a tentative step forward, knowing full well not to push her when she's like this.

"My name is James Buchanan Barnes, I'm your son," He explains softly, the words too familiar to him.

His mother's face contorts into a look of shock. "I don't have a son. I'm only just married, I-" She cuts herself off, eyes dancing wildly as she tries to navigate her way through her maze of a mind, finding nothing but jagged edges and dead ends. "I, no- I'm a doctor, a surgeon," She insists as he sits in front of her. "I am nobody's mother, do you understand?" Her voice is determined, but she falters towards the end, as she tries to decipher what's true and what's false.

Bucky nods, tries to be understanding, but god, it's still hard. "Yes," he answers. "Yeah, I do."

He leans forward to take her hand, but as the tips of his fingers brush her knuckles, she yanks her hand back, clutching it close to her chest. "How dare you!" She spits, eyes alight with fire. "Who are you?" She demands. "How did you get into my room?"

"I've been here for the past few minutes-"

"No you haven't! Do you think I'm stupid?"

"Listen to me, listen to me-" He says gently over her ranting, but he can already tell it will be for nothing. "I'm your son. Do you remember me? I'm Bucky, I'm your son."

"I don't have a son!" She yells.

Suddenly, a nurse comes rushing in, and takes one look at Bucky, before motioning for him to leave the room. As he retreats he hears his mother's voice slowly come down from a yell, and eventually he can't hear much else apart from indecipherable comforting murmuring from the nurse.
He leans his head against the cool wall, pressing his palms against the plaster and taking a deep breath in, and slowly out, trying not to let the seizing in his chest get the better of him. It's gotten a little easier to deal with episodes like that, but it's never easy.

"We have to talk about her will." He nearly jumps out of his skin when the voice cuts through his relative quiet.

When he turns to face the person from which the words emanated, he see's Tabitha, his mother's consultant, a tall, imposing woman with crow's feet at the corner of her eyes and lines surrounding her mouth, etched into her chocolate skin.

"That bad?" He sighs.

Her mouth twists into something sympathetic- halfway between a grimace and a smile- and she shrugs. "Her moments of lucidness are becoming fewer and far between. We need to get her will certified before her condition progresses and worsens."

Bucky pinches the bridge of his nose and squeezes his eyes together. "Um, okay. I, uh." He scrubs his face, before opening his eyes and flicking his wrist up to check the time on his watch. Quarter to nine. "My shift will be over at six-"

"In the evening?"

He gives her a wry grin. "In the morning. But lunch break is at three for about an hour give or take that state of my patients- How long do those things take, do you know?"

She purses her mouth. "Depends on what's being done, the financial state, properties... Usually, at least an hour."

"Damn," Bucky breaths. "Okay, so lunch is off the table. Give me a call anytime from six tomorrow, I guess. I'll try to make it, but, you know. Being a doctor, my life isn't always mine."

She gives him a quick pat on the shoulder, before ushering him away from the room. "I understand that, Mr. Barnes, but your mother's mental state is very fragile at the moment, as I'm sure you can see. You have to understand that soon she will have little to no lucid episodes. You have to take these moments as they come, use them for important things like this but also..." She trails off, and Bucky turns to look at her.

"And also what?"

"Well, cherish them."

"I do cherish them," Bucky says, but the response is tired, it's an argument he's with himself and the staff countless times. "But god, I'm a medical intern, and there are only so many hours in a day. Not to mention, she hardly remembers me as it is. I've only seen her fully lucid and aware once in the past month."

Tabitha shakes her head. "You have to start coming at more accessible times. I understand your work is demanding, but I really recommend taking a day off, or even re-arranging your work schedule to try to come between afternoon and evening. She is lucid for a time a few times during the week, Mr. Barnes, you just always miss it."

Bucky snorts. "Look, I try, I really do. But I've already given my life to a career that my mother wanted for me, I can't let her jeopardise this, not now. But I mean. God, I come when I'm free. At least once a week- I'm trying, you know? It might not win me son-of-the-year award, but it's my
Tabitha nods, and is silent for a moment before she speaks again. "You know, Mr. Barnes, you've missed the past five family dinners. In fact, you've missed all of them. Every Thursday at seven—don't you think you could try to make that? At least once?"

"Look, I appreciate the sentiment, but you see what she's like. I'd really rather not to have to sit beside her like a stranger on a train for an entire dinner."

"Well, it's a pity you'll miss out. Winifred has been fully lucid for the past few we've had."

That makes Bucky stop in his tracks. "What?"

"She's been sitting at her table every Thursday asking when her son James is going to come. Admittedly, sometimes she floats in and out of it, but sometimes it holds for a few hours." At his probably stunned expression, she pats him on the arm and her voice softens. "I really do think that coming to one of our family events would be beneficial to both you and your mother. Why don't you think about it, hmm?"

Bucky nods his head, a little dazed. And guilty, he supposes. Then again, he is a surgical intern. He barely has enough time for himself as it is.

Tabitha flips open her chart and scans through it before shutting it again. "Now, about your mother's legal aid..."

~*~

"It doesn't taste right," Natasha moans, throwing her roll-type thing into her container.

"Are you kidding me?" Clint exclaims around a mouthful of the stuffed bread. "This is delicious! What'd you say they were called?"

"Piroshki," She answers.

"Let me see what all the fuss is about." Bucky leans over and plucks one from the Tupperware. Sitting back down, he takes a bite, and immediately his mouth is filled with oozing, delicious Swiss cheese and roasted onions. "Natasha," He moans. "This is the best thing I have ever tasted."

"Careful, Steve might get jealous," Jane quips as she takes one as well.

Bucky rolls his eyes so hard it nearly hurts before turning back to Natasha. "What's the matter with them? This is divine."

"They just don't taste the same," She answers glumly, picking a piece of flaky pastry. "My mom used to make them all the time, but they're not right. I've looked through the recipe countless times, and I can't see what I'm doing wrong."

"You're not doing anything wrong," Clint says, as he takes another. "These are the best things ever. It probably just tastes different because you haven't had one for a while."

Natasha shakes her head, and chews her lip. "That's not it, I'd know if that was it."

Clint shrugs. "Then just ring your mom and ask her."

Natasha frowns. "No," She says. "I can't do that."
"Why not?"

She straightens up and tucks back a stray piece of hair. "I just can't. " The words are clipped, and Clint shuts his mouth.

A silence settles between them for all of a few seconds before Darcy turns to him. "Where were you all this morning?" She asks, poking Bucky in the arm. "You left alone with Quill and all his shitty jokes. I had to fake laugh by myself, Barnes!"

"I know, I know, I'm sorry," He atones, holding his hands up. "But I had to sort some things out for my mom and then as soon as I came here I was called into the ER because some kid fell and I've spent the last hour plucking gravel out from her leg."

"It's okay, I forgive you," She smiles, and as she opens her mouth to say something, Bucky's pager starts beeping. Sighing, he takes it out and checks it.

"Damn, Quill wants me. Gotta go." He takes his nearly empty container of salad and salutes them, before turning and walking from the lunchroom, and making his way to the children's ward.

~*~

"Barnes!" Quill yells from down the hall, approaching him.

"Yes sir?" Bucky says as he turns and walks towards Dr. Quill.

"What's your diagnoses for Tyler?" He asks, taking Bucky's chart from his hands and scanning through it.

"Appendicitis. I examined the abdomen and he was having severe pain on his right side. I also did a CTC and that confirmed it."

Quill cocks his head as he examines one of Bucky's notes. "Good, good," He says absentmindedly, before snapping it closed and handing it back to him. "Book an O.R, would you?"

"Sure. What time?"

"Say anytime from twelve tomorrow morning, it's not far progressed and we need time to let any liquids and food he took in today get out of his system. You're leading this case, Barnes, I expect everything to be done well, got it?"

Bucky nods. "Book the O.R, talk to the patient and the family, assemble a team, prep the O.R, do surgery."

Quill smirks. "Top of the class, Barnes. I'll see you at seven," He calls from over his shoulder as he turns right, while Bucky goes left to the nurses' station.

He slinks through the hustle and bustle of the nurses going to and from all directions, handing over charts and stats like it was nobodies business.

Eventually coming to the desk, he taps his fingers on the smooth wood. "Can I book an O.R please?"

"Procedure?"

"Appendectomy."
“Surgeon?”
“Dr. Quill.”
“Time?”
“Is twelve free?”
“No, but you can have 1:30. Fill these out,” And with that, a stack of papers are slammed in front of him. Before his hands can take the forms to fill out (and in the midst, lose the will to live), a shrill voice calls out “Dr. Barnes? There’s a Ms. Josephs on the line for you.”

Quirking his eyebrows, he walks over to the nurse at the far end of the desk and takes the phone from her.

“Dr. James Barnes speaking,” He says into the receiver.

“Mr. Barnes, this is Tabitha from Knights Bridge. Are you free to talk for a moment?”

“Um- yeah, I guess,” He replies, rubbing his forehead. “I just- Can I ask how you got this number.”

“You forget, Mr. Barnes, that we work with a lot of your patients post or pre-op,” She answers, and he can hear a hint of a smile in her words.

“Oh, yes. Of course. Anyway, what was it that you wanted to talk about?”

“Well I’ve talked to the lawyer and the legal aid and we were wondering if any time from ten o’clock tomorrow suits you?”

Bucky scratches the back of his neck. “Yes, yeah. That’s fine. And you’ll be there to act as a second witness?”

“I will.”

“And do I need to bring anything- Forms, identification?”

“A form that proves your mother’s ownership of the house, and a form of identification for youself.”

“Okay.” Bucky lets out a breath. “Okay.”

“Well, I’ll let you get back to your work. I’ll see you tomorrow, Mr. Barnes.”

“Yes, see you tomorrow,” He answers.

Bucky drops his head into his hands, taking a brief second to go from Bucky Barnes, son, to Bucky Barnes, doctor. After a minute, he forces himself up from where he was resting on his forearms against the desk, and goes to get those damn forms.

He hefts them up, and holds them close to his chest as he walks to wherever the next free gurney is to settle in for a long hour of paperwork.

“Hey,” Steve calls, from where he’s leaning against a wall, checking his pager. “How’s it going?” He asks as he pushes himself off the wall and takes some of the files from Bucky’s pile.

“As well as it could for a stressed out intern,” He answers.
A crease appears in Steve's brow. "What's the matter?"

Bucky gives him a wry grin, before taking back the files he had taken. "I grew up. How did that happen?" He turns the corner, but not before looking back at Steve. "And how do I make it stop?"

~*~

Bucky releases the heavy breath he had been holding for the entire operation and rubs his eyes as he walks down the hall, the fluorescent lights assaulting his tired eyes.

"Barnes, good job in there!" Quill says as he walks past him. "Do me a favour and stay on call until you're shift's over?"

"No problem, Dr. Quill," He answers, trying to not to sound as tired as he feels. Judging by Quill's somewhat sympathetic smirk, he doesn't do a very good job.

Yawning, he continues on his way, exiting the hall of operating theatres and into the second floor. Pushing open the doors, Bucky walks down two flights of stairs before coming at the first floor, and immediately making a beeline for the on call rooms. He shoves the door open and closes it behind him, then promptly collapsing onto the bed, tiredness already beginning to make his eyes shut.

However, his eyes open when the door opens, briefly dispelling the grogginess that clouded his mind.

Sitting up, he's fully prepared to fight someone for the bed, but when he looks up, Steve's figure is eclipsing his vision.

"Hey," He says, voice scratchy. "What're you doing here?"

"What? I can't want to spend time with my fella?"

"Fella," Bucky chuckles quietly, sinking deeper into the bed. "Get out of the 40's, Stevie."

Steve huffs out a laugh, and takes Bucky's hand, pressing kisses into each of his knuckles.

"Stay," Bucky whispers. "Would you just stay with me?"

"What's in it for me?" He teases lightly, before leaning over and cupping the back of Bucky's neck. "'Course I'll stay, Buck. I'll follow you anywhere."

"Even into the jaws of death, right?" He murmurs, sleep already dragging him under.

"Even into the jaws of death." And then Steve gives him a gentle, soft kiss.

Bucky's enjoying, and as he wraps his arms around Steve to make it deeper, two things happen very quickly after.

The first thing- The door flies open. At the sound, Steve yanks back.

The second thing- Bucky opens his eyes to see Dr. Hill standing at the door, eyes blazing.

Bucky is suddenly very much awake.

~*~
Steve is going to break his heart in one of three ways- he'll either fall in love with Bucky as well, and Bucky will spend the rest of his life living in Steve's life, and terrified of the dark he'll leave if he ever goes, or he'll fall in love with Bucky, and Bucky of course will love him back, but they'll end up with broken hearts anyway, or that damn skeleton in Steve's closet that Bucky thought he glimpsed this morning will begin to dance.

Steve will break his heart in one of three ways. But he'll still break his heart.

Chapter End Notes

I'm here! on tumblr so you should come talk to me there!

(And give out to me for that cliffhanger because I'll admit it was fucking mean of me.)

Please leave a comment! I'd love to know what you guys think, and your thoughts on the chapters. And if you guys have any suggestions about the fic at all- e.g a playlist etc, where you see a storyline going etc.- DEAR GOD please tell me because I live for that stuff I really do.

And to those of you who are commenting and kudosing and generally being amazing with your support-

Thank you. So much.
Damn your kiss and the awful things you do (Your love's a fucking drag)

Chapter Notes

WOW nearly two months since the last update go me. I'm really sorry about the wait guys. But school's crazy busy, I had a really bad case of writer's block, and I've got loads of other stuff that I need to work but in terms of the many many many fics I'm working on at the minute (oops) DITOR now has some priority until I get the back broken on this.

Slight warning in this one for stronger language than usual.

So anyways, the chapter title comes from Nicotine by Panic! At the disco.

Any mistakes are mine! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bucky shuffles into the hospital, which is already teeming with people, as the automatic doors slide open for him. His hood is pulled up, his hands shoved into his pockets and he's slightly hunched over as he walks.

He sighs. He's just back from finalising his Mother's will- as if that wasn't hard enough, and now he has to work a forty-eight hour shift. He had to sit there and watch her eye him with a hawk-like, piercing gaze as he signed the papers and let her half of her fortune go to him. After, there had been a stuff but polite conversation about how work is going. And then, of course, an awkward hug. It had Bucky's chest siezing- it didn't smell like his mother, barely even felt like her. The feather-light pat on the back was nothing compared to the bear-hugs he distantly remembers.

Nevermind that, but there's also the matter of fact that his boss- the direct overseer of pretty much every surgery and case he will ever get- knows about his relationship with Steve, and probably wants his head on a plate.

Bucky still remembers how her eyes had hardened, how something related to rage trickled into her glare.

(Bucky scrambled up from the bed where he had been lying.)

"Uh, Dr. Hill-" He begins but she quickly cuts him off.

"Get out, Barnes." Her voice is low, but it's certainly filled with anger.

Steve starts to get. "Maria-"

"You, stay," she snaps, pointing a Steve, and then turns her murderous glare to Bucky again. "You, out. Right now, Barnes. Go home. I'll deal with you tomorrow."

Bucky had scuttled out, head down, like a kicked dog. It hadn't been enough to drown out the rest of the conversation, though.
"What the hell do you think you're doing with him, Steve?"

"Maria, it's not-"

"He is an intern, Rogers! He is my intern under my care and your supervision. And more importantly he isn't much more than a child! How dare you!"

Trying to quell the wave of anxiety that overwhelms him, he focuses on his breathing, head down, counting his steps-

He walks head first into something hard and warm, and after a second large hands are gripping his shoulders. He squeezes his eyes shut for a second- he knows that aftershave, and he sure as hell knows those hands.

Stepping back and opening his eyes to look at the man, he sees a frown of worry etched into Steve’s brow.

“Hey, we need to talk-” He begins lowly, but Bucky cuts him off.

“No we don’t,” He says quickly, already walking around him.

“What do you mean?” Steve demands.

“I mean- I have to go. Now.” And with that, Bucky takes his leave, skirting past Steve and hightailing it for the changing rooms, ignoring Steve’s quiet protests.

~*~

Flinging his bag onto the benches underneath the lockers, Bucky lets out a heavy breath.

“What happened this time?” Natasha asks from where she’s sitting opposite him, popping a cherry into her mouth.

“Hill,” he answers.

“Oh?” Her eyebrows raise. “What does that mean?”

“It means-” Bucky hisses, yanking his shirt off over his head. “That me and Steve were in the on call room, kissing, and Hill walked in.”

The small, amused smile that had previously been playing on Natasha’s lips drops off immediately and she nearly chokes on her cherry stalk. Good.

“Wait what?”

Bucky nods. “Yeah. So. I mean- That happened. And I’m dealing with it-”

Before he can even finish that sentence, because God likes to look down at him and laugh, Hill storms in. "Barnes, on call room, now," Hill snaps.

And Bucky is most definitely not dealing with it. Shoving his clothes into his bag, he stuffs it into his locker and follows Hill out, into the on call room opposite where he had been changing seconds
before.

She whips around to look at him. "How long has it been going on?"

"I- What?"

"This thing between you and Dr. Rogers. How long has it been going on?"

Bucky’s face flames red and he feels like naughty child in elementary school. "About the past two months? A month and a half?"

Hill sighs. "Dammit," she mutters. She looks up at him. "What are you doing, Barnes? You could have had your pick of the interns, or the nurses- hell, even a resident and I might have let it go. But the head of trauma surgery? One of the most senior people here?" Bucky swallows, but she continues. "Is it because he gives you the best surgeries? Puts in a good word for you-"

"No, no," Bucky cuts her off. "God, no. It's nothing like that. I would never- it's not like that."

"It started as soon as you joined the hospital?"

Bucky shakes his head- not wanting Hill to think that Steve is some kind of creep that works his way through all the interns in the hospital. "No, before. We met at a bar the night before I started here- I didn't know who he was."

"Then why in god's name didn't you break it off? You're far from an idiot, Barnes, you must have known the consequences that would have occurred."

"I, well, um-" Bucky struggles for words before Maria huffs and crosses her arms.

"What are you, Barnes? You and Dr. Rogers, what are you?"

"I don't- What do you mean?"

Hill arches a perfectly sculpted eyebrow. "I mean, what is the relationship between you and Rogers. Are you in a no strings attached engagement? Are you boyfriends?"

"I don't- I don't know," Bucky finally mutter out.

Hill lets out a deep sigh, and Bucky doesn’t miss the hint of despair in it. "Well find out," She says after a second, but some of the venom has seeped out of her words. "Barnes-" She says his name without the usual hardness, and instead as a soft plea. "Please, just- Find out. For yourself, as much as your career. And if you and Dr. Rogers want to become a couple, then tell Fury, for the love of god. At least then we can avoid the sneaking around and paranoid glances. And it will be my head off the line."

Bucky knows what she’s not saying. That if they were to tell Fury, it would cushion the blow somewhat. If Fury knew, and agreed to it, he’d also be able to calm the beating hearts of both the board of directors and Steve and Bucky. That being said, there’s an even better chance that Fury won’t be on board with it and he and Steve will be asked to terminate the relationship.

“Bucky,” It’s the first time she’s said his first name, and he hates the way it sounds from her mouth. She says it with pity, with sorrow. “Do you… Are you sure that you know what you’re getting yourself into?” The anger in her voice has completely vanished, and it makes Bucky’s heart clench.
“Yes, yeah,” He answers, nodding his head. “It’s um- It’s what I want.”

She nods curtly, and knowing the conversation is over, he dismisses himself from the room. He just wishes his heart would stop pounding, and that his brain would stop reminding him that he doesn’t actually know what he’s getting himself into.

~*~

“Well?” Natasha asks urgently. “What did she say? She’s not going to tell Fury, is she?”

Bucky sighs, and shakes his head. “No, she just hates me with the passion of a thousand burning suns now, I guess.”

“Yeah but what did she say?”

“Just asked how long it’s been going on, stuff like that.” He leaves out the part where he was asked about the actual definition of their relationship, because Natasha would give him holy grief over that and demand an answer herself.

She looks at him, searching for something in his eyes for a few seconds, before nodding. “Well that’s not too bad, I guess.”

Before he can answer, Hill comes storming back up the hallway. “Romanoff, Odinson wants you on a consult in room 107. Barnes, you’ll join her after you give Nicholas in 3311 his meds, Mr. Mohler needs his IV re-inserted, and I want two grams of morphine with that, and check on my four post-ops, write them up if they’re ready to go and re-dress the incisions if they’re not. Now stop standing there gnomeless and go out there and save people! What the hell do you think we’re paying you for?” She snaps, already storming down the corridor way from them.

“Yeah,” Bucky sighs. “Not so bad. But that-” He jerks his thumb to where Hill is turning out of the hallway, “-Is.”

Natasha raises a perfectly sculpted eyebrow. “Hey, this must be your karma for taking a beautiful man from the cold, dead grasps of us singles. Beggars can’t be choosers.”

Bucky nods his head slowly. “Well, there are worse things in the world.”

“Damn straight!” Natasha calls from over her shoulder.

Honestly, it’s all very unfair, Bucky thinks as he makes his way down to check on the patients Hill gave him. Now, not only is his entire future in SHIELD in jeopardy because he couldn't keep it in his damn pants that one time, but Hill's punishing him for having a healthy and working libido. Which is unfair, really, because unless you're asexual or something, sex is an important and somewhat vital part of your life.

Fuck his life, seriously.

~*~

“Alex Duffy, twenty-seven and suffering from seizure activity. He’d been sent here for a medical evaluation to check on that before he could be sent back to the psych ward.”
“Why was he in the psych ward in the first place?” Bucky asks.

Loki turns back to the light-screen, where Alex Duffy’s brain scans are tacked up, and gestures to Natasha to explain. “He was put there by his family. They felt he was dangerous because he claims that he talks to dead people and has visions.”

Bucky’s eyebrows shoot up into his hairline. “What like a medium or something?”

“Or something,” Nat scoffs.

Loki steps away from the screen. “Personal thoughts on Mr. Duffy’s beliefs aside, we very clearly have a problem here. Barnes?”

Bucky leans towards the CT’s, scanning them quickly, until something catches his attention.

“This-“ He points to an ominous and unfathomable dark cluster on Duffy’s brain. “It’s… I don’t know. A deformed tumour?”

Loki makes an unimpressed face. “Wrong. It’s an AVM. Romanoff?”

“AVM stands for Arteriovenous Malfunction. It’s a tangle of poorly formed blood vessels, and have a higher rate of bleeding.”

He nods. “And how do we remove it?”

“The same way we remove a tumor- direct extraction. It seems to be on the surface, so no real risk when taking it out, but if we find it to be deeper, we’ll face problems.”

“Such as what, Dr. Barnes?”

“The deeper in the brain, the bigger the AVM is, the harder to take out. The AVM would have a more increased risk of sprawling a wider area, so when we take it out we risk damaging nerves and other vessels.”

“Exactly. I’ll go to schedule the OR, you two can break the news to Mr. Duffy. Come back to me with is charts as soon as you’re done.”

~*~

“Mr. Duffy, your seizures-“

“They’re not seizures,” he insists for what must be the tenth time. “They’re visions. I’m a psychic.”

‘And I’m Superman,’ Bucky thinks.

Natasha rolls her eyes. “Ok, Mr. Duffy, we’re going to start our workup now. Sit up for me please.”

He shifts in the bed, hauling himself up. “Do whatever the hell you want, it’s not gonna change the fact that I’m psychic. It’s a waste of your time.”

Bucky’s eyebrows hike as he looks up from Duffy’s chart. “Ok, well, humour us. Can you grip Dr. Romanoff’s fingers, please?”

As he goes to do so, Bucky sees his eyes glaze over, and his hands freeze, going into a trance-like state.
“Uh, Natasha?” He gestures towards Duffy with his pen, walking towards the bed.

“Mr. Duff?” She asks, checking his response levels. “Mr. Duff, are you ok?”

To Bucky’s relief, Alex opens his mouth and begins to speak. “Someone...” He whispers.

“Someone what?” Bucky prompts.

“Somebody’s going to die. Bye-bye.” With that, he sighs and blinks, lolling his head back onto his pillow.

“Oh, man, he's nuts,” Bucky blurts out.

Alex opens an eye to glare at him. “I'm dizzy, not deaf, buddy. And I'm telling you, someone on the fourth floor is gonna die.”

Before Bucky can move on, the PA system crackles on and announces- “Code blue* on level four, I repeat code blue on level four.”

Natasha’s eyes widen and Bucky’s snap up to meet hers.

Honestly. His life.

~*~

“Dr. Fury,” Loki greets, coming up beside Fury, facing the large board where all surgeries and their time and place were put.

“Dr. Odinson,” Fury nods. “Schedule whatever surgery you have but just make sure it doesn’t fuck up the board.” The fragile eco-system of the hospital and the things that went on revolved all around the board. Nick watched it like a hawk, making sure that not one second interfered with another surgery.

“I’ll make sure of it, sir. Stark has cancelled his op this morning at three, can I schedule it then?”

Nick squints his one good eye, studying the board. He leans closer and squints harder, until a prickle of concern spikes in Loki’s mind.

“It’s there,” He point to the now-empty slot, a few inches from where Nick had been looking.

“Of course,” Fury harrumphs, standing up straight again. “Go ahead, Odinson, the slot’s yours.”

Loki makes a satisfied noise, picks up the marker, and begins to jot down the details of the operation.

“Eye trouble?” He asks.

Nick crosses his arms over his chest. “Nothing a good night’s sleep will fix.”

Loki looks up, unimpressed with the blatant evasion Nick had thrown him.

“Are your eyes easily strained?”

“Yes.”

“Narrowed field of vision?”
“What are you implying, Odinson?”

Loki turns to Nick, face stoic. “I’m implying,” He says, voice low. “That you’re the chief of surgery in one of the most prestigious hospitals in the world. You’ve got countless years of knowledge and experience behind you. Surely a man of your stature should be able to spot the symptoms of a brain tumor, especially considering your previous complications.”

Nick stares at Loki, gaze just short of burning holes into his chiselled cheeks.

Loki stands back up, snapping his chart shut. “No one would have to know, either. Radiology room two will be free tonight at eleven. Oh-“ A wolfish grin takes on his face as he taps the empty slot. “-Looks like you’ll be free then, too.”

With that as his parting words, Loki turns and goes, Nick’s eyes following him like a hawk, and an unease settling in being, mixing well with the small niggle of anxiety that had been there previously.

~*~

“Dude’s a freaking psychic, then,” Clint says, taking another bite of his pizza.

Bucky’s fork stops on its route to his mouth and is lowered back down again. “Are you serious?”

“Hell yeah I am. Me and my brother used to get passed around a lot, and one time we were with this woman, Crystal, and I’m tellin’ you, that shit’s real.”

“Any respect I had for you at all, as a medical professional and a person, has completely diminished,” Natasha says, straightfaced.

Jane knocks Clint’s shoulder. “She has a fair point, Clint. He’s obviously a very sick man, and not only that, but the fourth floor is ICU- it was just an educated guess.”

“How do you know, though?”

“Probably basic common sense,” Natasha drawls.

“Oh come on, don’t tell me a little part of you isn’t even a little bit enthralled by this whole thing. Bucky said himself that it wasn’t a normal seizure!” Bucky has to duck slightly at the last part to avoid getting whacked in the face by Clint’s overly-enthusiastic gestures.

“So you think that was one of his ‘visions’?”

Clint shrugs. “I don’t know what I think, but I do know that I have four years of med school behind me and the knowledge of all the stuff I saw when I was at Crystal’s, and I know that whatever he had-“ He waves his fork around to enunciate his point, “-Was no regular seizure.”

“But it still could have been a seizure,” Darcy reasons. “There are literally hundreds of variations of seizures. Not only that, but the guy still has a serious AVM.”

“Yes, thank you Darcy, at least someone here hasn’t lost all sense of reason.”

Bucky can’t help but give Clint a sympathetic smile and clap him on your shoulder. “Your sunny disposition is, as always, much appreciated though.”

“Gee, thanks.”
Darcy sighs from her seat on the bench beside Bucky. “Hill’s been in a pissy mood all day. She gave Rogers the stink eye during our surgery for the entire time.”

“Blame Bucky,” Natasha says, poking him with her fork.

Bucky snaps “What the hell, Nat,” the same time that Darcy says “What did you do now?”

“I didn’t do anything. Technically.”

Jane gives him a very unimpressed look. “Bucky.”

He chews his lips for a second, a nervous tic that he’s never quite been able to break. “I was on the on-call room with Steve, and Hill walked in on us kissing.”

There’s a stilted silence.

“Wait- what?”

“It just… I dunno, it happened. He came in and we were talking and then we just, y’know, started making out and I guess he must have forgotten to lock the door because Hill came in and raised hell.”

Clint’s brow is furrowed deeply, and his mouth opens and shuts at least three times before he settles in simply saying “Oh shit.” And that kind of sums up Bucky’s current disposition pretty perfectly.

“Yeah.”

“Well, what’d she do?”

“She threw me out of the room-” He swallows the lump in his throat that arises when he thinks of the things that were said, the lump that has nearly made a home in his body it’s showing up so often- “And then cornered me this morning. She just wanted to know how long it had been going on and all.”

“Is she going to tell Fury?” Jane asks quietly.

Bucky shrugs. “I don’t know yet, but I don’t think so. She didn’t say, anyway.”

“Are you going to tell Fury?”

“What? No, of course not. I can’t.”

“I know it’s bad Bucky, but if you tell Fury now, you might be able to soften the blow. Better him find out from you yourself than sneak behind his back.”

Natasha nods. “It’s be looked at in a better light if you went to him and volunteered the information.”

“And if you told him that you were serious about it, he wouldn’t see it as just a ploy to get better surgeries.”

Bucky nods as all this is flung at him, head already spinning with all the consequences and outcomes that are filling up his head.

“You are serious about it, right?” Clint asks.
“Yeah. Jesus, yes, of course I am.”

That much he knows true. But what about Steve?

‘But what about Steve?’ The same question, again and again.

~*~

“Mr. Duffy, we need to do a surgery on you almost immediately. You have an AVM located in your brain. An AVM is a knot of abnormal veins, and when they appear in the brain, they can cause damage, which most likely explains your ‘visions’. The procedure involves-”

“Wait, hold on. You’re telling me that the reason I’m having my visions is because… Because what? There’s a fuck-up in my brain that was put there by chance?”

“A ‘fuck-up’ is putting it bluntly, Mr. Duffy, but yes, and we should be able to remove it easily enough-“

“What happens if I don’t get it removed?”

Loki shuts his mouth abruptly, and his brows knit together. “Mr. Duffy it is absolutely paramount that we perform this procedure-“

“Tell me,” He demands, and Bucky can see desperation hiding in his eyes. “What happens if I don’t have the surgery?”

Loki sighs. “The AVM will continue to grow, and eventually it will cause a haemorrhage or an aneurysm, and by that stage there’ll too much damage in too large an area.”

“You’re looking at living for two to three more years optimistically, but realistically we’re looking at one year before you run into more difficulties,” Bucky explains. “Mr. Duffy, if you don’t have this surgery, you will definitely die. Your condition is fatal.”

Duffy shakes his head. “Well then I’ll take my year. But I’m not having the surgery.”

Loki plasters a mask onto his face, careful not to let anything slip, but Bucky doesn’t miss the quick flash of frustration that crosses his face.

“Mr. Duffy-“

“No. I don’t want it.”

Natasha purses her lips. “Mr. Duffy, we need your final decision in one hour. Please think this over and don’t make it lightly.”

“I’m not having the surgery and I’m not changing my mind.”

Loki lets out a breath through his nose, and his jaw ticks. “Barnes, Romanoff, a word.” Bucky grabs the chart from Alex’s bed as he follows Natasha and Loki out of the room.

Once they’re outside and just out of ear shot, Loki whips around to them, annoyance clouding his features.

“Get that man to have the surgery or I swear to whatever Gods are up there that I will make sure that you two won’t see the inside of an O.R until your dying day.”
With that, he turns away and storms down the hall.

“You got any miracles you want to pull out of your ass?” He asks Natasha.

~*~

Bucky taps his fingers against his arm, leaning against the frame of the door of radiology, waiting for the results of one of Hill’s patients.

He knocks on the glass pane in the window. “You nearly done in there?”

“Patience is a virtue, Barnes,” Stark calls back.

Bucky sighs, and shifts against the wall.

He closes his eyes, and leans his head, letting all the sounds of the hospital wash over him- not nearly as daunting and overpowering as they once were. The whirring of all the hundreds of machines, elevators opening and closing with gurneys and people coming and going.

And then, footsteps approaching and something warm beside him. He already knows exactly who it is, already knows what’s going to come, but he’s been on the go for eleven non-stop hours and he’s got another thirty seven to go, so he’s going to take every single second he gets for himself that he can.

“Dr. Barnes, could I speak to you for a second?”

Bucky creaks his eye open, looking at Steve.

“You can go, Barnes. I’ll be okay for another few minutes,” Stark says from inside.

He swallows, and pushes himself up from against the wall. “Yeah, sure.”

He and Steve walk down the hall in silence, and Bucky’s stomach is riddled with nerves. Eventually, they find themselves in an empty ophthalmology room.

“Listen,” Steve begins. “If Hill is giving you a hard time-“

“It’s fine,” Bucky cuts him off. “It’s nothing I can’t handle. And I understand why she’s doing it.”

Steve frowns. “Well why, then?”

Bucky shrugs. “To make sure I know that I’m never getting any kind of special treatment.”

Steve nods. “Well, if you ever need me to-“

“Steve, you seriously think that would ever help my case? Thanks, but no thanks.” They’re silent for a second, staring at each other, weighing up the current situation in their own heads.

“I did want to talk to you, though,” He says, breaking the heavy silence.

Steve lifts his head up. “Okay. Shoot.”

“Um. I think-“ He clenches his hands together, and swallows that goddamn lump again. “I think we should tell Fury.”

No, we can’t. What are you thinking?”

“What the hell’s your problem?” Truth be told, Bucky’s taken aback by Steve’s complete rejection.

“What the hell is my problem? What the hell do you think? Telling Fury is a fucking suicide mission, Bucky. Do you realise how much you’re risking?”

“Of course I do! But would it really be so bad? He’d understand-“

“No, he wouldn’t. I could lose my job, god knows what he’d do you to… We can’t. Bucky, we can’t. I’m not letting you risk your job because of me.”

“What about what I want?”

“Well what do you want?”

“I want to come clean about it to Fury!”

“No!”

Bucky clenches his jaw, and locks his eyes with Steve. “What are we, Steve?”

“What the hell do you mean by that?”

“Today, Hill asked me that. I had to make up some answer. But you tell me. What are we?”

Steve lets out a heavy sigh, and runs a hand through his hair. “We’re…. We’re…”

“You don’t even know!” Bucky exclaims. “You’ve been stringing me around for months and you don’t even know!”

“Bucky-“

“No fuck you! I’m not your fucking rent boy, Steve. You’re either with me in this, or you’re not.”

“I just don’t want your career to get hurt-“

“Bullshit. That never stopped you before.”

He gets up out of his chair and wretches the door open. “Tell me when you figure it out.”

He lets his anger brew as he walks back down to Stark, feeling almost… Betrayed by Steve’s answer. Or lack thereof.

When he walks into radiology to get the finished scans from Tony, he notices the other man’s eyes on him, studying him intently.

“Yes, Dr. Stark?”

