

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Steve and the rest of the Howling Commandos return to base.

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As the Howling Commandos' plane comes in for a landing on the tarmac outside of the airbase, Peggy Carter is already striding towards it, lips drawn and eyes sharp. Her brunette locks are pushed back by the moving air, but she doesn't stop until she's at the back of the plane just as it's coming to a rest.

The ramp comes down, exposing the innards of the plane and the first of the Howling Commandos begin to rise from their seats, all of their faces some degree of somber to devastated. None more so than Steve Rogers himself though, who sits near the front of the plane with his head in his hands even now.

Peggy holds up a hand before the first of the special ops group can fully leave.

"Nobody leaves, please. Captain Rogers! I need you and your team to come with me, immediately."

There's a pause as everyone exchanges glances. Steve lifts his head, revealing blood shot eyes that stare at her for a moment. Peggy stands her ground though, lips pressed tightly together. She can't say anything more at the moment... all she can do is give Steve a meaningful look that makes it clear she wouldn't be doing this without a good reason.

Fortunately, while she very much doubts most of the Howling Commandos consider her to be 'one of them', both because she's not a man and because she's not been able to go on missions with them... she has built up enough social credit that they don't try and fight her. Anyone else and she's sure that they would have flipped them the bird and ignored them entirely... but Peggy is different. Thankfully.

Once everyone grabs their gear, Peggy leads them all off of the plane and across the tarmac, into the base. She glances back a few times to make sure they're all following and none are breaking off... the Howling Commandos are a solid group of soldiers, but they aren't exactly known for their discipline. They're firecrackers one and all, the kind who are fighting for a cause, not for their superior officers. The perfect set of men for Captain America to lead, really.

Regardless, they make their way into the bunker, passing by some people, moving through hallways. As they go, Steve finally musters the strength to speak.

"Peggy... what's going on?"

He sounds so... done. Shellshocked, probably. Losing his best friend would do that, though Peggy likes to think he'd bounce back given a little bit of time. However... that won't be necessary.

"You'll see in just a moment. But... don't worry. It's good news."

He falls silent at that, no doubt thinking to himself that there's no such thing as 'good news' at a time like this. Well, he's in for quite the surprise then.

They arrive at their destination a few moments later and Peggy holds the door open, gesturing for Steve and the rest of the Commandos to go inside. Of course, the Captain barely makes it in through the doorway before he stops dead in his tracks for a moment, his broad frame blocking the view.

"Wha- Bucky!"

Then, he's racing forward further into the room. The rest of the Howling Commandos furrow their brows and exchange looks of confusion and consternation before following after him, each of them letting out a shout of shock and joy, excited exclamations from every man leaving their lips.

Peggy can't help but smile a little, their happiness rather infectious as they crowd around the bed of one Sergeant James Buchanan Barnes. She slips into

the room last, barely able to see the Sergeant through all of the men surrounding his bed. He's missing an arm but other than that... he's doing remarkably well for what happened to him and is even conscious.

"Hey Stevie... guess you aren't gonna get rid of me that easily, eh?"

Steve Rogers doesn't respond with words. Instead, he wraps his arms around Bucky, holding him tight as he breaks down into sobs right then and there.

As the rest of the Howling Commandos avert their eyes, letting their Captain have his moment, Peggy moves to stand beside a man who is currently in the far back of the room... Colonel Chester Phillips. The Director of the Strategic Scientific Reserve stands with his arms crossed over his chest and his face set in stone as he watches the happy reunion. Once she's at his side, he glances her way.

"Did you make sure they came directly from the plane?"

"Yes sir."

"Good. If we're going to lie and say they recovered Sergeant Barnes after sending that first message, we need everyone on the same page. Especially considering who we're lying too."

Peggy grimaces. Yes, that was very fair. Because at this point... they were lying to just about everyone. Which was why she'd had to bring the Colonel in on things in the first place.

When Mike had shown her just how fast he really was, Peggy honestly hadn't known how to respond. But she did know that if Sergeant Barnes could be saved... then someone had to make the attempt. So she'd given their resident space alien her blessing and watched him zip off into the sky, disappearing faster than a bullet with how fast he left.

However... afterwards, it became a matter of what to do when he came back. If he had come back empty handed, that would have been one thing. But when he

arrived back with Sergeant Barnes in his arms before Steve and the rest of the Howling Commandos even made it back by plane... well, that became a situation. A situation that Peggy by herself could not handle, thus necessitating the inclusion of the Colonel in the whole situation.

Chester Phillips was a hard man. But he was also a good man. He understood more than most that sometimes, you had to look the other way to get shit done. More than that, sometimes you had to look the other way to protect your people.

And Mike was their people at this point. He was a member of the Strategic Scientific Reserve, for all that his origins were a pack of lies. He'd been helping them for months now, developing some truly fantastic gadgets that had helped the Howling Commandos on many of their missions. Hell, even Peggy had used some of the things he'd made... really, things he'd invented, she was pretty sure, because she'd never seen their like before.

And now... well, now the man was wearing a doctor's white lab coat and had been tending to Sergeant Barnes since he brought him back. Only now that Steve and the rest of the Howling Commandos are crowded around Bucky's bed does Mike pull away from them and make his way over to her and the Colonel.

The strong jawed, broad chested, all around chiseled alien specimen stops a couple feet away and gives the Colonel a measured look followed by a simple nod.

"Colonel. I imagine you have questions."

Colonel Phillips scoffs.

