Left Your Mark on Me

by Crematosis

Summary

Bucky and Steve are both alphas with the same soul mark, which means they're destined to share an omega. But when Bucky falls from the train, Steve resolves to not go looking for the omega and never get with him if he does find him. But Tony is hard to resist and Bucky might not be as dead as Steve originally thought.

Notes

For a prompt by kyuumihaira on fanfiction.net
Steve and Bucky had been best friends from the moment they met. Steve had been eight at the time, picked on by the older boys in the neighborhood because of his small size. And Bucky had charged in waving a pipe and yelling, "Don't you dare mess with my friend!"

Steve had never met this dark-haired boy before, but it had just felt right to hear him call him his friend. So when Bucky stuck his hand out with a proud smile after the bullies had been chased away, introduced himself, and invited Steve to come over and play at his house, Steve automatically accepted.

And they had been inseparable ever since.

But now it was the night before Bucky's 18th birthday and he was huddled in Bucky's bedroom, waiting for midnight. In just a few hours, Bucky would be an adult while Steve would be a teenager for another year. And more importantly, Bucky would get his soulmark.

Steve had always known one day Bucky would find his omega mate, just as Steve would find his. Still, Bucky was the only friend he had and Steve hated to think about losing him.

"Hey," Bucky said, leaning forward on the bed to clap Steve on the shoulder. His face was intensely earnest in the candlelight. "This isn't going to change things, you know. Nobody finds their soulmate in a day. So we'll get a little apartment together as soon as you turn eighteen, live together for a few years until we find our mates. And we'll always be friends, Stevie. Even after we've got families of our own. We can live right next door and have poker nights at my place and listen to the ballgame on the radio at yours. It'll be great."

Steve smiled weakly. "Sure, Buck."

Bucky looked towards the clock. "Not much longer now. How about another game of cards?"

Steve groaned, but he reached for the deck of cards anyway. Two hours passed as they munched apples Bucky had pilfered from the pantry and wagered bottle caps, shoelaces, pocket lint, apple seeds, and whatever else they could scrounge up.

Steve was sitting on a sizable winning streak of two bottle caps and an apple core when Bucky looked up at the clock.

"Midnight," he said with delight.

For a moment, nothing happened. Steve felt a rush of relief that everything could stay the same if Bucky didn't have a soulmate immediately followed by a stab of guilt for thinking such a thing.

And then Bucky cried out and clutched his shoulder. Steve stood by with a wet towel to press over the mark. Everybody said it felt like being branded, but the pain was worth it.

For a few minutes, Bucky just sat there shaking, teeth gritted against the pain. But then he took a deep, shuddering breath and gestured for Steve to unwrap the towel.

The two of them stared at the mark together. It was an eagle with two heads facing in opposite directions, wings unfurled and clutching a wrench in its talons.

Steve almost traced the outline of the mark with a finger, but stopped himself just in time.
hurt?" he asked.

Bucky shook his head. "Just itches now."

"What do you think it means?"

Bucky shrugged. "Damned if I know."

Soulmarks were meant to represent both mates, an amalgamation of their personalities and interests. And everyone dissected their marks for signs of what their mate would be like. But the signs weren't usually clear until you actually met your mate. Still, having a vague guide was better than nothing.

Steve carefully stroked a finger over the wrench. "Aren't you still trying to fix up that motorcycle?"

Bucky rolled his eyes. "Because my whole life can be represented by that damn bike." He shoved Steve's shoulder. "Thanks a lot, punk."

Steve grinned and shoved him back. "Anytime, jerk."

"Let's just go to bed," Bucky said. "We can come up with some better ideas in the morning." He blew out the candle and threw himself into bed.

Steve carefully slipped into bed beside him. Who knew what tomorrow would bring? This might be the very last night he spent in Bucky's bed, huddling with him for warmth. But he resolved to be happy for his friend and support him fully.

The morning dawned like any other. Steve woke up to the sounds of Bucky and his siblings fighting over breakfast and Bucky insisting that as he was a guest, they ought to save some of the bacon for Steve.

He smiled and felt a little tension in his gut subside. Things hadn't really changed after all.

True to his word, Bucky began looking for a job and an apartment where they could live together. But he was also spending more of his nights out on the town, going out with several women at a time and coming home thoroughly disappointed in the morning.

"You see what I told you?" Bucky said after nine months of failure. "Nobody finds their soulmate overnight. It takes years and years of searching. By that time, you'll be tired of living with me."

Steve didn't see that happening. His own birthday was coming up and he was frankly more excited about the idea of moving in with Bucky than searching for love. If Bucky couldn't find his soulmate easily, what chance did he have? Most people wouldn't even spare him a second glance, much less take the time for the brief body contact that would confirm whether they were mates.

Two days before Steve's birthday, he came down with a bad case of pneumonia and he was bedridden for almost a week, miserable and feverish. He only remembered his birthday when the back of his neck started stinging.