He shakes his head. “No, it’s nothing. I just… I know a guy who used to work with Rogers.” Tony stares out the window where Steve had once passed. “Must have gotten him mixed up with someone else.” He looks up at Bucky, and taps the scan. “Turns out it’s not a clot, it’s a tumor. Funny how things deceive us like that.”

“Yeah,” Bucky mutters. ‘Freakin’ hilarious.”

~*~
Loki slaps Nick’s CT scan onto the light board. “You have a tumor on your corpus callosum.* Like your previous tumor, it’s affecting your sight. Unlike the last one, it’s located on top of a major artery. As we’ve caught it early enough, it shouldn’t have rooted deeply, and is most likely on the surface of your brain. I should be able to get out in one surgery and then with a few treatments of radio you should be rid of it.”

Nick nods, the news not hitting him as hard as most would expect- There was more a slight crushing feeling that his weeks of denial had been for naught.

“I don’t want anybody finding out about this, Odinson.”

“Of course not, sir. The O.R is still free this morning, and I can have a private team of nurses put together.”

He nods, and scratches his chin. “Yes, do that. And put your two best interns on the case- And by best, I mean ‘good at keeping secrets.”

Loki’s mind immediately directs to Darcy, to her sharp mind and sharper tongue, to the way that he can’t stop thinking about getting back in her good graces-

“Absolutely, chief.”

Nick stands from his chair. “I’m trusting you on this, Odinson. It would look bad on your CV if you killed your chief of surgery.”

Loki smiles ruefully. “For both our career’s sakes, I’ll certainly try not to, Chief Fury.”

Allowing himself a small smile as well, he heads towards the door. “I’ll meet you in half an hour to go over paperwork. But now I’ve got a phone call to my wife to make.”

Loki watches Nick leave, follows him as he ambles down the hall, and wonders, absently, if he would ever be able to have a family himself. It’s no secret that he’s somewhat married to his work, which begs the question if he’ll ever allow enough time to forge another, genuine human connection. And if he was to do so, would he have children? The thought alone makes him bitter. Look at his father, for god’s sake, and look how royally he messed that up.

“Dr. Odinson?”

Darcy stands at the door. “Hill wanted to see you. A patient came in and they need a consult.”

“Yes, of course,” He answers automatically. “Darcy wait.”

She turns back around to him, and raises an eyebrow.

“I- I have a surgery. This morning. At three. Perhaps you’d like to scrub in?”

“Depends. Is it any good?”

He smiles wickedly. “It’s very good. And you’d be one of the few people that get to witness it.”

“Okay,” She answers, with resolve in her eyes. “Count me in.”

~*~

“I don’t want the surgery,” Duffy answers. *Again.*
“Why not? Tell me why not,” Bucky says, no small amount of pleading in his voice. “You will die without it. Are your visions worth your life?”

“Of course they are. The visions… They’re everything.”

“You know, after that stunt you pulled this afternoon when you predicted that that man was going to die, that something else. If you were a real psychic, don’t you think you’d be able to hold on to your powers even after your surgery?”

Bucky can see Alex’s resolution begin to crumble, and he continues. “Look, you don’t even know. Maybe if you have the surgeries the visions will become ten times clearer. Maybe not. But isn’t it worth the risk? If your gift really is what you say it is- a gift- then you should still have it after the surgery. And you won’t die.”

Alex fiddles with his fingers. “You really think it’ll stay with me?”

“You tell me, buddy. I’m not the one able to predict a death that’s gonna happen two feet above me. I’m no kind of religious, but I am a man of science. And no kind of AVM that I’m aware of can cause psychic powers.”

There’s a second of hesitation and then-

“Fine. I’ll have the surgery.”

~*~

Alex has the surgery, and it goes fine. The AVM is removed without a hitch.

And as he’s being wheeled back to his room and is just coming back to consciousness, he grabs Natasha’s hand, tight.

“The ingredient you were missing in your Piroshki was olive oil, not sunflower.”

When she goes home that night, she gives into her curiosity and tries it.

It’s midnight and she’s sitting in her kitchen in utter amazement because he was right.

~*~

Loki stares into the blackness of the room, eyes boring into the ceiling, until they’re torn away by the creak of the door opening.

The light flicks on, illuminating the room, and he can see Darcy standing at the end of the bed, the door locked behind her.

“You said you needed to be able to teach me,” she says, as she takes off her shirt. “So teach me.”

She walks closer, skin pale in the bright light and her eyes electric, and soon they’re only a breath apart. “Teach me.”

And then she meets his mouth with hers, closing the gap between them.

Chapter End Notes
I’d like to point out the fact that in this fic, Bucky is about 24, which is far from a child, but in the eyes of medical professionals, he has little to no practical experience, which is why first year residents (interns) are often seen as the babies.

AVM- An AVM is a tangle of abnormal and poorly formed blood vessels (arteries and veins). They have a higher rate of bleeding than normal vessels. AVMs can occur anywhere in the body. Brain AVMs are of special concern because of the damage they cause when they bleed.

Code Blue- a hospital code used to indicate a patient requiring immediate resuscitation.

Corpus callosum- Contains nerve fibers that allow the left and right sides (hemispheres) of the brain to communicate.

Thank you so much for reading! I’d love if you told me what you thought! Comments are amazing.
"Bucky, I think I have menopause."

Bucky sighs heavily into the phone, rubbing his eyes. "You are not going through menopause, Pete."

There's a common phenomenon amongst medical students called the 'medical student syndrome', in which, when reading over a list of diseases and their symptoms, students start to think they have all of them. It's not unheard of, and obviously it occurs predominately in first year students. (He still remembers running to the nurse’s office in a blind panic because he was certain that he had typhoid.)

But Peter had surpassed most of that during his previous three years of college- except a brief stint where he was convinced that he had been bitten by a deadly spider. Turns out it had been a bee sting. He was a smart kid with a good head on his shoulders and knowledge from Bucky’s previous years to get him through. However, now faced with his final year of medical school and looming exams, he called Bucky nearly every other week, convinced that he had a multitude of ridiculous diseases.

"Bucky, I'm serious-"

"You were serious last week when you called me and said you had leprosy."

There's a moment of silence, before Peter continues. "Okay that’s a fair point, but-"
Bucky checks his watch again and huffs. "Okay, I tell you what- to put your mind at rest, I'll give you a brief examination, and we'll see if you have menopause then, okay?"

"Okay," Peter says, audibly bracing himself.

"Peter, have you grown a vagina since the last time we met?"

There's an indignant huff on the other end of the line. "... No."

"Have your oestrogen levels sky rocketed?"

"No."

"Are your testosterone levels still intact?"

Peter lets out a breath, defeated. "Yes."

"Congratulations Peter, you don't have menopause."

"Okay but I was reading this thing on-"

"Peter, you're not dying, and I have to go now because I have brain surgery. In five minutes. Besides it is literally two am, what the hell are you doing up?"

"Studying. Just wait, would you?"

Bucky sighs into his phone and gestures to passing nurse that he'll be in the O.R soon. Between his ongoing feud with Steve, the general stress of his job, and the interrogation he knows he'll get from May regarding his personal life, the day isn't shaping up to be all that great.

"Yeah?"

"You coming to May's this morning for breakfast?"

"Yeah, 'course," he answers.

"Okay, cool, see you later. Oh! And, um, would you maybe be able to bring like a stethoscope or something because I think-"

"Goodbye, Peter,” Bucky says, cutting off any protests from the younger man. Shutting his phone off, he threw it into his bag with the rest of his belongings, and slammed the locker doors closed, before going to join Odinson and Darcy for the scheduled brain surgery. On Fury.

Admittedly, it had been a total shock to Bucky when he entered the room with Loki’s ‘private’ patient, he had been almost shell shocked when he looked at the Chief of surgery lying in the hospital’s bed.

(And, as much as Bucky hates to admit it, it was followed by a second of disappointment. The way
that Odinson had been going on about their ‘important and entirely confidential’ patient had Bucky thinking that it would be Bono or something).

But the whole thing had brought Bucky a horrible, unwanted realisation of how fragile morality was. How quickly you could go from healthy to sick, alive to dead, good to bad. It only takes one complication— one halted beat of your heart, one second, one word. Hell, look at his mother. One morning, she wakes up, and doesn’t know who her son is. Can’t remember how to drive, or where her husband is. Here was Nick, a man he can vaguely remember from his childhood, needing an urgent and high-risk surgery.

And Bucky is going to help preform it. What if he gets it wrong? It’d be so easy for him to just-

“Barnes.” Loki’s voice, sharp like ice, interrupts his spiralling thoughts. “We’re on a tight schedule. Get scrubbed in now."

“Oh- Yeah. Sorry, Dr. Odinson.”

Loki makes a harrumph that in some way relates to an acknowledgement, and presses the tap, letting the water spill onto his spidery fingers. Following his lead, Bucky quickly gets himself scrubbed up, and puts his medical mask on as he walks into the theatre, before putting his gown on.

He’s been in the operating room so often over the past few months, and he’s experienced so much within the familiar four walls, he should be used to it by now. But yet, here is, watching Nick being rolled in, and he’s thrown into the deep end. His mind momentarily blanks and all medical knowledge escapes him, and as he watches the anaesthesiologist put Nick to sleep, he feels like a helpless freshmen again, completely out of his depth.

“Dr. Barnes,” Loki says from behind him. “I’m about to perform a high risk surgery. Pressure is high, and I need only the best. So tell me now if you can’t handle it, because I will not have you jeopardising this procedure.”

Bucky’s jaw tenses for a split second, before he turns to Loki, and nods. “I can do it. I’m able for it.”

The flicker of uncertainty in the other man’s eyes doesn’t go unnoticed, but Bucky is going to do this. He has to.

“Alright,” Loki says. “Let’s try to leave here with all our brains intact, shall we? Ten blade, please.”

Bucky takes a deep breath, and focuses on Loki’s movements and tries desperately to concentrate- to do his goddamn job.
Nick wakes up to sound of beeping monitors and whispering voices that are just barely out of his range. His mind is foggy and there’s a dull, sore throbbing in his head.

Slowly but surely, he comes back to himself. He remembers being wheeled into the OR- which was more daunting than he could have expected. He knows every success and every death that had occurred within the four walls.

But he’s alive, and if there’s any kind of god in this world, he’s tumour free. He’s eyes are still heavy with drug-induced sleep, but he blinks them open anyway. The room is painfully bright with the fluorescent lights, and the beeping of the monitors and hushed conversation from outside the room cut through his head like a knife.

“-Sorry, you know that. I didn’t mean to make you upset.”

“How can you say that? You’ve pushed me for days to go on a stupid date with you- I give you everything even though it’s against my better judgement, and the one thing I ask you for, one thing, and you straight up shoot me down. How did you think that would be remotely fair? You didn’t even think about it!”

This is absolutely not a conversation Nick should be eavesdropping on, but he’s always had a problem with sticking his nose in places he shouldn’t be. What can he say- he’s chief of an entire hospital, he has to keep an eye on things.

“I know, Buck, I know. Look if it… If you really want to tell Fury, then okay. We’ll tell him. But, just, maybe we should get to know each other a bit better. You should make sure you want this before you risk your reputation for this.”

Bucky Barnes. Still a fifteen year old in Nick’s eyes, the same moody teenager who’d sit on the gurneys, shoes scuffing the floor as he waited for his mother or May or someone to pick him up. But still the same kid with missing teeth and an inherit curiosity in the human body, why it did what it did, and wanting to be ‘just like my mommy’.

Winifred Barnes. That brings back memories of Nick’s first years of being an attending at Shield, of late nights studying with Winifred, of an intensity in her that was contagious- a desire to know more, do more, help more.

Bucky Barnes. Who clearly has something going with Dr. Rogers. Nick feels his heart squeeze slightly at that. If anyone knows about bad work relations, it’s him. Nick shuts his eyes once more, wanting to ignore the whole conversation- intimate, and deeply familiar.
“Of course I want this. I know enough about you already, Steve. And I know that my reputation is worth it.”

“Yeah, I get that, but still. You might change your mind.”

“Why the hell would I change my mind now?”

“Well, you never know. A tall, dark stranger might walk through these doors any moment. Who’s to say you won’t fall for him instead?”

Bucky snorts. “I think we’ve already determined that my taste is muscly blonde punks.”

There’s the sound of a gentle shove, and a “Jerk.”

“I’m with you, Bucky. I know you don’t think I am, but I am.”

Quietly, very quietly, Bucky answers “Okay”, and Nick really shouldn’t be listening to this. He really, really shouldn’t. And then “I’ve gotta go check on Fury now before I leave. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Yeah, see you,” Steve answers.

Bucky walks in then, and Nick keeps his eyes closed, but he’s not a damn actor, and he knows he’s not fooling anyone.

After a few minutes when Bucky’s pottered around for long enough, Nick creaks an eye open.

“Was the surgery a success?”

Bucky smiles and nods. “We’re doing a biopsy as we speak, but we got everything out.”

Nick lets out a relieved sigh. “Call my wife and tell her that, would you? She worries, and she’ll probably cause herself an accident driving her.”

Bucky nods. “Of course, sir. Can I do anything else?”

Nick shakes his head. “No, that’s fine.” Just as Bucky turns to leave, Nick stops him, not able to keep quiet for any longer. “Barnes.”

Bucky looks at him, and he knows that gaze all too well, can see the love Bucky holds for Steve in the cracks of the mask he’s wearing.

“If I was your mother, I’d tell you not to get involved with that man.” Shock registers first on Bucky’s face, then conflict.

“With all due respect, sir, if you were my mother, I’d tell that it’s really none of your business.”

~*~
When his alarm goes off, it feels like a bullet to the heart.

“Up and at ‘em, sunshine!” Clint yells, nudging the door open and walking in. “Here,” He says, placing a cup of coffee on his bedside locker. “Your lover no joining us this morning?”

“He had something on,” Bucky says groggily, voice thick with sleep. Struggling up from under the covers, he props himself up so that he can drink his coffee.

“You staying for breakfast or grab something at the hospital?”

Bucky shakes his head. “’M going over to May’s for breakfast.”

“Okay, cool. Me, you and Nat are on rotations together so meet us in the pit when you get in.”

Bucky nods, and swings his legs over the bed, groaning slightly when his feet touch the cold wooden floorboards. As Clint leaves, he runs a hand through his hair and rubs the sleep from eyes.

Fury’s confrontation was still making his head reel. He had obviously overheard some portion of Steve’s and his conversation, but what was he going to do about it? Was he for the most part okay with it or did his warning to ‘not get involved with a man like that’ run deeper? And speaking of said warning, what the hell did that mean? What did Fury mean by ‘like that’?

Bucky lets out a frustrated grunt. He’s just about running on seven hours sleep after a forty-eight hour shift, he’s not in the moon for problem-solving. On the bright side, though, at least Bucky's sharp comment had just earned him a look from Nick, and not a note of redundancy.

But at least Steve was on board with going ahead and making their relationship kosher. He’s still a little annoyed about how Steve first reacted, and while he gets that this is maybe just his way of looking for redemption, he’ll take what he can get. He spent enough damn time in the closet anyways.

He needs a shower. He needs to not think. It’s too early for this.

~*~

“Bucky!”

He’s still surprised at how happily May greets him, how she never makes him feel like a burden to her even though he is.
“Hi, May,” He greets warmly, as she embraces him in a hug. He smiles at her as she pulls back, while her forehead creases in concern, and she tsks.

“You’ve lost weight,” She scolds, shepherding him inside. “Look at you!” She lightly pinches his arm. “They’re working you too hard.”

Bucky laughs humorously. “I’m interning at one of the best hospitals in the world. It’d be bad if they didn’t push me a little.”

May sighs as goes, and the familiar scent of frying eggs and bacon wafts from the kitchen.

“Oh man,” He groans. “Are you seriously cooking bacon?”

“I am. And thank God I did- You’re too skinny.”

“You’re too kind.” He presses a quick kiss to her cheek. “Thank you, May, I adore you.”

“So you should. Go up and get Peter would you? He’ll be late for his lectures.”

“On it,” Bucky answers, as he walks out to the stairs. As he goes, he drinks in the familiar but well-missed sights- The slightly faded carpet, the peeling wallpaper and all the pictures on the walls (some of which include Bucky). He hasn’t been here since September. The last time he had been here was for a celebratory dinner before his first day of being a medical intern. Later that night, he went to a bar with Peter, and then, well. Steve.

“Hey, Petey.” He knocks lightly on the door, and when he gets a muffled response he opens the door and walks in. The room is a mess (as always) and underneath the lumpy mass of duvet, Bucky can just about make out his friend’s body. “Let’s go. Your aunt’s doing breakfast and if you don’t go now I swear to god I’ll eat your bacon.”

At that, Peter’s head pokes up from the covers. “C’mon, Buck.”

Bucky slaps him lightly upside the head. “Rise and shine, sweetheart.”

Peter rubs his eyes blearily as he stumbles out of bed, shoving on jeans (that were found on the floor) and a shirt (that was also found on the floor, but after a dubious sniffing on Peter’s part, was deemed acceptable).

Eventually, they make their way downstairs, where a delicious spread is waiting for them. The happiness doesn’t last, though.

“I got a call from Nick Fury this morning,” May says as she sets napkins down.

Bucky groans. Peter snorts.

“He can’t seem to get in contact with your mother.” A raised eyebrow and that look that she gives
when she wants an answer is enough to put him off his food for a few seconds.

“Yeah, well. You know how she is. She doesn’t want anybody to know. Especially not her old colleagues.”

May harrumphs. “Well. All I’m saying is that all secrets have a cost. When you have them and when you want them. So keep that in mind.”

“I will, May.” And damn, he feels like he was caught with his hand in the cookie jar again.

“And then guess what he tells me?”

Oh no. Oh shit.

“Apparently, you’re seeing some new, hot-shot doctor.”

Bucky goes still. Peter chokes on his blueberry.

“Holy crap,” Peter wheezes.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” May berates. “I can’t believe you!”

“I know, I know,” Bucky says, hands out, pleading. “Believe me, I would have told you, honestly. But the guy- Steve, his name’s Steve- he wanted to keep it all. Y’know, quiet.”

May narrows her eyes. “Why would he want that?”

Bucky can feel his cheeks begin to go red, and beside him Peter mutters “This gonna be good,” as he looks at him like a kid waiting for Christmas.

“Well, it’s just. He’s um, he’s kinda my boss.” And then the two of them go quiet.

“That’s awkward.” Peter blurs it out, breaking the silence.

May rolls her eyes and throws her hands up in surrender. “I give up. Bucky-” She points her fork at him. “-I’m angry you didn’t tell me about your new boyfriend. I thought all those nights of me sitting up late to you mooning about whoever your current crush was in high school had thought you better. But,” She relents. "I respect that it was your decision. It was your decision, wasn’t it?"

“Yes, of course,” He answers, and it’s not that much of a lie.

“Good. Just remember that love changes as often as the seasons do. You don’t need to rush into a relationship right now, especially at this point in your career.”
“What, are you two like exclusive now?” Peter asks.

Bucky makes a face. “Well, not yet, exactly.”

He squints. “So then how do you know if you love him? Isn’t that what love’s all about? Trust and exclusivity?”

Bucky shakes his head. “Well, no. Relationships are about being exclusivity. But love is just love. You can love people without wanting them to be yours.” As an afterthought, he adds “You can love someone when they’re not yours at all, really.”

“Wiser words never said,” May smiles. “Just make sure that you don’t let his needs eclipse your own- Peter, clean up the orange juice you spilled. You weren’t, nor will you ever be, raised in a pigsty.”

~*~

Bucky presses in on the hard surface of Mr. Franklin’s bloated stomach. “Mr. Franklin, how long has your abdomen been like this?”

“It’s been getting bigger for a while,” He says, voice gruff.

His wife, over in corner, tuts. “I told you, Leroy. I told you there was something wrong. No one gets fat like this so fast. But do you listen to me? Oh no, of course not.” She sighs, and turns to Natasha. “That man, I swear. Everybody told him. He just wouldn’t listen.”

“I understand that, Ma’am, but at least he’s here now and we can begin our treatment. Hopefully, it won’t be too late.”

“But what if it is too late?” She worries.

“How about we roll with the punches as they come, eh?” Clint smiles.

Bucky stands up, finished his exam. “He has dullness to his abdomen- might be a hernia, a spider angiomias, excess liduid...”

“What’s all that mean?”

“It means that the growth of your stomach definitely isn’t weight gain and those tests we sent you for should definitely tell us the root cause of it.”

“You do whatever you can to make my Leroy better,” Ms. Franklin says.

“We will, Ma’am. I’ll be back soon with your results,” Natasha says as she picks up Leroy’s chart.
and goes out, Bucky and Clint following her. “You guys go and get the results, I have to go speak to Dr. Wilson about one of my other patients for a minute.”

Bucky salutes her as she walks down the other end of the corridor, and he and Clint make their way down the stairs to collect the test results.

“Hey, uh, Bucky. Can I ask you something?”

Bucky turns his head to look at Clint, and he’s surprised at how distressed he looks. “Yeah, sure.”

“Well, it’s just- You’re friends with Natasha, right? Like really close?”

“Yeah, I guess.” It was true. During their time here, Natasha and Bucky had found a friend in the other, partially because of their personality and partially because of their shared approach to their work. (Which was, ‘I need to get the good surgeries or I’ll fuck shit up’)

“Okay, well. Has she mentioned anyone?”

Bucky raises an eyebrow at Clint, who’s looking intently at the ground. “Holy crap, Barton. Do you have a crush on Nat?”

“No,” He responds, head jerking up, and a second later his face crumples in defeat. “I mean-No. Dammit, yes. Yeah. I don’t know why I lied.”

“Aw, Clint, you’re smitten,” He cackles.

“Just tell me if she did,” He huffs, already reddening.

Bucky shakes his head, still smiling. “No, she hasn’t told me about anyone. But that’s me. She might not anyway, even if she did. Ask her over drinks at the bar. It’d seem more like you were just making casual conversation.”

Clint nods his head thoughtfully as he knocks on the door of the biopsy lab. “Leroy Franklin, please?” He asks as he sticks his head in. “Yeah, I mean. I guess I could try that. Maybe I will.”

Bucky nods absentmindedly. “Yeah, you should.”

~*~

“Excuse me, Dr. Hill?”

“What is it, Barton?” She asks, not looking up from her paperwork.
“Um, according to his wife, Mr. Franklin is a heavy drinker. And it checks out with the biopsy result, too.”

“Six to eight drinks a day,” Bucky chimes in. “An alcoholic by any standard.”

“Mm-hmm,” Hill hums, seemingly uninterested. “Protocol?”

“Schedule a paracentesis*.”

“Reason?”

“Uh, draining the fluid will relieve the pressure from the lungs,” Clint answers.

Hill nods. “Good. Okay, boys. I want you to schedule it.”

“Will you be performing it, Dr. Hill?”

“No. You will.”

Clint’s eyes nearly pop out of his head. “You want us to do the procedure?”

“Surely you’ve seen one from Med School?”

Bucky nods. “Oh, yeah.”

“Well, now you do one. Page me when it’s over.” With that, she turns and leaves.

Clint turns to Bucky, panicked. “Buck, I've never seen one.”

“Oh, well. You're about to.”

Clint puts his face into his hands. “Oh, my God.”

“Hey,” Natasha calls as she joins them from down the corridor. “What happened?”


“You three!” Bucky whips his head around to see Hill jogging up to them. “Change of plans. There’s a heart surgery that’s been bumped up, and Wilson needs somebody to scrub in. Which
As Clint opens his mouth to respond, Hill cuts him off. “Not you, Barton. Stark needs you to stay on his rotation.”

“Bucky can do it,” Natasha says. “I’d like to stay to perform the paracentesis, if that’s okay.”

Hill raises an eyebrow. “Barnes, are you happy with this?”

Bucky nods. “Yeah, sure.”

“Make your way to O.R four, we start in ten minutes. Romanoff, Barton-” She flicks her pen between the two of them. “-Don’t kill anyone while I’m gone.”

~*~

“Oh God, this sounds terrible.”

“It just means there’s fluid in the peritoneal cavity- The abdomen,” Clint explains. “And the swelling is pressing against your lungs which is why you’re having trouble breathing.”

“In your case, it looks like a symptom of liver disease,” Natasha says as she prepares the IV tube.

“What’d I say, Leroy?” His wife scolds. “Too much alcohol!”

Natasha quirks her eyebrows at Leroy as she inspects a syringe.

Sighing, he relents. “I drink a bit,” He admits.

His wife scoffs a laugh. “That’s the understatement of the year.”

“No, Alice!”

“Okay,” Clint intervenes. “Mrs. Franklin, if you’d like to leave now, we can begin the procedure.”

As she walks out, she stops abruptly at the foot of Leroy’s bed. “Stay alive, would ya?”

“You won’t get rid of me that easily.”

Giving him a watery smile, she crosses the distance and presses a quick kiss to his lips.

When they’re finally alone, Clint and Natasha finish prepping him. Nerves are still buzzing in Clint’s veins- What the hell is Hill thinking? Letting them do a procedure all by themselves?

Granted, it’s somewhat standard. It’s one of the first things you learn in Med School. Doesn’t make it any less scary, though.
“I’m going to give you a local anaesthetic now, Mr. Franklin,” He explains as he slowly and precisely drops the liquid into the IV bag. “The procedure shouldn’t hurt, but you might feel some pressure.”

Mr. Franklin clenches his jaw, but nods. “Okay, I’m ready.”

Natasha pinches the skin of the underside of his right forearm. “I’m in the peritoneal cavity,” She says as she slides the IV into his skin.

Clint moves to the other end of the bed to monitor the bag they have set up to collect the extra fluid. He frowns as slowly, a few drops drip into the bag. “The fluid is bloody,” He says as he looks at the muddy-yellow in the bag. “Is it supposed to be bloody?”

Mr. Franklin begins to fidget on the bed. “You’ve done this before, right?”

“Oh loads of times,” Natasha answers as she bends down to take a look. She studies it for a few seconds before standing back up. “It’s fine, it’s only a bit, and blood is natural. You’re doing great, Mr. Franklin.”

“Okay,” Clint sighs under his breath, trying to will his nerves to leave his body.

Now all they have to do is wait.

~*~

Seconds morph into minutes…

Tick, tick, tick…

Mr. Franklin starts to go into cardiac arrest.

~*~

Bucky should have known.

Bucky *could* have known.

It had all been staring him in the face, really. If he had only asked more questions, dug a little deeper, known where to look, he would have found out.

If he had never slept with Steve in the first place, he would have saved himself so much pain. But he didn’t. And now he’s reaping what he sowed.
He had thought at first that Steve had been the answer to all his problems, but if he had ever bothered to fucking look instead of following Steve around with heart eyes, he would have seen. Would have seen that Steve had caused all his problems.

What’s that May had said? ‘All secrets come with a price- when you keep them and when you want them.’

That’s the problem with secrets. And like misery, they love company.

Tick tick tick…

~*~

Bucky walks, exhausted, to the entrance to the hospital. He’s in his civvies, and he nearly cried when he put his shirt on, the soft cotton a welcome change from his rough scrubs. He’s bone tired- Wilson’s surgery had meant standing for six hours straight, and what with the lack of sleep he’s already running on, it’s taking its toll. As he walks down the final steps, he sees Steve sitting in one of the chairs in the foyer. “Steve!” He calls.

“Long day?” Steve asks, smiling brilliantly, as he turns to face Bucky. He, too, had taken the time to change, dressed in a pressed shirt, jeans and his old, worn leather jacket.

“Too long,” Bucky sighs.

“There is an oven pizza and bottle of wine ready for you back at my apartment,” Steve says warmly.

“Ah, see this-”Bucky pokes lightly at his chest. “-This is why I keep you around.”

“What can I say, I have my uses,” He jokes. A second later, his lightness seeps from his face, his expression going slightly sombre. “Listen, Buck. You and I need to talk.”

At Bucky’s slightly alarmed expression, Steve juts in. “I mean- Not like that, god, not like that. Just. Some things we should get out in the open, I guess.”

“Ah,” Bucky gives a little smile, tension seeping out of his shoulders. “Well. Wine first, talk later.”

Steve leans down to pick up Bucky’s coat, and as he comes back up, he stops.

It’s almost like looking at a different man.

His entire posture stiffens, and becomes taught like a rubber band about to snap. His face hardens, shutting down all emotions, and his fingers clench in Bucky’s jacket.
He finally looks like the soldier he had imagined Steve as.

―Bucky‖, He says, as he looks at him, the mask slipping for all of a few short seconds. He can see fear, trauma- helplessness in his eyes. “I am so sorry.”

Before Bucky can ask what the hell is wrong, Steve straightens. “Peggy.”

When Bucky turns around, he sees an absolutely, drop dead gorgeous woman. And he’s gay. She’s about 5’6, with curling brunette hair and red lipstick on her perfectly shaped lips. Her skin is creamy white, and he can see even through the outline of her coat that she has an hourglass figure, the fabric curving perfectly to her.

“What are you doing here?” Steve demands. Bucky can’t help wonder what on Earth this woman- Peggy- could have done to get on Steve’s bad side this much.

“Well you would have known if you had bothered to return any of my calls, wouldn’t you?” She replies coolly, in a rich, cutting English accent. She looks at Bucky, and extends her hand. “Hello there. I’m Peggy Rogers.”

Rogers.

―Rogers?‖ He turns back to look up at Steve, desperate.

Peggy gives him a brilliant smile, her teeth perfectly white. “Yes, dear. And you must be the man sleeping with my husband, correct?”

Chapter End Notes

... Whomp, there it is.

Some of you had guessed before hand, so snaps to you!

To others- Sorry, dude.

As you can tell, this is a massive turning point in the fic. At the moment, I'm not sure how many chapters are left of this part of the story, at the moment I'm estimating around 10? Give or take a few. After that, we'll be on to the second part in this series! I've decided to break them up because my plans are pretty big for this fic (we're talking a huge expansion of the universe) and I feel like if I kept it in one fic it would become
a gigantic monster.

It would be great if you could leave a comment telling me what you thought! How do you think Peggy will interfere with Bucky and Steve's relationship? Why do you think they separated in the first place? How do you feel about her inclusion into this story?

You can talk to me here on AO3 or you can message me with the new messaging system on tumblr!

And now on to the medical stuff-

Spider angioma- A type of swollen blood vessel beneath the skin surface, often containing a central red spot and reddish extensions which radiate outwards like a spider's web.

Ascites- The build up of fluid in the peritoneal cavity, causing abdominal swelling.

Peritoneal cavity- Essentially the space that connects the abdomen cavity to the abdomen wall.

Paracentesis- The removal of fluid/gas from a cyst/ similar outgrowth/ body cavity.
No, we're not falling in love here, we're just falling out (But I'm just screaming in silence can you hear me now?)

Chapter Notes

This whole 'storms taking out my wifi every five minutes' did not do wonders for my updating plans, but hey, the chapter's here and it's the longest chapter so far (8,000+) and that's what you guys mostly care about so et voila!

Title comes from Walking On Car's 'At gunpoint' (check 'em out they're so so so good) and I've also linked another song in the chapter so seriously check that out.

Hope ya enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first time Steve Rogers sees Peggy Carter, he’s covered in dirt and grime and they’ve just reached base camp after his nightly patrols.

“Ah, Captain Rogers?” Someone calls.

He turns to see Howard Stark, the tech expert on all their medical equipment, coming towards him, with a brunette woman beside him. And a beautiful brunette too. Hell, just looking at her, it could just near break Steve’s damn heart.

“This here is Dr. Carter. She’s the new surgeon here,” Howard smiles, slinging an arm around her, and Dr. Carter just rolls her eyes and gives Steve a rueful grin. He thinks his heart stops beating. “And thank god for that. We need someone to knock Steve down a peg. He wins one medal of honor and suddenly the guy thinks he’s the best thing in town.”

“Don’t make me regret removing that bullet from your arm, Howard, or I might just put in a new one,” He replies.

Dr. Carter laughs, and it’s… Well, again, it’s beautiful. Almost as beautiful as her. This must be the most Steve’s ever used the word beautiful, but there’s no other word to use. Hell, it doesn’t even come close, but it will have to do. Oh god, he can already feel the blush creeping up on him.

“Well, I’ll certainly endeavour to try, Howard,” She says, her british accent contrasting everyone else’s American twang.

“I’m sure you’ll knock it out of the park.” He smiles, and holds his hand out. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Carter.”

“Please, Captain,” she says, taking his hand. “Call me Peggy.”
Bucky gets out of the car just in time to see the ambulance flip over, and land dangerously on the curb, teetering on it’s own weight. He had just put his hand on the door to close it, when it had come speeding round the corner of the hospital to the ambulance bay, when it skidded on a patch of ice, landing on its side with a metallic screech.

Previous worries that had filled his head vanish, Bucky grabs the emergency bag from the boot and rushes over, Clint and Darcy behind him.

“You okay?” He asks the paramedic as she crawls out of the sideward van. She grunts a ‘yes’ as he helps pull her up.

“What happened?” Clint asks, quickly scanning her for injuries.

“The patient in the back- she’s critical. We had to rush, I didn’t see the ice, I-”

“Okay,” Bucky says, his voice surprisingly calm, even to him, despite the madness going on around him, and in him. “Clint, would you check out Jemma for any internal injuries? I’m going to check out the patient.”

Clint nods, and catches the bag as Bucky throws it to him. “Darcy, go in and make sure we have all hands on deck here.”

She nods, making her way towards the main building. As Bucky rounds the vehicle, and begins to open the door, Clint calls out to him. “Uh, Buck? I think you have company.”

Bucky freezes for a split second.

“Leo’s in the back with the patient,” Jemma says, her voice strained with pain, and bringing Bucky back to his sense.

He knows what Clint is implying, but still. He has to do his job, this patient is bigger than his problems. He can hear the pounding of feet coming closer, but he focuses on wrenching the doors open, and when he does, it’s not a pretty site.

A woman lies on her gurney which has been flung sideways with a brace around her neck, and beside her is Leo, the other paramedic, and he’s putting pressure on the woman’s leg, where a sharp, bloody shard of glass is sticking out of her leg.

Before Bucky can step inside, a crisp voice interrupts him. “No, no Dr. Barnes. Let me.”

Whipping his head around, he sees Peggy Rogers coming up to him, Steve following close behind. From the other side of the van, Wilson and a few other staff, including the chief nurse, come running up.

“What happened?” Sam Wilson demands.

“The van flipped over on the ice,” Bucky explains, trying to ignore his chest tightening increasingly with every second that Peggy has her eyes on him. “Leo is in there with the patient.”
Wilson points an eyebrow at Peggy. “And you want to go in there in those shoes?”

Peggy scoffs, rolling her eyes, and lets her handbag drop to the ground, before bending down and taking off her shoes, quickly unloading them into Steve’s arms.

Bucky swallows the lump in his throat.

“Just be careful how you move around in here,” Leo says from inside, his voice somehow completely steady. “We can’t be sure this is stable.” Peggy takes a tentative step inside, and then takes Steve’s outreached hand as she finds her balance inside, his hand wrapping around her waist, before crouching down to the patient. Bucky wants to punch something. Or cry.

“Leo, you okay?” Wilson asks.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m okay,” He answers, a little breathlessly this time, as he increases the pressure around the woman's wound. “Jem got the worst of the hit.”

“And who is this?” Peggy asks.

