

## ***Star of the Screen***

*A short story by Henry Cavanaugh*

Steve Rogers wasn't completely unaware of the movies being made about the Avengers but he did his very best to ignore them as much as possible. Even though he himself had participated in films back when he had been little more than a shill for the US military back during World War Two, Steve didn't have much love for the sensationalism that often came with these types of projects. He and the Avengers did what they did because they wanted to keep innocent people safe and it felt improper to benefit off of that through capitalistic means.

Stark had been the one to originally talk them all into it by stressing the importance of winning the public over and after some hesitance he had succeeded in getting all of his teammates to sign likeness deals and offer up the rights to adapt their stories. Now, years later, there was merchandise with Steve's face on it all across the world and it never failed to make him do a double take. In order to assuage the guilt he felt, Steve donated his merchandise earnings to a variety of charities, rotating through them each month. He had no need for the income and he wanted to continue doing something good with it, so it felt like the only sensible solution.

The first movie starring the Avengers was released two years after Loki had attempted to invade New York with an army of chitauri and it covered those events through a fictionalized lens. Steve had received a ticket to attend the premiere but he had been quick to turn it down and had successfully managed to avoid seeing anything more than brief clips from the film (or any of the six that had followed in the years since), although Tony assured him that the actor portraying Captain America did a great impression of him and had "almost as nice an ass".

Due to being in Germany for the past several weeks where he had been investigating rumors of an old Hydra base that was still active, Steve hadn't heard the announcement that another film based on his adventures was about to begin filming. As such, he also



hadn't heard that there had been a major accident just a few days into filming and the entire production had been shut down due to the lead actor being severely injured during the filming of a stunt sequence. Steve only learned of all this once he was back Stateside and happened across an article in the newspaper covering the disastrous events of the first week of filming. While he definitely harbored reservations about his stories being made into mass entertainment, Steve was immediately sympathetic towards the actor who had been hurt. The newspaper report claimed that the actor - Harry Bevins - had experienced severe burns across his chest and face and would almost certainly be left with extensive scarring even after the charred flesh healed.

Although he had never met the man before and thus had no relationship with him beyond the other man's portrayal of him in the movies, Steve immediately felt compelled to pay the man a visit. While there was nothing he could do in order to heal the man's wounds, he was hopeful that his stopping by might give the actor a more optimistic look on his future. Harry would have numerous struggles ahead of him as a result of his injuries, there was no denying that. Steve loathed how judgmental the world could be at times, particularly when it came to outward appearances. Heavy scarring wouldn't make the man any less human but there would most certainly be members of society who viewed him as such and it was possible that the other man might even feel that way about himself too.

It didn't take much for Steve to find out the actor's address - he had apparently been holed up in his Beverly Hills mansion since being discharged from the hospital several days previously - and without even getting out of his costume, he hopped onto his prized Harley-Davidson motorcycle to pay the man a visit. As he approached the gated residence belonging to the actor, Steve discovered that there was a small army of paparazzi hanging around outside. They went crazy with camera clicks as he pulled up outside the gate and were so loud in calling out to him that Steve had barely been able to hear the voice on the gate's intercom system. After informing them of his identity, the gates rolled open and Steve was permitted access to the premises. He was glad to be away from the throng of photographers, there was something vulture-like about their presence that had very much unsettled him.

Steve was met at the door by a man who appeared to be either in his late fifties or early sixties, with silver hair, a round face and a thick mustache. "Well gosh, it really is you!" the man exclaimed as he took in the sight of the superhero standing on the other side of the door. "Harry will be so honored to finally meet you. He's been trying to arrange a meeting for years, you know." Steve wasn't sure if the comment was purposefully made in order to guilt trip him but it certainly had that effect - why hadn't he reached out before then, even just to be polite? "Forgive me, where are my manners? My name is Marcus, I'm Harry's uncle and I'm looking after him while he's still recuperating."

“It’s nice to meet you, Marcus. I wish it wasn’t under such circumstances,” Steve replied politely, shaking the man’s hand and then entering the house. “I don’t have too long but I wanted to meet with Harry and check up on him.”

