That's MY Bucky Bear!

by emma98

Summary

Steve Rogers and Darcy Lewis didn't exactly get along. In fact, when they were within a stone's throw of one another, they were often bickering. If you asked Steve, it was because Darcy couldn't manage to not get herself kidnapped every other week. And if you asked Darcy, it was because Steve was a giant douchewagon.

Leave it to Natasha and Bucky to bring them together for their own personal reasons and enjoyment. But when Steve and Darcy turn from bickering adults into bickering children (with incredibly foul mouths), it turns out the joke is on Mother Russia's finest.

Notes

Can I just turn the entire MCU into children, one fic at a time???
So one fine day on Tumblr, I requested that people send me fic titles, for stories I would
NEVER write. Big talk there. Phoenix_173 sent me "That's My Bucky Bear!" and a
synopsis shot out about Darcy and Steve de-aging and Nat and Bucky being their de-facto
parents. I thought maybe I'd come back and write it as a one shot.

What really sold me though were the set of pictures that the shieldshockfanfic blog attached
to them.
SO CUTE. And then I let my fingers go crazy today and here we go.

See the end of the work for more notes.
That’s MY Bucky Bear!

Chapter One: Steve Rogers’ Very Bad No Good Terrible Day

Wisconsin, April 2017

Steve Rogers was having a helluva day.

It had started at dawn, when Bucky had woken him up with a none too gentle shake and they had quickly vacated the safe house they had been bunkering down in for the past three weeks. Bucky had apparently been in one of those moods where he just didn't talk so much. It didn't happen too often since he had woken up from cryofreeze and been healed, so every time it DID happen, it felt sort of jarring for Steve to have his congenial, chatty best friend replaced completely with a sullen, Winter Soldier sort of proxy.

Their rations had turned rotten overnight, so the pitiful symphony of enhanced metabolism fueled stomach gurgles played in their ears all morning as they drove to the pickup point to meet Natasha. They were running late thanks to the damned old pickup truck that refused to go up and above forty-five miles an hour.

"Nervous about seeing Romanoff?" Steve had asked as they got stuck behind a hay baler on a one lane country road.

Bucky grunted in the negative.

Steve rolled his eyes. Natasha had dropped them at the safe house three weeks ago and Steve had DEFINITELY spied a lip lock between she and Bucky. Bucky had refused to speak of it to Steve, refusing to admit it had even happened. If they hadn't of been in such close quarters, Steve would have never heard Bucky three nights into their stay having an amorous type of dream and whispering Natalia in an earnest, wanting sort of way.
Bucky hadn't been amused when Steve had teased him mercilessly about it for the next week.

"She's got a civilian with her," Bucky announced as he finally managed to get around the hay baler and took off as fast as he could, getting the truck up to at least forty-eight miles an hour.

"What?" Steve blinked at Bucky curiously. "Did she contact you outside of the message to pick her up?"

"Coded," Bucky explained.

"How did she fit a code in a twenty word text message?" Steve demanded. "And how did I completely miss it?"

"Time of day she sent it, day she sent it, date she sent it, capitalization, grammar," Bucky rattled off. He shook his head and rolled his eyes at his friend in the first glimpse of amusement he'd managed to hold onto all day. "You're not a spy, punk, I wouldn't expect you to get it."

"Do we know the civilian?" Steve sighed. They were fugitives from the law, absolutely unwelcome in the United States they were currently traveling in. Steve's team were scattered to the winds since the Raft breakout, safe and connected and doing good work, but definitely fugitives and outlaws all the same.

Bucky had been added to the mix four short months ago when things destabilized in Wakanda, and Natasha had thankfully gotten the final piece regarding deprogramming, bringing it in just as the Wakandan physicians and engineers placed the new vibranium arm on. She'd dropped him with Steve afterwards and the duo had been crisscrossing the United States ever since, meeting up with Natasha here and there as they did small missions to protect and defend Earth as a whole.

"The curvy mouthy brunette one," Bucky winked at Steve. "The one you have no interest in whatsoever cause you like willowy blondes now."

"Buck," Steve groaned out. He hated when Bucky brought up Sharon Carter. It had been a disaster the moment he had kissed the woman. One night Steve had met up with Sharon thinking it was a date only to realize it was a logistics and planning meeting. Sharon may have been attracted to Steve at one point, but it was a pitiful thing when compared to the roaring inferno she held in her heart for her work and her principles. She was a Carter woman through and through, and Steve was happy to
call her a friend now.

"Natasha thinks that this Lewis girl is being heavily targeted by a handful of bastard organizations, and they're about to make their move," Bucky explained. "She knows too much and too little all at the same time."

Steve's jaw tightened. He had warned against that years ago when Darcy Lewis had started to expand her duties from just taking care of Doctor Jane Foster's notes into taking care of Tony Stark and Bruce Banner and Helen Cho and Erik Selvig. And all of that was after the first awful kidnapping she had endured. Not to mention her personal ties to Thor and the other Asgardians. The woman had access to far too important of information, even if she swore she didn't understand it, and every day the bullseye on her back got bigger and bigger.

He'd drawn the line when she had started to work on finding Bucky three years ago in conjunction with Sam and Natasha.

Of course his protestations had been ignored, and she had continued to hack and slash her way through defunct and active Hydra databases online, until she'd become wanted by that organization as well.

And throughout it all, Natasha had always been avidly trying to set Steve up with Darcy, declaring them the perfect match. It had taken a herculean effort on Steve's part to make sure that didn't happen. Darcy Lewis was on the most wanted list for the top ten most nefarious organizations on Earth and probably beyond. The last thing she needed to add to that list was paramour of Captain America.

And of course there was the other reason. But Steve hated to even think of it.

"What's the play here then? We going to get her somewhere safe?" Steve demanded.

"You could say that," Bucky smirked, his spirits finally fully lifting in his teasing of Steve. "Just hold your horses, pal, all will be revealed in due time."

Elsewhere in Wisconsin
"Fuck you, you fucking assbucket! I hope you shit in bed and roll in it and DIE!"

Natasha smirked from the other side of the alley as she expertly disarmed three men twice her size. Darcy had only had to deal with the one man who wanted to kidnap her, and she was doing quite well with remembering her physical steps in taking down a man twice her size. But no matter how much Clint or Natasha drilled the girl in the past few years, she refused to stay silent during the fighting. Instead, she offered a non-stop commentary of insults, filthy swear words and deeply dark wishes for the person's future well-being, or absence thereof.

They finished at the same time, Natasha applying a widow's bite to the driver coming at her and Darcy finally ramming the head of her potential kidnapper into a trash dumpster until he fell in a slump on the ground.

"Piece of shit mother fucking fuckball!" Darcy spat out before she kicked the guy in his spleen for good measure. She looked around at the four men Natasha had taken out and sighed. "Who are these guys?"

"AIM," Natasha answered.

"That's the second time this month from them!" Darcy wrinkled her nose in annoyance. "When are they gonna get it through their thick skulls that I don't have Tony's passcodes anymore!"

"I'm guessing never," Natasha shrugged.

"I'm---I'm fucking TIRED, Tash," Darcy sighed, leaning against the trash dumpster, careful of the wet spot of blood from her violent efforts. "I'm just---this is ridiculous."

"I know," Natasha smiled. "I have a solution, it's why I took you away from Fury."

Darcy wrinkled her nose. She had quite liked tagging along with Fury for the last eighteen months. It had probably made her at least fifteen new enemies, but Fury was good at protecting her, and she'd even managed to learn a few new swear word combinations under the man's protection. She'd been reluctant to part from him, but when the Black Widow said follow her, it was smart to listen.
It had kept Darcy alive for the last five years, even with being kidnapped seven times already.

"I don't understand what's safer than Nick Fury," Darcy reached her hand out for the SHIELD cuffs that Natasha gave her. The two women made quick work of wrapping the AIM goons up tight, wrapping the cuffs around wrists and ankles and activating them so that the men were hogtied. The activation sequence would alert Coulson and company and they'd be along to pick the ruffians up for questioning in short order. "I mean, half of the time, Maria Hill was with us too, so you know, that was like, super DUPER safe. She can shoot a man quicker than I can say FUCK, which is pretty fast."

"You'll be safer now, I promise," Natasha assured her, leading the way out of the alley to grab a new car from the street. "We have to go, we're meeting up with Rogers and Barnes in fifteen minutes."

"Fine," Darcy sighed, trudging after Natasha. She paused and went back and quickly kicked the man who had dared to try and kidnap her (again). Her foot froze when it went to kick a second time and she spun, turning to face Natasha, who had paused to wait for her.

Natasha's smirk was cat like and amused and entirely too self satisfied.

"Did you say Rogers?" Darcy gulped.

"Yes. I did," Natasha's smirk widened into a beaming grin. "Who could be safer than Captain America?"

"Fuck."

The frozen custard shop in small town Wisconsin was a bit of overkill, if you asked Steve. He and Bucky had ordered two trays full of everything the menu had to offer: hamburgers and hotdogs and french fries and deep fried cheese curds, as well as a pint of each flavor on that day's menu (seven flavors in total). They were waiting patiently outside of the shop at one of the little plastic picnic tables that were bolted into the ground, shaded by the weather worn umbrella above them.
They’d demolished one of the trays of food already, declaring the cheese curds to be the greatest thing ever created. Steve was just about to go back into the shop and replace what they had eaten when his enhanced hearing picked up the sound of a car door closing and a young woman whining.

"It’s like a freaking double date from 1955, and I’m pretty sure that three out of the four people here were totally frozen in 1955, and the other person didn't even exist, so it seems just ridiculous to---"

"Barnes was not frozen in 1955, we were actually out on mission together for most of 1955," Natasha murmured as they walked towards the patio area of the frozen custard shop.

"Cold war spy games?" Darcy whispered eagerly. "Oh my god, please tell me about the cold war spy games you got to play with Barnes."

"We had to pose as a married couple," Natasha divulged. "It involved a lot of tumbling around in the bed, if I remember correctly."

"You do, but that wasn't for the mission, doll," Bucky laughed as the girls appeared. He gave Darcy a wink before turning his sultry gaze on Natasha. "Tumbling in the bed was because you couldn’t resist pawing at me every opportunity you got."

"ADORABLE," Darcy declared, practically skipping to the table. She held out her hand and grinned, "Darcy Lewis."

"Bucky Barnes," Bucky shook her hand eagerly. "You know that though, cause you made my former torturers pretty pissed with looking for me back in 2015."

Steve huffed out a sigh.

"Oh, look, it's Senor Grumpy Butt," Darcy looked over to Steve with a smirk. "How’s your grumpy butt doing, Senor Grumpy Butt?"

"It's been fine since I haven't had to rescue you from overzealous kidnappers for over a year," Steve sassed back.
"Jesus, punk," Bucky sighed, turning an irritated glare Steve's way. "Your ma would have tanned every square inch of your hide--"
demanded as Natasha led an amused Bucky away.

"You know what, it doesn't matter," Darcy grumbled, looking down at the remaining food on the table. She grabbed for a random container of frozen custard and a spoon and began to walk away from the table. "You're an insufferable pain in my ass, Rogers!"

Steve was her shadow as she tried to walk away, following her to the front of the little restaurant towards the car that Natasha had driven them in. He watched her as she opened the container and shoved spoonful after spoonful of butter brickle frozen custard in her mouth as she sat on the roof of the car. She glared at him and swallowed a spoonful before demanding,

"Go back and eat your french fries, Rogers," Darcy ordered.

"Oh, and leave you alone out here so you can find yourself in enemy hands again? I don't think so," Steve answered back. "I don't exactly have the infrastructure to plan a rescue mission. Save me a bite of that, it's my favorite flavor."

"Jump off a cliff, Rogers," Darcy scoffed around another mouthful. "I'd rather be in that torture chamber in the Alps than be sitting in front of you right now!"

Steve felt his jaw clenching again and his hands balled into fists at his hips. Of course she would bring up the Alps. It had been the first and the worst of all of her kidnappings. Steve felt his stomach turn over and his blood boil simultaneously as the picture perfect memory filtered into his mind of what state she’d been in when he’d finally managed to get her cell door open with the shield.

She’d been in a hospital gown, not that he could tell because it was ripped up and covered in disturbingly large stains of her own blood. Her face had been nearly unrecognizable at the time, both of those beautiful blue-green eyes had been swollen shut and colored with black and purple and yellow and green bruises. Her pouting lips had been split. She’d been remarkably thin from too much stress and no food for nearly two weeks. She’d been on her feet when he entered the room, armed with a weapon she’d managed to salvage from her bed frame.

As soon as she had gotten a glimpse of who he was, truly recognizing him, she’d let out one small whimper of relief before passing completely out. Steve had caught her in time, her blood staining a pair of gloves that were still safe in a vault back in New York City.

He wanted to run like hell at her mention of the Alps.
Her first and most brutal kidnapping had been all his fault.

The thing was, Darcy wasn't supposed to know that it was his actions and decisions that had caused her to be kidnapped away from Jane Foster to the Alps just three short weeks after they had fended off the Chitauri Invasion in 2012. Natasha had sworn she'd never be allowed to find out. And Steve was sure Darcy didn't know. It was just that everyone knew that the kidnapping in the Alps had been Darcy's hardest, most difficult and most painful to endure. And she usually never brought it up. Something about the way Steve was itching at her had all of her defenses up and she was using all the metaphorical slings and arrows she had available to her.

"Come back to the table, Miss Lewis," Steve said quietly. "We're going to have to get along for the greater good."

"FUCK the greater good. I'll call Heimdall and ask him to move me to somewhere in outer space that has no one in it," Darcy grumbled.

"You'd STILL manage to get yourself into trouble," Steve shook his head in annoyance and bitter amusement. "We stuck you in the Arctic Circle, and you managed to get carried off by rogue penguins."

"They were MUTATED penguins," Darcy corrected him.

"You're a trouble magnet---"

"Oh, sure and you're the poster boy for responsible living!"

"And you'd think you'd learn after the first time---"

"You are a wanted fugitive, tell me ALL about how to learn and be a responsible adult, Rogers!"

"But you keep getting deeper and deeper into trouble and I can't understand how---"
"YOU WERE A FROZEN CAP-SICLE FOR OVER SIXTY YEARS!"

"Miss Lewis, if we're going to be doing this, you are going to learn about using a more appropriate tone---"

"FUCK YOUR FUCKING FACE OFF YOU PIECE OF SHIT MOTHER- oh shit, what's that?"

Steve's eyes widened as a blast of light came out of driver's side window of an eighteen wheeler whizzing by the frozen custard shop on the very empty road. It wasn't the reflection of the sun off of chrome. It was an amorphous beam of plasma light energy and it was heading straight for them.

"DOWN!" Steve barked out, making a dive for Darcy just as the incredibly cold light beam hit them, knocking them both to the ground at the same time.

"Have I ever told you I find your dastardly ways really very attractive?"

"Yes, at least half a dozen times in the last half of a century," Natasha answered back with a smile right before she popped another of the cheese curds into her mouth. They found their way back to the table and both of them seemed not at all surprised that Darcy and Steve were not where they left them.

"Odds of them still being in the county?" Bucky sighed.

"High," Natasha furrowed her brow, looking around curiously. "Steve hates to leave french fries to get cold."

"What a good ma you are to my little Stevie," Bucky laughed. He focused his senses and looked around, seeing Steve's distinctive sneaker pattern on a bit of earth leading to the front of the shop. He heard crying, getting louder by the second.

Natasha heard it too, and blinked in concern up at Bucky. It was the sound of a child crying. They
began walking in unison towards the front of the shop, going through the little bushes that obviously
Steve had pushed aside earlier. Bucky picked up a strand of hair that must have gotten caught on
one of the branches, long and curly and brown.

"Shhh, stop your whining!" a little voice ordered harshly. "Just--just calm your pants, we just gotta--
gotta find Buck and Nat--"

"SHUT YOU FACE HOLE JUST SHUT YOU FUCKING FACE HOLE!"

Natasha's spine went rigid at the words. The sentiments behind them were familiar, very familiar.
She'd heard Darcy screaming those sentiments at many people over the last five years. But the pitch
and tone and diction of the words was wildly off. Bucky began running, with Natasha following in
his footsteps. And in four short seconds, their entire world was spun backwards on its axis.

"YOU OUGHTA GET YOUR MOUF WASHED OUT WIF SOAP, LITTLE LADY!" Steve
Rogers hollered, his face turning red. He was dressed in a t-shirt that had once been skin tight on
him, but now fit him like a dress, going to just above his knee.

He was nearly four feet tall, towering over Darcy who stood in front of him, her dress drowning her
petite little frame even more, she couldn't have even been three and a half feet tall as she glared up at
Steve with tears running down her chubby little face.

"I HATE YOU'S STINKIN' GUTS!" Darcy screeched, her hands going to wild brown curls and
yanking on them.

"I HATE YOU TOO YOU BIG CRY BABY!" Steve screamed right back, his own hands yanking
in mimicry at his downy fine blond locks that hung on his head.

"ASSBUCKET!" Darcy yelled and then shoved, two little hands reaching up and shoving against
the tender point in Steve's nose, forcing him to quickly move backwards so that she wouldn't break
it. He landed on his behind, staring up at her in shock as she choked on her next loud insult in favor
of bursting into sobs once more. "I WANT MY MOMMY!"

"Holy cow," Bucky whispered.
Steve looked over at that, having heard it with his seemingly enhanced ears and he made a big gulping motion and held up his hands, protesting his innocence.

"I didn't do it, I swear!"
Darcy had clung to Natasha like a burr and wasn't likely to let go anytime soon. Bucky had managed to get them all in the pickup truck, even going back to the custard shop and getting all the food they had ordered to go instead, taking it along with them as Steve sat in the middle of the bench seat, a lot closer to Bucky than he was to Natasha and Darcy.

Darcy's tears had stopped once in the truck, cuddled into Natasha's bosom. She'd even managed to fall asleep about a half hour into the drive. Steve didn't want to sleep, he wanted to EAT, and eat he did, managing to nearly finish off the butter brickle frozen custard pint that Darcy had started, then moving on to all the french fries that had been dumped into brown paper bags. He was eerily calm, and had little to no answers about how he and Darcy had been de-aged into five year olds.

Or they were guessing five year old's. From what Natasha knew about children thanks to the Bartons, Darcy closely resembled Lila at the age of five, even if she was a little too small and petite. And Steve seemed five as well, except for the fact that he was obviously on the other end of the size spectrum, a serumed Captain America at the age of five, peak of physical perfection.

And they spoke like five year olds, the both of them. Except for the swear words that they both frequently tossed out, they spoke almost clearly except for a few mischosen words and bad grammar. Steve had some problems with "th" sounding like "f" in places, but Bucky confirmed that the man had experienced that during his first childhood and blamed it on his large two front teeth.

And the both of them were behaving like they were five, so it wasn't just a matter of shrinking in size. Their mental processes had been de-aged as well.
They had retained a few of their memories, for the most part. Although it was clear Steve didn’t remember certain concepts or words when he tried to describe that he would prefer not staying in a seedy motel by referring it to as a "kissing house that's REALLY bad!". They had the basics though. Steve knew Bucky was his best friend. Darcy knew that Natasha was hers. And they both remembered that they weren’t each other’s biggest fans. As evidenced by Darcy refusing to look at Steve and Steve continually stuffing his mouth with food.

Bucky KNEW what Steve was doing. Steve knew that he really should have gotten his behind whooped for being so mean to a little girl, or at the very least gotten scolded for being rude, even if Darcy was being rude as well. Steve and Bucky had grown up with a strict moral compass from their strong willed mothers and all of Bucky's sisters. *Rule number one: always treat a lady with respect.*

Even when she was cussing at you something fierce.

But Steve was stuffing his face currently, and being quiet and respectful NOW, so that neither Natasha or Bucky could call him out on his bad behavior.

"They need clothing," Natasha whispered, still shell shocked as Darcy drooled against her collarbone. Nothing much shell shocked the woman, but finding Captain America and Darcy Lewis as five year olds in a parking lot had managed to do the trick.

Steve had told them it was a truck going about two hundred miles an hour, and he’d memorized the license plate (which Natasha had immediately called into Maria Hill and Coulson), but there was no way to know where, who and why any of it had happened.

"Right. Clothing," Bucky nodded, glancing down at Steve as he inched closer and closer to him on the bench seat. The boy was still wearing an oversized t-shirt and nothing else. "Your giblets have got to be getting cold, pal."

"Don't speak of giblets in front of Darcy!" Natasha hissed.

"She's sleepin," Steve blinked up at Natasha in confusion.

Bucky blinked at her in concern, having only ever seen Natasha so shaken once before, and that had been her first mission out of the training room, after an innocent life had been taken in the crossfire. Bucky swallowed and quickly pulled off on the next exit that had displayed signs for a department store. When he pushed the car in park, Steve made movements to go along with him and he turned and looked the child up and down.

"You ain't got underpants on, Stevie," Bucky said calmly.

"Dammit," Steve sighed, looking forlorn as he turned to look at Natasha warily, where the squeaking door of the truck had obviously caused Darcy to begin to stir from her nap.

"I'll be right back," Bucky promised. "Don't be rude to the ladies, Steven."

"Fine," Steve huffed out.

Natasha looked at Bucky desperately as he looked back at her very quickly on his way into the store. She mouthed the word *hurry* and he did just that, quickening his pace into the store. Darcy's hand had moved from Natasha's shoulder and was now buried in the woman's red curls, the tiny fingers wrapping around the locks. Her hand moved from Natasha’s hair and went instead for her ear, kneading and caressing and pulling at it. Darcy made a whimpering noise in her sleep and Steve went ramrod straight, looking over at the girl with anxiety clearly written on his small face.

"She's alright," Natasha whispered, sounding a little like she wanted to convince herself of that.

"I don't care," Steve wrinkled his nose. His bravado was forced and nearly obnoxious as he spat out, "She can rot for all I care."

"You little shit," Natasha's voice was a low rumble of a sound and her green eyes slanted and narrowed like a dangerous viper as she stared down at him.

Steve's big blue eyes went wide with unabashed fear, but the tiny idiot only sat up straighter and his small, pointed chin went up into the air defiantly. He was trembling though, afraid of the retribution. He knew Natasha could decimate him physically, it didn't matter if he was a kid now, mentally and physically. But Natasha knew all his secrets too, and Steve knew he had a couple of really truly awful ones.
"You will be kind to this girl, or I will make you pay when this is all over," Natasha's tone left no room for argument.

"Yes ma'am," Steve automatically replied, his voice quavering just a little. His eyes darted to the left and the right and he shrugged just a little. "What if'n she's mean wif me?"

"Then I will speak with her and make sure she doesn't purposefully try to hurt your feelings again," Natasha said honestly. "I don't know how you two came to be this way, and I'm sure you're scared. But Steve, so is Darcy. She's terrified."

Darcy twitched in her sleep and let out another whimper as she surfaced to wakefulness. Steve's eyes were still round and full of trepidation, but he inched a little closer to Natasha, trying to get a good look at Darcy to be sure she was truly okay.

"She outta have a toy," Steve whispered. "A baby doll or somefin to hold while she sleeps."

"My ice cream!" Darcy gasped as she woke up. She looked around in confusion and her tears were only held at bay by Natasha's gentle hold on her and a soft shushing noise coming from the woman's mouth. Steve looked down at the nearly empty pint of butter brickle. He had left one, soupy spoonful in the bottom of the container for Darcy, knowing it was the right thing to do.

Now the girl adjusted herself in Natasha's embrace and caught sight of the pint of ice cream that Steve held in his hands. She looked hopeful and held out her hand expectantly.

"My ice cream?" she asked hopefully.

