

# Memories

Von ShuuShuu

A long sigh drained from his lips, when he silently put another notebook in the small shelf above his bed. His finger slid along the colorful backs, which already added up to about half a meter of length. It was his 'external brain', as Steve had titled it with a broad grin and a friendly slap on his back. Bucky couldn't share the laugh. This was nothing but a record of his miserable life. A proof of his failure and weakness. Yet, it was all he had left from his past. Just memories, sometimes vivid and sharp, sometimes nothing more than a faint image or feeling that he always failed to put into context. He wrote everything down, every single bit of memory that came back to him. Sometimes, when something came up to him he rushed through the house to write it down as fast as possible, in fear that the image would be gone if he was too slow. It was exhausting and downright scary.

Each evening he spent his time reading the already filled notebooks, as if trying to memorize all the things had written down so far. Some of the memories were becoming sharper the more he remembered them. But some, especially the ones that were only faint to begin with, would completely vanish. To him, remembering things over and over had become like a gamble: Win it back completely or see it vanish to nothing. It was like trying to catch flares of smoke without even knowing if they were real.

His oldest notebook was already on the brink of falling apart. It contained the very first memories that had come back shortly after he escaped from Hydra. Most of these memories had become much more vivid since he had written them down. It were rudimental, yet fundamental things: His parents, parts of his childhood, his hometown... Bucky drew the delicate notebook from the shelf and carefully opened it.

<Steve Rogers> was the first thing he had written down. A single name which had flashed through his mind. He had seen his face on a mission and he had immediately known that he was somehow connected to that man. He remembered how confused and scared he had been, more so than on any mission before. And this feeling of confusion had lead him to anger, deep, dark anger. Not against the faintly familiar man, but against himself for showing weakness, for showing even the slightest affection and mercy.

He let his fingertip trace the hurriedly written letters. Although back then he hadn't remembered who the man was, Steve still had been the first thing he remembered from his old life. He had felt a strong connection he couldn't really explain. It had led him to write the name down on clean, white paper, in a notebook he always kept close by his side. After all, his feeling had been right. From his lonely life hidden from Hydra

- and somehow from the whole world - he had watched Steve. Over time, more memories had come back to Bucky. Memories of a determined look through sky-blue eyes. Memories of his stubborn words and actions, his determination and will-power. A young boy, small and delicate – not suitable as a soldier, but more willing to fight than any other man Bucky had known. No one would have dared to just walk into the Hydra-quarters and rescue 300 captivated soldiers. Everyone would have thought it insane. But Steve had just done it without a sign of doubt.

Bucky carefully put back the notebook with another sigh. There it was again, this strange feeling, when he thought about the other. As if a fist was taking hold of his heart and squeezed it. It hurt, yet it made him feel lighter. Insane.

He was used to start reading in his notebooks, as soon as an unknown thought or feeling came up inside him. His 'external brain' was not only filled with scattered memories, but also countless connections now: Tiny notes explaining how one memory was tied or related to another. This way he had somehow started to organize the scattered images of his past.

But for this strange, heart-squeezing feeling none of his notes could give him an answer, no matter how often he tried to find one.

Sitting down on the edge of his bed he laid his head into his palms. What if, he asked himself for what must have been the thousandth time, what if his memories would never be complete again? He did remember the faces of his family and some people from the army he knew – but that didn't matter anyway since all of them were dead by now, except for Steve. He also remembered all skills he had once learned: Cycling, swimming, orienting himself in the wild... but it was hard for him to remember situations. He couldn't think of a single Christmas with his family or a party with friends, although he knew he had been there. He knew he should remember, but he couldn't. It was depressing, he felt lonely and unworthy, guilty for not remembering the happy times. It was like his memory consisted only of photographs: He remembered the faces, he remembered the places, but he never could remember the feelings connected to the situation in the picture. Never felt that emotional connection he knew he should have.

But that was not even the worst: Since Steve had taken him in some weeks ago, he also feared that some of all the precious-kept memories in his notebooks could be wrong. Who knew if he remembered correctly? Maybe he misjudged a dream as a memory? For a man in his shoes, what could possibly be more scary than that? Hydra had stripped him of all his memories, of all his life! But somehow he had managed to escape, to come back. And he had fought hard to win back even tiny parts of his past. But as scary as it was, at least it would explain the confusing memories that had come up lately. Memories that seemed like fantasies, just too real to be just that. Memories that – for the first time – washed over him with emotion which was sometimes too much. Which sometimes left him crying without knowing why. The memories were not sad or cruel or scary – not even always a clear image to remember. It was just a wave of sudden emotion he could not name.

