

The best of us can find happiness

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The best of us can find happiness

by [Missy_dee811](#)

Summary

A conversation with the Ancient One convinces Steve. But in the past, he finds he's still restless.

Notes

Inspired by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's [Do Not Cheer, Men are Dying](#).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [Where Our Restless Monsters Sleep](#) by [Mizzy](#)

“Oh, Captain Rogers. What a pleasant surprise,” said the Ancient One.

She was tending to her garden. It was a lovely garden, Steve might add. It was well into spring and the flowers were blooming. It provided such a contrast to all the death and destruction, with the Battle of New York raging before them.

He hadn't meant to look, and her eyes wasted no time tracking his movements, as he spotted the wormhole.

It was still open. It was still early.

This day has lasted forever and not long enough. It felt... Removed. Separate from all the rest. It existed apart from his memory. He had the means to come back here, had the means to revisit this day. All the turns he took, and all the things left unsaid.

Perhaps, it had been easier then, when he didn't know, couldn't know how it would all work out.

“I take it this isn't your first stop,” said the Ancient One, standing before him.

Steve hadn't seen her move, and it would've startled him, if he hadn't grown accustomed to Natasha's swift movements. Once a dancer, always a dancer. It had been the first time he thought of her, and not just her death, but *her*. The flesh and blood woman who had jumped to her death to give them all a fighting chance.

He knew it would never stop hurting. The way it hurt to think of Bucky - the Bucky he had known - when the conductor warned of the closing doors.

Amazingly, while rummaging through the ruins, Sam had found Natasha's ballet shoes. When asked if he was sure they were Natasha's, Steve had nodded. Letting it slip, he had said, “For sale: ballet shoes. Never worn.”

“Don't make jokes,” said Sam. “It's disturbing.”

They had salvaged all they could. It was the only thing they found of all Natasha kept at the compound. It wasn't fair. She would never reach her 40th birthday.

“We should make a pact,” she had said.

They had spent most of the day traveling by camel. It was late and they were exhausted, but neither could sleep. They had both showered, since Sam preferred to take his time, and in the process, avoid their awkward conversations.

He had warned Steve, Natasha would have something to say. She had been silent most of day, which never boded well.

“What kind of pact?”

“Marry me,” she said, matter-of-fact.

“If we’re not married by 40, we should just tie the knot. Who else would be here with you? And don’t say Sam because he’s with us, and I asked.”

Steve laughed. He had considered saying Sam. Natasha swatted his arm. He faced her, still smiling.

This bed was hardly big enough for one of them, let alone all three. They took turns sleeping on the floor, or on a couch, if need be. But this was a small safe house, it had one room, with one bed, and so they would have to make do.

“I already asked Sam, and he turned me down,” said Natasha.

The shock must’ve been written on his face because Natasha added, “If you want to know, you’ll have to put on your big boy pants and ask yourself. I was already rejected once.”

He hadn’t given her an answer that night. On the contrary, it was many, many nights before he gave her an answer.

“You deserve someone who loves you,” he said.

She nodded. Her arms crossed, waiting for him to continue.

“Are you saying you don’t? After all this?”

“No, I’m not saying that. But you shouldn’t settle for me. Because this is easy,” he said.

“Love is easy,” said Natasha.

“First, love is for children, and now? Love is easy?”

“I don’t want to be alone,” she said, reaching for his hands.

It was a confession, he knew.

He shouldn’t have brought this up today. It had been arduous and awful. But Sam would be out of the shower soon, and he needed to get these thoughts out.

“You deserve someone who can give you all the things you need, and I don’t know that I can,” he said.

She was hanging onto every word.

“But I promise to love and honor you, if nothing else,” he said.

“So, we have a deal?” She was smiling, wide and bright.

How could he deny her this? It would be easy, she was right. They had spent so long together, they knew each other better than anyone else. There was a connection between them, a shared understanding. They could make each other happy, if given the chance.

He loved another, but she didn't need to know, and his time was long gone.

As if on cue, she said, "I know who you love, and I wouldn't be so sick as to deprive you of that. But I don't want you to be alone either. The promise goes both ways."

He nodded just as Sam walked out of the bathroom.

The Ancient One didn't want to hear any of this.

"No ma'am," he said, remembering his manners and remembering she had asked a question.

"I'm curious, which Stone did you return first?"

"Soul."

"I wouldn't have thought you'd make that trip first. The death of your friend still weighing on your soul, as it is," she said.

"I didn't want to delay the inevitable. Best to meet things head-on," said Steve.

After that, the Ancient One was silent for a long time. He had stood, at parade rest, watching her make her way around the roof. She wasn't staring, she wasn't even looking in his direction anymore, and yet, Steve felt as if her eyes were on him. It made him uneasy, but he still had unfinished business.