Steve couldn't explain why he did the thing he did. He would never understand it. He had to do it. He held the pint up to Darcy's eye level, lifted out the last soupy spoon and jammed it right into his mouth, sucking down the last little bit of it. He wrinkled his nose in consternation as a flurry of emotions flew across Darcy's small, expressive face.

Betrayal...horror...anger...sadness...then absolute, pure fury.

And then she started shrieking like a banshee.
"ASS! YOU'S AN ASS! YOU'S AN AWFUL GREEDY ASS!" Darcy screeched at the top of her lungs. For a ridiculously tiny thing, she had one hell of a powerful, harsh voice when she wanted to.

Steve dropped the ice cream pint and held his hands over his ears, which were super sensitive thanks to the serum enhanced hearing and the closed up pickup truck they were in.

"You little shit!" Natasha hissed at him, her own ears just as sensitive as Steve's. She tried in vain to soothe Darcy, who was shouting swear words to the truck ceiling about her ice cream and about what a horrible ass Steve was.

"HEY!" Bucky jerked the driver's side door open and threw in two bags. Darcy stopped screaming immediately and instead sobbed into Natasha's collarbone once more. Bucky looked perplexed and asked, "What in the hell happened? I could hear her screaming at the cash register."

"He happened," Darcy pointed at Steve. "He ated all my ice cream and he's an ASS!"

"Oh, kitten, I'm sorry Steve stole your ice cream," Bucky took a moment to glare at an appropriately contrite Steve. Natasha was digging into the bags he had delivered and restrained herself from throwing a package of small boy's briefs at Steve's head. Bucky walked around to the passenger side of the truck with two other bags still in his left hand. "Come along little lady."

He opened the door and held his arms open for Darcy. "I'll take you to the little bathroom and we can get you changed. And then I'll take you to go and get any kind of toy you should want, okay?"

Steve opened his mouth to object and a stern glare from Natasha stopped him completely.

"Okay," Darcy mumbled pitifully.

Steve wrinkled his nose and watched as Darcy clambered into Bucky's arms, leaving Steve in the truck to change with Natasha. Outrage bloomed on his face as Darcy grinned like a cheshire cat before sticking her tongue out in taunting as Bucky cuddled her and walked away. Steve turned to Natasha and whined,
"She's being a big baby on purpose, Nat, she's doing it for the 'ttention!" Steve accused.

"Rogers, seriously, you are on my last nerve," Natasha warned, stepping out of the truck and pulling out clothing for Steve and tossing it on the bench. "Get dressed and maybe I won't make you ride in the bed of this truck all the way to the safe house."

"Rude," Steve accused. He watched as Natasha cleaned up the mess he had made with all the food he had eaten on their trip so far and began walking it to the nearest trash can. "YOU’RE REALLY SHIT AT BEING A GOOD MOMMY FIGURE, ROMANOFF!"

Steve wrinkled his nose when Natasha held up her middle finger in response.

"Wanna know a secret?" Bucky asked as he turned around so Darcy could pull up the incredibly small pair of underwear that Bucky had just purchased in an eight pack. He busied himself with delicately pulling off the tags to the little blue sundress he had purchased as well. It was a deep navy color and had little white heart polka dots all over it. He'd also gotten her a little white sweater to go along with it, taking some enjoyment in dressing the little thing like the doll she was.

"I like secrets," Darcy nodded. She tugged on Bucky's left index finger and he turned smiling at her as she held her hands up in anticipation for the dress to be pulled over her head.

Bucky did just that and he whispered very secretively, "Okay, so you know how Stevie is being very rude to you?"

Darcy stuck out her tongue and made a raspberry sound.

"I think you make him so riled cause secretly? He likes you a little," Bucky revealed.

"DISGUSTING!" Darcy gasped.

"I know, totally disgusting, right?" Bucky nodded, shaking out the sweater and allowing Darcy to step in it. He smiled as she admired it, her hands going to the little pockets that were shaped like hearts. "So next time he goes to tease you for no good reason, you just remember, it's only on account of him having those disgusting feelings and not knowing how to get them out proper."
"Sounds kinda sad when you say it like that," Darcy reasoned.

"It is sad," Bucky nodded sagely. "So sad."

They walked out of the family bathroom, Bucky tossing the bag he had put Darcy's old dress in. She grabbed for his left hand, which was covered by the photostatic veil, but still felt cold and hard like vibranium. Bucky smiled down at her as she squeezed his hand with all her might as he led them straight back to the toy section, just as he had promised.

"This is a very nice toy department," Bucky declared, letting out a soft whistle at the size of it. There were six aisles, some of them pink, some of them blue, some of them neutral. He waited patiently and walked along as Darcy led him by the hand up and down the main aisle as she surveyed each of the toy aisles carefully. Finally, she stopped at the stuffed animal aisle and grabbed a brown bear, about the size of a small softball. Bucky grinned and nodded, "That's a very nice little bear, sweetpea...hey, where're we goin?"

Darcy ran, tugging Bucky's hand harder as she went towards the doll aisle, looking around carefully before selecting a simple black t-shirt meant for a dollbaby roughly the bear's size.

"Well, yeah, the bear should have clothes, you're right," Bucky nodded and laughed when Darcy tugged on him again, leaving the toy department completely and rushing as fast as she could to the hardware department. She seemed to know exactly where she was going, and stood on her tip toes in order to obtain a roll of silver duct tape.

She couldn't quite reach and Bucky helped her, holding the roll up for her approval. She grinned and made a little happy sound before gently pulling Bucky along this time, heading up to the front register. She stopped only once on the way, pointing at a big bag of tootsie rolls with a smile.

"Those are Stevie's favorite candies," Bucky revealed.

"I know," Darcy nodded with a little smile, revealing for the first time that she was missing one of her bottom teeth. Her tongue wiggled impishly, revealing that another one of her bottom front teeth was loose and looked to be ready to fall out at any second.

"Alright, we'll get them," Bucky nodded. "Maybe someday, he'll deserve 'em."
Once everything was paid for, Darcy wasted no time in grabbing the bag and running to the little bench that stood at the front of the store, she dug through the bag, quickly ripping open packages and handing the duct tape to Bucky to open. In the blink of an eye, the bear was wearing the shirt and she had started to wrap silver duct tape up and down the bear's arm.

The bear's left arm.

When she was done she handed the entire menagerie to Bucky, who had the sense in his head to rip the tape off. Darcy immediately grabbed her bear and tucked the tape down, cooing and marveling at his adorableness. She gave him a resounding smack of a kiss against his snout then cuddled him close.

"What's that fellas name, sweetpea?" Bucky questioned.

"It's my Bucky bear," Darcy grinned.

Bucky huffed out a breath and felt his heart melt inside of his rib cage. He wrapped the left arm around Darcy and pulled her in close, giving her a hug. She returned the hug and made an excited sound before pulling away.

"Let's go show, Rogers and Nat!" Darcy exclaimed with a large amount of enthusiasm.

She skipped by Bucky's side as he led her back to the truck, where Natasha was leaning against the passenger's side, with Steve inside, now dressed in appropriately sized clothing. He looked sharp in the blue jeans and red and blue checked flannel shirt. He didn't have boots on any longer, but the black sneakers with Thor's hammer on them weren't so bad. All in all, he looked like a well put together, calm little boy, and had even stopped sulking in the car as he carefully looked through everything else that Bucky had purchased.

His sensitive ears heard Darcy's giggle and he looked up expectantly, only to scowl as Darcy skipped next to Bucky. Steve's eyes squinted as something silvery sparkled in the setting sun. She was holding a toy, which made Steve so mad. He knew Darcy was faking half of her tears and outrage in order to wrap the other adult's around her little fingers. But it wasn't working on Steve, no sir.

He inched towards the passenger door and rolled down the window a crack to hear Darcy announce
to Natasha happily.

"I love my dress sooooo much, and look at my shoes! They gots sparkles on 'em!" Darcy cooed, tapping her feet against the ground enthusiastically. "And look it! Look it! I made a Bucky bear."

Steve pressed his nose against the window as he got a better look at the bear. It was brown like Bucky's hair and was wearing a simple t-shirt, but the arm was all wrapped up in silver, and looked a little bit like Bucky's real arm. Steve scowled at the bear.

As if sensing his displeasure, Natasha turned around and arched a brow at Steve. He rolled down the window via the old fashioned hand crank and glared at the bear. He shrugged and said, "She ain't never met Bucky before so how come she likes him so much?"

"Bucky's the nicest soldier ever," Darcy said succinctly, sounding a little prissy and stuck up when she did it. "He's the nicest soldier I ever met ever, ever, ever. And a best soldier ever. No other soldier is as good as Bucky."

Steve's scowl deepened.

"Did you want to show Steve what you got, sweetpea?" Bucky asked, holding the bag full of candy out to her expectantly.

In Bucky's experience, sugar usually mended fences between little people pretty well. It had always worked with his own house full of sisters.

"Oh, yes!" Darcy gave an adorable grin Bucky's way before carefully placing her Bucky bear in her sweater pocket. She reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of tootsie rolls.

Steve immediately began to drool.

Darcy unwrapped the first one carefully, putting the wrapper in her empty sweater pocket. She held up the chocolate nugget so Steve could see it, before popping it in her mouth, chewing slowly and looking insanely happy to be doing it. Bucky snorted with laughter and Natasha put her hand up to her mouth. The little girl was emboldened by their reaction and began unwrapping the next candy, repeating the process.
By the third candy Steve was livid.

"You ain't gonna share, you greedy girl?!?" He demanded hotly.

"You ated my ice cream," Darcy reminded him.

"You're gonna get a belly ache from all a candy you're eatin!" Steve accused.

"Yes, and when I get sick in the car later, I'm aiming it at your ugly shirt," Darcy said primly, before stuffing her face with another candy.

"Alright, alright, enough candy, sweetpea," Bucky took the bag and threw it in the bed of the truck. "We got three solid hours of driving before we get to the safe house."

"Without bathroom breaks," Natasha muttered.

"Damn, that'll probably be a thing now, huh?" Bucky looked at Natasha warily.

"Yes, probably," Natasha smiled just a little.

"I don't even get a little candy?!?" Steve yelled from inside the car. "YOU PEOPLE ARE AWFUL!"

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the support on this second de-aging fic of mine. I really appreciate everyone who reads. This is just a reminder though, that I don't solicit construction criticism. I'm very aware of my flaws as a writer and it's weak (but I'm cool with being weak), but getting comments telling me why you don't like the story is a muse killer for me. (It wasn't this story, but I'm issuing a blanket request).

So if you're mad at me or want to tell me I stink, just tell me a knock knock joke instead. Then we'll all be happy.
Thanks again for reading!
"THIS is the safe house?!?!"

Steve was staring up at the three story Victorian house that looked like something out of a storybook or the happy ending of a movie. The paneling on the outside was a bright, robin's egg blue, and the wood work around the many large and interesting windows and doors and porch was painted a shockingly bright white. On the left side of the house there was a substantial circular turret going up the whole building, and the top floor had big bay windows looking out into the world.

The house was an oddity to be sure, because it sat right in front of the lake, the only house of its style amongst log cabins. Steve only had to peek a little around the side to see an in ground pool and a lovely and incredibly expansive backyard. He looked back to Natasha who was smirking back at him knowingly.

"You been holdin' out on me!" Steve pointed a small, righteous finger right up into her face. "I been stayin' at houses RATS didn't even wanna stay at and you had a house like THIS a whole time?"

"Yes," Natasha said calmly as she stood next to Bucky, who Darcy had immediately latched herself onto as soon as they had stopped driving.

The little five year old girl in question was staring up at the house in wonder, her mouth hanging open as big, blue green eyes took in every intricate detail of the wondrous abode. Steve watched
with a frown as Darcy's eyes began to look at that circular tower of the house, her mouth closing and a small smile blooming on her face as her eyes reached the top of the tower.

She'd only just opened her mouth to speak when Steve's quick thinking and absolutely trollish tendency took over and he blurted out loudly.

"DIBS ON THE TOWER ROOM!"

Darcy stamped her feet repeatedly before letting go of Bucky's hand in order to make a run into the house and claim her fairy tale tower room bodily. But no sooner had she gotten to the top step of the lovely porch than had Steve and his super speed rocketed past her, causing her to stumble and fall on her behind as he merrily zoomed into the house to get the room himself.

"STEVE!" Bucky roared out angrily as Darcy looked around in confusion at having fallen, the hints of tears appearing in her eyes. "YOU GET BACK HERE YOU LITTLE PUNK!"

Darcy started to cry, and Natasha couldn't stand the sight of it and immediately stalked into the house, intent on forcibly removing Steve from the room. Bucky quickly went to Darcy, picking her up and cuddling her close as he tried his best to soothe the little girl.

"I just wanna be a princess in a tower!" Darcy whimpered pathetically. "Bucky, Bucky, Bucky, it's my DREAM!"

"There there, sweetpea, we'll figure somethin' out," Bucky promised, his right hand moving up and down her back as he quickly headed into the house as well. He immediately went for the steps of the little tower, rushing up it and hearing Steve screeching at the top of his lungs at Natasha.

"SHE CAN HAVE THIS ROOM OVER MY DEAD BODY! I CALLED DIBS AND DIBS IS DIBS, ROMANOFF!"

"Rogers, LET GO OF THE BED!" Natasha shouted.

Bucky sighed and gave Darcy an extra squeeze before opening the door to the absolutely beautiful and picturesque room. It was painted in a light, buttery yellow, and the queen sized four poster bed was situated perfectly to give the sleeper a view of the lake and the setting sun every night.
Currently, the serenity of the space was disturbed by a pint-sized Captain America screaming at the top of his lungs, and the Black Widow definitely losing her cool as she screamed back at him. Steve was clinging onto one of the posts on the four poster bed with both hands, even as Natasha had a hold of his feet and was trying to pull him away.

Steve's super strength wasn't having any of it though and he refused to give up his considerable hold.

"YOU WILL GIVE DARCY THE ROOM!" Natasha yelled. "She's been through ENOUGH!"

"That's HORSE SHIT!" Steve screeched, the efficacy of the swear word weakening thanks to the high pitched, nails on a chalk board quality his voice had.

"YOU'RE HORSE SHIT!" Natasha shouted back, trying to get better leverage as she pulled and yanked on the extra-tall, stocky five year old, looking as if she was trying to stretch him even taller.

Darcy giggled a little against Bucky's neck and he patted her back, the smirk on his face knowing and amused. Steve wasn't about to be budged anytime soon, and Natasha had lost any pretense of cool she ever had. She at least had retained some sense, because the Black Widow would have normally been able to detach even a super strength enhanced five year old from the bedpost, but thankfully her frustration had not allowed her to access that level of dastardly violence just yet.

"YOU ARE! YOU ARE! YOU ARE HORSE SHIT!!" Steve insisted, sounding desperate and on the verge of tears. "Just a cause of Lewis bein' littler don't mean that she's more scared an me!"

Natasha stopped pulling for one second, contemplating that. Steve didn't often show his fear in normal day to day living. Every once in awhile she'd catch a glimpse of his handsome face contorting into truly hilarious expressions of fear on the battlefield. She felt properly ashamed for not even thinking that Steve, at the age of five was not immune to fear. All of her anger bled from her quickly, realizing that Rogers was just putting on a brave face the entire day.

"I'm sorry," Natasha said softly. "Of course you're scared."

"Yeah," Steve sniffled. He turned and gave Bucky a look that was far from scared. His blue eyes were twinkling but not with tears. They were glittering with definite, absolute, non-negotiable mischief. He looked directly at Darcy who was peeking out from the safety of Bucky's shoulder and gave her the stink eye. "AND SEE HOW EASY IT IS TO BE A FAKE CRY BABY AND GET
"YOU LITTLE SHIT!" Natasha yelled, her anger back up past the danger zone as she began yanking on Steve's body again.

"THIS IS MY ROOM I CALLED DIBS!" Steve began screaming again. "IF A MAN CAN'T CALL DIBS AND HAVE IT COUNT FOR SOMEFIN' THEN THERE'S SOMEFIN' WRONG WIF THE WORLD!"

"I'm going to put you in the BASEMENT!" Natasha roared.

"Princess Sweetpea, I think a compromise is in order," Bucky sighed, enjoying the very loud show that Natasha and Steve were currently putting on. But it was cyclical and only a matter of time before someone got hurt, either physically or emotionally. He whispered into Darcy's ear, easily going undetected since both Natasha and Steve had just resorted to shouting war cries at the top of their lungs as they yanked and pulled and struggled.

Darcy sighed at Bucky's suggestion, although it HAD been a pretty big worry of her own up until that moment. She was well aware that grownups like Bucky and Natasha had to sleep in the same bed. For kisses and hugging, of course. But she didn't want to be alone.

She was scared to be alone.

Darcy shrugged and Bucky chucked her under her chin until she gave a little nod and smile. She was rewarded for her sacrifice with a soft little kiss to her temple that made her feel warm straight down to her toes and she cuddled into Bucky more fiercely, turning just slightly to watch Natasha struggle to get Steve off of the bed some more.

"I have a solution!" Bucky called out gaily.

"SCREW YOU, JERK!" Steve shouted.

"Darcy and Steve will share the room," Bucky continued on cheerfully.
Steve immediately stopped struggling to hold onto the bed post, but Natasha kept yanking, and her strength and his sudden wet noodle status had them both flying backwards in the room, where thankfully Natasha landed against a little overstuffed armchair sitting next to the bureau. She had had Steve by the ankles as she flew backwards, but had somehow managed to flip him and had him wrapped up in a hug against her chest.

"Ooff," Natasha sighed as at least forty-five, possibly fifty pounds of muscular child landed hard against her gut. She glared at Bucky and shook her head. "Are you crazy?"

"They have to learn to get along," Bucky said calmly. "And neither one of them wants to give up the room, so this is a compromise. Besides, this house may look big but we both know there isn't that much living space."

It was true and Natasha knew it. It had even part of the plan before Darcy and Steve had shrunk into pint-sized versions of themselves. Then, Bucky and Natasha had wanted to use their own relationship to play on their friends sentimentality to get them sharing a room and a bed. Now, Natasha feared the children bickering and somehow burning the house down.

Steve's face was turning purple in his anger as he reached up a finger and pointed it at Bucky accusingly, "You're a no good, rotten, awful---"

"HEY!" Darcy piped up. "Shut your face you poop face fuck duck! Bucky's the best and you're not allowed to be mean to him!"

"Thanks, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky smacked another kiss against Darcy's head. "Now, if everyone would like to stop being awful to each other, let's go down to the kitchen and cook us up some grub together."

"Yum yum yummy yummo yummers."

Steve wrinkled his nose irritably as he stared down at the single piece of paper that Bucky had provided for him. He didn't have too many crayons, just a four pack found in a cabinet in the mudroom. But it was better than nothing. Especially when the alternative was conversing with the idiot five year old girl who was in raptures next to him as she unwrapped yet another tootsie roll candy and popped it into her mouth.
It was five seconds before the raptures started again.

"SO YUMMY.  YUMMERS.  YUM TO THE MOSTEST!" Darcy said around a full mouth of candy.

They'd had a strikingly proper dinner of oven baked chicken, mashed potatoes and green beans. There were even little buttery rolls that had been badly shaped into crescents but were still properly delicious. Steve had eaten such a ridiculous amount of food, that Natasha had immediately begun silently panicking about the state of their provisions. She had quickly cleaned up the dinner that Bucky had made and then immediately taken the truck and run out to make sure they would have enough food to last should they have to stay in the house for too long.

Darcy had not eaten nearly as much food as Steve did. In fact she had eaten one spoonful of mashed potatoes, and she had only done that because Bucky had given her a charming smile and a very heartfelt please. She had drunk two little glasses of milk though, and that had seemed to assure both of the adults that she wouldn't starve to death.

"I don't see how you're allowed to have candy when you didn't eat your beans," Steve grumbled. "You gots the adults on some kind of magic spell, Lewis, and I'm gonna make sure you get caught at it."

"I can't help it if I'm just naturally loveable to everybody who don't got big...fat...heads," Darcy said primly before taking another tootsie roll and popping it into her mouth, smiling as she chewed and made rapturous, wordless noises.

"I HOPE YOU CHOKE ON IT!" Steve hissed, his own stomach already growling despite the very satisfying dinner he had just eaten. Bucky had always been able to do magical things to chicken, even way back before the Big War. Steve remembered that vaguely.

Darcy's eyes flew open and her entire body went rigid as she stopped chewing. Panic bloomed on her pretty little face quickly and tears began to slide out of the corner of her eyes. Real tears this time, Steve could tell. The little boy immediately tensed, jumping so that he was standing on his chair and he looked around warily.

"I didn't do anyfin!" he automatically muttered. He then jumped on top of the table and walked the short four foot distance to Darcy's chair, squatting in front of her on the table amongst the wrappers of the tootsie rolls she had already eaten. His shaky right hand reached out for Darcy, finger tips
brushing at the tears slipping down her tiny, rounded cheek. "You okay, Darce?"

"Mmm mmm," Darcy hummed as she shook her head no.

"Do you need a doctor?" Steve fretted, looking around again for Bucky, who had said he was going to make a sweep of the house, just in case.

"Mmm mmm," Darcy shook her head again, a little more desperately this time.

"Please tell me what's wrong," Steve asked softly.

Darcy nodded, before spitting a half chewed tootsie roll at Steve's feet. He fell to his behind as he looked down in surprise and disgust. For sticking out of the tootsie roll was one of Darcy's front teeth. He looked from the candy wrapped tooth to Darcy's face and his eyes went wide with horror at the blood trickling out of Darcy's mouth.

"YOU'RE BLEEDING!" Steve shouted, falling forward and putting both hands on her cheeks with surprising tenderness for a five year old. Darcy began weeping in earnest and he panicked, lifting his face up to the ceiling and shouting at the top of his lungs, "DARCY'S BLEEDING! GET DOWN HERE YOU USELESS JERK!!"

Bucky's rush to them was silent, and it was quick, but to Steve it felt like far too long as Darcy sobbed and cried, the sounds resembling squeaks and wails of pain. He did the only thing he could think of, he quickly hopped off the table and picked Darcy up, sitting down in her chair and pulling her into his lap, her back to his front. He began rocking her back and forth, speaking into her hair.

"S'okay, Darce, s'okay, sweetheart, s'okay," Steve whispered. "Buck'll come and help, promise. You're alright."

"What in the hell happened here?" Bucky said softly as he rushed in, grabbing a napkin from the end of the table and approaching the children quickly.

Steve could only point at the spit out candy with the macabre baby tooth in it. Bucky took a breath of relief, before kneeling next to Steve and Darcy on the chair, one metal finger urging Darcy to open her mouth so he could put the cloth napkin against the new gap in her teeth.
"You're gonna be just fine, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky promised. "It'll stop bleeding in just two shakes of a lamb's tail..."

"MmMugwwwy!" Darcy whimpered against the napkin.

"What's that now, hon?" Bucky asked, pulling the napkin away, pleased to see that everything looked just fine, the bleeding stopping quickly.

"I'm ugly!" Darcy fretted. "One tooth is cute, two teeth is UGLY!"

"You are the farthest thing from ugly, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky promised. "You are adorable."

"I'm a freak!" Darcy whimpered. "Steve'll be mean!"

Bucky took his focus off of Darcy for a few seconds to look up at Steve, his expression one of soft encouragement.

"Y Ain't a freak," Steve mumbled. His voice was barely audible, and they sounded like they pained him to say but he shrugged and did it anyway, "You're beautiful, like a real life doll."

Darcy sniffled and turned her head slightly so that it lay more properly on Steve's shoulder. She kept pressing her forehead against his jaw until he went a little boneless and pressed his head against hers a little.

