

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/7489365) at <http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/7489365>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Captain America (Movies) , The Avengers (Marvel Movies)
Relationship:	James "Bucky" Barnes/Steve Rogers
Character:	James "Bucky" Barnes , Sam Wilson (Marvel) , Sharon Carter (Marvel) , Natasha Romanov , Original Characters , Steve Rogers , Tony Stark , Rebecca Barnes Proctor
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Angst and Feels , Angst with a Happy Ending , Depression , Recovery
Series:	Part 2 of Ghost Stories
Stats:	Published: 2016-07-16 Words: 9722

My Name Is ...

by [LadyKarai](#)

Summary

A ghost can haunt more than a house. A ghost can also haunt a heart.

Companion piece to "Haunted". The story of James "Jamie" Barnes Proctor.

Notes

This story will make little sense if you haven't read "[Haunted](#)". Please read that one first. And bring tissues. For both of that story and this one. You have been warned.

When James was five years old, his grandmother picked him up, put him in her lap, and told him all about James Buchanan "Bucky" Barnes. What a great big brother he had been, kind and warm during a time when the world was cruel and cold. How he had gone to war, fought for freedom, and died a hero, saving other men's lives. And how he, James, had been given his name by his mother and father as a way to honor him.

James listened with his mouth open, eyes wide, and remembered every word.

The next school day, he marched into kindergarten and informed his teacher and all his friends

that he didn't want to be called "Jimmy" anymore. His name was "Bucky", and he was going to grow up to be a hero just like his Grandma's big brother.

His mother thought it was adorable and told all her friends. His father smiled at him and told him he could be whatever he wanted. His brother Nick said he was stupid, but Bucky knew it was only because Nick was jealous that he hadn't been named after a hero, too. Grandma hugged him and told him she loved him with tears in her eyes.

All through elementary school, Bucky told anyone who asked that he was going to grow up to be a hero. Any school project that he could make about his great-uncle, he did. The kids in his class grew sick of hearing about Sergeant Barnes of the 107th, but he didn't care. He always got good marks since he was so passionate about the subject and could get all the information and pictures he needed from his grandmother. He dressed as a WWII officer for five Halloweens straight. For Christmas, while Nick alternated between spacemen, cowboys, and army men, Bucky always asked for period appropriate toy soldiers, weapons, and books. The neighbors started calling him "Little Sarge", and the older man next door would occasionally salute him until Bucky learned NCOs shouldn't be saluted and asked him to stop.

Every time he visited his grandmother, he asked for more stories. She told him of a boy with a happy smile and a bright laugh. Of a young man coming home with bloody knuckles and a blooming shiner because "I couldn't just let them *talk* like that, Becks. You understand, right?"

Of long, hard days working themselves to exhaustion, barely managing to scrape together enough food for a mouthful each, but "It'll be okay, cuz I'll take care of ya. I'll always take care of ya."

She showed him letters to her, written from basic training and from the front lines. He nearly died of happiness at being able to see his hero's handwriting, read about his experiences in his own words.

It was a magical, perfect time in his life, and Bucky didn't think any kid in the history of the world had ever been as lucky as he was.

xXx

When Bucky first saw the house, he wanted to go inside, but his grandmother wouldn't let him. It would be rude, she said, to waltz up to the front door and demand entry. Bucky didn't think it would be considering their family had once owned it, considering Bucky Barnes had once owned it. But Grandma insisted, so he contented himself with looking through the fence slats as they walked by. A woman knelt near the front of the house, planting flowers, and he could hear children playing in the backyard. They sounded like they were his age.

He frowned but kept on walking, holding onto Grandma's hand tightly. Internally, he vowed that he'd come back some day and go inside, rude or not. He just wouldn't tell his grandmother.

xXx

When Bucky entered middle school, the snickering started.

"Oh my God, your name is *Bucky*? That sounds like a *dog's* name!"

And

"Geez, are you *still* calling yourself that? You need to grow up, dude."

And

"You should probably change your name, man. The girls all think it's stupid, and we're not kids anymore, you know?"

The last week in September, he walked into each class and politely told the teacher that he had changed his mind and would like to be called James, thank you. Sure, his teachers all said. Not a problem. One even asked if he would like to be James, Jim, Jimmy, or something else.

“Whatever’s fine,” he answered with a smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “I don’t really care.”

That night, he lay in bed, staring at the ceiling, and thought that Bucky Barnes wouldn’t have given in. Bucky Barnes would have laughed and shrugged it off and kept going, or he would have grit his teeth and thrown up his fists and fought. He wouldn’t have hidden himself just because people disapproved. Because Bucky Barnes was a hero.

But he wasn’t a hero. He was James Barnes Proctor, and he was a coward.

That night, and for many nights after, he cried himself to sleep.

He told his family he had outgrown the nickname. It took them a few months, but eventually they had all adjusted and called him James. Even his grandmother.

When his mother asked him what he wanted for Christmas, he replied that that new *Star Wars* game sounded fun. Maybe that and a new pair of cleats. The guys had been trying to get him to play baseball with them after all.

xXx

When James realized that the reason he had never been interested in having a girlfriend wasn’t because he hadn’t met “the right one” but was because of something else entirely, he didn’t tell anyone. He simply added it to his private list of failings and kept on going.

xXx

When James graduated from high school, he told his parents that he wanted to take a year off to ground himself and make sure he knew what he wanted to do with his life before heading to college. They supported his wishes provided he get himself a job or join a volunteer group or do something with his time other than sit around playing on the internet all day. He had been planning on doing that anyway, so he agreed to their terms without complaint.