The first time it had happened about two months ago. Already lying in bed he had been watching TV before falling asleep, a habit he had trained himself into, because it helped blocking out all thoughts and relax. He realized that he really enjoyed thriller and detective stories and that was what he watched that night. The detective was following his suspect through dark alleys and backwards, when it happened. Looking at the dirty brick walls, the floor scattered with waste, Bucky realized tears prickling down his face. He rubbed his eyes in bewilderment but found himself unable to stop.

Terrified, shaking, confused he had found himself curled up in the sofa, where he spent all night long crying until he fell asleep in the dawn completely exhausted.

Since that night, it had happened again every now and then. Never had he found an actual reason for his grief. It had just been there all of a sudden, taking his heart in a vice grip, so painful that he couldn't help crying. But recently it had changed. When it was nothing more than pure emotion before, he now remembered actual things, like the thought of Steve's lips as the most delicious thing he had ever tasted. And this was exactly where his doubts set in: This had to be part of a strange dream he once had! No way could that be an actual memory!

He startled and pushed himself to his feet as his lips began to tingle with the memory as they always did. Damn, it seemed that he had been a terribly vivid dreamer in his past. Since he escaped from Hydra, he rarely dreamt at all, except for a few nightmares now and then, which couldn't affect him as soon as he woke up and found himself safe. But these memories – or dreams - they were scarier than any nightmare he had faced. Because when he woke from a nightmare, he knew it wasn't real! But with these... He shook his head, trying to get these thoughts out of his head. It was enough that they wouldn't let him sleep at night. He couldn't allow them to affect his days too – especially not when Steve was around!

Heading for the kitchen to get himself something to drink, he thought about a long, nice bath to relax and calm himself down. But when he found Steve in the kitchen, obviously straight out from the shower, he froze for a moment. His eyes – trained for fixing targets fast and efficiently – immediately noticed the silvery droplets of water dripping from blonde hair, making their way down Steve's spine, where a towel brought their journey to a sudden end. Bucky swallowed and forced himself ahead.

"Hey Steve... you're already back?" he managed to bring out as unconcerned as possible. From the fridge he grabbed a bottle of juice and opened it. Steve snapped the bottle out of his hands right when he was about to take a sip. "Yes, just came in a few minutes ago though. Sorry I didn't tell you sooner, but I couldn't wait to get a shower!" Bucky watched as Steve took a glass from the cabinet and filled it with juice before handing it to him. "Correct as always... thanks..." he commented as he drowned half the glass in one sip.

While Steve started to pull out pots and pans from the cabinet, Bucky sat down at the small table and watched him in silence. It was maddening. Not only did he have the feeling that he knew how Steve's lips tasted, he also craved to feel his skin once again. To touch his shoulders, his chest.

Again. Why again? Was it his imagination? Dreams? Wishful thinking? ...reality?

He forced his gaze off of Steve's still damp skin. Was he going crazy? Had the stress after all lead him to insanity? But why now? Hydra had had his mind crushed more than a few times – and he had withstood them somehow. And now his own mind should be the thing to bring him down? That was impossible. But still: He had to do something about this situation! He glared so hard at the half-empty glass of juice that he jumped in surprise, when a plate of rice and meat was placed in front of him. He looked up into sky-blue eyes, which looked at him cheerfully. "Why so gloom, Bucky?" Steve handed him a fork and knife and Bucky took it with a small nod. "Just thinking...", he replied in a low voice. He didn't want to talk about it. Or maybe he did, but it just didn't seem like the right time to do so. Steve seemed to understand. He sat down across from Bucky and started eating. Well, in fact it was more like he started shoveling the food into the bottomless pit Steve called his stomach. Bucky wasn't even sure if he bothered to chew from time to time or if he just swallowed his food

like a snake. It was a side-effect of the serum, Steve had once told him. His organism went much faster, which resulted in an unbelievable high need for nutrition. It was quite obvious that Steve had skipped lunch, maybe even his breakfast. Now at half past seven in the evening he seemed like a starved animal. Bucky's lips merged into a faint smile. When Steve was eating out he always fought to keep it slow. Alone with Bucky he seemed not a bit concerned about manners. Not that he would care. In fact he found it strangely cute to see him like this.