"Now, no more candy, tonight," Bucky got up on his feet and picked up the gob of tootsie roll, smiling at the tooth sitting in the middle of it. He popped it into his pocket before he pat at Steve's head gently, proud of the kid for being able to not scream and tease and pick just this once.

"Steve, you can have the rest of the candy," Darcy sighed. "It's TAUNTED."

"Tainted," Bucky corrected patiently.
"CURSED CANDY!" Darcy hissed.

"Why you gonna give ME the cursed candy?" Steve demanded, pulling away from his slight snuggling and staring down at the annoying girl.

"Cause you told me to choke on it!" Darcy tattled.

"STEVE!" Bucky scolded.

"She was TAINTING me with it!" Steve tattled right back.

"Taunting," Bucky corrected. "You know you aren't supposed to talk to a young lady that way."

"That's a load of bunk!" Steve accused, glaring down at Darcy when she turned in his previous embrace to smirk up at him in that teasing way of hers. "You were put in the big freezer too much, cause even I know that you ain't supposed to treat girls different no more!"

Darcy's smirk eased a little and she looked at Steve appraisingly.

"Girls are equal to boys in all the ways, and they always had been, if anyfin they're even BETTER than boys are at dealing wif SHIT all a time!" Steve passionately argued.

"Fine," Bucky nodded calmly. "Then the new rule is, you should treat everyone with respect, boy or girl."

"Fuck that, I'm still punchin' Nazis when I wants to!" Steve insisted resolutely.

"Well, is that sweet little lady sitting in your lap right now a Nazi?" Bucky questioned.

Darcy gasped and put her hands over her mouth. "Bucky, I'm Jewish," she whispered desperately.
Steve wrapped an arm around Darcy's stomach and hauled her in a little closer. "S'okay, Darce, Buck didn't mean it, he was just provin' a point."

"I didn't mean it, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky assured her. "But Stevie needs to know he's gotta be kind and not a bulldozer of a boy."

"I'm polite when it matters," Steve grumbled. "Was nice when I thought she was hurt."

"Yeah," Darcy agreed quietly.

"Well, that's a start," Bucky smiled. "Now, I think what you need right now is a nice warm bath."

"I AIN'T TAKING A BATH WIF HER!" Steve shouted. "I'll sleep in the same room cause if'n I don't she'll PROBABLY get kidnapped by bad guys, but I don't got to be in a bath wif her!"

"He's got a DANGLER!" Darcy whispered to Bucky desperately. "I don't want to see it, I can't, if I do, I'll go BLIND!"

Bucky snorted with the hint of laughter before standing up and getting his face back to neutral with some difficulty. He wiped his hand over his mouth before nodding.

"I know, and I don't want you to go blind. Thankfully, there are two different bathtubs on the second floor, so we don't have to worry about danglers or goin' blind," Bucky assured them. "C'mon, Princess Sweetpea, why don't you go and pick out some nice, fresh pajamas, and meet me on the second floor for bath time."

Darcy nodded before her hand patted against Steve's forearm that was still wrapped around her. He had the good grace to let her go right away and she calmly hopped off the chair then took off at a run for the bureau in the room she would share with Steve. Steve then looked up to Bucky, an absolutely unmistakable expression of curiosity on his little, earnest face.

"Yes, Stevie?" Bucky asked patiently.
"If'n I gots a dangler---" Steve hesitated, knowing very well what was between his legs. And yes, he understood why Darcy called it that instead of just 'privates' because it did dangle. Hilariously, or so Steve thought. "And some nuts---"

Bucky snorted with laughter again but quickly calmed himself and nodded at Steve to continue.

"Well, what's she got that's so different that she couldn't see mine?" Steve wondered.

"Uhm...well," Bucky hesitated, before thinking back to his own childhood, when he had calmly looked at little Becca as her mother changed the infant's diaper. He'd asked what it was too. "She's got a flower, Stevie."

Steve blinked at that, absolutely flummoxed by the idea of it.

"And she ain't gotta shake it in the bathroom?" Steve blinked up at Bucky.

"Ladies wipe their---their flowers," Bucky shrugged.

"Huh," Steve nodded. He wrinkled his nose and said, "Are the flowers---are they pretty?"

"aaahhh...yeah," Bucky admitted truthfully. "But you can't try to sneak a look at Darcy's, you hear me? That's violating her privacy. And don't go showing her your dangler either! Just---no!"

After a whole day of mostly keeping level headed and cool while Natasha very quickly lost all semblance of sanity, Bucky had finally been broken. He shoved his hands through his hair, his face turning slightly red in frustration, then pointed an accusatory finger at Steve.

"NO MORE DANGLER AND FLOWER TALK!"

Natasha still hadn't returned, and it was well after the bright, early springtime sunset had sunk into the sky. Bucky wasn't too concerned about it. Bathtime had been easy, as Steve needed nothing more than a tub full of warm water to be content. The five year old Captain America had spent half
an hour of his bath time diving and swimming in the large, old fashioned tub. He'd spent approximately two minutes actually washing himself and another two minutes staring at his dangler with a confused look of perplexion on his little face.

Darcy had been a harder sell on bathtime. She had no qualms with stripping all her clothes off in front of Bucky, which felt sort of typical for a girl that Steve Rogers was (secretly) sweet on to do. Bucky could remember two or three girls in the past that Steve had been head over heels in like with wanting way more from him than from Steve. Poor kid.

But the water alone wasn't enough to content her. So after the tub had already been filled, Darcy had convinced him that she should squirt half a bottle of shampoo in and he should use the metal arm to swish it around powerfully and create loads and loads and loads of bubbles.

They'd created only a few bubbles that way, but Bucky had managed to get completely soaked. Darcy had finally gotten in the tub, but then had been woefully depressed about the lack of tub toys.

Now Bucky was the former Winter Soldier. He was a former WWII POW who had seen a lot of torture in his long, sad life. But in the span of twelve hours, Darcy Lewis had managed to somehow wrap him so inexplicably around her little finger, that disappointing her hurt his heart more than anything else had ever hurt it before. She had pouted at the water just a little morosely, and then dutifully gotten the washcloth in order to suds herself up.

Bucky was having NONE of that. He ran, checked on Steve (who was trying to figure out how long he could stay underwater, but the kid could only count to a hundred so it was all for naught), then ran down to the little supply cabinet in the basement of the house. He'd come back up with an armful of gear and Darcy's eyes had lit up when he'd returned.

"Are those bath bombs?" she asked excitedly as he placed a black orb the size of a baseball into the bath water.

"No, not anymore," Bucky promised her. "I figure they can be Princess Sweetpea's Armada, ready to defend her at a moment's notice."

"OHHH!!" Darcy clapped her hands together excitedly. "Tomorrow we can paint them to look like fancy airplanes with the fancy ladies on the side of them."
"Stevie can help with that, actually," Bucky grinned, watching as Darcy played with all of the former weapons he had de-weaponized. Four former grenades, two of the Black Widow's baton's, and a few icer weapons made up the armada of bath toys that Darcy was pretending to sail around.

He watched her until her hands turned pruny and then clapped his hands together.

"Time to get all sparkly and clean, Princess Sweetpea. Tomorrow we live to get messy again."

Darcy wanted her hair in braided pigtails for bed, but Bucky didn't quite trust himself to do it for her with the relatively new vibranium arm. Sure, the kid wasn't shying away from it, far from it. She was always grabbing at his metal hand first. Even with her little bear that she was currently making dance in front of her as she patiently sat on the bed next to Bucky, she would always pet at the 'metal' arm of the stuffed animal.

"Oughta put her hair up in rags," Steve announced as he walked into the door, feeling very smart indeed in the very old fashioned boy's pajamas that Bucky had managed to pick out. They were white flannel, with small red pinstripes running up and down every few inches. The pants were a little short on the overly tall five year old, but he didn't seem to mind as he threw himself up on the bed, landing with a bounce on his belly.

He looked at Darcy carefully, the nightgown wasn't like what Steve could remember of little girls wearing, but it was plenty pretty. It looked like a princess dress, and it was an aquamarine shimmering color and had a picture of a mermaid on the front of it. She had that insufferable Bucky bear in her hands, smiling down at it sweetly as she made it do a simple little dance.

Bucky was sitting next to her, brushing carefully through Darcy's wet hair. He looked up and smiled at Steve before shrugging.

"My hair is all clean, Rogers, WHY would I put it up in dirty rags?" Darcy asked in that superior, haughty tone of voice that really made Steve itch all over in annoyance.

"It's not DIRTY rags, Lewis," Steve told her. "And girls did it to make their hair curly and beautiful."

"My hair is already curly," Darcy informed him haughtily. She turned and smiled at Bucky warmly. "Braids please."
"Sure, braids," Bucky nodded, finally diving in. He knew how to braid. You didn't grow up with four sisters without learning how to braid. But he was going slow and extra careful so that Darcy's hair didn't get caught up on the metal plates of his hand. They wound up a little sloppy due to the fact that he wouldn't pull too tight, but Darcy seemed more than pleased with them when he had declared her done.

She smacked three smart kisses on his mouth, each one longer than the last until he started laughing at the last one.

Steve tossed himself on the bed dramatically, bringing a pillow up and over his face.

Darcy bounced herself away from Bucky then, going to her own side of the queen sized bed and delicately slipping herself underneath sheets and blankets. She wiggled into a comfortable spot, then made sure that Bucky Bear was cuddled under her arm.

"OH!" she sat up straight in the bed, causing Steve to jump into a sitting position, looking around warily. "THE TOOTH FAIRY!"

"The wait, what?" Bucky blinked at her.

"Oh yeah, the tooth fairy," Steve nodded. "Lewis here is due a big payday, I think you know, at least a penny."

"A PENNY!" Darcy scoffed. "That thing is worth a five dollar bill at least!"

"Five whole dollars for one crummy baby tooth?" Steve gaped at her. He blinked rapidly as he tried to count the teeth he had in his mouth. He was going to be a billionaire once he started ripping the darned things out of his gums.

"Well, we'll put the chomper under your pillow and we'll see what you get," Bucky smiled at Darcy. He dug around in his pocket and pulled out the tooth, candy and all and handed it over to Darcy.

She spent the next three minutes finding the best spot for it under her pillow before situating herself for sleep once more. Steve tossed around a bit as well before finding a cozy spot of the pillow then he looked up at the ceiling with firm resolution.
"I'm gonna stay awake and get an eye on that tooth fairy," he promised. "Make sure she's on the up and up."

"That's a good idea," Darcy nodded. "Some fairies are bad fairies."

"I know!" Steve nodded in eager agreement, he turned on his side and looked at Darcy with big, wide blue eyes. His voice was a whisper as he spoke with her, "My ma used to say that some fairies STOLE babies and kids."

"Stevie, no," Bucky shook his head.

"I don't want to get stolen again!" Darcy lamented, on the verge of exhausted hysteria immediately.

"Don't worry, Lewis, I'll stay awake and make sure no stinking fairie thinks they can take you," Steve promised her, puffing up like a proud little peacock. "You just go on to sleep."

"Okay, thanks, Steve," Darcy whispered, genuinely grateful. Bucky went to get up and leave the room and she reached out a hand, gripping his left index finger. "You know any good sleepy bye songs?"

"Uhm---well, sure," Bucky shrugged, sitting back down and smirking at Steve, who was waiting expectantly. He nodded and got up anyway, reaching for the light and throwing the room in soft darkness, lit up by the moon and the stars and the little night light that Bucky had plugged in earlier.

"Thanks for the memory...of candlelight and wine, castles on the Rhein, the Parthenon and moments on the Hudson River line" Bucky sang softly. Both he and Steve were staring at Darcy, watching the process of her eyelids getting heavy as she went boneless with the feeling of warmth and safety. "How lovely it was. Thanks for the memory of a rainy afternoon, swingy Harlem tunes and motor trips and burning lips and burning toast and prunes..."

His tune was aimless and slightly sharp, and much slower than the original he remembered. Steve eventually stopped watching the girl as Darcy quickly dozed off to sleep, happy to have a soft melody guide her there after her very eventful day.
"How lovely it was..." Bucky finished.

"I sorta remember that song," Steve whispered. "You never liked it when Bob Hope sang it."

"No, I didn't," Bucky winked at Steve. "Get some shut eye, kid. Let me and Natasha worry about fairies."

Steve wrinkled his nose and looked back at Darcy, who was already slack and heavy with sleep. He smirked when she let out a snore and a mumble, before turning out of her prim sleeping position and winding up face down in the pillow, her limbs all akimbo.

Bucky quickly made his exit and wasn't surprised to see Natasha standing in the hall, wiping suspiciously underneath her eyes.

"That wasn't the 1938 version," Natasha accused.

"No. It was the 1955 version," Bucky smiled at her. "We saw Ella Fitzgerald singing it. Wasn't a bad day at all."

Natasha took in a slow, deep breath and nodded at him, taking a step forward, looking ready to devour him whole. And Bucky would have, plainly speaking, enjoyed being devoured whole heartedly. But they had bigger concerns.

"Stevie's expecting a tooth fairy to visit, and Darcy's expecting at least five whole dollars for that tooth," Bucky advised her.

"Right...I can handle that."

Chapter End Notes

The song referenced in the chapter is this one [here](#). Lovely tune.

Thanks so much for reading!
Chapter Notes

Happy Monday!

Here's a new chapter! Warning: Tooth fairy tomfoolery, Sam Wilson being adorkable, Bucky Barnes trying to destroy ovaries, Natasha Romanoff in the kitchen, Steve Rogers is an adorable little shit with confusing feelings, and Darcy---Darcy gets into trouble. Again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Four: Tooth Fairies and Darcy’s Diet

"Seriously? He's the tooth fairy? Really? Natalia, I gotta tell you, dollface, but you were a helluva lot smarter back in 1955 than you are right now," Bucky said with absolute seriousness, unwilling to take it back even when Natasha raised a very angry right eyebrow at him, her face carved out of granite and marble otherwise. "I'm worried about you now. I mean, what have these Avenger fellas done to your smart brain? Where is my brilliant red headed ballerina?"

"I'm gonna enjoy her response to you," Sam Wilson clapped his hands together and waited for the magic to happen.

He'd been two hours away, crossing the border from Canada into the United States, intent on getting to the safe house in the perimeter zone that Natasha had set up for him when he'd gotten her call. He had been trying to understand the idea of Captain America shrunken mentally and physically into a five-year-old, staring constantly at the texted picture of Steve scowling at Darcy.

And after that, he'd been on autopilot, continually staring at the damned picture, marveling as tiny man biceps bulged against the fabric of the child's flannel shirt.

That was one kid Sam Wilson definitely didn't want to horseplay with. He seriously doubted he'd walk away with all of his physical capabilities.

The idea of Barnes having to deal with the two pint sized kids had given Sam a lot of joy, actually.
Because Steve Rogers was impossible to wrangle as a supposedly full grown, responsible man. He'd probably be unbearable as a five-year-old. And Darcy Lewis was no gentle, lovely princess in a tower. There'd been many times when Sam had briefly considered selling the woman to the nearest bidder just to be rid of her smart mouth and her teasing and the way she completely made Steve a trollish, ripe bastard just by being within close physical proximity of him.

He hadn't, because he hadn't had reason to. After Ultron, Darcy Lewis' frequent kidnapping attempts were no longer the Avenger's problem. Steve had still been mostly a trollish, ripe bastard, especially every time either Nick Fury or Maria Hill had checked in with the Avengers.

But Sam liked the idea of Barnes tearing his ridiculous hair out as he reached the end of his rope thanks to awful children that used to be awful adults.

"I----I---he was the only one close," Natasha muttered. It's not like we can get the real tooth fairy here."

Sam blinked in startled confusion at that.

Bucky smirked at Sam's reaction.

Obviously things hadn't been going how Sam thought they would be going. Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow, the former Russian Assassin and current most powerful and competent Avenger was FRAZZLED. And Bucky was calm and teasing.

"Is he sleeping yet?" Natasha demanded of Bucky, who was checking the nanny cam he had installed earlier while Darcy was busy losing her tooth.

"Nope, I told you, Natalia, he's a stubborn little asshole and he won't be going to sleep until he sees the tooth fairy coming and giving Darcy a fair earning for her tooth."

"Little SHIT," Natasha hissed.

Sam merely looked on in amazement as Bucky adjusted the camera angle, getting a closer look at the bed. Darcy may have started out the night as being normally tucked in and laying against her pillow. But she had devolved quickly, and now was laying horizontal on the bed, her feet pushed against Steve's chest.
To the boy's credit, he wasn't fussing about it. Instead he had a hand on her feet, patting them in a non discernible rhythm. He would also brace against them every time she kicked out in her sleep, which was smart, because tiny though she may be, Darcy had the leg strength of a small pony.

"So, what exactly am I doing again?" Sam looked between Natasha and Bucky, two of Mother Russia's finest pains in his ass, with extreme wariness as things seemed to be getting really real, really quickly.

"Put this on," Bucky turned and held up a pair of glittery wings that he'd cobbled together out of wire coat hangers, two pillow cases and all the glitter he had managed to create by grinding up an entire room full of silver foil emergency blankets.

It was a lot of glitter, truth be told.

Sam sucked on his front teeth and shook his head. "Oh hell no."

Steve was finding that his eyelids were becoming heavier and heavier with every passing second. He blamed being a stinking child. And he also blamed Darcy. And how stinking warm she was when she was asleep. She'd flipped around in her never ending unconscious crawling around the bed, and instead of her feet on his chest, she had now sprawled her entire little body against his feet and ankles.

His feet were currently warmer than they had ever, ever been.

She kept snoring too, so it was like that white noise machine that Scott Lang said he couldn't live without. So he was warm, and comfortable, despite Darcy's bony back pressed against the tops of his feet and the noise from her was like that white machine. He wanted to stay up and protect her from the fairies and make sure she didn't get kidnapped...again...but it was getting harder and harder to keep his eyes open.

He startled awake at a whimpering sound from Darcy, and sat up in the bed, staring down at his feet that she was still lying against.
"S'okay, Darce," he mumbled, patting the top of her head.

"Bad," Darcy mumbled in her sleep.

"No bad guys are gonna get you, sweetheart, s'okay," Steve promised sleepily, patting her on her head once more and looking around the room. Still all clear, and Steve felt himself swaying in his comfortable sleepiness as Darcy turned to be on her side, gripping his right big toe in a warm clasped hand.

It tickled just a little, but Steve refused to laugh and wake her up. Instead he kept fighting sleep with every blink, as his head began drooping as sleep over took him while he was sitting straight up.

The next time he blinked his eyes open, his hands reached for a weapon of any kind, but only found Darcy's Bucky Bear, which had been abandoned at his hip in Darcy's sleep aerobics. With only his still ingrained battle instincts, Steve whipped the bear in the direction of Darcy's original pillow, the thing making a dull soft thud against someone's head.

"You little FUCKER," the intruder hissed in a familiar voice.

Steve blinked blearily and looked at the tooth fairy reaching under Darcy's pillow. The sparkling from the wings made him wince and squint at the fairy.

"Where's your dress?" Steve mumbled suspiciously at the sight of a grey sweatshirt and a pair of track pants.

"At the cleaner's," the tooth fairy gruffly responded.

Steve furrowed his tiny brow at the voice. It sounded sort of familiar, but clearly distorted. But the face wasn't familiar. As a matter of fact, through some kind of faerie magic (photostatic veil, but Steve didn't realize that at all), the tooth fairy's face kept changing.

One minute he looked like Tinkerbell. The next he looked like that really cool actor grown up Steve had met once, Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson. The next he looked like Marlene Dietrich.
"You gonna let me finish my business here, you little shit stirrer, or should I call my friends—the BAD fairies?" the tooth fairy demanded in annoyance.

Steve managed to roll Darcy up using his feet, and he held onto her little, sleeping body in his arms tightly. He glared at the tooth fairy and mumbled, "Do what you have to do. But if anybody comes for Darcy, I'm gonna tear those wings off and make you eat them!"

"Sure, sure," the tooth fairy laughed. He sucked his two front teeth in annoyance as he pulled out the gob of chewed up tootsie roll candy and shoved it into his pocket. He then took a twenty dollar bill out of his other pocket and popped it under the pillow.

"Twenty?" Steve whispered.

"Girl's got nice teeth," the tooth fairy shrugged. "And none of us had change for a twenty."

"Huh," Steve blinked in confusion and weariness.

"Go to sleep, kid," the tooth fairy ordered. "You had a long day."

"I'll go to sleep when you fly away," Steve insisted, holding Darcy a little tighter to him protectively. To her credit, she bent like a pretzel and wound up with her left foot pressing into the small of his back painfully.

"Fly away. Right," the tooth fairy rolled his eyes up to the ceiling. He turned to Steve and pulled his hand out of his pocket, holding the palm of his hand up to his lips and blowing something dusty right into Steve's face.

"HEY!" Steve whined as he breathed in whatever it was. It combined quickly with his natural sleepiness and before he knew it, he collapsed onto the bed, now with Darcy's legs buried under his back as she lay horizontal to him on the bed, face down.

His super soldier metabolism fought against the whammy the tooth fairy had put on him, but all he could see from his lazily, stubbornly blinking eyes was the tooth fairy going to the window, yanking
it open and carefully crawling out, keeping up a non-stop commentary of swearing the entire time.

"Don't even have my real wings, you god damned assholes..."

"MY LEGS MY LEGS MY LEGS!"

Steve startled awake to Darcy's shouting and he reached for a weapon again and his hand found the Bucky Bear that had ricocheted off of the Tooth fairy's head, and he lobbed it at Darcy's face instead this time.

"OW!" Darcy whined. "RUDE!"

"Wassaamatter?" Steve mumbled.

"I CAN'T FEEL MY LEGS!" Darcy wailed, truly frightened and scared. "Your fat butt has paralleled me!"

Steve looked down at her in shocked outrage. He wasn't fat. He was just big boned.

“You should be nicer with your mean dumb damned mouth!” He grumbled irritably.

"Hey, hey, hey," Bucky was immediately in soothing mode as he ran into the room. Steve was laying on top of Darcy's lower half, fifty pounds of five year old crushing her little legs and leaving her trapped. She was sprawled out on her stomach and pounding her fists into the bed.

"DON'T CHOP MY LEGS OFF!!" Darcy moaned pitifully. She sniffled and shrugged. "Unless you can get me cool metal legs like your arm. But maybe only one so we can be twinsies."

Steve rolled his eyes and gently turned away from Darcy, easing his body weight off of her little legs. Bucky was there before Steve could do anything more, massaging tiny calves with a metal and
flesh hand as the blood flow came rushing in.

"Ow, ow, ow," Darcy's bottom lip wobbled. She sniffled as Steve retrieved the Bucky Bear he had bounced off of her face moments earlier, and danced it in front of her face. She took the bear and clutched it as Bucky continued to try and ease the pain of her pins and needles. She sniffled at Steve and nodded, "Thanks."

"Sorry my not fat butt made your legs numb," Steve mumbled. "You'll be alright, I promise."

"Okay," Darcy whispered into the head of her little bear. "You're not fat. That was mean I guess. You're just freakishly large."

"You move too much in your sleep," Steve accused. He nodded and said, "So's this don't happen no more, I'm gonna build a barrier so you can't mash yourself under me in your sleep no more."

"I don't want to be mashed on you!" Darcy disputed, her mind immediately taken off of the pins and needles working through her legs. "DISGUSTING."

"But you was mashed on me, so there!" Steve smartly retorted. "YOU'RE WELCOME for saving you from the fairies, by the way."

"Thanks," Darcy pouted into her bear.