“Of course, of course. The world can’t save itself, after all!” Marcus exclaimed, his round face splitting into a beaming smile that didn’t quite meet his gray eyes. “You know, he insisted on doing his own stunts because of you? He said he wanted to embody the spirit of Captain America, the poor fool. He’s always admired you ever since he was a boy.” The man stared off into the distance for a moment before seeming to remember that he wasn’t alone with his thoughts. Clearing his throat, he fixed his attention back on Steve. “Anyway, he’s in his room. I’ll take you up there now, if you’ll follow me.”

Despite the man’s outward appearance and his general tone of positivity, Steve couldn’t help but find something menacing hidden just under the surface. *He’s just annoyed you ghosted his nephew before now*, the super soldier told himself. It wasn’t as if this near-elderly man could do anything that might vaguely threaten him so there was really no need for Steve to be on edge, was there? *A side effect of being surrounded by spies for most of the day. You never know who might secretly be Hydra and plotting against you...* Steve was well aware that he struggled to get his brain out of superhero mode, it was one of the reasons why his relationship with Sharon had been so short-lived.

As he followed Marcus up a grand staircase, Steve glanced around at his surroundings and was quick to note just how differently the actor portraying him lived from the real deal. Steve wasn’t the type to surround himself with any sort of luxury really - he was much more simplistic in his needs. As long as he had four walls, a roof over his head and a comfortable surface to lie down on, he was good. Back during the War, Steve had slept in foxholes and on concrete while bombs were going off around him, so his small one-bedroom apartment in downtown New York was more than enough for him. He was pretty sure that his whole apartment could fit into just the actor’s lobby three times over! While he’d never understand why people felt the need to live in buildings that more closely resembled palaces rather than actual houses, Steve supposed it wasn’t his opinion to judge. Harry had presumably worked hard to earn his money and he could spend it however he wanted - even if Steve secretly hoped that the man donated at least some of his earnings to charity in order to help the less fortunate. Was he expecting too much of other people again?

Finally Marcus stopped outside a set of double doors and turned to the visitor once again. “His sight and hearing were both somewhat compromised by the accident, so it may be best for you to get close if you want him to hear anything you have to say,” the older man advised, before drawing his lips into a thin smile. Steve was once again struck by the suspicion that Marcus didn’t actually like him very much. He wasn’t about

to waste time trying to change the man's mind though, so Steve just nodded and thanked him for the advice before knocking and entering the bedroom.

Like the lobby before it, the bedroom looked like the concept of overindulgence come to life: high ceilings, gold-framed paintings, and a giant four-poster bed. Sat up in the bed was a man that Steve presumed to be Harry Bevins, the actor who had spent the past half a decade portraying him in Hollywood blockbusters. Truthfully the man in the bed didn't actually look all that much like the photos of Harry that had been published in the newspapers: the scarring was indeed quite severe, completely dominating one half of his face, and his shiny blond hair was completely absent with the man's bare scalp being covered in burn marks. There was also a light miliness to the eye on the left side of the actor's face and part of both his ear and his nose were missing.

"Mr Bevins? It's Steve Rogers," the hero introduced himself as he approached the man. Even though the other would obviously know who he was once he saw him, Steve considered it to be polite to introduce himself properly. "I wanted to come see how you're doing and see if there was anything I might be able to do for you."

A look of recognition flashed over the actor's face once Steve was right at his bedside and the corners of his lips pulled up into a pained smile. "C-Cap," the actor croaked in a rough voice. "Y-you came." There was clear joy written all over the man's face to such an extent that there were even tears brimming in the man's eyes. Once again Steve found himself feeling guilty that he'd never reached out to the other man before his accident. It was clear from just a few seconds of being in his presence that the actor really idolized him and while Steve wasn't the type to relish in being anybody's hero (he'd happily let Tony claim the title of most arrogant Avenger), would it really have been so difficult to have even just a five minute conversation with him?

"It was the very least I could do," Steve remarked wistfully, keeping his voice loud and clear to ensure that the actor could hear him. "How are you feeling?"

"Better now you're here," Harry replied, his voice sounding fuller despite the grimace that flashed across his face for a fleeting moment. "It's been a long time coming! I didn't think our first meeting would go like this but..." He broke off coughing into his fist for a few moments and then shook his head. "Sorry about that. I feel like I've been fighting a war with this body since it happened."