Bucky started eating too, but as good as it tasted his appetite just wouldn't come. After a little more than half of the portion he put down knife and fork and pushed the plate in Steve's direction. "No time for lunch?" Bucky asked when Steve had emptied both plates. He nodded slowly in response, sitting back in his chair to take a deep breath. "I slept in..."

Bucky couldn't help himself and broke into a laugh. Just as he had thought! "You know Steve... you looked like a starved retriever just now." Steve joined his laughter. "Really? I thought it was something cool, like a tyrannosaurus or something...", he joked and made Bucky giggle even harder. "No, you're much too cute for that!", he said without thinking how that would sound. Steve busied himself putting the dishes into the sink. "Cute? I think nobody ever named me that after I got >these<!", he replied teasingly and flexed his arm and chest muscles, so that they made a short jump. Bucky stared for a moment, his laugh dying from one second to another. The fist around his heart squeezed a little firmer.

"Steve... I... there's something I'd like to ask you...", he began hesitatingly.

Steve blinked and tilted his head slightly. "Sure, Buck... anything!" Bucky clenched his fists and released them again after some seconds. "You... know about my notebooks, Steve. I... Lately I was thinking that..." He paused for a moment, wiping his sweaty hands on his jeans. "What if I... remember things wrong? What if I write down dreams I remember as actual memories?" His heart started beating faster. He was suddenly nervous and felt the strong urge to flee. But before he could stand up, a warm hand on his shoulder held him back.

"I'm glad to see you getting back new memories every day. Give it time, Bucky! I'm sure it will sort itself out eventually!"

Deep down he knew that Steve was right. Hydra had had years to destroy his memories – it was only natural to take an equally long time to restore. But still, it was hard to keep on going like this. To not know if he remembered things correctly. What if he acted strange or inappropriate because of it? He froze internally when he thought //Maybe I already DO act strange? Maybe Steve just doesn't tell me?// After all, that would be typical for Steve, who would never want him or anyone to feel weird. He was so caring, so understanding, that surely he wouldn't say anything.

"Bucky..."

Steve sounded concerned now. Worried even. "What's the matter, Buck? Did something happen?" Bucky jumped up from his chair, which fell over with a loud rattle and clatter. He shook off Steve's hand and brought some distance between them. "You don't understand Steve... I can't go on like that!" He rushed out and back to his room. Leaning against the closed door he took some slow, deep breaths. Gods, he acted like a fucking brat! But the thought that Steve wouldn't tell him, if he was acting strange out of pity was unbearable. How should he know if he acted normal? What even was normal for him? After all, he couldn't really remember how he used to act around people before.

He sat on his bed, head in his palms again, when the door opened a short while later.

He didn't have to look up to know it was Steve. Who else? "Please Steve, leave me alone!", he said in a low voice. A pleading for solitary, not because he wanted it, but because he felt he was nothing but a burden to Steve right now.

"I will... Just wanted to give you this."

Something cold touched his ear and Bucky lifted his hand automatically to take it. His fingers shortly touched Steve's hand when he took the cool paper cup and the feeling from before came flooding back. He looked into the cup to see what Steve brought him.

"Vanilla milkshake", he explained in a soft voice. "You used to like it very much, you know?" Steve sat down beside him and Bucky didn't object. "Back then you always sent me to grab some at the milkbar down oakstreet. I had to run back every time so it wouldn't completely melt. And all just because you said it was a drink for girls and you wouldn't want to be seen enjoying it." Steve smiled with the memory, which Bucky could not share. He couldn't even imagine that he ever gave a shit about something like being seen drinking a 'girl's drink'. But well, the times had been different back then.

The feel of the cold cup in his hands was strangely familiar, now that he felt it. He remembered hot summer evenings, when he and Steve had been sitting in the backyard of Bucky's home, sipping milkshakes and lemonade. He gazed at the paper cup, bathing in the memories that came with the feeling of condensating water that wet his palm. Slowly he lifted the cup, brought the straw to his lips and took a slow sip, letting the taste roll on his tongue for long moments before swallowing. Vanilla. Summer-heat. The sound of crickets. Soft lips. Steve's lips. They had tasted faintly of vanilla. In his dream at least. Or was it a dream? Now that the taste was flooding his mouth, the memory seemed much more real than a dream could possibly be.

