

## A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/4471457) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4471457>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a> , <a href="#">Multi</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Captain America (Movies)</a> , <a href="#">Captain America - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Marvel Cinematic Universe</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">James "Bucky" Barnes/Peggy Carter</a> , <a href="#">James "Bucky" Barnes/Peggy Carter/Steve Rogers</a> , <a href="#">James "Bucky" Barnes/Steve Rogers</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">James "Bucky" Barnes</a> , <a href="#">Peggy Carter</a> , <a href="#">Steve Rogers</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Kink Negotiation</a> , <a href="#">Awesome Peggy Carter</a> , <a href="#">POV Peggy Carter</a> , <a href="#">Steve Rogers Is A Very Lucky Man</a> , <a href="#">POV Steve Rogers</a> , <a href="#">Everyone Is Poly Because Avengers</a> , <a href="#">Polyamory</a> , <a href="#">Polyamory Negotiations</a> , <a href="#">Polyamorous Character</a> , <a href="#">OT3</a> , <a href="#">Kissing</a> , <a href="#">Surprise Kissing</a> , <a href="#">Protective Bucky Barnes</a> , <a href="#">BAMF Peggy Carter</a> , <a href="#">Bisexual Steve Rogers</a> , <a href="#">Bisexual Bucky Barnes</a>
Language:	English
Collections:	<a href="#">FemmeRemix: A Female-Friendly Remix Challenge</a>
Stats:	Published: 2015-08-14 Completed: 2020-04-13 Words: 4,635 Chapters: 2/2

# A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement

by [Brenda](#)

## Summary

*"This will go ever so much easier on both of us if you treated me like I had eyes in my head and a brain," she said, interrupting him without regret. She wanted, more than anything, to wipe that fearful look off of his face. "I promise, I'm not trying to trap you or to blue-card you. In fact, I'd like us to come to some sort of arrangement where Steve is concerned."*

*She could see the visible effort it took for Barnes to relax his shoulders. He licked his lips, his voice cracking only slightly. "What...what'd you have in mind?"*

## Notes

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

- Inspired by [Four Art-Inspired Ficlets](#) by [Rubynye](#)

# Chapter 1

Peggy's mother – a formidable woman in her own right, who ruled her small fiefdom with a velvet fist and a steely look that could flay anyone who crossed her – also had a laundry list of pithy sayings and catch phrases for every occasion. Peggy had grown up hearing them all her life, and in the way of most children and rebellious youths, had managed to tune almost every single one of them out. But there was one saying she always took to heart and made her mantra as she'd grown older and had seen the way of the world, and how she'd be expected to navigate its tricky waters:

*A lady never went into battle unarmed.*

Tonight, her weapon of choice was a bottle of a 1942 Latour she'd taken from a Nazi stronghold she and the rest of the Howlies had liberated two weeks prior, and artfully applied Dorothy Gray Firelight Red lipstick. Her uniform was crisply ironed, her hair was carefully styled, and she walked into the crowded, noisy pub with a confident stride, with another one of her mother's sayings – *never let them see you as anything less than the epitome of grace under pressure, my dear* - ringing in her ears.

She scanned the room quickly, then set her target firmly in her sights, rounded her shoulders back slightly so her posture was perfect. If she was going to do this, it had to be tonight. Steve was due back tomorrow, and she might not get another shot at getting Barnes alone. He and the good Captain were rather joined at the hip. (And, unless she was very much mistaken, joined in other places as well.)

Barnes was holding court at the center table with the rest of the team, as rakishly disheveled as ever when he wasn't on active duty. Top button of his shirt undone, hair falling across his forehead just so, sleeves rolled up to display a nicely muscled set of forearms. Peggy may have had her heart set on Steve, but she wasn't blind to Barnes' charms, not by any means. And she knew he wasn't entirely immune to hers, either. Hopefully, such an awareness would make this conversation go a little easier for the both of them.

To a man, the Howlies all looked up when she stopped at their table. She waved them all back into their seats when they started to rise. "No need for the formalities, gentlemen. This isn't an official call."