He was in the middle of an interview when the call came, and he waited until he got to his car to check his messages, so he was the last in the family to know. The last in the family to get to the hospital. Nick met him in the lobby and led him straight to where the rest of the family were waiting. His mother and his aunt hugged him and cried, and his Uncle George explained what had happened. His grandmother had collapsed. They suspected a stroke. The last they knew she was still alive, but they were waiting for an update. It wasn’t much more than what his father’s message on his phone had been, but James nodded and thanked his uncle before taking a seat in a hard, plastic chair along the wall.

He felt ridiculously out of place with his neatly-pressed suit and his hair done just so, especially next to his younger cousins in their sparkly T-shirts and cut-off jean shorts. But no one said a thing, so he swallowed his embarrassment along with his fear and waited, holding his youngest cousin against his side to comfort her.

Eventually, the doctor came out with the news: Mrs. Proctor had indeed suffered a stroke, but she would live. She was currently recovering in a private room, and the family could visit but only a few at a time. She was tired, and the doctor didn’t know how many visitors she would be able to see before becoming too exhausted. Naturally, her sons went first, their wives staying behind to improve the chances that she would still have enough strength to see the grandchildren. James

relinquished his seat to his aunt and went to stand by his mother, holding her hand and continuing to wait.

When his father returned, he motioned for James and Nick but warned them both that their grandmother did not look well. She was very pale, he said, and not completely lucid. She had recognized both of her sons, but talked to them as if they were teenagers, not grown men with children of their own. The doctor had told him that it was a side-effect of the stroke and hopefully would not be permanent, but he wanted them both to be prepared for her not to recognize them.

James nodded, as did his brother, and the two followed their father down the hall to their grandmother's private recovery room.

When James stepped inside and saw his grandmother, his heart ached. She looked so old and so very frail, lying on that bed with her white hair splayed out on the pillow and her pale hands folded neatly over her stomach. He suddenly realized just how much he loved this woman, how much she had given him. Every afternoon he had spent on her lap, listening to her stories, came back to him in a rush. Every evening at her kitchen table, looking at letters and pictures in wonder and awe. How, every time he had announced he would be a hero, too, she had smiled at him and told him that of course he would. And how, when he had stopped announcing it, she had continued to smile at him, loving him just the same. Tears began to fill his eyes.

And then his grandmother turned her head to look at who had entered, and her eyes went wide.

"Bucky?" she breathed.

Behind him, his father choked, but James shook the name off and began to cross the room to her.

She was remembering him as a child, that was all. Before he turned coward and fled from the only dream he had ever had. It hurt, but he smiled at her, determined that she wouldn't see his pain.

"Bucky?" she said again as he got close enough to take the hand that was reaching for him. He took a breath to say hello to her, but she interrupted him and with her words, the world simply stopped.

"It *is* you. Oh God, Buck. They told me you were dead!"

James froze, his mind stalled. On the other side of the bed, Nick stared at him, open-mouthed. In the doorway, their father was openly weeping.

"I got a telegram. It said you were shot. Bucky, Bucky, it said you were dead!"

Her voice was anguished, her eyes streaming tears, and in that moment, looking at his grandmother whom he loved so much, James made a decision. He sat down in the chair next to the bed, cradled her hand against his chest with one hand, and with the other, softly stroked her forehead. He smiled.

"I'm here now, Becks. It's okay. I gotcha. Everything's okay."

Nick backed away, his hand fisted in his mouth, his cheeks wet with tears.

"Oh, Bucky. Oh my God. I can't believe it."

"Shhh, rest now. Geez, Becks, I can't go away without you gettin' hurt, can I? Just rest now. I'll take care of ya. I always take care of ya, don't I?"

The words, the accent, they all came easy to him. Too easy. This man, his namesake, was in his bones. Had been his entire life.

“Yeah, you do. I know you do.” Her hands suddenly scrambled to grab him, and he took them in both of his before she could hurt herself. “Bucky, oh Bucky!” she said, sounding desperate again. “Stevie. Poor Stevie! He ... he had a heart attack ... and ...”

“I know,” he shushed her gently. “I know, Becks. They told me.” He knew the story of Steve Rogers almost as well as he knew the story of Bucky Barnes. Their lives had been intertwined practically since birth.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

“Shhhh, Becca. I know. Just rest now. Let me take care of you. Everything else can wait.”

She nodded, relaxing back into the bed, her eyes still wet and her lips trembling.

Time passed. The other grandchildren came in to give her hugs and kisses, and while she smiled and thanked them all, she didn’t really recognize any of them. And she never let go of James’s hand. It wasn’t until she had fallen asleep that he was able to extract his fingers from her tight grip.

As he left, he heard his oldest cousin ask why Grandma had thought James was Great-Uncle Bucky. His aunt’s reply passed through him, not really registering in his dazed mind.

“James looks a lot like Grandma Proctor’s brother. Not exactly, of course, but more than any of the rest of us. And in that suit and with his hair slicked back like that, he looks even *more* like Uncle Bucky. So I suppose that’s why.”

His father had stopped crying by then, but could do little more than nod at him as he moved toward the exit. His mother caught him to give him a hug before he left and said they’d keep him updated on her condition. He hugged her back and thanked her. A few minutes later, he found himself sliding into the driver’s seat of his car without any real knowledge of how he had gotten there.

He knew he should go home and rest. He had another interview the next day. But suddenly, the thought of getting a regular job made him sick to his stomach. He didn’t need time to figure himself out and find his place in the world. He knew exactly where his place was. He had always known. He had just been too afraid of what other people thought to accept it.