Slowly, he looked up in Steve's sky-blue eyes. "...can I ask you something?"

Steve nodded, putting his big, warm hand on his shoulder again. "I already told you Buck: Anything you want to!"

Bucky hesitated for a second, unsure of how to start. "...and you will tell the truth? Even if the question is... stupid... you won't think any different of me?" Steve tilted his head, obviously not understanding completely. "Sure, Bucky. I would never lie to you or let anything get between us and you know that damn well!" - "Steve! Language!", he said with a short laugh, before getting serious again.

Sighing Bucky looked down to his cup of half-melted milkshake. With a low, unsure voice he then dared to ask: "Have we... ever been closer?" He swallowed a lump that formed in his throat. "I mean... like... closer than friends..?"

He didn't dare to look up when Steve's silence stretched for several moments. Then, when Bucky almost thought that he wouldn't ever get an answer, he heard Steve's voice again. He sounded different from before. Not the usual self-confidence broke through, but the unsure, shy boy he had once been. "Would you have wanted that?"

Bucky lifted his gaze and sat up in sudden anger. "How the hell would I know??" Was Steve making fun of him??

He took a slow breath and let his head sink again. "Sorry Steve. I didn't want to yell... It's just... I feel like I'm going crazy with all this memories that I can't seem to sort out. Sometimes I can't even tell if I remember correctly or if maybe the memory has only been a dream or something..."

Steve's hand on his shoulder gave a short, reassuring squeeze. "It's ok, Buck. I know this must be hard for you..."

To hell with his understanding! He knew nothing! Nothing about how it felt to forget

his own life – his own feelings. How it felt not knowing what was real.

"Steve... will you please answer my question?"

A short silence stretched between them, before Steve began talking again. "Tell me what you remember ..."

Bucky watched a droplet of water trickle over his shiny metal hand, when he took the cup into the other. "I... don't really remember anything. It's just the feeling that... ah, forget it Steve, this is stupid!" He wanted to stand up and leave, but Steve held him back. Their eyes met and suddenly Bucky just wanted to stay here and never flee again.

"Please, tell me!" Steve insisted and stood up. Slowly he pulled Bucky back, until he was standing right in front of the blonde.

"I... have this feeling that... I know how... how you feel..." Ok, this sounded strange. And slightly creepy. "I mean... as if I have touched your skin before. I feel like..." he bit his lip for a second. "...like I know how your skin feels. Your lips taste like... I just... Ok, listen Steve: Probably this is just a memory of a strange dream and I really should try to forge-"

His voice was muffled by Steve's lips, his words swallowed by a soft, warm kiss which lasted just long enough for Bucky's knees to go weak and shaky. With a bumping sound, which they both ignored completely, the milkshake landed on the carpet and dyed it in creamy white.

Steve's blue eyes gazed into Bucky's, his lips drawn into a lazy smile. "So..? DID you remember it right?"

Bucky wasn't able to form a single word. He just stared at Steve for some seconds, trying to think straight while his lips prickled in a way he knew he had felt before. "Steve, does that mean, we...?" he managed to ask after a short while. He had the feeling that he couldn't trust his shaky knees right now, so he put his hands on the blonde's shoulders to steady himself. He was painfully aware of Steve's body heat.

"Does that really matter Bucky? It's been almost 80 years after all..."

Again, he was unable to find words. Should it be so easy after all? Now that he thought about it, maybe Steve was right. Partially at least. Maybe he had forced himself too much into his past, trying to remember as much as possible, so that eventually he had forgotten that there was a 'here and now' which was equally important.

"I know you think that memories are what makes you yourself. But frankly I don't care who you were, Bucky. It's all about who you are now..."

"So... you still... no: you DO want this?" he hesitated, seeking for reassurance in Steve's eyes "...me?"

Suddenly he was feeling like a shy school boy who knew nothing about love. Well... maybe that wasn't the worst comparison considering all the years that had passed. This was new to him. Not unknown, even familiar in parts, but still exciting and new.

Steve didn't give him the response he wished for, but drew him even closer and Bucky decided that for now, another tender kiss was worth more than any answer.