Barnes' expression quickly went from an easy, open smile to a worried frown. "Is Steve...is this...?"

"He's fine," Peggy assured him. Yes, she had the right way of how things were between Barnes and Steve, alright. Barnes' immediate concern was a dead giveaway. "Howard radioed earlier – the mission was a success and Steve is waiting for Howard at the rendezvous point. They should both be back on base in the morning, as planned."

"Sonofabitch pulled it off," Dugan said, shaking his head in admiration.

"Was there ever a doubt?" Morita asked.

Falsworth wiped a line of foam from his mustache and smiled. "I daresay that bloke of yours will win this war for us single-handedly, if we let him."

"Well, that's a bit presumptuous –"

"For the last time, Monty, he's not my –"

Barnes and Peggy both looked at each other and chuckled. She suspected she had the exact same sheepish look on her face Barnes did. "Ladies first," Barnes said, with a rueful smile and a quick wink.

She flushed slightly, and hoped that the lighting was dim enough it wouldn't be remarked upon. Definitely *not* immune to his charms. "I was simply going to say that the Captain would be the first to tell all of you that he is nothing without his team," she said.

Gabe raised his mug to her. "Hope you know that includes yourself, ma'am."

"You better," Barnes said, with considerable feeling. "And if you don't, I'll make sure Steve reminds you as often as it takes." It might have been a trick of the light, but she didn't think she was imagining the way his smile dropped just slightly at the end. She wanted to reassure him that she'd never dream of coming between the two men, no matter how much time she and Steve spent together. But she stilled her tongue. There would be time enough to sort all that out.

"Thank you," she replied, "but I don't think that will be necessary."

Dugan kicked out the empty chair between him and Barnes (most likely Steve's normal seat) and gestured at it. "If this is a social call, you should sit, have a beer with us."

Dernier scoffed and said something in rapid French to Gabe, who laughed. "Frenchy wanted to remind you what happened last time you challenged Agent Carter to a drinking contest."

Barnes' smile brightened, turned rakish. "I remember I won fifty bucks off that bet," he said, and transferred that smile to her. "I always had full faith in you, ma'am."

It was a little like seeing a lightning storm in person, she thought. Brilliant and blinding and bloody terrifying all at the same time. No wonder Steve was so smitten. Who wouldn't be, having all of that energy and charm directed right at them?

She shook her head, forcing her hands to stay at her sides. "Another time, Dugan."

"Suit yourself," Dugan said, with a shrug. "But I'll get my rematch one day."

"We'll see," she said, and offered another smile. "Actually, I stopped by because I wanted to borrow you for a few moments, Sergeant."

Barnes pointed at himself. "Me?"

"Yes." She was thankful her voice was steady. "I was hoping I might have a word with you privately."

His chair scraped across the floor when he pushed it back, and stood. "Of course, Agent Carter." He gestured at the door. "After you."

She swept a smile around the table. "Gentlemen."

"Ma'am," they all replied, more or less in unison, and she turned towards the door, felt the weight of Barnes' gaze upon her with every step they took. It wasn't altogether an unpleasant feeling.

They walked in silence back to their base of operations, and up the stairs that led to the team's living quarters. She stopped when she got to the door of her own suite and unlocked it, then turned to give him an apologetic look. "I hope you don't mind the presumption in inviting you to my room."

"Not my reputation on the line, no offense, ma'am," he replied, with a shrug. "It don't bother me as long as you're not fussed about it. But, you, uh, you mind if I ask if Steve knows about this little meeting?"

"No, he doesn't," she replied. She had to admit, his immediate concern for Steve's feelings was...more than a little gratifying. And very attractive. "But I will tell him tomorrow when he gets back."

"Good enough for me," Barnes said, and stepped inside without another word.

She followed and shut the door behind her. Barnes was standing the middle of the room at parade rest, shoulders back, legs slightly apart. His expression was one of polite inquisitiveness. "So, what is it that you wanted to talk about?" he asked. "You and the Colonel got another solo mission for me?"

