Bukavac

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Bukavac

by littleblackfox

Summary

Deep in the Gloaming, Bukavac felt a sharp tug at his centre. An insistent, steady pull. Someone, something, had written his name. In chalk. In blood. A summoning. He was being pulled up, or down, perhaps. Hard to be sure when everything is all non-euclidean. Either way, he was being dragged into the mortal realm.
"Aw, fuck!"

Notes

I read 'The Unlikely Summoner" by Kryptaria (have you read it? Go, read it now! It's beautiful) and it stuck with me. By 'stuck' I mean 'grew into a sprawling great monster that wouldn't leave me alone'. I haven't written anything but letters in the last 15 years, and never written fanfic period. But the thrice-damned thing wouldn't leave me alone. So here it is, it was supposed to be a one shot, but instead its 7 chapters, with parts two and three still to come. Fuck.

- Inspired by The Unlikely Summoner by Kryptaria
Deep in the Gloaming, Bukavac felt a sharp tug at his centre. An insistent, steady pull. Someone, something, had written his name. In chalk. In blood. A Summoning. He was being pulled inexorably up, or down, perhaps. Hard to be sure when everything is all non-euclidean. Either way, he was being dragged into the mortal realm.

“Aw fuck”

Steven Grant Rogers, Stevie to his Ma, barely a week in the ground from tuberculosis, crawled over the bare floorboards of the too-empty living room. The threadbare rug that had kept the worst of the drafts at bay dragged up and tossed into the corner. Bloody chalk clenched in his right hand, battered paperback in his left. He hovered over the triangle that took up most of the floor, the circle within it, densely packed with concentric rings and markings carefully copied from his book. He added a few curls here, a strange, flowing shape there and finally sat back. He flicked through his book, absently rubbing his wrist. It had taken most of the evening to get everything down perfectly, and the book insisted on perfection, hinting at the horrors that befell the careless practitioner. Steve rubbed his eyes, spreading chalk dust and blood over the bridge of his nose. There was still so much to do and he was already so tired. The book, found in his mothers dresser days ago (and wasn’t that a shock, Steve? Sarah Rogers hiding a book on the occult tucked away with the handful of costume jewellery she hadn’t sold to pay for asthma medication) had required little for the summoning. Candles for the four quarters, a stick of chalk and the blood of a virgin. That part was easy, he thought ruefully, rubbing at the cut on his thumb. The four elements on the altar were simple enough. A mound of dirt for the earth. A feather for air. A candle for fire. A glass of water for… water. He set down the book. No sense in waiting around. Either nothing would happen, and he’d wasted a couple of days on this nonsense. Or his soul would get damned for all eternity. Which couldn’t be much worse than his current situation. But maybe… Maybe it would actually work. He carefully got to his feet, his twisted spine cramping and creaking, and began to speak

Bukavac hated being summoned. Hated it. Hated being dragged through the ether, unable to challenge or resist. Hated being tossed about like a puppet with its strings tangled. Hated snivelling little wizards and jumped up mortals bossing him about. Steal this amulet, Demon. Sack that city, Demon. Build me a palace, Demon. Ugh. With their shining chains and magic circles and burning salt. But look at this little apprentice. What the fuck is he doing? Little shit is just asking to get hollowed out and worn like a scarf. Okay, you want a Demon? I’ll give you a fucking Demon.

Steve shivered as fever wracked his body. He kept reciting the incantation, slowly and clearly. His lungs were on fire. His head began to spin. Still, he kept on speaking. The walls bowed inwards. The floorboards creaked and strained, splintering around him. His heart pounded in his ears, too fast. At the centre of the circle a thick mist writhed, twisting and coiling like a serpent. The air hung heavy with saltwater and river mud. The room filled with sound, sharp and discordant. There was a flash of light, and there stood the Demon. Great, twisting horns and far too many legs. Steve was dimly aware of pain in his arms, a clenching in his chest, and blacked out.
Bukavac glanced dispassionately at the human slumped at his feet. Well, that was an anticlimax. He hadn’t even done the bit with the giant serpent, or the rotting corpses. He crouched down to study the circle containing him. Well, would be containing him if it hadn’t been drawn on cracked and loose fitting floorboards. What the hell? He could have just walked out of this thing and strangled the human the old fashioned way, if the kid wasn’t doing such an excellent job of killing himself already. Bukavac stepped out of the circle and skidded across the floor. Damnit, too many legs. And hooves, what was he thinking? He paused, looming over the human. Ugh, not the finest specimen of mankind. A twisted spine, that’s gotta hurt. The lungs a mess. The heart a fragile, misshapen thing. Poor kid. Bukavac shook himself. Was that pity? Bukavac shifted, carefully, six legs look impressive but are a pain in the balls to maneuver, and glanced around the room. Drafty and cold and sparse. And stinking of the recently departed. A nasty death too, the walls reeked of it, fear and pain and choking on blood. He clip-clopped slowly around, skirting the shivering, twitching body on the floor. The walls hummed with faint energy, and wasn’t that interesting? He reached the window and peered out. Carriages shuttling around without horses to draw them. Buildings clustered together, lives stacked on top of lives. How long had it been since he last walked the mortal world? The body on the floor whimpered, a small sound of hurt that sliced right through Bukavac. Ouch. His shoulders slumped. Getting soft in old age. Not that getting soft is so bad, you can’t spend all eternity lurking in rivers or strangling fishermen, that would get depressing.

“Aw. Fuck it all,” he muttered, twisting in on himself. Two legs, then. And feet, not these fuckawful hooves. No horns, either. Two arms. One face. Boring. Hair instead of seaweed, don’t want to stink out the place. Keep the eyes, though. He, because, aw fuck off, alright? Okay. Bukavac shakes his shoulders. Yeah, feels pretty good. And if it turns out the dying kid is an asshole, well I’ll just, I dunno, eat him and steal his identity. Yeah. Good to have a plan.

Bukavac kneels down beside the human, and places a hand on his chest (oops, claws. There. Hands. Shut up). He cups the heart in his palm, smoothing out the muscles and squeezing it rhythmically until it gets the idea and starts to pump with slow, steady beats. Next the lungs, gently opening them out, blowing away the blockages and pressing down the swelling. He rolls the kid onto his front, studying the twist of his spine. He places his palms on the small of the back, pushing up between the protruding ribs and fanning his fingers out to the shoulder blades. There. Much better. Always inconvenient when your human shuffles off the mortal coil when you’ve not even finished the introductions. Well, time to meet the new boss. He rolls the kid onto his back and gives him a little shake.

“Hey kid, wake up,” he mutters, his accent thickly Balkan. He clears his throat. That won’t do, he sounds like a river rat that’s crawled out of the fucking Danube. Okay, so yeah, maybe he is one, doesn’t mean he has to sound like it. He pauses and listens. Where the hell is he? Not europe, somewhere new. No Demons shifting between the spaces. No Golems under the earth. Well that’s interesting. And energy crackling through copper wires. And what the hell is moving those funny looking carriages around? Okay, focus. Out on the street he can hear people talking, laughing. Drawn out vowels and dropped consonants.


“Hey kid!” He grins. Teeth. Fuck. Teeth. Bukavac snaps his mouth shut. Too late, the kid has seen the rows of needle sharp teeth. His eyes, already big and round and blue, get just a little bit bigger. Bukavac tries again, bigger smile, less teeth. The kids eyes get even bigger. Well, this is awkward. Bukavac lifts a hand (a perfectly human looking hand. No scales or rotting flesh, thank you very much) and gives a weak little wave.

“Hey,” he manages. Okay, so not the best start. But the kid isn’t shaking, or pissing himself (because no one needs to see that) or shrieking for help or mercy. Which Bukavac can’t help but be a little impressed with. Aside from the whole heart attack and dying bit, he’s been holding up pretty well. He’s had High Priests sucking their thumbs and wailing for their nannies with the rotting hordes trick (well, just the one time, but it was memorable), The Demon watches him try to sit up for a moment, before grabbing him by the shoulder and hauling him into a sitting position.
"Had to intervene there, kid. Heart that won’t suddenly crap out on you’ll take getting used to.” The human is rubbing the back of his neck, feeling for knots and twists where there are none. He closes his eyes.