As soon as he was well enough to go out, he went straight to Bucky's house.

"I got my mark," he said cheerfully. "Back of the neck." He turned his back to his friend and tilted his head to one side so Bucky could see it better. "What's it look like?"

"Holy shit," Bucky breathed out.
"What?" Steve asked, craning his head around even though he knew he couldn't actually see the back of his own neck. "What is it?"

"Our marks are the same."

"That's impossible," Steve said. "We're both alphas."

Unless his body was even more broken than he thought.

"It's rare," Bucky said. "But I heard somebody once talking about two alphas who were such best friends they were platonic soulmates. And when they found their omega, they didn't mind sharing her."

"Co-alphas," Steve said quietly. It was the best idea he had ever heard.

"It makes sense if you think about it." Bucky pointed to his mark. "Double-headed eagle represents the two of us."

Steve grinned. "You're right, Buck." He felt almost weak with relief.

Bucky slung an arm around his shoulder. "Feels good, doesn't it? Knowing we're doing this together, just like we've done everything else. I'm with you to the end of the line, Steve. Neither of us has to ever go it alone."

Looking for an omega to share their lives with didn't seem like such a bad idea anymore.
Chapter 2

For the next few years, Steve’s life was almost perfect. They were poor, but he and Bucky managed to scrape a life together as best they could. Bucky worked down at the docks and Steve took small jobs here and there whenever he could. Whenever he wasn’t ill.

He felt bad that Bucky had to bear most of the financial burden, but Bucky had never gotten frustrated with his inability to hold down a job or pointed out how Steve’s frequent illnesses were costing them money they could really use for other things.

That was the beauty of a soulmate, Steve supposed. At the moment, Bucky was the one person biologically wired to love him unconditionally and never dream of leaving him, no matter how bad things got. Thanks to him, they’d probably be living on the streets by the time they found their omega, but they would still be happy together. Steve was sure of it. With each birthday, he ached more and more for their omega. He loved Bucky, but there was a steadily-growing hole in his heart that kept him from being truly happy.

Still, Steve was pretty content with his life. Even the whispers of war and rationing did little to bother him. They were poor anyway, used to going without. Steve felt bad for the rest of Europe, struggling against the Nazis, but it didn’t really affect his life.

Until the day Bucky came home in a soldier’s uniform.

“What are you doing?” Steve hissed. “You’re going to get yourself killed.”

Bucky gave him a weary look. “They would have drafted me sooner or later anyway. Volunteering gives me a better position.”

“For what? Getting shot at? Come on, Buck. This isn’t a game. What about our soulmate?”

Bucky’s eyes took on a faraway look. “I’ve been thinking,” he said slowly. “What if our soulmate comes from, say, Oregon or Michigan? We’d never find them, except through this war. What if that was what’s meant to happen?” Bucky traced a finger over his mark. “The eagle, our national symbol. A symbol of strength and power. Military might.”

“I think that might be a bit of a reach.”

“No, it all fits. Wrenches are used to fix things, right? And nurses fix people. I bet you our omega’s a nurse on the front lines.”

“Or maybe one of the enlisted men,” Steve countered.

“Omegas aren’t allowed in the army. You know that.”

Steve shrugged. “He could have lied on the enlistment form. Passed himself off as a beta.”

Bucky’s eyes crinkled at the corners. “He’s got spunk then, our omega. I like that.”

“So do I.”

Bucky smiled faintly. “I’ll be sure to tell him that if I meet him.”

“What about me, then?” Steve asked quietly. They would probably draft an omega before they ever thought twice about an alpha with his ailments.
Bucky clapped a hand on his shoulder. “With most of the alphas off to war, you’ll have all the omegas in the city coming up to you. Maybe you’ll get lucky and find them here, hiding in plain sight.”

“You don’t really believe that, do you?”

“No,” Bucky admitted, his smile dimming a little.

Steve squeezed his eyes closed and let out a heavy sigh. “Alright,” he said. “But you better come back.”

“With our soulmate,” Bucky said with a winning smile.

They made the best of the short time they had before Bucky got shipped out.

Bucky had so many people to say goodbye to. His family, his friends, his coworkers. And Steve didn’t begrudge giving him a few days to see the rest of the people he cared about. He wanted Bucky to be happy, even if he would miss spending time with him.

If the army would only take him, he wouldn’t have to miss Bucky at all. But every time he tried enlisting, he was turned down. The pitying looks before they turned him away made his blood boil. All he wanted was to march into battle with Bucky at his side. Why was that too much to ask?

Still, Steve supported Bucky fully. He hated not being able to go with him, but he felt proud of Bucky for being willing to fight for what he believed in. And he picked fights with anybody who suggested the war effort was pointless.

Bucky always managed to show up right when Steve was in serious trouble. Maybe soulmates had a sixth sense that told them their mates were about to get their asses kicked. Or maybe Bucky just knew him too well.