“Veronica Scott, thirty years old from Michigan, on her way to Reagan Airport. We picked her up with a suspected fractured elbow after she’d slipped on some ice while getting out to re-start her car.” Leo shifts, taking his hand off the wound after deeming it safe, and moving to sit in front of Veronica’s head, with Peggy examining the gash. “Post RTC*, and she’s got a foreign body embedded in her thigh, looks like a shard of fibreglass. She’s had ten of morphine en route for her elbow.”

As Peggy begins to tie up her hair, Steve steps into the van as well, crouching by Peggy’s side, and taking a look at the injury himself.

“Okay,” Wilson says affirmatively after a second of silence. “Barnes, you can stay here and help Steve, Peggy and Leo. Do a quick check on Leo while you’re at it. Natasha, go over and help Clint with Jemma, make sure she gets a CT to be safe, and after you can report to the ER. Declan,” he looks to the head nurse. “I need you on standby here, make sure they have everything they need. The rest of you, go inside. Make sure that the ER is prepped for Ms. Scott’s arrival.” He turns to face the four of them. “Anything you need, don’t hesitate. We’ll have everything ready inside for when you bring Ms. Scott in, but if you need anything ready in advance, make sure we know.” With a nod, he heads back in doors.

“Can we get some more morphine for Ms. Scott here, please?” Steve asks Leo.

“Of course,” He replies, getting up carefully.

“Veronica,” the woman chokes out, her breathing laboured. “You can call me Veronica.”

Steve flashes her that winning smile he has- the one that makes Bucky’s heart speed up- and then Peggy turns her eyes to Bucky.

“Barnes, get in here,” She barks, and he does so. He hates every minute of it, but he does. What’s he going to do, any way?

“Get onto the other side of Ms. Scott,” She instructs. “Compress the wound while I check for further damage.”

He gets down onto his knees silently, but as he places his hands on her blood-soaked jeans, he turns to her, and gives her a small smile.
“Alright let’s get that morphine into the IV, let’s go Leo. Declan can you prep resus for us please?” Peggy asks the head nurse.

“You don’t know that she’s going to need to it,” Steve says quietly.

“Call it an educated guess,” She fires back. “Feel her pulse please.”

Veronica lets out a moan of pain, and Bucky takes her hand with his free one. “You’re alright, Veronica,” he says, squeezing her hand. “We’ll take great care of you.” Her face is contorted with agony, but she gasps a little breath and nods.

“Okay, I’m going to try to wrap around your wound know, is that alright Veronica?” Peggy asks.

“Okay,” She says shakily.

“She might in shock,” Steve says quietly as he starts to gingerly wrap the bandage around the shard, and Veronica hisses in pain. “I know, I’m sorry.” He sounds apologetic, and Bucky tries not to think about the last time he heard those same two words from Steve. “But this is to secure the shard of glass so it doesn’t move as much and do anymore damage.”

“And here I was, thinking a fractured elbow was worst of my problems.” She laughs breathlessly, but her voice is shakey. “Typical. The one day I have to be somewhere.”

“Don’t worry,” Bucky soothed, as he releases his hand from her glass to take the roll of bandages Steve is currently trying wrap around the back of her leg. He takes it from his hand, ignore the slight flash of anger that rushes through him, and lifts it up, handing it back to Steve. “You’ll get there. We’ll have you out of here in no time. You’ll be running marathons by Friday.”

She lets out another small laugh, and as Bucky reverts his gaze to the glass, his smile is dimmed by Peggy’s glare.

“You promise?” Veronica asks.

He can feels Steve look and Peggy’s glare burn into the side of his skull, practically hearing Steve say ‘Don’t do it, Buck. Don’t promise her something you might not be able to keep.’

Then again, Steve lost the right to any input in his life the second that he hid the Peggy-shaped secret from him, so he nods his head, and smiles once again.

“I do. I give you my word.”

She smiles, looking so genuinely relieved, and Bucky doesn’t care that it might not be true; in that moment, she looks so relieved, it’s worth it.

~*~

Steve and Peggy work closely together during their time in Afghanistan. Being the only surgeons their team has- The Howling Commandos they call themselves- it’s inevitable, and Steve loves every moment. She’s quick as a whip; always quick with a plan of action and keeps him on his toes. She’s a hell of a lot smarter than him, he’s not afraid to admit. In fact, he thinks that’s one of
his favourite things about her.

“Yeah, you might gonna need some stitches,” He says, brooklyn drawl dripping from every word and his inner-city lingo corrupting his sentence. He wasn’t raised in the best part of town, he knows, but he got a letter from his mom recently, so his city-boy ways have come back to him momentarily.

“You ‘might gonna need some stitches’? That’s the worst english I’ve ever heard,” Peggy grins beside him as she too examines Gabe’s gash.

“What? He might gonna need some stitches.”

She laughs, her peels filling the room, and he grins. He wants to make her laugh every day.

~*~

“What’s that stuff you gave me?” Veronica asks Peggy, slurring her words ever so slightly.

“It’s like morphine,” Peggy says, a small smile playing on her lips.

“It’s worth millions in the black market,” Steve says, quirking his eyebrows and shooting her a sly smile.

“If I get hooked I’m blaming you.” She’s smiling, and Bucky checks her pulse-- It’s gone down considerably. For the entire time they’ve been here, as much as Steve has been focused on the patient, he’s been looking at Bucky, too. Trying to catch his eye. Bucky ignores him. He’s doing it again now, and Bucky’s will slowly begins to waver under Steve’s gaze--

“Right, we need to get this leg elevated now.” Steve’s voice cuts through the tension, and Peggy nods in agreement.

Bucky tightens his grasp on Veronica’s leg. “This is where the fun starts,” He says.

“Irony, right?” She says sarcastically, and Steve chuckles under his breath.

“This is how we roll,” Bucky shrugs, smiling. As Steve’s stethoscope press into her chest to check her heart, she lets out a hiss of pain.

“Veronica?”

“It’s nothing,” She says. “It’s just my chest- that’s another story.” She lets out a little laugh. “I bumped it a bit beforehand.”

“Alright.” Studies studies her face for a quick second, before turning back to Bucky. “Let’s do this do this.” Bucky nods, short, and averts his eyes as quickly as possible, turning back to the leg. “One… Two… Three!” They’ve barely lifted it an inch off the ground, when Veronica lets out a sharp yelp of pain. Bucky looks up at Steve, not knowing how to continue, and Steve shakes his head. “Okay, no, we can’t do this right now-- Oh Declan, can we get some O Neg on standby please?”

“Right away, Doctor. Anything else?”
“That should be okay for now, thanks.” He looks between Bucky and Peggy. “I want to tie a tourniquet to stop the bleeding, it doesn’t seem to be stabilising on it’s own.”

“Here,” Leo said, digging around in a cabinet for a second, before producing what looks like a belt. “We keep some stuff like this in here in case it comes in handy.”

“Where did you get it in the first place?” Peggy asks, looking slightly amazed.

“Some guy left it here and never came back for it.” Leo shrugs. “I’m sure he wouldn’t mind.”

Without second guessing it, Steve takes the belt from his hand, and begins to tie a tourniquet, finishing it in a few seconds. “That feeling better, Veronica?”

“Feels like you’ve put a belt on my leg to be honest.”

“Fantastic.”

“So, Veronica,” Bucky starts, wanting to keep her mind occupied. “What have you been up to today? Late Christmas shopping? Find something in the January sales?”

She shakes her head, a happy smile coming on her face. “No, I was buying sun block and a swim suit. I’m going to Australia tonight.”

Bucky raises his eyebrows. “Ah, very nice. How come?” As he speaks, Steve and Peggy are surveying the other damage, and making sure her leg is stabilising.

“I’m moving there, emigrating. Sold my apartment, packed up, everything is done.”

Bucky nods his head in understanding. “So that’s what you meant when you said you had somewhere to go.”

“Mmhm. And I can’t be late, either. My husband-to-be is coming all the way from Australia to meet there, ’cause I’m afraid of flying and he said he’ll hold my hand.” She giggles fondly.

Bucky swallows, and lets a breath out through his nose. “Well, that’s some fella you’ve got there.”

Steve freezes for a second. “He must love you very much.”

“Oh, he does. Can I fly with a broken elbow?”

“Unfortunately, that’s not recommended, and in your state, very dangerous. I think you might have to rearrange,” Peggy answers, some genuine remorse in her voice.

Bucky gives her a soft smile. “Looks like America doesn’t want to let you go.”

A small smile plays on the edge of her lips. “Nothing’s stopping me. I’m going to get my happily ever after with Nick.”

Bucky lets out a heartbroken groan. “You’re just ruining all my hopes.” He gives her a pretty pout, feigning his sadness.

“Sorry,” She grins. “You’ll just have to find someone else.”

He doesn’t think about how his heart contracts, or how Peggy tenses and Steve whips his head up to look at him. He squeezes her hand. “I guess so.”
“Some definite bruising,” Bucky says as he examines Veronica’s chest. “Have you experienced any shortness of breath?”

She shakes her head. “No, nothing like that.”

“We’ll need a CT once we get inside,” He says to Peggy, and once she nods her confirmation, he’s quick to break eye contact. As Bucky gets up to check Veronica’s IV bag, the ambulance groans under his weight and teeters dangerously.

“Oh god, it’s going to fall over,” Veronica breathes. Her breaths are coming quicker and shallower now than they were before, and there’s a panicked look in her eye. “I have to get on that plane. My fiancé, Nick, I left him a message saying I was on my way to the hospital. If I can’t make onto the plane, you have to tell him, okay?”

“Oh yes, long distance love, you said?” Peggy uses it as a distraction while Steve subtly shifts her leg to inspect it again, and Bucky tries not to worries when he frowns. “When was the last time you met in person?”

“We’ve never met.” She explains. “We met online. And we just clicked.” Steve and Peggy share a look. A look that Bucky wants to wipe off their fucking faces because hello. But it’s a bad look. It’s a look that says ‘Nick might not be on that plane. Nick might not even be real.’ “It’ll be all sun and barbeques from now on.” She lets out a shaky laugh.

“A real gentlemen, it seems,” Bucky remarks. “There’s not enough of them around.”

“He’ll be on the airplane now.” Nervousness is etched into every word, and she worries her bottom lip. Bucky shoots them a glance as he checks her pulse again, noting its increase.

“The last time you met in person?”

Bucky swallows. Steve studies his hands. Peggy glares daggers into the floor. “Yes,” He answers. “I did. I’ll give him your message, don’t worry.”

“I don’t know.” She asks, almost begging him to say yes. “You understand what it’s like to be in love?”


“Resps of eighteen, BP’s one hundred over seventy, pulse of one hundred.” Then, Peggy gets up. He doesn’t know why, but she does. And as she raises herself up, the van tilts over, crashing down onto the footpath, and bringing down everyone inside with it. Veronica is jostled about, and Steve’s work comes undone as the shard is forcefully wrenched sideways, and she lets out a screech in agony. Leo is flung to the side, and Peggy manages to grab the top shelf to stop herself from going over. Bucky, however, is hammered into the hard metal, banging his head against the top of a cabinet, a searing pain flashing through his skull, and then another sharp, stinging pain above his eye.

He yelps in pain as his vision blurs, and everything starts swimming for a second. Static noise fills his head, making it feel like somebody’s just poured sand into his brain via his ear. He squeezes his eyes closed- and boy does that hurt like a bitch- while a screech rings out inside his head, as his body desperately tries to re-centre itself.
“...Bucky…!”

A shout, muffled, brings him slowly back to his senses. “Bucky! Can you hear me?”

He groans as he touches the back of his head, and when his fingers come away they’re slick with blood. “Unfortunately,” He answers.

“Steve, she’s starting to bleed out.” Peggy’s voice is low.

“Okay, we need to get her out of here as soon as possible, it can’t wait any longer-- Bucky, are you okay?”

There’s a pounding in his head, his vision is still slightly frayed at the edges and it hurts to blink, but he steadies himself even so. If he allows himself to stop, to have to focus on himself, instead of a patient or hell, even Steve, then that wouldn’t end well. “Yeah,” He answers, making sure no trace of dizziness or weakness slips through his voice. “I’m fine. What needs to be done?”

Steve frowns. “Are you sure?”

“I said I’m fine ,” He snaps. The second that Peggy showed up, Steve lost all right to worry about Bucky.

Steve nods, and has the audacity to look almost hurt, and Bucky wants to punch him. Or kiss him. Or cry. “We have to get her out of here. She’s bleeding out, and with the way the shard has moved, we’re only doing more damage than good the longer we stay here. Leo, could you get us another stretcher, please? It’ll be too awkward to try to move this one with the way it’s fallen.”

Leo nods affirmatively and manages to maneuver his way out with precision, before running into the main building.

“Veronica, you still with us?” Bucky asks, as Steve rummages for something, and Peggy keeps a check of her heart rate.

“Yeah,” She breathes, pain laced through all of it.

“Okay, Veronica here’s what we’re going to do,” Steve says, with his Super-Serious-Surgeon-Voice. “We’re getting you into the main building now, but I’m going to have to break this shard into more manageable pieces, that alright?”

“Okay,” She responds, almost whimpers.

Steve looks to Peggy- a glance passes between them, before she whispers quietly, “It’s your call.”

And then, despite everything, an overwhelming look of support comes into her eyes. Bucky wants to throw up, but maybe that’s just his head injury.

“Veronica, it’s lot worse than I thought at first,” Steve explains as he rummages around in of the compartments. “I’m going to have to remove the shard, that okay?”

“Please, just do it fast,” Veronica implores. “I have to meet Nick.” Steve nods, seemingly reassured at this. He moves his hand, and as his fingertips so much as brush the skin surrounding the shard, she lets out a wail of pain.
“Sorry, sorry,” Steve apologises, his brow creasing. He grasps the shard, and with a forceps begins to try to pull it out. Within half a second, cries of pain fill the van, and all Bucky can do is hold her leg still and pray.

Paramedics, nurses, and various other med staff are now surrounding the entrance of the ambulance with a gurney ready to go. In one swift motion, Steve’s extracted the rest of the shard, and Veronica’s cries are muffled by the other staff suddenly descending upon them, helping Bucky and Leo out while Steve and Peggy help lift Veronica onto the gurney.

“Barnes, you cut your head, you okay?” Leo asks.

Bucky turns to him, touching it tentatively. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just a bit of a bang.”

Leo narrows his eyes. “I shouldn’t have to ask you this but you’re sure it’s not a concussion?”

Bucky nods. “Yeah, ‘course. Honestly, Fitz. It’s nothing a painkiller won’t fix.”

“If you say so,” He answers, but the concern in his eyes doesn’t go away. Bucky turns away from him quickly, averting his eyes.

“Bucky,” Charlie calls as they push Veronica’s gurney towards the hospital. “Are you good to stay on this case?”

“Yeah,” He replied automatically, the answer settling like a heavy weight on his chest. “I’m good.” He jogs up beside them and grabs the rail, helping them to push Veronica inside.

~*~

“I’ve got a thirty year old female, she’s pale, very clammy, and she’s got distended neck veins*, let’s get her blood as soon as we can, please,” Steve calls as they rush Veronica into the ER, everybody around them pushing out of the way.

“Heart rate’s increasing,” Peggy notes.

Steve shakes his head as he takes out his stethoscope. “It’s gotta be that chest injury.”

“Yes, but she said it felt okay, considering,” Peggy shoots back.

Steve shakes his head again. “How much do you want to bet she only said that to be out of here and on that plane?”

“Cap refill’s* down,” Bucky says, as he presses her thumbnail again, and getting the same result-five seconds for colour to fully return.

“Dammit she’s losing blood-- Peg you checked her chest yet?”

“She’s got a pericardial effusion,” She answers as she looks at the small screen in her hand, a lot like an ultrasound. On the screen, Veronica’s chest is filled with some kind of liquid.

Steve curses again. “Alright. Let’s sedate her. I want twenty mils of propofol, please, Dr. Barnes, and a pericardiocentesis kit ready.”
“Right away,” Bucky answers, hating how formal the words are, nothing like their usual, light hearted banter. And Bucky hates that he misses that. But still, he gets a syringe and injects the right amount into Veronica’s IV bag.

“Someone page Dr. Wilson from cardiothoracics, please, tell him it’s urgent,” Steve says to a group of nurses.

~*~

“I cannot believe you!” Peggy storms into the med bay, fuming.

Steve puts down the file he was reading over- trying not to move his injured arm too much- and stares at her. “What’s the matter, Peg?”

“What’s the matter? What the bloody hell do you think, you oaf? You put yourself in the direct line of fire! You got away lucky with the bullet hitting your elbow-- You could have been killed for goodness sake!”

She’s come closer to him, arms waving about the place, and he manages to catch her hand gently. “I’m sorry, Peggy. But I had no choice-”

“Yes, you did. You always have a choice, don’t you see, Steve?” She’s sat on the edge of the bed now, eyes staring into his, pleading with him. “You could have done any number of things. Dugan had the shot, he was well prepared to-”

“You don’t know that,” He stops her gently, shaking his head. “There were any number of risks with every plan we had, and I wasn’t going to risk men for it.”

“Oh just--” She stops, and the fire in her eyes seeps away, until there’s just something… soft. “Goodness, have some self preservation, will you? Lord knows you need it.”

“Well, I’ll certainly endeavour to try,” He teases, remembering one of the first things she ever said to him. She smiles warmly, and then she kisses him.

And he feels like he finally found a piece of himself that he lost long ago when he was an angry, skinny little thing. It feels like home.

~*~

With precision only an experienced trauma surgeon could have, Steve guides the syringe into the exact right place in Veronica’s chest in order to get some of the fluid out.

“How’re we doing?” He murmurs, his brow creased in concentration.

“How’s are still low,” Bucky answers.

A nurse walks up beside Bucky. “Dr. Wilson is in surgery at the moment, Doctor, but he’ll come down as soon as he’s ready, and I have him on the line just in case.”
“Thank you,” Steve replies, eyes barely flicking up to hers as he adjusts the needle.

The nurse nods, and goes back to the phone. Now it’s just Steve, him, and Peggy, and a few nurses up against the wall, ready to go.

“Would you fly across the world for someone you love?” One of them muses.


She looks at the crown of Steve’s head, and in her eyes, there’s warmth, familiarity, love. It’s small, and it’s partnered with something else—Regret?—But it’s there. Steve tenses, but continues to plunge the needle deeper into Veronica’s chest, and Bucky wants to scream.

“This thing seems a little suspicious to me,” Another one says. “I mean, you hear about those guys on the internet everyday. He’s persuaded her to sell everything, move halfway across the world and set up a nice little joint bank account.”

“That’s cynical.”

She shrugs. “I’m not being cynical I’m being a realist.”

“I’ll bet you ten dollars he’ll show,” Bucky pipes up. Every eye in the room, including Steve’s for a brief second, is turned to him.

The nurse—Selena, if he remembers correctly, quirks an eyebrow at him. “Ten dollars? You’re on.”

“Nearly there,” Steve announces, breaking Bucky away from his conversation. As he pulls the syringe stopper upwards, blood begins to fill it. “C’mon, Veronica—there we go, well done.” He mutters.

“Pulse?”

Bucky flicks his eyes up to the monitor. “Improving.” Surprise colours his voice. “Resps 15, BP’s 120/80, pulse in 80.”


~*~

Forty Five minutes later, Veronica is awake—drowsy, but still conscious. Bucky checks Veronica’s heartbeat once more, and jots it down in her file.

“Oh, Veronica, it shouldn’t be too long before we get you up to theatre.”

“Is Nick here?” She asks languidly.

Bucky shakes his head as he checks her I.V bag. “I, um, I wouldn’t know. I don’t think so, at the moment.”

“He will be.” She nods once, slowly but with determination. “He will.”

“I sure hope he will,” Bucky answers quietly, smiling down at her and squeezing her hand once in
comfort. “We’ll get you up to theater soon, Veronica. It should only be about ten minutes.”

“Excuse me, Dr. Barnes?”

It’s Peggy, standing at the door of the ward, and there’s something in her eyes—regret?—and he hates it, hates everything about this fucking situation from the twisting in his gut as he walks towards her, to the fact that she’s married to Steve. Fuck.

“Dr. Carter,” He says in greeting.

“Ten dollars, you said?”

Despite himself, he perks up. “You found him? Nick?”

She sighs, and shakes her head. “No. I checked every flight from Australia, and there was nothing.”

The blood drains from his face, and his chest tightens. “What?”

“I’m sorry, Dr. Barnes—”

“No, no, he’s not-- That woman in head over heals in love with him. And you’re telling me that he’s, what, a con merchant? No. No.”

To her credit, some semblance of empathy can be seen in Peggy’s eyes. “He’s probably scammed that poor girl out of every penny she owns.”

An overwhelming rage takes over Bucky, because fuck that. The woman before him has taken everything from him, the one good thing that he had, and now she wants to take that from Veronica too? Fuck that. “No,” He replies vehemently. “That’s- No. That’s not fair. She deserves to be happy. She deserves at least that. You’re not taking that away from her, you hear me? You can’t.” He hadn’t realised he had raised his voice from the low whisper they had started with, but he found himself nearly yelling, and as he did so, Peggy’s eyes turned to ice.

“I think you’ll find quite a lot of things are unfair in life, Dr. Barnes,” She replies, voice even and strong, resolute, but the words are sharp as razors along his skin. “I am not taking anything away from that girl, I am presenting you with the cold, hard facts. I wish I could change it, but I can’t. You’d do well to remember that.”

“Could you just- Could you just wait and see? We don’t know for sure, I mean-- Look, how the hell are you going to tell her that?”

“I’m not, Dr. Barnes. You are.”

He goes stock still, mouth going sandpaper dry. “Can it wait until after the surgery?”

“No, it cannot. Tell her now, Dr. Barnes. And that is an order.” With that, she turns and walks out of the room, leaving Bucky with a lead weight on his chest and a nurse whispering to another, “Some people are just so lonely they’ll fall in love with anybody, you know? Blind to the truth.”

~*~
Steve clears his throat, trying to get rid of the lump that’s settled there. “So, Peg, I want to talk to about something.”

She looks up from the report she had been reading through, barely-there concern on her face. “What’s the matter, my love?”

He chuckles, despite his nerves. “Nothing. But, look, I just-”

She’s looking at him expectantly, a little encouraging smile on her face, and he just kind of…

“Will you marry me?”

Blurs it out.

The pen she had been twirling through her fingers clatters onto the kitchen counter. “What?”

“I’m sorry, I know it’s not very romantic, but-” He reaches into his pocket and takes out the small, velvet box that’s been burning a hole in his pocket for the past few weeks. “But I wanted to do this right, at the perfect moment. And fancy dinners are all well and good, but I don’t want just fancy dinners with you.” He gets down on one knee, and Peggy’s hand is over her mouth. “I want this. I want Saturday mornings drinking coffee with you and reading reports and lazy Sundays and days in bed. I want walking to camp every day with you and walking back every night. I want to live with you, out of a war zone, in a house, with a dog. I want all the things we’ve planned, and I want all the things we haven’t. I want this, us, and if this is where I am in fifty years- If it’s with you by my side, then I will be the happiest man in the world. So, would you do me the honour of marrying me?”

Peggy stares at him, aghast, for a few seconds, and Steve starts to worry that he’s made a terrible misjudgment before lets out a cry of glee. “Yes. Yes yes yes! One hundred times yes. Oh Steve-”

He lets out an elated laugh and stands up as she peppers him in kisses. When they pull away for long enough, he slides the ring onto her finger. “It was my mom’s,” He whispers into her temple. “It’s okay if you don’t like it, I know it’s a little old fashioned, but-”

“Steven,” She whispers ardently as she admires the piece of jewellery. “I love it all the more.”

His heart breaks then, and mends itself all at once, as he looks at Peggy. It bursts with love, splitting in two, so overcome with love and joy and pure elation-- It’s the kind of love they write about in songs, and he’s read about in books.

And it’s perfect.

~*~

“I’m so sorry, Veronica.” The words come out of Bucky’s mouth like clockwork, and it’s Bucky saying it, not really, because he feels out of whack, completely off-centre, as if he’s stopped, just momentarily, and he’s running on autopilot for the time being. “We checked all the flights, and we found no record of a Nick Smith on any of them.”

Veronica looks at him with unabashed conviction. “No. No, you’re wrong. I love him, and he loves me, and it doesn’t matter what you think-”
“You have to understand-”

“No! Don’t you think I’ve heard this before? Don’t you think I get this from my friends, my family? But he loves me, and you can’t fake that, not for all the money in the world. So you listen to me, when he gets here- You tell him to come find me. You tell him that I love him, that I’ll be over to Australia as soon as I can. Tell him that, won’t you? Promise me.”

He nods, and it feels like a knife twisting in his heart. “I promise.”

~*~

It’s their first anniversary, and in the space between them getting engaged and now, they’ve gotten married, left the army, accepted positions at St. Mark’s Hospital, in London, and relocated to London. (With Howard following close behind). It’s a lot, but Steve’s taking it in stride. And now, their friends are throwing them an anniversary party. (He says ‘their’, but really they’re all closer to Peggy. Steve’s friends couldn’t make it, the flights were expensive and it was short notice.)

“Speech!” One of the men shouts out (John? James?), which gets a round of hoots and whistles. Relenting, Steve presses a kiss to Peggy’s cheek and stands up.

“Well, first off, huge thanks to Rob and Gemma for organising this-” he holds up his glass and tilts it in their direction. “We really appreciate it, guys. Secondly, to all you guys, for coming-” He gestures to the room at large. “I think I can speak for both of us when I say that we’re thankful that you could celebrate this with us. And thirdly, to Pegs.” The room aw’s as he looks down at Peggy, beaming up at him. “She is- and I say this with the absolute sincerity the most amazing woman I’ve ever met. She always wants to know what she can do to help, she’s strong and determined, she’s compassionate and so willing to give whenever it’s needed, and I love her for that and a million other things that would take to long to list.” He smiles at her, heart filling with love and joy. “Doll, since the moment I met you, you have been the source of every happiness in my life. And everyday, you have amazed me in ways words fail to encompass. You bring so much joy and happiness into the world, and I promise, I move heaven and earth to make sure that same joy and happiness is returned to you. To a hell of a year, sweet, and many more to come.”

The room cheers, and there’s that swelling feeling in his heart again.

It marked the beginning of an end, really.

~*~

“She’s going into heart failure!”

“Somebody get me a resuss kit now!”
“Dr. Barnes.”

Bucky’s hands don’t stop from compressing Veronica’s chest, quick and fast and goddamn determined.

“She doesn’t have any output,” Peggy says.

He shakes his head, ignoring her. *One two one two*. Up, down. Rinse, repeat.

“You’ve been at this for twenty minutes—”

“And I can do another twenty minutes, easy,” He snaps, and he shouldn’t, he knows he shouldn’t but he’s beating a woman’s heart for her and he needs it to work--

One two, up down, breathe in breathe out.

“Bucky.”

Steve.

It’s soft and quiet and makes Bucky’s own heart squeeze. There’s a hint of regret in it, more than one thing being said. It sends a flash of anger up Bucky, because what the fuck is this? He’s in the fucking trauma room trying desperately to resuscitate this woman (and it’s not working and it won’t work and he knows that, he always fucking knew it but he couldn’t just let it *happen*) and Steve’s looking at him and his eyes are sad and Peggy’s beside him.

He’s standing in a room with a dead woman, the man he loves and that man’s wife.

It sounds like a bad joke. It kind of is, he guesses.

“Don’t call it,” He says, albeit a little desperately.

“I don’t want to—”

“So don’t,” He snaps. “I’ll keep compressing, you keep the adrenaline flowing.”

Up and down and up and down. Just keep going and you’ll be fine.

“Veronica?” He looks down at the woman, pale and unresponsive. “I need you to stay with me, okay? You gotta stay with me. For Nick. Think about Nick, yeah? I was wrong, Veronica. About Nick. He’s coming. You were right—”

“Dr. Barnes!”

“He’s probably at the airport already, waiting to see you. So hold on for him. Doesn’t matter about anything else, really, just him, right?”

“Barnes—”

One of the nurses pushes him out of the way, and takes her pulse. She shakes her head.

“She’s not coming back, Bucky,” Peggy says to him. “We have done everything we can, but she is
not coming back.”

He steps away.

Breathe in breathe out.

There’s a knock at the door, and one of the nurses pokes her head in. “I’ve got a Nick Barrett at the desk asking for his fiancé Veronica Scott?”

~*~

Bucky doesn’t remember much after that. He remembers his vision blurring slightly at the edges like it always does before an attack, he remembers pushing his way out of the room as fast as he could because he couldn’t stand being close to her body for one second longer-

He remembers seeing Nick Barrett at the desk holding a bouquet of flowers in one hand and his suitcase in the other and the breath being physically knocked from him as he looks at this man- And then he remembers running.

~*~

(x)

Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin

Peggy’s face is cradled against his chest, his cheek resting against the crown of her head as they sway together, barely moving from the spot, but Steve loves it, loves her so goddamned much it’s all he can do not to stand in the spot awe-struck about how he got this lucky.

Dance me through the panic ’til I’m gathered safely in

(Bucky runs and runs down the corridor and vision clouding and heart thudding and head fucking pounding and he has to get out of here-)

Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove

“Finally gave you that dance you always wanted, hm?”

She kisses his hand. “And all the happiness in the world.

This, with Peggy, feels right. It feels like home.
Show me slowly what I only know the limits of

(His hand brushes the door handle of the janitor’s closet and he remembers the last time he was here, with Steve, before their date and-

And then he can’t breath.)

Raise a tent of shelter now, though every thread is torn

“We’re very sorry, Mr. Barrett. We did everything we could,” Peggy explains.

“We know that she loved you very much. You have our sincere condolences.”

And dance me to the end of love

(“Barnes? What’s wrong?”)

(“Steve-” He chokes out, and then he stops, crumples to the ground because it feels like a train is rolling right over his chest and he really can’t breath).

~*~

“Barnes.” Hill’s voice is firm, but Bucky doesn’t think he’s ever been so relieved to hear it before. She gently slaps his cheek and lifts his head up from where it had been curled into his chest. “Eyes on me, Bucky. You’re okay.”

He tries his best to get it to stop, so that he can get up and do his job and not look like a fucking idiot, but it only increases the tightness in his chest, and all he can do is let a pained gasp escape from his lips.

Hill shakes her head. “Don’t speak right now, Bucky. Just breathe. In and out-- that’s it, good.”

She’s clasped his hands in hers, and he’s holding on so tight, like a dying man’s final prayer. “You’re doing just fine. Look at me, Bucky. Focus. In and out.” And up and down and one and two and-

A ragged gasp slips from his mouth. “Fuck.”

“It’s okay,” Hill says. “You’re going to be okay.”

He doesn’t have the energy in him to explain, to show that he’s really not, but his lungs are calming down, feeling like he’s ran a marathon. He rests his head against the wall, letting the next few minutes pass in silence as his breaths slowly work themselves out.

“You’re neck-- You’re bleeding,” Hill observes as he stands up. “When did this happen?”
He shrugs. “The ambulance, I think. When it tipped over, I knocked my head.” His fingers go to the wound, and it’s small. He’d completely forgotten about it.

“Dammit, Barnes,” Hill says, trying to go for angry, but coming off as concerned. “Get into the damn medbay.”

He walks down the corridor with Hill hot on his heels to the place where the staff go if ever there’s a small incident.

He sits down on the bed, and Hill opens a first aid kit. “You want to tell me what that was about?”

“You want me to believe you don’t already know- Ah!” He hisses as Hill dabs antiseptic onto his cut.

“Fair enough,” She concedes, and continues to work in silence for a few moments, before she speaks again, her voice quiet and unbearably filled with ruefulness. “I didn’t know. About Steve. If I had, I would’ve… I’m sorry, Bucky.”

“S’okay,” He mumbles.

“Just- take tomorrow off. Give yourself a rest, and come in on Friday, and we’ll discuss options for you.”

“Options for what?” He asks, chest tightening all over again, oh god what if she wants him to quit-

Hill’s hands still. “For that. You can’t seriously try to tell me that what you just had was a minor little panic attack?”

He looks down at the ground and grips his hands tight together.

“Barnes. Not only did yoy blatantly disregard protocol regarding any head injuries, which meant not only did you risk your health but your patients too, but you just had a severe panic attack in the hospital-- And, it’s understandable, given your… situation,” She winces. “But this isn’t the first time it’s happened, is it?”

He gathers up the courage to look at her. “Only one, but it was small, it was-”

“Don’t you dare say nothing,” She snaps. “Don’t make your problems seem less than they are.” She takes a deep breath, and when she speaks, her voice is quieter, a hint softer. “Are you… Have you been taking meds to deal with it?”

“I used to.” He clears his throat, and shrugs. “But I don’t need them anymore.”

“Well clearly you do.” She sighs. “Barnes, you’re in no shape to be handling the pressures of this job right now. I know it’s hard to deal with--” She holds up her hand to stop him from interrupting. “-- But it’s the truth, and you would be a liability to yourself and the patients if you were to continue like this. So I’m not letting you work until you have a full evaluation from the psych ward.”

He begins to protest, but Hill shakes her head. “Don’t fight me on this one, Barnes.”

“I’ll sleep it off. I’m fine.”

“No, Bucky, you’re not.”
Bucky gets in his car, after a long day. His shoulders are stiff and his back is sore. He drives and drives and drives and fuck how the hell is meant to go home? He can't, he won't, he doesn't want to deal with the pitying glances and 'I told you so's. By this time fucking everyone knows- If the amount of texts and missed calls on his phone is anything to go by. He doesn't want to go back home, back to his bed that will still smells like Steve, and have to put clothes in the wardrobe that houses some shirts Steve had left there- Bucky hadn't thought much of it at the time, he had thought there'd be time. Time for Steve to take them, hell, time for Steve to add more and more shirts to his wardrobe. He hadn't thought it would be over so soon. He thought he had time.

Maybe he should just sleep in the car tonight. He sure as hell isn't sleeping in his own bed, and his back is killing him partly from the long day, and partly from sleeping on the floor the night before.

He can’t deal with this shit. All this shit that’s been piling up on him, slowly, load after load.

His mother.
His job.
Steve.
Death. Fucking death everywhere.
His mother.
Steve.
His job.
Steve.
Peggy.

What the fuck had he ever done to deserve so much utter shit in his life? Four years of med school, for what?

He’s parked the car, facing the highway stretching out before him. So many cars. He wonders where they’re going.

But where is he going?

His job is a joke. His boss- his boyfriend- is, and always had been, cheating on him. To a woman he’s married to.

Why the fuck is Bucky even a doctor? He knows his mom was always hell bent on him following in her footsteps, but when was the moment of realisation of ‘this is what I want to do when I’m older’ for him?

A tear escapes when he can’t find it. Fuck. His entire life planned out for him, and he doesn’t even
“Don’t fucking cry,” He mutters under his breath, resting his head against the steering wheel, hands gripping either side of it.

He’s living a life he doesn’t want. He’s living a life his mother wanted for him. And he’s not even good at it.

He has to work beside Peggy Carter everyday.

He has to watch Steve go back to her.

He has to watch Steve leave him.

That girl died today. She died, and she was loved, so should that not have been enough?

Steve is leaving, and Bucky loves him, and why is that not enough?

That girl died today.

He did his best.

She died.

It wasn’t enough.

Why is nothing ever fucking enough?

Rinse. Repeat.

That’s going to be Bucky’s life.

Bucky Barnes, the man who was never enough.

“Don’t cry,” He says again. The thoughts tumble through his head again and again and again and

He breathes in. He breathes out.