“It doesn’t hurt,” he whispers. Bukavac smacks him hard enough on the shoulder to send him reeling, though he manages to regain his balance. He looks up at Bukavac.

“It worked?” He frowns. Bukavac offers another grin, raising his eyebrows.

“But you’re a…” the kid hesitates.


“Fine then, I’ll start. What is your bidding, oh master? That better?” He raises his hands and tilts forward in a bow. Steve continues to stare at him.

“Come on, kid. Work with me here.” The Demon shifts and crosses his legs, resting his elbows on his knees. Maybe he should have spent less time looking at the lungs and more time checking out his brain.

“Oh. Well, I’m Steve,” the kid begins. What the hell? I mean, what in the actual hell is wrong with this little fucker?

“NO! Don’t tell me your name! What the fuck is wrong with you?” Bukavac snapped. “Names have power! You give me your name, I have something over you”. The Demon gestures to the chalk markings on the floor. “That’s why the demons go inside the circle and the assholes who know their names go outside the circle.” He waves his hand around the room in a vague circle. “You put our names in your fuckin’ books and chant your little spells and we come runnin’. If we had your names…”

“But I don’t know your name,” the kid blurts out.

Bukavac freezes. Oh. Oh this is not good. He points to the edge of the circle, to the twisted glyphs below the alchemical symbol for water.

“You wrote it right there,” he snarls. The human glances at the chalk scratches.

“I… I can’t read it,” he stutters. Bukavac feels his teeth itch. Feels the room grow cold, the air heavy like a thunderstorm. The human snatches up a book from the floor, opens it and holds it out.


“Steve, was it?” he asks, his voice brittle and bright. The human nods. “This is an incantation for summoning a eudemon.” The humans expression doesn’t alter.

“A guardian angel?”

The kids expression clears. He nods his head.

“Yeah, and you came”.

Bukavac closes the book and tosses it on the floor. Of course the kid was looking for a guardian angel. Parents dead and a weak heart, desperate and lonely and so fucking stupid. The Demon rises to his feet. Without the circle containing him, he can leave. The kid doesn’t even know his fucking name, what can he do about it?

“I’m not a guardian angel, kid. Kind of the opposite.” He shakes his head and turns away, points to the floor where his name is written, the crack in the floorboard that twists a letter out of shape. “You got the name wrong. That’s not me in your little book”.

The kid scrambles to his feet.

“But you came, and you helped me,” he says. “And I don’t care what you are. I just… I’m just looking for a friend.” The kid shrugs. Aw, quit it kid, you’re killing me here. “Someone to watch my back,” Steve continues. “And to look out for.”

Oh, that's new. Got spirit, this one. And Bukavac knows that if he goes now, the idiot will try again, and fuck up again. Then bits of his brand new heart will get stuck in the teeth of whatever abomination he pulls out of the ether. Fucking stupid. Both of us.

The kid holds out his hand to the Demon.

“Hi, I’m Steve. Steve Rogers.”

Aw Fuck. Okay, okay I'll shake your thrice damned hand you little shit.
“Bukavac,” the demon murmurs. Steve grins at him.
“Well then, I’ll call you Bucky”.
The Future

Chapter Summary

Bukavac has no qualms killing someone if they're about to kill him. Or might do in the future. Or piss him off. Not the same thing, though. You fight for your own reasons, not someone else's.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap, people are reading this?!
Seriously, thank you for the kudos, the bookmarks and most especially comments! I owe you the hot beverage of your choice and a jaffa cake.
Also special thanks to my beta and cheerleader MikeyFox, for moral support, grammar and popcorn.
You can find me on tumblr, where I mostly bitch about mental health and Sebastian Stans face.

Initial negotiations between Steve Rogers and Don't-Call-Me-A-Fuckin’-Angel were strained. The kid refused to have have Brooklyn razed to the ground and replaced with a golden palace, reasoning that it would be impractical, and would probably draw unwanted attention, and really the apartment was fine.
Bukavac, in turn, claimed no need or desire for sleep, and refused the couch, or Ma Rogers bedroom, reasoning that the walls still remembered her dying, slow and painful and not enough air in her lungs to pray for what she’d be leaving behind, and that kind of thing makes a guy twitchy (which, although a perfectly valid explanation, did not sit well with Steve. After several rather loud exchanges where many things were Said and also Not Said, Bucky suggested a cleansing and they doused the room with salt and charred rosemary and scrubbed the walls with seawater and silently agreed to Not Talk About It Or Anything Ever Again).
Steve also insisted on working for money, rather than tricking people into taking shreds of newspaper or bottle caps. Steve had many noble and damned irritating opinions on the value of earning a living. Bukavac considered being alive wasn’t a thing you had to earn, more endure in the hope that eventually someone will clap you on the shoulder, commend you on not doing a terrible job at it and maybe suggest you take a nap. But Steve just gave him that disappointed look which meant three days a week when Steve was sat at a desk doing pointless human activities for a pittance, Bukavac would find himself down at the docks hauling crates and barrels. Being close to the water settled the itch under his skin, and he found that, though science had brought unimaginable wonders, the world was still full of crooks, thieves and corruption.
The two evenings a week Steve went to art class Bukavac spent at Goldie's Gym. Steve had told him to go out and find himself a hobby, and spending his evenings punching humans in the face sounded like a fuckin’ delight. Once a week he would drag the kid along with him, teach him how to throw a punch and take a hit. Steve was getting stronger every day, walked taller. It made something small and warm unfurl in Bukavac’s chest.
Bukavac claimed to need no sustenance (and Stevie, eat something damnit, you’re skin and bones), which was not well received. He had a weakness for candy, which Steve exploited when he had the
money to spare. They spent a day at Coney Island, where the smell of the hot dog stand made Bukavac so nauseous he had to sit with his head between his legs taking deep breaths while Steve rubbed gentle circles on his back and offered him sips of soda water. They ate pizza, which Bukavac approved of, and saltwater taffy, which he did not. They rode the Cyclone, which made Steve throw up (“Quit laughing, Jerk. It ain’t funny!”)

There were several conversations about swearing, about not swearing, and about certain really awful swears. Wash your mouth out, Bucky.

Bukavac took a long time to shake the, not fear as such. Ain’t afraid of nothing. Fuck you. Concern that Steve was just another fuckin’ Magician who would start ordering him around. When some asshole who wouldn’t take no for an answer from a girl clocked Steve on the jaw, he refused Bukavac’s offer to dismember him and make a bracelet of his fingers (“Jeez, Buck!”). Steve also refused the offer to steal an easel and set of badger fur brushes that he was eyeing up in an arts supplies store (“No, Christ! I just need a new pencil.”), the Mona Lisa (“Where would we even put it, Buck?”) or the Golden Gate Bridge (“You can’t steal it, Bucky. It’s three times the size of Brooklyn.”).

So maybe the kid was alright (“Hey, quit doing that. I don’t need nothing as long as I got you, yeah?”).

That book gets packed away in a box with the few things of Ma Rogers that Steve can’t bear to part with and shoved in the back of a closet. The rug (maybe less threadbare now) stays on the floor. And if their shitty little apartment is not so cold at night and the window doesn’t rattle in its frame when a car goes past, well, neither of them mention it.

Still a dumb fuckin’ punk, though.

The new sciences were a source of endless fascination for Bukavac. He would spend evenings after work sprawled on the couch scouring Popular Science and Scientific American, reading favoured articles out aloud to Steve while he sat on the floor with his sketchbook. Steve would nod and smile while Bukavac marvelled over the works of Tesla and Einstein.

“We should go to the Stark expo,” Steve said with a grin. “They’re gonna have a flying car!” He laughed as Bukavac drops his magazine, eyes wide.

“You’re shitting me, right?” Bukavac sits up, fixing Steve with a glare.

“Serious, Buck.”

“Well, fuck.”

“Language!”