She hadn't asked for the Stone and he hadn't wanted to give it over and just leave. There was something... Something he wanted to confess, get off his chest, and he didn't know in whom to confide. His usual confidants, unreachable. He was compelled to wait for an invitation, an opening.

"You wish to speak," she said, sometime later.

Steve nodded. Moments later, she was standing before him.

"I can see into the future, Captain Rogers, but I cannot see past my future. However, we both know your future lies in the past. And that, I can see."

Steve nodded. Some of the tension dissipating.

"You've made up your mind and are seeking validation. You want to do this, but you also want someone to tell you this is the right thing to do. I cannot tell you what you need to hear, but I can offer guidance. There are many small, mostly insignificant decisions you'll be

forced to make on a day-to-day basis. That won't change. But you won't know how they will change things. Not until their consequences present themselves," she said.

Steve nodded, and stared at his shoes. There was still ice on them, from the trek up the mountain. Clint had explained how long the trek had taken and which path they'd followed. It had been oddly comforting to know he would be following in Natasha's footsteps.

On that fateful day, none of them had known what awaited Natasha and Clint. None of them had known, "See you in a minute," would be the last thing she ever said.

He was starting to understand what the Ancient One was trying to say. But he had made a promise, a promise he intended to keep. Though, in his heart, he knew Bucky and Sam would've dropped it all and joined him on this errand run, but he hadn't asked. Hadn't given them a chance to offer. Hadn't given them the chance to convince him otherwise.

The Ancient One was right. He was seeking validation.

He met her eyes. "I understand," he said.

"I knew you would," she said.

It was once again quiet. Steve let the silence fill the air around them, before he reached for the Time Stone.

"I think I've taken up enough of your time, and I should be on my way," he said.

"Oh, it's no time at all," she said.

She took the Stone from him. She pulled a pendant from underneath her garments. Tapping its front revealed a small chamber. Its green interior the color of the Stone.

Knowing the Stone was in good hands, he bid the Ancient One farewell.

"You are restless, Captain Rogers. I hope you rest wherever you set foot."

"I hope you are right," he said, before disappearing.

"Are you coming to bed? Steve?"

Peggy was standing at the top of the stairs in her billowy nightgown. She was ready for bed, and just waiting for him.

He set down his sketchbook and made his way to the foot of the stairs.

"It's going to be a late night. You can go to sleep, I won't keep you," he said.

She started walking down the stairs.

“Are you going to tell me what you keep sketching in that book of yours, or is this another one of your mysteries?”

It had been several years since he had arrived in this time. And in the interim, they had accomplished much. He was happy to be here, and he was grateful to have her by his side. But some days... Some days, that wasn't enough. It wasn't enough to quell the demons.

They were bloodthirsty and hungry. Steve kept denying them what they wanted. He'd close his eyes, and once again, he'd be on that battlefield. And once again, Tony would snap his fingers.

“The sketchbooks... It's nothing,” said Steve. It was a lie and he knew it.

He should be better than that. But he didn't want to explain how he drew the same awful things night after night hoping he'd be free of them once and for all.

He drew other things, of course. The world was quieter, and he took pleasure in the small things. He could allow himself that. He had promised to enjoy his life, and he was trying. Peggy would say he wasn't trying enough, but he wasn't perfect.

She followed him as he walked to the study. She stood by the door.

“Steve... What's going on?”

“I can't sleep,” he said.

“Oh, I know that.”

“And I keep... I keep...”

He sighed. “I had - I had promised I would rest. Of course, I'd never stop fighting, but I could rest. You're here, we're better prepared than we'd ever be. And yet, I can't sleep. Some days, it's difficult to eat. Nothing tastes right. It all smells wrong. I miss things that don't exist and people who aren't born. It's... None of this is fair to you. And I wonder if I made the right choice, coming here. Or, if I robbed you of a different life,” he said, gutted.

Peggy pulled him into a hug.

“You've robbed me of a few minutes of sleep, but little else. Steve, I chose this life, knowing what I know. I chose this life with you,” she said.

He pulled away from the hug and met her gaze.

“You are my family. You and the kids,” he said.

“I know, darling.”

“But I'm restless,” he said.

"I know that too," she said.

"So, what do I do?"

"Well, I know what we could do that would put you right to sleep, if that's what you need. Or, you can stay here and keep sketching whatever it is you're hiding from me. Or, we can keep talking. Those are your choices," said Peggy.

The Ancient One had warned him. Living in the present was easiest. He came home to Peggy and their children and all was well. The disasters of the future were decades away, and there was no guarantee he would even live that long.

He nodded and started to make his way out the room. She followed closely behind, turning off the light and shutting the door.

Tomorrow he would show her the sketches. Tomorrow he would confess. But tonight, he would take his wife to bed and ease her mind. Tonight, he would rest knowing she was safe and sound.

End Notes

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