But the tears don’t stop.

“Don’t cry!” He whispers furiously to himself, despite his the lump in his throat.

“Oh, James. What am I going to do with a boy like you?”

“Bucky, I am so sorry.”

“My name is Peggy Rogers.”

“Dammit Barnes compress-!”

“You are not gay , James.”

“Time of death 6:01 pm.”
“Don’t fucking cry!” He roars, tears retching themselves from his eyes.

“Oh god, Bucky. I’m sorry.”

“There is no room for mistakes here, Mr. Barnes.”

“You must be the man sleeping with my husband, correct?”

“Fuck!” He screams. He screams, and yells and hits the fucking steering wheel because he needs to-- Because if nothing else it silences his head for one moment.

(He does it like someone would pray; in the hopes that someone is hearing him.

But it’s eleven at night, and he’s sitting in his car alone.)

“My son is a surgeon. He is smart, he will be the best surgeon possible. He will the best man possible. He doesn’t need love to be fulfilled, and certainly not from a man. Do you hear me, James? What are you? Are you my son?”

“Yes, mom.” He feels like he’s suffocating.

Chapter End Notes

It'd be awesome if you guys could leave a comment telling me what you think! Also if I've gotten anything medically wrong and any of you have medical knowledge, drop me a line!

*RTC- stands for Return to Clinic

distended neck veins- Pressure on the venous system in the veins

Cap refill- Stands for Capillary Refill. It can be measured by holding a hand higher than heart-level and pressing the soft pad of a finger or fingernail until it turns white, then taking note of the time needed for the color to return once pressure is released. Normal capillary refill time is usually less than 2 seconds.

Pericardial effusion- Pericardial effusion ("fluid around the heart") is an abnormal accumulation of fluid in the pericardial cavity.
I'm such a coward, these wretched things I do (Disgrace and treachery and the sickness that I know is true)

Chapter Notes

Guess who's back?!

Me. I'm back. After like a month long break which I am very very sorry for.

Warnings for quite a lot of cursing, mentions of child abuse and a blink-and-you'll-miss-it mention of an overdose.

I hope you enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[+5 unread messages]

**Wednesday, 8:07 pm**

Hey, you okay? Who was that woman I saw with you and Steve? J.

**Wednesday, 9:03 pm**

u okay?? jane said u went home instead of on ur date w/ steve????? is his sister in town r something??? r u gonna order pizza instead for dinner or???? -clint

**Wednesday, 10:57 pm**

Buck, give me a chance to explain. Just talk to me whenever you’re ready. It’s not what it looks like. -Steve

**Yesterday, 11:30 am**

Bucky, there’s something you need to know about Steve. Come see me asap.
“Hey this is Bucky. Drop me a line after the beep and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.”

Beeep.

[This message was left on: Wednesday, at nine twenty-five pm.]

“Bucky, it’s Steve. I know you hate me right now, and you should. But me and Peggy… We were over a long time before I met you. When you’re ready, we can talk and I’ll tell you everything, I swear. I shouldn’t have kept it from you, I know. I’m just… God, Bucky, I’m so goddamn sorry.”

[This message was left on: Today, eight oh three am.]

“Hey, Buck. It’s Clint here. Listen, we didn’t get to see you last night, man, and you didn’t want to be disturbed, so… Look, I know losing a patient can be hard. And all that shit with Steve… I just don’t want you to feel like you’re going through this alone. We’re all here for you, a hundred percent. But we totally get that you might want to be alone for a bit. So, whenever you’re ready, we’re ready. I know it might feel right now like it’s you, alone in all this, but it doesn’t have to be. Anyways, we’ll be home early enough tonight, so we can talk then, if you want. Take it easy, buddy.”

[This message was left: Today, at ten thirty pm.]

“Hello, is this a Mr. James Buchanan Barnes? My name is Dr. Helen Cho, I’m just calling to confirm our appointment tomorrow at twelve thirty, as made by your resident, Maria Hill. I look forward to seeing you, Dr. Barnes.”
Bucky’s clutch on the pillow lessens slightly, and he rolls over to his nightstand, grabs his phone, and does what he did to all the other messages- deletes it.

~*~

“Barton!”

Hill’s voice cuts like a knife through Clint’s thoughts, and he turns around to see her stalking towards him. “Dr. Hill,” He greets.

“Fury wants to see you in his room. Ward 5, room 37, and before you ask, no I don’t know why, no I can’t tell you why he’s there, and you better keep your trap shut about this or there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Understood.” Giving her a two finger salute (which she rolls her eyes at), he sets off in the direction of Fury’s ward. While it wasn’t exactly a surprise to him that Fury’s leave wasn’t for a vacation but rather for post-op examination (because Bucky ran his big mouth), he still had no clue why Fury would want to see him.

Clint isn’t stupid. He made it through med school, he’s an intern in one of the best hospitals in the country, he is by no means stupid. But he’s not blind either. He knows that he will never be a Bucky or a Natasha, or hell, even a Jane or Darcy. Medicine has not, does not and will never come naturally to him, or even easily. Clint has gotten to the point he has by forging his own path with no help from anyone, he’s standing on hours upon hours of revision and studying and more studying and too many coffees and redbulls to count.

But he’s always been better with his hands then with his words, and he’s always liked being able to fix broken things. His first ever patient was his mother, sitting beside her on her bed and messily stitching the fresh cut in her eyebrow, trying to replicate what he had seen her do countless times before.

(His second patient was himself, when he was thirteen and decided he had balls big enough to take on his father. Dad didn’t much like the sound of that, and shut him up with his fist, his rings and a beer bottle over the head.)

And after he finally pulled his head out of his ass in high school, he decided he wanted to help people, to fix the things on the outside, in the hopes that it would maybe help the things on the inside. Add in an old friend of one of his countless foster parents who worked in admissions for Michigan State University, and here you have Clint, not a complete fuck up.

So he discovered his love of medicine somewhat late in life, and yeah, his middle to high education wasn’t perfect, but still. He was here. And for him, that was more than enough, certainly more than he ever thought he’d get out of life. But he knows that in comparison to people like Natasha and Bucky who are able to churn out knowledge like it’s nothing, he falls behind.
So, yeah, he’s a little confused about why the chief of surgery wants to see him.

He knocks tentatively at the door and pokes his head in. “Sir? You wanted to see me?”

Fury looks at him from over his newspaper, and folds it. “Barton,” He beckons Clint inside. “Just the man I was looking for.”

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“Clint, I’m assigning you to a special case today, and it requires your absolute discretion, do you understand?”

Clint straightens, interest peaked at the mention of this ‘special case’. “What is it?”

“Well, as you can see, I’m indisposed at the moment. I can’t be keeping tabs on my hospital and staff. Barton, I’m the goddamn chief of surgery. I need those tabs. Today, I need you to be my eyes and ears.”

“You want me to be your eyes and ears,” Clint repeats the words sounding foreign to his mouth.

“A sponge, even. I need you to soak up every piece of information you can find.”

“You want me to be an investigative sponge.”

“Barton! Focus. I’m not fooling around. Too much has been happening under my radar, and it stops. Today.”

Clint nods. “Right. Okay. I can do that.” He begins to slowly retreat out of the room, still puzzled by his new ‘case’. “I’m just gonna go... Sponge.”

~*~

Bucky taps the steering wheel nervously with his fingers as he stares at the nursing home in front of him. The last time he was here…

You’re not my son.

He turns the volume up on the radio, in a futile attempt to drown out his thoughts.

( x )

Slow and steady guitar chords fill the space, the beat from the stereo doing little to distract him from his thoughts.

You knew what was going to happen, didn’t you?
You knew I was slowly falling in love with you.

Bucky’s insides turn to slush as he listens to the lyrics reverberate around his head, hitting too close to home.

‘Cause then you shot me down

I doubled over and I hit the ground right in front of you

He shuts his eyes and scrubs his face-

I guess in the wild west it’s okay to shoot the pest that’s annoying you

And he turns the radio off.

(Just because someone knocks at the door doesn’t mean you have to let them in.)

He doesn’t know why he’s here. His mind screams in protest as he takes the keys out of the ignition and gets out of the car. Every step feels like he’s dragging a heavy weight, each second that passes brings him closer to the doors and the weight gets heavier and heavier until it’s settled in his stomach.

He doesn’t know why he’s here.

But that’s not entirely true. It could be because he’s still grasping to the hope that his mother will be better, nicer today, and then tomorrow… It could be because he knows what she’s going to say and sometimes it’s easier to get kicked when you’re already down, and he needs someone to tell him to man up and take it. It could be because he woke up this morning and couldn’t feel anything, even when he tried, when he pulled up every memory, replayed Steve’s betrayal in his head, Peggy’s harsh words, the absolute certainty in Veronica’s eyes. He didn’t feel shame or pity or failure when all that came from this was spending three hours in bed, stuck in the same spot. He just lay there, digging inside himself in an attempt to find something, and coming up empty.

Empty.

He doesn’t want to fucking think about it right now. So he opens the door, signs himself in and walks down the corridor to his mother’s room. His skin begins to crawl as he gets closer-- not because he’s anxious, because he isn’t. Anxiety has been with Bucky every step of the fucking way, has been his constant downfall in every aspect of his life, and yet. He’s about to see his mother and he finds himself without so much as a tremor of nerves.

(It’s like he can see himself, though. Like he can see the Bucky that’s hurt and betrayed and heart-broken, bloodied and beaten from all the blows he’s had to take over the years. But that’s that Bucky, a far off memory of himself that he can’t quite reach no matter how much he tries. He’s this Bucky, looking at that broken Bucky. And he’s looking at him, all battered to a pulp, barely recognisable, and stabs himself in the heart in the hopes that this will make them the same.)
“Not such a good day today, Mr. Barnes,” A nurse says to him quietly. “She’s fairly lucid, a little grouchy, but you know yourself. Be patient with her.”

“Thank you,” Bucky says as he walks inside, seeing her sitting there, staring out the window. The door creaks as he pushes it open, and at the sound her head whips around.

“James,” She says, a there-but-not-quite smile on her lips. “Hello.”

“Hey, Ma.”

“Sit down.” She gestures to the chair across from her, and he does so.

They look at each for a second, quietly assessing.

“You’re sad,” She observes.

He nods. “You’re right.”

“Don’t be short with me, James. Why?”

He looks at her, properly his time instead of a passing glance. Her face is not as stoic as it usually is, her eyes giving away an inkling of motherly concern she so rarely acts on.

She’s gotten older. Older than Bucky had realised, but the lines around her mouth and crows feet in the corners of her eyes are undoubtedly there.

“I fell in love.” It’s the first time he’s ever said it, and he hates it. Hates that he has to use past tense and hates that his throat starts to close up ever so slightly. “It didn’t work out.”

She stares at him for a few minutes, her expression growing in irritation. “And this is a problem for you?”

His eyes snap up to look at her. “He was my boss. He had a wife the entire time, who’s now working at the hospital. Of course it’s a problem for me.”

Her eyes widen. “A he? Goddammit, James, I thought we had settled this.”

“It’s a part of me, I can’t just ignore it.”

“You don’t have to act on it either,” She snaps. “I know you hated me for so long for telling you what I did when you first told me, but trust me on this- you won’t be half the surgeon you could be if you let your emotions lead you.”

He shakes his head. “Oh yeah, because you’d know so much about that.”

“You think I don’t regret how I raised you? Every goddamn day I think about how different it could have been if I had taken a step back, or if your father had stayed. I had the entire world against me when I decided to pursue my career to level that I did- What with everyone wanting me to play the good wife and stay at home, but that is not me, James, never has been and never will be. But it is what it is, and it was what it was and you need to learn from my mistake.”

“You’re telling me just stop and I can’t! It’s me, it’s who I am-- What do you want me do? Become a machine?”

“You’re confused,” Her voice has calmed and quitened, but he can still hear the force behind it. “You are stressed and you’re latching on to a notion that everyone is telling you to achieve- Get a
partner, have a kid, be happy. It doesn’t work like that. But if you go back to work, and dedicate yourself to it, properly this time, none of that messing about like when you were in college, you’ll find satisfaction in that. Anyone can fall in love and be blindly happy, but not everyone can pick up a scalpel and save a life. You’re a surgeon. That will be your life, and you have to learn to accept it.”

“That will be my life? That’s fucking bullshit.”

“What do you want me to say? That you’ll have a lovely and happy life and that you’ll be able to balance work and home life? Because you won’t. You of all people should know that.”

“So you admit that you regret having me?”

“I regret the circumstance in which you were brought up.” She straightens up in her chair. “You don’t think that I wanted to be home with you when I was stuck in theatre? That I resented May so goddamn much because you loved her more than me? Because I did. But I don’t regret it, because it’s made you the man you are today-- It’s given you the potential to something great. Something better. I know that you came here in the hopes that I would comfort you, but that is not going to happen. You need to open your eyes to the real world, James.”

He shakes his head. “I can’t. I don’t want to be a doctor anymore. I don’t want to save people. If that’s going to be my life then I don’t want it.”

She looks at him, outraged. Lips pursed and eyebrows knitted close together. “What, you don’t want to be a doctor? Don’t want to save people? You’re waiting for inspiration, are you kidding me? I have a disease for which there is no cure, I think that would be inspiration enough.”

“You’re not getting it. I can’t be better. I’m giving everything I have right now and it’s not working.”

“No. You’re not. Because when I was in your position, I barely had time to eat, let alone date. I was working every single second I could, and when I wasn’t I was studying, I dominated.” She leans forward. “When are you going to get it? You start behind the eight ball, you’ll never get in front. Drop that man, and devote yourself. You could be so much, James. You could go further than I ever did-- You could be so much more than just be a surgeon, you could genuinely help mankind and advance medicine. Don’t throw it away for one man-- You don’t belong to anyone. The sooner that you realise you’re alone in this- that you will always be alone in this profession- the better.”

Breathe in. Breathe out.

Don’t get mad.

“Is that what Dad was? Throwing it all away? What, did you pick him up off the street because he was the only thing going-”

“Don’t you dare bring your father into this,” She snaps. “You don’t know anything about your father, you hear?”

“No thanks to you,” He snipes back.

Her eyes go hard and steely. “You think you’re screwed up without him? You’d be a hell of a lot worse with him. I kept him away to do you a favor.”

“Yeah, well, your favour didn’t do shit.”
“Don’t talk to me that way,” She says, a warning edge to her voice.

“You’ve said worse to me,” He spits.

She’s silent for a moment or two. “Why do you always play the victim, hm?”

He barks out a humourless laugh. “Because I’m always the fucking victim.”

She looks at him, blue eyes burning into his as the tension in the room fizzes out, both of them too tired to rehash age-old arguments. “Were you ever proud of me?” He asks.

His mother nods. “Oh yes, plenty of times. When you won the science fair, when you came top of your class, any of your graduations.”

“You never told me.”

“I thought it would be better that you weren’t babied every step of the way. You have to learn to forge your path one way or another, and other people’s praise is never enough to keep you standing by yourself.”

Bucky nods absentmindedly. “Was it ever hard to love me?”

Her eyes soften somewhat, and the hardness in the lines in her face dissipates. “It’s never hard for a mother to love their child. Even though you think I did all those times I handed you over to May. Even when…” It might be one of the first time he’s ever seen her struggle for words. “I know you hated yourself after what you did. And I know you thought I hated you for it, but I didn’t. I couldn’t. I loved you so much- I just found it hard to like you.”

He looks down, hands shaking at the mention of that incident years ago and chest constricting.

“I tried to give you so much. And then you did _that_, and… How could you do it? Did you hate your life that much?”

Bucky can’t even look her in the eye as he nods, numb. “Yes.” _And I’m starting to feel that way again, like everything that’s me has been swallowed up and I couldn’t find it if I searched for the rest of my life._

Breathe in. Breathe out.

He looks up.

“I only ever wanted you to be the best.”

“Sorry to disappoint.”
Natasha squints at the sight before her-- Clint leaning against the rails of one of the levels in the vast stairwell, whipping his around like an owl.

“Hey, bird brain,” She calls as she approaches him. “What are you doing here? Why aren’t you on rounds or, you know, practicing medicine?”

Clint’s face twists into a look of confusion and amusement. “Fury needs me to be his sponge.”

…. That was, admittedly, not the answer she was expecting. “What?”

He sighs, and shrugs. “He wants me to be his eyes and ears, find out if stuff’s going on behind his back. So here I am,” He waves his hand around to all the levels below him. “Sponging.”

She can’t help the smile that tugs at her lips as she shakes her head. “Wow. You really got lucky, didn’t you?”

“Hey,” Clint shoots back. “It’s some kind of sign of trust, all right? So. You’re just jealous he didn’t pick you.” And then, like the five year old he is, sticks his tongue out at her.

“Oh, totally,” She deadpans. “So jealous. I really drew the short straw today, all I got was to scrub in on one of Stark’s surgeries.”

Clint’s face promptly falls. “You got to scrub in with Stark?”

“I’m about to. Speaking of which, I’m going to be late.” She claps him on the shoulder. “Have fun being a sponge. Oh, and word of advice? Nothing interesting happens in the stairwell.”

“You never know,” He calls out after her as she exits through the door.

He sighs, and drops his head down, running a hand through his unruly hair. Honestly? Being Fury’s eyes and ears is fucking boring. Nobody’s saying anything out of the ordinary, everything is all perfectly normal and legal. Though he’s pretty sure Fury’s not going to be satisfied with “No malpractice suits today!”.

With that, the door at the bottom floor opens and closes, and the sound of sneakers fills the space, followed by the door opening and closing again.

When Clint cranes his head over the rails to look down, he see’s Dr. Hill’s head, and behind her Steve’s.

Steve.
His grip on the rails tightens at the sight of him, of what he did to Bucky.…

“Hey, Maria,” Steve’s breathless voice brings Clint out of his thoughts. “Listen, I need you to take Bucky off of my rotation. No, just- Look, I know I can’t ask you to take his friends off, but. Jesus, I did a horrible thing to him. He shouldn’t have to deal with working with me while we figure this out.”

When Maria answers, her voice is as sharp as a razor. “You’re asking me to jeopardise one intern’s education because you couldn’t keep it in your pants?”

Steve lets out a breath. “Yeah,” He answers quietly. “I am.”

Maria is deathly silent, but Clint can practically feel her glare. “I am. Because you said it yourself, what you did to that boy was horrible, and he doesn’t deserve the extra emotional stress.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t bother thanking me,” She says in a clipped tone, and woah, Hill is pissed. And not the kind of pissed she would be at them, the ‘I could be doing so much more right now, and yet’, this is near full on anger. “I’m not doing this for you, I’m doing it for him. Because not only have you hurt him deeply, but you’ve single handedly made this workplace hell for him. You could ruin his career, do you understand? Are you not getting how much you’re screwing him up?”

“Maria-”

“Don’t. I don’t want to hear any bullshit excuses-- You don’t get to make excuses for this. You did what you did and these are the consequences. I am doing this once. But I swear to god, Steve, if you try anything with any of my interns that isn’t completely professional, I’m sure as hell not going to keep it quiet.”

A second later footsteps start coming up the stairs and Clint takes that as a cue to get the hell out of dodge, and promptly bolts out the door.

He fucking hates being a sponge.

~*~

Bucky knows his feelings for Steve are something he should let go of. Hell, if Steve knew about his feelings, he would want him to let them go.

But not even just for Steve- his mother makes a good point, caring makes you weak. And despite how often he’s called bullshit on anything she’s said regarding that area, he’s starting to come around to her way of thinking.

Because look where he is.

It’s caring about Steve that got him to this point-- Caring about Steve that he ended up inadvertently fucking up his career, it was because he cared about Steve that he broke his own
goddamn heart, it was because he cared about Steve that his entire life got flipped on his head in the worst way possible and know it’s left him weak and hurt and alone.

And he hates it-- The feeling of being completely cut off, disconnected, to his friend, his family, his own damn self.

But this is a situation of his own damn making, and now he has to live with consequences.

He has to live with knowing that he has finally found the one person that could be everything to him but never will be. And he has to live with knowing that it was his fault- Nobody pushed him into this, he made the decision by himself. He has to live with knowledge that he’s the architect of his own destruction, always has been and always will be.

~*~

“So was your sponging fun?” Natasha asks as she slides up next to him.

“No,” Clint mutters darkly. “I got fuck all done. All I heard was a private conversation between Hill and Rogers, and that was it.”

“Ooh, about what, pray tell?”

Clint shrugs and waves his hand. “Steve wanted Hill to take Bucky off his rotation, because of, y’know…”

Natasha’s expression darkens. “Yeah,” She answers shortly. “Wait, Hill knows about them?”

Clint nods. “Sure as hell sounded like it. Hey, has he talked to you?”

She shakes her head. “No. I thought he would have talked to you.”

Clint grimaces. “I’ve only gotten radio silence from him. He wasn’t there when I got home and he was asleep when I got up, I didn’t want to wake him.”

Nat sighs. “Shit.”

“No.” He can’t say much more, because really, that’s all that can be said for the matter.

They amble down the hallway together some more, the only other sounds apart from their footfalls are muffled conversation and the whirring of machines.

“So what are you going to tell Fury?” Natasha asks, and Clint groans.

“Fuck knows. I mean, I can’t go in and be like ‘so, turns out Dr. Hill knew about the affair between one of you head surgeons and interns and didn’t tell you! Surprise!’.”

“Well, you could always try it-”

“Oh shut up,” Clint gripes as Natasha snickers, but there’s no heat to his words, only could be described as nothing more than affection.

“Go down to the nurses station,” She advises. “Ask them for updates on major patients, like Jones
in 202 or Birch with the abdominal tumour. If he asks about staff, just lie and say everything seemed normal as usual. He can’t hold it against you.”

“You’re a beaut, thank you,” Clint gushes as he takes off in a light jog down the other end of the hall to the stairs. “I’ll catch you later!”

“Bye, bird brain,” She calls after him, and doesn’t completely resent the fondness that flickers up at the sight of him,

No sooner had Clint stepped foot on the first steps of the stairwell then did he make out muted conversation.

“Did you know?” A familiar voice demands.

“Know what?” A sharp voice that is unmistakably Dr. Odinson’s.

“Did you know that Steve had a wife?” Someone- oh shit that was Darcy what the fuck.

“This is no way to talk to your boss.”

Darcy scoffs. “Please, you’re not just my ‘boss’ anymore. I think the minute that you slept with me confirmed that, right?”

What the everloving fuck.

An irritated sigh.

“No. I barely talk to the man as it is. Do I look like the type of person who regularly engages in conversations about truth, honour and patriotism?”

A resigned sigh, this time from Darcy. “No.”

“Exactly.”

A heartbeat of silence.

“Listen, about what I said in the oncall room last time-”

And no, that’s enough of that. Clint does not want to know. He turns on his heel and gets the hell out of there, not caring that his sneakers squeak on the linoleum floor.

As he stumbles back into the hallway, Natasha looks up from where she had been checking a file with a frown. “What’s the matter?”

Clint blinks. “Uh, nothing,” He stutters. “I just- I have to-” He gestures towards the elevators and rushes in, letting out a relieved sigh when the doors close.

He was never stepping foot in a goddamn stairwell again.
Clint, in truth, didn’t do much with the hour he had left. He went to the bathroom, panicked and tried to figure what the hell Darcy and Loki had going on, and then panicked some more because he now only had forty minutes to try to come up with a day’s events for Fury. So after rushing to the nurses station, he trudged up to Fury’s room, with nothing more than his weight’s worth of fucking secrets and nothing useful. If someone had had a heart attack or reacted well to their treatment or hell even died he’d be the happiest man in the world, but no. Everyone stayed the exact same.

Fuck’s sake.

“Barton,” Fury greeted when Clint stepped into the room, folding over his newspaper. “What’s the report?”

Any bit of backbone Clint thought he had quickly fled. “It’s very quiet today, sir. Jones in 202 is stable, Richardson in 405’s CT came up clean it’s all- It’s great. Everything is fine.”

Fury’s eyes narrowed. “There's no news, gossip, surgeries I should know about?”

Clint shakes his head. “Um, nothing that I heard.” Jesus it’s hot in here-- He can feel the tell tale prick of heat creep up the back of his neck and move to his ears, no doubt tinging them red.

Fury levels him with a glance. “We both know that’s bullshit. Now come on, what's the buzz, Barton?”

“Nothing!” Clint blurts out. “You know, not in the halls, not in the OR, not in the stairwells. Especially nothing happening in the stairwells-- you know, they're just stairwells.”

They look at each other for less than five seconds before Clint breaks. “Um, will that be all? ‘Cause my shifts finished so-”

Fury sighs. “Just go, Barton.”

Clint thinks he manages to make it out of Fury’s line of sight before he lets out a breath and scrubs an agitated hand through his hair. He just wasted an entire day doing fuck all. Fuck that. That’s grade A bullshit, and yet. He keeps getting handed it.

(See he’s the thing- Clint loves medicine. He lives, breaths, loves medicine. And it’s hard to watch someone as naturally gifted as Bucky not even care about it, to take it completely for granted and not want it at all.)

“Hey, you ready to head home?” Jane suddenly comes out from the corner and starts walking beside him.

“Hm? Oh yeah, sure,” He answers. “Just let me grab my bag?”

She nods. “‘Course. Hey-- You talked to Bucky? He didn’t answer my text and--”

“--Was asleep when you tried to talk to him this morning?” Clint shakes his head. “Damn. Same
“Well, at least we should be able to talk to him at home. I know he’s closer with Nat, but she got stuck on ER duty.”

If Clint tenses slightly with the thought that comes into his head, he hopes he doesn’t show it. “Darcy not coming home?” He asks carefully.

Jane shakes her head ‘no’. “She has surgery in a few hours so she decided to just sleep here instead.”

“Wow, she does sure spend a lot of time here,” He says, hopefully nonchalantly.

Jane just nods, looking none the wiser. “Yeah, I know. Don’t take this the wrong way, but I think she’ll crash soon enough. All those hours she’s logging? It’s totally unhealthy. And against work policy. She’ll either get caught or her work will catch up on her, but either way, she should be sleeping in her own bed soon enough.”

“Mhmm,” Clint hums. “Here’s hoping.”

Here’s hoping indeed.

Damn.

He fucking hates keeping secrets.

~*~

Steve tugs off his surgical mask and flings it in the bin, discarding his gloves and gown along with it, before methodically scrubbing his hands, watching the skin grow redder and angrier as he practically attacks it with soap.

He sits alone in the gallery, looking down at the OR where twenty minutes he just saved a man’s a life. Twenty minutes ago he was taking a bullet out of a police officer’s abdomen--

Doesn’t have quite the same kick it usually does, though.

He sighs, and runs a hand through his hair.

He hates this-- This feeling of helplessness, of having no one to tether himself to. It’s his own damn fault, yeah, but. It doesn’t take the sting out of the cut.

He hates this.

He hates having hurt Bucky, hates that he couldn’t have cooled his jets for five seconds to actually divorce Peggy before flying off to Washington, hates that he can’t fight his way out of this. Not with his fists, hell, not even with his words.
He’s defenseless.

The familiar sound of high heels on linoleum brings him out of his thoughts, and he gears himself for whatever Peggy has to say now.

( “You treated him like the dirt beneath your shoe,” He hisses in the on call room, jabbing his finger at Peggy’s chest. “You wanna be mad at someone? Be mad at me, but don’t bring him into this. He didn’t do shit to you, I did.”)

“Oh, so I’m just supposed to act as if nothing’s wrong?” She snaps back. “Forgive me for not taking kindly to the man who slept with you while we were still married.”

“Did you not get the message when I flew halfway across the world? I don’t want to be with you anymore. It’s over, we’re done.”)

A thin black folder is dropped beside him. “Divorce papers.” Peggy’s voice cuts like ice, and Steve tears his eyes up to meet hers. “I’m not going to keep this relationship up if it makes you so unhappy.” He picks it up and begins to flick through it, a lump getting caught in his throat as the life they built together gets divided up so neatly and clinically and it feels plain wrong. “We both hurt each other--”

“-- You cheated on me first,” He interjects quietly, but there’s no heat, no fight to his words.

“That doesn’t give you permission to do the same to me! What, did you just pick him up off the streets to spite me?”

“No,” He snaps hotly, and there’s that emotion.

Peggy arches an eyebrow. “Ah. Not just a fun time, then. You care about him.”

Steve scoffs. “Of course I do. I didn’t do it to spite you, or anything else, I did it-- I did it because I do. I care about him. And it had jack shit to do with you.”

She nods. “I’m sure. But still, I want you to know-- I regret it, Steve. I regretted it as soon as I could think clearly, it didn’t mean anything. I’m sorry, Steve. I truly am. And I understand that you want this to be over, but just. Think about it, yeah? At least try, would you? For me? We had such a great life, we still could if you would only try. Just-- Don’t give up yet.”

He doesn’t answer, just keeps his eyes glued to the words on the page, and when the sound of Peggy’s footsteps retreat into the distance, he lets out a shaky breath he hadn’t realised he had been holding.

Well what the fuck is he meant to do now?
Clint knock, once twice three times on the door. “Bucky? You in there?”

Bucky sits on the cold, wooden floor, staring at his bed. Beside him is his wardrobe, and he can’t help the wave of anger that comes over him when he remembers the few of Steve’s shirts that somehow made their way in there. “Yeah,” He calls out, not taking his eyes off the offending piece of furniture.

There’s a muffled cough. “Um, can I come in? Or you can come out, maybe? Jane’s here too, we-- We’d love to talk to you.”

But it’s not anger- not really. It’s sadness, grievance, deep seated and rooted in his bones, so deep he couldn’t find the beginning of it if he tried. It’s a sadness that’s been hiding there for a long time. And he let it. This is all on Bucky- He let it stay there, let it fester, let it grow so it became a part of him and it didn’t seem like a problem at the time, because he pushed it away, pushed and pushed and pushed and was so ignorant in assuming that the strength he had would always be there to push again and push more.

“No, I’m okay,” He answers, voice wavering slightly as his eyes fill with tears. “I’m pretty tired though, and I gotta get up early tomorrow for this therapy appointment, so I’m hitting the hay.”

And god, he’s tired, and the sadness isn’t as small as it used to be, it’s huge now, towering over him. He couldn’t push it away if he tried.

So he sits in his room, alone in the dark. Bucky and his sadness, sitting side by side.

“Oh, well, if you change your mind, you know we’re here, right? You can always talk to us, Buck, we just want to help you.”

Bucky has to physically cling to the radiator pipe to stop to anchor him in an effort to stop his voice from shaking. “Yeah, I know. Thank you- thank you. Thanks.”

A beat of silence. “No worries.”

Bucky should be happy that he can focus on his career, that he’s in one of the most prestigious medical programmes in the world, that he has great friends, that he doesn’t live in a shoebox--

But he doesn't.

He just feels really fucking sad.
(He can see himself. But he has two different wounds, and looking at that one does nothing to heal this one.)

~*~

Chapter End Notes

So there it is.

I hope you enjoyed, and it would be great if you could leave a comment telling me what you think!

yo come talk to me on tumblr
I was naive and hopeful and lost (Now I'm aware and drowned in my thoughts)

Chapter Notes

Heyyyy....

Sorry about the delay. I got a virus on my computer which meant I couldn't access any of my documents. It's mostly gone now, thankfully. I know this is a short chapter, but the next one is in the works! I have a lot of projects coming up but I'm typing as fast as my fingers will let me :)

Title is from 'R.I.P 2 my youth' by The Neighbourhood!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A first person, introspective interview with James Buchanan Barnes, part the second.

Remember when I said that love is selfless, and that it’s about ‘us’?

I take it all back.

Love is the most selfish thing there is. It's based on nothing more than attraction and good sex.

It's about ourselves.

I love the way you make me feel. I love the way you love me.

Lovers take everything you have- and the worst part is you see them do it. He let me watch as he did it, the bastard, he let me watch as he curled his fist around my heart and wrenched, all while I looked on with pure affection. Love is a burglary that you can't insure against, and good luck finding your heart again because they take it with them.

The bastard took my damn heart with him.

I don’t even know what the fuck I was thinking-- I sounded like a lovesick freakin’ teenager, I know the guy for a hot second and suddenly I’m madly in love with him?

I fell hard and I fell fast and I knew I was doing it but I just assumed that the landing wouldn’t hurt, that Steve would catch me.
That Steve might fall *with* me.

But like I said, love is selfish.

And I think that maybe I loved the me that he brought out. You know, good person, good doctor, good friend. Happy. But I’m not that person, and just because I felt that way doesn’t mean I *was*. Like, you can think you’re great, you can feel great, but it doesn’t change the fact that you’re still a shitty person. Because you have to be the one to fix you, you can’t get someone else to fix it for you. That really is shitty.

And how the hell am I meant to go back to work?

Steve was like a drug. He made me feel great, invincible, like nothing bad could touch me. My anxiety was reduced which was amazing. I felt honest to god happy, that I hadn’t felt in a long time, which was great. And maybe that’s why I felt so hard about him.

And now it’s going to be like med school all over again. Nights of being stuck in one spot, not even able to read the book in front of me because I’m terrified. What if I get it wrong? What if I don’t remember? What if I have another attack? What if what if what if-

Stuck in a loop, over and over, every thought worst than the last, the ache in my chest that gets bigger and harder with every breath and--

You know, before Steve, I couldn’t remember the last time I slept all through the night without the pills. I always woke up with a dizzy head and I might have just enough time to register that I was having an anxiety attack and not dying of a heart attack if I was lucky. The first time I slept soundly was the same night I first slept with Steve, the day before my first day at SHIELD, was mostly because of the drink-induced haze beer and tequila offered.

The second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth time all occurred because I was not only bone tired but also because Steve was there. Holding me down, keeping me close, focusing on his breathing steadied mine and I can’t even sleep in my own fucking bed anymore because it’s too big and cold and I have never been great at handling my problems well.

That being said, I know that being an anxious person is hard, but being an anxious kid is definitely worse.

I know that I have problems, issues about my dad, know that the pills and the drinking and the hiding in the closet are always going to leave cracks in the deepest parts of you despite however hard you try to patch them up. That being said; I understand that it’s a part of me., just like anything else.
I was just nice to forget about it for a bit.

Peter likes to wax lyrical about going to park and playing with Uncle Ben, nights of playing monopoly with me and summers spent on bikes, having a great childhood even after his parents died.

And I mean, even when I had my mom-- properly-- when I think back to being a kid, I can’t really remember being happy, not in the way I wanted to be.

So deal with that shit.

Chapter End Notes

Well that's that.

I hope you enjoyed, and it would be great if you could leave a comment telling me what you think!
Thank you to everyone who has already kudos/commented!

 yo come talk to me on tumblr
Bucky wakes in the morning to the obnoxious screaming of his alarm clock. Rolling over with a frustrated grunt that comes from having a shitty night’s sleep on his shitty couch he slams it off, and flops back down. His phone buzzes on the pillow beside, and with a reluctant sigh he picks up—pointedly ignoring the texts from Steve—and see’s a reminder from Dr. Cho about his appointment today at 10.

His therapy session.

Fucking fantastic.

He’s jolted out of the reverie he had slipped into by Jane stumbling in, looking pretty much still asleep, hair mussed and rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

“She,” She curses, presumably startled by Bucky’s figure on the couch. “God, Bucky-- Sorry, I thought—”

Bucky waves his hand as he sits up- ouch, his back is fucked- and yawns. “No, it’s okay. I was just, um--” He gestures to the makeshift bed beneath him. “His shit is still in my room, y’know? This is just. Easier. For now.”