The Stark Expo is a riot of sound and colour, dominated by a huge iron globe. The sky is lit up by fireworks and spotlights. Bukavac is near giddy with it all, dragging Steve from one exhibit to the next. The Synthetic Man sets him off on a rambling monologue about Golems, huge figures formed from clay that built the walls of Prague (“There’s a bit of paper in their forehead, tells them who to obey. You take it out, they stop movin’. Strong like you wouldn’t believe. Never need sleep or food, just keep workin’ until they crumble into dust. Poor Fuckers.”).

The pass an Army enlistment tent and Steve hesitates. Bukavac throws an arm around his shoulder. He looks up at the display.

“C’mon kid, you’re not serious,” he takes a few steps back, trying to pull Steve away. The tent makes him anxious. He’s read the papers, he knows there’s a war going on. Fuck, he can feel it, deep where his bones still lie, the blood spilling onto the earth. The camps and the trains and the gas chambers. The thought of Steve out there too makes his gut twist something fierce. Steve pulls away from him. Oh. Oh that stings.

“I know you don’t think I can do this,” Steve begins.

“It’s a war, Stevie.”

“I know it is, you don’t have to tell me.” Steve squares his shoulders, defensive. Bukavac mirrors his stance. Stupid kid, with his heart too big for his fuckin’ body. He didn’t see that arrogant little shit
from Macedonia tear up half the earth to bolster his own ego. Or that clusterfuck in the east, 500 years of slaughter over whose imaginary friend wants this patch of dirt. Bukavac has no qualms with killing someone if they’re about to kill him. Or might do in the future. Or piss him off. Not the same thing, though. You fight for your own reasons, not someone else’s.

“You have any idea what it’s like? It’s blood and screaming and bodies piled up. It’s a threshing machine chewing up people and spitting out bones. All torn up and spat out for the amusement of kings and noblemen who’ve never done a damn thing in their lives but send better men to die for them. For land, or gold or to show they can.” Bukavac snarls. “Lords and leaders who have never touched a sword but their hands are dripping with blood!” Steve stares at him, shocked by his sudden anger. He steps close, puts a hand on his friends sleeve, wary of getting too close.

“Bucky, hey,” he murmurs. “I get it, I really do,” he rubs his hand up Bukavac’s arm, squeezing his shoulder. “But this isn’t the same. And I’m not gonna sit in a factory…” Bukavac pulls away from him, scowling.

“Bucky. Bucky, come on.” Stupid, stupid kid. Bukavac sighs and moves closer, lets the kid rest a hand on the back of his neck. It soothes more than it has any right to.

“There are men laying down their lives. I got no right to do any less than them.” Bukavac tilts forward and presses his forehead against Steve’s.

“You got nothing to prove, kid,” he whispers. Steve presses back. And, oh, something so sweet shouldn’t sting so much.

“Ain’t about me, Buck.” Bukavac snorts a laugh at that. It’s not a fight he can win, only delay. He pulls away and smacks the kid on the arm.

“C’mon, let’s go see that flying car.”

Howard Stark’s flying car comes crashing to the ground, but is no less impressive for it. Stark is a genius, a showman, and sets Bukavac’s teeth on edge. (“It’s like watching a kid waving around a gun, Stevie. All this power and he’s got no idea what he’s doin’ with it.”). Bukavac falls silent after that, and they wander around the fairground, eating peanuts and watching the fireworks. Steve nudges Bukavac with his shoulder, still mindful of their fight earlier. It’s the first time they’ve really fought over something, and he knows he can’t back down. He doubts Bucky is going to give ground either. He tilts his head, tries to catch his eye.

“You okay, Buck?” Bukavac shifts, kicking a pebble. After a long pause he sighs.

“S’weird is all,” he mutters.

“S’weird,” Steve coaxes.

“Yeah. magnetic fields and electricity and,” he waves his hand around. “All this.” They walk in silence a while longer, Steve not pushing or pressing. Just waiting. Jerk.

“We used to be everywhere, y’know.” He glances at Steve. “Demons. Building castles an’ stealing treasure an’ whispering secrets in the ears of emperors.” He runs a hand through his hair. Why is he fidgeting? What the fuck is the point of hands, what do you do with the damned things? “I ain’t seen a single other one since I been here. Like…” He shoves his hands in his pockets, restless and suddenly annoyed with himself. “S’like you all forgot about us.” He turns back to watch the crowds. “I always figured the day you stopped dragging us out from the spaces inbetween it’d be a fuckin’ relief. I always hated it, being a fuckin’ puppet. Being someone’s dog just ‘cause they knew the right incantation.” Steve reaches for his sleeve, looks distraught.

“Bucky, if you don’t wanna be here anymore…” Steve begins. Bukavac waves a hand.

“Fuck, no! Stevie I ain’t here because you’re making me,” he grins, all straight white teeth and charm, but Steve is still fretful. “You think I’m still here ‘cause of that? You seriously think that mess on your living room floor coulda summoned anything?” He throws his arm around Steve's shoulders and gives him a shake. Steve grins at him and loops an arm around his waist, his shoulders slumped in relief. Soft hearted little punk.

“I dunno, Stevie. We’re redundant. You got cars and magnets and fuckin’ vita-rays, now. You don’t need us.” Steve grins at him, presses a little closer.

“I’ll always need you, Buck,” he says softly.
It lights something up in Bukavac’s chest, like a firework.
“You got me, kid,” it crackles and sparks behind his ribcage, against his spine. “Till the end of the line”.

Cigarettes

Chapter Summary

He's seen how the kid watches him. Felt his pulse quicken when Bukavac throws an arm around his shoulder and calls him a punk. Seen the warm flush on his neck when he's caught staring.
So. Yeah.

Chapter Notes

Holy crap, it's chapter three!
This chapter was written on the train to London. So every half hour a Very Nice Person appeared at my shoulder to offer me an overpriced beverage while I tried not to shriek and throw my laptop out the window,

Thank you for reading, leaving kudos and commenting, I can't tell you what it means to me. Just gnash my teeth and flail my arms at you.
You can find me on Tumblr (I am uncreative with names. I also have a hate/fear relationship with technology) at thelittleblackfox.tumblr.com where I get emotional about stone fruit and reblog the efforts of more talented people.

Trigger Warning: some body horror. Which I should have mentioned in the last chapter (but it didn't occur to me that needle-teeth and excessive limbs was body horror. Oops)

There are a lot of things that are fucked up about the new world, but there are some pretty decent perks, Bukavac thinks to himself. A hot bath, for one. Hey, you spend a few thousand years with your feet in the silt and the current battering into your bones and the first time you settle into a hot bath? Fuckin' bliss. Bukavac is a river Demon, and like most European Demons he runs colder than humans. He’s met a few Ifrits in his time, that nightmare in Parthia with a master who couldn’t keep it in his pants and sent hordes of Demons after anyone who looked at him funny. Poor bastards, lurking in ruins and caves with their burning wings and coppery skin.
He can’t complain (not that that's ever stopped him). It's just a fucking chill he can’t shake half the time, deep in his gut (though it’s lessened with the kid around. When the little punk smiles, cross legged on the floor with his sketchbook, it’s warm like a summer day. When Stevie nudges his shoulder or calls him a jerk it's a forest fire, fast and fierce and burning everything it touches).

Coffee is another one. Black and bitter, with an edge that no amount of sugar can disguise. Coffee warms his throat, burns his mouth and he relishes the sensation. It’s not like being alive, but it's good. It’s heat on his skin and a thrum in his veins and keeps the river chill from sinking too deep into his bones.
But cigarettes. Cigarettes are better than coffee. Where coffee warms cigarettes burn. Filling his lungs with smoke, hot and acrid. He could happily spend the rest of eternity propped against the windowsill in their ratty little apartment, sucking away on a pack of Luckies, rolling the smoke on his tongue. Oh, the pleasures of the flesh.
Bukavac smirks, letting curls of vapour creep from his mouth. It’s been a long time since he last engaged in such things. Bukavac closes his eyes, sifts through his memories. Oh yeah. Some nobleman had summoned him and declared that he wanted to bang his friends daughter (Fuckin’ typical. Girl was barely ten years old). What better way to sate your desires and avoid damnation than summon a lowly river Demon to assume her form and let you get your end away. Bukavac blows out a slow, heavy breath. Put your hands on me, the fat old pervert had demanded. So Bukavac had. He hadn’t been specific on the how, so while he had probably meant put your hand on my dick Bukavac had happily interpreted it as tear my heart out through my chest and eat it while I watch. Cigarette to lips, another hot, sour mouthful of smoke. Always be clear and precise when dealing with Demons, especially sneaky fuckin’ river rats who’ll choke down every last chunk of gristle and fat while you stare, twitching and bleeding out.