"There's absolutely no need to apologize, Harry," the super soldier assured the other man. "It's me who should apologize anyway. I should have reached out to you a long time before this. You're right, it would have been nicer for our first meeting to be under better circumstances, but I take the blame for that."

Something about Steve's remark prompted a flash in the actor's eyes for a brief moment that reminded him of how Marcus had looked at him outside the bedroom. There was almost something predatory about it, which was ridiculous! The look had vanished as soon as it had appeared and Steve was once again quick to put it out of his mind. Maybe the men of the Bevins family were just a little awkward in social situations?

"Let's let bygones be bygones then, eh?" the actor remarked, gingerly raising his hand from the bed and offering it out to Steve. The hero thought that Harry's choice of words had been a little strange given they hadn't really had much of a disagreement but he wasn't about to lecture the poor man about language under the circumstances! Instead, Steve reached his own hand out and clasped the other's with the intention of giving it a soft, friendly shake so as to not hurt the actor.

The good-natured handshake didn't happen though, because as soon as the two men's hands were pressed together, the magic rune on Harry's palm that he had successfully managed to hide from Steve's view was activated! A cry of alarm forced its way out of Steve's lips as he experienced a searing heat through his leather gloves, although apparently he was the only one to feel it, as Harry hadn't so much as flinched. Steve tried to wrestle his hand free of the other's grasp (which should have been easy considering his enhanced strength courtesy of the super-soldier serum) but bizarrely he was unable to remove his hand from Harry's iron grip.

An uncharacteristic fear flooded through Steve as he realized he was in immediate jeopardy and there was seemingly nothing he could do about it. Despite the frosty behavior Marcus had exhibited towards him upon his arrival, Steve had never really expected to find himself in any sort of danger. He had arrogantly thought that there was nothing a middle-aged man and a bed-ridden actor could do to harm him - how foolish and blind he had been! If he wasn't so wrapped up in his alarm for what his immediate future would hold, Steve would have been flushed with embarrassment and frustration at his own overconfidence.

Before his panic could last for too long, Steve's body was rocked by a sudden lethargy and a skull-splitting migraine that almost caused him to collapse on top of Harry. The pressure in his head intensified over the next few seconds, so much so that Steve momentarily blacked out. It had only been for a few seconds at most but when his vision started to return, Steve was quick to identify that he was no longer standing at the actor's bedside. He hadn't collapsed to the floor like might have been logical though. No, he was somehow *in* the bed, wearing silk pajamas rather than his iconic costume and with the sheets pulled up to his waist. That wasn't the most puzzling part for Steve - that honor went to the fact that he could see his body still standing next to the bed, now wearing a proud smile. A shiver traveled down his spine as he very hastily put the pieces together.



“Harry?” he gasped, watching in horror as the other man pulled free of their previously locked grasp. “What-- what’s going on? Did we just... switch?” Looking down at his hands, the terrified former super-soldier took note of the strange pattern that had been painted on the palm of his - of *Harry’s* - hand. While he wasn’t the most knowledgeable when it came to magic, Steve knew that whatever it was, it had given Harry the power to switch their bodies. This wasn’t some bizarre accident, it had all been planned! The fake Steve’s smile only grew more wicked as the seconds passed, all but confirming the real Steve’s suspicions in the process and plummeting him further into the depths of fear.

“Harry, you don’t know what you’re doing. This is going to end really badly!” he exclaimed urgently, already beginning to picture a terrifying picture that might await him should he

remain trapped in the other’s body. Looking back down at the symbol on his palm, he guessed that if it had been responsible for switching them in the first place then it would most likely be able to switch them back too. “Just take my hand and let’s undo this before you do something you’ll regret later on. I promise I won’t tell anyone about this. You won’t get in trouble, just... please, do the right thing!”

Rather than replying, Harry took several steps back away from the bed, smirking all the while. Once he was safely out of reach, the former actor rolled his broad shoulders and lifted his arms to flex both of his biceps on either side of his head. “Do the right thing, eh?” he repeated finally, the expression on his stolen face switching to one of intense bitterness. “Yeah, there’s not a chance in hell of me doing that, bud. This body is *mine* now and it’s gonna stay that way until the day one of us dies!!”