“And here I thought I was gonna be the one in danger of getting killed,” Bucky said with a shake of his head as he steered Steve home after a particularly nasty fight. “But I guess if you can’t get to the war, you bring the war to you.”

“Shut up,” Steve muttered. “He was a bully.”

“Oh really? I’m pretty sure you antagonized him.”

Steve leveled him with a glare. “They were telling us about the war effort before the movie. And this jerk kept talking over the whole thing and saying how nobody wanted to hear about the war, they just wanted to see the movie. And I told him that I wanted to hear it. And if he couldn’t be quiet so I could hear about the troops, he needed to take it outside. And so we did.”

“For Christ’s sake, Steve,” Bucky began heatedly. “Do you always have to-” He took a deep breath and scrubbed at his face. “No, we’re not doing this again. Don’t want to argue with you on my last week.”

Bucky had arranged to spend his last week entirely with Steve, which was exactly what he needed. They went to see a few movies together, even attended the World’s Fair.

“This is incredible,” Steve said as he watched Howard Stark make a car hover briefly in midair, to the delight of his audience.

Bucky made a dismissive sound. “They think that’s amazing? They should get a load of you.”
“Aw, Buck.”

“No, I’m being serious. Your ma told me she thought you’d die as a baby. But I know you. Too stubborn to die.” Bucky cupped his hands around Steve’s face. “Promise me you won’t get yourself killed in some alleyway while I’m gone. Because after all we’ve been through, that would be a pathetic way to go.”

Steve smiled. “I promise.”

Bucky kissed his cheek. “Good. Let’s get home. I ship out in the morning and I want to get to bed early.”

But Steve’s eyes were drawn to the recruitment center nearby. He felt magnetized to the spot, unable to look away. For some reason, he knew he had to try enlisting again.

Bucky groaned. “Come on, Stevie. They won’t take you. You know that.”

“So?” Steve said stubbornly. “No harm in trying.”

Bucky sighed. “Fine. If you need to hear somebody say it before you’ll believe it, be my guest. But I’m not going to feel sorry for you when you come home all mopey.”

Steve pushed into the recruiting center and began filling out the paperwork, confident that this time, he would finally be accepted into the army. He could feel it.

He waited in the examination room until the doctor walked in and began looking over his paperwork. “Steven Rogers, is it?”

Steve sat up a little straighter. “Yes, sir.”

The doctor looked at him knowingly. “This is not the first time you have applied, is it?”

Steve swallowed. “No, sir.”

The doctor flipped through a folder, producing six more enlistment forms, including the one where Steve had, in desperation, given a false name.

“That’s, uh, not me,” Steve said quickly. “Must have gotten mixed up with somebody else’s stuff.”

“No? The description fits.” And the doctor began reading out his height, his weight, his blood type.

Steve slumped down onto the bench. “You’re going to arrest me, aren’t you?”

“Maybe, maybe not. Why are you so eager to join the army, Mr. Rogers?” He tapped his pen against Steve’s bruised knuckles. “For the thrill of the fight, perhaps?”

Steve stuck his chin out defiantly. “I don’t like to fight. I just hate bullies.”

The doctor raised an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

“Look,” Steve said earnestly. “I want to fight for my country, for my best friend, for my future omega. I want to fight for all the people in Europe who are being picked on by bullies like the Nazis. I keep getting told to stand back and let other people keep me safe, but it’s my fight, too. And I want to help however I can.”
“Interesting,” said the doctor. “Very interesting. No, you are not under arrest, Steven. But I require your cooperation in exchange. You will return here tomorrow morning, after seeing your friend off.”

Steve opened his mouth in surprise.

The doctor’s eyes twinkled. “Yes, I have been watching you for quite some time. And I think you are just what we need.”

Steve walked home, puzzled and a little unsettled. He had no idea what he was getting himself into, but at least he wasn’t getting arrested.
Chapter 3

Steve walked Bucky to the train the next morning. The mood at the station was pretty somber. All around him were families saying goodbye to a son, a brother, a father. But what affected him the most were the omegas tearfully hugging their mates goodbye. It brought a lump to his throat as he thought about never seeing Bucky again or their omega getting killed in battle.

“Hey,” Bucky said with a nudge to Steve’s shoulder. “It’s going to be alright. I’ll find us our soulmate and we’ll be back home having babies and making that sickeningly adorable family you’ve always dreamed of.”

Steve smiled. “He’ll be a wonderful mother ad between the two of us, we’ll make a decent father.”

Bucky snorted and then his expression became more serious. “You really feel like our soulmate will be a man, don’t you?”

Steve nodded. “As sure as you are that you’ll find him in the war.”

“Well, they do say every one of us knows something that leads us to our mates.” Bucky nodded decisively. “I’m sure he’ll be amazing. But kind of a bitch to find in battle. A nurse would have been so much easier.”