“What’re you smirking at?” Steve asks from his spot on the floor, sketchpad balanced in his lap. Steve never shows Bukavac his finished sketches, and it takes stealth and speed to get a good look over his shoulder. Kid is twitchy like that. The kid also has to sleep sometimes, so Bukavac just takes his time flipping through the pages then. They’re good pieces; street scenes, Coney island, piles of fruit. And Bukavac. Page after page of them. Detailed drawings of Bukavac on the couch reading a magazine. Quick, furtive sketches of his eye, the curve of his jaw, his fingers brushing a strand of hair behind his ear. Bukavac would bet good money that at that very moment Steve was sketching him leaning against the window, cigarette in hand.

Bukavac tilts his head and studies the human for a moment. He’s been walking in the world a while now, and heard enough from the guys at the docks to know certain… hmm… inclinations didn’t sit so well with folks these days. He’s also seen how the kid watches him. Felt his pulse quicken when Bukavac throws an arm around his shoulder and calls him a punk. Seen the warm flush on his neck when he’s caught staring.

So. Yeah. He holds out the cigarette and raises an eyebrow. Steve snorts at him.

“No thanks, Buck. You know I can’t stomach them.” He goes back to his sketching. Steve has a pack of medicinal cigarettes lying around somewhere. Couldn’t manage a single puff without setting off a coughing fit that turned him damn near purple. He never complained about Bukavac smoking, unless it was to open the window a crack and mutter about some folks needing fresh air now and then. Of course the asthma was long gone, along with heart murmur and scoliosis. With the visits to Goldies and regular meals, the kid was taller, stronger and fuckin’ shone like the sun. Oh. Well then. Bukavac grinned and stalked over to Steve, who quickly snapped shut his sketchbook. Fuckin’ knew it.

“Doctors orders, Stevie,” he grins and wrestles him to the ground. The kid is strong and fast, and puts up a fight, chuckling and smacking Bukavac in the ribs.

“Ow! Quit it, Buck!” He laughs as they scramble on the floor, Bukavac resorting to pinching his ribs and digging fingers into his armpits, finally pinning him to the floor and settling on his thighs, bent knees bracketing his hips.

“C’mon, jerk.” Steve grumbles as Bukavac sits back and puts his cigarette to his lips. He takes a long, slow breath, pulls it away and bends over Steve. The kid starts to squirm, so Bukavac takes a wrist in each hand and pins them down either side of his head. Steve freezes, his eyes wide. Bukavac slides rough palms down his forearms, eases his thumbs in the crook of Steve’s arms, feels the blood pounding in his veins. Smoothes his hands back over to his wrists. Steve’s pupils open up, thin rings of blue around black pupils. His heart pounds rabbit-fast in his chest. Bukavac leans close, brings his mouth against Steves. Not touching, but close. Close enough for Steve to tilt his head up and bridge the space between them, should he choose to. Bukavac breathes out a slow, languid stream of smoke and Steve gasps, swallows, his heart skipping a beat before pounding faster. He makes no move to escape when Bukavac sits up again. Sliding his fingers down Steve’s arms, trailing them across his chest. He brings the cigarette up to his mouth and takes another lungful of smoke, tilting his head back to expose the column of his throat. Draws his other hand to rest on his thigh, fingers splayed.
He bends down again, brushing his nose against Steve’s. Brushes fingertips against the flush of red at his throat and cradles his jaw in both hands. Steve shifts at the touch, bringing his hand down to ghost against Bukavac’s. Not touching. Not touching but so achingly close. He breathes against Steve’s lips and Steve breathes with him. Tilts his head and touches Steve’s mouth with his own.

For a moment, a heartbeat, Steve is warm and pliant in his hands. Then he twitches. He kicks and struggles. And because Bukavac is many thing, but not that, he pulls away sharply. Steve is on his feet, panting and panicked. Bukavac holds up his hands as though soothing a panicked animal. Which isn’t so far from the truth. He had wanted, Bukavac had been so certain. Wouldn’t have laid a fuckin’ finger on him otherwise.

“Stevie, hey. Come on.” Steve backs away from him, shaking his head.
“No, Buck. I… it’s…” he stutters. Stills. Then turns and leaves. Out the door without a coat or a glance back. Well, fuck.

It’s dark when he finally returns. Bukavac is hunched up on the couch, choking down cup after cup of burning coffee like it could ever touch the gnawing chill in his gut. He calls out to Steve, but the kid doesn’t respond, just goes to his room and bolts the door.

Bukavac is a demon thousands of years old, has razed cities and built new ones on their bones. But a bedroom door in New York defeats him. So he leans against it and whispers soft promises, swears oaths and finally begs. When he has run out of words, when he can no longer stand the silence, he stumbles back to the couch, picks Steve’s sketchbook up off the floor and tears out a page (and there is the drawing of him leaning against the window frame, cigarette in hand) and carefully writes out an incantation for banishing a Demon, taking extra care with the twists and curls of his name. He folds it and tucks it under the door without a sound. Returns to the window and leans against the frame and stares out into the darkness and waits for the pull of the void.

The kid is standing in the doorway, scrap of paper in his hand.
“Bucky.” Steve's voice is low and sorrowful.
“You need somethin’ kid,” he tries for bravado and fails.
“I don’t want this,” Steve holds out the paper. “Take it back.” Bukavac doesn’t move, so Steve steps forward and places it carefully on the window ledge. Later Bukavac will find it and hide it away in Steve's sketchbook. Much later he will curse himself for doing so.
“Bucky,” Steve says carefully. “Things are… different here. People don’t…” Bukavac can’t help the derisive snort at his stumbling.
“I know the drill, kid. Won’t happen again,” he says flatly. It hurts. It hurts. But if it means staying, he’d agree to just about anything right now. Steve shakes his head.
“I don’t know how it is with… with Demons but humans…”
“Wasn’t always a Demon,” he cuts in. Steve falters and Bukavac can’t help but feel bitter pleasure at catching him out. Knows that it's not the kids fault, but he hurts and there’s a sour, mean place in him that wants to hurt back.
“Was human once. Long time ago,” he glances at Steve. “Gotta come from somewhere. We can’t all be gods, or curses or fuckin’ manifestations of abstract concepts.” He runs his hand along the window ledge. Touches the scrap of paper with a fingertip. The memories are old, worn around the edges.
“Was a dumb kid chasin’ skirts. Got snatched by a bog witch.” He doesn’t mention what happened after. The spells and the bindings. The pieces of him dropping away. “Kept me around a long time, feeding off of me until there was nothing left of me worth eatin’”. And not being able to stop her. Watching her hold his wrist and chew the meat from his fingers. The charred bundle of his bones and leather cord she had sunk deep into the riverbed, bound together with pain and hate. “Only so long you can spend hurtin’ before it changes you.” He shivers, feels the river's chill. Feels the warm press of Steve against his side.
“You ain’t a monster, Bucky.” Steve murmurs.
Bukavac sighs, half tired, half relieved. Things ain't okay. But they will be. The kid doesn’t hate him or want rid of him. They’ll get past it and the world will keep on turning.
Dumb fuckin’ kids, the pair of them.

In the morning they go to the Army recruitment centre and get enlisted.

Dumb Fuckin’ kids.
Basic Training

Chapter Summary

"I want to say I'm sorry for stuff I haven't done yet
Things will shortly get completely out of hand"
-Old College Try
The Mountain Goats

Chapter Notes

A short chapter today.
Thank you to everyone reading this, for the kudos and especially for the comments. I love every last damn one of you.