"And you got WAY too much money for your lousy tooth," Steve accused.

"Money is good!" Darcy's eyes lit up. "How much of it did I get?"

"TWENTY WHOLE DOLLARS!" Steve spat out in disgust, going to her unused pillow and yanking out the money. He handed it to an eager Darcy and shook his head in dismay. "Didn't even do anything to deserve it."

"I gave up one of my beautiful teeth," Darcy calmly disputed. "Twenty dollars sounds just right."
"You're not wrong, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky grinned as he patted and tickled at the soles of her feet. "And it looks like we won't be cutting off any legs today, so how's about we go downstairs and see what Natalia's cooking up for breakfast this morning?"

Natasha had made gruel.

It wasn't quite oatmeal. It wasn't quite porridge. It was more...thinned oatmeal gravy.

"This is disgusting," Bucky was the one to say it, as Steve still shoved spoonful after spoonful into his mouth and Darcy would only look at it in horrified fascination.

"Rogers has no complaints," Natasha sneered as the boy held up an empty bowl for seconds.

"Tastes like gray warm sugar water," Steve shrugged, as Natasha poured him a second helping. "I like all a those things, so why wouldn't I like this?"

"Well, what's Darcy supposed to eat, huh?" Bucky questioned Natasha seriously. "She ate tootsie rolls and a spoonful of mashed potatoes yesterday, she oughta have a good healthy breakfast."

"You are the one who indulged her with the candy," Natasha accused. She held up the bowl of gray gruel in Bucky's face before placing it in front of Darcy. "And this is a good healthy breakfast."

"This is out of a Dicken's novel!" Bucky countered.

"Didn't think you could read," a newcomer laughed in the doorway. Sam Wilson smirked with his hands full of donut boxes and his gaze fell on Steve, who was staring back at him curiously while pushing spoonful after spoonful of some mysterious gray goop into his mouth.

Almost on reflex, Steve popped out of his chair and approached Sam, going in for the slap you on the back bro hug, but his hands didn't reach Sam's back, but his butt as he pounded with his palm three times.
“Good to see you, Sam.” Steve nodded before rushing back to eat more breakfast.

“What on Earth are you feeding that kid?” Sam wondered.

“Cram it Wilson, I seen you eat mayonnaise from a jar,” Steve waved him off, dedicating himself to polishing off his second bowl. He was so busy he didn’t notice that Darcy had been quietly moving closer to him, bringing her own bowl of Natasha's mystery breakfast.

She waited until both Bucky and Natasha were looking at Sam, arguing about how donuts weren't a real balanced breakfast, but when their attention was elsewhere, she held up her bowl of goop to Steve hopefully, a small, lopsided, friendly smile on her face.

"Please?" she whispered.

"You owe me one," Steve mumbled.

"Okay," Darcy nodded, dumping her entire bowl into Steve's nearly empty one. She watched in disgusted fascination as he began attacking it with gusto.

"The child doesn't need goop!" Sam yelled.

"The child doesn't need SPRINKLES!" Natasha insisted, quickly losing that cool, calculating edge to her voice. She imagined her ability to keep a calm head had probably left her the moment she saw Captain America and Darcy Lewis as babies in that parking lot.

"What my Princess Sweetpea needs is a GOOD breakfast," Bucky insisted. "Fruit, toast, eggs and bacon."

"I don't like those things, Bucky," Darcy said sadly. She held up her empty bowl and smiled, "I ate the gray stuff. It was not delicious. The talking candlestick lied to me."

Bucky blinked down at her as Steve wolfed down the last spoonful of his gray stuff before holding
up his empty bowl to Natasha again, a little smirk on his face. Something was up there, but neither kid was about to tell him, as they sat next to each other, looking like a united front for the first time in twenty-four hours.

Bucky sighed and shrugged. "I guess that's alright then."

Sam Wilson had not only brought donuts, he'd brought a chlorination kit. Steve was dutifully fishing leaves out of the pool while Sam worked on coming up with the right mix of chemicals to shock the pool into cleanliness. It was far too cold to swim yet, but they had no doubt that the fifty-five degree weather would eventually give way to warmer temperatures.

And Steve and Darcy both were looking forward to using the pool. Bucky had even promised that little pool toys would be brought back after the next supply run. Darcy had cheerfully declared that she would need a life vest and some floaties because she couldn't swim, but she wouldn't let that stop her from enjoying the pool.

While Steve skimmed the pool endlessly for leaves and other debris, Darcy was very thoroughly and very carefully picking up all the leaves she could find on the outskirts of the pool, placing them in a surprisingly neat pile on one of the lounging patio chairs.

"They okay?" Natasha questioned as she walked up to Sam with a tray of food.

Sam looked down suspiciously and saw that it was a tray of hot dogs, at least two dozen of them, and not gray goop spread on hard toast. He looked back up at Natasha and arched an eyebrow at her.

"James made them," Natasha rolled her eyes. "They are nutritionally devoid, but he says that kids love hot dogs and maybe Darcy'll finally eat something more than a glass of milk and a spoonful of mashed potatoes. He looked at the surveillance and Steve DID eat her breakfast for her, the little shit."

"Girl is a picky eater," Sam shrugged. "My cousin was a picky eater, and when my Aunt got sick of buying pediasure to make sure the little dude didn't die of starvation, she finally just made him sit at the table until he cleared his plate."
"How'd that work out for her?" Natasha asked with genuine curiosity. She didn't remember very much about her own childhood, but she knew that it was strict and regimented and she certainly didn't have the right to complain or refuse the food that was given to her.

She wanted the exact opposite for Darcy. Darcy had been someone she had genuinely considered her best friend prior to shrinking. And Natasha could honestly say that whether Darcy was at the age of twenty-eight or five, she wanted the same things for her friend. Comfort. Safety. Love. So she would do her best to try and make sure the girl ate something resembling a balanced diet, without forcing her to do something she didn't like.

"Kevin passed out at hour ten of refusing to eat spaghetti and meatballs," Sam nodded. "My mom had to go over and figure things out at hour twenty-two so Aunt Debbie didn't get children's services called on her. Moral of the story? Normal kids are stubborn little assholes who want to make you miserable. And you have two VERY not normal kids here."

"I know," Natasha sighed, shielding the large tray full of food from a rogue leaf that blew by on a powerful wind. "Any word from---anyone about who did this and why?"

"Nothing," Sam shook his head. "Which is weird, because usually the bad guys want to get their credit, even when it's not due."

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING? I JUST CLEANED THAT CORNER!" Steve shouted angrily.

Natasha went tense and looked to the pool where the kids had been getting along, miraculously enough. But now the leaves that Darcy had been carefully organizing were floating in the corner of the pool that Steve had just skimmed and Darcy was kneeling by the edge of the pool, her hand outreached over the newly deposited piles of leaves, looking down with a blank face.

"You're an awful girl!" Steve accused. "You did it on purpose!"

"I didn't!" Darcy disputed, the blankness of her face disappearing and being replaced with the picture of innocence. She rose to her feet and did an anxious sort of shimmy, her voice wavering when she protested her innocence again, "I swear I didn't do it on purpose!"

"You're always doing dumb things on purpose!" Steve raged on. "When you's a growed up you was always running here or there thinking you was bulletproof and then BAM you'd get kidnapped."
"I didn't do it on purpose!" Darcy stomped her feet, crossing her arms in front of her and looking like she was about to dissolve into tears.

"Jesus," Sam breathed next to Natasha. The animosity between the children was new to him. He had only seen a sleepy Steve try to protect an unconscious Darcy, and the children sharing a quiet, gray goop filled breakfast together. This screaming at each other thing was a shock to the system, but not entirely new territory for Sam, who had seen Steve and Darcy snipe at each other as adults at Avenger's Tower before Utron and the one time Fury had visited the upstate New York facility.

"There are certain things that are bleeding down from their adulthood," Natasha acknowledged, trying to curb the impulse to sidle up to Steve and smack him upside the head. Bucky had told her she would have to work on it. Both of their natural inclinations was to spoil Darcy. She was tiny and adorable and innocent. Steve wasn't the bad guy here, he was just a little shit, and he couldn't help that.

But seeing Darcy cry, at any age, made Natasha's blood boil.

"Alright, enough!" Sam called out, walking towards them and pulling out his phone.

Steve crossed his arms and glared up at Sam with righteous fury. "You got no room to talk Wilson, you thought all a those things about her before, you was the one that made me think she was acting dumb and getting kidnapped on purpose for 'ttention!"

Darcy gasped in dismay and took a jerky step away from an approaching Sam. She wobbled on her feet and in less than the blink of an eye, she had fallen face forward into the pool with a terrified shriek. Both Natasha and Sam jumped to pull her out, but were too slow as Steve immediately dove into the pool, with perfect Olympic form. He popped up to the surface, a coughing and spluttering Darcy clutched tightly in his arms as he reached out for the pool skimmer that Sam had extended towards him.

Just as he climbed the steps with her a vicious wind blew past, causing even Steve to shiver.

"To the house," Natasha said quickly.

They made a run for it, Bucky startling in the kitchen while he was cleaning up. His eyes went wide with concern at the sight of five year old Steve running into the house with a whimpering Darcy in his arms, the both of them absolutely drenched.
"What happened?" Bucky demanded, going to the little cushioned bay window that Steve had dropped Darcy on. He pulled the boy away as Steve began to try to strip off the girl's wet, cold clothes off of her.

Sam turned Steve away from Darcy as Bucky went into action, pulling the girl's wet clothes off as her teeth chattered loudly. Sam yanked at Steve's own wet shirt, but the boy shrugged him off so that he could undress himself. Sam took it in stride, holding up his phone in Steve's face, showing the surveillance he had pulled up from the pool for the last ten minutes.

"Why you got cameras everywhere?" Steve demanded as he shamelessly stripped down to his skin in a way that only a distracted kid could.

"It's a safe house, Rogers," Natasha explained with a hint of patience as she dropped a towel on his head, then began wrapping him in a quilt. Bucky was doing the same to Darcy, whose teeth had at least stopped chattering endlessly, but now she was sniffling pathetically. “Sam is our first perimeter of defense. He’ll be able to check in on us twenty-four hours a day.”

Sam handed Steve the phone and went straight for the cupboards, banging them open in an attempt to find something warm to make for the kids.

"What kind of house doesn't have hot cocoa, you guys do know you're in Wisconsin right now, right?” Sam muttered.

"All we got is coffee," Bucky sighed, watching the surveillance over Steve's shoulder.

"I like coffee," Darcy whispered against Bucky's shoulder.

"Warm her up some coffee," Bucky hugged the little girl as tight as he dared.

Steve furrowed his brow as he watched the surveillance on screen, seeing Darcy pick up a handful of leaves and begin to stack them neatly in her tiny hands. Brown curls began to move in an unpredictable swirl on the surveillance feed, a violent wind whipping off the lake and pushing the neat stack of leaves that Darcy had made right into the pool that Steve had just skimmed.
The little Darcy on the screen looked absolutely terrified and she slowly approached the pool and reached, trying to pick some of them out while everyone else was occupied. The little Steve on the surveillance turned to her at that moment and saw her reaching into the pool and all his hard work ruined.

Bucky wrinkled his nose in annoyance when Darcy went jumpy at Sam's approach on the surveillance and hugged the girl tighter. Sam wasn't a threat, and Darcy knew that. But the girl had been so terrorized as an adult that ANYONE bigger and stronger than her approaching her made her flinch.

"What were you yellin' at her, Stevie?" Bucky asked quietly as Sam handed him a cup of coffee and gently prodded for Darcy to sip at it.

The girl gripped the mug with both hands and began slurping the caffeinated beverage down quickly. Steve could only stare down at the phone morosely. Natasha's hand on his shoulder squeezed with surprising gentleness and Steve drew in a shaky breath.

"There was a misunderstanding about the leaves," Natasha answered back with that uncanny calmness that meant the conversation was over.

Darcy slurped at the dregs of the coffee and looked up at Bucky with eyes that were extra large and pathetic looking with her wet, bedraggled hair. She wiggled the coffee cup in her hand and gave Bucky a little half smile.

"You'll stunt your growth," Sam shook his head. “No offense, but you’re already on the tiny side, midget.”

Darcy pouted pitifully and put the mug to the side, before curling into her towel and quilts and Bucky's side more fiercely. He wrapped both arms around her and held her close, feeling something warm and foreign hit his heart as the tiny person burrowed her face into his shoulder some more. He swallowed a little, realizing he was a goner for the little bundle he held against him. Twenty four hours in and he was done for. Bucky sat up, bringing a quilt covered Darcy-sized ball with him.

"Let's get you a quick rinse and some fresh clothes and I'll braid your hair, Princess Sweetpea."

Steve looked up and watched miserably as Bucky walked out of the room with Darcy. He handed
the phone back to Sam and looked up at the man who had been one of his best friends when he was a grown up. He shrugged at Sam and asked, "You did used to say stuff about Darcy."

"Yeah, because you were at your wits end," Sam smiled. "You needed a comrade in arms to commiserate with you."

"I don't get half those words!" Steve grumbled, his little face turning red very quickly. He stomped his right foot with such force that it shook the foundation of the house. "I don't get ANY OF IT! I don't get why she makes me so---so---MAD so quick. And I don't get why it makes me sad if she's crying or why I care so much when she’s hurting!"

Natasha shot a little smile over the top of Steve's head at Sam, who was staring down at Steve in unfettered fascination. A bet was about to be settled between the two of Steve's grownup friends. And it was all thanks to a five year old's inability to process very complicated feelings.

Suddenly Steve turned to Natasha, cobalt blue eyes glittering with tears. He looked perplexed and heartbroken and Natasha could feel her gut turnover unpleasantly at the sight of Steve's discomfort.

"How come, huh? How come it feels so bad?" Steve demanded. "Awful stuff happened to her, and it's MY FAULT! Why can't she just stay safe?!?"

"Nothing's your fault," Sam insisted.

"It is! IT IS!" Steve lamented. "It's my fault, it's mine!"

"Steve," Sam took a step forward, confused. He had been expecting Natasha to be right. He had been expecting all that animosity Steve held for Darcy when they were grown up to be a ridiculous, emotionally stunted way of covering up real feelings. But what Steve was feeling right now, as a five year old, was tortured guilt. And Sam couldn't understand where it was coming from.

"Come on, warm dry clothes for you too," Natasha said quickly, knowing EXACTLY what Steve was alluding to and knowing that the grownup version of Captain America didn't want that particular secret getting told. She lifted him up, ignoring his first violent squirms. They melted soon enough, and by the time she had gotten to the room she shared with Bucky the night before, Steve was just a quivering mess of soundless sobs.
"M'terrible," Steve lamented. "Why'd you want to make me spend time wif her, you shoulda kept her far far away wif Fury!"

"You're not terrible," Natasha insisted, pushing Steve's face back down so it lay against her shoulder. Her hands did a sweep up and down his back and she sighed. "I've told you hundreds of times, that the Alps---what happened to Darcy in the Alps, that wasn't your fault."

"It was," Steve disputed softly. "I ruined her life afore I even met her. I ruin stuff all a time!"

"You didn't and you don't," Natasha sounded angry in her denial. "The Darcy I befriended after the Alps is a wonderful woman. She's strong. And resilient. And GOOD. She is not ruined."

"You shouldn'ta made me be around her, I'm gonna be awful!" Steve pulled away and looked up at Natasha with betrayal. "You shouldn'ta pushed!"

"I just want you both to be happy," Natasha said quietly, suddenly very calm. "I just want for the both of you to not waste time. Time taken and time wasted are the same, Steve."

Steve blinked up at her, not quite understanding what she was saying, the intense feelings behind it. But he bet it had something to do with the fact that he'd caught Bucky and Natasha kissing that morning after Steve had eaten all of the gray goop.

"I ate Darcy's breakfast this morning," Steve revealed. "And she ain't had nothing but a glass of milk since. So when she starves to death, it'll be my fault."

"Thank you for telling me that," Natasha smiled. "And don't worry, we'll figure out what Darcy likes to eat soon enough. Now come on. Let's get you dressed and then we'll go see if the hot dogs are still edible."

The hot dogs had been edible. And they had brought them back into the house and ate them around the table. Or Bucky, Natasha, Sam and Steve had eaten them. Darcy did not.

"Sweetpea, you gotta eat something," Bucky said calmly, despite the fact that behind that calm
façade he was mentally calculating how many calories the girl had consumed in twenty four hours, and if she could conceivably survive on so very little. He remembered the Depression a little, but the clearest memories had always been a growling, hungry stomach that hurt so damned much it had brought tears to his eyes.

She'd even refused the candy, claiming it was still taunted.

"I can't eat hot dogs, they got butts!" Darcy insisted, clutching her Bucky Bear to her chest and staring at the food that Steve was quietly shoveling into his mouth.

"What do you mean, they got butts?" Sam repeated as he packed up a backpack before he headed out to his own safe house in the safety zone, ready to provide a layer of security. "All meat once had butts."

"Butt," Darcy pointed to one end of the hot dog. She pointed to the other and wrinkled her nose, "BUTT!"

"What if I cut the butts off?" Bucky bargained, glaring at Sam when he snorted with laughter.

"Still so gross," Darcy shivered.

"Darcy, you HAVE to eat," Natasha said sternly. "Tell me what you want to eat and I'll get it."

"Butter brickle frozen custard," Darcy answered easily.

Steve wrinkled his nose when his face flushed. He took a big gulp of water and then concentrated on eating his seventh hot dog.

"Ice cream is not a balanced meal," Natasha sternly advised. "Do you like any fruit?"

"No, they got bug poop on it," Darcy shook her head.

"Do you like any vegetables?" Sam asked.
"BIRD POOP ON THOSE!" Darcy shivered in disgust.

"Bread?" Bucky asked hopefully.

Darcy thought about that for a moment before shrugging and saying, "No poop on that, but still yucky."

"Congrats, you guys have a five year old who likes coffee, non-taunted candy and ice cream," Sam said dryly. "Don't go into the pool for at least another forty-eight hours. Call me if you need me."

"Got it," Bucky saluted the man with his middle finger only as he walked out, followed closely by Natasha, who likely had security measures to go over with the high flyer. Bucky then turned his attention back to Darcy who was sipping at her milk very carefully. "Sweetpea, do you like pizza?"

"I like cheese!" Darcy said with excitement.

"We got cheese," Bucky nodded eagerly, hopping up and going to the refrigerator. He was cutting a block of cheddar into cubes in no time, putting them on a plate for the girl, who gobbled up three pieces very quickly.

"Do you like burgers?" Steve wondered curiously. "I like burgers."

"Gross, cow patties," Darcy made a humorous disgusted face. "And you like everything!"

"Not true, I don't like tacos," Steve argued, although he seemed very subdued at it, clearly not up to picking at Darcy, whose hair was still wet from her earlier trauma.

Darcy blinked thoughtfully and turned to Bucky as she crammed another two pieces of cheese into her mouth. She nodded at Bucky and admitted, "I like tacos. But only the meat and the lettuce. From a Taco Bell too, not homemade."
"What about the cheese on the tacos?" Bucky wondered as Darcy shoved more cheese into her mouth.

"Gross," Darcy mumbled.

"But the cheese is the same as what you’s eatin’ and the meat is the same as a burger and the lettuce is a vegetable!" Steve countered, his annoyance building easily with the volume in his voice.

"Well, it's a start," Bucky gave Steve a stern look. Darcy and Steve had had a traumatic morning already, they didn't need another blow up. "We'll get you some tacos. Right now, you just eat your cheese...and drink your milk..."

Bucky put his head in his hands and realized something far too late as Darcy finished off what had to be her third adult serving size of cheddar cheese.

"You are gonna be as constipated as the dickens. Well...maybe the coffee will come in handy then"

Chapter End Notes

I'm super excited about some future things in this story. Every once in a while I'll be slapping some feels in here, so fair warning.

Next up---smooches by the fire.
Fire Pit Safety and Appropriate Marshmallow Handling

Chapter Notes

Who wants 4000+ words of ridiculousness that made me invent a new dance for the happiness writing this brings me. It looks like the macarena, FYI.

Seriously. I hope you enjoy this chapter because I had a BLAST writing it.

Get ready for an evening by the fire pit with hot dogs and marshmallows and kisses.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Five: Fire Pit Safety and Appropriate Marshmallow Handling

“Is Sam gonna come back?” Steve asked Bucky as they carefully placed little logs into the fire pit that was on the fancy patio area next to the in ground pool. They were practically building a little log cabin at that point, stacking logs into a structure nearly one foot high in the small pit that resembled the inside of Steve’s old shield.

Natasha and Bucky had decided after Steve’s quiet moroseness continued throughout the day, that drastic measures needed to be taken. The list of things they needed was rapidly growing, because they didn’t have cable, or wifi, or board games. The only movie that was on the shelf next to the large flat screen television was Dog Day Afternoon, and not one of the residents of the safe house had been the least bit interested in watching it.

It had been Darcy that had approached Bucky after her naptime (her crash from the caffeine and adrenaline high had happened pretty quickly), when she had stumbled into the kitchen with her Bucky Bear clutched in her hands.

“Rogers is being a piss baby and I don’t like it.”

Bucky had had to shove his head in the fridge at that moment to let out the snort of laughter, and had come back with a little box of juice for the girl. He was happy to see that she squirmed in excitement at the juice box and before he poked the straw in, she carefully lifted up the wings on the side of the box, giving her little handles that she clung to as she quickly drank the entire thing.
“He needs fun and stuff to do so he stops being a pissbaby,” Darcy had advised. “But we don’t got none except for coloring. And he’s so good at it that he needs better crayons and paint and stuff.”

Bucky had promised her that depending on the security reports, they would definitely go to the store the next day and pick up all the activities the children could want. In the meantime, it was decided that in lieu of television or movies, a night of toasting marshmallows and hot dogs at the fire pit would have to suffice.

“Wilson will be back eventually,” Bucky shrugged at Steve. “He’s like a winged version of the clap, I can’t be rid of him forever.”

“What’s the clap?” Steve furrowed his brow. He sort of remembered the word, but not exactly what it meant. It was happening a lot ever since he was made small and young and it was getting more and more frustrating every time it happened.

“Uhm, like cooties but different,” Bucky hedged as they began building a little roof for the fire pit log structure out of tiny sticks and rolled up pieces of paper. “Cooties between a lady and a fella. Or a fella with a fella. Or a lady with a lady. All sorts of combinations, really.”

Steve wrinkled his nose in intense thought at that as he reached for the torch lighter and tried to figure out the child lock. He quickly became frustrated and just decided to break the damned thing off, giving him unfettered access to a really large flame. He held it carefully to the pieces of paper and the entire little log cabin they had spent the better part of a half an hour building went up quickly and efficiently.

“Cooties from kissin’?” Steve asked quietly as he took one of the little metal skewers for the hot dogs and marshmallows and poked the fire for fifteen seconds before pulling it out and dipping it into the cooler that was full of ice, bottles of water and the remaining juice boxes. He grinned when the metal hissed and went about repeating the process. “Or cooties from huggin’?”

“From sharing a bed,” Bucky said as delicately as he could, knowing that somehow, Natasha would still find a way to be disappointed with allowing this conversation to continue. She had been less than pleased that he had allowed them to speak of danglers and flowers.

Steve stopped his poking around the fire immediately and looked up at Bucky with extreme wariness.
“I share a bed wif Lewis!” Steve reminded him. “And you share a bed wif Romanoff!”

“Uhm---well, it’s not so much that as---uhm---”

“We’re gonna be a cootie infested clap house!” Steve lamented.

“No, no, none of us have the clap,” Bucky insisted. “Or cooties.”