If their soulmate really was an omega man passing himself off as a beta, he wouldn’t want to make contact with any alphas for fear of a soul mark revealing his status. Bucky would have to get really creative figuring out ways to touch all the soldiers he could.

“Just promise me you won’t turn him in,” Steve said. “It’s a brave thing he’s doing, breaking the law to fight for what he believes in.”

“I won’t,” Bucky promised. He pressed a kiss to Steve’s cheek. “Now you promise me you won’t get into any fights while I’m gone.”

Steve murmured his assent into Bucky’s collarbone and then stepped back to wave goodbye with the rest of the crowd as the soldiers filed onto the train.

True to his word, once the train pulled out of the station, Steve headed back to the recruiting center.

The doctor was waiting for him there, smiling pleasantly. “As I hope we will be working together for some time, allow me to introduce myself. I am Dr. Erskine.

Steve shook his hand. “What exactly are we working on?”

“It will not be easy,” Dr. Erskine cautioned. “What are you willing to do to join the army?”

“Whatever it takes,” Steve said firmly.

“Good answer.” Dr. Erskine flourished his enlistment form and stamped it for acceptance.

Steve felt elated. He was finally able to do some good.

“Today is your first day of basic training. I have arranged for a car to take you to camp. The rest is up to you.”

Steve clutched his paperwork to his chest. “I won’t let you down.”
Basic training was a grueling slog that pushed Steve to his physical limits. The drill instructor, Colonel Phillips, was a hard man to please. His assistant, Peggy Carter, was tough, but fair. And the rest of the squad seemed determined to try to trip him up every way they could just for a laugh. At the end of each day, he was just grateful to be alive.

Amazingly, at the end of training, Dr. Erskine still wanted him for his project. Out of all the people in camp. Just because he was fighting for the right reasons.

“The serum magnifies a man’s strongest qualities,” Dr. Erskine explained. “A cruel man becomes even more sadistic. And a good man becomes a great man. The army needs more men like you. Men willing to do the right thing, no matter the cost.”

It didn’t really make sense to Steve, but if the army needed him, he was willing to be Erskine’s test subject. No matter how much they had warned him it would hurt.

And it had definitely hurt. It was the most excruciating pain Steve had ever gone through.

But when he stepped out of the machine, he felt vibrant and alive, like a new man. All of his ailments were gone and he had more than doubled his muscle mass. Now he finally felt capable of doing his part to fight.

And then Erskine was killed. And with his death, Steve’s dreams of fighting in the war seemed to die with him.

For awhile, he was holed up in a lab, having his blood drawn every day to see if Erskine’s serum could be synthesized from his blood. And then he was used for propaganda. He toured around the country, performing and making his sales pitch at every major city. And everywhere he went, people crowded around to meet him. It felt sometimes like he would end up kissing every baby and clasping the hand of every omega in the country. And none of them were his mate.

When he finally made it to the front lines, they told him Bucky was missing, presumed dead, along with half of his unit. And nobody had bothered to mount any sort of rescue.

So Steve had gone after him, Peggy and Howard helping him get deep into enemy territory, where Bucky was being held by Hydra. Steve finally had a chance to put his new body to use. He snuck into the base, taking out as many Hydra soldiers as he could and freeing Bucky’s unit from their imprisonment.

Bucky was a little harder to find. He was in a separate room, prepped for medical experimentation, looking a little worse for wear, but still very much alive, to Steve’s great relief.

“Whoa,” Bucky said, staring at him in amazement. “What happened to you?”

Steve grinned as he unstrapped Bucky from the table. “Joined the army. Sorry, babe. Might have broken my promise about fighting. But at least I’m fighting the right people now.”

Bucky snorted. “Alright, punk. Get me out of here.”

It felt like a dream, finally being able to fight at Bucky’s side. The two of them worked so perfectly as a team. And the Howling Commandos were great back-up. Together, they were slowly wiping Hydra off the map.

Infiltrating Dr. Zola’s train was just another mission for Steve and his team. Hydra was running out of places to hide, and if they could capture the doctor and bring him in for questioning, they might finally take down the last of Hydra.
From high on a mountain top, the Commandos planned their op. Most of the team worked set-up, securing a zip line down to the train and working the timing out perfectly. Only three of them would actually be needed to take down the train. Steve, Bucky, and one volunteer from the team.

It had been hard to maneuver in the confines of the train, and he and Bucky had been momentarily separated. But they worked as a perfect team, even apart. And the battle was finally starting to turn in their favor.

But the Hydra soldiers had weapons stronger than Steve had ever seen. Even with his shield up to absorb the blast, Steve found himself thrown to the ground by the impact. Bucky bravely picked up Steve’s shield to continue the fight, but another shot from the gun bounced off the shield and punched a hole through the side of the train. And Bucky was thrown out of the train, saved only by a tiny railing.