Jane nods. “Oh, I get it. Totally. Been there, done that. Threw out the t-shirt. Whatever helps you deal with this in the best way.”
“Listen,” Bucky says, as he stands up and (painfully) cracks his back. “I appreciate that you all have my back, I really do, but it’d be great if I wasn’t treated like glass. I mean, I’m still Bucky you know? I just-- My life is so fucking messed up right now on so many levels you don’t even know and it’d be nice to have some normalcy.”

Jane frowns, but nods anyways, before schooling her features into something more neutral.

“You want some coffee?” She asks as she walks into the kitchen. Bucky hums an agreement as he follows her, glad to leave his phone behind in the other room and forget about texts and calls that reduce him to a shaking pile of nerves.

“You want breakfast as well?” Jane enquires as she starts to fiddle with the coffee maker.

Bucky shakes his head. “No, I’m okay.”

She raises an eyebrow. “You sure? It’s the most important meal of the day.”

His throat begins to tighten as his thoughts drop to the nerves that have taken up permanent residency in his stomach. “I had a late dinner,” He lies.

Jane’s back is turned to him so he can’t see her face, but he sees how she stops for a second, how her grip on the pan stutters for a second. “Alright. There’ll be leftovers anyways, when you want to eat.”

Jane clears her throat as methodically breaks eggs and begins to whisk them. “Your, um-- therapy. That’s today right?”

Bucky’s entire body goes rigid as his internal organs start doing back flips. “Uh, yeah.”

She turns back to look at him, sympathy evident on her face and Bucky fucking hates that, brief irrational anger flaring inside of him--

“How are you feeling about it?”

--before being replaced by the all-too familiar feeling of anxiousness, the kind he had gotten before every appointment.

He thinks of how it feels like he can’t breath because his throat feels so fucking tight all the time, of the butterflies living in his stomach. He thinks about how he’s going to have to go into a tiny office and start peeling back his layers until he’s as good as naked and have to look at himself, at his damaged mind and broken heart and all his fucked-up issues.

He thinks about how every time he goes in it feels like an autopsy he has to perform on himself.

For a second, he thinks of Pierce.

But he swallows that thought, and gives the same old spiel that’s been drilled into him since he can remember, the words therapists and doctors and his mother and May and anyone who knows shit about him fling at him, thinking that it will make it better.
“Yeah,” He answers, amazed at how normal his voice sounds. “I think it will be good for me.”

Jane seems to like the party-line.

~*~

Bucky stares at the lino on the floor, the fluorescent lighting reflecting off of it. He watches as his foot goes up and down as his leg bounces, a nervous tick he picked up in college, stuck in two-hour lectures with no escape and a million eyes on him.

“James Barnes?”

A tall, slender woman stands in the doorway, her light caramel skin contrasting the deep brown of her eyes.

“Um, yeah, that’s me,” Bucky answers gruffly as he stands up, subconsciously running a hand through his hair, which is slowly getting longer.

She smiles warmly, and offers her hand, which he takes. “I’m Dr. Helen Cho. It’s a pleasure to meet you- Please, come in.”

Bucky nods jerkily as he follows her inside, his gut already twisting with pain and nerves as he’s hit with an all-too familiar scene; a fancy chair, a sofa and a coffee table between them.

Dr. Cho gestures to the couch, which he takes a seat in, trying not to seem entirely uncomfortable. She sits down opposite him, and he hates how his heart clenches.

“You don’t need to be nervous, Bucky,” She says. “Think of today as a getting to know one another. I’m just trying to assess you and your health, the bare surface. Is that okay?”

He nods.

“This isn’t your first time in therapy, is it?”

He shakes his head.

“It says here-“ She plucks a file off from a small table beside her. “-That while you were in college, you attended intensive sessions with Alexander Pierce.” She raises an eyebrow. “He’s a world-renowned psychologist.”
“Yeah,” Bucky clears his throat in an effort to try to ignore the feeling of suffocation crawling through his windpipes. “Dr. Pierce helped me with a lot.”

“I can imagine so. You must feel very lucky to have had his help.”

This is what he hates, the feeling of being a bug trapped under a microscope. He rubs the back of his neck, and he can feel her eyes stare at the crown of his head. “Yes, yeah, he was great-- Um, did you want to talk about something else?”

By some miracle, she relents. “Yes. Tell me about your work.”

“Well, I’m a surgical intern.”

She looks at him.

“Em…I’m working with Dr. Hill, but you probably already knew that.” He struggles for words, searches his brain for viable answers. “...I’m thinking of going into general surgery. Uh… I don’t… What do you want me to say?”

“Do you remember that personality test we made you take at the start of your internship?” When Bucky ‘mm-hms’, she continues. “That was determine, roughly, whether or not you would be psychologically robust enough to complete your surgical training. One of the questions we asked was why you wanted to become a doctor. Answers varied, as they do, but yours-” She pulls out the sheet with Bucky’s name scrawled at the top in his own handwriting. “-was left blank. Dr. Fury let it slide, but I want you to tell me. Why did you decided to become a medical professional?”

“Well, my mother.”

“What about your mother?”

Bucky tries not to let the frustrated sigh escape from his lips. “She was a surgeon. She always wanted me to be one, and I grew up with all kinds of medical shit. I mean, jesus, my fifth birthday present was ‘Operation’. For Christmas I got one of those ‘hedda gets bedda’ dolls, you know, the ones where you turn the dolls head and they’re like sick, so you have to make the right diagnosis and figure out which way to turn the head so she gets back to normal.”

“So you’re only here because your mother put this career on you?”

“What-- No!”

“Well, why then?”

“Because… I like it!” He hates this part, as well. When they try to back you into a corner and raise your hackles.

“Why do you like it? Give me a moment, James. Tell me when you knew without a doubt, this was the career for you.”
“I don’t have one,” He answers, and doesn’t bother leaving out the bite.

“Why not?”

“‘Cause it’s my fucking life. It always has been.”

“Why are you here, James?”

“Because Hill made me,” He snipes. Letting out a frustrated breath he rubs the bridge of his nose. “Look, I’m goddamn good at what I do, okay? Ask any of my supervisors, they’ll tell you. Why the fuck I got into or whatever has nothing to do with it.”

“So you think because you’re good at this you have to do it?”

“Well I can’t exactly drop out now.”

“You don’t have to become a surgeon, either.”

“Listen, I’m becoming a fucking surgeon and that’s that. I don’t have thousands of dollars of debt just to dick around and ‘find’ myself. I know where I’m goddamn going.”

That, he thinks, might be the biggest lie he’s ever told.

“And anyways,” He continues. “I thought this was just about getting to know me. Why do we have to go into this stuff?”

“Okay, James, let’s change topic. Do you like what you do?”

His forehead creases. “Like… Do I like medicine? Yeah, of course I do.”

“Why?”

“Well… I’m good at it. And I just like it.”

“Do you think that’s because your mother never let you explore any other options?”

“What? No!”

“Because to me it sounds like you’re stuck in a rut. You’ve lived your entire life with the great Winifred Barnes as your mother, who- as you said yourself- enforced the medical profession on you since you were a young boy. That doesn’t leave a lot of room for growth.

“But you’re right, James. You are a brilliant surgeon. I have talked to your supervisors, and they’ve said the same. You’re ahead of your classmates, you make quick and accurate diagnoses, and you’ve proven to be good in the theatre as well. You graduated first in your university, and you made the dean’s letter every month. But all the surgeons who are mentoring you here have said the same thing- They don’t know if you’re truly happy. You can be brilliant at something, but that in no way dictates that you have to pursue it. You are a gifted young man, James. You undoubtedly are. But I’m looking at you, and at your history, and all I see is a young man who is still deeply troubled and an unfortunate victim of circumstance. So, please. Make this easier on both of us and save yourself the extra weeks of therapy and tell me, honestly. Are you happy?”
He’s quiet as the word sink in. The hit him, like a blow to the chest, and he feels like he might cry.

Dr. Cho is looking at him, waiting for an answer.

Bucky has always known that he wasn’t happy. His sadness is just something that sits under his skin, a coil that wraps around his bones and keeps him right.

No one’s ever really asked him, though.

And he’s never really said it out loud.

He murmurs it when he takes another shot alone in a crowded bar. He whispers it to himself when he gives in to his vices and lights his third cigarette. He said it to his reflection a few times, testing the words on his tongue, trying to make it fit. It never sounds right though.

I am sad
I am unhappy
I am depressed
I need help.

When I was twenty two years old I tried to kill myself.

His sadness is just something he knows that’s within him. He’s never said it to anybody though. Especially not to his friends.

“I don’t know,” He whispers. “I can’t remember.”

She leans forward, arms crossed.

“Can’t remember what, James?”

“What it feels like to be happy. By myself. Without drugs or people. I don’t… I look at my life, and I can’t remember just being happy in me.”

“What helped you feel happy?”

“In highschool and college it was that drugs. Anti depressants, anti anxiety. I didn’t like using them, they made me feel… I don’t know. Fake? Like I wasn’t real. Plastic. I drank maybe a little too much to help. I was prescribed some pretty heavy stuff. But then I met Warren.” Bucky’s heart clenches at the thought of him. “He was a guy in my classes, and we met because we both seeing Pierce. He had problems too- his parents and shit. He got it, he had been there, so he helped me. He helped normalize meds-- Suddenly it wasn’t this secretive, shameful thing, it was like being in a secret club. Like we were getting the best high in the world and all because we were damaged goods. I mean, I knew it was bad and stuff… Shit got bad for both of us. I, you know…” He trails
off, trying to block that time from his mind. “But when I got this internship, I tried to get better. And I did, I went cold turkey. But then I met another guy. And he made me happy too. At the time I thought it was real happiness, but now… I don’t think so.”

“The relationship ended?”

“Yeah. Warren-- Warren went away. He shipped himself off to rehab, got himself sorted out.” Bucky picks at his nail. “He’s doing his internship at Xavier’s, I think. And, the other guy… He was seeing someone else. So.”

He stares at his shoes as the silence hangs heavy in the air, weighted with his confession.

Then, she speaks again.

“Was Warren with you when you overdosed?”

And it hits him like a knife to his heart.

~*~

“You think he’s doing okay?”

It’s a question that’s been on Clint’s mind for most of the day, plaguing him like a weird dream you just can’t seem to shake off.

Natasha tenses beside him, and the scribbling of her pen stops momentarily.

“I’m sure he’s doing fine,” She concedes after a moment. “I’m sure it’s just mandatory practice. I mean, this isn’t exactly a run-of-the-mill situation. Hill probably just wants to avoid some kind of sexual harassment suit.”

“Is that what she said to you when you asked Bucky about it?”

Nat shakes her head. “No, he said something about making sure he was handling the stress well.”

Clint frowns down at the files he’s supposed to be studying. “I don’t know, man… Hasn’t Bucky seemed a little off to you? Even before he found out about Steve. Like… Highly strung?”

“He’s just stressed, Clint, it’s fine. Wouldn’t you be, if you were in his shoes?”

“Yeah, but-”

“Look, all we can do is be here for him and support him. It’ll be fine, stop worrying, you mother hen.” She’s cut off by her pager beeping. “Crap, that’s Stark. I’ve gotta go.”

“Have fun,” Clint calls as she strides down the hall, turning back to his papers. He gets all of five minutes of work done before Darcy is flopping down beside him, letting out a morose sigh.”Why so glum, chum?”

“I’m so tired,” She moans, leaning her head against his shoulder.

“Well maybe if you actually slept in the house instead of clocking an ungodly amount of hours
here you’d actually get some sleep.”

“I know, I know.” She sighs. “It’s just… I don’t know. Shit happens.”

Clint is almost about to blow the lid then and there and tell her, spill his guts and confess that he knows about her and Loki but then--

Speak of the devil, and he shall appear.

Odinson walks briskly down the hall, looking like the epitome of a man who has no time for anyone else.

“Hide me,” Darcy whispers, but before Clint can answer, the man himself is towering over them, imposing as ever.

“Lewis, aren’t you supposed to be actually working?” He snaps.

She matches his glare, and they look at each other, just. Glaring. Clint kind of feels like he’s watching a standoff from an old Wild West movie. He fucking hates Wild West movies. Thankfully, Darcy breaks the (sexual) tension by standing up and grabbing her chart. “Yeah, I really have to be going.” With that, she takes off, walking with a determined stride.

Leaving Clint alone with a Loki that looks like someone pissed in his coffee, staring after Darcy--

Before his head whips back to Clint.

“Oh, I’m sorry, are we paying you to sit there looking gnomeless? Get to work, dammit! Save some lives!”

“Yessir,” Clint says, scrambling up and getting the hell out of there.

What was everyone’s problem with keeping it in their pants?

“Hey, birdbrain, wanna scrub in?” Natasha’s redhead sticks out from one of the O.R’s, with that glint she gets in her eye when she’s doing what she really loves, the glint he thinks he can sometimes see when they’re talking--

And okay. He can’t really say much.

~*~

Warren--
Warren’s left a niche in a place in Bucky’s heart, a place that’s deep and dark that no one else has ever been able to reach.

And in the same way, Bucky has left a Bucky-shaped scar on Warren. They’re the best and worst thing that’s ever happened to each other.

“Yeah,” Bucky croaks, in answer to her question.

_Was Warren with you when you overdosed?_

He lets out a rueful chuckle. “Warren was there, alright.”

~*~

The first time Bucky met Warren was also the first time he met Alexander Pierce.

Having been strong armed into attending therapy, he had sat, scowling on the hard plastic chair outside Pierce’s office, waiting for him to come out. He had been a colleague of Bucky’s mother, and had been the head of the psyche department until he was offered tenure at Dartmouth.

Bucky looked up at the sound of a door clicking closed, but instead of finding a forty year old man, he saw a young, blonde boy with wild curls that nearly obscured his bright, blue eyes. He was pale, about Bucky’s height, with deep, black bags under his eyes.

At seeing Bucky though, he had given him a wry grin. “You here to see Pierce?”

Bucky nodded.

“What’s your name?”

“Bucky.”

The boy-- who was in a few of Bucky’s classes now that he thought of it-- fished a cigarette out of his pocket.

“Oh hey, we have classes together. Sorry. First few weeks and all that. I’m Warren.”

Bucky nods his understanding. “What’s Pierce like?”

“He’s alright,” He shrugged. “Bit weird, but hey, aren’t we all?” This time when he grins, Bucky can’t help but grin back. It’s infectious. “Anyways, I should be going, I’ve got bio with McEntyre. But, I have been needing some help with some of my homework. Wanna be my study buddy?”

“Depends.” Bucky cocks his head and gives him a sly smirk. “What subject?”

Warren bites the stub of the cigarette, and just smiles. It’s a really nice smile. “Anatomy.”

Before either one can continue, the door opens, and the man Bucky can only assume is Pierce steps
out. “James,” He smiles-- and his does nothing to calm the nerves humming in Bucky’s veins. “It’s a pleasure. Why don’t you step inside?”

~*~

“It says here in your file, that, although you were at first kept for your overdose, you were later admitted full time for depression and suicidal tendencies.” Her voice is soft now, treading lightly. “Was it Warren that brought this on after he left you?”

Bucky’s throat closes up. “No-- God no. Warren didn’t- Warren helped. For the most part, I mean. He…” Bucky lets out a shuddered breath. “Pierce put us both on Rumyodin.”

He’s not looking at Dr. Cho, but he can hear a faint but sharp intake of breath. “James, that’s an MAOI*. It’s one of the most restrictive and side-effect heavy drugs--”

“I know that.” And he doesn’t mean to snap, he doesn’t. “I know that now. That thing fucked up my life, I know all about that fucking drug.” He takes a deep breath. “Pierce gave it to us-- individually-- but he didn’t outline all the side effects and the restrictions it had. It was new on the market, too, so no one knew that much about it. But it felt…” What did it feel like? The initial high, that hit the first five seconds give you after a slump, it felt… incredible. Like having an orgasm, jumping onto a bed of feathers and the rush of standing atop a mountain all times ten. “...Amazing.” Is what he settles for. “That’s what it was like, but all the time. It never wore off, it was addictive. I don’t know why cocaine addicts bother when they could just have this shit instead. It heightens everything. That’s what we thought, anyways. Now…” Now he knows it was probably a hallucination, brought on by mixing it with prozac, or alcohol, or hell, even cheese. You could hardly eat anything with Rumyodin, he later found out. It makes sense, though. Rumyodin becomes the focus of your life.

He scratches the back of his neck. “You’re supposed to take them every four hours. But Pierce… Sometimes he’d makes us miss one or two. I don’t know why. I don’t want to know. At first, it was okay. I got a little antsy, but I figured that was normal. But I got more dependant, and… When he made me miss one, I went crazy. It was withdrawl, but christ, I…”

_I waited in a curled up ball in the bathrooms in his building, sweating and puking and hallucinating like a trip gone wrong until Warren found me with the pills and I_

“I overdosed. So did Warren, but not as bad. He wasn’t as hooked. I took eight pills in the space of an hour. He took six.”

“That’s twice the daily limit.”

Bucky nods numbly.
“When I got off them, Warren left. He went to rehab, transferred to a different medical school. Said we needed space.” He picks at a hangnail. Shrugs. “Maybe we did. I tried to kill myself after I was realised because I didn’t know how to be without the drugs.”

This part, he knows. He knows how to detach himself from the memories, to talk about his attempted suicide with clinical analysis.

“I felt like I was rotting from the inside. It was like eating chocolate, but I couldn’t taste it. Everyone was saying ‘look how lucky you are to be alive!’ but I didn’t feel alive. I felt dead. I felt empty.”

I feel empty.

His eyes are welling as he remembers it. “I didn’t study for exams- I wanted to fail them. I didn’t want to be a surgeon. I wanted to fail so my mom would let me change course or drop out or something. But she didn’t-” He chokes on a sob as he remembers what happened, the shame washing over him. “And I just couldn’t do it. I couldn’t be a failure anymore so I-- I tried to jump off Brooklyn bridge. I was stopped by a guy who was walking his dog.” He laughs, but it’s bitter and sad and contorted by the sobs lodged in his throat. “It was 3 a.m. Who walks their dog at 3 a.m?”

“You graduated with all honours,” Dr. Cho says gently.

“They let me retake them in the fall after I ‘sorted myself out’. My mother talked to them, got them to erase it because of my circumstance.”

“Were you put back on any medicine?”

He shakes his head no. “I did my time in psyche. I got a different therapist. I got off the drugs and most of the alcohol. It was final year, so I threw myself back into my studies, made up for lost time.” Bucky shrugs, finally looking up to meet her eyes. “And now I’m here.”

She nods. “And now you’re here.”

There’s a silence that settles between them and works it’s way into Bucky’s bones, and makes him itch for every second that passes.

“Why are you still here? Do you still want to be a surgeon?”

He thinks.

And he thinks

and he thinks and thinks and think because that’s all he does
Before he shrugs in futility.

“A void isn’t the absence of passion. I do want to help people, I do. But look at all the shit in the world. Yeah, you save someone, or try you’re goddamn best and give it everything you have. But, and I tell you this from my own experience – and I know you’re not going to brush aside anyone telling their truths – the world keeps turning and doesn’t care. You’re alone in that. We’re alone.”

(“Man is a giddy thing, and quick to dance on graves.”)

“Better to dig a man’s grave than put him in it.”

“You’re equating the digger and the dancer, now, love.” Warren smiles, and presses a kiss to his collarbone.)

“James,” Dr. Cho begins, before Bucky cuts her off gently with a “Call me Bucky.”

“Bucky,” She amends. He can see her as he searches for the right words, seemingly overwhelmed with the information he has dumped on her. “I think, from what you’ve told me here today, that you are a young man under a tremendous amount of pressure. Both from your work and from your personal life. Do you live with anyone at the moment?”

“Yeah,” He answers, nodding numbly. “I live with a few friends.”

“Do you find yourself… not as sad around them?”

He sighs. He shrugs. “Um, I don’t really know-- I don’t know if I really like my friends or if I only using them as a way to drive away my thoughts. I know it’s a shitty thing to say, and I feel shitty about it, I know it’s manipulative, but I need to not think. It’s easier to pretend to be normal than to be stuck in my head.”

He knows though, that maybe somewhere, where he’s not over thinking that he really truly does like friends. They’re someone he knows he can count on and they’re so, so fucking important to him.

maybe.

are they?

“Okay.” Dr. Cho says it gently, and it helps calm him for the time being. “That’s okay, Bucky. You’re not a bad person because of this, do you understand?”

He nods, if only to get her to move on.

“What are you gonna do?” He asks quietly. “Don’t put me back on meds, please. I don’t think I’ll--” His throat starts closing up and it’s so tight and he can’t breathe--
“Bucky, Bucky-- James. I’m not going to prescribe you anything, okay? We’re going to try to keep you off any substances for as long as possible. That being said--” She sighs, and it’s heavy, and he knows whatever this is is going to hurt him. “Looking at your current mental state, I think the best thing for you right now would be to cut back your working hours.”

The blood drains from his face.

“I’m going to talk to Dr. Hill, and we’ll see about getting you on rotations of a night shift once a week and working twelve hours instead of thirty--”

“What? What-- No, you can’t. You can’t. What about my education? What about what my friends will say? You can’t do this!” He’s getting more and more frantic with every passing second.

“Bucky, take a deep breath for me.”

He does.

“I’m going to explain this to you. You are a very stressed young man, and as a result your anxiety and depression are rearing their heads. You’re entire world is off-kilter at the moment. Now, if you were to continue the way you were going, I can only say for certain that it would be incredibly detrimental to your health, both mentally and physically. By giving you this time off, it will allow you to get more sleep, distance yourself from the hospital and medicine, and re-evaluate where you want to end up.”

That makes sense. Of course that makes sense, because he’s a broken person, deeply fractured and that’s how broken people get fixed. “What am I going to tell my friends?” He whispers.

“Do they know about your previous issues?”

He shakes his head. “No. I don’t want anyone to know.”

Dr. Cho purses her lips. “Well, I suppose myself and Dr. Hill can do our best to keep this under wraps as best we can. And as for your friends-- Consider this permission to tell them whatever you want.”

“Are you going to tell Dr. Hill about what happened?”

“No, of course not. Whatever is said here is said in complete confidentiality. She will have to be alerted as to your treatment plan.”

Bucky nods. He rubs his eyes, because he feels so fucking drained.

“Bucky,” She says gently. “I know you’ve heard this many times, but-- It’s going to be okay. You are going to be okay.”

He’s heard that before.

It didn’t really prove true.
(“I wish the world wasn’t so harsh on you,” Warren says as he brushes his thumb over Bucky’s knuckles. “I wish you could stay pretty and young and happy.”)

“Tell me something happy, then.”

Warren’s mouth twists into a bitter smile. “Darling, haven’t you heard? All I know are sad stories.”)

Bucky trudges out of Dr. Cho’s office, feeling drained, emotionally and physically. He shoves his hands into his pockets and puts up his hood, hoping people will get the message and leave him alone as he walks out.

"Bucky!"

He turns around to see Steve jogging up to him-- just a few days previously, it would have brought a smile to his face. Now, it just makes him feel like throwing up.
"Fuck off," he replies weakly, already turning around to walk away, but Steve’s hand reaches out, and grabs his forearm, stopping him. He whips around, the touch igniting the sadness in his veins into anger. “What do you want?” He hisses, yanking his hand away.

Steve recoils slightly at the venom in his words. Good. "I just- Please, let me explain."

“No. No way--”

“--Bucky, please. I can explain. It doesn’t make what I did any better, but, god, please. Please. Just so you know. So you can understand.”

Bucky looks at him, at the pain chiseled into his features. He thinks about Peggy, about their interactions two days ago in the ambulance--

He thinks about Warren. About how he has never been able to let him go, not really, because he never got any closure.

Bucky doesn’t want that with Steve. He wants to close the book, wash his hands of it, forget. He doesn’t want to spend years of his life waiting for waiting for half-whispers about how Steve’s doing, where he is. He just wants to be done. He lets out a breath. "Fine. Fine! When does your shift finish?"
"Six," Steve answers quietly. “I’ll meet you at Rockets?”

"Fine." Bucky stalks away, anger and hurt still itching beneath his skin.

As he walks, he looks up briefly to catch Peggy’s eye.

And he sees’ hurt there, too. And anger and guilt.

He doesn’t know what to do with that, how to process it, so he puts his head back down, pushes through the sea of people around him, feeling more alone and lost than ever.

~*~

Clint takes a deep breath, steels himself, and approaches Natasha, who is currently engaged in her patient write-up.

“I have to ask you a question.”

She raises an eyebrow, eyes still on the paper. “Okay. Go.”

“There’s this restaurant I know. They have an all you can eat buffet. And really good wine, too. You can get your food for free if you can eat the vindaloo--”

“Clint.” She cuts him off, her pen is no longer scratching at the page and she’s looking at him.

“Yeah?” His breath hitches in his throat.

“None of those were questions.”

“Oh! Right-- Do you want to get with me? Maybe? It could be, like, a date, or something, I don’t mind-”

“Thought you’d never ask, birdbrain.” Nat flips the charts closed and heads off to the wards. “Pick me up at seven.”

If Clint does a little victory dance in the middle of the ICU, well. No one is the wiser.

~*~

“Pray tell, how are you going to spin a sob story out of this? One that’s worthy enough to lure that boy back to your bed, of course.”

Steve bristles at the sound, hands freezing as he tenses.
“What’re doing here, Dr. Carter?” He asks evenly, trying not to let his underlying frustration distort his voice. Because he knows if he let it out, even a bit, he’d never stop. Anger is the one thing Steve’s always had, the one thing he’s always known how to wield. But now… Now he feels like the victim of his own fury, plaguing him day and night. Angry at himself, at Peggy, everything.

“I heard your little conversation with him today in the hallways. You really should be more careful-- Or have you lost all sense of self-respect?”

“What do you want, Dr. Carter?” He repeats, busying himself with spraying deodorant on.

“I want to know why on earth you’re still pursuing this boy--”

“I’m not fucking pursuing him!” He slams his fist against the locker, before taking a deep breath, trying to compose himself. “Dammit, Peg, I did a horrible thing to him. I know I did. I’m not going there to try to play the victim, or to get him to forgive me-- I just want to apologise. Not that you’d know anything about that.”

“I know what I did was bad, but at least Daniel wasn’t my student--”

“Oh, don’t you dare play that card,” Steve snaps. “It doesn’t matter that I’m technically Bucky’s boss, we were both consenting adults and we met before I knew he was working here. Dammit Peg, you broke my heart!”

“And you broke mine!”

“Well at that stage you had made it apparent that clearly Daniel- your head nurse, by the way, so that’s not any better- was a more suited spouse for you.”

“You brought that on yourself-- You were focusing on work, that was all you lived for-”

"Because I had nothing else! Goddamnit, I gave up everything for you! The army, my friends, my goddamn country for you! And I hated it, I fucking hated it." He shrugs on his jacket forcefully. “You know what, you can blame me, but don’t even think about putting any of this on him, you understand?” He slams his locker closed. “And don’t forget that you’re in this too. We both broke each other’s hearts, and you take as much blame for that as I do.”

He walks out of the room, with nothing but a pocketful of truth and an anger that hasn’t left him since he was ten years old in an ICU ward dulled into a painful remorse.

~*~

Bucky sits in one of the leather booths at the back of Rocket’s bar, mostly hidden from view, waiting for Steve. He takes a drag of his cigarette.

He hasn’t done this since he became clean, since Warren…

Warren was a unique contradiction of himself. He knew exactly how to save a person, while he
destroyed himself. Bucky remembers one of the first times he met him outside of Pierce’s. They stood in the rain, waiting in line for a hotdog from a vendor, as Warren told Bucky all about how bad processed meats were for your system, how deep fried foods guaranteed heart problems, all while Warren smoked.

And Bucky didn’t give a shit about himself, so that night when they were tangled up in each other, he plucked the cigarette from Warren’s hands and dragged...

Steve slides into the seat opposite him, hair slightly damp from the rain and droplets dotting his face. He frowns.

“I didn’t know you smoked.”

*You don’t know jack shit* is what he wants to say. Instead, he shrugs. “When the situation calls for it.”

“Bucky--”

“I don’t want a goddamn health lecture,” He snaps. “Just say whatever it is you want to say, and let’s be done with it.”

Steve swallows, and nods, taking a sip of his beer. “Peggy cheated on me. I know that’s no excuse, and I’m not using it as one-- What I did to her was still horrible, I know. But. I was putting my work before her. I know that. I was trying work on improved methods of saving limbs of people in traumatic accidents. One day, we had a breakthrough, and I was so happy-- And I rushed home, earlier than usual-- I wanted to surprise her, you know? So I get inside, and the first thing I notice is that there’s a pair of shoes strewn about that I don’t recognise. And I walk up the stairs, and clothes are just everywhere. Right outside the bedroom, there’s a jacket I know. It’s not mine and it’s not Peggy’s, it was one of our head surgical nurses, Daniel Sousa.” Steve stares at his hands, the memories washing over him and hitting him with a force he had thought he had forgotten. “I open the door and--” His throat tightens, and he scrubs his chin. “They were together. So I just stormed out. Slept in one of the on call rooms in the hospital I was working in, handed in my resignation, and took Nick Fury up on the job offer I had gotten a few months before.” He lets out a shaky sigh. “I had bought the two of us tickets to America. To celebrate, you know. Take some time off. I went back to the house the next day, packed a few bags and left. And now I’m here. That’s… That’s what happened.”

“Did it ever mean anything to you?” Bucky asks numbly.

Steve looks up at him.

“Us. Did it ever mean anything?” Bucky repeats.

“*Yes*. God, of course. I mean, that first night, I thought it might be a fling, but then I met you in the hospital… You mean so much to me, Bucky. Please believe me. I never lied about my feelings to you, and I would have told you about Peggy, I swear. I know I broke your trust and your heart, and that you’ll never really forgive me- and you shouldn’t- but I’m so deeply sorry. I care about you so much.”
“Are you going to get a divorce?” It’s hard to see Steve this way, open and vulnerable in a way he’s never been before.

Steve nods. “I think so. The wounds are too fresh… I don’t want to add any more salt.”

A silence settles between them, both of them looking at each other, searching for the right words.

“I’m sorry,” Steve says after while. “I’m sorry that I hurt you.” He stands up and picks up his jacket. "You didn't deserve it. You don't deserve any of this shit."

“You’re not the first boy to break my heart,” Bucky answers, looking up at him, as he raises the cigarette to his lips, and inhales.

“Good night, Bucky.” Steve offers him a small, sad smile, and Bucky tries to return, but it feels more like a mechanical twisting of his lips.

He knows smoking is bad, blah blah blah, and that he should feel bad for being so weak so that he’d give into his vices so easily. But all he can do is focus on how good it feels.

He doesn’t leave for another while, slowly sipping his scotch, watching his cigarettes turn to ash, and tracing absent-minded patterns of wings on the table, thinking about what Warren is doing now.

(“Behold, James Buchanan, morose again,” Warren slips into the chair opposite him, leaning across the table, holding a tumbler of gin. Warren’s eyes are dark and hungry, his smile practically predatory. “We have to stop meeting like this. I heard someone say today you were too pretty to be sad, what would you say to that?”

“I’d ask you to fuck me,” He says as he crushes the but of his cigarette into the ashtray. “That’s what I’d say to that.” He looks up, and Warren is grinning, and Bucky grins back.

He feels so happy.)

Chapter End Notes

*MAOIs- Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs). MAOIs — such as tranylcypromine (Parnate), phenelzine (Nardil) and isocarboxazid (Marplan) — may be prescribed, often when other medications haven't worked, because they can have serious side effects. Using an MAOI requires a strict diet because of dangerous (or
even deadly) interactions with foods — such as certain cheeses, pickles and wines — and some medications, including birth control pills, decongestants and certain herbal supplements.

PLEASE SEE: Rumiodyn is a completely fictional drug. I made it up. It's actually an acronym for 'your mind' so. Do what you will with that information.

Also 'Warren' is Warren Worthington III from X-Men! So there ya go.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter!! I would really appreciate it if you could leave a comment telling me what you think!

*vo come talk to me on tumblr*
She’s singing “Baby come home” in a melody of tears (Did you ever love him do you know? Or did you never want to be alone?)

Chapter Notes

Heyyyyy so sorry as per the usual for the delay but I think this one might be worth the wait.

(I'm uploading this at 2 a.m see how much I love you guys?)

I feel like you've got the jist at this point but I'll say it again-- Emotional shit ahead. You have been warned.

Title is from 'Jet pack blues' by Fall Out Boy :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint awoke to a ferocious pounding in his head, like some bastard repeatedly banging a hammer against his temples. Groaning, he burrows deeper into the goose-down pillows and how-many-thousand count sheets.

“I told you the peppermint schnapps and tequila and whiskey was a bad idea.” A gentle finger trails down his spine, and he blinks an eye open to see Natasha sitting upright beside him, smiling quietly to herself in a way he’s never been privy to see before. The thought alone is enough to have the corners of his mouth tugging upwards to a grin.

“Not to mention the four beers,” He rasps, feeling like death personified. He rubs his eyes with the heel of his hand. “Jesus christ, you drank like twice as much as me. How are you not dead?”

Natasha shrugs. “I’m Russian. We have hollow legs.”

Clint nods, only once, ‘cause it hurts like a bitch. “Yeah, I believe that.”

Natasha pats him on the back, before swinging her legs over the bed and slipping into an oversized, old t shirt and pants. “C’mon.” She turns back to look at him, and holds out a hand. “C’mon.”

And, despite how much it kills him, he grasps it, and follows her, slipping on his pants as they go.

“I hope you have painkillers,” He grumbles. “And coffee.”

“I might even have extra shots of espresso left over.”

Clint sighs happily, and throws an arm around Nat’s shoulders. Just because. “Goddess amongst men.”

She pokes him in the stomach. “Took you long enough to catch on.”

As Clint slides into a chair at the island in Natasha’s kitchen, she (with too much grace for someone who should be hungover) pops toast into the toaster, sets eggs to boil and starts making coffee for two.
The eat in silence, one that isn’t uncomfortable, and Clint practically inhales his food while Natasha looks on, impressed. And maybe a little shocked.

Eventually though, the good times have to come to end, and Clint is drying the final plate and handing it to Natasha to be put away. He leans against the kitchen sink, crossing his arms, and sighs, tilting his head as he observes Natasha, who is reaching up to put a plate in a cupboard, the hem of her t-shirt riding up so that the jut of her hipbone is exposed.

He clears his throat.

“So. Last night.”

Natasha fiddles the threads at the bottom of her shirt. “Yeah. About that.”

“Um.” He clears his throat, bracing himself despite the nerves that grip him. “I don’t know about you, but I had a good time.”

Natasha grins. “Course you did. I’m a goddamn catch, Barton.”

Clint laughs. “You are. You definitely are. Um,” He scratches the back of his neck, averting his eyes. “Just so we’re clear, I really like you.”

Natasha smiles slightly, and crosses and uncrosses her arms, a small nervous tick. “Good. I do really like you, too.”

“But, just so you know-- I don’t think I could do this,” He gestures between them. “Like, as friends with benefits. I just. I couldn’t not bring emotion into it. So if you’re looking for something casual, it’s not with me. I’d love to, I would, but. It wouldn’t be fair on you.”