Steve looked up at Bucky in disbelief and shook his head. “You and Romanoff was kissing after dinner today, when you was cleaning the dishes.”

“Stop creepin’ on us, pal, that stuff is private,” Bucky scolded.

“And she goosed your behind!” Steve pointed at Bucky’s face. “It was disgusting, the noise you made---like you liked it or somethin’!”

“I did like it, you little goon,” Bucky revealed, grinning at Steve’s shocked gasp. “Nothin’ better in this world than making time with Natalia. We kiss all the time when you little rugrats aren’t looking!”

Steve gagged and moaned out in distress, “I think I just threw up some ‘pasghettis from dinner.”

“Yeah, and you know what else?” Bucky crouched into a kneeling position so he was face to face with Steve. “I know that when you were a grownup a few days ago, you wanted to kiss girls too. One particular girl.”

“Lies!” Steve accused.

“It’s a girl we both know,” Bucky teased.

“Shut your fuckin’ face hole!” Steve screeched, putting his hands over his ears.
“Her name starts with a D and ends with an ARCY,”

Bucky’s teasing immediately stopped when Steve roared like an angry lion and reached again for the red hot skewer that he had left in the fire. Thankfully his reflexes and speed still matched Steve’s pretty well, and he managed to stop himself from being stabbed in the groin with it.

“Take it back!” Steve demanded.

“Take what back?” Natasha demanded, carrying a tray and walking alongside Darcy, who held two bags full of marshmallows, her Bucky Bear crammed into the front pocket of her little purple sweatshirt. Natasha sighed and said as calmly as she could, “Rogers, if you keep trying to injure Barnes, you’re not allowed to have any s’mores.”

Darcy claimed she abhorred roasted marshmallows. But she had no problem with regular marshmallows and chocolate bars. Bucky’s previous fear about Darcy having insufficient calories to survive was now gone, but he still feared that she was getting absolutely zero nutritional value the past two days.

It wouldn’t be a problem if this second childhood of theirs wasn’t going to last much longer. Fury had sent a text two hours ago stating that either the license plate had been wrong, or whoever had put the whammy on Steve and Darcy was better than they thought at subterfuge.

Steve had gone off in an expletive laden tirade about how he has a perfect memory and ‘Fury is just an incompetent secret keepin’ me’er do well who can’t do any job gooder than me’. Either way, nearly forty-eight hours in, they had no answers. Bucky feared that if they had one or two more weeks of Darcy at the age of five, they would have a case of scurvy on their hands.

Darcy was shoving another marshmallow into her mouth before Steve sat back in his patio chair next to Darcy and carefully turned his newly empty skewer towards her for more marshmallows. She had refused to give up either bag she had carried, but would benevolently give everyone marshmallows when they needed it. Steve couldn’t help but stare as Darcy’s little mouth could barely contain the marshmallow she had shoved in. The corners of her lips were smudged with chocolate.

Bucky began humming a tune aimlessly and Darcy smiled at it, finding that she quite liked how Bucky sang things. She looked at him hopefully and sure enough he began singing the words for her, throwing Steve a wink beforehand.
"Kiss me once and kiss me twice and kiss me once again...it's been a long long time," Bucky sang in his slow, measured, slightly sharp drawl.

Steve wrinkled his nose up at the man who was clearly just trying to rile him. Bucky hadn’t even known that particular song until a few weeks ago when Steve had played it for him, and here he was singing it to torture the hand that had given it to him to eat.

Also, Darcy was eating it up though, dancing in her seat, her little hands clutching marshmallows in her fingers as she waved them around, her stupid grin big enough to split her face as Bucky continued to sing the song. Steve gave him a glare that could kill someone before looking to a curious Natasha for help. She could only shrug and then look back at Darcy, a little indulgent smile on her face.

Steve huffed a sigh and looked back at Darcy. He didn't remember everything so clearly about being a grownup. He remembered the swear words, clearly, as did Darcy. He remembered how Bucky and Natasha were important to them. He remembered that the last year of his life had been filled with pretty awful things (fighting with Tony, being a fugitive), alongside pretty awesome things (getting Bucky back, knowing how far his friends would go for him).

And he did remember every time he saw Darcy Lewis (rarely), or read a report about Darcy Lewis (often), he had been frustrated. He was sure it felt different when he was a grown up, staring at her mouth. But as a five year old, staring at her mouth and having Bucky tease him mercilessly about having wanted to kiss her as a grown up, but right now it felt awful. It was itchy and uncomfortable and he knew, HE KNEW, he shouldn't feel like that at all, and it made it that much more awful.

"GIMME MY MARSHMALLOWS!" Steve shouted angrily, waving the metal skewer in the air and interrupting Bucky's singing.

"Watch her face, Rogers!" Natasha scolded, wincing when the hot metal got within inches of Darcy's chin.

"I wouldn't hurt her!" Steve insisted quickly.

Darcy shoved three marshmallows on the skewer nevertheless, then screwed her face up into something silly and not at all menacing even though she had meant for it to be quite menacing. Steve couldn't help but bark out in laughter at it.
"Mwaaat?" Darcy asked around the mouthful of marshmallow.

"You look like Stark!" Steve laughed heartily, pointing at her with his unoccupied hand. "You even got the face hair like him!"

"I GOT HAIR ON MY FACE?!?" Darcy looked to Natasha in fear.

"You got some chocolate, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky assured her, gesturing to the corners of his own smile.

"Come here, I have these disgusting smelling wet wipes," Natasha held her arms open for Darcy, a patient, nearly happy smile tugging at the corners of her own mouth.

"Naah, that kind of chocolate doesn't get wiped, that gets kissed off," Bucky advised as Darcy still skipped towards Natasha.

Something in the little girl's eyes lit up and Natasha remembered her telling stories of being touch starved in her own childhood after her single mother had passed. She hadn't learned how to hug properly, really, until she was a freshman in college. And she had taken to physical affection like a duck to water, really. But the eager little look on Darcy's face had Natasha flinging the wet wipe to the side and picking the girl up and off her feet, smacking welcome kisses against the corner of her mouth, doing nothing to clean up the mess on Darcy's face.

But the kisses were sweet and the giggles Darcy made were the things dreams were made of.

Steve watched as Bucky moved on the lounger that he had been sharing with Natasha, getting close enough to place kisses on the other side of Darcy's face. The little boy stewed as the scratchy stubble on Bucky's cheek tickled at Darcy's skin and made the girl squeal and giggle louder.

"There's more chocolate here if you want it, Stevie," Bucky advised.

"DISGUSTING!" Steve shouted automatically, taking his skewer and shoving it right into the fire, the marshmallows getting buried under a pile of burning embers, ensuring that they would be molten lava sugar underneath a healthy brown and black crust of burnt confectionary. "It's not even
sanitizer!

The kissing and giggling ended eventually and Steve had just pulled his thoroughly roasted marshmallows from the fire. Darcy had been going back to her bags of sweets, her mouth wiped off now and she stared at the glowing, nuclear marshmallows on Steve's skewer.

"They really taste good like that?" Darcy wondered of Steve.

"Yup," Steve answered, waving the stick so they would stop flaming. He sat back in his seat and grabbed for a very cold bottle of water out of the ice cooler. He drank half the bottle while Darcy stared at the marshmallows, obviously trying to work up her courage to try one.

Steve heard the smacking of lips and turned to glare at Bucky and Natasha, who had obviously just chanced getting caught by him to share a kiss by the fire. His steely blue eyes narrowed at them, Natasha shrugging at him and Bucky winking playfully.

Both of their faces did an interesting sort of magic trick in the span of about half a second. Their expressions had been playful and teasing and slowly melted into two nearly identical expressions of horror and fear as they scrambled to their feet. Steve knew it was Darcy standing by the fire and he dropped his water bottle and sprung to his own feet, going towards her as she bent down and tried to take a bite out of one of his still incredibly hot and unsafe marshmallows.

Steve pulled the skewer away just as she got her lips grazed against the marshmallows that had just been ON FIRE a second ago. He flung it away and put his hands on her shoulders looking down as her eyes went wide with the pain of very briefly burnt lips.

"OWWWWWWW!" she whined.

Steve did the only thing he could think of.

He bent his head and kissed her.

His lips were freezing cold from the water bottle, and he only wanted to give her relief from the pain.
He'd always only wanted to give her relief from the pain. He remembered that. A distraction. A diversion. Teasing and picking and being obnoxious so she wouldn't remember how scary it had been the first time she had seen his face. Because if she remembered, that'd mean he'd feel so guilty and he didn't, he couldn't think of it.

So he kissed her and she stood stock still, her whining stopping. Both of their eyes were opened and Darcy was staring at him with a confused, furrowed brow. Her eyes darted to Bucky and Natasha, but they seemed to be busy putting out a fire on a pillow, Bucky's left arm covered in white, goopy, melted marshmallow.

So she just let Steve's cold lips press against hers, drawing away any of the slight burning feelings that had quickly bloomed. It didn't look like a real kiss. She was sure of it, so it couldn't be a real kiss. It was like first aid, for sure.

But then Steve moved his big ole stupid arms and wrapped them around her shoulders in the approximation of a bear hug. And his eyes closed like a creepy creep.

"Okay, enough of that," Bucky announced. Sure, he'd been teasing Steve relentlessly for the last hour and a half about wanting to kiss Darcy, but it was quite another thing to see the gigantic five year old swamping the little, motionless girl in his arms, her eyes wide with shock. Natasha had run to the house for the first aid kit after the flaming marshmallow fire had been put out.

Bucky reached out to separate the five year olds, but suddenly Steve was having none of it, his lips still pressed gently to Darcy's, his arms were unyielding as he crushed her in a bear hug. Bucky couldn't pry Steve off of her even the smallest of inches. Steve had planted his feet and wasn't going to be moved at all.

"Pal, ease off, I need to make sure her lips aren't burned too bad," Bucky advised. "She might need some aloe for her lips if she's real hurt."

Steve pulled away at that, but didn't release his hold on a completely gobsmacked Darcy. He gave her mouth a once over, and saw that it was pink and pouty like it normally was, no horrible burns or blood.

"Does that count as my first kiss?" Darcy wondered in sudden horror. She looked past Bucky and Steve to Natasha, who was coming back onto the scene with an obscenely large field kit, full of so much more than just bandaids. "TASH, TASH WAS THAT MY FIRST KISS? I CAN'T AMEMBER ANY OTHER FIRST KISS!"
"Good job pal," Bucky smirked as Steve dropped Darcy at the first reappearance of her shrieking.

The little girl ran to Natasha who was digging into the field kit, pulling out ointment that could have instantly healed a second degree burn. She dotted it quickly on the girl's lips and Darcy felt her whole mouth go a little numb. Which was disappointing a little, because she had liked the nice cold feeling Steve had managed to give her. She looked up at Natasha in worry.

"Wash it mah firsh kisshh?" she asked around numb lips.

"I don't think so, Darce," Natasha gave her a gentle smile.

Steve's brief scowl was only seen by Bucky, but it spoke volumes.

"Caushe I didn't do it wight!" Darcy insisted. "I jush shtood an didn't do noshin!"

Bucky chuckled and Darcy turned to face both him and Steve. She looked at Steve in concern.

"Wash it your firsh kissshh?" she demanded anxiously. "I RUINED SHTEVE'SH FIRSH KISSHH! OH NO!"

"I---what?" Steve asked in complete horror.

"I'll do it right thish time," Darcy promised, rushing at Steve and throwing her arms around his middle and pressing numb lips against his cheeks and his nose and his forehead.

"HELP!" Steve screamed as Darcy essentially drooled on him.

"It's not his first kiss, Darcy!" Natasha laughed despite herself.

"How d'ya know? It felt like he never kished anybody!" Darcy revealed, causing Bucky to start cackling with laughter. She smacked a numb lipped kiss against Steve's chin, then pulled away to
watch his face turn rapidly tomato red.

"I kissed Steve back in 2014---"

Bucky's laughter ceased immediately and he looked down at Steve with an arched eyebrow.

"You did what now?" he asked Natasha in a cool whisper.

As gently as he could, Steve removed Darcy from his person and made her sit on his abandoned chair. He then nodded and looked at a smirking Natasha with a sour expression.

"KISSH ME!" Darcy demanded. "DO IT RIGHT THISH TIME!"

"NO MORE KISSING!" Steve shouted. "We're all gonna get the clap cause we've all kissed each other!"

And then he ran like the dickens. His super speed was on display and cartoon trails of smoke might have kicked up in his wake as he escaped back to the house, truly in fear for his well being with the way Natasha was smirking and Bucky was glaring.

Darcy looked around in confusion and demanded, "What'sh the clap? OH MY GOD DO I GOTSH THE CLAP?!?"

Bucky couldn't find Steve for two whole hours after the revelation of Steve and Natasha's one time kiss. The little bastard had managed to evade him even at bath time and refused to even answer the siren call of warm milk and a cookie before bedtime. He had finally clambered down from the rooftop at Darcy's first protestation regarding having to sleep in the room by herself and fretting over his safety. He swung himself into the bedroom, giving an amused Bucky a wide berth. He then climbed the bookshelf in the corner of the room, reaching behind the books that all were hollowed out in the middle to hold something previously nefarious (that Bucky had emptied out that first day).

Bucky watched in subdued amusement as Steve pulled out a bunch of ropes, then went back to the bed that Darcy was lying on. The five year old began setting up a rudimentary rope barrier,
something sort of like a net, but not very well done at all. He was stringing it up between the foot and the head of the bed in an imaginary line straight down the middle.

"What're you doing?" Darcy demanded, the feeling back in her lips. She was no worse for the wear, not showing any signs of having nearly burnt her lips off earlier in the night. She was fresh faced and clean, no sign of smoke or soot from the fire, her hair braided into twin pigtails in Bucky’s too loose fashion. She wasn’t wearing her mermaid nightgown that night. Instead, this one was purple and lavender and lilac and looked very much like the dress the princess had worn in that Tangled movie that Steve had quite liked even as an adult.

"Borders," Steve said succinctly.

"I ain't got the clap! Tash hit Bucky upside the head for teaching you such a word," Darcy revealed. "Tash said I was unsullied like freshly fallen snow and stuff!"

Bucky pinched the bridge of his nose. That was perhaps too much information to give Steve, who was blinking at Darcy curiously, wondering what on Earth she could mean by it.

"And she said there wasn't nothing wrong with it either, it's my choice to make when I find a right person," Darcy pouted. "So you don't need a barrier to protect yourself from the Clap, cause I ain't got it!"

"It's so you don't crawl underneath me again and get your legs all numb," Steve explained simply.

"Well, pal," Bucky might have emphasized that word a little harshly, because Steve nearly jumped out of his skin and looked at his best friend warily. "I think this is a bad idea. Darcy's a dancer in her sleep, what if she gets tangled in the net and hurts herself?"

"Oh," Steve breathed out before quickly dismantling his net. "I'll think a somefin better tomorrow."

"Can we sleep now, please?" Darcy sighed dramatically, burrowing down under the blankets in that textbook perfect sleeping position that she would certainly not be staying in for any duration of time. "I had a very exhaust-ating day and Bucky and Tash say we get to go to a store tomorrow so we need to rest up right."

"Alright, sleep then, instead of yammering on!" Steve ordered a bit too tensely and harshly as he
eased himself under the top duvet cover. He was amazed when Darcy listened and she was out like a light seconds later.

Which left Bucky and Steve staring at each other warily.

"You kissed my gal," Bucky nodded.

"Didn't know she was your gal then!" Steve defended himself. "And she kissed ME to save our hides from gross Brick Rumler."

Even if Steve mangled the name, Bucky recognized who he was talking about. He scowled and nodded.

"Don't go kissing my gal again," Bucky finally warned.

"You kissed ALL of my gals," Steve pouted petulantly.

"Never kissed Peg, well just that once, but that was on account of an accident," Bucky recalled vaguely. "I was supposed to be kissing a pig but Dum-dum made the switch last minute. It wasn't enjoyable at all. Promise."

"I didn't enjoy kissing Nat, neifer," Steve insisted. "Like kissing a sister."

"Well alright then," Bucky's scowl melted and he smiled instead. "And I ain't never kissed ANOTHER of your gals either."

It was Steve's turn to scowl at Bucky as Darcy did her first turn in her sleep, rolling like a tumbleweed until her butt was right in Steve's face, her head on his knee. He tried to push her away gently, to no avail, and one of the ruffles on her nightgown that lay around her waist began tickling him under the nose.

"She ain't my gal!" Steve hissed in an angry whisper.
"Yeah, and you didn't try to kiss the daylights out of her, neither, huh?" Bucky chuckled.

"She burned her lips, I had to do it to save her lips!" Steve itched under his nose as Darcy's nightgown continued to scratch him.

"Well good job, the lips are saved for future kisses from all sorts of fellas," Bucky teased.

Steve's hand reached down and clasped around Darcy's wrist possessively.

Bucky hummed something tuneless and stood up, ruffling Steve's hair messily.

"Wait, uhm...do you know---am I unsullied too?" Steve wondered curiously. "Like a freshly fallen snow?"

Bucky laughed and shook his head. "No pal, you are not unsullied. But that don't mean nothing when you think about it."

Steve glanced down at his hold on Darcy's wrist and shrugged.

"Get some shut eye and stop thinking about such things," Bucky ordered as gently as he could. "Tomorrow, we're going to get some fun stuff at the store to make this place a little more bearable."

Chapter End Notes

...I really hope this was fun for you to read. Happy Monday!!
“And I don’t fink it’s really fair cause Lewis got to help Romanoff wif the list of stuff we’re gonna buy,” Steve continued to complain Bucky’s ear off as they buttoned up spring jackets and locked up the safe house.

The boy had been complaining for ninety minutes nonstop when Darcy had announced at breakfast (Natasha’s gray gruel again with Darcy eating cheese and a juice box) that she had helped with the list of things they would need to make life liveable in the safehouse. Darcy had also refused to allow Steve to see it, tucking it into her sweater pocket along with her Bucky Bear for safekeeping. Ever since then, Steve had insisted that the list would only have shit that Lewis wants like makeup and hairbows and kitten videos on youtube, and not anything that would make his stay at the safehouse brighter.

“And what about the snacks, huh? I like a lotta different snacks and Lewis’ll only want cheese and sugary crap.” Steve accused, walking down the steps of the house and heading to the truck in the drive. He tensed, because Darcy was standing outside of the truck, staring in with a horrified look on her face. He ran to her, surprised when Bucky didn’t follow his lead and called out, “Darce?!? What’samatter?!’’

He was in front of her in a second, putting his body in front of her as he glared fiercely into the truck. And then he laughed.

Because Natasha was already sitting in the truck and she was wearing a blonde wig that made her look like one of those moms you would see in cereal commercials. She was dressed in a pair of
jeans that weren’t exactly unflattering, but were a far cry from what she wore back in the days of the Avenging. Steve was particularly amused with the faded blue t-shirt that had Mickey Mouse on it paired with a big, old gray cardigan that looked like something Steve would have worn straight out of the ice.

Darcy was caught between staring at the blond, curly wig on Natasha’s head that was cut into a bob-like haircut and the pristine white keds on Natasha’s feet. It didn’t compute and her little brow was furrowing heavily as she tried to wrap her head around it.

“Look who likes blondes now too!” Steve crowed, turning around and pointing at Bucky tauntingly.

Darcy furrowed her brow even further and turned to Steve. She scowled at him when he finally turned his attention to her and she crossed her arms in front of her, cradling her Bucky Bear against her chest.

“Women are MORE than just their hair color, most of that crap comes from a stinking box!” she lectured, before stomping her way to the truck and climbing in so she could sit on Natasha’s lap.

Bucky finally arrived and gave Natasha a wink. He’d already seen her put the wig on that morning before she had left the house to sweep the truck for explosives. It had been agreed that they should blend in, and with the photostatic veil covering his left hand, Bucky had no problem with a baseball cap. And it helped that when you glanced, he and Darcy did look like father and daughter just a bit in coloring at the very least. As a blonde, Natasha did look like she and Steve matched a little. The four of them looked like any other family and that was a very good thing for what they had planned.

Besides, it wasn’t the first time he’d seen her as a blonde and he doubted it would be the last. Steve was suddenly disappointed that Bucky wasn’t more disturbed by Natasha’s appearance.

And Darcy seemed highly annoyed at the moment. She and Steve had found some sort of peace after waking up to Darcy’s right heel on Steve’s jugular as she lay perpendicular to him on the bed once more. Steve had not picked or teased and yelled once, and Darcy had not been haughty or belittling at all. Aside from the awful gray gruel (that only Steve truly enjoyed) that Natasha had served for breakfast, it had been a blissful morning.

“Don’t TOUCH my shoe you fish faced jerkass!” Darcy muttered angrily as Steve scooted into the truck.
“Really? We’re taking them into public?” Bucky asked Natasha over the children’s heads.

“It’ll be fine.”

Steve could safely say he’d never been in a Super Walmart before. This wasn’t like not being able to remember kissing other people or being unsullied or not. He would have very clearly remembered walking into a large, ugly building that held everything that the world could possibly offer under one flat, boring roof.

Logistically it was the safest bet for the ‘family’ to go and get a few things. For one, Natasha had coordinated all of their resources, including Fury, to hack into the surveillance systems to make sure the quartet were not only safe, but also unrecognized. Maria Hill had her best people on the wire taps, making sure that no calls went out to the authorities regarding a sighting of fugitive Bucky Barnes. Natasha knew that Cameron Klein was an absolute expert in diverting the calls to his own headset, and leading the potential informant on a merry, meandering path that had the caller hanging up in less than five minutes.

She also knew that while Sam was keeping eyes on the safe house, they still had other helpful eyes close by, watching the store from afar to make sure no one got close and another valuable pair of eyes right in the store.

Natasha had also taken an extra precaution that first night when Darcy had lost her tooth. She’d been gone so long from the safe house not only to obtain triple rations that they would be needing to keep up with Steve's incredible capacity to demolish food, but also to infiltrate the box store, working out the easiest quick exits or places to stash two children should the worst happen.

Currently, it would have been easy to stuff Steve and Darcy in the hamper she had hidden behind the soda display at the front of the store. Steve was busy marveling at the brightly lit, nearly empty store, he wouldn’t even put up a struggle with her, and then he’d be so obsessed with protecting Darcy that he’d stay in the damned hamper until he was retrieved by Natasha or Bucky. It was perfect really.

"Why don't we got one of feese in a Avengers Tower?" Steve wondered.

"It's not exactly what you'd call Tony Stark's aesthetic," Natasha smirked.
"Hmm, can I get feese?" Steve walked over to the display of chips and he held up a big blue bag of Doritos with a superhero movie character on it. Upon seeing that Natasha wasn't saying no, he quickly went for two more bags, "Can I get all a feese?"

"We're going to need two carts," Natasha sighed.

Just then, one cart came rushing up behind her and she spun around, betraying her suburban mom costuming to reveal absolutely stunning reflexes as she reached out a hand and stopped the large metal cart that Bucky was pushing. He was handling one cart already, the one he had pushed at Natasha had been regular, and the one he was pushing had some sort of large plastic seating attached to the handle of it. Darcy was currently sitting on one side of it and she waved at Steve with surprising enthusiasm.

"Rogers! Get you's ass in gear!" Darcy demanded with a happy waving of her hands in celebration. She had obviously had fun carefully laying her Bucky bear down for a nap in the truck cab with Bucky, after having fretted about having to leave him in the truck before coming into the store. She gestured grandly to the cart she was being pushed in and announced happily, "We gotta special kinda cart for just us!"