Bukavac enlists under the name James Buchanan Barnes (born March 20th 1925. Eighteen, Stevie? Seriously? They’re sending 18 year olds out to fight this fuckin’ war?!). He has assumed many identities over the millennia, and the lies flow easily. Born in Indiana, moved to New York at 13 where he met Steve and they’d been friends ever since.

Basic training mostly involves an unnecessary amount of running, navigation, not shooting yourself in the foot while holding a gun or standing around waiting to be told where to run to next. Bukavac, all easygoing charm like he belongs there, is handy with a gun and winds up a Sergeant. Steve ends up a Private, though Bukavac keeps threatening to bump him up to Captain (Oh my God, Buck. Don’t!). They are both assigned to the 107th and shipped out to England. It’s there they meet Peggy Carter.

Agent Carter of the Strategic Scientific Reserve is capable, smart and beautiful. Bukavac hates her. Hates her red lipstick and her plummy accent and her hourglass figure. Hates the way she looks at Steve like he’s the only thing in the room worth looking at, and he really fuckin’ hates the way he looks back. But he keeps his damn mouth shut and does not spend his nights thinking of all the ways he could dispose of her body (a fine mist, red as her lips, pattering down like rain). He wonders what Steve draws in his sketchbook now (but is too much of a coward to look). Fuck.

Life as a soldier is no different now than it was a thousand years ago. Hell, no different than five thousand years ago, only thing now is rifles instead of pointed sticks and rusty blades. He leads a team of five men out into battle, keeps them alive as best as he can (which is exceptionally well. Never lost a man) even when one of those five men is Steve Rogers, colossal idiot who leaps into the fray with no thought of an exit strategy or looking out for himself for a change. And would probably never dream of using a fellow soldier as a human shield. So Bukavac keeps a close eye on them, and Nazi soldiers with a bead on their target suddenly find themselves with a snapped neck, or their still pumping heart two foot to the left of where it’s supposed to be, or just end up as a wet patch on the dirt. The bodies get noticed, so Bukavac accompanies his non military approved methods with a sharp cracking sound and gains a reputation as the best sniper in the Allied Forces. It’s not so bad. He gets to kill humans, file mission reports and Steve looks at him with such pride that it makes him
feel like his skin is too tight. Fuckin’ punk.

Nothing good can last. Somewhere in Italy (fuck knows where. Land is land) he gets orders to take a unit of men to attack a Nazi science base. He goes looking for Steve and finds him. Talking to fuckin’ Carter. What used to sting aches instead. The ache is worse than the sting. A sting is short and sharp but an ache will settle into your bones and linger. He watches them dancing around each other. Idiots. He thinks of the taste of tobacco on his tongue, just for a moment. Then shakes his head and walks away. Fuckin’ stupid. Because if it ain’t Carter it’ll be someone else, eventually. Shit. They all just wind up rotting in the dirt in the end. Like he cares. For all his bluster, it still aches, and the lie is sour on his tongue (because he cares. Fuck, why does he care).

He hustles up his unit and they move out. The whole thing is a fuckin’ bloodbath. two hundred men go out. Less than fifty return and Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes is not one of them.
Chapter Summary

"You must be Stevie. He said you would come".

Chapter Notes

I am so overwhelmed by the response to this fic! Also, intimidated.
Thank you to everyone who reads, and leaves kudos. And extra special thank you to
those lovely people who leave comments. You make my day better.
I write from the Egyptian room at the British Museum. I'm pretty sure I've found a statue
of Bukavac here. When I asked him about it he told me go fuck myself, which is about
as close to a confession as I'm ever going to get.
Also, I'm sorry.

Steve Rogers is losing his mind. It’s been three weeks since Bucky disappeared. He knows he
should be thinking of the rest of the unit, that they were all good men. But Bucky hadn’t made it
back with the survivors. How the hell could that happen? Bucky was smart, fast on his feet, a crack
shot and a welterweight boxing champion. He could kill Nazi soldiers with a flick of his wrist. So
how could he have been captured? Col. Phillips won’t even listen to him anymore and even if he did,
how could Steve even explain how he knows Bucky isn’t dead? That bullets wouldn’t stop him.
That there is a weight in Steve’s chest like a hand wrapped around his heart that says Bucky is out
there somewhere.

He had been so angry with Bucky when he had found out the unit had gone without him. When less
than fifty men had crawled back with reports of an ambush and a Nazi officer who looked the devil
himself, Steve had been furious. Then terrified. He had hidden himself behind the barracks and
whispered Bucky’s name desperately, but aside from a slight tug in the pit of his stomach, there had
been nothing. He had drawn a circle in the dirt and carefully copied out Bucky’s name from the
scrap of paper he kept hidden in his sketchbook, spilled his blood on the soil and begged any god
that was listening to bring him back, but it hadn’t worked. And that scared him more than anything.

He asks questions and makes himself a nuisance until Peggy of all people takes pity on him and tells
him where his friend has been taken - a prison camp in Austria. Behind enemy lines. Col. Phillips
has no plans on a rescue, other than winning the war, and writes Bucky and the other soldiers off as
dead or near as damn it.

So he steals a handful of supplies and goes AWOL. He knows he’s in trouble, but figures if the army
won’t go after a hundred men, it won’t go after one. His feels phantom aches in his arms, his chest,
and is terrified of what it could mean. Was Bucky hiding amongst his fellow prisoners? Was he hurt?
Did they know what he was? That thought more than any other chilled Steve to the core. Bucky
hadn’t wanted to be a soldier, didn’t want to fight wars. If anything happened to him, Steve knew he
would never forgive himself.

It takes him two days to reach the Austrian border, another to find the prison camp. He is guided by
the weight around his heart. It clenches when he is in danger and pulls when he is running in the
wrong direction. He doesn’t sleep, and when he tries his dreams are full of tightly bound cords and
the burn of salt. He only pauses to catch his breath, blood thrumming in his veins. Quickly, the curl in
his chest seems to whisper. Guard at your six it seems to hum. Dumb punk it breathes when he takes
down a soldier and scoops up his gun.

He creeps his way into the camp. Takes the guards he finds down one by one, quiet and fast. They
are focused on men escaping, not trying to get in. He finds the prison cells, breaks the locks. He
whispers instructions to the men, hands out the weapons he managed to collect and asks after his
friend. There is a man in a separate cell who calls out to him. It is only when he has broken the lock
and opened the door that he notices the tapping in his chest. Not human . He looks up at the prisoner,
thin and dishevelled, and sees the silver in his eyes.

‘What are...’ Be civil , the weight seems to chide. A Demon. He hears Bucky’s voice echo in his
memory (Courtesy, Stevie. We don’t get enough of it. Just fuckin’ orders. Costs nothin’ but it’s
priceless). “What should I call you?” He asks. The Demon gives him a bright smile and speaks, his
voice the creaking of wood in an endless forest.

“You must be Stevie. He said you would come.”

Steve nods his head and wants to push his hand into his chest, clutch the shape against his heart and
call it a stupid jerk.

“Well...” the Demon says and leads him through a warren of cells and chambers.

“Know this is a research base, yes?” He says, hurrying down rickety stairs.

“Yes, the Nazi science division,” he replies. Erskine nods.

“Hydra, run by Johann Schmidt. Very powerful, very ambitious. A believer in Teutonic myth and
occult power,” he glances over at Steve. “He knows about us.”

“Demons?” Steve pauses, his face pale. Erskine nods.

“He believes that he can harness Demonic power to his own ends. He has begun amassing an army
of us, bound to his will”. Erskine shakes his head. “He has built summoning circles in Hydra bases
all over Europe near sources of ancient power. He wishes to rule the world. Or destroy it”.

Erskine stops in front of a cell. Steve steps through the doorway and feels his heart crack.