"No," she replied, and moved to the small table that normally housed her maps or mission files. "Can I interest you in a glass of wine, Sergeant?"

A look of confusion passed over his face, but he finally nodded. "Yeah. Uh, I mean, if you're pouring, sure, why not?"

She uncorked the bottle and filled two slightly chipped coffee mugs, then handed one to him. "I apologize about the lack of quality glassware, but I've been told the vintage is quite good."

"Ma'am, no offense, but I was raised in a Brooklyn slum. I wouldn't know if you were serving me swill or ambrosia, even if was out of the finest crystal," he said with a smile that managed to be charming and self-deprecating at the same time. Then he took a small sip and made a small humming noise. "That being said, it's a far cry from what they used to serve at the dance halls Steve and I used to frequent."

"I can well imagine." She remembered Steve talking about coming of age during Prohibition, and the moonshine he and Barnes used to drink at some of the speakeasies around town.

Barnes took another sip, then set the mug on the table. "So, as happy as I am to be spending time with such a beautiful woman as yourself, I don't think you invited me up here for a wine

tasting."

Her pulse fluttered. Her throat closed. She felt uncomfortably warm under the material of her jacket and shirt. "No, I did not."

"Yeah, I figured." He combed his hair off his forehead with a careless swipe. He had beautiful hands, she thought. Almost as beautiful as Steve's. "What's all this about?" he asked. "And why all the secrecy?"

Now or never. She steeled her nerves, ignored the butterflies taking residence in her stomach, and gave him a small smile that was only slightly strained. "I actually wanted to talk to you about Steve."

Instantly, his spine straightened and his expression closed off. He was holding himself so stiff he may as well have been a piece of wood. "What about him?"

"Please, Sergeant...do you mind if I call you James?" He shook his head quickly, and she smiled again, conciliatory, and continued. "James, let's not mince our words, shall we. I know that you've seen the way Steve...looks at me."

He swallowed, cleared his throat. "If this is about asking you to dance the other night, you know I'd never step in on Steve —"

"James." Her tone was soft, but infused with steel. "I've also noticed the way you and Steve look at each other."

His handsome face seemed to drain of all color. "I'm not sure what you're getting at —"

"This will go ever so much easier on both of us if you treated me like I had eyes in my head and a brain," she said, interrupting him without regret. She wanted, more than anything, to wipe that fearful look off of his face. "I promise, I'm not trying to trap you or to blue-card you. In fact, I'd like us to come to some sort of arrangement where Steve is concerned."

She could see the visible effort it took for Barnes to relax his shoulders. He licked his lips, his voice cracking only slightly. "What...what'd you have in mind?"

She let out a small breath, and felt most of the tension leave her body when she exhaled. This was going much easier than she'd imagined. "I would never dream of coming between you two —"

"You gotta know I'd never come between you and Steve, either," Barnes said, his pretty eyes wide and so very earnest. "He deserves...he deserves the entire world." His voice broke completely on the last word, and he stopped, gave her a helpless look.

In that moment, she fully understood exactly why it was Steve would have risked his entire career and his life for this man.

"Yes, he does," she replied softly. "He loves you very much, you must know this."

"Sure, I do," Barnes said, with a small grimace that conveyed far more than she thought he'd intended. "But I can't give him kids or a life. But you...you can give him everything I can't."

"Well, that's assuming any of us make it out of this bloody war alive," Peggy said. "I'm under no illusions about what may or may not happen after that, or if Steve would even want —"

"Peggy —" Just the way he said her name, like a physical caress, was so shockingly affectionate that she almost missed what he said next. "Steve wants, okay? Trust me on this. He absolutely wants a future with you."

She blinked back the sudden welling of tears. "Thank you for the reassurance, but right now, all I would like is to not have any regrets. Too many of my friends died before..."

He stepped closer, lifted his hand like he wanted to offer comfort, but lowered it back to his side. "However you want to do this," he said, dropping his voice to match hers. The intimacy of the moment wrapped around her like a blanket, soft and warm and so very alluring. "I just want him to be happy. That's all I've ever wanted."