“Hang on!” Steve shouted. “I’m coming to get you.” He edged himself along the side of the train, stretching his hand out as far as he could. “Bucky, take my hand!”

But it was too late. The railing snapped off and he could only watch helplessly as Bucky fell from the train into the abyss below.

He vowed then that he wouldn’t go looking for their omega anymore. And if he happened to meet him anyway, he wouldn’t bond with him. Because no bond would be worth it without Bucky.
Chapter 4

In the end, Steve had been insanely grateful to find himself on that Hydra jet full of bombs. Life had lost all of its luster after Bucky’s death, but he couldn’t bring himself to commit suicide when so many people were depending on him to win the war. And now he had found himself in the only situation where he could honorably sacrifice his life.

Peggy had cried over the radio, begged him to give them time to find him a safe landing. But Steve knew there wasn’t any time left. Putting the plane down in the middle of the ocean was the only way he could be sure the bombs wouldn’t go off.

As the cold water closed in on him, he closed his eyes, surrendering to oblivion.

But then he woke up.

To Steve’s great horror, some organization called SHIELD had found him in the ice and defrosted him almost seventy years in the future. So now not only was Bucky dead, but just about everyone Steve had ever known.

But he couldn’t give in to the crushing despair because Captain America was needed again. He hadn’t been the only thing SHIELD had pulled out of the ice. The Tesseract, Hydra’s favorite weapon had been found, too. And it had fallen into enemy hands.

Steve suddenly found himself working with an entirely new team. There was Dr. Banner the scientist with anger issues, Natasha the SHIELD spy, Thor the Asgardian demigod, Tony Stark the man with the metal suit, and a whole host of SHIELD operatives. Steve didn’t really trust any of them, especially Tony.

He couldn’t say why, but for some reason the man just got under his skin. Maybe it was because he reminded him so much of Howard and he was expecting him to act a certain way. Or maybe it was just the cocky attitude. Because in Steve’s experience, the people who made the biggest spectacles of themselves were often the ones hiding the biggest secrets.

Whatever it was, Loki’s magic stick didn’t help matters at all. Steve found himself in the middle of a shouting match with the man, wanting nothing more than to punch the stupid smirk off his face.

“Big man in a suit of armor,” Steve said challengingly. “Take that away and what are you?”

“Only the most powerful omega in the world,” Tony said. “I worked my ass off to get where I am, unlike you. Everything special about you came out of a bottle.”

Steve was really ready to punch him then, but then all hell broke loose as Loki’s allies stormed the helicarrier. They were forced to cooperate then.

He and Tony made a surprisingly good team in battle. Listening to Tony talk set Steve’s teeth on edge, but they didn’t need to talk while fighting. Somehow, Tony was always able to anticipate his movements, being in the right place at the right time sometimes before Steve was even aware he needed him. Even Bucky, who knew him better than anybody, still needed Steve to tell him his tactics.

How was Tony able to bounce his repulsor beams off the shield at just the right angle to take out a chitauri? How was he able to put his arms up and just know that Tony would be there to grab him and carry him up over a piece of debris?
But there was no way he could have predicted that Tony would actually take hold of the missile heading towards the city and fly it up into the chitauri’s portal. He didn’t know what to do anymore. He didn’t know what Tony was going to do.

He stared into the void for what seemed like hours, waiting for a glimpse of Iron Man’s armor, but in the end, he reluctantly ordered Natasha to close the portal.

And that was when Tony fell from the sky.

The Hulk snatched him out of the air so he didn’t smash into the ground, but when he laid him down, the light from the arc reactor was out, which meant Tony’s heart had stopped.

Steve felt like his heart had stopped, too.

But then the Hulk roared and Tony gasped back to life. “Oh god. Please tell me nobody kissed me.”

For a moment, Steve wished he had. But he quickly buried the thought.

In the aftermath of the battle, Tony wanted to go out for shwarma. Everyone was tired and exhausted, caked with layers of blood and dirt. All Steve wanted to do was eat his weight in food and then drop into bed. But he found himself staring at Tony as he ate, more interested in watching the flutter of his eyelashes as he fought to keep his eyes open, the play of light across his cheekbones, the way his throat worked as he swallowed.

Half of Steve still wanted to strangle Tony, but the other half had grown pretty fond of him.

He was almost sad when they all had to go their separate ways.

The team came together one last time in the middle of an empty field to say their goodbyes.

Thor left for Asgard, taking Loki and the Tesseract with him. Natasha and Clint drifted away together, smiling like they were catching up on old times. Which left Steve to say his farewells to Tony and Bruce. From what he had overheard, Tony had invited Bruce to stay with him in the Tower and work down in his lab. It was a kind act. Poor Bruce had been on the run for so long. It would be good for him to finally have a place to call home.