Bucky is shirtless, strapped to a table in the center of the room. His arms are bound with silver chains
that hiss and smoke where they touch his skin. His legs are wrapped in leather cord. A strip of metal
engraved with symbols is clamped around his neck. Copper wires have been pushed under the skin
of his torso, branching out like veins across his clavicles and abdomen. His eyes are glassey and
black, like obsidian, and he murmurs softly to himself in a language Steve doesn’t recognise.

“He kept escaping, so they restrained him,” Erskine says softly. “I have never seen such a bond”.

Steve approaches the table, trembling hands hovering over twitching muscles.

“What do I do?’ He asks.

“I cannot enter the room,” Erskine points down to the floor, where concentric circles and curling
inscriptions are carved into the stone. “Remove the bindings. Talk to him. Your hands already know
what to do”.

Steve pulls at the rotting leather, snatches away the silver chains. He whispers to Bucky as he works,
tells him how mad he’s going to be once they’re clear and away. Eases off the metal collar at his
throat. Whispers how scared he has been. Asks what the hell he was thinking.

“Didn’t want to muscle in,” Bucky rasps. “Not when you were with your girl”.

Steve falters with the copper wires.

“Oh, Buck,” he breathes. “No. Don’t ever..” he gasps.

Bukavac reaches out to him, grasps his arm. His eyes are clearer, blue where they had been black
moments before.

“Hey, kid. Shh”. Bukavac rubs up his arm, squeezes his wrist. “S’alright”.

Steve thinks he might start sobbing at the gentle hand on him, the wracked voice offering assurances.
He pauses to take a breath, then pulls at the last wire, easing it out from bruised flesh. He pulls
Bukavac up to his feet, who hisses like he’s been burned. “Fuckin’ Devils Trap,” he mutters, looking down at the carvings at their feet. He stamps his foot, hard, and the stone floor cracks. He wobbles on his feet. “Uh. Overdid it there,” he says, swaying. Steve wraps an arm around his waist and guides him, stumbling, out of the room. “Where to?” He asks Erskine. “This way,” the Demon gestures back the way they came. There is distant gunfire, the dull percussive thump of explosions. “Your men are busy”.

Steve half carries Bucky up the stairs. He is still twitching and shivering, but gaining strength. He wraps an arm around Steve’s shoulders and feels an answering squeeze at his hip. Erskine leads them out towards the courtyard. In the distance the surviving soldiers from the 107th are doing an impressive amount of damage. The air around them seems to bend and shift. Bukavac skids to a halt and pulls Steve back. He curses loudly and pushes Steve behind him. There is a blast of hot, sulphurous air and two figures stand before them.

“Schmidt,” Bukavac growls. And Steve stares in horror at the smear of red where Erskine had been standing a moment before, at the creature stood before him. Man in body, but with a red skull where a human face had once been. Beside him a smaller creature, hunched over and terrified. “What the hell,” Steve gasps. “How exciting,” Schmidt crows, “I have been so looking forward to meeting you”. Bukavac shifts forward, firmly placing himself in Schmidt’s path. The abomination laughs. “Not exactly an improvement, but still impressive”. He moves forward. Bukavac throws up his hands with a snarl and Schmidt stumbles backwards like he’s been punched. He barks out a laugh and the creature behind him trembles. “You are deluded. You pretend to be a soldier” he shouts to Steve as if Bucky wasn’t standing between them. “I’m deluded?” Steve counters. Bukavac throws his hands up again, and Schmidt’s head snaps back with the force of it. “Little soldier, we have left humanity behind.” He reaches up to a disc at his neck, blood red with a black insignia. Bukavac flinches. “Unlike you, I embrace it proudly!” Bukavac grabs Steve and pulls him to the ground, shielding him with his own body. Schmidt grasps the disc and a shockwave pulses outwards. The ground shakes and cracks around them. “Schmidt, we have to go,” the creature beside him wails, tugging on his sleeve. The courtyard crumbles around them, the earth begins to smoke and tremble at their feet. The creature lunges at Schmidt and the air around them ripples, stretches, and they are gone, leaving nothing but ruins in their wake. Bukavac pulls Steve to his feet, drags him across the groaning, shaking earth. Steve is half blind with the smoke and debris, stumbling over chunks of masonry, deaf to everything but the voice at his ear whispering to go a little bit further. Almost there. M’sorry. Almost there.

There is shouting and arms around them, guiding them to a clearing. They cling to each other in the clamour and too many hands on their skin.

“Give us a minute, guys,” Bucky says, settling Steve on the dirt. Sets down beside him and brushes dust and mortar out of his hair. Steve leans into the touch and lets the tension ease from his shoulders. Bucky’s hands are cold, his torso streaked with blood, so he shrugs off his coat and hands it over. Watches the Demon shrug it on without a fuss, pulling it close over his bruised and bloody chest. “So,” Bukavac says warily. “We oughta talk”.

“Erskine?” Steve asks. Bukavac shakes his head. And Steve is suddenly so tired. He had been a good man. Demon. A good Demon. “Schmidt?” It’s not a question, but it’s all he can manage. “Schmidt…” Bukavac hesitates. Steve presses against him, offers silent comfort. “Schmidt is trying
to become a Demon. I know how it looks, but he ain’t there yet. Takes a long time, he’s rushing.
Corrupting his flesh and soul”.
Steve shivers. Bucky had told him once about becoming a Demon. Time and pain and fear, he’d said. he didn’t want to imagine what Schmidt had been doing to himself.
“He didn’t even look at you,” Steve murmurs. Bucky snorts.
“I’m a pissy little river rat. No use to him”. Steve shakes his head at that but lets it go.
“He said we...”
“You ain’t like him,” Bucky snaps. “Whatever you are, you ain’t that”.
“Bucky,” he whispers. Bukavac shakes his head.
“Didn’t mean for it, Stevie.” The Demon covers his face with his hands. “M’so sorry. You were sick. I was just tryin’ to fix it”. He clutches at his hair and twists. “I didn’t think it would stick. But you ain’t corrupted”.
Steve can’t bear the sight of Bucky, his Bucky, tormenting himself. Pulls him close, wraps arms around him and squeezes tightly. Steve Rogers is not an idiot. He knows that since Bucky showed up he’s been slowly getting stronger, healthier. His back doesn’t ache and his lungs don’t get tight on cold mornings. Whatever Bucky did to him, he’s alive and well, and he can’t resent that.
“Thank you, Buck,” he says softly. “You’ve been fixing me and looking out for me an’ I never said thank you”.
Bukavac loosens the grip on his hair, leans into the embrace.
“You ain’t a Demon,” he mutters.
“I know I’m not”.
“you’re just, maybe. A little bit”.
Steve nods and holds him tighter. The weight in his chest heavy and warm.
The Howling Commandos

Chapter Summary

"In the pines, in the pines
where the sun don't ever shine
I will shiver the whole night through".
- Where did you sleep last night?
Leadbelly

Chapter Notes

Chapter 6!
Cthulhu takes the wheel, guys. Chapter 6!
Thank you everyone who has read, left kudos and commented. I love you all. No, really. I do. If you're ever on the same continent give me a shout and I'll buy you a drink.
Special thanks to my utterly useless beta MikeyFox, who when asked for concrit just wailed WRITE MORE at me.

They walk the 30-odd miles back to the SSR base across the border and come bursting into camp. Bukavac nudges Steve to the front of the procession, rousing the rabble into cheers and whistles. They report to Col. Phillips expecting a dishonorable discharge for a frankly implausible tale of occult forces but the SSR already knew of the existence of Demons. He feels Bucky stiffen beside him. Col. Phillips picks up a pile of reports from his desk.
“Been reports of these… demons going back twenty years. Damn Völkish. The SSR has been keepin’ tabs”. He sighs. “Never thought I’d see the day”.
“So you believe us,” Steve says carefully. The Colonel lets out a sharp laugh.
“Course I don’t.” He waves his pile of reports. Steve feels Bucky relax slightly.
“But we are gonna set a fire under Johann Schmidt’s ass. What do you say, Rogers? You think you can find these bases? Wipe Hydra off the map?” The old man barks at him. He glances over at Bucky, who nods, the corner of his mouth lifting.
“Yes, sir”.
Steve finds himself with a promotion (Captain, Buck? Seriously?) and orders to assemble a special unit. They pick the biggest troublemakers from the 107th.