When he pulled out of the hospital parking lot, he didn’t go home.

The guy at the recruitment office raised an eyebrow at the suit, but James didn’t give a shit. Not anymore.

xXx

When James arrived at Basic Combat Training, he felt, for the first time since he had been in elementary school, like he had found home.

xXx

When James finished BCT and had a week left before his first tour, he went back to the old Barnes house. It looked exactly the same. He even saw the same woman, older now, through one of the front windows. In spite of what his child self had wanted, he didn’t go up to the front door and knock. Grandma had been right; it would have been rude. But he could stand on the sidewalk and look and think and feel. And so he did, for a long time.

As he turned to walk away, he thought he saw something white move in a room on the second floor, but when he looked again, there was nothing there.

xXx

When James shipped out to Afghanistan, he couldn't have been happier. Yes, it was hard and it was lonely and it was scary as hell sometimes, but it was where he belonged. It didn't matter that he wasn't trudging through the forests and trenches of 1940's Europe. He was a soldier, and a good one. Promoted to Private First Class in under a year, on the fast track to Corporal if the whispers were to be believed. He had a knack for hand-to-hand combat and long-range shooting with rifles.

A family talent, he told anyone who commented, although he never went into more detail than that.

He was respectful and honest and hard-working and kind. His fellow soldiers liked him, and his officers approved of him. Private Proctor was born to play in the sand, they would say and laugh. He would grin in response and laugh right along with them, but he knew that wasn't entirely true. He hadn't been born to play in the sand; he had been born to be a *hero*.

Everyone still called him James, or Private or just Proctor. He didn't correct them. He hadn't earned the right to be called anything else. Not yet.

xXx

When James got the phone call, he had just been promoted to Corporal a week prior. He was still buzzing slightly from the happiness and pride. As soon as he had been notified, he had called his parents and they had promised to send him and his unit a huge care package full of goodies, so he thought perhaps the call was a follow-up to that.

It wasn't.

When he returned to the tents, his feet dragging and his face blank, one of the men in his unit ran up to him and took him by the arm, asking if he was okay and what was wrong. James allowed himself to be led back to a group of his friends, all sitting around a table and playing cards. They all stopped their game and waited patiently for him to speak.

He told them that his grandmother had had another stroke. She hadn't survived.

Murmurs of sympathy rippled around the table. And then one asked if he had been very close to her.

James broke down.

It all came out. His childhood dreams, the pride of being named after a man who had died saving others, the realization that he would never be that brave, never be that good. And then his decision to try anyway, to be the man he wanted to be, to earn the right to have that name. His joy at starting to succeed, his relief at finally feeling like he had found himself, his excitement at imagining how proud she would be of him, how she would tell him that he reminded her of her hero brother. How he was now a hero to her, too.

But now she was gone. Before he could show her. Before he could prove himself to her. Before he could be a hero for her like he had always wanted to be.

He sobbed until he had nothing left, his head in his arms as they lay crossed on the table, the warmth of his friend's hand in the middle of his back. When he finally fell quiet, he waited for the

jeering to start. Waited for the scorn and the teasing and the disdain. It never came. Instead, the warmth on his back was joined by another on his shoulder and two on his arms. The men in his unit said nothing, but they offered up their silent support until James had collected himself enough to lift his head. Then they went back to their card game, their voices subdued but their conversation normal.

And when that round had finished, the dealer smiled at him and asked, “You want I should deal you in, Corporal?”

James swallowed, gave a watery smile, and nodded. “Yeah. Deal me in.”

xXx

When James finished his first tour, he signed up for another. When he finished that one, he signed up for a third. There were whispers in the air about another promotion, and while this one would take him to that long-desired rank of Sergeant, that wasn’t the reason he stayed.

He just didn’t want to be anywhere else.

xXx

When James met Sam Wilson, he was lying on his back in the sand, staring at the sky.

Dying.

“Hey, focus on me, man. I’m going to get you out of here, okay? Just focus on me.”

He slid his eyes to the left to find the pararescueman hovering over him, trying to stop the bleeding. He wanted to tell the man not to bother. He was fine like this. He was ready to die.

“I got you, all right. You’re going to be fine. We’re going to get you out of here and to a hospital, and you’re going to be fine.”

No. No. He was going to die. And that was okay. That was *right*. Because he had managed to save the rest of his unit. He had seen them get away. Before the explosion. And the pain.

He was a hero. And he was going to die. Just like Bucky Barnes in 1944.

He had everything he ever wanted. And it was perfect.

“Focus on me, man. Don’t pass out on me. What’s your name, hey? Can you tell me your name?”

Staff Sergeant James Barnes Proctor.

Bucky.

He took a breath and passed out.

xXx

When James woke up in the hospital, it took him several minutes to remember what had happened. Once he had, he started screaming and didn’t stop, even when half a dozen nurses came running in and pinned him down so he could be sedated.

Through the sound of his anguish ripping itself from his throat, he heard the nurses use words like “shock”, “trauma”, and “PTSD”. They didn’t understand. He wasn’t losing his mind because of

what he had endured or because of the stump that was all that was left of his left arm. He was screaming and thrashing like a demon in Hell for one reason and one reason only:

He was still alive.

xXx

When James was released from the hospital, Nick came to get him. In the years he had been away, his little brother had graduated college and moved to Philadelphia. Nick offered him the spare bedroom in his apartment so he wouldn't have to go home and live with his parents. So he could make a new start in a new city.