Steve watched Tony fidget as he stood beside his bright red convertible, checking his watch and adjusting his sunglasses. He was probably eager to get back to his Tower and start repairs. As much as Steve hated to see him go, he decided to take pity on him and keep his goodbyes short.

“Take care of yourself,” he said, extending a hand to Tony.

Tony hesitated for a moment, but then plastered on one of his famous smiles and reached for Steve’s hand. “See you ’round, Cap.”

The moment their hands touched, Steve felt a rush of warmth course through his veins. He couldn’t see the back of his neck, but he could see a glowing, golden spot under Tony’s shirt, his soul mark lighting up.

“You’re my soulmate?” Steve said quietly. “All those years…” All those years of searching, and they would never have found Tony because he hadn’t even been born yet.

Tony snatched his hand back. “Oh bullshit,” he snapped. “Don’t give me the sob story about how long you’ve been waiting to find me. You were just chilling in the ice the whole time. And I had to
deal with the endless speculation of ‘Why hasn’t Tony Stark found his soulmate yet?’ ‘What if he doesn’t have a mate?’ All because you had to play the hero.”

“Play the hero?” Steve said indignantly. “Those bombs were meant to take out major cities. Do you know how many innocent lives would have been lost if I hadn’t brought that plane down?”

“You could have found another way,” Tony said through gritted teeth. “But I guess it was more important to go down in a blaze of glory than take care of your soulmate.”

“Are you even listening to yourself right now? If I hadn’t taken that plane down, I’d be in my nineties. Is that what you really want, an elderly man as your soulmate?”

“Like you’ll ever be an elderly man,” Tony said scornfully. “You’ll keep being fucking young and perfect forever and I’ll just get older and older. You missed out, Cap. My youth and my best years are behind me. There’s no space in my life for you now.”

“Stop it, Tony. It wasn’t my fault that-”

“Yes, it was. I waited for you for years and you never showed up. I’m done waiting now.” His mouth twisted into an ugly sneer. “I’ve lived this long without my soulmate. I can keep living just fine without you.” He threw himself into his convertible. “Come on, Bruce, let’s go. Got a lot of work to do.”

“Um,” Bruce said, glancing between the two of them uncertainly.

“Get in,” Tony snapped. “Or I’m leaving your ass right here.”

With a last, worried look in Steve’s direction, Bruce got into the passenger’s seat.

Steve watched the two of them roar off into the distance.

He had finally found his soulmate. But Tony didn’t want him. And it was all Steve’s fault for letting Bucky fall.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the long hiatus, but I wanted to wait until Civil War came out, and now that it has and I’ve seen the movie, I worked out a little plan for how I want to incorporate some of the events.

Steve spent several weeks putting as much distance between him and New York as he could. He wanted to see as much of America as possible, see how it had all changed while he was in the ice.

But his thoughts kept returning to Tony. After two months on the road, he reluctantly returned to New York.

He felt so conflicted. He didn’t want to want Tony, but there was no denying the connection he felt to the man. Even knowing he was in the same city as Tony felt strangely comforting.

But he was sure Tony didn’t feel the same way. Tony would probably be perfectly happy never seeing him again.

And Tony really was doing okay without him. Bruce assured him of that during each of their weekly lunch meetings. Steve had started by reaching out to Bruce and the other scientist was all too happy to discuss life at the Tower over Thai food or Indian. He had been keeping a close eye on Tony, worried that he would do something rash, considering all the pent-up anger he was harboring. But the omega hadn’t imploded or exploded. Bruce was pretty sure none of Tony’s other friends even knew he had found his soulmate. Tony seemed to have decided to ignore Steve’s existence and just continue on with his life like he didn’t have a soulmate.

“Just give him a little more time,” Bruce advised. “He’ll come around.”

“I’ve given him too much time already,” Steve said ruefully.

Bruce shrugged. “There’s nothing you can do but wait. In time, he may learn to love you.”

“I can’t ask that of him,” Steve said. “I don’t deserve his love. I just don’t want him to hate me.”

Bruce’s expression softened. “He’ll forgive you,” he said. “In time. Tony’s not good at holding grudges.”

Steve was pretty sure Tony had spent most of his adult life holding a grudge against the soulmate who never showed up, but he decided to take Bruce’s word for it.

It still wouldn’t be fair to Bucky, but Steve felt like he could live with himself if he could make friends with Tony. It wouldn’t be the close connection he really craved, but he didn’t deserve true happiness. Not after he had let Bucky fall and practically abandoned Tony.

So Steve stayed in New York just in case Tony changed his mind about him. He got a tiny apartment a few miles away from the Tower and started taking jobs for SHIELD. He knew Tony was still doing consultant work for them and it was one way of letting Tony know he was nearby without intruding into his life.
Besides, he kind of liked going on missions with Natasha, Clint, and some of the other SHIELD agents. He hadn’t spent much time with the Avengers before the battle was over and they had all gone their separate ways. But they had all kind of grown on him and it was nice being able to catch up with part of the team. He hadn’t realized how lonely he had been those few weeks on his own until he was surrounded by people again.