‘Dum Dum’ Dugan, a Sergeant from the 69th with a bristling mustache and an excess of personality who agreed to anything as long as the beer kept flowing.
Gabe Jones, from the ‘All black, all proud’ 92nd spoke German & French fluently, which came in handy with Jaques Dernier, a member of the French Resistance and explosives expert who would occasionally pretend to not speak a word of English. Bukavac couldn’t help but like the weaselly little fucker.
Jim Morita, a US Army Ranger and communications officer, a fine marksman and quick wit. And finally James Falsworth, the last surviving member of the British 3rd Independent Parachute Brigade, an expert strategist and crack shot.
Bukavac spins a tale about seeing a map with the locations of the Hydra bases while he was a prisoner, and no one questions him. In truth, he could find them with his eyes closed. The summoning circles thrummed with power, sending out ripples of energy that even Steve could feel.

Dernier leads them through rural France to the meeting of two rivers and the Hydra base overlooking a lake. The area is littered with salt mines that make Bukavac jittery. They attack at night, fast and brutal, Steve in the lead, Bucky on his six. By morning the base is a smoking, flooded ruin and they are already on the move.

Bukavac locates the second base in a narrow valley of the Cottian Alps. A guard slips by unnoticed, gets a line on Steve. Bukavac snaps his fingers and the guard explodes, spraying blood and gristle. Steve ducks for cover, glances back at him, nods. Fuckin’ idiot. They move under cover of darkness. They do not encounter any Demons, but find plans for nuclear weapons and sketches of the disc Schmidt wore around his neck. A red disc with a skull headed symbol with far too many limbs.

“An amulet, Stevie. He’s storing Demon energy in it”. Bucky swears under his breath. “You’d think nuclear weapons would be enough, but no, he’s gotta power them with Demon energy too.”

Krivoklátsko makes Bukavac nervous. The forest is ancient, the river that runs through it whispers to him. It tugs at him. Steve can feel the disquiet rolling off him, and does his best to soothe it. Steve can feel something too, a prickle under his skin.


Krivoklátsko makes Bukavac nervous. The forest is ancient, the river that runs through it whispers to him. It tugs at him. Steve can feel the disquiet rolling off him, and does his best to soothe it. Steve can feel something too, a prickle under his skin.


Steve wraps a hand around his arm, holds tight. Calls to the others to stay close.

Falsworth sidles up to them.

“I don’t wish to alarm anyone,” he says quietly, crisply. “But we’re being followed”.

Steve glances at Bucky, who keeps chanting softly and raises his chin. Ahead lies a castle, like something out of a damn fairytale, all white turrets on the mountainside.

“Vlkodlak. Lot more than three. Got some of their own in there,” Bucky tilts his head to the castle...

Shapes move around them, keeping a careful distance. Bukavac continues his soft incantation. Moon bright eyes and claws burn in the shadows. They reach the courtyard and Bukavac gestures for the unit to stop. The shapes around them keep moving, silent and swift as they move along the perimeter.

“Stick together. Don’t leave the circle” Bucky rasps, raising his hands, fingers splayed. The air around them shimmers and crackles. “I’ll hold them off, but anything comes at you, shoot it”.

The Howling Commandos raise their weapons and stand guard. The Vlkodlak move as one, sleek and fierce. Tear into the guards and howl in their triumph. Swarm the castle, ripping down anything in their path. Creatures within the walls shriek and rage. Silver cages are torn open, spilling horrors and monstrosities into the night. The Demons find the summoning circle and wrench it apart piece by piece, casting the chunks of carved stone down the mountainside. They roar in triumph and claw at their bodies, tearing at their sparsely furred skin and charge into the forest.

The Howling Commandos are untouched by the melee, Bukavac snarling at any creature that strays too close, until the last wraith disappears into the darkness.

Bukavac lowers his hands and the ripple in the air around them trembles and fades. He is pale and shivering, exhausted. Steve pulls him close, touches a palm to the rime of frost on his chin. Brushes a thumb across his cheek. Eases him to the ground.

“Here, sit down before you fall down,” he fusses.

Jones rustles up a blanket for Steve to wrap around him, makes no comment as the two huddle together, or how Steve wraps his arms around Bucky's shaking frame and whispers softly to him. The Howlies have seen Bucky face up to Demons before and had quietly agreed amongst themselves that he had to be some sort of specialist. So they kept quiet when he started chanting, or spoke strange languages to the creatures they encountered. He kept them alive, and Steve, well, Steve kept Bucky alive.

Dernier sits down on a rock and lights up a smoke. Dugan starts searching the ruins for alcohol. When Bucky is able to stand and Dugan has exhausted his search for liquor, they travel south, find a quiet bar and drink the damn place dry.

They rest up a few days before heading up to Poland. Some place in the north overlooking a great lake. Bukavac strips off his heavy winter coat and wades out into the waters, warning the others to keep their distance. Steve perches on the water's edge and watches Bucky slip under the surface, feels the clench in his chest. No one comments on how long he spends under, and Steve wonders if they have figured out the truth. Bukavac surfaces, doesn't complain when Steve hauls him out of the water and wraps both arms around him while he coughs up brackish water. He lets himself be coddled and soothed.

“They’re abandoning the base,” he coughs out. “Headed north. Schmidt’s already gone but his lackey is still there”. Steve recalls the small creature that kept to Schmidt's heel. “How much time do we have?” He asks. Bucky looks back over the water. “Already got an ambush set up” He lets Steve wrap his coat around his shoulders. “Rusalki. Schmidt’s been snatching up Demons all over,” he grins, feral and vicious,”They ain’t too pleased with him”.

The creature, a kobold Bucky says, calls itself Zola. It surrenders willingly and begs for amnesty. He tells the SSR of Schmidt’s attempts to turn himself into a Demon, of his plane, the Valkyrie, and its cargo of Demonic weaponry destined to strike at the entire Eastern Seaboard. He offers up the location of the final Hydra base in the Alps.

Fuckin’ Demon powered nuclear weapons. What the fuck?
The Valkyrie

Chapter Summary

All rivers lead to the sea, don't they?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The final Hydra base is five hundred feet below ground and heavily guarded. The Howlies are a well-oiled machine, fighting their way through the defenses. The SSR not far behind. They split into two teams, Steve and Bucky search for any sign of Demons, the rest of the unit work on clearing the area.

Bukavac follows the thread of energy downwards into the heart of the mountain, Steve beside him. They race through a network of tunnels carved into the mountainside, lit by burning torches and oil lamps. There are symbols carved on the walls that make Bucky falter.

“Bindings, Stevie. Keep anything from getting out.”

Steve stares at the markings, tries not to think of Bucky laid out on a table in a cell with metal around his throat.

“How come they don’t work on you, Buck?” He asks. Bucky doesn’t answer, keeps moving forward, further into the mountain.

The floor drops away ahead of them. A pit. A pit under the mountain that stretches out into the darkness. It is filled with Demons. Bucky stumbles and collapses to the ground with a soft, low sound. A sound Steve never wants to hear again, it rattle through his ribcage, horror and hurt and fear. There are thousands of them. *Thousands*. Stuhac. Poroniec. Kobold. The flare of Ifrits. The yelping of Drekavac. Steve rests his hand on Bucky’s shoulder.

“Shhh, Buck. Shh”.

Bukavac can’t move, can’t do anything but choke on the stifling air. Thousands of them, crushed together in the darkness. They are screaming. Clawing at each other, trying to escape. Steve grabs Bucky’s arms, tries to pull him up but he can’t move. They are screaming.

“Bucky, come on. We gotta move”. Steve pulls at him. Bukavac shakes his head, can’t tell if he’s laughing or screaming. The walls press down on him. He twists like a rat in a trap, would gnaw his own limbs off to get away. He kicks at the dirt floor and silver glyphs catch the torchlight. Steve drops to his knees, sweeping his hands through the dry dust. There are silver discs buried in the earth, carved with symbols.