Her eyes widen at his spiel, and she takes a step forward. “No, no, I… I mean, I don’t know what I want. I don’t want just sex, but I don’t to jump right into all the couple-y stuff, either.” She scuffs a toe off the floor. “I’m not good at relationships. I’m always too independent, or not as emotionally invested as the other person, or…” She huffs a breath out. “I’m just saying. I’m not what anyone wants as a girlfriend, so.”

“Hey,” Clint says gently. “I’m not perfect, either. I’ll forget anniversaries and I don’t know shit about wine or fancy food, I’m narky in the morning, I have a pretty bad caffeine addiction and when my hearing aid eventually stops working I’m going to frustrated and annoying as fuck-- Oh also. This one time this girl broke up with me ‘cos I kept stopping to pet dogs. So if that’s a problem for you, I guess we should call it quits. Anyways, the thing is-- Neither of us is perfect, and it’s not going to be all rainbows and daisies. But we can take it slow? One step at a time, with option of bowing out open at all times.”

He reaches his hand out, and she took it in hers, intertwining their fingers. They smile at each other in the morning sun, and it’s a promise.

~*~

Bucky trudged into work, hood up, hunched over and hands shoved in his pockets.

He didn’t want to deal with anyone today. He didn’t want to deal with anything.

The key to surviving a surgical internship is denial. You deny that you’re tired, you deny that you’re scared, you deny how badly you want to succeed, and most importantly, you deny that you’re in denial.
“Barnes!”

“Christ,” He mutters under his breath, and turns around to see Hill walking towards him.

And most importantly for Bucky, we deny that we’re avoiding everything and everyone.

“A word.” She gestures him inside into a staff room, thankfully empty, and sets about making herself coffee. “You want one?”

He nods. “Please.”

“So,” She says, trying to be nonchalant. “I was talking to Dr. Cho. She said you made progress at your first session.”

Bucky’s stomach lurches at the newly upturned memories that his time with Dr. Cho brought. He nods weakly. “Yeah it was good.” It was, to an extent. It also left him feeling completely and utterly fucked up, broken beyond repair. He feels haunted by the memories, plaguing him every minute.

He feels like a bit like ghost himself.

Maria’s expression is soft with underlying sympathy. “I’m glad. We just want to help you, Bucky. We’re not trying to hinder you.”

She passes him his coffee, and he takes it, wrapping his hands around the warm ceramic. “I know. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” She studies him for a moment, and frowns. “Are you feeling well? You’re white as death and you’ve got bags under your eyes. More prominent than usual.”

That’s probably a result of the lack of sleep and the fact that his entire diet is consisting of coffee, wine and cigarettes.

“Yeah, m’fine,” He says. “Just a little tired. Do you know who I’m working with today?” He asks, trying to get Hill off his back.

She hesitates, averting his eyes, and he gets the feeling that it’s not going to be good news. “Listen, because you’re only working day shifts, I’m trying to give you the best standard of education possible. But the problem is, most of these things take place at obscure hours or night shifts. So today the only way you could get anything valuable from your shift today would be to work with someone performing a complicated enough surgery.”

He raises an eyebrow. “And who is that?”

Hill sighs, looking apologetic. “Dr. Carter.”

Fuck.

He swallows, trying to push down the panic clawing up his throat. “Dr. Hill, please--”

“Bucky,” She cuts him off gently. “I tried to get on other rotations but the OR’s are pretty much all booked up, and they were only interested in taking interns that were able to stick around for the surgeries.”

“Could you even move me to paperwork?”
He hates the pity and the sympathy on her face, wants to wipe it off, take it back, but he’s just so fucking desperate. “If I did that, then you’d get nothing out of today, and will have wasted twelve hours. You can’t afford that, James.”

He nods, reluctantly, and stares into his coffee, not able to take a sip, his stomach roiling.

“She’ll meet you up at third floor, at the nurses station.” The words are soft, and she gives him a brisk pat on the arm as she walks out of the room.

Fuck.

Fuck fuck fuckfuckfuck.

How the hell is he meant to do this?

Peggy hates his guts, she’s going to make his life a living hell. He knows why, and he knows she’s right-- He’s a fucking dick, he slept with her husband, but he can’t help but feel the victim.

“Hey man!” Clint walks inside, sounding more cheerful than usual for a Monday at 8 o’clock. “You good?”

“Fantastic,” He mutters.

Clint just grins. “Me too. Oh-- is that coffee?”

Bucky slides his untouched cup towards him and his chair out, getting up. “You can have mine. I didn’t touch it.”

“Bucky, you sure? Dude, wait!”

“I gotta go,” He says. “I’ll be late for rotations.”

“Hey, c’mon, wait--!”

But Bucky’s already out the door, with his bag slung over his shoulder and his hoodie pulled up. He feels a little bad, but he knows if he stuck around Clint would only ask about how his session with Dr. Cho went, and if he’s on meds for anxiety, and would he take them if he could get prescription, and hey, how come he’s only working a twelve hour day?

All kinds of awkward shit would come up-- Shame, guilt, embarrassment… And Bucky couldn’t deal with that shit right now.

He flings his bag and hoodie into his locker on the way, ducking in and out of the room in a few seconds to avoid the gaze of other, nosey interns. He walks to the nearest elevator, and presses the button, rocking on the balls of his feet as he waits for the doors to open.

Of course, when the elevator dings and the doors open, Steve is on the other side.

“I’ll leave-”

“It’s fine, I’ll take the stairs,” Bucky cuts him off, clenching his jaw and turning on his heel and pushing through the doors to the stairwell, and bracing himself against the banister.

Shit.

He hadn’t thought seeing Steve would be this hard, and yet. Here he was, in the stairwell, trying to
talk himself out a panic attack. If he couldn’t even handle seeing Steve for a split second, how was he meant to deal with Peggy for the whole day?

He took a shaky breath in, not quite a sob, but retched all the same.

“Bucky?” There’s a quiet voice behind him, and when he turns around, Natasha is looking at him, concerned. “What’s wrong?”

He shakes his head, but tears are already welling in his eyes. “No, I’m fine—” But he can’t continue anymore, because a treacherous sob escapes his throat and suddenly Natasha is there, wrapping him in a bone-crushing hug.

He wraps his arms around her back, weeping loudly into the crook of her arm. She shushes him, whispering kind and comforting words into his ear as she rubs his back, but it’s hard to hear them over the white noise in his head. He holds onto her like a lifeline, and when she squeezes back harder, he can only be infinitely grateful.

“Bucky. Talk to me. What’s wrong?”

He pulls back slightly, wiping his eyes. “No, it’s nothing, it’s just Steve and I have to work with fuckin’ Carter today and shit with Dr. Cho.” He rubs his eyes again. “I’ll be fine, I’m just having a shit day.”

“Can’t you ask Hill to move you?” She asks, frowning.

He shakes his head. “I did, but I’m only working a twelve hour shift.”

Her frown deepens. “But we’re all on a 48 hour rotation tonight—”

He stares at his shoes, the shame causing more tears to fill his eyes, threatening to spill over. “Dr. Cho’s making me take twelve hour shifts. Something about me being not ‘mentally robust’ enough.”

“Fuck.” The words are whispered and quiet. “Couldn’t she have just given you some Prozac and sent you on your way?”

“I don’t want meds.”

She nods. “Okay, that’s understandable. Bucky, calm down-- Breathe, Bucky. Breathe with me.”

Breathe.

Relax.

In and out.

She offers him a small smile. “Better?”

He nods minutely.

“You’re going to be okay up there. Don’t roll your eyes at me-- You are. You’re strong, Bucky. Stronger than you know, and stronger than this. You can do this.”

He wipes his eyes again, and gives her a weak smile. “Thanks, Nat. Shit, I’m sorry, I got your scrubs all wet—”
She scoffs and brushes him off. “Please. I’m about to go to the ER. These things are about to see a lot worse.”

He lets out a watery laugh. “Okay, have fun. I’ll see you soon.”

“Okay, have fun. I’ll see you soon.”

“You’re still having lunch with us, right?” She inquires as he makes his way up the steps.

Shrugging, he replies “I don’t know yet, I might have different lunch hours.” It’s a lie, and she knows it, but she let’s it go, and with a final wave, departs.

He makes his way up the stairs, his stomach feeling heavy with lead and his throat gradually closing up with every step. Eventually, he gets the third floor, and before he opens the door, he takes a second.

He breathes.

In and out.

When his heart rate has slowed down somewhat, he opens the doors, and makes his way towards Dr. Carter, her back turned away from him, but he can make out by her dark, brunette curls.

He clears his throat. “Excuse me, Dr. Carter. I’m the intern that will be working with you today.”

Sorry for fucking your husband.

She turns around, and assesses him with a cool, quiet demeanor that does nothing to put Bucky’s nerves to rest.

She narrows her eyes. “Are you high?”

“Wha-? No.”

Carter crosses her arms. “Your eyes-- They’re very bloodshot.”

Bucky stands, speechless. What the hell is he meant to tell her? ‘Oh this? Haha no I was just having a mental breakdown about your husband and working with you in the stairwell it’s nothing I’m a-okay.”

“I want the truth, Dr. Barnes.”

And that snaps him back into reality. Probably doesn’t do much to help his case, either.

“No, no, it’s not because I’m high,” He amends. “It’s just the hayfever.”

“Hay Fever?” She doesn’t seem to buy it. Oh well.

He nods firmly. “Hay fever.”

She studies him again for a moment, before seemingly letting it go. “Alright, Dr. Barnes. Follow me.” She picks up her charts and whips around, walking towards the wards.

“Erin Lange, twenty nine, came in complaining of severe abdominal pain. She was brought up for a CT scan. I need you to go up, collect the results, and also check in on my patients in 201, 206 and restock the linen closet.” She hands him the patient’s files. “Here you go. When you’re done, page me and we’ll meet back here.”
And with that, she turns and walks away, leaving Bucky to work.

~*~

An hour later, Bucky is waiting in the third level wing, having finally finished the mountain of work Peggy gave him.

“ Took you long enough,” She says, examining the now-updated patient files.

“There was a holdup at CT and Mr. Maur pulled out his IV again, which meant I had to give him another,” He parrots back, sounding eerily robotic, devoid of any particular emotion, but he couldn’t really care right now.

She nods, somewhat reluctantly and gestures with a wave to follow her. “Liven up, Dr. Barnes. Contrary to what you might believe, patients respond a little better to care when they’re confident that their doctor is actually amongst the living.”

“Sorry.”

She whips around. “Listen, I understand that my husband cheating on me with you might be hard for you stomach, but I was hurt too. And here I am, still doing my job. I don’t want a robot, Dr. Barnes, I want an intern.”

He nods, and clenches his fist, nails digging into his skin. “Yes, Dr. Carter. Sorry.”

She lets out a breath through her nose, and Bucky thinks he catches a flash of sympathy in her eyes, but he can’t be sure, and he couldn’t really be bothered to hope. Peggy drops the files off at the nurses station before picking up another one, handing it to him, and walking into a room.

“Dr. Barnes, this is Julie. She’s thirty one, with TTTS. Julie, this is Dr. Barnes, he’ll be the intern assisting me with your case.”

Bucky nods and smiles at the blonde, short haired woman lying in the bed, hating how plastic it feels, like it’s physically stretching his skin.

“Dr. Barnes, could you define TTTS?”


“Connected by?”

“Blood vessels in the placenta.”

“Meaning?” Bucky stops in his tracks and racks his brain--

Shit. He’s drawing a blank.

He knows this, he fucking knows this--

Peggy sighs.

“One twin gets too much blood, the other too little, endangering the lives of both. I’d expect you to know that, Barnes.”

“They told me there wasn’t much chance anything could be done,” Julie says worriedly.
Peggy turns her disappointed gaze from Bucky to Julie, transforming it into a placating smile. “TTTS is usually impossible to correct. Unless you happen to be one of a handful of surgeons in the world who knows how to separate fetal blood vessels. Which, luckily for you, I am. So we’re gonna get you into surgery today, if possible. If you have any questions at all please ask Dr. Barnes. He seems to be one of the hospital’s most in-demand intern.”

Peggy walks out of the room, with Bucky following her, anger simmering beneath his skin. “I could've answered your question had you given me the chance,” He says to her once he’s caught up, outside the room.

She looks up at from where she had been looking through Julie’s file. “Chin up, Barnes. I'm this tough on everyone, not just the man my husband sleeps with. Order an ultrasound for her and pre-op labs in full. You can take lunch while you’re waiting for the results.”

~*~

“What does it take to go after another woman's husband?”

Bucky, about to perform the ultrasound, freezes. “Excuse me?”

Julie stares at him, eyes unforgiving and cold. “I overheard you and Dr. Carter talking. She mentioned that you were sleeping with her husband. It happened to me. Jeff left me for a long-legged miniskirt who answer his phones, three weeks into my pregnancy.” She hisses. “By the way, that gel is really cold.”

He squares his jaw, and shifts in his seat. “I'm sorry. I'm sorry about your husband, but I don’t think this is the kind of conversation we should be having right now.”

“Are you even sorry about Dr. Carter’s husband?”

His jaw clenches again, and he tries to ignore it, to continue, all the while trying to calm his racing heart. “I'm going to be checking a few things today--”

“Did she ask to work with you? I bet she asked to work with you. It's what I would have done. Payback. Make the bitch sweat it out.”

With that, Bucky turns to her. “I understand that given this situation you’re uncomfortable with me performing your ultrasound, but this is my job, okay? I have no obligation to justify my case to you. So please, just let me do my goddamn job and when we’re done you can ask Dr. Carter to remove me from the case.”

With that, he turns to the monitor, and tries to quell the weight pressing on his chest as he explains what’s happening on the screen to Julie, trying not to let his voice crack as her voice washes over him.

“When I found out about the miniskirt, I called her up and took her to lunch. It was perfectly civil. I said I didn't hold it against her, that these things happened. But, really? I just wanted to put a face on the bitch that got my husband to throw away 15 years of marriage.”

Bucky cuts her off by standing up. “Kevin is a pediatric nurse, he’ll bring you back up to your room.” He gestures at the attending nurse standing outside the door, hopefully not hearing anything. “I'm gonna go check on your labs.”

He leans over to Kevin, dropping his voice a few octaves. “Hey, Kev, would you be able to take Ms. Connolly up to her room? She really doesn't like me.”
Kevin, thankfully, smiles empathetically. “That’s fine, Bucky. We’ve all been there.”

Bucky breathes a sigh of relief. “Thanks, I owe you.”

Kevin waves him off. “Nah, we’ll call it even. You saved my ass that time with Dr. Potts.”

“Still, thanks. I’ll see ya.”

He walks away, breathing in and out, still trying to calm down, shaken from Julie’s words.

‘Are you even sorry for Dr. Carter’s husband?’

Was he? On one hand he was sorry that he had done it in an abstract way, he understood that he was, by all accounts, a terrible person. But on the other Steve has said that Peggy had cheated first. Plus, Bucky hadn’t known.

“Bucky!”

He’s snapped out of his thoughts by the shout, and turned to look for the source.

Natasha calls him from the end of the hall, and jogs up to meet him. “What are you doing?” She asks, slightly out of breath.

He gestures to Julie’s file. “Waiting for lab results. You?”

“Picking up a patient for Stark.” She lowers her voice. “How’s it going with Carter?”

Shrugging, he replies “Okay, I guess. She doesn’t seem to completely hate my guts, but she still, you know, hates my guts. Plus the patient hates me, because she overheard me and Peggy talking and her husband cheated on her so I’m public enemy number one.”

Natasha bites her lips, and he hates the look of sympathy on her face. “Shit. I’m sorry, Bucky.”

He waves her off. “It’s fine.” He sighs. “I’m a dirty mistress now. That’s all I am. I’m the other woman, Nat.”

“Well, focus on the positive. You’ve still got a great ass.”

“Thanks, Nat. You say the sweetest things.”

“Dr. Barnes?”

The lab tech, Derek comes out holding up the results. “You wanted pre-ops, right?”

“Yeah and a CT, right?”

Derek nods and hands it to him. “It’s all there.”

“Thanks. See ya, Nat.”

“Wait!” Natasha grabs his arm to stop him. “You eating lunch with us?”

He winces. “Shit, sorry. I can’t. Carter made me take it while I was waiting for the results.”

“Well do you want to go to the bar tonight instead?”
“Um, I’m not sure I can,” He lies. “Anyways, I’ll see you-- I’ll tell Clint if I can do tonight or not, okay?”

She watches him go reluctantly. “Okay.”

When the elevator doors open, the first thing Bucky sees is Steve and Peggy at the far end of the corridor. “That took a lot of nerve,” Steve was saying.

“Oh come on, he came highly recommended.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Right.”

“So you don't recommend him?”

“No, I did not say that,” Steve huffs.

“Just not for his medical skills,” Peggy quips.

“Oh, would you shut up?” He snaps.

Christ. Talk about an old married couple. Bucky clutches the lab results as he approaches, doing his best to appear calmer than he feels.

“Dr. Carter?” Bucky asks, feeling about two inches high.

“Yes, Barnes?”

“Labs confirm what look like abnormalities on the ultrasound. I think you should come and see for yourself.”

“Okay. Let's go.” She takes off, the clip-clop of her high heels providing the soundtrack to an otherwise silent corridor. Bucky goes to follow her, not wanting to stay around Steve for any longer than he has to.

“Bucky. Bucky--”

“Don’t.” There’s no strength or venom to it, just a tired plea.

And thankfully, Steve listens, and with a sigh turns and walks away.

~*~

“See?” Bucky points to the ultrasound scan. “Bilateral pleural effusion with evidence of subQ edema.”

Julie looks between the two of them. “In English, please?”

“We've detected what looks like beginning heart failure in the twins,” Peggy explains calmly. “Don't be alarmed.”

“Are my babies gonna be ok?” She asks, beginning to look panicked.

“I'm gonna go ahead and take you into surgery now. We're not gonna wait.” She turns to Bucky and starts to usher him out of the room. “Book the OR. Now.”
In the O.R, Bucky watches as Peggy expertly separates the blood vessels, doing it with a precision nearly inhuman. Saving two babies.

Something inside him flickers, a spark he’s forgotten.

Hope, maybe. That his efforts won’t be for nothing. That saving lives is still something worth doing.

“How you doing there, Barnes?” She asks softly.

“Good,” He answers, and it doesn’t feel like a total lie. “I’m good.”

Three hours later, Bucky’s shift is finishing up and he finds himself in Julie’s room.

“See?” Peggy says. “Nothing but a small scar.”

“And my babies?”

“Your babies are doing just fine,” She smiles. “Dr. Barnes will be back in a few minutes to give you some more pain relief, and he’ll be keeping an eye on you for the remainder of your time here.”

Julie frowns. “Actually, Dr. Carter, I’d rather if Dr. Barnes was taken off the case.”

Beside him, Peggy stiffens. “I’m sorry, why is that?”

She shrugs, uncomfortable at the scrutiny. “Just reminds me of someone I don’t like very much, but my husband does. In lingerie. I’m sure you understand.”

Peggy’s blinks. “No. No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Well, it’s just, you know, he slept with your husband, right? He turned your husband gay.”

“Ms. Connolly, I lack Dr. Barnes’s class and patience so, let me set the record straight. He didn’t ‘turn’ my husband gay, my husband is bisexual, and always has been. Secondly, I cheated on him first. The wronged person here is Dr. Barnes. So, I think you owe him one hell of an apology.”

Julie’s face is read, but in fairness she looks Bucky in the eye. “I apologise.”

He nods his head, offering a weak smile. “I accept your apology.”

“Barnes?” Peggy says once they’ve left the room. “I think it’s time you and I have a little chat, don’t you?”

Bucky takes a breath, and nods.

Time to face the music.

"You can't hate me," Bucky says, once they’re alone in Peggy’s office. "I know you want to, and I know you do, but I didn't know." He looks into Peggy's eyes. "I swear I didn't know."
"I don't hate you, Dr. Barnes. What you did, yes, but not you," She pauses. "But can you honestly say that you don't hate me either?"

"No," Bucky replies in a heartbeat. "But I think that's just me projecting my hate for Steve onto you." He shrugs. "I dunno. You'd have to ask Dr. Cho."

Peggy gives a small chuckle.

After a moment's silence, he breaks the silence. "I take it back," Bucky admits. "I do hate you. And I wish more than anything I didn't."

Peggy's head whips up and she stares at him with eyes of steel. "Why?" She says it less as a question and more as a demand.

Bucky raises his head to look at her, and he gives a pained smile. "Because he'll choose you," he explains. "We both know it. He married you-- He has memories with you." Bucky sucks in a breath. "He loves you. And where does that leave me?"

He sees some of the hardness in Peggy's stare drain away.

"Hating the girl the man I want loves. Because I can't hate him." Bucky sighs. "I wish I could hate him. I really do," he shrugs. "But I can't."

There's a silence that grows between them, finally both on equal footing, the artifice having faded away.

"You did well today, Bucky," She says after a minute or two, and it's a shock to hear his name from her lips. "It was a pleasure working with you. And, as for Steve... I know I acted unfairly. And I apologise."

He nods. "Thank you."

She gives a small smile, and holds out her hand. "I hope to work with you again soon."

He returns it, and takes her hand.

And then his heart is in his mouth, and he's back to square one, because she's still wearing a goddamn wedding ring.

~*~

There's a knock on Peggy's hotel room door.

When she opens it to see Steve, it's not exactly a surprise.

"Can we talk about this?" He asks, voice gentle but firm-- The one he used when he was about to negotiate with his men about battle plans. But this is a different kind of battle entirely, and she doesn't think either of them are prepared for it. "We're going to have to, at some point," He prods gently.

"Yes, yeah. Okay." She opens the door and invites him in.

She closes the door and looks back up at Steve, waiting for him to say something, anything, bracing herself for the impact.

But he doesn't.
He just looks at Peggy, with a sadness in his eyes that makes her breath catch.

The words tumble out of him before he has a chance to think better of them. “I did everything I could have done.” He swallows, feeling the sting in his eyes. “I cut back my hours at work, even though there were still a lot, yeah. I was home every night and--” He cuts off with a sound of frustration. “I tried, Peg.”

“I know.” Her voice is watery as is her eyes. “I tried too, I did for so long. But even when you were there you weren’t there, Steve, and I…” She takes a wobbly breath, trying to keep composure, but it’s hard to keep the facade when it feels like everything around you is crumbling beneath your feet. “If I could go back and change that night, you know I would. In a heartbeat. But I want to fix this, Steve. I do. And we can do it, if anyone can.”

“We both did shitty things, Peggy. Where would the trust in our relationship be?” He cuts her off gently but she shakes her head.

“No. No, Steve, we can do this.”

“Peggy.”

“We can,” She insists. “We’ll move back to Brooklyn, like you always wanted. I’ll get a job at a private practice and you could get a job at the trauma department at Metropolitan General. We can work this out.”

“But I don’t want to.”

His words are gentle but god, they hurt.

He speaks like fights, in succinct hits that shake you to your core.

“You don’t love me any more.” It hits her, and she already had her suspicions but why does it hurt so much to voice it aloud?

He shakes his head and takes a step towards her, face knitted into an expression of anguish. “I don’t know how it happened. I loved you so much, Peg, you know I did. It shouldn’t have been possible.”

“It’s him.”

His shoulders sag, and he scrubs his face. “Yeah. I guess. But it’s not just him, Peg, I was going to go through with this before I met Bucky--”

“You’re leaving me for him?”

“No, I’m not.” He shakes his head. “I’m not leaving anybody for anyone. Bucky doesn’t want to be with me, I’m sure. And I… I don’t know. I think I need some time out.”

It’s not fair.

But then it is, isn’t it? Because it was her that cheated first, it was her that set them up to fail. She single handedly designed her own destruction.

But she loved Steve. God, she loved him. They were happy together, and she doesn’t want it to end like this, with Steve apologising for not being in love with her, with her sitting here, helpless against everything that’s happening.
"So this is it? You want to throw away 5 years of birthdays and anniversaries and dates and vows and you want to give it up?"

"Yes I- yeah. I do."

“Because you don’t love me anymore.”

“I wish I did. God, I wish I still loved you like I did.”

“If I-” She blinks back her tears, refusing to give into the pain in her chest. “If I asked you to stay with me, if I told you I was okay with you not loving me, would you stay?”

She wishes they could be arguing. It would be easier, she thinks. If there was screaming and crying, and declarations of hate. It would maybe feel less like she was losing a part of herself, it would be like a band aid ripped off quick and pain free.

“Yes,” He answers in a heartbeat, and it makes her want to punch him and kiss him. “If that’s what you really want, then yes.”

It’s Peggy that breaks the gaze first. “I hate you.” It comes out like you might say I love you, because when it comes to Steve she can’t remember feeling anything other than love.

“You should,” He agrees.

“But I don’t.”

The smile is sad and his eyes are tearing up too when he says, “I know. I only want you to be happy, Peg, and if I thought that was with me, I would stay. You know I would.”

“You’d be miserable,” She points out.

“But you’d be happy. I’d be okay with that. But you haven’t been-- You hadn’t been.”

“I’m not sure I remember how to be without you-- Permanently.” Peggy’s not sure she remembers how not to love Steve.

“You’ll learn.” He wipes an errant tear from his cheek. “We both will. It will hurt, but. We’ll do it.”

He offers her his hand.

She takes it.

~*~

"Hey," Bucky's voice is cracked but warm. "I'm maybe a little bit drunk right now, I'm waiting for Darcy to get off her shift so we can go home and then Rocket offered me some new fancy scotch he got and yeah. I'm in the bar. Calling you. Well, leaving you a message on your voicemail.”

There's a pause. "I don't know what time it is... If it's late or early or whatever, but you didn't pick up and you're probably with Peggy now doing some shit that married couples do and that's okay because Jesus Steve, you're married. I saw her wear a ring today and everything. It's a nice ring.”

Bucky licks his lips. "I hate you. So much, I could fucking murder you I swear to god. I hate you.”

He deflates, sighing.
"I don't.... I mean, I miss you. My bed seems bigger, I don't know what it is but..."] His voice is quiet now, weighted with pure sorrow. "And there's a drawer with all your shit in it and I can't get rid of it- you put your shit in my drawer and you were married. And I miss you, Steve. I miss the way your name tastes like a promise on my lips.

"I love you," he says abruptly. "Did I ever tell you that? I don't think I did. But I do. I realised it when you brought me out for dinner in that place- and you were talking about that time that you went to Coney Island with your mom and I was just like 'shit I love you' and I couldn't even listen to the rest of the story because the words kept running around my head...

"I was going to tell you, though. That night that Peggy came, I was going to tell you. I had it all planned and everything. I was going to bring you home and make scrambled eggs because I remembered how you said one morning that it was your favourite because it didn't matter if you had it for breakfast or lunch or dinner it was still delicious and your mom always made really nice ones- you know I practiced scrambled eggs everyday after you told me that? Jane wanted to strangle me after the third day but I wanted to make sure it was right. Anyway we'd come home and you'd eat and I'd just tell you. But I can't do that now. Fuck you for that." There's no venom in his words- just resignation.

"I hate you. I hate that I love you and you love that I'm gone." His voice drops to a whisper as he utters his parting words. "Goodbye, Steve."

Chapter End Notes

Well that's that.

I would really really love if you could leave a comment-- it makes my whole week and I appreciate every single one :)

[yo come talk to me on tumblr]
There's no patron saint of silent restraint (There's no sword in our lake, just a funeral wake)

Chapter Notes

I wrote this on birthday so here's hoping that's a good sign whoop whoop!

Title is from 'Weights and Measures' (Acoustic Version) by Dry The River. Please listen to it here it's amazing

I really hope you enjoy this chapter! Usual warnings for talks and descriptions of depression and anxiety.

Thank you guys so much for sticking with this and being so supportive, it means the whole world to me and you guys are amazing <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hushed tones outside his bedroom door, muted phone conversations and texts filling up his phone, too short days at the hospital and worried glances thrown his way, invasive questions covered lightly and evasive answers in the form of barely strung together sentences that stick in the back of his throat because he’s lying.

It’s not so much that it’s getting Bad again, but it feels like he’s sleepwalking through life, lost all purpose and is shuffling forwards in whatever direction he’s pushed.

Become a surgeon?

Take a step forward.

Sure.

Go to therapy again?

Drag yourself in kicking and screaming.

Fine.

Let’s talk about your mental health.

Stop.

Why?

“Because I think it would be good for you,” Dr. Cho replies. “And because you despite the fact that your mental health is poor and that you’re not feeling well, you’ve refused to actually talk about your diagnosis.”

Bucky averts his eyes, and fidgets. He’s got his shift straight after this, so he’s dressed in tracksuit bottoms, black faded into a navy over the years of wear and a ratty old Queen t shirt. Without his scrubs, he feels exposed, like he’s walking into battle armorless.
“What do you think of your mental health, Bucky?” She asks gently, and maybe she’s copped on to the fact that he hates the word ‘diagnosis’, as if he’s some surgical patient. That if he could only get his shit together, and do the right thing, he could excavate the illness living in him.

He takes a while to answer, composing his answer carefully. “I think probably the not very sophisticated ‘diagnosis’ is that I was depressed. That I am depressed, I guess. ’Cause when I was in college, when it really got bad, my ego’s all invested in, you know, being what my mother wants me to be. It’s the only thing that I’ve got, the only kind of instruction from the universe I’ve ever received. So I felt really trapped: Like, “Uh-oh, my four years is nearly up. I’ve gotta move on, but I don’t want to move on.” I was… stuck. And meds was part of that. But it wasn’t that I was stuck because I took meds. It was like, I really sort of felt like my life was over at twenty three, just about to finish college. And that felt really bad, and I didn’t want to feel it. Because everyone else was so excited to be out, to be a proper doctor or become a surgeon, and all I wanted to do was hide. So I would do all kinds of things: I mean, I would drink real heavy, I would fuck strangers. And then I’d try to fix it, to patch it up and pretend it wasn’t there by taking action, all-nighters spent studying shit I didn’t want to learn but it was on the course, right? And if I did what was on the course, and I got my credits and I did everything by the book I would be fine. And I did, in a very round about, fucked up way, but I did it. And now I’m here, and the only instruction I have is, like, work a maximum of eighty hours a week, decide what you want to specialise in, good luck. I have no sense of what do with myself-- I’ve never not had instruction. I’ve never been in control. So I think that this,” He gestures between them. “Was inevitable. It happened a little faster because some things acted as catalysts, but I think I was destined for it. Even if I couldn’t see it. I just… I really wanted to be better. I wanted to be the best intern, I wanted to have the perfect relationship and the perfect life. I was so obsessed with it, that when I realised that it wasn’t perfect, all the bricks started tumbling down and I felt left with nothing.

“It happened with Warren-- When I didn’t have him, I felt like I had nothing. The one tether I had that I felt kept me human, kept me right, was torn away, and when I looked back, it was kind of like ‘Huh. You’re still a piece of shit. You still did all the stuff, and you can’t say it was because of Warren because it was you too.’ I was left with all this stuff that I had done, this person I had become, and I couldn’t even blame him because he was a victim too, so I blamed Pierce, but I blamed myself, mostly. I guess that followed me around, a lot.”

“When the other guy-”

“Steve.”

Bucky freezes, his heart stopping in his chest. “What?” He croaks out.

“You can say his name here, Bucky. Dr. Hill informed me of your relationship, as she is legally bound to do so when she sent you here. It won’t get past these walls, but it’s important that you feel you can talk about it without being judged.”

“Why did she tell you?” He asks, words burning his tongue, feeling almost betrayed.

“I asked her if she felt there was anyone here who triggered your anxious feelings, and she answered honestly.” Her calmness and cool is infuriating, and Bucky huffs through his nose. He understands why Hill had to do it, but it still stings. It feels like he’s being treated like broken glass, with everyone talking about how much of a mess he is behind his back.

“Fine,” He says, biting it out. “When I found out Steve had cheated, I was devastated. I thought it had been going great, but then it turns out it was all a lie. Just like, in shock and grief, but now I’m kind of relieved that I found out. Because I think I needed to get out of the relationship anyways. Not because Steve was bad or anything-- I mean he’s an absolute dick, don’t get me wrong, but
because my anxiety started up again because I was nervous about people finding out, and then it kind of evolved.”

Dr. Cho has a look on her face, slightly shocked, slightly contemplative, and underneath it, a little relieved.

“It looks like you’ve been thinking about this for a while,” She says eventually. He shrugs, and doesn’t shrink away from her gaze this time.

“Yeah, I guess,” He answers. “I just… I want to get better.” He lets out a frustrated groan at his words. “See this is the problem-- I say shit like ‘I want to get better’, ‘I want to be happy’, like I’m owed it, like I should live this permanently happy life or something. And I’m not owed it and I don’t deserve it and even if I got it, I wouldn’t want it. I want to be normal, but then that terrifies me, because I’ve never not been anxious, or depressed, or a million other things. I feel like it’s the only thing that tethers me to… me.”

Dr. Cho nods. “That’s understandable, and a lot of people in your position have said the same. That doesn’t make you weird, in a slightly perverse way it makes you normal, because you’re having a normal reaction to your health issues.”

Bucky hums and looks out at the window, tracking the rain as it slowly trickles down the pane.

There’s a quiet, then, Cho assessing him and Bucky breathing in the peace and quiet of the room, that smells like books and green tea.

“Have you talked to your friends about the problems you’re having? Or have had?” She asks him, breaking him out of his reverie. He tears his eyes away from the window to look at her, shifting in his seat.

“No,” He replies quietly with a shake of his head. The thoughts of the lies he’s told them out of avoidance settle cold in his stomach, roiling like snakes.

“Why not?”

“Well, I’ve told Nat,” He amends. “Only a bit. I had to do a rotation with Dr. Carter, and I was freaking out about it a bit and she found me, so I told her everything.” Bucky shrugs at the memory, trying to shake it off. He was never great at having weak spots, preferring to set up defences and making sure no one got past them without him knowing.

“Have you been having a lot of anxiety recently?”

He shakes his head. “It’s not… As bad as it could be. They’re getting less, I guess. I’m dealing with it.”

Cho nods thoughtfully. “What is it that’s holding you back from telling your friends?”

“I don’t want them to feel like they have to hold me together, along with the stress of everything else. They don’t need that burden.”

“Do you see yourself as a burden?”

A startled laugh erupts from him. “Have you met me? I’m a disaster.”

“So you’re saying that you’re a burden because of your mental health?”
“Well,” He thinks about it, and shrugs. “I mean yeah? I guess?”

Helen is quiet, and it’s unsettling. He feels on edge, like he’s said something wrong, and there’s the anxiety again, the itch at the back of his skull threatening to take over his thoughts. It’s broken then as she takes a sip of her tea, like she always does before she says something profound.

“Do you think a person who gets cancer is morally responsible for it?” She asks, and Bucky frowns.

“What? No.”

“Do you think a child born with a heart outside of its chest or down’s syndrome or muscular dystrophy is a fault for their condition?”

“No, but-”

“Then why are you responsible for your anxiety?” She leans forward. “Anxiety, depression, these things don’t mean that you don’t deserve to tell people. Emotions won’t kill you, Bucky, even though you think they will, even if it’s the worst you’ve ever felt. Your anxiety, your depression, they will not kill you. No matter how much it might seem like they will. Anxiety, depression--these are feelings grown too large, grown aggressive and dangerous. You’re responsible for its consequences, you’re responsible for treating it. But you are not, nor will you ever be, responsible for causing it. You’re not morally at fault for it. No more than you would be for a tumour.