After a few weeks working with her, he and Natasha were almost friends. She was surprisingly chatty during missions. He couldn’t help but smile as she made deadpan jokes over the comm, swapped stories of previous missions with Clint, and teased the SHIELD agents for not being able to keep up with her. And occasionally, after a long mission, she invited him out drinking with her. He couldn’t get drunk, but just having someone to keep him company helped.

In between briefings, Natasha usually got on the subject of soulmates. He always listened politely as she discussed which of the SHIELD agents she thought would be a good match for each other and the plans she devised to get them together to see if they were soulmates. It was nice that she cared enough about her coworkers to help them find their mates, but he dreaded the day she would start matchmaking with him.

The latest mission had been surprisingly easy, something that should have been handled by some of the newer SHIELD agents. Clint and Natasha spent the entire time engaging in competitive trash talking, complaining how simple things like cooking dinner or weeding a garden were harder than taking out this group of bad guys. Sometimes while kicking the bad guys in the face.

Steve almost felt sorry for the villains. Almost.

“You know what?” Natasha said as she kicked one man square in the chest, causing him to crash into the group of three men running up to help him, knocking them down as well. “Getting Stark to believe my cover as Natalie Rushman was harder than this.”

Clint cackled with laughter. “God, Nat, I think you win this one.”

Steve swallowed hard as Natasha went on a rant about how readily Tony accepted her as his new assistant. He did want to learn more about Tony, but this felt like a little too much personal information. It had been a time in Tony's life when he was really struggling and Steve doubted Tony wanted other people to know just how much he had been suffering. Tony seemed like the type who wanted to hide any sign of weakness from the rest of the world.

Natasha leaned against a railing, surveying the pile of bad guys with disdain as Clint made a last sweep of the warehouse to see if they had missed anybody.

“Well, it looks like we’re all wrapped up and ready to go home,” Steve said.

“The night's still young,” Natasha said. “I might take Susan from accounting down to the bar on East Street. She told me she keeps wanting to check the place out, so maybe her soulmate’s there.”

Steve summoned up a smile, but pretty much tuned her out as she mused about which of the bar's staff would be the best match for Susan.

But he jolted back into focus as Natasha said in a casual tone, “I’ve seen Stark’s mark. Double headed eagle with a wrench.”

“I know,” he said. He had never actually seen Tony’s mark and thinking about it made his skin itch with desire, but he reminded himself it would never happen.

She raised an eyebrow. “You know? Then why are you still running around with SHIELD and
living in that crappy apartment?”

“He doesn’t want me.”

Natasha sighed. “Stark has a lot of trust issues,” she said begrudgingly. “But the Steve Rogers I know isn’t a quitter. He’d do whatever it took to convince Stark to love him back.”

Steve smiled sadly. “If Bucky was here, absolutely. All three of us are supposed to be mates. But Bucky’s dead. And without him, we’re never going to have a complete bond. I promised myself after Bucky died that I wouldn’t go looking for our mate. If Tony really wanted me, it’d be hard to keep that promise. But he doesn’t. It’s better this way. Easier on both of us.”

Natasha stared at him incredulously. “Easier? You think it’s easier to be lonely and miserable for the rest of your lives? An incomplete bond is still better than no bond at all.”

Steve shook his head. “I’m sorry, Nat. We’re not all lucky enough to have a perfect romance. At this point, I’ll be lucky just to make friends with Tony. But maybe that’s been fate’s plan all along. Maybe I was always meant to just have a platonic soulmate. Bucky was meant to be my friend in the 40s and after he fell, Tony was meant to keep me company here in the future.”

He swallowed the lump in his throat.

Poor Bucky. He had been so excited about meeting his future soulmate. If only he had known that Steve was the only mate he was supposed to have.

“I still think you’re being an idiot,” Natasha said. “But if that stupid theory will at least get you to make contact with Stark, I don’t care. The two of you aren’t meant to be alone. So get out there and connect. It’s still early evening and Stark rarely sleeps anyway. Invite him out for coffee or something to reconnect. I don’t want to see you again until you’ve made some effort.”

Steve chuckled. “Yes, ma’am.”

Natasha gave Steve a gentle shove towards the warehouse exit. “Go on. Clint and I have this. Go get your mate. I expect to hear all the details later.”

Steve rolled his eyes as he walked out. Natasha was going to be waiting a long time if she thought something exciting was going to happen between them.
Chapter 6

Steve headed back to his apartment first to change out of his uniform before going on to see Tony. He didn’t need to put on anything fancy. It wasn’t an actual date, after all. But he felt it was only polite to show up at someone’s home not covered in the blood of idiot henchmen.