"His happiness is very important to you, isn't it?" she hazarded, although it wasn't much of a guess on her part.

"More important to me than anything," he promptly said, with an open, vulnerable look that was breathtakingly beautiful. No, she thought, there would be no separating Steve Rogers and James Barnes. And, she was starting to realize, she had no wish to do so.

"You know, we could always..." She stopped, blushing as the thought entered her mind. What she was contemplating was very presumptuous and rather forward, even for her modern sensibilities. But, maybe they could make it work. They were three extraordinary people; surely, they could find a way if they were motivated to do so.

"We could always...?" Barnes prompted, with a knowing smile that suggested he knew exactly what it was she was getting ready to say. "Don't keep me waiting."

Well, never let it be said that Peggy Carter backed away from a challenge. "I was going to suggest sharing him."

He lifted an eyebrow. "Sharing him?"

He *would* make her spell it out, the wretched man. But, she supposed, she'd want the same sort of assurances herself if their roles were reversed. "Yes," she answered. "We could...be with him." She had to be blushing to the roots of her hair, but she pressed on. "At the same time. If...if you think that might be...something he would like. Or that you would like."

She hoped it went without saying that she would *very* much like it.

"Peggy Carter, I gotta say, I like the way you think," Barnes said, and grinned, wicked and so filthy she shivered at the sight of it.

There was something else about that look...

"Have you and Steve discussed the possibility already?" she asked. Just the idea of it – of the two of them, perhaps in bed together, perhaps in a private moment while out on patrol on a mission – was exciting beyond belief.

He lifted his shoulders. His hair fell back across his forehead, but he didn't bother to comb it back this time. She suspected the intended effect was deliberate on his part. Not that she minded. "I may have planted a few ideas in his head about what such an arrangement could be like, provided you were comfortable with it," he said.

She shouldn't be this aroused, not from just the way his voice dropped and the hooded look he was giving her. But she didn't try to fight it. "And what were...some of those ideas?"

He swiped his mug from the table and drained it, made a show of licking those very full lips. "Well, Steve...see, he's got this thing about being told what to do. Gets off on being ordered around, even though he puts up a good front about it. And, let's just say the idea of having two of us there to give him orders, telling him what to do, directing him however we like...well, it didn't take him long to see the potential."

She cleared a very dry throat. Between her thighs wasn't nearly as dry. "I'm...very good at giving orders."

"Yes, you are," he said, and stepped closer, ran the tip of one finger along the back of her hand. The small touch ignited a wildfire under her skin. "And I really want to see that. See you order him to strip you down, lay you back on those nice pillows you've got there on your bed, tell him to go down on you, make you come again and again while he can't touch himself –"

She wanted that, too, she realized. So much she was all but shaking with it. "And what would you be doing while he was pleasuring me thus?"

"Whatever you want me to do," he promised. "I got no problems in following your lead or your commands."

She shivered again, so wet she was certain she'd soaked her knickers through and through. "I think I like to see you filling him up. The two of you have done that before, I assume?" She couldn't believe she was having such a frank discussion, but she wasn't about to back down. She wasn't some wilting flower or vestal virgin, and she had, after all, started the discussion.

"Oh yeah." The half-lidded, long-lashed look he gave her was an exact replica of the look Steve always gave her. At least now she knew where Steve had learned and perfected it. "Why, is that something you'd like to see?"

"Yes," she said, simply. "Very much." Then her gaze dropped to his crotch for the briefest of moments before she gave him a considering look. "I do wonder at how well you'd fit, however."

His laugh was open and honest, and tinged with more than just a hint of arousal. "Don't worry about that. I fit just fine. Perfect, in fact. At least, Steve seems to think so." Then he gave her



a considering look. "You know, if you wanted, you could see for yourself how good the fit is. If you know how to ask around for the right...tools, so to speak."

"No need." Had Barnes – James – moved even closer? It was hard to think past the need pooling low in her groin and the roaring in her ears. "I can get my hands on the necessary equipment, if you think that's something he might like."