James didn't care where he went.

He didn't care about anything anymore.

Nick put up with him for two months. Then, one night he heard his brother on the phone, crying and saying that he didn't know what to do and couldn't take it anymore. The next day, his father showed up at the apartment and started packing up James's things, not that he had many. James could ruin his life if he wanted, his father grumbled, but he wasn't going to take Nick with him. His little brother just cried some more and apologized again and again. James didn't care.

None of them understood. He didn't have a life to ruin. He was supposed to be dead.

When his father ordered him into the car, he got in without resistance. It didn't matter. He was just a corpse, after all, being transported from one place to another.

His parents insisted that he get therapy and a job. He didn't even bother to try to do either. Two weeks later, when his father yelled at him that he needed to start contributing to the family income to pay for the food he ate, he stopped eating. His mother tried for three days to get him to eat; then she called an ambulance.

The doctors in the hospital talked to him with very stern expressions on their faces. He needed to pull himself together or they would have to recommend he be sent to a mental health facility. James didn't care where they sent him.

He was already dead.

xXx

When James met Sam Wilson the second time, he had needles in his arm and tubes stuck into various holes in his body.

"Whoa, man, that looks nasty!" he said as he crossed to where James lay motionless on the bed. "Of course," he added, "I hear it's the only way they can keep you from dehydrating or starving to death." He gave James an appraising look; James just stared dully back. "We were never properly introduced. Sam Wilson. You know, the guy who dragged your sorry ass out of hell. 'Course that doesn't seem to matter since you went and put yourself straight back in it."

James closed his eyes and turned his head away. If Wilson wanted to yell at him, he could. It didn't matter.

But the man didn't yell. Instead, he started wandering about the room, examining various things as he talked. "So you were my last mission. Been home for a bit now. Thought I'd use some of my experiences over there for good, so I'm in training to be a counselor. Figured I'd work for the VA. Help out people like me. People like you.

“That’s not why I’m here, though. I’m here because I know this guy. Smart guy. Inventor. He’s working on inventing a new prosthesis, one that’s state of the art and can move like a regular limb. Great flexibility, stuff like that. But it’s still in the experimental stages. I was talking to him the other day, and he asked me if I knew anyone who might be interested in being a beta tester for him. Some amputee who might want to take his new invention out for a test run. And I said, man, I know *just* the guy. So I called up some guys I know and tracked you down.

“And I found you here,” Wilson finished, stopping in the middle of the room and turning to him.

“Wasting away in a mental ward. What happened to you, Staff Sergeant? I talked to the men you saved, the men you served with. They all had nothing but the highest praise for you.

Dedicated, courageous, the best man they knew. And I talked to your family. They said you were happy until you came home and crashed. You can’t tell me this is all because you lost your arm. The Sergeant Proctor that those men knew wouldn’t have let something like that destroy him like this.”

James kept his eyes closed. Let Wilson’s words wash over him. A heart that didn’t beat couldn’t feel.

Very quietly, Wilson commented, “I would say this is survivor’s guilt, except that no one died.”

James stayed very still until Wilson left. Then he shook silently until he fell asleep, no longer able to cry.

Wilson came again the next day, and then again the next. He seemed to have made James his personal project. James told himself he didn’t care. And yet, as the days turned to weeks, he found himself wondering when the other man would show up and feeling sad -- just a little -- when he would leave. He never said a word; Wilson did all the talking. But it was still a nice break in the monotony of staring at the ceiling and waiting to die.

At the start of the third week, Wilson walked in with a handful of letters. “Hey, Sarge!” he called, grinning widely. “I stopped by your parents’ house yesterday. They said you’ve been getting lots of letters from guys in the army. Thought I’d bring them and read them to you.”

James blinked at him and rolled his head to the side to watch the other man pull up a chair and sit down. Wilson immediately started reading out the letters. Guys from his old units. One from an officer who was worried about him. Some of them had pictures.

“Oh hey!” Wilson smiled as he pulled a photograph out of an envelope. “This one is nice.” He turned it to show James a picture of a young man in fatigues, holding an infant and smiling like the sun. “From one of the guys you rescued,” Wilson told him, scanning the letter. “‘Without you, I never would have met my son.’ And they even named him after you. James Bucky Lewis. Now how about that, Sarge. Isn’t that wonderful?”

James inhaled sharply and instantly choked on the tube that had been shoved down his throat. He coughed violently, the pain tearing through him, his body’s automatic reactions making it worse.

Wilson sprang to his aid, and a few terrifying, excruciating moments later, the tube had been removed and James could cough without searing agony. The other man left the room briefly and returned with a small glass of water which James drank, the first liquid he had put in his mouth for months. He nearly threw it back up again, but he drank it very slowly and concentrated hard on keeping it down, telling himself that the last thing his burning throat needed was a wash of stomach acid.

“Are you okay?” Wilson asked him once the glass was empty and James had held himself very still for several minutes.

Carefully, James nodded. But then he opened his eyes, and his gaze fell upon the picture that Wilson had laid on the side table. The smiling face of the soldier and the little baby in his arms. The boy who had been named after him.

James. Bucky.

His chest heaved, and his eyes burned. Just as carefully, he shook his head no. Wilson didn't say anything. He simply leaned forward and gently wrapped James in his arms, mindful of the tubes and needles. James leaned against him and shook and shook.

His heart hadn't died. It had frozen. And now it was cracking, and the insides were raw and bloody and full of pain. Everything hurt. He wanted to scream but he had no voice. He wanted to cry but he had no tears. All he had was pain.