For some reason, he felt anxious about the meeting. He didn’t know why. He wasn’t asking Tony on a date. All he wanted to do was talk, clear the air between them. So there was no reason why he should feel so tense.

Must be leftover tension from the mission, he decided. The fight had been so much easier than he expected and he hadn’t used up all his adrenaline. So his body was apparently turning it into nervous energy.

“Don’t be pessimistic,” he told himself.

The best case scenario was Tony being willing to talk things through. But Steve was going into this fully expecting Tony to either want to curse him out again or just refuse to see him. Still, Tony would know that Steve was trying to work things out and that had to be a step in the right direction.

He arrived at the Tower, his nerves feeling a little more steady and pressed his thumb over the door’s security system to trigger the Tower’s security system. He’s done this so many times when he collects Bruce for their lunch dates that he’s no longer afraid Tony has the system set to destroy him on sight. Jarvis just welcomes him warmly as an Avenger and that’s that.

“Hello, Captain Rogers,” Jarvis greeted him. “This is an unusual time to see you. Dr. Banner is presently in the middle of an experiment, but I’ll announce your arrival.”

“No, don’t bother him,” Steve said quickly. “I actually wanted to see Tony.”

“I’m afraid Sir is unavailable.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Of course he is. Tell him I’ll be waiting to see him as soon as he finishes up whatever he’s working on.”

“You misunderstand me, Captain. Sir is not in the Tower.”

“Oh.” Somehow Steve had failed to account for that possibility. From what Bruce had told him, Tony was rarely out of the lab.

“Dr. Banner will see you now,” Jarvis said, and the front door swung open.

Bruce was standing in the foyer, dressed in his lab coat. “Hey, Steve,” he said. “I, uh, wasn’t expecting you.” He looked down at the splatters all over his coat.

“It’s okay, Bruce. I was just going to have a word with Tony.”

Bruce grimaced. “You have terrible timing, Steve. Tony took off this afternoon for his mansion in Malibu.”

Steve scrubbed a hand over his face. “Well, this explains everything.”

Soulmates were supposed to feel a sense of connection to each other, a subtle tug leading them through life’s path until they found each other. Tony suddenly moving half a continent away had to
have subconsciously upset his senses.

“It’s not you,” Bruce assured him. “Tony’s apparently been having nightmares ever since the battle. From what he’s told me, he usually dreams about going through the black hole again. It really left an impression on him.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?”

Steve felt sick. He had almost closed the portal on Tony. God, what if Tony was having nightmares about that?

Bruce shrugged. “Tony didn’t tell me. I had no idea he was leaving until I came out of the lab for breakfast and found all his bags packed. But that’s Tony for you. He bottles everything up inside until he hits his breaking point.”

Steve heaved a sigh. “Any idea when he’s coming back?”

Bruce shook his head. “Sorry, Steve. Pepper went with him. She seemed to think it was a good move getting away from New York.”

“Getting away from me.”

“She doesn’t know you’re soulmates. All she wants is for Tony to stop having nightmares.”

“But if she knew?”

“She’d probably tell Tony he’s being an idiot,” Bruce said with a laugh. “And she’d force him to give you a try.”

“But the two of them,” Steve said with a helpless gesture. “They’re so perfect together.” They weren’t soulmates, but their relationship was a lot stronger than most soulbonds Steve had seen.

“I’m not going to lie to you, Steve. They’ve been going through a rough patch. Again, not your fault,” Bruce said, holding up a hand before Steve could protest. “She’s not into the whole superhero thing. She doesn’t like sitting at home worrying that Tony’s going to get himself killed. But you know Tony’s not going to stop. Not even for her.”

“Wow,” Steve said.

Bruce shrugged and stared off into the distance. “Going to Malibu gets them away from it all for awhile, but I think it’s only a matter of time until they break up. Could be months, could be years. But she won’t be staying with him forever. She’s never going to stop caring about him, but she can only take so much stress. It’s hard in our line of work. You’d almost have to be dating another superhero.” His eyes flicked back to Steve.

“No,” Steve said. “It’s not going to work between us.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do. Tony went all the way to Malibu to get away from me and any reminder of New York. Believe me, Bruce. He wants nothing to do with me.”

Bruce shrugged indifferently. “Something tells me Tony’s going to get bored out there. He’s not going to stop being a hero just because there’s no bad guy to fight. The second anything goes down, he’ll be right back here in New York.”
“That is if it goes down in New York.”

Bruce sighed. “All I’m saying is that you just need to be patient. In time, Tony and Pepper will break up and he’ll be back here in New York, needing a friend to keep him company. And if you play your cards right, it could turn into something more.”

There was no denying that Tony was attractive. He was an incredible person and anybody would be lucky to have him as their mate. But Steve couldn’t see himself romancing Tony when all he could think about was that Bucky wasn’t there.

Still, he could give it a try. Tony was going to reject him anyway, but at least he could say he made the effort.

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