"Ma'am, I can tell you with the upmost confidence that he would be your willing slave if you ever did anything like that to him."

Yes, she could see that. Very clearly, in fact. She lowered her eyes briefly to James' lips. "How could I resist, then?"

"Yeah, I knew I liked you for a reason. You're gonna be so good for him, I can tell," James said, with a wicked laugh that she had to taste.

She grabbed him by the lapels and jerked him forward, had her mouth on his the next moment. His lips tasted like sweet summer berries, but he kissed like a man who well knew his way around a woman and how to give her exactly what she wanted. The combination was heady, intoxicating, and she all but melted into his arms, gave herself over, for just a moment, to the carnal lust raging like an inferno inside her.

They were both short of breath when they parted. His lips were temptingly bruised and his look was almost too much temptation for her to resist. "I rather like you wearing my lipstick, James," she told him, with a knowing smile of her own.

"I got no objections," he replied, quick and amused. "But I should probably get out of here before we take things too far. Next time we do this, I want Steve naked and hard and tied to that bed of yours, watching us."

She shuddered. "You *do* know how to paint an image."

He gave her one last lingering kiss, sweeter now, but no less skilled, then smiled again. "Thank you. For...well, thank you."

"No need," she replied, with her own smile. "I'll see you tomorrow for Steve's debriefing?"

"Wouldn't miss it," he told her, and with another bright grin, strode out of her room, whistling a low tune she didn't recognize.

Tomorrow couldn't get here soon enough.

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## Chapter 2

Steve took a brief moment to tug on the jacket of his uniform and sweep a few strands of damp hair off his forehead before rapping sharply on the door of Peggy's – *Agent Carter's* – quarters. Since returning from his mission, he'd been stuck giving his mission report to Colonel Phillips, and had barely had time to shower and change into something clean before the note had come to meet with Agent Carter for a debrief. Steve didn't know why she hadn't been with the Colonel, but maybe she'd had other duties to attend to. He hadn't even had a chance yet to tell Bucky he was back safe and sound.

The door opened a moment later, and Agent Carter was standing there, wearing a knockout navy blue dress, hair tumbling around her face in artful curls, and her signature red lipstick making her lips look soft and inviting. She'd done something to her eyes to make them look even bigger and more mysterious than usual, and Steve was having a hard time catching his breath at the look she was giving him.

"Steven," she said, eying him up and down with something that looked like approval. "Welcome back."

"Ma'am," he replied, and swallowed. He wanted to loosen his tie or his shirt collar or something, but he couldn't move. She was a damn nice sight for sore eyes.

"Come in," she invited, and held the door open wide for him to step through. The room was small, but spotless – just a bed and dresser and a small table with two chairs. And sitting in one of them, slouched casually – like he was right at home – and giving him a wide smirk, was Bucky.

"Heya, Stevie," he drawled. Bucky was also in uniform, but, as was usually the case when he wasn't on duty, he looked slightly disheveled, and he wasn't wearing his tie. The top two buttons of his shirt were also undone, and Steve could see a hint of clavicle and the hollow of his neck peeking out. It was an effort not to stare. Not the time nor place, he reminded himself.

"Hey, Buck," Steve replied, then gave Agent Carter a confused look. "Are you sure this is alright? I mean, having us in your quarters like this?"

He knew the meeting was on the up and up, sure, but there were still rumors and whispers about why Agent Carter was working so closely with the Commandos, and most of the gossip didn't focus on her considerable skill set as a soldier or SSR agent. Steve had witnessed firsthand some of the unpleasantness she'd had to deal with on a daily basis. The last thing he wanted was to make anything tougher for her.

"It's fine," she assured him, with a full-lipped smile that all but stopped his heart. Oughta be a law against a smile like that.

"Peggy and I just wanted a private word, that's all," Bucky said, with a look that was much too heated for their current setting. It was the type of look that Bucky normally reserved for

when he and Steve were alone and wearing far less in the way of clothes.

