

Captain America - After the Endgame

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"It was harder than I'd thought."

The other man was silent, letting his subject drift into the memories. He was very anxious - of course, he would have to be after all this time chasing his white whale. The details about his father had been vanishingly few and he'd tracked down conflicting stories about his death. In one account, he'd died bringing the Avengers together. In another, he'd become a Director of SHIELD. The only constants were that his father was inspiring, courageous, and dedicated to his job. He was an ordinary man thrust into extraordinary circumstances and had more than risen to the occasion. Oh, and he looked like his father and had a lot of the same qualities. But the more he searched, the more enigmatic the life of Philip J. Colson was. There was one constant that he'd found, though- his father had loved Captain America. So yeah, sitting in front of Cap was a big deal.

But impatience would get him nowhere. He'd learned that on too many other stories. These things had to play out in the subject's timing. Looking at the man in front of him, you'd never guess his age. Though older and more worn, there was something about him that still made him seem- vital. But you could also sometimes see the tiredness. Especially around the eyes, still piercing blue. His wife had died many years earlier, and what it had taken to stay away from her side and hide in the shadows while she declined, he couldn't imagine. But that was just one of the things that he was here to find out.

"One of my best friends told me," he continued suddenly, "that I should get myself a life. They'd pushed me towards this one woman, and she was amazing."

He looked down, pausing again.

"But she just reminded me of what I'd lost," he said with a sigh as he shook his head. He looked up. "It also felt just... *wrong*. For her as much as me. And she deserved so much more."

"You know Tony, right?" He shook his head, ruefully. "What am I saying - *of course* you know him. But did you ever get to meet him? Or even Morgan - she reminds me so much of him that it's painful at times. But the way he was around her..."

He paused again, a wistful smile on his face. "That was something to see, especially for those of us that knew him before he was a father. I once said that he couldn't make the hard choice if it came down to it."

He paused, looking back up at me. "She changed him. For the better. And I realized that I wanted that. And seeing her after all those years, when we went back to take the Stone..."

As he paused, I annotated my notes. Finally. The Infinity Stones. Peggy Carter. I underlined that last, the end of a long journey seemingly within reach.

"... I realized just how much I'd lost and I'd never be able to move on, no matter what. It was selfish, I realize, but I knew that I was going to do it long before I did. Why *else* was that the last stone that I took back?" He shrugged, smiling. "I wasn't totally sure until I saw the look on her face..."

"We were happy. She was so overjoyed to see me. I told her as much as I could, but there was the timeline to consider, so I couldn't share everything. We agreed on that once I sketched out what me being there meant."

"It was hard. The lying, the hiding. There were still wrongs to be righted. Still fights to fight. But my time was done, and I was fighting a totally different fight. Against my instincts."

"When we were together, all was right with the world. But she had her life, and she was an important part of the world." He slowly shook his head. "I was selfish, but not quite that selfish," he added, a slight gleam in his eyes.

"So, I spent a lot of time in my makeshift gym. Repeating the same cycle as I had the first time I came out of the ice." He shook his head ruefully. "Those poor bags."

"But it didn't really hit me until one night," he said, descending into his thoughts again. "Peggy was gone- I never asked her where, and that was one part of her life that we didn't share. I realized only later how terrible that was, not being able to talk about current affairs with your husband..." He dropped into silence again, a frown on his face, then continued his original thought.

"Peggy was gone. I'd decided that I didn't want to cook, so went out to some new diner- I had to vary my routine a bit; I didn't know what I'd do as the tech became better, but that was a thought for a later date."

"I heard a pained groan as I passed an alleyway, and old instincts took over- I dashed in, finding a Black man struggling to get to his feet. I rushed to his side, memories of many alleyways that I'd been beat up in rushing back. As I helped him to his feet, underneath the pain, I saw that look- the one that you get after a time of seeing the horrors of war. In that moment, I thought of Sam.

I asked him if he was ok, and tried to find out what happened. I'll never forget that exchange.

"Just a case of right place, wrong color," he said ruefully. Then he guardedly added, "Sir."

I thought he'd seen something that would make him think of rank, then it hit me. "None of that," I said. "You sure you ok?"

"Nothing I haven't seen before or won't see again," he shrugged.

"You want to grab a coffee?" I asked, feeling something stir in me. "I was just going to grab a bite, and don't feel like eating alone."

He saw something in my eyes, and lightly touched my shoulder. I looked around at him already shaking his head. "I appreciate it. Really, man, I do. But, no. Just the way things are."

"But they shouldn't be," I said resolve in my voice. "It's what we fought for. What we bled and died for."

"Shouldn't be," he agreed. "But *is*," he emphasized. "Don't you get it? I could have fought those guys. But the next man that they took it out on might not have been able to. There's times and places to fight. And times and places to stand." I saw the anger on his face. Saw him slowly put it back to a dark place that held many such memories.

"But that reverend that spoke on the Mall had it right. You gotta do it in the right way. Play your part in it. And if we go in there right now, that's not a part." He shook his head again. I've never seen a shake of the head show so much pain.

"That's looking for a fight," he said, a bone tiredness evident in his voice. He was silent for a long moment, then said, in a quiet, still voice. "Sometimes, it takes more to just do nothing when you know it's the right thing to do. Bide your time. support others fighting the fight in the right way. "

"I thought of Peggy in that moment. And how I'd been. And was ashamed," he said, a weight in his voice I'd not heard before. He looked at me, shame in his eyes. "I'd come back, and had so much because of that one decision. But I'd not *really* left it all behind." He shook his head. "Not really laid it down. Not until that moment."

"My wife," he continued. "She understood so much. Carried so much. And my own experiences in the future had kept me from being the support system that she needed. Listening. Taking care of the kids and being an example for them, and a good father and husband."

"That the fight I chose. And I fought it gladly, ignoring those instincts to be on the front lines, in favor of a more important battle."

"That's what I want my legacy to be. Not hammers, nor shields, nor any of those struggles. Just that I was a good father and husband."