"Cool," Steve gave a little smile, taking the three bags of chips and placing them carefully in the basket of the cart that Natasha had expertly caught. Obviously Darcy was over any upset about talks of blondes.

"Can we get the orange kinds too? I like 'em," Darcy looked to Natasha hopefully.

"The blues are better," Steve said quietly as he climbed up into the special child seats that Darcy was already occupying. She was tiny but Steve was really broad, so they were still sitting crammed up against each other.

"CHEESY ORANGE!" Darcy sing sонged. "THEY'RE THE SHIT!"

"Stop swearing," Natasha said softly, her eyes doing a quick check of the area.

Apparently the elderly woman at the front of the store, greeting customers when they came in, didn't see anything wrong with children using that kind of language. Seemed to be more common than they thought.
"How'd you find this buggy?" Steve wondered, reaching out and gripping the second handle of the cart and pretending it was the handlebar to his motorcycle. His lips pushed together and he made an adorable engine revving sound.

"I saw it right away, it's my super powers, I can see stuff I want right away," Darcy preened as Bucky tugged playfully on one of her loosely braided pigtails. "And he pushed like---a thousand other carts aside to go get it for us. Cause he's super duper strong."

"I'm super duper strong," Steve muttered, sparing a glare Bucky's way. The man in question only shrugged and winked back playfully.

"Yes, but you're a little guy now---"

"I'm NOT little! Sam measured my head when he was at the house and said my head was watermelon sized!" Steve disputed proudly.

"And Bucky is super and a growed up and he's stronger an you now," Darcy said simply.

Steve fumed and was about to dispute it when Natasha patted his shoulder. He looked to her and shrugged helplessly, on the verge of being an absolute little asshole and not being able to help himself.

"We'll have a contest when we go home," Natasha announced. "We'll see who is stronger."

"Going down old man," Steve glared at Bucky one more time.

Darcy looked at Steve discerningly and he jumped in his seat when she put her hand on top of his on the handlebar. She gave him a small smile and pleaded sweetly and earnestly, "Don't hurt Bucky, I love him so much already."

Steve wrenched his hand out from under Darcy's and climbed out of the special seat and jumped about four feet in the air to land in the basket of Natasha's cart with the chips. He crossed his arms in front of himself and looked to Natasha in jealous annoyance, "Can we please go and get paints and stuff?"
Natasha gave him a small, gentle smile, something she wouldn’t have been able to do two days ago with the five year old. She nodded and walked towards the left of the store, intent on getting them to the arts and crafts section. Bucky began pushing the cart to follow them, humming a little melody as they went. Darcy wiggled in her seat and turned to look up at him and tapped his left wrist.

"Yes, Princess Sweetpea?" Bucky questioned.

"I hurted Rogers' piss baby feelings," Darcy revealed morosely.

"Nah," Bucky smiled down at her.

"Yes I did," Darcy sighed wearily. She wrinkled her nose in frustration and shrugged. "And I don't know how I did it! It's just like afore, he just--he sees my face and no matter what he gets SO MAD and MEAN."

"I think, you need to stop here at this pretty necklace department," Bucky announced, maneuvering the cart into the jewelry department. He found a little spinning shelf full of jewelry that would be appropriate for a smaller child and delicately handled a necklace with an ice cream cone as the pendant, holding it up for her to look at.

"Now, from what my Natalia tells me, when you and Stevie originally met, it wasn't so nice, was it?" Bucky said very quietly, putting the ice cream cone necklace in the cart and pulling off a large and colorfully beaded bracelet that Darcy was pointing at. "Do you remember that Sweetpea?"

"Not really, except it was scary," Darcy whispered. "But then---then he saved me."

"Stevie did, didn't he?" Bucky clarified.

"Yeah," Darcy sighed sadly. "And I remember that being good and bein' so happy and thankful cause it was so so so scary and it hurt and I don't like it, I didn't like it at all!"

"I know, I know, sshhh, sweetpea, I know," Bucky got down on his knees and looked up at Darcy's
face. He popped the bracelet on her wrist and it threatened to fall right off, so he quickly double wrapped it. "I'm so sorry you were scared then. But that's never gonna happen to you again, you understand?"

"When I was better and had my wheelchair later, I saw Rogers again, and he hated me," Darcy whispered confidentially. "I musta done somethin' awful when I was sick and hurt, said somethin' mean to him cause he hated me and wouldn't talk to me and then was mean."

"Yeah," Bucky furrowed his brow at that. Neither Natasha or Steve had explained that to him yet. It was quite the mystery. And Bucky had always appreciated a good mystery, but he'd rather know what was making both Steve and Darcy so very upset.

"I don't wanna talk about it no more, Bucky, please?" Darcy asked hopefully.

"Okay, no more," Bucky caved quickly to the big tear filled blue green eyes staring down at him. He popped to his feet and pulled her right out of her seat, hugging her as tight as he dared. "You're safe now, I promise. No one is ever gonna lay a hand on you again."

"Thanks," Darcy whispered. She sniffled and patted Bucky's shoulder, pointing to a little table with clearance items on it. "Look, it's Rogers' grown up 'vengering face on a watch. We should get it."

"Huh---maybe we should."

Steve was noticing something strange about halfway through the toy department. It had started when Bucky and Darcy had caught up to them in the arts and crafts section of the store. She had been selecting things with patience and care, having Bucky read labels quietly to her about colored pencils and washable markers before making her selections and placing them in the cart.

And then she hadn't even wanted to go into the girl section of the toy department first. She'd had Bucky go through the supposed boy section first, and was looking over everything with a very critical eye before beginning a pile of toys in the cart.

There were fancy lego sets, lincoln logs, two neat looking thin scooters in red and blue, sidewalk chalk and bubbles along with a bucket full of little green army guys with parachutes attached to them. Steve LIKED all the toys Darcy had collected. He liked them a lot.
He would have asked for them but she had asked for them first.

Steve was very very concerned that Darcy was just being an awful bratty brat and picking out toys that he wanted so that she could hoard them when he wanted to play with them. As they wandered through the aisles and got into the aisle with doll accessories, Darcy clapped her hands together at the selection of little furniture and accessories for dolls.

"Bucky, Bucky, Bucky!" she chanted excitedly.

"Shh, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky said softly. Natasha was already on alert, looking around to see if anyone had heard the VERY unmistakeable name. "You can't call me that in public, alright?"

"But---what do I call you?" Darcy looked up at him in concern.

Bucky caught Natasha's eye and they both realized too late they hadn't had that conversation ahead of time. Bucky was at a loss and it wasn't helping having TWO sets of little eyes looking up at him curiously.

"Can I---should I call you Daddy since we're under the covers?" Darcy whispered.

"No don't do that!" Steve hissed at her. He wrinkled his nose in consternation, knowing that back when they had been running around Brooklyn as young men, Bucky had wanted girls to call him Daddy for a different reason. Matter of fact, Steve remembered a whole host of ladies who called him Daddy, and sometimes a few of them at the same time.

Natasha put her hand on top of Steve's head to hush him and looked at Darcy carefully. She was hopeful and waiting for Bucky's decision anxiously. Darcy had grown up father-less. Her first paternal figure in her life had been Erik Selvig, and she'd already proven that due to that connection and relationship, she'd be willing to go to the ends of the Earth for the man.

Natasha ruffled Steve's hair and looked to Bucky then, who was looking to her for the assist. Her lips moved up on the left side of her face in a little tick and he took a deep breath before looking back to Darcy.
"Well, let's try it out," Bucky gave her a smile before picking her up and out of the cart and holding her close. "How's my Princess Sweetpea doing? You hungry? Thirsty? Need a break from all of this shopping?"

"No, Daddy, I'm okay," Darcy giggled when Bucky spun her in a quick circle. "Daddy, we can get Buc---Daddy bear things to play with. We should get him pajamas too so he's comfy and cozy when we go to sleeps."

Bucky danced her to the doll accessories and Steve watched with narrowed eyes as they picked out pajamas and mulled between the party fiesta playset or the cowgirl playset. Steve looked up to Natasha, who still had her hand on top of his head, ruffling the fine blond hairs there gently.

"I ain't callin' him Daddy," Steve said sourly. "He's a jerk's what he is."

"Steven," Natasha said in a low, firm voice. "James is not trying to steal Darcy from you."

"I don't want her!" Steve hissed at Natasha.

"Fine, you don't want her," Natasha rolled her eyes. "But let's be clear, James only wants to make Darcy happy. He cares for her."

"LOUSE! NO GOOD ROTTEN LOUSE," Steve rattled the sides of the cart in his grip.

"She reminds him of his sisters," Natasha said calmly. She took her hand off of Steve's head and clenched it in a fist at her side. She had more to say but the words wouldn't find their way out and she shrugged. "This is just---something he might want someday, and he's---he's---"

Steve gaped up at Natasha. He had never seen her so frazzled, he was sure of it. Not even after that first bad encounter with Wanda. At least then, when she had been so traumatized, she had managed to keep her mouth shut. Now, she was stuttering and fumbling for words. Natasha had eventually told him what she'd relived, what had been done to her in the Red Room. He didn't understand it or remember it now, but he knew it had made him so sad and angry all at the same time.

He easily climbed out of the cart and reached for Natasha's hand.
"Mom?" Steve whispered.

A full body shiver went through Natasha's body and she looked down at him and gave him a small little smile.

"You're picking up the spy stuff really well," she whispered down at him, squeezing his meaty little fist in her hand.

"We outta go back and get Lewis a helmet," he shrugged. "And knee pads. And maybe a cushy kind of vest, cause we both know she's gonna fall offa that scooter."

"Okay, let's go," Natasha nodded.

"Can I push the cart?" Steve asked hopefully.

"Don't go crashing it or throwing it at any security threats," Natasha mumbled.

"No promises, that guy at the paint counter looked fishy."

"Daddy, can I get makeup?"

"Absolutely not," Bucky shook his head.

"But---but I LOVE makeup more than ice cream," Darcy whispered. She looked to Natasha and stuck out her bottom lip pitifully. "Amember how much I love makeup? I love makeup."

"Little girls shouldn't be painting their faces," Bucky said stubbornly, sounding like an echo from another era as he put the third industrial size bottle of bubble bath in the bottom of the cart.

Steve and Natasha were standing in front of all the bath toys, marveling at the crayons that you could
draw on yourself with and then wash off as soap. Steve looked up at Bucky's proclamation and shook his head at Bucky.

"That's not true," Steve insisted.

"Hush you," Bucky waved him off.

"It's NOT!" Steve stomped his foot. "Aunt Laura's daughter gets to wear sparkly makeup for fun! It don't hurt no one."

"Oh and sparkly nail polish!" Darcy clapped her hands together excitedly. She looked at Steve appraisingly and asked, "You can paint stuff, right?"

"Uh huh," Steve nodded.

"Good, cause I got ten little piggies that need paintin' with sparkly nail polish," Darcy nodded. She gripped Bucky's metal hand and tugged on him. "C'mon, lemme show you the good stuff!"

By the time Natasha and Steve had gotten one of everything in the bathtime recreational section, Bath fizzies, bath crayons, miniature Bath Shaving Kits with soapy foam and about two dozen rubber duckies, they managed to get both carts to the bright pink section of the makeup department designed for pre-teens and both Bucky and Darcy had their hands full. Bucky with ribbons and bows for Darcy's hair and three packs of flavored lip balm along with a bright purple container for all the 'makeup' Darcy held in her arms.

"Stevie, did you see this?" Bucky managed to hold up one of the packages of chapstick. "This here tastes like a tootsie roll? Can you believe it?"

Natasha was the one to laugh, even as Steve crossed his arms in front of him and grumbled. She stepped around the cart and got her hands on the front of Bucky's t-shirt, gripping it tight and pulling him to her.

"ooohhhhhh!" Darcy cooed as Natasha laid a big wet one right on Bucky's kisser.
"DISGUSTING!" Steve whispered.

Darcy dumped her things in a cart and went to stand next to Steve. She did an excited little shimmy of her shoulders and reached out and grabbed for Steve's hand.

"C'mon, let's give 'em some pirate-sea."

"You are not supposed to be unsupervised."

"Huh?" Steve looked up at the Walmart employee. She looked like an annoyed teenager and she was glaring down at Steve with her hands on her hips. He wasn't so sleepy as he had been when the tooth fairy had come to visit. He could clearly see the edge of the photostatic veil up against the blonde wig the teenager wore. Which meant this person was in disguise and could potentially be an enemy.

He squeezed Darcy's hand, pushing her behind him completely and he looked up at the disguised stranger with suspicion.

"You don't know noffin' 'bout me, Lady! BUZZ OFF!" Steve sassed.

"Oh my god," the employee laughed. It was a happy, mirthful sound, one that wasn't very familiar because Steve hadn't heard it very much. But he remembered it because it had been so good to hear it. The teenager went to her knees in front of Steve and put her hands on his shoulders. "You are so adorable, I can't even believe it."

"HEY!" Darcy shouted.

It was all the warning before the Walmart employee got a can of deodorant chucked at her face, landing squarely on her nose.

"Son of a bitch!" the employee howled.
"HANDS OFF STRANGER DANGER!" Darcy yelled, before gripping Steve's hand tight and taking off like a shot from a gun.

"Darce, wait, no, I know her," Steve promised, running along with her anyway as she zipped to the ladies clothing department. They dove for one of the clothing racks, and hid amongst a wide variety of floral fabric dresses.

"Is you okay? Did the mean lady hurt you?" Darcy fretted, checking Steve over for injury.

"Darce, I know her," Steve promised, his smile big and wide on his face as Darcy poked at his shoulders to make sure they were solid as usual. "That's Wanda."

"Wanda?" Darcy blinked up at him. "The Scarlet Witch works at the Wally mart?"

"No, but---I fink Natasha put her here to make sure we didn't get hurt or took by bad guys," Steve revealed.

"But---Da---Bucky's here, and Tash," Darcy shrugged. "And you're here, so I'm safe."

Steve couldn't help but blink at her in wonderment. The idea that he made her safe was a great one. It made him feel warm right down to his toes. Just as warm as his toes had been when Darcy had slept on them that first night.

But then slowly the cold came creeping in, starting in his neck and spreading all over. He didn't make Darcy safe. He was the worst at keeping Darcy safe. She'd be safer without him ever knowing her.

"It's my friend, Wanda," Steve twitched his shoulders in annoyance before she could poke him again. He opened the little clothing cave they had escaped into and walked out. "C'mon, I gotta get you back before Nat worries."

"You little fucking BRAT," the employee---Wanda had caught up to them. Her nose was red and she had a trickle of blood at the side of it. She reached down and gripped Darcy's hand, a wisp of red energy unfurling.
"Don't hurt her!" Steve begged any discomfort he may have felt disappearing immediately at the thought of Darcy being hurt. "She didn't mean it she fought you was a bad stranger! STOP IT DON'T HURT HER!"

"I'm NOT!" Wanda whispered in annoyance, gripping Steve's hand as well and yanking both children back to where she knew Natasha was. They met in front of the toothpaste aisle, Natasha looking not quite frazzled, but definitely a little perturbed that the two troublemakers got so far so fast that Wanda felt it necessary to make herself known. Bucky, however, looked like a mess and he abandoned the cart he had been pushing, rushing to Darcy and picking her up. Wanda rolled her eyes and shrugged nonchalantly, "Lose something?"

"You scared the dickens outta me," he whispered against Darcy's forehead.

"Rogers is safe," Darcy whispered back, but she was sniffing as quietly as possible too, which Bucky had worked out meant that she was genuinely upset.

"Yeah, but still," Bucky sighed. He nodded at Wanda and said in a grateful tone, "Thank you, Miss. I appreciate it."

"LOOK at my nose, you can see the bruise through the VEIL," Wanda snapped haughtily.

"She didn't mean to!" Steve whined, going straight for Natasha and looking up at her imploringly. "She thought she was a stranger, she didn't KNOW. She was trying to be good!"

Darcy nodded against Bucky's neck.

"So Rogers is safe with you, huh, Princess?" Bucky chuckled. "C'mon kiddo, we'll pay for this stuff before round two and then, how's about we go get one of those soft pretzels up front?"

"I don't like 'em, unless they're nuggets," Darcy answered back.

"They gots nuggets, I saw 'em earlier," Steve nodded, going for the special cart and easily pushing the very full, very heavy cart that had the special seat in.
Natasha was left behind with the other full cart as Bucky swung Darcy up on his shoulders and helped Steve regulate the super strength pushing. Wanda turned to glare at Natasha and pointed to her bloody nose. Natasha only gave her a blank look in return and a slight shrug.

"I'm not gonna scold a girl who has been kidnapped seven times from hurting a stranger coming up to them," Natasha muttered as she began pushing her own cart to follow Bucky.

Wanda huffed out a sigh and shook her head in annoyance. She had thought it would be fun to go out and have the mission. She could be a normal nineteen year old, working at a store and being obnoxious. But of course, she'd been attacked by the non-super powered five year old.

"You're parenting leaves a lot to be desired, lady!!" Wanda called after them before adjusting her vest and following from a distance, going back to searching out ill intent in the store with her powers.

Natasha laughed and turned to Wanda just briefly, a smirk on her lips. "So I've been told. By little Rogers."

"Oh wow, what a pretty little lady you are!"

Darcy grinned as big and huge as she could at the senior citizen who was manning the cash register at the pretzel place. The man chuckled in response and added a few extra pretzel nuggets to the box. Steve stood like a statue beside Darcy and scowled at the man.

"Don't think I ever saw a little lady as pretty as you in a place like this," the man continued to coo.

Steve crossed his arms in front of him as a way to intimidate, but the movement merely made the pretzel man turn his smile to Steve. He reached out to ruffle Steve's hair, only to have Steve uncross his arm and do a fancy kind of karate chopping block and suddenly the man was turned around, yanked halfway across the counter with his wrist twisted painfully in Steve's grip.
"Rogers, no! He's old!" Darcy put her hands on Steve's shoulders to try to shake him free.

"He ain't so old!" Steve countered. "What are you, son? Sixty-seven, tops?"

"Daddy! Help!" Darcy called out.

"I swear to Christ, Rogers, I leave you for five seconds!" Bucky grumbled as he rushed to the counter the children were standing at. "Drop the man, punk!"

"He was being gross!" Steve insisted. "A lady is more an what she looks like!"

"Sure, sure, sure," the pretzel worker nodded, wincing when he was let free. He looked around in terror, wondering who he could even call about a super powered toddler in front of him. His eyes flashed a little red and he smiled complacently.

Steve turned and gave the still disguised Wanda a thankful kind of smile.

"Sorry," he apologized, knowing Wanda HATED using her powers in such a way.

"Get your shit together, Steve," Wanda sighed.

"He's FIVE, you get your SHIT together, lady" Darcy ordered haughtily as she grabbed Steve's hand as soon as the pretzels were handed over. She yanked on him and marched him to the nearest little table in the shop, sitting him down so they could share their snack.

"They are very odd," Wanda sighed at Bucky as he payed the complacent man who wouldn't be thinking about reporting a super muscled five year old to the nearest Accord compliance panel.

"They're kids," Bucky shrugged. "Kids are weird."

"No---the feelings they have are volatile, so---" Wanda struggled with the proper word and reached
out for a straw, wrapping it circles tightly until it was a coiled and compact piece of plastic.
"Compressed and buried and hidden. It's only a matter of time, in their natural state, that something
strikes it."

Bucky nodded and flicked a metal finger in the middle of the coiled straw, and it exploded under the
pressure, making a fun banging sound.

"They are not normal children, Barnes," Wanda warned, looking over and a sad sort of smile that
seemed out of place on the image that the photostatic veil projected washed over her lips.
"Adorable they may be, but there is too much leftover emotion from their adult selves. They
cannot know how to properly handle it all. The roller coaster you are on with them will have so
many more twists and turns."

"Don't worry, we'll handle it when we get there," Bucky nodded, observing how Darcy and Steve
were getting along really well at the moment. They had the pretzel box opened between them, and
Steve wasn't scolding Darcy for adding sugar packets to the already sweet red slushie drink she'd
requested. She was doctoring it more than she was drinking it, but Steve was smiling at her with a
naked sort of fondness that grown up Steve would have never shown. "Thanks for the assist. You
know, here and now and...before."

"Hmm," Wanda shrugged.

"It stinks, I know," Bucky said softly. He knew all too well how it felt to use skills that many other
people viewed as heinous.

"Problem?" Natasha wondered as she walked up to Bucky and Wanda.

"Imperio," Wanda gestured with a jerk of her head towards the pretzel seller and rolled her eyes at
the code names Sam had insisted on from their old days.

Natasha nodded, her eyes flicking to the ground for a moment before looking back up at the sound of
Darcy's laugh, as she squirted little dots of mustard on pretzels before Steve would eat them whole.
Apparently there wasn't a kind of mustard that Steve didn't like, as Darcy had amassed all the bottles
of mustard on their table.

"They need more pretzels," Natasha murmured, even though they weren't halfway through the box.
It was just like that first night, when she had looked at the impressive provisions that one of Fury's
people had left in the house with a critical eye and declared it insufficient. "And grab Rogers one of those cheese cups. He always liked heart clogging snacks but never liked to admit it."

Bucky smirked and before he stepped towards the counter, he let his right fingertips graze against Natasha's forearm before she went to sit next to the children.

"Always such a good ma to my Stevie."

“Be careful there,” Wanda whispered to Bucky.

Bucky turned to her, and instead of confusion or lack of knowledge, his eyes were shrewd and careful. He smiled at Wanda very slowly and gave a slight nod.

“You’ve been in her head once, don’t get upset that I know, I don’t think less of you or what you’re doing now, because that would be the pot calling the kettle something you have hot water in,” Bucky murmured back. He shrugged and gave a small wave to Wanda before looking back at the still compliant and happy pretzel worker. Bucky sounded resolute and sure, something that Wanda felt he hadn’t experienced in a very long time. “I know exactly what I’m doing.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed reading this!

Next up! Lunch and tears and farts.
Chapter Seven: Tears and Farts

Shopping went pretty well after that. Steve had found some kind of patience that he hadn't had before when dealing with Darcy and they went through the grocery side of the mega store with Steve pointing things out that he thought Darcy might find appetizing. And ninety percent of the time, she had wrinkled her nose and stuck out her tongue in disgust. And Steve had somehow not gotten the tiniest bit frustrated.

It was like a miracle.

It emboldened Natasha and Bucky, who with coolers full of food in the bed of the truck, along with far more merchandise than either had ever bought in their lives, decided Darcy and Steve might like to stop at the Taco Bell halfway to their safehouse. Steve had even given Darcy his seat closest to Bucky, and had no problem sitting next to Natasha instead in the truck.

Steve and Darcy had been playing a game of sorts on the bench seat between Natasha and Bucky. It involved Bucky Bear, as well as a little figurine Steve had found hiding on a shelf in the cereals (where Darcy had cleared out the lucky charms). It had red hair and a black sleek catsuit and it was about the same height as Bucky Bear but the doll's dimensions were pretty true to life with the blonde wig wearing woman to Steve's right.

Natasha had been amused by it, but especially how Steve had immediately taken the doll and began using it to destroy imaginary enemies in their way. Right now, Steve was beating every square inch of the Bucky Bear with his Natasha doll, and Darcy didn't quite understand the game, obviously,
because she was giggling and cooing and just continued to try and get Bucky Bear's arms around little plastic Natasha.

"Ya stink!" Steve told the bear through doll Natasha. "Ain't had a proper shower in decades!"

"Rude," Bucky rolled his eyes.

"Awwwww, Natalia!" Darcy cooed with the bear. She then strung together a few Russian words she knew causing Bucky to look down at her in wonder.

"Did she just say I love potato dagger ear?" Bucky asked quietly.