"I've got you, James. It's okay. It's all going to be okay."

Pain and Sam Wilson.

xXx

When James met Sharon Carter, he was still plugged full of needles and tubes. The thawing of his heart hadn't magically given him a desire to live. All it had done was fill his days with pain instead of apathy. He still saw no reason to eat or try to prolong his life in any way. As far as his caregivers were concerned, he hadn't made any progress.

Sam, however, seemed to think differently. And when he walked in one day with a beautiful blonde woman on his heels, James found out why.

"Hey there, Sarge. Let me introduce you to Dr. Sharon Carter. Sharon, this is Staff Sergeant James Proctor."

"Nice to meet you, Sergeant," Dr. Carter said with a pretty smile.

James just blinked at her.

Wilson bustled around for the next few minutes, ushering Carter into the chair he usually used and carefully removing the tube from James's throat. He finally settled against the wall, his arms folded over his chest and his expression expectant.

"Sergeant," Carter said, tearing James's attention away from Wilson and his odd behavior, "have you ever heard of Margaret 'Peggy' Carter?"

A little thrill rippled through James's body, and something instinctual within him, too long battered down and buried, lifted its tired head. Yes, he knew of Peggy Carter. Bucky Barnes had never worked directly with her, but no one could study WWII without learning at least something about the amazing woman who had done so much behind the scenes. Very slowly, he nodded.

The doctor smiled at him and revealed, "She's my great aunt. When I was growing up, I admired her so much. I still do, of course, but back then I wanted to *be* her."

James's breath caught, and he was instantly grateful that Wilson had removed the tube. His eyes shot to the other man, but he was still leaning against the wall, oblivious or at least pretending to be.

"I made her tell me all the old stories," Carter was continuing, "or at least all the ones she was able to. I told everyone I was going to work in intelligence when I grew up, and I even started making

my friends call me Peggy. I wanted to be her so badly, and I thought she would be proud of me.

“But then,” she said, the smile on her face softening into something sadder, “she took me aside one day and told me I could never be her. ‘There is only one Peggy Carter,’ she said. ‘And that’s me.’ If I tried to be Peggy Carter, too, I would never succeed. At best I would end up a shadow of her, an actor playing a part, a ghost. I would never be real. And she couldn’t be proud of me if I ended up like that.

“I was devastated, of course. I cried and cried. She let me cry for a while, but then she wiped my eyes and kept talking. And she said that just because I couldn’t be Peggy Carter didn’t mean she couldn’t be proud of me. Because there was only one Sharon Carter, only one person in the world who could be her. And that lucky person was me. Sharon Carter could be real, Sharon Carter would never be a shadow, and Sharon Carter was someone she could be proud of.”

James stared at the woman beside him, stunned. She smiled at him gently, as if she knew exactly what was going on inside his mind. Based on her story, she probably did.

“I’m obviously not in intelligence,” she finished, indicating herself with one hand. “I’m a psychologist. A good one, if you believe my colleagues and my clients. And it’s because I chose to be me. I still admire my great-aunt, and I still love her. But I don’t measure my self worth against her anymore. I am myself. That’s all that matters.”

After a long silent minute, Dr. Carter rose and smiled down at him. “I would love to come see you again, James. And I would love to hear all about Sergeant Barnes of the 107th. But only once. After you tell me all about him, the only person I want to hear about is you. If you’d like to talk to me, let Sam know. He knows how to contact me.”

After she had left, James turned wide eyes to Sam who just shrugged. “I *may* have contacted that guy with the new kid to ask him what was up with the middle name. And he *may* have spilled the whole story of your great-uncle to me. And based on that, I *may* have sought out Sharon specifically because of her relation to Peggy Carter.” He paused and met James’s eyes before finishing, “What can I say? I don’t like giving up on people.”

Sam turned then and started to leave, so he didn’t see the way James struggled to sit up, the way he worked his mouth and willed his bruised and battered throat to function. But he heard the single croaked noise that fell from James’s lips, and it stopped him in his tracks.

“Sam.”

Slowly, Sam turned back, a hopeful smile on his face. “Yeah?”

James swallowed several times, trying to get any moisture into his throat. Sam waited patiently, his eyes bright.

“Thanks.”

Two words, and James was exhausted. He fell back against the bed as gently as he could manage and nearly missed his friend’s reply.

“You’re welcome, Sarge. You are very welcome.”

Smiling for the first time in nearly a year, James closed his eyes.

xXx

When James woke, he pressed the button beside his bed that called for the nurse and, when one

arrived, asked in his croaking, creaky voice if he could have something to eat.

xXx

When James was released from the mental health facility, he had a detailed diet plan from a nutritionist to help him get back to eating normally, a weekly appointment with a physical therapist to help him recover his physical strength after starving himself for half a year, and a weekly appointment with Dr. Carter. His father picked him up and drove him home where his mother and brother waited, Nick having come up from Philadelphia for the occasion.

There were a lot of tears and a lot of apologies. James apologized to his brother for giving him so much stress and guilt. He apologized to his parents for shutting them out and refusing to get help. His family apologized over and over for not being stronger, for not doing more, for somehow not being able to magically fix the dark snarl that James's mind had become. James didn't tell them their apologies weren't needed even though they weren't. He just held them and let himself be held and allowed his family to heal.

When he shut himself in his room, still unchanged even after all that time, he took a long look at himself in the mirror. He had lost so much weight, most of it muscle mass. His skin looked pale, his eyes haunted. His hair was long and stringy and terribly unkempt. He looked like a man who had gone through Hell and had left a piece of himself there.