“Bindings, Bucky gasps. “Everywhere. In the earth, on the walls. I can’t move.” He stops, gasps for breath. “I can’t move”.

Steve grips his shoulders, tries to get him to focus.

“Buck, it’s okay. C’mon, look at me”.

Can’t think. Can’t breathe. Can’t move. Can’t Can’t Can’t. They are screaming. Tearing into each other. Panic and rage and so much hate.

“Shh, Bucky. C’mon.” Steve has arms around him and fingers tangled in his hair. “It’s gonna be okay. Shh”.

Bucky shivers and gasps as Steve whispers to him, tells him to breathe. He presses his face into Steve’s shoulder and knows that there’s no way out of this, not for him. But he can go down swingin’. Fuck. He’ll miss the little punk. Fuck.

“Exorcism,” he mutters into Steve’s jacket. He should move his head, pull away. But he doesn’t want to. He doesn’t want to go.

“Exorcism. Cast them out of this realm and back into the Gloaming”. He presses his face to Steve’s neck, breathing in the scent of him. “The space inbetween. Probably kill half of ‘em’. He shudders. “Still better than this”.

“Okay. How do we do it?”

Bukavac pulls back. Oh that aches. Gets slowly to his feet.

“An incantation. You’ll have to do it. M’not strong enough. It’ll burn right through me”. He holds his hands out to Steve and pulls him to his feet. Tries to keep from shaking. Doesn’t let go.

“I say the spell, and it sends them away. All of them?”

Bucky smiles at him, sweet and sad and terrible.

“All of us, Stevie. Every Demon here. Them down there,” he keeps his eyes on Steve’s. Keeps their hands clasped. “An’ me”.

Steve shakes his head, tries to pull out of Bucky’s grasp.

“No. No, there’s gotta be something else”.

Bucky pulls him closer. Squeezes his fingers.

“We destroy the bindings…”

“That’d take days, Stevie. We got no time left”.

Steve shakes his head and Bucky pulls him into a fierce embrace.

“It’s okay, kid. You’ll be okay”. Holds tighter than he should. “You’ll get out of this, an’ you’n Carter will go get hitched. Name your kids after me”. Steve shakes his head.

“No, Bucky. No. I ain’t leaving. Not without you”. He clings to Bucky.

“You don’t got a choice, kid”. Bucky says gently.

“You gotta come back, Buck. You said you’d stick by me”.

Alright, kid”. Bucky says softly, “You call me. When this is all over you call me and I’ll come”. He gently untangles their bodies and holds Steve at arms length. “You say my name and I’ll be there”.

Steve nods, fingers digging into Bucky’s arms.

“What do I say?”

Bucky places his left hand on Steve’s throat, his right hand on the small of his back. Presses against him and leans into him, mouth to his ear.

“Repeat after me. It’ll burn, some. But I’ll take care of you”.

Steve nods, clears his throat, and Bukavac begins to speak.

The words are soft, rasping and make his throat burn. Bucky presses his cold fingers to his throat and he breathes easier. Bucky’s voice catches and Steve feels something crumple at his cheek, feather light. Flakes of ash brush his lips. He can smell burning. Bucky takes a breath, presses a forearm to his neck, continues to speak. Hot tears pour down Steve’s cheeks, running trails through the ash smeared on his skin. Bucky pauses, takes a breath, presses the crook of his arm to Steve’s throat. Wraps tighter around him. Brushes his mouth to Steve’s cheek. The smoke is brackish and bitter but he still thinks of cheap coffee and Lucky Strikes. Bucky utters a last syllable and falls silent. Presses his face to Steve’s shoulder. Steve’s mouth is suddenly filled with the things that he will not have the chance to say. They clatter behind his teeth. Promise me, he wants to say. She was never, he wants to say. I should have, he wants to say. He swallows them down and they burn like coals. Like skin. He opens his mouth and speaks.

The earth shakes, a deep resonance that stirs up a dust storm at his feet. A cacophony of sound rises up, a low moan thundering deep under the earth. Great forces grind and push and bend. The moaning becomes a roar, and the oil lamps stutter and burn out. And then there is silence. And then there is nothing.

Steve Rogers stands alone in the darkness. There is no head resting on his shoulder. There is no weight resting against his heart. He is alone. The sensation overwhelms him and he is cast adrift, a little boat in an ocean of darkness. No anchor to hold him to the earth. No star to sail by.

He hears voices. Sees flickering lights in the dark. Dugan. Jones. Calling out to him. He follows the
sound to its source and they grab him, dragging him through the tunnels. Earthquake, they say. The mountain’s collapsing, they say. Where’s Barnes, they ask.
Gone, he chokes. He’s gone.
They reach the surface. The Hydra base is in ruins. They tumble through the wreckage. He see’s Peggy in the distance, makes his way over to her. She starts to ask after Barnes, but at the look on his face fall silent. Steve aches. His throat burns and there is a hollow space in him where everything that mattered used to be curled up against his heart.

“Where’s Schmidt?”
Schmidt is headed for the Valkyrie. Steve orders the rest of the unit to clear out and sets off in pursuit. He hears the whine of the engines and pushes himself harder. The bomber is moving erratically and he manages to throw himself on board. He stalks through the hold and makes his way up to the bridge, losing his footing as the craft lurches into the air. The bomber banks and turns and he scrambles to his feet.
Schmidt is hunched over the console, smashing his fist into the controls. Steve shouts to him and he turns slowly.
Where there had been a red skull is now a mass of cartilage and bone, and nothing beyond the right eye socket. His right arm and shoulder had withered away and he lurches clumsily. Halfway between man and Demon, and the Demon half has been cast out into the space between.

“It’s over, Schmidt.” he snarls. The mess of a creature lunges at him.
They tumble to the ground. It scrabbles at his throat, smearing ash and blood across his jacket. It screeches at him and he places his hands on what is left of its face, thinks of Lucky Strikes and chill fingers pressed to his throat. Schmidt glows like coal embers, like a cigarette, and crumbles into ashes.

Steve struggles to his feet, makes his way over to the controls. See’s the sparking, crumpled mess of the console.

“Bucky,” he says warily. “Bucky, you there?”
Silence, but for the hum of engines. He checks the controls, tries to override the system. Fails.
“Bukavac,” he whispers. “Buck?”
He feels numb. Hollow where there had been weight and warmth. He makes his way over to the ashes that had once been Johann Schmidt. Finds a black and red disc buried amongst them. He picks it up. A circle of metal and enamel, nothing more, whatever power it had held has gone. He lets it fall from his fingers.
An exorcism. A banishing strong enough to wipe out half the Demons under the alps, strong enough to wipe out the Demon half of Johann Schmidt. What chance did some obscure little river Demon have?
He is on the bridge of a Hydra bomber. What remains of the controls tell him that it’s aimed at New York. He thinks of the Cyclone at Coney Island. Throwing up while Bucky laughed and handed him a bottle of soda.
He finds the comms, manages to get it working. He hears Peggy’s voice. He describes the situation. He feels empty, like he is two feet to the left of his body, dissociated and so damn cold.

“It’s moving too fast. I gotta put her in the water”.
He can hear Peggy speaking, though he can’t recall what she says.
“I’m in the middle of nowhere. If I wait any longer a lot of people will die”.
He doesn’t care about the people. Not anymore. All that he cares for has gone from this place. He sits at the controls, takes the steering column and pushes forward, pushes down to the sea.

All rivers lead to the sea, don’t they? And he isn’t a Demon. But he is, a little bit. So maybe his bones will call out to his Bucky. Maybe there is enough Demon in him to reach the spaces in between and find him there.
If he. If he is there. If he cradles Steve’s face in his hands. If there is smoke on his lips, he won’t turn away.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry guys...

It's not over. This is the first part of a trilogy (I'm halfway through part two). So give me a week and we'll be back. Assuming you haven't all summoned something benthic and squishy to pull my insides outside and wear me like a cravat.

Works inspired by this one: [Samhain by Lasgalendil](#)

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