As he spoke, he brought his arms down and folded them across his chest while leveling a glare at the man now trapped in the bed. “Has anybody ever told you how fucking *arrogant* you really are?” the body thief spat, causing Steve to flinch at the harsh expletive. It sounded so strange in his own voice. “You think you’re better than everyone because you preach about truth and justice every single day but you’re so much of a hypocrite that you don’t even recognize just how much you judge other people!”

Although Steve was quick to dismiss Harry's words as the raving of a madman (for only a madman would enact what had evidently been a cunning plan to steal Captain America's body), everything that left the other's mouth felt like a punch to the gut. It certainly didn't help that as the shock of the body swap wore off he was also starting to feel the various pains that lingered as a result of Harry's on-set accident. His muscles screamed in protest at even the slightest movement, ruling out any possibility of Steve pulling himself out of the bed and forcing the other to lock hands with him again. "That's not the tr--"

"Shut the fuck up, I'm talking!" the other man loudly demanded, stunning Steve back into silence. "You really thought you were better than a guy like me because I earned my paycheck by starring in movies, didn't you? I was honoring your legacy, bro! All that hard work on my end and you paid me in dust, only caring to meet me when you thought my accident might cause you a bit of bad PR. Fuck you, Steve Rogers!"

Tears rolled down onto Steve's cheeks as Harry's rant continued but upon seeing this, the other man's attitude shifted from angry back towards cruel mockery. "Yeah, you better cry. You're gonna be stuck in that bed for a long time, buddy! The pain's a real bitch, isn't it? I'd say I'm sorry you have to deal with it but I'm really not. After all, if it wasn't for you then I wouldn't have even been on that set to get those injuries. That's right, you caused that pain so you might as well be the one to deal with it!"

While Steve silently wept, Harry pulled the shield from his back and began spinning it between his hands. "Before you try and spout any nonsense about how somebody will be able to tell the difference between us, let me remind you that I've played the role of Steve Rogers for half a decade now. I know you as well as I know myself, dude. I'm not gonna have any issue pretending to be you," the actor pointed out in a smug tone. Steve was horrified to realize that the man was probably right - so much of his life had been widely publicized, from the various illnesses he had suffered from as a child right through to his fleeting romance with Peggy Carter. Sure, there were a few things that Steve had managed to keep concealed from the public but a trained actor like Harry was probably more than capable of improvising should he find himself in a situation without the necessary context. He was probably the only person in the whole world who could get away with this unique case of identity theft!

"Although just between you and me, I think you could do with being a little less uptight. You had this hot body and you never even flaunted it? What a waste, man! You won't catch me being a prude. The world's gonna meet a new Captain America soon, you can bet on it. One who isn't afraid to show off his strength and all the muscles underneath this suit. Speaking of what's going on underneath here..."

Everything the real Steve had seen and heard up to that point had felt like a physical attack but watching the body thief reach down and grab at his crotch made the former Captain America want to launch himself at the other and begin wildly swinging. The crass action was so unlike any sort of behavior Steve would have been caught doing, yet Harry took clear pleasure in it, judging from the cocky smirk that had settled back onto his stolen visage. "Feels big," he remarked, "I should have guessed that even this was super-sized, huh? Oh, I'm gonna have fun putting it to use!"

With the former Steve Rogers emotionally beaten and physically unable to fight back, the replacement took a moment to savor his ultimate victory over the man who had ruined his life. "I'll be sure to visit more than you ever did," he informed the other, "No doubt I'll have plenty of stories to share if you know what I mean." He accompanied the suggestive remark with a wink. "In the meantime, Marcus will look after you and make sure you don't end up hurting yourself. He'll be keeping you away from phones and other forms of communication, of course. Can't have you trying to tell people... but if you do, I guess it's not too unbelievable that the accident fried poor Harry Bevins' mind as well as destroying his body."

Placing the shield upon his back, the new Steve puffed out his chest, placed his hands on his hips in a heroic pose and smiled. He carried himself exactly like the Avenger always had - nobody would ever suspect a thing! "If you listen to Marcus and stay on your best behavior though, I might even set you up with whatever top plastic surgeons my superhero status can score. They should be able to fix up some of that scarring if you're lucky! But again, only if you play nice with your uncle." The superhero shrugged his broad shoulders. "The offer's on the table. I'm not a complete monster after all." He laughed and shook his head. "No, I'm Captain America and I *always* do what's right!"