"Who are you?" he asked his reflection in a half-whisper. "I don't know anything about you. I don't even know your name."

The stranger in the mirror gave him no answers, so after a few minutes of silence, he gave up and went to bed.

Dr. Carter said that it was perfectly fine to not know who he was anymore. Relearning his identity was part of the recovery process. It frustrated him because he thought he had already figured out his identity, but it turned out that had only been an illusion, a mirage he had left in the desert. There was a person buried underneath all the shadows and ghosts, Dr. Carter said, and it would take time for him to dig that person out and bring him into the light. And he could have all the time he needed, she said. There were no right answers, there was no pressure, and he never had to do any of it alone.

Sam helped get him a job at the VA. He didn't work many hours and it paid next to nothing, but it was *something*. Something to put on his résumé other than his military career. Something that gave him the familiarity of a routine and the immense satisfaction of a paycheck. Something that got him interacting with other people without feeling the pressure of their scrutiny. In a building full of vets, no one looked twice at his empty shirt sleeve.

The acceptance he found at the VA, combined with Dr. Carter's support, allowed him to start visiting the coffee shop across the street, with Sam at first and then, eventually, on his own. He started accompanying his mother grocery shopping and going on walks with his father.

Sometimes the stress of being around other people got to him and he would have to run home and hide, but his parents were patient with him and never made him feel guilty for his reactions. Every day, they told him that they loved him and were proud of him for continuing to fight.

Slowly, very slowly, James relearned what it was to be a part of the world.

xXx

When James came out to his family, they accepted it with only a bit of surprise. His mother made a bit of a fuss about grandchildren but eventually decided she would just put all the pressure on

Nick. When his brother heard that, Nick groaned loudly over the phone but commented that, luckily for their mother, his current girlfriend wanted *lots* of kids. James laughed and told him to keep that information to himself or their mother would immediately start planning a wedding.

Dr. Carter was very pleased. She told him she was proud of him for accepting a part of himself that he had been suppressing. She said it boded well for him identifying and accepting the rest of his identity. James agreed. He told her he thought he was finally starting to see the person who had been hidden in the shadows for so long, and so far, he liked what he saw.

At the end of their session, she muttered something about “to hell with being professional” and hugged him tightly. He hugged her right back.

xXx

When James met Natasha Romanov, he had just finished his shift and was having a coffee at the shop across the street. He always sat at a little two-person table in the back, back against the wall and eyes facing the store, even though he never really paid much attention to the other patrons.

The red-head who entered the store was hard to miss, though. She held herself like she was royalty, although not in a condescending way. In contrast, the man who entered behind her oozed entitlement, made clear by the way he kept trying to put his hands on the red-head in spite of her obvious disinterest.

It wasn't his business, though, and James had gone back to staring into his coffee cup when he suddenly heard the distinctive clacking of heels heading in his direction. A moment later, the red-head slid into the seat across from him, a fond smile on her face.

“I'm so sorry I'm late,” she said sweetly. “I had to finish that project before I left. You know, the one I told you about last week? And then getting here was such an ordeal.” Her eyes flicked to the slimeball that had followed her to the table.

“Oh come on,” he whined, although his self-assurance had clearly been knocked down a notch. “You can't tell me a gorgeous woman like you is dating a guy like him?”

James lifted an eyebrow at him. This guy was such a dick. Not even worth getting angry at for the clear insult. The woman across from him had twisted her lips into a vicious little smirk. Her eyes dared him to deny their relationship, dared him to protest that they had never met. She wasn't the slightest bit afraid of being rejected by him, and James found himself suddenly in awe of her.

Flicking his eyes lazily up at the asshole who was still hovering, he drawled, “What can I say? She's got a thing for a man in uniform. Especially decorated officers.”

“I just love a man with medals,” she purred, easily taking his lead. She smiled at him dreamily and let her fingers slide across the table to be closer to his. Not touching, though, he noticed with extreme relief. She was smart and respectful in addition to being beautiful. Oh, he liked her.

Slimeball muttered something that sounded vaguely like gratitude for his service, and in the next moment, the door of the coffee shop signaled his exit with a merry ding. The red-head watched him go, satisfaction on her face, before turning to James with a smile.

“Thank you. I appreciate what you did. Guys like that refuse to listen to ‘no’.” She screwed up her face in disgust as she continued, “They only back off if they think I belong to another guy already. And sometimes not even then.”

“That's ... that's awful,” James said, frowning. “I'm so sorry you have to put up with that.”

Her face cleared, although there was something sad in it now. “It’s called being a woman, I’m afraid.” She gestured to his cup and added, “If you like, I’ll buy you another one of those as a thank you.”

“No, that’s all right,” he replied, shaking his head. Then, he asked, “But isn’t what you just did dangerous? How did you know I wouldn’t be just as bad as he was?”

She laughed lightly. “Well, let’s see. You’re having coffee in a shop across from the Veterans’ Affairs building, and you’re wearing a US Army T-shirt with one empty sleeve. Chances are you’ve seen far too much to be a self-entitled, sexist asshole like that guy, and even if you are, you’ve had at least some respect drilled into you. I was willing to take the risk.” As she finished, she slid to her feet and smiled down at him. “Natasha,” she introduced herself, extending her hand for him to take. “And thank you again.”

“James,” he replied, taking her hand in his. “Any time.”