"Yes," Natasha laughed. "Apparently some Russian trickled down from what I taught her as an adult."

Steve wrinkled his nose and pulled his doll away from Bucky Bear's embrace. He hadn't wanted Darcy to learn Russian. It had been deemed necessary in order for her to make any headway in her probes into Hydra. She had taken to it like a duck to water, bragging that languages had kind of been her special thing she was good at.

It had been impressive, but it hadn't made Steve any less anxious about Darcy's well being when they were adults.

Bucky rattled something off in Russian to Darcy and she clapped her hands and made a happy squealing sound before answering him back with pretty impressive coherence for a five year old. Steve crossed his arms in front of himself and scowled. His scowl went even deeper when he realized where Bucky was driving them to.

"I don't LIKE tacos, I told you I didn't like 'em!" Steve reminded everyone rather loudly.

"Rogers, they got stuff you like, like burritos," Darcy offered, genuinely helpful. He had said he liked burritos when they had gone through the frozen aisle and Bucky had then added three industrial sized packs of them into the cart. "And nachos. You like nachos."
"You don't know that!" Steve snarled at her. "You don't know noffin' bout me! You don't know me!"

"I do too!" Darcy yelled back, clutching her Bucky Bear tight in her arms. "I do too!"

"You're a liar! A no good liar!" Steve shook his head adamantly. "I made sure you didn't know me at all!"

"I know you like nachos, cause I saw you eat a whole tray of 'em when we was big at a birthday party for Thor," Darcy disputed. "And I know you like grape soda, and I know you like watchin' movies that got happy endings. And you'll eat anything 'cept olives. And I know lots and lots and lots about you...not just about what you eat. I know stuff like what makes you sad and what makes you happy and what makes you mad---"

Bucky put the truck in park, and pulled Darcy close to his side. The little girl was SHAKING from head to toe, as tears leaked from the corners of her eyes. Steve was staring at her in horrified fascination as his own eyes shone with unshed tears.

"I made sure I watched you careful cause you hated me so much, even though Thor said you didn't and he said you were apposed to love me, but you never showed it and---and I don't know why!" Darcy wailed out. "I tried and been so nice and tried and done good things and you were a PISSBABY! And I don't know why!"

Steve couldn't answer her. He was silently crying in his seat and when he opened his mouth to say something, to retort somehow, to most importantly ask her what she meant by what Thor said. But all the words left him and what came out of his mouth more closely resembled the piercing cry of a little kid who was sad and confused and distraught.

"C'mon, Rogers," Natasha said softly, before turning and hopping out of the truck, grabbing for the boy who was still crying at the top of his lungs. His cries were melding with Darcy's own sobs, making for a gut wrenching harmony. Thankfully, he gave no protest and she managed to get him in her arms, and began a brisk walk away from the Taco Bell towards the rest of the little shopping center.

His loud wails and cries eventually eased in volume, until he was only sniffling and leaving tears continually drip onto her neck. She walked into a nondescript, family owned pizza shop and took a glance up at the menu.
"Four of your largest pizzas with pepperoni, please?" Natasha asked the counter person hopefully.

"And bacon," Steve sniffled.

"And three of them with bacon," Natasha nodded. She sat on the bench in a little alcove of the restaurant and cuddled Steve as close as possible. "Are you going to be alright?"

"No, I don't like seeing her cry cause a me. Cause of how mean I gotta be," Steve said bitterly. "You and Buck shouldn't'a done fis. You shoulda kept us separate."

"Not an option," Natasha said softly, although she didn't sound so sure anymore.

"Can I go stay wif Sam, please?" Steve asked hopefully. "You and Bucky can take care of her proper."

"No," Natasha shook her head, although she had paused. "Steve. What do you remember about Darcy's first kidnapping?"

"Don't wanna talk about it," Steve mumbled, looking away from Natasha with glittering eyes.

"Can I tell you what I remember?" Natasha wondered.

"NO, shut your face hole," Steve grumbled.

"That wouldn't have worked when you were big," Natasha assured him. She nodded and pulled him close again, her arms like steel bands around him so that he couldn't push her away and run. "Steve, SHIELD gave you a phone after the Chitauri. They made sure you could use it before they let you leave."

"Stop it," Steve whined.

"No, listen to me, listen to me carefully," Natasha's voice was steady and calm. "They sent you off on your own, on some soul seeking road trip on your stupid bike. Like you hadn't just experienced
the death of your best friend, the disappearance act of your entire world, and an alien invasion in the span of a month."

"I was okay," Steve went weak against her, boneless and heavy, but the tears continued to hit Natasha's shoulder.

"You were NOT okay," Natasha disputed gently. Her hand stroked from the top of his head down his back and repeated it over and over again. "Steve, when I put out that message for assistance from you in getting Darcy to where she needed to be..."

"No, no, no, nooooo," Steve whined pitifully, not wanting to hear it.

"You didn't answer the call, not because you didn't care," Natasha said resolutely. "Clint found you in a fugue state. You hadn't moved. You hadn't eaten, you hadn't opened your eyes in over two days. You were in a state of shock and depression."

"I don't know what that means," Steve insisted.

"Yes you do," Natasha assured him. "You were so sad and hurt and destroyed by what had happened to you that you could do nothing but sleep for days on end."

"And that's why Darcy got hurted, cause I didn't answer your call," Steve sniffled. "I ignored it."

"Steven Grant Rogers, you had ignored the need to eat and use the bathroom for two whole days as well," Natasha's words were harsh, but the voice she delivered them in sounded like she was trying to lull him into sleep. "Your body is an amazing thing, and it had practically put you back into hibernation just to make sure you survived however long you would be out."

"I'm worfless," Steve lamented.

"Don't say that, it's not true," Natasha assured him. "And Darcy doesn't think you're worthless at all. Despite how you two always argue, I can assure you that Darcy thinks the world of you."

"I shoulda heard the telephone ringing," Steve sniffled.
"Steve, Clint said that when he found you, you didn't hear him talking to you, or shaking you, or dumping a cold bucket of water on your head. When you came back, after rescuing Darcy, you were in round the clock therapy, remember?" Natasha sighed. "You have to let this one go. You did nothing wrong, and Darcy would never hate you for it. I promise you that she is a good, decent soul..."

"I don't wanna talk about it anymore," Steve begged, sounding drowsy indeed. "I don't--I don't wanna. Just--let me stay wif Sam."

“I’ll make a deal with you,” Natasha promised. “Let me tell James why you’re feeling the way you’re feeling, so that we both can help you.”

“He’s gonna hate me,” Steve panicked.

“Steve, James could never hate you,” Natasha promised. “Give him the chance to give you what you gave him. Do you hate him for what Hydra made him do?”

“NO!” Steve whispered, horrified at the thought.

“That’s because you’re brothers,” Natasha reminded him. “Bound by more than blood. It means something.”

“Fine,” Steve sniffled, going a little boneless in Natasha’s arms, feeling nearly all of his fight leave him. “But if you tell him, and I still feel bad all a time I look at Darcy, please, please can I go stay wif Sam?”

“Okay, deal,” Natasha nodded. “Don’t worry, Steve, I promise, things are going to be better. You can’t feel so guilty about this all the time. You can’t and you won’t. It’ll heal. And you’re going to be so happy.”

Natasha felt him like a lead weight against her as he dropped off into emotionally wrought exhaustion. She held him close and sighed. She had a mission now. Different than all of her others, but she was going to be sure to see it through.
Darcy had watched Natasha walk away with a crying Steve until they disappeared into the pizza shop in the distance. She had been a crying mess, even when Bucky pulled her on his lap and cuddled her as she kept a watch on Natasha and Steve. Her more desperate cries went quieter and soon she was just doing that sad sniffing that tore at Bucky's inside like no torture Hydra had ever managed to inflict. He wrapped an arm around her and encouraged her to bury her face into his chest, smiling very softly and sadly when her little arms tried to wrap themselves around his body and not getting close to managing it.

"Princess Sweetpea, I don't know what's going on in Stevie's head. I don't. Only Natalia knows, I think. And she's not gonna betray his confidence for nothing," Bucky murmured into the soft brown curls pressed against him. "So I'm sorry I don't have answers for you."

"I just want him to stop being a pissbaby," Darcy's voice was the smallest thing he ever heard, muffled and wet against his shirt. "I tried and tried. I did."

"I know you did," Bucky nodded. "I really like that about you, kiddo. I love it."

Darcy pulled away and looked up at Bucky with glassy blue eyes tinged with red. "You love it?"

"You are a tenacious, stubborn little mule, and I love it," Bucky insisted with exaggerated enthusiasm. "I always like my people stubborn. I mean, Steve's a stubborn guy."

"He's like a donkey's ass," Darcy nodded eagerly.

"And my Natalia, she's a stubborn kind of lady, isn't she?" Bucky smiled.

"Uh huh," Darcy agreed. "She never would let me go when everybody said I shoulda gone away, even Janie wanted me to go away for my safeties and Tash said no way José."

"Who is José?" Bucky asked with as much seriousness as he could muster, his eyes twinkling merrily.

"YOU KNOW!" Darcy managed a giggle.
"I never met a guy named José," Bucky shook his head in his playful seriousness. "I know a guy named Luis. Me and Steve met him on a mission about a month ago, man, that guy talked more than anyone I knew."

"I talk so much more than him," Darcy assured him, even though she had never met the man.

Bucky laughed and smacked a kiss against her temple, getting another happy sound from her before she threw herself on his shoulder in a fierce hug. He took a deep breath, soaking it in a little. He remembered this. He remembered cheering up a little girl with curly brown hair and big blue eyes the color of the sea. He remembered the heady feeling of having someone so good and pure and innocent loving him unconditionally with a fierceness that couldn't be imitated.

He'd held onto such things throughout it all, happy little slivers that never could be burned away. Humanity and happiness and the promise that no matter what he had been turned into, he had been worthy of such a beautiful thing once upon a time. Steve had tried to tell him he was still deserving of good things before he went into the Wakanda deep freeze. And Natalia had woken him up again in Wakanda and tried to do the same.

But this little gal had just met him days ago. And he couldn't hold onto the idea that a person would think him a horrible monster if they hadn't known him before. Not anymore. Because Darcy was giving him all those things that used to be just a memory. And even before she was made small and young, Bucky knew she had been a truly good person with a heart of gold. And he hadn't known how badly he had needed someone like her until he had her clinging to him for safety and comfort.

"Don't let anybody tell you that you being a stubborn little mule is a bad thing," Bucky sighed. "I think the only reason I'm sitting here with you now is cause Stevie just wouldn't budge, no matter what. And even when I wanted to give up, he wouldn't dare let me."

"I should thank him," Darcy sighed, melting a little into Bucky with each soft gravely word. It had been a busy couple of hours in the store. And a very emotional twenty minutes since leaving. She knew that only babies napped, but it was okay to rest her eyes for just a bit. Especially when she felt so safe and warm and Bucky was stroking her back and humming a tune suddenly. "He's a good guy even if he's a pissbaby."

"Yeah. He is," Bucky agreed. "And he's hurting something fierce and I don't know why."

"It's me," Darcy drowsily whispered, slurring the two words together.
"No, it's not," Bucky promised her. "You are a good, kind, smart girl. You didn't do nothing wrong. I promise you. Just stay stubborn and give Steve time and he'll tell us what's got him so upset."

"Kay," Darcy promised before her body went completely boneless, melting into Bucky.

He nodded and held her a little longer, trying to give her some kind of affection boost as she slept, cuddling her close before the glint of a mirror coming from the pizza shop caught his eye and he nodded, placing Darcy carefully on the seat so she slumped against him. He drove through the Taco Bell's drive thru and ordered a truly impressive amount of food before driving to the pizza shop and smiling softly at the sight of Steve sleeping in Natasha's arms.

She brought him to the truck and gestured back into the shop minutely.

"I grabbed pizza, Rogers will eat it stone cold from the fridge for snacks most days."

"Everything alright?" Bucky asked quietly when he got back from retrieving the pizza boxes and situating them perfectly in the bed of the truck under the tarp.

"Not at all," Natasha sighed. She had placed Steve on the bench seat next to Darcy, and unsurprisingly, Darcy had begun to scoot in her sleep, until she had done a half turn into Steve's body.

A sad, wistful smile went across Natasha's lips when Steve reached out clumsily and pulled Darcy to him, holding onto her as if she were a stuffed animal. For the first time since the drama started, the little furrow between Steve's eyebrows disappeared.

"Can you give me a hint of anything?" Bucky asked.

"When they took you from me, when they made me watch you get the memory of me electrocuted from your mind," Natasha whispered, a cold shiver running down her spine at the memory. "I thought I had lost everything. I had no family. I had everything taken from me by the red room. I had no hope for a future that could be considered normal. And they burned you from me."
Bucky nodded, silent and tense. It had been a particularly disgusting move by the handlers. They had been allowed to be so close, to work together, to form an irreversible connection. And in a moment of weakness, Natasha had chosen to save Bucky in an op gone bad rather than finish the mission. Her punishment had been to see Bucky strapped in a chair and screaming in pain.

"I was a shell of myself for a very long time after that, until they had no choice to wipe me too," Natasha revealed. "There were days when I couldn't move."

"M'morry," Bucky whispered.

Natasha gave him a soft smile and turned on her still pristine white Keds, wrapping her arms around his waist and hugging him fiercely. He smelled of his old fashioned aftershave combined with the smell of Darcy’s brand new cotton candy scented perfume she had tested in the store. When he placed his lips to her forehead she felt something slot into place. Something that should have never been dislodged in the first place.

"When a person wakes up with everything they cared about gone, with the world changed, with only the prospect of violence and fear and loneliness ahead...how can they climb up and out of that without help?" Natasha wondered.

Bucky nodded, understanding what parallels she was drawing. He knew the timeline of what happened since his ‘death’ in 1945. He knew what Steve had gone through in the span of one month.

"I wanted to give him a bright spot, so I set it up for him to run ops on Darcy and Jane moving," Natasha revealed quietly. "He never answered that call and it was when Darcy was kidnapped the first time. It was all hands on deck to get her out of there. When Clint found him—he was practically in a grief and depression induced coma. Completely unresponsive."

"Jesus," Bucky breathed out.

"And he came along anyway, he was the one to find her, to bring her to safety," Natasha looked into the truck and smiled at the cuddling, napping children. "Only she wasn't his bright spot then. She was a reminder of his supposed failings."

"How do we make that right?" Bucky wondered. "It's hard to convince Steve of anything if he doesn't want to believe it. I once tried to tell him it was raining and the ball game would have to be
cancelled and the punk insisted it wasn't even drizzling even though he was soaked and chilled to the bone."

"I never thought I'd see the day he could do something so simple as be in the same room as her, much less talk to her pleasantly," Natasha admitted. "And they're---look at them."

Darcy made a whimper in her sleep and Steve tightened his hold on her, his cheek cuddling against her hair.


"Then that is what he will get."

When Steve woke up, it was a soft and gentle thing. He usually never woke up like that. There was something about the serum that made everything harsh and jarring. It was like a shot from a pistol waking up with his senses as they were. This time, he woke up to warmth and a headache and something smelly right in his face.

And the sound that had coaxed him from his slumber had been a little squeaking sound. And sure enough it happened again, and there was that smell again.

"Wha?" Steve whispered, feeling like his nap had left him even more drained than before. His eyes were crusted shut for the most part, the result of crying too hard earlier. He had his arms full of something warm and he looked down and saw that it was a little, scrawny pair of legs with a familiar pair of bright turquoise leggings.

Darcy's legs were in his arms. And she was bent in half on the couch, laying down with her frilly skirt clad behind right in his face.

"pffffllllttt"

The noise happened again and Steve opened his eyes and his mouth in stark horror.
"SHE'S FARTIN' IN MY FACE! RIGHT IN MY FACE!" Steve called out. "OH GOD, NO MORE CHEESE, LEWIS! YOUR FARTS IS TOXIC!"

"Huh?" Darcy blinked her eyes open and looked around in confusion, not quite understanding what was happening. She turned her head and saw that Steve had his arms wrapped around her legs.

And then she passed gas again.

She was a little mortified. Or she tried to be. She knew that grownup her might have been a little horrified at farting in Captain America's face.

But she was five right now.

So she giggled. And farted again. And then laughed loud and clear like a bell.

"STOP IT! STOP IT! YOU'S TRYIN' TO KILL ME!" Steve whined loudly, squirming in his place on the couch.

"Well I can't get away, you got my legs!" Darcy was still laughing and now wiggling her smelly butt in Steve's face. Her giggles stopped and she said softly, "Here comes the farty fart farts!"

"NOOOOOOO!" Steve's shout of indignation was cut through with his own giggles.

"BOMBS AWAY!" Darcy yelled before farting in his face again. "HAHAHAHA. YOU'RE A FART FACE NOW!"

"That's it, you're gonna be a fart face now!" Steve threatened, grinning when Darcy shrieked out in terror.

"You eat everything with butts on it, you're gonna KILL me!" she began to try to wiggle away, but Steve still had a hold on her legs, and had maneuvered himself so he was sitting on top of her. "YOUR TOXIC FARTS WILL DESTROY THE HOUSE!"
"Toxic farts, huh?" Steve laughed, wiggling his butt on top of Darcy's back and letting one rip.

Darcy began fake coughing and making pained, dying noises, all the while flailing her arms. She managed to somehow get some leverage against the couch cushions and flipped herself, knocking Steve off of her. Her eyes were big and huge with delight and her grin could have split the sun at having gotten the physical upper hand on the bigger, stronger, child version of Captain America. She tried to crawl away on her knees to the other end of the couch.

"TASH TASH HELP!" she screeched.

"Uh uh, not so fast!" Steve insisted. "You farted in my face like eighty-seven times, I get to fart in yours at least once!"

"No one can fart eighty-seven times without dying," Darcy countered calmly as she crawled at a snail's pace away, before she couldn't move any further because Steve had a hand on her left foot. "I mean, eighty-seven's probably small numbers to you cause you're older than DIRT!"

"You're gonna get a fart face, Lewis!" Steve promised, laughing as he quickly caught up to her and turned himself to point his rear end in her face.

Darcy managed to wiggle free once more and instead of trying to run uselessly away, she turned so that her butt was pressed against Steve's.

"Dr. Janie would like to see if we fart at each other at the same time if we can make a black hole," Darcy admitted.

"BOMBS AWAY!" Steve shouted his face screwing up in concentration as he tried to will his gas to shoot out of his butt.

"Uhm...this is---strange," Bucky announced from the doorway.

Natasha was standing next to him, watching in amusement as Steve and Darcy sat on all fours, laughing and giggling on the couch, their behinds pressed against each other.
"She farted in my face," Steve defended himself with a loopy smile on his sleep mussed face.

"We're doing fart science!" Darcy called out gaily and happily.

"Stubborn little mule," Bucky murmured to Natasha as both Steve and Darcy tried to will more gas to happen. He cleared his throat and said, "If you want fart science, let me come over there and help you out..."

He took one step and Steve let out a banshee's screech. He hopped off the couch and pulled Darcy down carefully, before taking her hand in his and hot stepping it out of the living room to be far away from Bucky.

"Fart science!" Darcy called out longingly.

"Darce, sweetheart no, Bucky really does got toxic farts and stuff! We'd REALLY DIE!!"

Chapter End Notes

I hope that you enjoyed this chapter! Thank you for reading!
Happy Monday! I almost didn't think I'd get a chance to post this. My summer is surprisingly a lot more busy and hectic than my school year. But I'd feel terrible to not give out a Monday dose of silly weird stuff, so here we go.

Oh, and there are song links inside the chapter!

Somewhere between the living room and the turret staircase, Darcy was the one that was leading Steve throughout the house, and he didn't realize where they were going when she kicked in a little panel that revealed a crawly space big enough for the both of them to fit in side by side. It led straight up in a winding sort of surprisingly kid friendly rock wall, and before Steve knew it, they were crawling out of another hole in the wall into a hidden room.

A hidden room that Darcy had obviously discovered very shortly after arriving, because it had a little cozy area set up by the window. Steve walked towards it and saw a few pillows and three or four comfy quilts made to look like a little nesting area. Also among her treasures was a water bottle, a nearly empty bag of marshmallows, a pile of perfect brown leaves and four shrivelling dandelions that had managed to poke up and out of the still cold Wisconsin ground.

There was a neat stack of paper as well and Steve sat down and looked at it curiously, blinking in confusion when he recognized his own drawings he had managed to accomplish with the four crayons Bucky had found.

"When it's safe we can go down and get your real art supplies," Darcy said shyly. She pointed to the picture of a little cartoon cat, round and purple with a bow in its hair and an ice cream cone in its paws. "I like that one the best, I call her Prissy Hissy."

"Okay," Steve said quietly, not quite knowing what else to say.

"We can hide here when we want, it's safe, cause look!" Darcy pointed to the window where she had placed a big pile of the shiny silver emergency blankets. She lifted it carefully and sure enough
there was a crossbow sitting there along with a set of throwing knives.

"Darce, you shouldn't be touchin' the weapons!" Steve scolded gently. "You coulda hurt yourself.

"I didn't, I promise," Darcy insisted softly and earnestly. "It was here when I gots here, I think Hawk guy left 'em. He likes to have weapons from caveman times. And---and I covered 'em up so I wouldn't be tempted to shoot the crossbow, cause I always thought they were fun, but I knew it'd be bad if I did it so I didn't cause I don't---I don't---"

"I know, sweetheart," Steve looked down at the ground, a little sadness creeping in at Darcy's ramblings that were bordering on upset.

"I don't do stuff on purpose," Darcy finally finished. She walked back to her little nesting area and sat down cross legged, looking at her picture of Prissy Hissy with a sad little, tight lipped smile. "I don't go trying to find trouble for the 'ttention. I promise."

"M'sorry I said it," Steve whispered, sitting down on the floor just outside of Darcy's cozy blankets and pillows, his butt hitting the cold, hard floor. "I know you was only trying to help."

"Yeah," Darcy whispered. She pushed a pillow towards Steve and said, "You can sit on this over here so you don't hurt your butt. Only you can't fart on it!"

Steve hesitated, but Darcy's eyes seemed to get extra big when she wanted something, and right now they were bigger than any eyes Steve had ever seen before, so he nodded and maneuvered himself onto the blankets, his butt much more comfortable now with the pillow underneath it.

"How come---"

Darcy's question was aborted and Steve looked at her curiously, hoping she wasn't crying again. She wasn't, but her cheeks were flushed a pretty pink and she was wrinkling her nose a little in sudden contrition.

"How come what?" Steve prompted.
"How come sometime---you call me sweetheart?" Darcy whispered, peeking up at him just once before looking back down at the drawing of Prissy Hissy the Cat.

Darcy peered over the side of the tiny circular building and made a face. "It's nothing but a window box. "

"Right," Steve agreed, propping his chin on his hand. "I dunno what we can do with it."

"How about a mini-storyboard?" Darcy lifted her hand and a tiny piece of cardboard fell out of her pocket. "I was gonna write a short story for school, and I don't have a lot of time."

Steve opened his mouth to try to say something, but nothing would come out. He hadn't even noticed he called her that. He remembered his neighbor from a long time ago. Mr. Dolan. Mr. Dolan had been a widower at a young age, and was probably no more than forty when Steve and his mother had moved into the building.

Mr. Dolan had taken a fierce shine to Steve's ma. He knew that. At the time he had been so annoyed by it and had done everything to dissuade Mr. Dolan from courting his ma. Steve had been a real louse and had gotten so many punishments for bad behavior and foul language at the time.