"Son, the less I know in this particular instance, the better. What you just did should be impossible... but I wasn't born yesterday. You haven't used whatever the hell this is before... and I doubt you're going to suddenly start using it to help us win this war starting tomorrow either, are you?"

Peggy thins out her lips at that. That was the big question, wasn't it? Mike had proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was... inhumanly fast. Not just fast,

but when he'd come back with Bucky in his arms... his clothes had been shredded with bullet holes. The type of damage that Peggy knew to associate with multiple machine guns being unloaded on a single target.

She hadn't asked what he'd run into when retrieving Sergeant Barnes. She'd just gotten him a new set of clothes before they brought all of this, including Barnes' miraculous recovery, to the Colonel. However, Peggy could read between the lines with the best of them. Mike was strong, fast, and bulletproof. And he could fly faster than the fastest plane they had.

He could end the war in a single day with just what he'd displayed today... but where would they be then? If he revealed himself in full to the world, there would be people who worshipped him like a Living God. And there would be people who feared him as the Devil. Everyone would want a piece of him... if they didn't just want him 'dealt with' instead.

It was a question that plagued Peggy's every thought, but here in the moment... Mike just shakes his head with a sad smile.

"I'm doing my part to help you already, Colonel. Because I owe Steve and Bucky a debt and because I believe your side of this war is more righteous than the side that imprisoned and experimented on me the moment I entered your world."

Colonel Phillips' jaw tightens at the mention of Mike's extraterrestrial origins. They'd already told him of course, but it's clear that the man is still wrapping his head around the concept of a 'space alien' that looks exactly like them even now.

"If I do more than what I've already done... where does it end? When I'm named God-Emperor of your planet? No... I'll leave the heroics to the likes of Captain Rogers."

There's a pregnant pause as Phillips mulls this over, before finally speaking.

“Is that why you’re still here then? Because you feel you owe a debt to some of my men? Now that you’ve rescued Barnes... are you going to be departing any time soon?”

Mike hesitates at that, glancing over at the hospital bed and the men surrounding it. Finally, he looks back at them, his eyes moving from Peggy to the Colonel and back again.

“... I suppose you’re owed a little more honesty, given you’re preparing to cover all of this up for my sake. When Hydra had me in their grasp, they took large quantities of my blood. I can’t stress this enough... but that blood cannot be allowed to remain in their hands.”

Colonel Phillips’ eyes grow flinty and sharp, his nostrils flaring on his weathered face.

“And why is that, son?”

Smiling thinly, Mike nods his head over towards Steve.

“You drew a lot of his blood after the experiment that created him, didn’t you? All so that your scientists could try to recreate Dr. Erskin’s work.”

“... Yes, that’s right.”

“Well... rest assured Colonel, the sort of thing that Hydra could perhaps create using my blood is magnitudes worse than Captain Rogers or Red Skull could ever hope to be. And while I have hope that your world’s technology is not significantly advanced enough yet to be able to create such a monster... it’s still enough to keep me up at night.”

Peggy’s eyes are wide and she expects her face is pale. She imagines a Hydra Soldier with Mike’s powers... or even worse, Red Skull himself even stronger than before. The idea terrifies her.

Seeming to sense how ill at ease he's put them, Mike nods with a grim, slim smile.

"My blood is my responsibility. Once we manage to track down Arnim Zola, I need to know what he did with it... so I can put a stop to whatever that is as soon as possible. Then and only then will I consider leaving this world behind. Until then... you're stuck with me, I'm afraid."

Looking over at the Colonel, Peggy tries to gauge how he's taking this. Truthfully, Chester Phillips looks like this conversation has aged him ten years in ten minutes. And yet... after a moment, he squares his shoulders and the tired look in his eyes falls away as he nods sharply.

"Far worse people to be stuck with son. Your help is appreciated... whatever form it takes."

Then, the man steps past them both and moves towards the bed, his voice sharp and commanding attention as he begins to speak.

"Alright people, listen up and listen closely. As far as any of you are concerned, you recovered Sergeant Barnes after you sent the initial message about his loss. You brought him back here on that very plane you just arrived in and if I hear any of you say it happened any other way, you're not going to have problems with just me, am I clear?"

As Colonel Phillips continues to explain the cover-up that they'd decided on, Peggy watches Mike carefully... and finds herself wondering if she's doing all she can for the war effort.

Admittedly, she's been hoping that Steve might make a move for months now... but with the war on and hunting down Hydra being so important, Peggy isn't surprised that she hasn't gotten so much as a kiss from the Captain. Sure, he'd certainly given that Private a kiss... but that was a one time thing as far as Peggy could tell, and more initiated by the woman than by Steve himself.

She definitely thought he had feelings for her... but Peggy doubted Steve would act on them until the war was over and they both survived... if they both survived.

That said, she was an Agent of the Strategic Scientific Reserve. And while she knew that she would never be asked to engage in... sexual subterfuge by her superiors, especially when her direct superior was Colonel Phillips, Peggy couldn't help but wonder if she was leaving one of her greatest assets on the table.

Mike... rather, Myk-Zod could be a true boon to the war effort if he was properly motivated to fight for them rather than staying back in all but the most extreme cases. And he'd made it clear that connections to people like Steve and Bucky had left him very motivated when it was their lives on the line.

What if she could leverage that? What if she could seduce the handsome, hunky alien man into caring enough to destroy Hydra and all of the Axis Powers in a single afternoon?

Wouldn't... wouldn't it be worth it? Even if she had to give up her pride to do so?

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!