The second time Natasha slid into the seat across from his, he played up their fake relationship immediately, taking her hand in his and bringing it to his lips for a kiss. She followed his lead with ease, and they completely ignored the douche who had followed her this time, chatting about some made-up date with friends they had for the evening until the guy stomped off. Before she left, he allowed her to buy him a coffee and croissant as thanks.

The third time, James lifted his head, prepared to play the game again, but he saw no slimy asshole on her tail. Confused, he looked to her to find her smiling tenderly at him. “You don’t need to save me today,” she said. “I was just walking by and saw you here and thought that I’d like to come say hello and share a coffee with my friend James.”

He smiled at her, happy and bright, and said he would like that.

xXx

When James saw the SOLD sign in front of the old Barnes house, his heart fluttered wildly and his stomach churned. He hadn’t even known it was for sale. He couldn’t have afforded it, no chance in hell, but still. It had been for sale, and now it had sold.

Something flickered out of the corner of his eye, and he dashed away the beginnings of tears to look up at the second floor window. There was no one there.

xXx

When James approached Sam about that inventor guy he said he knew and asked if he was still looking for beta testers, Sam whooped so loudly that half the diner shushed him.

Tony Stark, it turned out, was a complete ass.

“Wilson, I told you to bring me a vet, not an Abercrombie and Fitch model.”

“Can’t he be both?”

James spent most of the initial interview in shock, partly from Stark’s brashness, partly from his own crippling nervousness. It was kind of nice to be called a model, though. It meant his nutritionist and his physical therapist were doing their jobs well.

“You don’t get it, do you, Flyboy? My inventions are like brides at a wedding. I will not tolerate any bridesmaid who gets more attention.”

“That’s ridiculous. I’d think you’d want your arm to go to someone attractive. Better press that way.”

In spite of spending nearly the entire interview tongue-tied, however, he was back in Stark’s office two weeks later, getting examined and measured and generally poked. He had to sign a mountain of forms and read a ridiculous amount of instructions, but somewhere during the process, he started to get excited for the results. Even Stark started to become more tolerable as the weeks passed.

But only a little. Overall, Stark was still really annoying.

xXx

When James turned down Natasha’s seventh attempt at setting him up with a “really nice girl, you’ll love her”, he felt compelled to tell her that one, he was gay and two, even if she found him a nice guy to go out with, he didn’t have any money to date anyone. His paycheck was more symbolic than anything else, and he still lived with his parents. When she encouraged him to get a better job, he argued that he had never gone to college and had no marketable skills.

“So go back to school,” she suggested as if it were as simple as that.

And apparently to Natasha, it was. She showed up at his house that night with her laptop and a head full of ideas. James spent the evening at the kitchen table, his head in his hand while his friend and his mother looked up websites and researched programs and made notes.

“Don’t I get a say in my own future?” he asked at one point.

“Of course you do,” Natasha had smiled at him. “You’re welcome to come over here and give your input.”

Eventually he gave in. He had known Natasha long enough by then to know that giving in was his smartest option.

xXx

When James stood in front of the mirror after the procedure, he could hardly believe what he saw. The man who looked back at him was still a bit on the thin side and a bit pale, but he had filled out a fair amount and obtained a nice toned look to his newfound muscles. His hair was still long, but it was well kept and he liked the way it brushed against his strong jawline. Most importantly, his eyes were bright, alert, and happy.

The man in front of him had a family who loved and supported him, friends who appreciated him and enjoyed his company. He had a future to look forward to with classes starting soon that would give him a business degree on the path to management, something Natasha said he would be a natural for given his leadership skills in the army. He had a past that he was fiercely proud of but which no longer held him back and kept him tied down. He had the expectation of a fine, fulfilling life.

He also had a truly beautiful metal left arm that whirled softly when he moved it.

“So?” Sam asked him, standing a pace or two behind him and gauging his reaction in the mirror. “What do you think?”

Carefully, he lifted his left hand and brushed aside a lock of hair that had fallen into his eyes. “I think,” he replied slowly, a smile blooming on his face. “I think my name is Jamie.”

xXx

When Jamie finished his first semester of college, his mother began dropping hints. Natasha had a spare room, she said. The poor girl hadn't had a roommate in over a year, she said. She probably wouldn't even want much rent, she said, just someone to help her keep the place clean and keep her company.

That's when Jamie realized that introducing the two women had been a major mistake.

xXx

When Jamie heard that his last surviving grandparent had moved into a retirement home, he made it part of his routine to visit her at least once a month if not more. He quickly found that some of the other residents, those with various forms of dementia, became agitated by his arm, so he started leaving it at the apartment.

He also found that he simply couldn't resist the pull of the old Barnes house which was only a few blocks away from the home.

He caught a few glimpses of the guy he assumed was the new owner. A large blond with huge shoulders who seemed to favor the front room on the first floor. When Jamie saw him there, he didn't linger. He didn't want the guy thinking Jamie was casing the house or anything.

When the blond wasn't in sight, however, Jamie would lean against the fence and gaze up at the house, thinking of Bucky Barnes and Rebecca Barnes Proctor and if either of them could see him now. They would be proud of him, he knew. Because he was proud of himself.

xXx

When Jamie served as best man for his little brother's wedding, he didn't cry. He didn't drop the rings either, which he had been paranoid about ever since the rehearsal when he had and they had spent five minutes searching in the carpet for them. He also didn't mess up the best man speech too badly although he stuttered a bit and the mic screeched with feedback when he first started.