“You deserve to tell these people. You deserve to have a support system. It’s not a burden. You’re not a burden, James. If one of your friends was feeling at all like you were, would you want them to tell you? Would you want to be able to help?”

He nods numbly.

“Then don’t you think you owe them that much?”

~*~

"I hate that I love you and you love that I’m gone. Goodbye, Steve."

"To listen to this voicemail again, press one. To delete, press two. To--”

The voicemail ends.

Again.

Steve clenches his hands together, in front of his face, almost like a prayer. He breathes in deeply, shakey. He feels off-piste, has been since he first heard Bucky pour his heart out on the other end of the line.

How could he do this?

"I don’t like bullies.” He had always said. "I don’t care where they come from.”

But how much better was he? He’d made this amazing, smart, poor man fall into bed with him and then break his heart in the most horrible of ways. He did to Bucky what Peggy had done to him, and isn’t that what they say of bullies? That they take it out on whatever little kid because they were bullied?
"I love you."

Jesus, how could he do this?

He doesn’t deserve that, doesn’t deserve anything, and the tug in his heart is a vicious reminder of how much he fucked-up.

“Fuck,” He breathes.

And then, before he loses his nerve, he grabs his phone and types the words before he can even think about.

*Got your voicemail. Think we should talk.*

-Steve

---

“Stop jiggling your leg,” Darcy snaps. “You’re making me nervous.”

Loki looks at her, affronted. “Are you naturally subordinate or is it just to spite me?”

“Trust me, it’s talent,” She snipes back. “Plus, I think the fact that you’ve freezed me out over the past few weeks because we slept together and that you’re clearly not mature enough to handle that.”

“I handled that with as much care and grace as I saw fit,” He retorted. “And this is certainly not something we should be discussing with ears all around us.”

Granted, he had a point. They were sitting in the CT Scanning room, waiting for results to come through, because by the grace of whatever god was up there, Darcy had been placed with Loki. Again.

’*Because you’ve worked so well together!*’ The staffing nurse told her cheerily.

Wouldn’t that tickle you pink?

“Whatever,” She mutters. “Anyways, I don’t know why you’re so stressed about this. It’s a minor bleed, it can be controlled without surgery at this rate. And if it does need surgery, it small enough so it should be easy enough.”

“It’s the not the patient that has me stressed,” He grits out, gripping his pen so hard it might break. (Which, admittedly, Darcy would pay good money to see, because Loki’s notes are so meticulous he has a conniption should there be a piece of dust on it-- Imagine a huge splattering of *ink*.)

She purses her lips. “Okay, look, I’m not thrilled to be working with you either--”

“It’s not you,” He cuts her off. “Christ, what do you take me for? Of course it’s not you.”

Not wanting to dwell on what the ‘of course’ is supposed to mean, she asks “Well what is it, then?”

He sighs and scrubbs his hand through his hair-- And sleeping with someone is one thing, but seeing Loki like this, dishevelled by his standards (but pristine by others) and worn down, is unnerving. It’s like seeing someone without armour walking through a battlefield.

“My family.” He answers eventually. “I’m from Norway-- Don’t let the accent fool you, boarding
He clears his throat. “Not to worry, though. It will pass. I picked up one of those mindfulness pamphlets from the foyer, that should work wonders,” He snorts.

“How don’t you?” She asks before she can stop herself. He looks up, quizzical. “Forgive him, I mean.”

“He never apologised.”
His eyes are still so icy blue, but there’s nothing cold about them, just a dull resignation, and it’s hard to watch.

“I’m sorry, you know,” He says, his voice cutting through the silence though. It’s stripped bare, raw and honest, none of the usual power or showmanship Loki usually employs to get his way. She looks at him, where he’s worrying the edge of one of the pieces of paper-- also strangely uncharacteristic-- and he looks up at her. “I shouldn’t have responded to our… break as I did. I understand I must have made life for you here harder, and I apologise. I just… Didn’t deal with it well, or maturely, and I hope you can accept my apology.”

“It’s okay,” She answers, quietly, and he shakes his head firmly.

“No, it’s not,” He says, the force behind his words taking her aback. “It shouldn’t have happened in the first place, but I still should have been kinder about it.”

“Well…” She begins. “It was a dick move, admittedly. But I accept your apology.”

Loki offers her one of those rare, coveted smiles, and she can’t help but return it, and a happy but tentative truce settled between them.

~*~

Bucky pulls up to the thankfully empty car park and reluctantly gets out of the car, walking around to sit on the bonnet. He crosses his arms and stares at the ground, thoughts of Dr. Cho’s words swirling around his head, and causing his stomach to wind itself up into knots at the prospect of telling his friends about his problems.

He’s only broken from his thoughts when the sound of crushing gravel and a revving engine fill the empty space, and he looks up to see Steve swinging a leg off his motorbike and taking off his helmet. Before, that would have sent Bucky into the throes of lust, or a pit of despair, but now it’s a dull registration of how he’s still stupidly handsome, and a squeeze of his chest as premonition to what Steve’s about to say.

“Bucky,” He says softly.

“Steven,” He answers. “Why are we doing this in the out clinic parking lot?”

Steve shrugs, takes a tentative step forward before crossing his arms, then uncrossing them, leaving them lying limply at his side. “Thought it might be easier to do this somewhere impersonal.”
Bucky’s mouth twists into an ugly downturn. “I don’t think any part of this is ever going to easy.”

A quiet breath through his nose, and Steve’s sagging. “Yeah,” He says simply, and has the decency to sound genuinely torn up about it.
“I got your voicemail.”

That’s a shot to the chest.

He studies his hands. “Oh.”

A beat, and then he’s letting the words out before he loses his nerve. “I stand by it. Kind of. You broke my heart. You're a horrible person who did a horrible thing and saying sorry doesn't make it better.”

“Yeah,” He says again. “Christ. I-- Look, there is no way for me to make this better for you. I completely broke your heart, and there’s no way I can ever justify that. I’m sorry, I am, I’m so fucking sorry but I know that means nothing to you, and it shouldn’t.” Steve cuts himself off, a crease in his brow as he searches for the words he needs.

“I’m… Me and Peggy are getting a divorce.”

“Oh?”

“And once it’s settled, and I’ve my contract is up-- next month, I think-- I’m going to tender my resignation. I’ll take up a residency somewhere else. Hell, maybe I’ll rejoin the army. I don’t know. But I’ll leave. You can have me out of your hair and forget about me and not have to deal with me every again.”

He sucks in a breath. ”Oh.”

Steve nods, scuffing the toe of his shoe against the gravel of the ground. “Yeah. So that’s that. I just thought… You might want to know. So it wasn’t a surprise or that you thought I was leaving for different reasons, because I’m not. I know me saying sorry literally does nothing, but hopefully this will. I would have left earlier, but I didn’t want to raise suspicions.

“I…” He’s at a complete loss for words. The idea of Steve actually leaving seems foreign to him, but…

He can’t process this.

It would be better for him, this he knows. Without a doubt, it might keep the anxiety that itches under his skin every time he walks into the hospital, would quell the paranoia that everyone is looking at him and talking about him and Steve behind their backs. With Steve gone, there would only be Peggy, and that he could live with.

But without Steve, there would be no enabler. No one to directly blame his depression or anxiety on. It wouldn’t have the same effect. He’d be left alone with the fact that it wasn’t necessarily Steve that caused his problems. Sure, he’d still think it, would still know that Steve set off ticking time bomb in him. And what he done was still horrible. No, it was Bucky. It had always been in, lurking beneath his skin, and only revealed itself when Bucky was at it’s weakness.

Because that’s what it does.

“I appreciate that,” He whispers, and braves himself to finally look at Steve. The man is seems almost smaller, in on himself, and when their eyes meet, he offers Bucky a tentative, watery smile.
Bucky returns it.

“Just not Xavier, yeah?” He croaks, joking, but his voice is rough. “I’d rather have a punk like you in our corner. Have some damn loyalty, at least.”

Steve chuckles. “No promises, punk.”

~*~

Bucky gets home, mentally and physically drained, tired to his bones-- even breathing felt strenuous. It’s late, nearing seven, and as he’s shrugging of his jacket he’s surprised to hear voices floating from the kitchen. He frowns, walking towards them, and when he pushes the door open, he see’s Clint, Darcy and Jane sitting around the kitchen island, talking intently about something.

Darcy spots him first, going stock still, eyes wide open and mouth slightly parted. “Bucky.”

A hush descends amongst the other two, exchanging indecipherable glances. “Hey,” He greets, still confused at the weird, off-putting tension in the room. “What’s going on?”

“Oh, nothing,” Jane answers, but clearly flustered. “Want some coffee?”

He grabs a mug and pours himself a mug, looking around at the three of them. They’re on-edge, and he can’t for the life of them figure out why. “Guys, what’s the matter?”

Maybe he should tell them. Maybe now’s the time. The thought sends a spike of panic through him, but he tries to maintain a cool facade.

They look at each other again, Darcy worrying her bottom lip and Jane picking a hangnail. Clint, shifting in his seat like it was made of hot coals, breaks first.

“We’ve been thinking…. We’ve noticed how absent you are from rotations.” Bucky tenses, mug frozen halfway to his mouth. Clint takes no notice of this, or maybe chooses to ignore it, because he plows on anyways. “Look, we know Steve broke your heart, and did it in the worst way possible. And we’re not saying we know what you’re going through, or that it’s not hard-- I can’t begin to imagine how hard it is. But you’ve got to be smart about this, man! Missing all that time at the hospital is really going to do you damage. You’re missing out on surgeries, on patients-- If you keep on this way, you’ll reach a point where you can’t catch up anymore.”

Bucky grits his teeth, jaw flexing. “Clint, shut the fuck up.” The words are quiet, with underlying force. Anger at this sudden confrontation rises beneath his skin.

Clint shakes his head vehemently. “No! I’m not going to sit by while my friend is throwing his chance away.”

Jane nods beside him. She looks nervous but sympathetic as she speaks. “Clint’s right, Bucky, we’re worried about you. Hill is going to kill you the next time she see’s you.”

“You didn’t even do any work today!” Clint says, rising from his seat. “You just swanned in and did god knows what for an hour, and then left again.”

“C’mon, Bucky. Talk to us,” Darcy says gently. “We just want you to do well. We don’t want you to fuck up your chances like this.” She places a hand on his shoulder but he shrugs it off with more force than is necessary. Clint’s eyes darken at the gesture, while Darcy sighs.
No, he was wrong. It wasn’t a confrontation. It was a fucking intervention. Anger needles at him, at the unfairness of it all. Because they’re right, he’s fucking everything up because he couldn’t get his shit together, and now he has to pay for it with hours wasted at Cho’s or doing fuck all with his time.

“If you wanted me to do well, you’d all shut the fuck up about it,” He snaps, putting his coffee down with such velocity he displaces a drop or two.

Fuck. This is not how this is supposed to go. At all.

“Don’t talk to us like that,” Clint spits. “We’re your friends. Or I thought we were, but maybe we’re not good enough for the great Bucky Barnes. What, does the son of Winifred Barnes not need to slug normal hours like the rest of us? Too good for that?”

“Don’t bring my mother into this,” He bites back furiously.

“Not until you tell us what’s up with you,” Darcy replies.

His nostrils flare and he inhales a breath in. “A mental disorder characterized by a pervasive and persistent low mood that is accompanied by low self-esteem and by a loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities. Sound familiar?”

The silence that surrounds the table is deafening, and he watches as the colour drains from Clint’s face as the realization dawns on him. “Bucky…”

“Major depressive disorder,” He snaps. “Coupled with anxiety. Trigged by an avalanche of shit but that doesn’t matter. The point is, is that I have it. I had it before I got here and I’ll have it after, I’ll have it always. But I’m dealing with it. Hill found me having a panic attack and made me see Dr. Cho.”

“The in-house therapist,” Jane whispers, stricken.

Bucky nods, the anger slowly draining from him. “Yeah. I went in today.”

“When you said you had to see her, I didn’t… You never said,” Clint laments. “Christ, I thought it was some sort of evaluation.”

“You never said anything,” Jane says, and she looks so sad and hurt-- Not at him, but for him. “You made it seem like a one-time thing. That you were just a little down after the breakup. Why didn’t you say anything? We’re your friends.”

He plays with his mug, spinning it around and averting their eyes as tears threaten to spill over his own. “I’m sorry,” He says, hating how wobbly his voice is, determined not to cry. “But I didn’t want meds so she had to cut my hours and I was afraid to tell you guys. I didn’t want you to think that I was broken or something.”

Darcy surprises him then by giving him a bone-crushing hug. It takes the breath out of him, but it’s so warm and solid and fond he can’t help but lean into it, to wrap his arms around her and squeeze her back.

“Oh, Bucky,” She murmurs against his collarbone.

~*~

Nick Fury hates vacation, as a general rule of thumb. God knows it drove Melinda half mad, but it
was in his nature. He was never happier than when he organising doctors and scheduling surgeries.

So, lying in bed for two weeks straight so he could recover from major brain surgery wasn’t exactly sitting too well with him. When the nurse on duty walked in with the phone, he frowned, then sighed. No doubt someone had ratted him out and Melinda was about to berate him for checking the scheduling board today.

But then the nurse says “I have a Charles Xavier on the phone for you?”

Charles Xavier was a young, annoying cheerful and British upstart from Xavier hospital across town. He was the head of neurosurgery and was never short of accolades or articles being written about him, partially because he was young, annoyingly cheerful and British. His father owned the hospital, or at least, funded most of it.

“Xavier,” He harrumphed into the receiver. “What are you doing ringing me at eight o’clock on a Friday night?”

“Good evening Dr. Fury,” The chipper, eloquent voice greeted him. It was pissing Nick off already. Stupid, handsome doctors who got all the look in the gene pool. “I’d like to discuss a business proposal, if you’d be interested.”

Nick barked out a laugh. “Shouldn’t I be talking to your father, then?”

“Well, see, that’s the problem, Dr. Fury. He’s died.”

“What?”

“Yes. Very peaceful, in his sleep, and all that.”

“You don’t sound too torn up about it.”

“You must know what a miserable old battleaxe my father was.” At Nick’s hum, he continues. “I was never particularly fond of the man, nor him me.”

“So, what? Surely you’re up for the chief of surgery now. Aren’t you happy about that?”

“No. Not at all. It’s horribly nepotistic, not to mention I have no desire to become Chief of Surgery, which the old bugger knew full well. Therein lies my problem, thus my proposal.”

Nick raises an eyebrow. “Alright, Xavier, you have my attention.”

~*~

They’re sitting curled up on the couch, all five of them, Natasha included. Darcy’s on his left, head is on his shoulder, and Natasha is on his right, arms are wrapped his torso.

He sighs, but it’s not entirely unhappy. He’s content here, surrounded by friends who do actually care about him.

They’re streaming some series on netflix, but he’s not paying attention, and eating more popcorn and chocolate than is probably recommended, but he couldn’t really care.

“I’m sorry about earlier, Buck,” Clint says quietly into the dark. “I was just worried about you.”

Bucky looks over at him. “No worries, man. I reacted shit, too. I appreciate it.”
Jane, from where she’s sitting at his feet, squeezes his ankle, and Natasha hugs him tighter, like she’s trying to will his broken pieces back together.

Although, he supposes, it doesn’t really matter that he’s broken. It matters that he has the pieces.

Is hope a glue strong enough to not tear him apart?

He doesn’t know. But he looks at his friends-- his friends who are more family than that, and tries anyway.

He’s afraid, and slightly cynical, but he’ll try anyways.

Chapter End Notes

Well that's the third last chapter done and dusted!

I can't believe this is nearly over, I've had such a blast writing this, and I hope you guys have too :) 

I'd really really love to here what you think, because comments make my day.

vo come talk to me on tumblr
And when the seasons change, will you stand by me? ('Cause I'm a young man built to fall)

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

An introspective first person interview with James Buchanan Barnes, part the third.

Reader, it’s been a while.

I was just thinking... It wasn't a chemical imbalance, and it wasn't drugs and alcohol. It was much more that I had lived an incredibly controlled life. That, “If I could just achieve X and Y and Z, everything would be OK.”

There's a thing in a book I read: when people jump out of a burning skyscraper, it's not that they're not afraid of falling anymore, it's that the alternative is so awful. And then you're invited to consider what could be so awful, that leaping to your death seems like an escape from it. I don't know if you've had any experience with this kind of thing, but mental illness of any sort... It's worse than any kind of physical injury. It is a literal sickness of the mind, it thwarts your perception of reality, of yourself and others. You become fragmented, and it feels like you, and you only, have to be the one to put yourself back together but every time you try to pick a piece of your broken self up you cut yourself.

What I went through-- What I’m going through--is what my mother would describe as a ‘spiritual crisis.’ Feeling as though every atom of your life turned out to be false, and there was actually nothing, and you were nothing, and it was all a delusion. And you’re smarter than everyone else because you can see that it’s a delusion, and yet you’re the biggest fuck up in the room because you don’t know how to fucking fix it. And it’s really horrible. And I hope you never feel this way.

(Christ, I wasted so long feeling this way. You know, just carrying it around on my shoulders because we all have a burden to bear, right? But when you grow up with something like this, you don’t notice it. And I did, I think, grow up with anxiety and depression, so that as I got older, and it got heavier, I didn’t notice. Until the straw breaks the camel’s back, and you realise you’ve been living your entire life through not-normal glasses and you’re slapped with a reality that you’ve never known.

I know that I reacted badly, but jesus, I fucking hated reality.

It’s a life I had never known, and I didn't like the harsh change, because how was I meant to live like that?

So I think maybe that’s why, when it started creeping back (not that it had ever left-- But when the tendrils started coiling around my throat and squeezing again) I didn’t say no. I didn’t raise alarms, because in the face of so much change and newness, I was faced with something I had always known. A comfort. A constant.)

Back to my point-- I walk into therapy and I’m the smartest guy there because I know I’m depressed and anxious and broken, and I understand that fundamentally I will always know this better than Helen, better than any psychologist with however many degrees. But I’m always fucking aware of the fact that clearly some very important, very fundamental part of me is deeply fractured.
I once told you that I stood by all my mistakes and all my downfalls throughout life, because it still lead me to Steve. Because through addiction and a million other things-- I was in this happy, perfect, relationship. The icing on the cake to my textbook perfect life.

And, as you know, that fell through spectacularly.

So you're probably wondering- if I had known about Peggy, about all the trouble Steve would've brought me, would I still have gone up to him that night at the bar?

And you know what?

Yeah. Yeah, I would have. Because from all the heartache, and the sorrow, and the unrelenting anger, came a new perspective. That I didn't need Steve to make me better, or even to give me the motivation to better. Because anxiety, depression, whatever’s your poison, it’s not nice to deal with, but it’s even worse to live with it, untreated, festering in the back of your mind. I realised from that, that- cheesy as it sounds- I do actually have it in me to fix my broken parts, all I need is a push.

Like, I’m not saying it’s easy because, jesus, it’s not. He loves all the things that I'm trying to forget about and I just watched 5 hours of Netflix because I couldn't even sleep in my own bed because it smells like him and I couldn't tell you the main character's name but I could tell about how he likes his tea- 2 sugars but he only says that because he's too shy to say 3 and he loves his blue shirt with the stain on the right sleeve and I love him but I had to leave him and if that doesn't tell how fucked up the world is then I don't know what will.

(May had once told me that lovers can change like seasons, but they never mentioned that the winter lasts forever.)

I’m still fucked up, and he’s still terrible, and I will always, to a degree, not hit the mark of normal. There’ll always be bad days and panics and a million and one other things.

Anyways, like I said, it doesn't matter that all your parts are broken, it matters that you have the parts.

I don’t think we ever change. I’m sure there are still those same broken parts of me that are anxious and depressed and suicidal-- I’ve accepted that. They will always be a part of me. I’ve just gotta find a way not to let them drive. Y’know?

So.

Goodnight.

Chapter End Notes

One last chapter, folks.

Comments seriously give me life, it'd be awesome if you could leave one!

yo come talk to me on tumblr
I'm damned if I do and I'm damned if I don't (It's a shot in the dark aimed right at my throat)

Chapter Notes

Well, here we are. One year, eighteen chapters and over 100,000 words later. The end of an era.

I hope you enjoy. Warnings for talk of suicide and character death. Title is from Florence and The Machine's 'Shake it Out'.

Thank you thank you thank you to everyone who's commented, kudos'd and supported this fic this far. It means the absolute world to me that you followed this journey with me, and I cannot thank you enough.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Jane, turn the tv up!”

Bucky frowns at the screen, where a massive, smoking wreck is the centre of the shot.

“This just in-- A massive train crash occurred just minutes ago on the outskirts of Washington. The Seattle-bound train was carrying over 300 passengers. It’s unclear at the moment how many are injured or killed, but paramedics are on scene as we speak helping victims.”

A second later, all five pagers are beeping furiously. “911,” Bucky reads aloud.

Clint looks mournfully at his still-full coffee cup. “I just worked a thirty hour shift.”

Bucky slips off his stool, the itch of adrenaline already buzzing under his skin. He had been called in for a 911-- Even if he was just working his twelve hours, he’d still be in the thrill of it all.

“Hey!” Darcy turns around from where she’d been rummaging in the pantry, pointing a wooden spoon at him. “Where do you think you’re going?”

He made a vague gesture to the upstairs of the house. “To my room? To get changed? I’ll go wait in the car for you guys.”

“You haven’t eaten breakfast,” Jane scolded. “You’re not leaving on an empty stomach, you won’t be fit to cut people open.”

He sighed and rolled his eyes, about to argue back, before he caught Clint’s tired glance-- ‘You really think you can argue with them?’

He threw his hands up in defeat. “Fine. Give me some of that coffee.”

As Clint pours him a cup and Natasha starts buttering him a slice of toast, a victorious and smug smirk on her face, Clint says “I don’t even know why you’re so eager to go. It’s going to be a complete, unorganised mess.”

Bucky bit into his toast. “It’s nice to tend to somebody else’s trainwreck every now and then.”
It’s exactly like Clint predicted when they walk inside to the emergency entrance-- Utter, chaotic carnage.

There are two types of people in this world-- Those who like surprises, and those that don’t. Surgeons-- And Bucky, by extension-- generally don’t. As surgeons they like to be in the know. They have to be in the know. Because when they aren't, people die and lawsuits happen.

He’s rambling. Mostly because of the nerves that are now gripping him tight, replacing his earlier enthusiasm-- It’s one thing for someone to trust you enough to call you in for a 911, and then it’s another when you realise that you’re going to have to actually help with a 911.

A big, serious 911 from the looks of it.

People are running around frantically with gurneys and there’s already nurses coming behind them to try to clean blood that’s already been spilt.

Natasha grips his arm. “I think I saw a pneumothorax. I hope I get a pneumothorax.” With that, she heads off, practically skipping, and puts on her yellow gown, the others following suit and Bucky trails behind them.

“Hey,” Clint says lowly as he ties the back of his gown. “You okay, man?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’m fine. I just…” He lets out a shaky breath. “I already feel out of practice, I guess.”

Clint pats him on the back. “You’ll do great.”

As Bucky opens his mouth to speak, the familiar, and still terrifying, sound of high heels on the linoleum floor can be heard. He turns his head, and sees Hill stalking towards them in a black ball gown, dolled up to the nines.

Clint gapes. “Oh!”

Hill raises an eyebrow. “What are you looking at?” She kneels down and takes off her heels, and hands them to Clint, along with her purse and her shawl. “Here. Go get me my damn scrubs and my shoes.”

As Clint scampers off, she turns to the rest of them. “Before you all ask, or start the rumour mill, yes, I was off duty, and yes, I was on a date. No, I won’t be seeing the man in question again, because this has been the third time I’ve had to leave a date in the middle because of work, and that doesn’t leave the best impression. Any questions?”

They all shake their heads ‘no’.

“All right then. Stick with me and wait for your assignments. Bucky, tie me up.” He grabs a yellow gown, and goes to tie it up. “You okay with working more than twelve?” She asks lowly.

“I think I can manage,” He answers, and it doesn’t feel like much of a lie. She nods, and straightens up, before turning to the others. “Now you get all aquiver at the sight of blood, and organs but it’s gonna be a long night and you already tired. I don't want any mistakes.”

She gestures them with a flick of her hand into the ER, and to say the scene was of biblical proportions would be the understatement of the century. What lay before Bucky was complete and utter carnage.
“I’m so not tired anymore,” Darcy breathes.

Clint nods furiously. “Me neither. I’m not tired either.” It’s a weak attempt at trying to convince himself, but it tugs a small smile to the corners of Bucky’s mouth.

“Out of my way!” A sharp voice cuts through the haze as Dr. Potts comes striding through the ER with a gurney, in all her Prada-heeled glory. On the bed is a badly burned woman, dressings already haphazardly applied, who appears to be heavily pregnant.

Pepper nods at them. “I’ve got a 3rd trimester burn victim here, Dr. Hill, and I’m gonna need some help. Mind if I borrow one of your interns.”

“Not at all,” Maria says, almost too happy to oblige. “Ah-- Jane, you go.”

Clint and Darcy’s shoulders slump, defeated, while Jane smiles excitedly and goes to join Dr. Potts.

Jane turns to them and grins. “Have a nice nap.”

Suddenly a paramedic bursts through the doors, covered in blood and holding up a plastic bag filled with ice and--

“Is that leg?!” Bucky gapes.

“Got the leg!” Fitz, the paramedic, says victoriously.

Bucky is stunned speechless, as are Clint and Natasha, and even Maria joins them in simply staring at what was playing out in front of them.

I want the leg,” Natasha whispers.

“That’s mine!” Steve yells it from the other end of the room, wheeling in a patient through the large double doors, rushing down to Fitz, and Bucky hates, abhors how his heart speeds up as he approaches, in all his impassioned glory. Blonde hair tousled from the wind outside and curling at his forehead, a cowlick he desperately tries to conceal, and cheeks tinted rosy red from the wind. And Bucky’s at the bar again, the first time he met him, helpless.

“He’s lost a lot of blood at the scene,” Steve says, voice calm but filled with authority. “Pressure dressings applied. Two large bore IVs started.”

“Anything for the pain?” Hill asks as she checks the man’s vitals.

“Base ordered morphine. Five milligrams given so far.”

He can practically feel Clint and Natasha vibrate with barely concealed excitement.

Steve nods towards the group of them. “I’m going to need all hands on deck, at least until I can get the bleeding under control and hand it off to Peggy.”

“Clint, go,” Hill instructs, and he lets out a celebratory whoop.
“Yes!” Beside Bucky, the man pumped his fist and jogged off to catch up with Steve, who was already rushing to get the man to an O.R.

Hill turns to the two of them, about to open her mouth and put them on scut work, most likely, but before she can do that Loki comes speeding towards them.

“You three!” He barks. “Stop standing there gnomeless. ER Room five, now.”

They share a joint look of confusion and slight panic, before following Loki, winding their way through countless people and gurneys. ER Room five is nearly impossible to see with all the nurses and doctors filing in and out of it, frantic and harried.

He turns to them, and fixes them with a glare. “You’re going to walk into this room, and you are not going to say a word about what you’re about to see. Understood?”

That does nothing to calm the nerves under Bucky’s skin, anxiety rushing through him as he nods his head woodenly, walking with Natasha and Hill into the ER room.

He wishes Loki could have given them at least some kind of goddamn warning.

Sitting across two gurneys, was a man in what looked to be his late fifties and a young woman, not too far off Bucky’s own age. He had frowned upon seeing them at first, wondering why you put them on two gurneys, and facing each other of all things. From what he could remember, that was in violation of countless health and safety rules.

That was before he noticed the pole.

Blood is pooling around their sternums, where a metal pole is cutting right through them.

He manages to just about keep his gasp to himself, but he knows his eyes are the size of saucepans, and he has to try to keep his jaw off the floor. Beside him, Natasha is pale and rigid, and Hill exhales a slightly shaky breath, an undercurrent of a tremor running through it.

A paramedic comes up to them, turning to speak to Loki. “His BP is looking steady at 90 over pal. She’s had 2 hypotensive episodes to the low seventies.”

Hill frowns. “You couldn't get a saw in there?” She asks.

Loki shakes his head, arms crossed and a furrow in his brow-- thinking. “Not without moving them.”

“Which would have been a very bad idea,” Natasha says, distractedly as she studies them.

Bucky cocks his head, trying to get a better view. The pole is almost completely straight, which is good in some respects and bad in others. It will be easier to take out, if they even make it that far, but it may well be causing a lot more damage to the both of them. Without even realising, Bucky’s memory comes back to him, easy as breathing, as his mind rattles off the importance of stopping the blood haemolysing, and how to do so, calculating the organs the pole has damaged, how they can fix them.

He bites his lip. If they can fix them.

“Is this the craziest thing you ever seen?”

His head snaps up, and stares at the girl, blonde hair and eyes so blue it hurts to look at them,
letting out a nervous chuckle as she regards him. “Uh... Yeah,” He answers.

She smiles ruley. “Yeah. Me too.”

“They’re never gonna fit into CT,” Loki murmurs quietly to Dr. Hill. “We’re going to be flying blind. We’ll have to get x-rays nearly immediately if we want any chance of putting up some kind of fight.”

“Um, excuse me!” Behind them, the girl is looking at them. “Hi, sorry, I just have a question, if that’s alright?”

Loki takes a step towards her. “Hello. I’m Dr. Odinson. Please don’t turn your head, we still don’t know the extent of your injuries and it could be doing harm. Try to move as little as possible for the time being.”

She lets out a breath, staring ahead, and blinks. “Oh ok... Do you know if you can pull this pole out of us anytime soon?”

The man at the opposite end of the pole grins wryly. “It’s a little uncomfortable.”

Loki gives them an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry we can’t until we get a better look on what’s going on internally. But I assure you, we’re working as quickly as possible.”

“Is there some kind of ‘huge metal rod stuck through you and one other guy’ privilege?”

Loki chuckles and gives her a grin. “For our two guests of honour, of course.” Sometimes it was easy to forget that Loki had in fact taken his bedside manner course, and had actually passed. (It was still unnerving as hell, though.)

He turns back to the three others, and nods at Bailey. “Get them going.”

“Bucky, get them an X-Ray. Natasha, labs. Page Dr. Odinson as soon as you’re done, I’m going to try to help out at rounds.”

“Move them extremely carefully,” Loki warns. He regards them with an unreadable expression on his face. “We don’t know how much damage has been done, but either way, the spine is an incredibly vulnerable position.”

With Natasha at one end and Bucky at the other, they carefully try to navigate their way through the halls. Bucky thanks whoever the hell is up there that the X-Ray is on this floor.

“Is there anyone you’d like us to call?” Natasha asks as they slowly wheel them down the empty corridor.

“No,” The man answers. “They called my wife from the ambulance.”

“And my fiancé,” The girl replies. “He’s flying down from Vancouver now.”

“Normally, Amanda would be a tad upset to find me pressed up against another woman.” Natasha laughs, and the girl grins. “But in this case I think I’ll get a pass.”

“You two weren’t traveling together?”

“No. We just met.”

“Not the best meet-cute, I’m aware.”
“Look on the brightside, Tom. You have very nice eyes.”

Tom, the aforementioned man, chuckled once before wincing. “Damn. Hurts to laugh.”

Natasha frowns him. “Try take it easy, okay?”

As Tom grunts in response, Bucky has to bite back a curse. In front them, there’s a queue stretching down the entire corridor and around the bend to the X-Ray room.

Natasha looks at him and he shrugs helplessly. Rolling her eyes, she walks away from the gurney and taps another intern with an old lady in a wheelchair in front of them on the shoulder.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” She answers absentmindedly, but when she turns around, she recoils. “Oh my god. Whoa. You can go ahead.”

Natasha smiles. “Thanks.” She gestures for Bucky to move them forth, and stops when they get to the next intern. She clears her throat. Jeff, a guy Bucky’s done rounds with before, turns around and startles. “Oh wow.”

Bucky raises his eyebrows and tilts his head toward Tom and the girl. “Do you think we could…?”

“Yeah, yeah, of course. Go ahead.”

As Bucky and Natasha wheel the gurney up, they share a conspiratorial grin and soon five minutes later, they’re in the X-Ray room.

~*~

Loki walks down the hall, paying nobody any mind, fixated on his patients, planning the worst and best outcomes in his mind. What procedure he’ll use if the spine has been severely damaged, back procedures if something goes wrong, surgeries if the spine isn’t entirely injured, instead focusing on the organs. Wondering if he can call Dr. Rogers away from his current case to help with this one. Second guessing that, then, because something seems off between him and Barnes, and as much as he doesn’t like to admit, he actually quite likes Barnes.

He can’t exactly pinpoint how, and certainly not why-- He supposes if he had to pinpoint it, a noticeable change in Barnes came up around the time that the other Dr. Rogers arrived.

Perhaps Barnes had a petty crush on Peggy, jealous that she was married to Steve and entirely unattainable. Or maybe--

“Jesus Christ,” He groaned under his breath. What was he doing, theorising about his co workers like a gossiping school girl? He would ask Dr. Rogers to assist with surgery if it was need. Barnes was a big boy, he could handle it.

Then again, if he really needed to know, for professional reasons entirely, he could always ask--

“Oof!”

“Watch where you’re going!”

‘Speak of the devil,’ he thought.

“Same to yourself,” He replied, fully aware of his words lack of heat. “What are you doing in such
a rush anyways?”

Darcy let out a frustrated sigh. “I was put on Dr. Rogers case, right? This guy had his left leg chopped off, and it was fairly simple, we were going to reattach it. In fact, it was more than easy, because it was a guillotine cut, and the leg had been frozen and everything, so it was easy as pie. But this--” She held up a freezer bag filled with ice and…

“Is that a leg?!”

“Yes. But not our one. Because our guy needed a left foot, and what I have here is a right. How the fuck did Fitz not realise that? And of course, no one noticed until we were in surgery and about to attach it, so now we have a guy losing blood by the second on the table and I have to get down to the scene to find my missing leg before I get my ass handed to me by Rogers. Again.”


Some of the tension drains away from her body, and she breathes a frayed laugh. “To say the least.”

He catches her wrist as she begins to walk away, gentle in his touch, nervous.

“Let me take you for dinner tonight,” He says, the words tumbling out of his mouth before he can second guess them.

“Why?” She asks, but she hasn’t shaken him off yet so he’s taking that as a not-bad sign.

“To apologise. To de-stress. Why ever you want.”

She regards him for a second, before narrowing her eyes. “Tonight?”

“We can do it another time, if you’d rather.”

Darcy carefully unlinks her wrist from his fingers, only to poke him in the chest. “I’m not dressing up.”

He laughs, relieved. “All the better. I know good place in town, no formal wear required.”

“I get off at nine.”

“So do I.” That was not entirely true, he got off at seven, but he had paperwork to catch up on and patients to monitor, so really, it wouldn’t kill him to stay the extra few hours. “I’ll meet you at the foyer at a quarter past.”

She’s smiling at him, then, tentative and wide, and then taking off down the corridor, leaving Loki’s heart a frantic mess.

~*~

Bucky gapes at the screen, “Is that… Is it going straight through her spine?”

“It is,” Loki frowns, absentmindedly swivelling back and forth in his chair. “The T8 is completely crushed.”

Hill shakes her head in disbelief, crossing her arms. “Look at this. These people are still alive, despite basic medicine going against them. They shouldn’t even be sitting that straight.”