Steve flushed slightly, but stood his ground. If this was Bucky's way of messing with him, well, Steve would find some way of paying him back later. When it was just the two of them and he didn't have to worry about being circumspect. "That's Agent Carter to you, Buck. I know you've got better manners than this."

Carter and Bucky exchanged an amused look. "I appreciate you coming to my defense, but it's alright," she said. "I gave him permission to use my first name."

"You did?" Steve's frown deepened. When the hell had that happened?

"You have permission to call me Peggy as well," she continued, further surprising him. "In fact, I insist on it."

Steve got the feeling he was missing something. Something pretty important. "You do?"

Bucky rocked the chair back on two legs, the movement pulling the material of his trousers tight around his crotch. "You should just tell him, Peg, before his new heart gives out from embarrassment."

Steve jerked his gaze away from Bucky by sheer force of will. "Tell me what?" he hoarsely asked.

Carter – Peggy – stepped forward, trailed light fingers along his tie. "James and I had an ulterior motive for inviting you here."

Was it getting hotter in here or was it just him? Maybe a new side effect of the serum? "What...?" He cleared a clogged throat, kept his own hands resolutely at his sides. "What's that?"

He all but jumped out of his skin when a strong arm snaked around his waist, and he felt Bucky's warm breath against his neck. He hadn't even seen Bucky move. "We have a question for you," Bucky murmured, his voice all danger and promise.

He froze, certain his face had to be showing how panicked he was. "Buck?" he asked, dropping his eyes so he wouldn't have to see the look of confusion (or worse, disgust) in Peggy's eyes. "What're you doing?"

"Relax," Bucky told him, and placed an unmistakable kiss to his nape. "She knows all about us."

Then gentle, feminine fingers cupped his jaw. "It's quite alright, Steve," Peggy said and, before he could ask what she meant, brushed the barest hint of a kiss across his lips.

He was dreaming. Or the Nazis or Hydra had managed to capture him and he was hallucinating. Because there was no way Bucky was crowding against him, so hard Steve's mouth was dry at the thought, chest and hips and crotch pressed close to his back and ass. And no way at all Peggy was staring up at him like she wanted to devour him one big bite at a time.

"I-I don't..." he stammered, barely daring to breathe.

"You remember what we talked about during that mission in Lyon, Stevie?"

Lyon... Steve's eyes widened. Peggy was still smiling up at him as she deftly unknotted his tie and loosened the top button of his shirt. "Are you two...?"

"We had a private meeting last night," Peggy told him, glancing at him through partially lowered lashes. "And came to an agreement."

"Agreement?" Steve got out before Bucky's teeth scraped against his tendon and his breath left him again.

"You're a very clever man, Steve." Those soft, full lips pressed against his again, firmer now. "I'm certain you can figure it out."

Bucky chuckled, the sound reverberating against Steve's overheated skin. "But we'll be happy to give you a demonstration."

"A thorough one," Peggy agreed, then jerked Steve to her, the next kiss hotter than the sun and everything he ever wanted. She tasted sweet and tart, the combination heady and absolutely perfect. He moaned when her tongue curled against his, hands coming up to rest on the swell of her hips, and moaned again when Bucky started rocking against him nice and slow. He had no idea what he'd ever done to deserve this, but he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Peggy's lips were delightfully bruised and her lipstick smudged when she pulled back. "I take it you're amenable?" she asked, even though it wasn't really a question, and everyone in the room knew it.

"More than," he stated, fervent and grateful. Then he was turned slightly, and Bucky's hands were in his hair, and Bucky's mouth was on his, familiar and heated, but perfect all the same. The way it always was between them.

"Oh, that *is* just lovely," he heard Peggy murmur, and he blindly reached out to pull her to them, drew her inside their circle. And when Bucky moved effortlessly from kissing him breathless to sharing a blatantly carnal kiss with Peggy that she enthusiastically returned, Steve was pretty sure he'd died and gone to heaven.

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## End Notes

Thanks to G. for the betas!!!

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