All in all, it was a successful night. The bride was stunning, and his brother looked like he was floating with happiness. Natasha, as his date, had a lovely time, enjoying herself immensely by hinting to distant relatives that Jamie was planning on proposing to her but just hadn't gotten up the courage yet. He made a point of taking his two youngest cousins, both of whom had grown up to be incredible young women, out on the dance floor and showing them off. He also danced with his mother, holding her close when she could barely stop crying.

At a quieter point in the evening, he took a picture of Nick and his wife, dancing slowly on a mostly-deserted floor and sent it to Sam. *"Without you,"* he said, *"I wouldn't have seen this. I owe you so much. Thank you."*

"I didn't do anything," Sam replied. *"You don't owe me a thing."*

"Bullshit. You pulled me out of Hell. Twice."

"No. I pulled you out once. The second time, I just opened the door. You were the one who walked through it and kept on walking."

"Whatcha doing?" Natasha asked as she slipped into the seat next to him. The wine in her hands almost perfectly matched the color of her dress.

"Just thinking," he replied, putting his phone down on the table. He lifted his head and looked out

at the floor again, at his little brother so happy and in love. “Thinking about how lucky I am.”

“Hmm,” she hummed and settled into him, leaning against his side. “You’re a sap, Jamie.”

He slipped his arm around her, the left one, and rested his cheek against the top of her head. “I guess I am.”

xXx

When Jamie saw the giant blond man come barreling out his front door and down the path toward him, he thought he was going to have a heart attack. He wanted to run but found himself frozen in place, like a proverbial deer in headlights. Thankfully, he soon realized that the man wasn’t angry at him for loitering, but not so thankfully, he also realized at the same time just how amazingly handsome this stranger in Bucky Barnes’s old house actually was. That smile, in particular, filled Jamie with a warmth that he hadn’t felt in *years*.

And Jamie, being the smooth player that he was, stammered and stumbled and completely failed to look like anything but a first class idiot.

He assumed, considering the wonderful first impression he had made, that he would be summarily run off the property, so the invite to come inside floored him. So much so that he hadn’t really registered the other man’s name until he had already given his own, shaken hands, and walked through the gate on the way to the front door.

Steven Rogers.

It couldn’t be. There was just no way the man who had bought Bucky Barnes’s house had the same name as his best friend and brother in all but blood. It simply couldn’t be.

And yet ...

He turned to the other man to find him standing on the path to the door, gazing up at something on the second floor. Jamie found himself smiling a little at that. How many times had he thought he had seen something in that second floor room? It must be something with how the light reflected off of the window. Gently, he cleared his throat.

The blond man snapped his head down, meeting his eyes and smiling. In the next moment, he had bounded up the front steps and opened the door, leading Jamie inside. As he walked around the house, pointing out various rooms and explaining about the addition that had been put in in the seventies, Jamie tailed after him in a semi-daze. He could hardly believe he was finally inside this house, although he knew what he was seeing was nothing like what his great-uncle had seen all those years ago.

When they reached the second floor room, Jamie paused by the window, looking out at the street and that place by the fence where he had spent so much time. This room had been original, quite likely the original bedroom. Had Bucky stood here and looked out like this?

Without looking at his guide, he said quietly, “You said your name was Steve Rogers?”

The other man laughed a little, surprising Jamie into looking at him. “That’s right,” he answered, rubbing the back of his head with one large hand. “No relation to the Steve Rogers that used to be your great-uncle’s friend, though. Not even spelled the same. I spell my name with a ‘ph’. And the last name has a ‘d’ in it.”

“Oh.” Jamie altered the spelling in his head. Stephen Rodgers. “It’s still quite a coincidence.”

“I know, right?” Rodgers smiled at him, seeming embarrassed. “I had no idea when I bought the house. I only found out when ...” He trailed off, the tops of his cheeks turning a bit pink, and looked away. “Well, when I did some research about the house’s history.”

The color in those cheeks, that shy glance to the side, they were making Jamie’s stomach flutter and his fingers tingle. Rodgers was so ridiculously handsome and seemed so nice. And he was living in the house Jamie had watched from afar since he was in kindergarten. It was too good to be true.

“I think,” he said slowly, “that my Great Uncle Bucky would be happy to know there was a Steve Rodgers living in this house again.”

Rodgers turned even redder and shrugged one shoulder. “It’s just a name,” he protested. “It doesn’t mean anything.”

But Jamie knew that wasn’t true. Names meant *everything*.

Sergeant James Buchanan “Bucky” Barnes.

Staff Sergeant James “Jamie” Barnes Proctor.

My name is Bucky.

My name is James.

My name is Jamie.

My name is me.

“What’s your middle name?” he asked, his voice nearly a whisper now.

“Phillip.”

Jamie turned away from the window and held the other man in his gaze. “Stephen Phillip Rodgers, your name absolutely matters. I spent the first half of my life chasing a name that wasn’t mine, so I know. I don’t know you at all. I know nothing about you. But I know that James Barnes and Steve Rogers would both be pleased and honored to know that their house now belongs to you.”

Rodgers stared at him, the emotions washing over his face in waves. There was something else behind that reaction, something that Jamie didn’t know, but it didn’t matter in this moment. Right now, in this charged moment, he held those impossibly blue eyes and felt his heart opening up and reaching out in a way it never had before. And somehow he knew that Stephen Rodgers’s heart was doing exactly the same.

Barnes and Rogers. Bucky and Steve. Two names that would forever be intertwined.

“So,” Jamie said, breaking the moment. “You offered me coffee?”

Rodgers smiled at him. “So I did,” he replied. “This way.”

He turned and left the bedroom, and Jamie followed without looking back.