“Should they still be able to make small talk?” Natasha asks.
Loki sighs through his nose, and nods. He taps to the X-Ray, right where the pole cuts through the vertebrae. “See this? The pole is tamponading the wound as far as we can see. That’s how they’re sitting straight. Add in the amount of adrenaline they must be on…”

There’s a knock on the door and when Bucky turns around, it’s Steve sticking his head in. “Dr. Odinson. You needed a consult?”

Loki gestures him forward. The scent of his cologne hits Bucky-- The same smell that still lingers slightly in his room, despite the deep clean he tried to give it.

“Thank you for coming on short notice. I’d apologise for taking you away from your other patients, but…” He looks out at the girl, who’s name is Bonnie, he learnt, and Tom. “I think you can agree that perhaps they are in better need of your time at the moment.”

Steve nods. “Of course.” He leans in, squinting his eyes at the X-Ray. “My god,” He mutters under his breath.

“Yeah,” Hill sighs.

“Well, the pole seems to be acting almost like a support for their spines-- See how the fluid is building up? It’s almost acting like cement. But then…” He trails off and taps at the X-Ray. “It’s hitting the aorta.” He looks out at Tom. “Look at him. With the way the pole is hitting them, it's right in line with his inferior vena cava.”

“Is there anyway to operate without separating them?” Hill asks.

Loki shakes his head at the same time Steve answers ‘no’.

Bucky swallows. “But if we move the poll…”

“They’ll both bleed out,” Natasha murmurs.

Loki sits up, taping his crooked finger against his lips, stuck in silent thought. “What if we don’t move the poll?” He says, thinking aloud. “What if we move one of the patients off the poll to get the saw in there? Then we can hold the pole steady in the other one. Move it very slowly and repair the damage as we go. Even getting that far would be a feat-- These people will most likely never walk again. The damage is too catastrophic. But at least this way we’re balancing it out. They’ll each have an equal chance of surviving.”

“Who? Which would you move?” Hill enquires, eyebrows creased. “We could be facing a breach of the hippocratic oath if we don’t think this out first. Who has the better chance of surviving?” She turns to Loki. “You know as well as I do that there’s always an imbalance in situations like these.”

Loki bows his head, before looking back up at Hill. “With her aortic injuries, her chances of survival are extremely slim no matter what we do. Plus the pole has been skewed her side, at least with Tom it’s nearly straight. It would be easier to control hemorrhages and the like during surgery. But if we move her, we have a real shot of saving him.”

Steve looks at the other man, eyebrows raised. “Well I could argue since her injuries are so extensive, we should move him. Give her the best shot we can. Not to mention, she’s younger. Her body is more primed to fight this sort of thing. Tom already has onset arthritis, and he has just as much aortic damage as Bonnie.”
Slowly, Bucky’s frazzled mind pieces together the words unsaid, lying hidden between lines and beneath stoically professional exteriors. “So basically whoever you move doesn't stand a chance?” He blurts out. All eyes in the room come to face him, unsettled by his brashness. “So how do you choose? How do you decide who gets to live?”

Loki purses his lips. “We have to make this call soon if we want our shot of saving either one of them.”

“I'd like to examine them before I weigh in,” Steve says. “That okay?”

Loki nods, making a passive gesture with his hand. “I'll wait for your page.”

Steve turns, walking out. “Thank you.”

Loki follows him, as does Hill, stopping at the door. “Take them back to ER 2. And just… Keep them calm. No matter what. Page me if there’s any problems.”

“Of course,” Natasha answers, and goes to get the gurney.

Bucky’s frozen for a second, staring at the X-Ray, heart leaden.

And then he follows Nat, and does his goddamn job.

As they wheel Bonnie and Tom down the corridor, Bucky spots Clint in the distance, looking frantic and tired as he paces towards them, flipping through charts. “Hey,” He calls, and nods to Clint when he looks up and meets his eyes. “You okay?”

“Hey,” He replies, coming up to meet them. Bucky has to hand it to him, he manages to conceal his surprise at the two-person shish-kebab. “I’m fine, getting labs is a bitch though.”

Bucky snorts. “No need to tell me twice.”

Then Clint turns to Natasha, an unreadable expression on his face, soft in a way Bucky’s never seen before.

“And you?” He asks gently. “Are you okay?”

Bucky’s eyebrows get progressively higher as Natasha returns it a smile, and a warm response. “I’m fine.”

They’re in their own little world then, and Bucky’s chest aches at the sight of it-- missing it intrinsically-- feeling like he’s intruding on them. When Clint eventually manages to tear his gaze away he throws them both a ‘bye’ before going on his way.

“What was that?” Bucky asks, looking between her and Clint’s retreating figure.

“What was what?” She asks innocently.

“That,” He emphasizes, as if it makes any difference.

Natasha’s gaze flickers, a brief crack in her facade, and he knows he’s got her. “That wasn’t anything.”

Bucky’s about to respond, when Bonnie cuts in, taking the words out of his mouth. “Oh, that was
something alright.”

“See?” He points to Bonnie. “She doesn’t even know you and she can tell.”

“Can’t argue with a girl with a pole sticking through her,” Bonnie pipes, and Bucky blurts out a laugh-- The first time he’s done so in a while, and that hits him harder than he thought.

~*~

In the trauma room, Steve lightly squeezes one of Bonnie’s toes. “Can you feel that Miss Krasnoff?” With the bright, fluorescent light shining down on him, and people constantly surrounding him, it’s like he never left the battlefield.

She smiles, eyes closed and a contemplative smile on her face. Her blonde hair is in a messy ponytail, but there’s mascara smudged around her eyes, a glimpse at what must be her nerves, despite her calm exterior. “Hmm. You’re a cute Doctor. Cute doctors get to call me by my first name.”

Steve grins at her. “Bonnie?”
She hums a yes, and he tugs slightly harder on her toe.

“Ok, Bonnie. Do you feel that?”

Her brow furrows, and her lips quirk. “Can I feel what?”

Their eyes meet, and she quickly plasters on an indifferent air. “Oh. Well I guess that’s a no, then.”

Natasha pokes her head through the door. “Excuse me, Dr Rogers?”

Steve looks up briefly from his report. “Yes?”

She holds up a manila envelope. “I got the labs.”

Giving her a tentative but grateful smile, he takes it from her. “Oh great. Thank you.” He hands her the patient’s charts as he looks over the lab results. “Here you go. Hold that please.”

He frowns down at the labs, the information compacts a cavity into his chest. Hoping his face doesn’t betray anything, he turns to Tom. “Could you try to wiggle your toes Mr. Maynard?”

Effortlessly, Tom wiggles his toes, with no limited mobility.

“Are they moving?” He asks, worry tinging his words, unable to see from where he’s positioned.

Steve flashes him an encouraging smile. “They sure are, Mr. Maynard.”

He lets out a breathless sigh of relief. “Oh good. That’s good right?”

Nodding, he answers. “Yes, it sure is. It means the pole hasn’t affected your mobility yet, which is one more blessing.”

“What about me?” Bonnie pipes up. “Are mine moving?”
Her toes remain still, and when he bends down to get a better look, they’re unmoving, and it takes all Steve has to plaster on his best Good-Soldier-Boy smile and nod. “Yeah, they are.”

But the smile of relief on Bonnie’s face as her eyes flutter shut and she sighs happily makes it worth it. “Yay me.”

Natasha stares at him, questioning and judging as he hands her back the labs. He says nothing, but he feels his jaw subconsciously tick at her gaze— It was one he used to seeing on commanders telling him *What the hell were you thinking, running in there like some kind of superhero*. Nice to know that his rebellious streak had remained in tact, though.

“It’s Dr. Rogers, isn’t it?” Mr. Maynard asks.

Steve briefly looks up at him from where he’s signing off on the lab report. “Yep, it is.”

A frown flickers across Tom’s face, creased with worry and concern. “Dr. Rogers, Bonnie and I ... are we gonna live through this?”

“Now that's just macabre, Tom,” Bonnie chides.

“I’m sorry, doll,” He amends, before locking eyes with Steve again. “Doctor?”

The fruitless line Steve hates with a passion rolls off his tongue like lead. “We're gonna do everything we can Mr. Maynard.”

~*~

Loki only breaks his gaze from the scans when he hears footsteps behind him, knowing they’re Steve’s. “Where are we?”

Sighing, he scrubs his face. “You were right. Her vitals are erratic. Pulse is weak. Spine severed. I was hoping it didn't hit from that angle, that it had somehow missed her aorta.” He huffed at his own, naive optimism.

“What about him? Think he can live?” Hill asks, looking over Tom’s scans.

Steve rests against the desk, and looks down at his hands. These hands have saved lives. They’ve stitched skin back together, mended wounds, held hearts.

They’ve also killed. They’ve pulled triggers, and they’ve not been fast enough, and now, they’re going to be the tools that kill a young girl. “I hate to say it, but you were right. He's got better odds.”

The room is heavy, silent, sombre. Sucking in a breath, Hill turns to Bucky. “Alright. Let OR 1 know we're coming. Get a scrub nurse team together, make sure you steal the good ones.”

Bucky nods woodenly and pushes himself off the edge of the table he had been leaning against. “Oh, and Barnes?” Bucky stops, and looks at him. “Close off the gallery. We don't need an audience for this.”
Bucky opens and closes his mouth, at a loss for words. When he does speak, his voice is cracked and hoarse. “She’s cracking jokes. How do you tell somebody that she’s gonna be dead in a few minutes when she’s sitting up cracking jokes?”

All they can do in response is look at him sadly, and watch as he goes.

~*~

Bucky has to clench his jaw as he struggles to look Tom and Bonnie in the eye, knowing what’s to come.

Steve begins, and Bucky marvels at how effortlessly him, Hill and Odinson can keep their emotions so perfectly in check. “This is hard, because your body is in a certain amount of shock. It’s preventing you from feeling pain, feeling the extent of your injuries.”

Bonnie gives him a soft, wry smile. “Dr. Rogers, we have a metal pole cutting a path through our insides. I don't know about Tom here, but I didn't expect to walk out of here anytime soon.” Out of the corner of his eye, Natasha looks down at her feet, upset. “So... whatever it is you have to say just please... say it.”

Steve swallows, and nods. “Okay, Bonnie. In order to operate on Mr. Maynard, we have to separate you two. In order to do that, we have to move you backwards off the pole.”

“Can't you just pull the pole out of both of us?” Tom asks.

Steve shakes his head no, looking still at Bonnie, unmoving.

“Well if we did that,” Loki explains, “You would both start bleeding very quickly. Too quickly. Right now the pole is plugging the wounds. Once removed, the organs will shift and there’s a great deal of damage. If we were to do that, there’d be so much catastrophic damage, we’d have no chance of saving you.”

Bonnie’s face is now crumpled and pinched, with tears teetering on the edge of her eyes. “So if you move me, I’ll die?”

After a pregnant pause, Steve speaks up. “We're gonna do everything we can to…” He trails off as Bonnie begins to cry softly, gentle sobs causing slight tremors through her body. Steve takes her hand and rubs it soothingly. “I know this is hard for you, I know. But we are still going to give you every single thing we have and more in there.”

Tom cuts him off. “No. No. If anyone body has to go it should be me. I’m older, by a lot, move me and--”

Loki interrupts with a firm shake of his head. “No. Mr. Maynard ... Mr. Maynard your injuries are less extensive. If we pull the pole from you as we operate around it, we have a better chance at repairing the damage.”

“That's not right,” Tom says bitterly. “It's not fair.”

“Shh Tom,” Bonnie says quietly, smiling sadly after her cries have died down. “It's not fair either way.” She looks at Natasha. “Is, is my Danny ... is he here yet?”

Natasha looks up, and clears her throat. “There are delays at the airport, from the storm.”
“We could wait but the longer we do the higher the risk of infection for the both of you from the pole,” Hill adds.

Bonnie nods. “No, no. This is better... Um, Danny, he wouldn't understand. I've had a couple of hours to, you know--” She takes a deep, shaky breath. “-- process all of this. But if, if he had to see me ... talk to me like this ... well, I just think it would be too hard.”

Bucky has to look away before it gets too difficult.

~*~

The OR is abuzz with nurses and doctors alike getting everything ready, and in the centre, Bonnie and Tom.

“Can I ask you a question?” Bonnie asks, almost at a whisper.

“Mmm hmm,” Tom hums.

“Do you believe in heaven?”

“I do... Don't you?”

Tears dance on Bonnie’s eyes. “I want to,” She replies, watery.

“Bonnie,” Tom begins, awash with shame and guilt. “I just want to say that--”

“Shh.” She interrupts him, hushed. “I know. I know. You’re a good man, Tom. You deserve this, and don’t doubt for a second that you don’t.”

Steve walks in then, with Dr. Adams at his side.

“This is Dr. Adams, our anesthesiologist. When you're ready, he's going to put you to sleep.”

“So it's not gonna hurt?” Bonnie asks.

Dr. Adams nods, and offers a reassuring smile. “It won't hurt a bit.”

She lets out a breath. “Good. That's good... Dr. Rogers?”

“Yeah, Bonnie?”

“You're gonna be the one to talk to my Danny, right?”

Steve nods. “If that’s what you want.”

“Yeah, I would. I really would. You remind me of him.”

Steve swallows, and ducks his head, trying to calm the tidal wave of sheer sadness at the scene before him. “What would you like me to tell him?”
He leans his head in, as Bonnie whispers her last words to him.

In the sterilising room, Bucky scrubs up alongside Hill and Natasha.

“Why do I feel we're about to kill this girl?” Hill asks absentmindedly.

“Because life’s an unfair bitch,” Natasha answers, and Bucky has to agree with her there.

As Bucky is putting his gloves on, a nurse calls from the OR. “Dr. Rogers, she's crashing.”

Steve whips his head around from where the other nurses are rolling his gloves on and tying his gown.

“What happened?” He demands.

“I just put them under,” Dr. Adams says.

Loki curses. “Pole must've shifted.”

“I barely touched her,” Adams rebukes, defensively. “This isn't my fault.”

“It's nobody's fault,” Steve amends. “We'll need to remove her now if we're going to have a chance.”

“How are we going to do this?” Hill asks, finally entering with Bucky and Natasha towing behind.

“Team 1 continues, stabilize his body. Team 2 move her back and let's get the saw in there. This has to be fast and smooth, people. Romanoff, you hold the pole in place. Whatever you do, don't pull on it, don't let it move. On the count of 3. 1, 2 …”

Slowly, Steve and another few doctors and nurses slid Bonnie off the pole carefully and place her onto the operating table set up right behind them. As soon as they do they wheel her over to another side of the room, and another doctor gets a saw and starts cutting through the pole.

“She’s stable,” Dr. Adams says when he inspects her vitals.

Steve nods, eyes steely and determined. “Let's start slow and we can see what we can do. Everyone at this table isn’t moving from here until I say so, understand? Scalpel.”


“Re-tractor.”

Bucky holds it steady, despite feeling shaken to his core.

“I'm in,” Steve says. “Quick please. Give me some sponges, we don’t have time to waste.”

“More sponges. I’m going to try to cauterize the wound-- Dammit, her aorta is shredded. Okay, I’m going to try--”

“Steve,” Hill buts in gently. “She’s going to bleed out.”
As if on cue, Bonnie’s monitor starts beeping wildly, and nurse says “Got no rhythm.”

From the other side of the surgery, Loki calls out, “Doctors. He’s losing pressure. I’ll need as much help as I can get.”

“Shit,” Steve curses.

“He’s bleeding out. Rogers, I need you over here now.”


He drops his scalpel and follows everyone over to Tom’s table.

“Everybody change gloves,” Steve orders.

“What about her?” Bucky asks, upset. “We can’t just abandon her.” No one seems to hear him though, as they change gloves for Tom’s operation already forgotten about Bonnie. “We can’t just abandon her!” He implores.

“I’m going in,” Steve’s saying. “Extend the sternum. Scalpel.”

Letting out a frustrated, strangled breath, barely heard over the beeping off Bonnie’s flatlining monitor, Bucky starts massaging her heart, trying to revive it by hand.

“Let’s go, Barnes,” Hill instructs, halfway across the room.

“Bucky,” Natasha says quietly.

He ignores them, and keeps pumping her heart, elbow deep in her blood.

This is Veronica all over again, and last time she died and it was Bucky’s fault because if he had gone just a little longer, a little bit harder, she would still be alive and married--

“Dr. Barnes!” Loki snaps.

“James!” Hill urges.

“What about her?!?” Hr cries out, still pumping furiously. “We can not just abandon her! We have a goddamn obligation!”

Steve looks up, baby blues locking with his own, full of sadness and regret and Bucky fucking hates him, because feeling sad is one thing but emotions get you shit so why the fuck isn’t he over here right now him?

“Bucky,” He says, impossibly soft from across the room. “Come on. There was too much damage. There was never anything we could do. We have to let her go.”
Bucky stills, shocked and upset at the futility, and Bonnie’s flatline fills the room, shrill and demanding.

Hill sighs. “Time of death, three forty five.”

It feels like ripping his own left arm off, walking away from her, pulling his hands out of her chest and walking towards Tom. But no one asks him to do anything, and that, at least, is some small miracle.

~*~

“Bucky.”

It’s quiet in the sterilising lounge.

“Bucky.”

“Fuck off!” The aforementioned man snaps, whipping away from Steve as he viciously scrubs at his hands.

“Listen, if I could have--”

“But you didn’t,” He spits. “That’s the fucking difference. You’re so full of righteous fury and noble words but you never act on any of them. You said, you promised you would do everything to help her, but you didn’t. You just gave up. You didn’t do shit for her.”

“Hey--”

“You gave up on her. Just like you gave up on me. You didn’t try to fix shit. And now they’re going to stick me in more therapy and--”

“You’re in therapy?” Steve asks quietly.

“Don’t,” Bucky says low, fierce. “I make no apologies for how I chose to repair what you broke, what the whole fucking world broke in me. Whether it was voluntary or not.”

“You’re in therapy because of me?”

“No,” He snaps. “Jesus, you’re not that much of a bad guy. It’s anxiety and depression, alright? None of your fucking business, but there you go.”

“You should have told me,” Steve implores.

Bucky shoots him daggers. “Well it’s not like you were particularly forthcoming with your own personal information-- Ow!”

Steve grabs the sponge from him. “Jesus, Bucky, don’t you know when to stop?” He tuts, as he takes in Bucky’s broken skin, red and raw from scrubbing so hard.

He lowers his eyes. “I can’t-- It doesn’t feel like her blood is off my hands.”

Steve stills.

And then he stops the tap.

Then he gets the little first aid kit on the wall and takes out the salve and gauze.
“Is it okay if I…?” He gestures to Bucky’s hands, and the other man shrugs.

Tentatively, he takes one, testing the waters. When Bucky doesn’t pull away like the devil to a drop of holy water, he takes cue, and starts massaging in the salve. “Yeah,” He says quietly. “I know that feeling. Under your nails, right? In the crevices of your skin.”

Bucky nods, slightly startled at how apt Steve put it.

“In the army… You had to be quick. Ruthless. There wasn’t always the luxury of picking and choosing who lives and dies, it generally operates on a ‘first come first serve’ basis. And sometimes you’re in the middle of the desert, and one of your men has been shot, and all you can do is feel the blood pool beneath your hand as he bleeds out.” He shakes his head, and starts wrapping gauze around Bucky’s hand. “Anyways, the point is-- I know how you feel. And I know you think I’m a monster for doing what I did, but put it into perspective. Bonnie’s wounds were ten times worse than Tom’s. If we had stayed any longer, we would have wasted time, and we could have risked Tom’s life too.”

He moves onto his left hand. “I get the pain you’re feeling, I do. It was my entire career for a time. It was all I did, every day, pick who lives and who dies. But we got lucky today. We still saved someone. I know you’re not having a picnic right now, but for future reference… just remember that, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Bucky says numbly as Steve starts wrapping gauze around his knuckles. “Yeah.”

~*~

The young man in the chair opposite Steve swallows thickly. “Did she... did she suffer?”

He shakes his head. “No. Her injuries prevented her from feeling it… She wasn't in any pain.”

Danny, Bonnie’s fiancé, nods numbly. “Good. That’s...”

Steve clenches his jaw as he opens his mouth, finding it hard to string the words together. “She asked me to... tell you that ... she wanted you to know, that if love were enough ... that if love were enough that she'd still be here with you.”

It’s all Steve can do to remain stoic as the man breaks down in front of him.

~*~

There’s a knock on the door, but Bucky doesn’t bother answering it, doesn’t bother moving from his bed, because there’s no point.

There’s no point to do anything.

There’s quiet conversation below him at the door, where someone’s opened it, but the voices are muffled so he can’t hear what they’re saying. He doesn’t know if he cares.

His heart squeezes in his chest and he grips his bed sheets in a curled fist, trying to banish the tears the well from beneath his eyelids, and despite how hard he clenches them shut, they’re persistent in leaking out of the corners of his eyes.

A light knock on his door breaks him away from his mind for a second, and before he can snap a ‘go away’, a tentative voice floats through.
“Bucky? It’s me. It’s Pete.”

Bucky swallows, and sits up, roughly wiping his tears away. “Pete?” He rasps.

The door creaks open, and Peter’s young, sweet face sticks through it. “Hey,” He says quietly. “Can I come in?”

Bucky nods, sitting up straighter, rubbing at his eyes again. “Yeah, yeah, ‘course.”

Peter steps inside, toes his shoes off and slings his backpack, leaving it at the door. Without hesitation he flops down on the bed, letting out a happy sigh as he sinks into the mattress.

When Pete grins at him from one cracked lid, Bucky lets out a half-hearted huff and lies down beside him.

“Last time we did this, it was my graduation day, remember?” Peter says wistfully. “Aunt May made that sweet potato pie, and somehow convinced you to come down from college.”

“I wouldn’t have missed it, you know that.”

“Yeah. But I also know you’re a sucker for her sweet potato pie and that the post office wouldn’t let her express-deliver you one.”

Bucky lets out a hollow laugh. “You got me.”

There’s a beat, and Bucky fills it before Peter can say anything. It’s a stupid delay tactic, but he’ll take whatever few seconds he can. “How’s school?”

Peter shrugs. “Alright. I’m doing well, I guess. I put in my applications for my internships.” He gives Bucky that shark-tooth grin. “I put SHIELD down. We’ll be joined at the hip.”

“Oh joy,” Bucky says, and it’s meant to sound sarcastic, but he can’t help the fondness that slips out and warms the edges of his words.

Bucky looks back up at the ceiling. “Why’re you here, Pete?” He asks quietly.

“Movie night, right?” He answers in a heartbeat. “Friday, once a month. We haven’t done one yet this year, and we’re missing Blockbuster and microwave popcorn, but we can make do.”

His words are soft, so innocent, and shit, of course. A tradition between them that was rarely broken, even when Bucky was in college. But Bucky had been too absorbed in himself, or work or Steve to care.

“Fuck. Yeah, you’re right. I’m sorry. I completely forgot.”

“It’s okay,” He replies immediately. “We’re both busy. Being adults with responsibilities, and shit.”

A pregnant pause, and Bucky only has time to suck in a breath before Peter speaks, and when he does, the breath is kicked right back out of Bucky.

“You said you’d tell me if it got bad again,” Pete says, no heat to his words, and that nearly makes it worse. “You promised me after last time, remember? You said you’d tell me.”

“Who says it got bad again?” He demands, hating the heat in his words.
“Your friends. When they opened the door, and I told them who I was, they said ‘Give him a break, he’s had a tough day, and he’s not doing so hot’. Bucky. What happened?”

“Nothing,” He answers, voice cracking.

“Bucky, look at me. Please.” He does, meeting Peter’s soft brown eyes.

“Be honest with me. Have you had any thoughts about--”

“Peter, don’t.”

He ploughs through anyways. “Self-harm or suicide?”

Bucky grits his jaw and tears his eyes away, looking up at the ceiling.

“Bucky, please, I need you tell me, because the last time you were like this things got really, really bad and I’m really worried right now, okay?”

“No,” He answers. Then, louder. “No, I haven’t.”

“Did anything happen? How long have you been… Not-okay?”

He shakes his, wiping away the tears that drop from his eyes. “It’s just… I don’t know if I can do this anymore.” Peter’s silent, and Bucky starts picking at the bandage on his hands. “I don’t think that I’m making a difference, or saving lives. Or that I ever will.”

“But you don’t want to…”

“I’m not suicidal,” He snaps.

“It sounds like you might be, a little bit.”

“I’m not,” He insists. “I’m just saying that I’m really, really fucking tired.”

“Okay,” Peter says. “Did anything happen?”

“No,” He answers. Then, “Bonnie, a girl I was working on today. Her and another guy, Tom, got impaled by a pole due to the crash. And we had to *pick*. We knew when we were going in that she didn’t stand a chance, but we had to move her over Tom so she was the one that died. And I helped. You should have seen it, they all just fucking left her. I tried to fix it, I tried to resuscitate, but they made me go over Tom. And before that, there was Veronica. And Lucas.” The tears were running freely now, he didn’t care to give them chase. “How the fuck are you supposed to do that? How are you just meant to let people die? I did my best, and it was useless. Maybe it’s all just useless.”

“No,” Peter answers, insistent. “You know it’s not. May always said, nothing is ever in your control in those situations. You just have to trust your gut and give your all for that person.”

“You really believe that?”

“You don’t?”

“Pete, I don't - I mean, if it’s all worthless? If we're all gone in the end? And there's nothing preserved, not culture or books or history. Or people. Like we've never even been here. Then what was it worth? What was I -What was I worth?”
“Christ,” Peter swears. “*Bucky.*”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it like that, I just.” He lets out a rough laugh. “I can’t stop fucking thinking.”

“Slow down.”

“I can’t. I don’t know how. I’ve always been catapulted from one event of my life to the next, and now I feel frozen, suspended, and I don’t know what to do.”

He picks at a hangnail. “I don’t even know why I’m a doctor.”

“Hey,’ Pete says quietly. “Remember when we both got to stay up late and watch Live Aid, and you saw those starving kids, and Doctors without Borders, and you said you were going to join them and save all those kids?”

Bucky does. It’s a surprising memory, one he had forgotten about, banishing it to the corner of his mind. He hadn’t shut up about it for months, May had staged an intervention and everything. Bucky yelled about how the banner could have been put to use as slings and torques in Africa. Peter’s Uncle Ben told him to eat his peas.

“Yeah,” He says hoarsely.

“I know… Right now might be shit. But you’ll find that love, that passion that you had for those African kids again. You will, Bucky, I promise. You just have to stick it out, six more months, and then you can do whatever you want.”

He looks up at Peter. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” He confesses. “It’s like every time I think I’m getting better, I lose my footing and I’m back at the beginning.”

“It’ll be okay, Buck.”

“You think?”

He pulls him into a hug, tight, and Peter lets out a shaky breath as holds Bucky against him. “I know so. It felt like I lost everything when Ben died, and you told me it would be okay. And it was. I’m making you the same promise now.”

Bucky grips tighter, buries his face into the crook of his neck, and they hold each other, broken pieces and all.

Brothers, in every sense of the word bar blood, holding each other's hearts too heavy to house by themselves.

~*~

Dare he say it, but Peter might not be entirely wrong.

He still feels helpless, but he likes the scut work, where he can see for a fact that his hands stitch and fix wounds.

He still goes to Helen. They talk about a lot of stuff, and he’s trying to be more of an open book.
He talks to Peter more, too, and May. He cuts out time to talk to her on the phone instead of fleeting phone conversations every now and then. He owes her more, he knows, and he’s getting there.

He likes work a little more, too. There’s not a big grey cloud of anxiety following him around anymore. He’s told Helen of his half-formed plan, and she’s helping him research it some more. It’s giving him footing, ground to stand on instead of feeling suspended, at the mercy of the universe.

One day, he’s asked to stay back after his shift. He joins the gaggle of doctors, nurses and surgeons alike at the main nurses station, all tired from a long day at work, or some still drowsy from waking up.

“Hey,” He greets to Clint and Darcy. Seconds later Natasha and Jane are joining them.

“Anyone know what this is about?” Darcy asks.

“Probably some chicken pox outbreak again,” Jane says, rolling her eyes.

“Or, Fury really could be retiring,” Clint says conspiratorially, referring to the rumours that had been abuzz, whispering tales of Fury’s supposed eminent retirement.

When everyone arrives, Fury steps up and clears his throat. “I know you all have heard a lot of rumors, and I'm sorry for that.” He glares at them. “But you can rest assured I’m not retiring until I bite the goddamn dust.” He smooths his features after that, and straightens his back. “What I'm about to say will be hard to hear, and I'm sorry for that as well. As you all know, the economic climate is... Well, you all know what it is. It’s hard to sustain an environment like this. And, we’ve had an outreach from our counterparts. In the coming weeks, SHIELD Hospital will be merging with Xavier Hospital.”

Bucky’s chest constricts as pandemonium breaks out around him.

“It will be mutually beneficial, for both us and them. I wish I could tell you you'll all survive the merger, but there are only so many jobs,” He says as the din dies down, but that only adds fuel to the fire. “And the board and I have some tough choices to make. I'm on your side people. I'm rooting for everyone of you. All I can say is please, be at your very best. You'll need it.”

As shouts break out, Clint turns to the rest of the group, eyes wide. “Well, shit. Could anyone else use a drink?”

~*~

Loki lets out a breath, as he leans his head against the wall and shuts his eyes from the bright fluorescent lights.

The added stress of now having to vye for his job against Charles Xavier for head of neurosurgery was certainly not he needed. Imagine his father’s retort should he catch wind of this new fall from grace...

‘What kind of second-rate hospital are you working for if they have to merge?’

He sighs and pushes himself off the wall, grabbing his bag full of empty scrubs. Taking his phone out of his pocket, he scrolls through his messages.

Free for dinner? Might be the last thing I can afford from this godforsaken merger.
Within seconds, Darcy is replying, and he watches as the three bubbles pulse up and down.

**I’m at McLarens, we can go from there?**

He smirks, and pockets his phone as he enters the main entrance to the hospital. A large, imposing figure catches his glance out of the corner of the eye, and he can’t help but stop and look for a second.

Funny, that looked almost like--

The hulking, blonde figure, turns around, and Loki doesn’t know what he was expecting.

“Hello, brother mine,” Thor smiles. “It’s been an age.”

~*~

Bucky sighs as he leans against the bar and scrubs his face. “Well shit’ is right.”

“What are they going to do?” Jane says, panic tinged our voice. “I mean, how are they just going to choose who stays and who goes.”

“It’s the luck of the draw,” Natasha answers as she sips her beer. “It’s not like one hospital is better than the other. But, to be fair, we’ve scrubbed in on a ridiculous amount of out of the ordinary cases. That has to work in our favour.”

“You think?” Darcy asks. “Surely they should wait for us to sit the boards first, right? And then go by the best results.”

“Are you kidding me?” Clint says. “That’s a kill order. I mean, if we weren’t killing ourselves already with the workload we have, but if it was to go by boards? Nobody would get any sleep. We’d all crash and burn, let’s be honest, and think of all the accidents that would cause.”

“It’s stupid anyways,” Bucky gripes. “I mean, I get it economically, but surely there’s going to be issues over everything, right? We’re going to have to teach them everything from scratch, it’ll be like corralling cats. And it’s going to be twice as crowded now.”

Clint sighs, and raises his glass. “To impending doom.”

They all reply with various acknowledgments of agreement, Bucky with a muttered ‘hear hear’.

His phone starts buzzing in his pocket then, and he groans. However, it dies in his throat when he sees unknown caller blink up at him.

“Hello?” He answers cautiously, making his way out of the bar for better reception.

“Is this Mr. James Barnes, son of Winifred Barnes?”

The blood in his veins turns to ice cold slush and everything around him slows to a halt. “Yes, it is. Why? Who am I speaking with?”

“This is Connie, a nurse over at SHIELD Hospital DC. Your mother’s been admitted. We haven’t been able to diagnose exactly what’s wrong with her, but she’s getting tests and labs done now.”

Bucky’s heart is pounding but his mind is slow and foggy, and when he speaks it feels like molasses. “What-- Well how are her vitals? Is she in pain?”
“I’m afraid I can’t discuss that over the phone, Mr. Barnes. If you come to the hospital, the doctor on her case can explain everything to you.”

“I-- Okay.”

“Goodbye, Mr. Barnes.”

The line goes dead.

Bucky stares at his phone, limp in his hand.

All that footing, all the ground he thought he had built up, was swept up from beneath him, and he was left buried in it.

Mechanically, as if on autopilot, he turns into the bar to go tell his friends that he’s going back to the hospital, when he bumps into someone.

“Shit, my bad--”

“No worries.”

A smooth voice, like neat bourbon stops him in his tracks.

He knows that voice.

He looks up, eyes wide, praying they won’t see what they’re about to.

“Warren?” The words taste bitter and ugly on his tongue.

Blonde and beautiful, he stands there, with smirk Bucky wants to punch off his face, and a cigarette dangling from his lips and it’s all Bucky can do not to take a drag as the nicotine addiction he had fought prickles beneath his skin. “Hey, Bucky. It’s been a while, hm?”

“What the fuck are you doing here?” He demands, voice seething.

Warren pouts. “I know we didn’t break it off on the best of terms, but that’s no way to treat an ex-lover.” He puffs out a breath of smoke, and watches it curl in the air. It brings Bucky back to college, when Warren would expel smoke and Bucky would inhale it, as they breathed in tandem.

“Shut the fuck up,” Bucky hisses. “I have every right to treat you like this.”

Warren’s expression hardens. “You were the one that got yourself into that situation, not me. Pierce gave you those pills, and you took them, I had nothing to do with it. I want through exactly what you did, alright? Maybe I handled it better, maybe I handled it worse, but I either way, you were already on your downward spiral when I met you, and so was I. We were in the same fucking boat, and we put ourselves, alright?”

“I don’t want to rehash the past,” He snaps. “I want nothing to do with you ever again. Just get out of my fucking face and don’t ever let me see you again.”

“No can do, doll,” Warren replies, blue eyes steely. “Haven’t you heard? Xavier and SHIELD are merging.”

Bucky’s heart leaps into his throat.

Warren throws his cigarette onto the ground and stomps it out with his foot. “See you in a few,
sweetheart. I look forward to it.”

Then he’s walking away, vanishing into the night, illuminated only the streetlights, and Bucky’s chest in compacting in on itself.

He swallows.

And then he turns around, and he walks back towards the hospital.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed, and I would love if you could leave a comment telling me what you think of this fic I would adore you!

The sequel is in the works as we speak, and it will probably be up around December? I need to finish up some other works I've had to ignore for this, but other than that it should be up by December!

As always yo come talk to me on tumblr

If you've made it this far, thank you.
I wouldn't have gotten past the first chapter without your support, so thank you. I hope you had as much fun reading as I did writing it.
So, this kind of goes without saying and most of you have had the common sense to guess but to make it official- Yes, DITOR's sequel, 'Heartburn' has been put on hiatus.

So to everyone who's been commenting and asking (even on fics that are in no way related to the MCU!)- this ones for you!

I'd really appreciate it if people could stop pestering me for the sequel, I have a life outside of this that I'm trying to live to my best ability, and between school, mental health and countless other things, spending hours over a fic I'm not 100% passionate about isn't a priority for me.

To everyone who's stuck with this story from its humble beginnings- thank you thank you thank you. It's been a good time, I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

Later ☺

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