But Mr. Dolan had always called his ma SWEETHEART. And he'd always said it with a soft smile. Mr. Dolan went on to become a local union leader and then a local politician and eventually had to move to bigger and better places than shabby old Brooklyn. Steve had made his peace with the man eventually, after his ma had told him there was no other room in her life or heart for any man but Steve and his dearly departed father.

Terrifyingly enough, Mr. Dolan's torch for Sarah Rogers was the only example of romantic love Steve had glimpsed throughout his childhood. He hardly thought Bucky getting kissed square on his mouth at the age of ten counted as romance. Mr. Dolan's admiration for Sarah Rogers had been unrequited and unfulfilled. But it had never waned and it had never faltered. And Steve knew that the little conversations his ma had shared with Mr. Dolan had brightened her day.

And every time he called her sweetheart, Sarah Rogers would get a soft, glowing look about her.


"Ohhhhkay," Darcy sighed, looking around the room. "We should get more fun things for this here room. It could be our secret clubhouse!"

"Yeah," Steve agreed readily, happy to get off the subject.

"Look it, look it what I found," Darcy suddenly popped to her feet and grabbed Steve's hand, pulling him up and they rushed to the opposite side of the tiny circular room, just about ten steps away from the small nesting area. Plugged into an electrical outlet was the smallest, most pathetic little stereo that might have ever existed, it was probably from 1985, and it had room for a cassette tape and two
tiny speakers.

She pressed play and the sound that came out sounded like it was playing from another room. Steve wasn't familiar with the song, but Darcy was and she began swaying back and forth, and she still had her hand connected to Steve's hand, so that meant he had to sway just a little too.

"She drives me crazy...woohooo!" Darcy sang along. "Like no one else!!"

Steve never really took to modern music since he woke up. In his mad dash to catch up, he'd gotten stuck on Chuck Berry and never wanted to leave that new rock and roll sound, even though Clint had tried to assure him that rock got even more fun. This sounded like something Scott had tried to play him one day on the radio, it had that sound like it was from the 1980's, and Darcy seemed to know every word as she danced more enthusiastically.

She had grabbed both of his hands now and began jumping up and down a little, while simultaneously starting them in a slow circle. Steve followed her lead and when she laughed happily in between her singing the lyrics, he found that a really big grin took over his whole face.

"She drives me crazy!" Steve sang along at the next chorus.

"And I can't help myself!" Darcy finished for him.

The bouncing and spinning stopped, and they were still holding hands. Steve took a deep happy breath, before pulling on Darcy's hands. She stumbled close to him and he wrapped his arm around her in a proper hold for a foxtrot. He knew the steps, had watched Bucky do them enough in the past and his memory would never let it go. He took two steps forward, and took a relieved breath when Darcy stepped backwards, and then he stepped to the left and together quick.

"FANCY PANTS DANCING!" Darcy squealed excitedly and picked up what she was supposed to do real quick as they did the basic steps all over their little space until the song ended.

Steve dropped his hold on Darcy and shrugged his shoulders at her as the song ended. Darcy was breathless with happy laughter, her cheeks lighting up with a rosy little blush.

"Do you know more fancy dances?" Darcy asked hopefully. "I always wanted to learn, but I couldn't even learn a ballet cause it cost too much monies."
"I know other ones," Steve nodded. And what he didn't know, he would force Bucky to teach him secretly. Darcy clapped her hands and stamped her feet in excited little taps and Steve felt a rush of warmth at seeing her so happy. He wanted to keep making her feel that way. Forever if it was possible. "And Nat knows ballet, I bet she could teach you!"

"AH!!!!" Darcy gave a tiny shout before launching herself at him, wrapping his arms around his middle and burying her face in his chest. "We're gonna have so much fun, Rogers! We can dance all a time together!"

"Yeah," Steve whispered.

Just then, a voice came over on the tape, causing the children to break apart and stare at the stereo. The tone of it low and seductive, "This is big daddy Cool Coul, and like every song on this mix tape---this goes out to a special lady. The most special lady of all time. Don't ever break my heart M, I'd rather you break my nose. Again."

"He sounds familiar," Steve admitted as a slow 80's ballad began playing with guys singing about how they'd 'be loving you forever' in super high pitched voices.

"Yes, I think it's Mr. Coulson," Darcy admitted, shifting on the balls of her feet in front of Steve as the romantical song kept playing. "I finally have my revenge. He stole my ipod, so now I stole his mixtape for his lady love."

"He stole stuff from you?!" Steve demanded, looking down at her in concern. He saw that she was fidgeting and looking like she wanted to ask him something. He swallowed and asked, "Darce, did you---you know, did you wanna dance again?"

"YES," Darcy nodded and went for him again, but Steve didn't have a chance to get a proper dance hold on her, because she wrapped her hands around his midsection once more and managed to get her head on his shoulder and began a gentle, barely moving shuffle.

Steve had no choice but to wrap his arms around her and he had to admit, it felt rather nice. His brain, which had always been smart no matter his size started processing complex feelings that weren't quite right for a five year old to be processing. He had always only wanted Darcy safe and happy. She had been stubborn and refused to be safe. And Thor was always hinting to him that she was never truly happy.
But she was happy right now, he knew that well enough. She loved music and dancing. And he
didn't mind the dancing so much either. It wasn't as hard as he thought it would be, and it felt really
nice to have her hair tickling his chin. And she smelled like sugary sweets.

And if he had her right there with him, well then, she was safe then too.

So why'd he spend so much time avoiding her if all he wanted was for her to be safe and happy and
here she was, dancing with him and safe and happy?

"This can be our super secret special spot," Darcy whispered. "And when we're up here, we can't
fight, okay?"

"Okay," Steve nodded.

"We can fight other places," Darcy reiterated.

"Sometimes fightin's fun," Steve admitted. "I like when you say funny things when you're mad."

"Me too," Darcy agreed. "But here we don't gotta fight. We can just have fun."

"I was---I was thinking with the papers and the fancy colored pencils you picked out for me, I could
maybe draw some little dolls," Steve spoke into her hair, sounding extra shy. "And then, we can
make little outfits for 'em out of other paper, and you can switch 'em out. I saw---I saw Bucky's
sisters playing wif 'em, and they seemed to like them a lot."

"Yes, that sounds like a fun super special secret spot art project," Darcy agreed readily. "And
Sammy said he was gonna order an eazy bake oven for me, just like the kind I used to have, and I
can make us treats so your super stomach don't eat itself."

As if on cue, Steve's stomach started growling and Darcy took a step away, her eyes widening in
amazement.
"Your tummy sounds like a lion!" she accused.

“Yeah, I get real hungry real fast,” Steve explained with a blush, sighing when Darcy pulled away and turned off their music.

"Do you think we's safe downstairs now? Cause I bet Bucky got tacos and I'm gonna eat five of them," Darcy spun around and looked hopeful.

"Yeah, we're safe now."

They were not safe. As soon as Steve tiptoed into the living room, with Darcy safely behind him, he was lifted up into the air, placed on the couch and had Bucky's rear end in his face.

"Daddy, daddy, no!" Darcy laughed regardless as Steve roared and struggled against Bucky's metal arm. She bravely put herself between Steve and Bucky's potentially fatal rear end and said, "No more farts till later. Right now is TACO TIME!"

"Alright, alright," Bucky sighed. He pointed at Steve in warning and said shrewdly, "Next time you're being a little asshole, you're getting a ripe one right in the face."

"I'm gonna ---I'm gonna---" Steve spluttered in indignation, trying to come up with some kind of viable threat. Suddenly little blue eyes squinted and gleamed with satisfaction and he pointed right back at Bucky, "I'm gonna CUT YOUR HAIR."

Darcy gasped dramatically and turned so it now looked like she was protecting Bucky instead of Steve.

"But I love his hair!" Darcy whispered. "Please don't, please!"

Steve's little face screwed up with sudden annoyance and he glared up at Bucky, who had the good
grace to hold up his hands in surrender, not wanting to tease Steve about it when he seemed to get so sore whenever Darcy praised anything of Bucky's.

The little green eyed monster was alive and well in that boy. It had just taken a couple of decades and some serious insecurity about the lady love in question, in order to come out to play.

"I want pizza," Steve huffed out before stomping out to the kitchen.

"I---what'd I do?" Darcy turned to Bucky. "I didn't---I showed him my special secret spot and everything!"

"Hold on, Princess Sweetpea, you have a secret spot?" Bucky knelt in front of her, putting his hands on her shoulders gently. He could hardly believe she'd found a secret area in the safe house he and Natasha had studied and combed over for weeks. Which meant...

"Darcy, did you and Stevie, did you, do something naughty?" Bucky demanded.

Darcy blinked up at Bucky owlishly, her mouth hanging open a little.

"I never MEAN to be naughty," she finally answered.

"Well, what do you mean when you say special secret spot?" Bucky sounded calm, even though his eyes were darting all around like he was a crazy person.

"I can't tell you cause then it wouldn't be a secret," Darcy explained. "But it's lovely and Rogers and I are gonna decorate---you know, if he's not being a pissbaby."

Bucky took a breath and sighed. He and Natasha didn't really know what to suspect with the two tiny troublemakers in their care. They both had mouths that spewed gutter words as easily as their own names. They remembered things from being grown, but it was hard to tell just what they remembered---danger and flower wise.

He really didn't want Natasha to destroy him mentally and physically if the kids had gotten caught out at playing doctor in their current innocent states.
She'd reward him handsomely if he could get it to happen when they were back to normal. If they ever got back to normal.

"C'mon, I want to see you eat at least FOUR tacos," Bucky straightened up and took a hold of Darcy's hand, pulling her into the kitchen before she could despair too much about why Steve was being so upset.

"I said I'd eat FIVE," Darcy revealed to him. She swung their united hands back and forth gaily until the clinking of something plastic against something metal caught her attention. She looked down at their clasped hands and felt as if someone had poured a whole bucket of ice cold slush right down her back.

On her wrist was the beautiful, fancy plastic bracelet that Bucky had had her try on at the Wallymart. It had the most perfect colors and Darcy loved it because Bucky picked it out for her and because it was probably the nicest bracelet in all of the known universe and galaxy.

And she had STOLEN it.

She began fretting internally, her face carefully blank of expression. It had been something she had worked on very hard as an adult. Maria Hill had told her that her face was an open book and would likely be a liability during her frequent kidnappings. So they'd worked on the poker face. And now, almost as if by reflex, whenever she was facing certain doom, her face went completely devoid of emotion.

"Whatsamatter?" Steve demanded around a mouthful of pizza, looking down in concern as Darcy looked up and met his eyes, looking as blank as a new piece of paper. That wasn't like her at all, Steve knew that well enough.

"Nothin," Darcy lied, but looked down at the taco Bucky had put in front of her and she carefully opened the thing like a book and began mindlessly eating the meat and lettuce out of it.

She was a thief.

She was a no good rotten thief.
She'd STOLEN the bracelet from the nice people at the store. Their cash register lady had been so nice too, giving both her and Steve yellow smiley faced stickers to put on their shirts and remarking about what an adorable family the quartet of them made.

And she'd stolen the bracelet and now that poor lady was going to get fired because of it and lose her job and she wouldn't be able to feed her kids and Darcy knew, she knew without a doubt that it was HER fault, because she was an awful troublemaker who couldn't help but keep getting into bigger and bigger trouble.

"Number two," Bucky patted Darcy's head and dropped another taco in front of her.

Steve looked at the remains of Darcy's taco she had eaten the meat and lettuce out of. He reached for it and broke it into pieces, making himself nachos. When Darcy was done methodically eating her second taco, he took the nearly empty shell from her again and this time put a piece of pizza in the middle of it.

"Really?" Bucky smirked.

"Don't wanna waste it," Steve shrugged. He crammed a big bite into his mouth and talked around his absurdly full mouth, "Turns out I like pizza tacos just fine."

"Well, that's a good thing," Bucky nodded. "If I go out and help Natalia bring in all of your goodies, will the two of you promise me to keep the peace?"

"Go on, get outta here," Steve waved him off before taking another bite of his pizza filled taco shell. He chewed thoughtfully as he watched Darcy, who was still blank faced, looking like a creepy porcelain doll as she finished up her third taco and kept going for forkfuls of nothing but air. He didn't like when her face was creepy and empty like that. He liked it better when she was angry and spitting mad. "Hey. Hey!"

"Huh?" Darcy looked up at Steve and the saddest smile Steve had ever seen crept across her lips.

"What's wrong?" Steve wondered, truly concerned.

"I---nothing," Darcy looked down at her wrist morosely. No wonder Steve got so mad at her earlier. He'd probably noticed she had stolen from the store and was really mad at her for her crime spree.
"You want another taco?" Steve wondered.

"No," Darcy whispered, staring down at the table. "I'm gonna go to the potty."

"Alright then," Steve nodded, getting more and more worried about Darcy's state by the minute. "Make sure you wash up your hands real good. When you come back you gotta eat two more taco insides, so you can prove to Bucky you could."

Darcy nodded, before hopping off her chair and making a run for it. The bracelet slid against her wrist with every step, even the double wrap Bucky had done on it not enough to make it small enough to fit properly. It felt like shame and awfulness and she knew she had to make it right somehow.

She ran straight for the turret, intent on using her super secret escape she'd found the other day. She'd make it right and then Steve wouldn't be able to be upset with her anymore.

And maybe, if she stopped messing up all the time, just maybe, they could finally be friends then.

Chapter End Notes

Song number 1 was Fine Young Cannibals "She Drives Me Crazy" and Song number 2 was New Kids On the Block "Please Don't Go Girl"

And ALSO, someone anonymously submitted fanart to me for this! It's so cute! Extra brownie points to anyone who knows where these characters originally came from before they were turned into Steve and Darcy!
The Super Villain Origin Story of Darcy Lewis

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday! I'm having trouble coming up with words today. Not story words. But like, talking to people words. So...enjoy?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Nine: The Super Villain Origin Story of Darcy Lewis

Darcy knew how to get away. It had been ingrained in her by Natasha and Clint, and even Thor, who had taught both she and Jane how to hide from sorcery if they needed to. Fury and Maria Hill had perhaps taught her the most, and she had gotten especially good at escape. She HATED it, to be sure. She appreciated Natasha and Clint the most of all, because Natasha and Clint would let her stand her ground and get some hits in at the bad guy before she had to run away.

She liked not being pushed around by bad guys.

At five years old, Darcy was perhaps even better at getting away. She was smaller now, and quieter, and a little more likely to get scared, which always made standing her ground so difficult.

She ran to her secret entrance, but instead of going up, she went to the opposite side of the rock wall that took her to the top room (her and Steve’s secret clubhouse, or it would be if she could make amends for being a no good rotten thief). There was a hidden dumb waiter built into the wall and instead of going up or down, it went sideways with surprising speed, opening up silently in the garage that Bucky had parked the pickup truck earlier.

Darcy was quiet and soundless, sitting there in her little cubbyhole that would have barely fit her adult body as she watched Bucky and Natasha sharing an embrace next to the bed of the truck.

"I just---I worry," Natasha was whispering.

"Nothing to worry about, Red, my beautiful wonderful girl," Bucky murmured.

"I can't give you what you want," Natasha's declaration was the saddest thing Darcy had ever heard. "what you deserve."

"I swear, those Avengers all deserve a punch in the face," Bucky sighed, pulling back just far enough to stare down at her with a small, hopeful smile. "They really have taxed your brains in the last few years, my love."

Darcy blinked in confusion, realizing he had said the term of endearment in Russian and her brain had handily translated it for her. She put her hands over her mouth so that no squeaks fell out when Bucky leaned forward and kissed Natasha on her lips, slow and sweet. Darcy knew that THAT was what a real kiss looked like, and she had the feeling that what she and Steve had done by the fire the
night before hadn't counted at all, really.

"You're so good with her," Natasha whispered when they pulled back. "You deserve---"

"Natalia, I'm a---"

He began using words in Russian that Darcy couldn't decipher. He was a---was an abominable snowman? He had done---so much traffic badness and paint smears? Darcy wrinkled her nose, wishing she understood as much Russian as her grown up self. Bucky seemed to be getting more agitated with every word and Natasha had stopped her own moment of self indulgent emotion to try and soothe him.

"Yes, I like this time with Darcy and Stevie," Bucky was back to English again, thankfully. "They look to me for more than strength. They want softness and I'm enjoying it more than I can say."

Natasha nodded stiffly.

"But Red, my love, my dangerous girl," Bucky smiled. "I'm more than that, and no one on this Earth understands that better than you."

When she didn't answer him, he kissed her again, lingering with his mouth, his words spoken into the space between her lips.

"I don't want kids, don't be stupid," Bucky teased. "I'll be plenty happy someday to be Uncle Bucky, and I expect you to help me torture Steve by spoiling their kids something awful."

"But---"

"But NOTHING, I was a different man before the war, that letter Hydra had that I sent to that nurse, that means nothing, and Hydra spent too long analyzing it and putting meaning there that didn't need to be there," Bucky insisted. "I wrote I could see myself settling down with her as a means to an end, Red. You should know that before you I was a cad. I didn't actually mean it."

Darcy didn't understand what any of that meant at all, thinking she was missing some piece of the story, but there was something in the set of Natasha's shoulders, the way they went less rigid and more relaxed that made Darcy think that Bucky had said the right thing.

"I love you," Natasha whispered, her voice barely audible.

Bucky hummed, the sound surprisingly loud and rattling, like he was a big, strong, pretty cat that was purring. Darcy watched in rapt attention as he whispered the same words against Natasha’s lips and then kissed Natasha like the people in movies kiss.

Darcy kind of wished there was fancy music playing in the background, because this was like the ending to the best and most beautiful princess movie of all time, except they weren't princes and princesses, they were two superheroes who got to kiss each other and---

Darcy’s eyes widened in surprise as Natasha reached her hands down and grabbed two big handfuls of Bucky's rear end, and it was HER that made the happy sound as Bucky made a squeak of surprise. They both seemed to really enjoy the butt grabbing.

Darcy had put her butt against Steve's less than an hour ago, and it hadn't been as ridiculously fun as this butt grabbing seemed to be for Bucky and Natasha. Maybe touching butts wasn't enough. Maybe she'd have to grab Steve's butt and squeeze extra hard for him to like it as much as Bucky seemed to be liking it.
Her face quickly melted into one of complete and abject disgust. She didn't want to grab whole handfuls of Steve's butt. What if he FARTED? Right on her hands?!?

"You know, those kids have been quiet for fifteen whole minutes," Natasha sighed when they broke apart.

"I don't smell any smoke," Bucky shushed her concerns. "Give us another pinch, Red."

Natasha laughed, and it was a lovely sound, almost enough for Darcy to ignore that the redhead smacked Bucky on his behind and stepped back to the bed of the truck. She grabbed for two bags that Darcy knew was full of additional clothing that they had chosen out with care. One of the dresses would match her rainbow colored beaded bracelet---her STOLEN jewelry---very nicely.

Darcy sighed as Bucky and Natasha loaded up their arms with bulky full bags and headed back into the house.

She knew she didn't have a minute to waste, she rushed towards the open door of the garage, grabbed the red scooter that was brand new and leaning against the wall and made a quick dash for it, running on the dirt road as fast as her little legs would allow, the scooter banging against her shins with each quick, short step.

She knew she was bound to have giant purple bruises on her shins, but she also knew that she deserved it. It was a penance like Thor said his brother was paying. When you do something rotten, you have to pay penance.

And Darcy looked down at her beautiful, treasured bracelet that she had stolen on accident. She was rotten by accident, but it still meant she was rotten. So now, she would gladly pay her penance.

---

"What, Wilson? WHAT? WHAT?" Natasha huffed out in annoyance at the second call Sam had placed to her cell phone, she and Bucky were trying to cram as much as they could into the refrigerator in the kitchen, neither of them overly eager to head to the basement for the backup fridge. Even super spies and assassins could be lazy, after all.

"One, RUDE," Sam answered back. "Two, have you guys been watching the weather channel?"

"We don't have cable, Wilson," Natasha reminded him, ruffling Steve's hair absently as he did his level best to help them with the fridge, namely by emptying it out, grabbing all of the old juice boxes and taking them back to the table where he was patiently waiting for Darcy to return to provide him with more nearly empty taco shells. He put three of the juice boxes at Darcy's seat, pulling up the wings and carefully pulling the straws out, poking them in with his tongue sticking out between his lips. She smiled at his concentration before focusing back on her call, "And if you had been paying attention to the surveillance, like you're supposed to, you would know that we're a little busy with all of this---crap."

"Eloquent," Sam teased. "At this point, I'd rather talk to your sulkier half."

"That can be arranged," Natasha shrugged, tossing the phone to Bucky.

"Wait-no, don't!" Sam whined.

"Hiya Wilson," Bucky smiled. "How're you doin' in that little shoebox all alone? You driven yourself mad yet?"
"Fuck off Zoolander, Murder Edition," Sam clipped out. "Bring up a weather report. We're all about to get dumped on."

"What?" Bucky furrowed his brow.

Steve looked up at him curiously, then looked to the hallway Darcy disappeared in, wondering how long it took a girl to poop. Steve wondered absently if the flower made it harder to do. He was still being ultra patient, even though he wanted to empty out more taco shells in order to have more taco pizza. But he kind of figured Darcy liked the process of eating the tacos, and he wasn't about to have her shriek at him like a banshee for taking away her joy.

"It's April," Bucky reminded him contentiously.

"In Wisconsin, next to one of those Great Lakes," Sam's eyeroll could be heard. "Lake effect blizzard, coming our way in like, half an hour."

"Shit," Bucky huffed out a sigh. "Did you look up how long it takes the locals to shovel out?"

"Salt shortage, and a smaller budget means you might be in there for a few days after the snow is done. It doesn't help that you're in a summer home," Sam admitted. "You're not exactly a priority."

"Do we have enough food?" Bucky asked Natasha. "To last a week?"

Natasha immediately began taking inventory as Steve drank his fifth juice box in the span of two minutes. She shook her head warily.

Bucky hung up on Sam unceremoniously, earning a huff of exasperation from Steve, before he tossed both the phone and the car keys to Natasha.

"Go back and get everything you can," Bucky advised. "We're bunkering down for at least a week."

"Good thing we got the crayons already," Natasha nodded, walking towards the garage, but not before patting Bucky's rear end, then ruffling Steve's hair.

"DISGUSTING! THAT'S THE SAME HAND YOU JUST HAD ON HIS ASS!" Steve shouted after Natasha angrily.

"Where's my Princess Sweetpea?" Bucky wondered as he continued the job he and Natasha had been doing together. "And why ain't you scarfing down the rest of that pizza?"

"I want taco pizza," Steve shrugged. "And Darcy's taking a shit."

"Steve, ladies don't take shits," Bucky advised him.

"That's a damned lie!" Steve laughed. "Clint's wife takes HUGE shits and says they're the best thing ever!"

"Wow, I didn't need to know that," Bucky blinked in disbelief. He loaded up his arms with milk gallons and nodded at Steve, "I'm taking these to the basement. When Darce comes down, don't needle her about her bathroom time."

"Fine," Steve shrugged. He sniffed the air and only smelt his pizza and Darcy's tacos. He didn't even smell a hint of the farts Darcy had been ripping in his face earlier. Maybe she was having a hard time of it cause of all the cheese.
He stared at the tacos longingly, then looked down at the chair next to Darcy's abandoned one. Her Bucky bear was sitting there, and Steve couldn't help but reach for it and bring it up to stare at it. He was wearing a fancy jacket now, a blue blazer obtained from a equestrian doll set, that sort of resembled what he had worn back during their fun Howling Commandos days.

Steve danced the bear in front of his face and in a mocking, deep voice, "My name's Bucky Bear and Darcy loves me more than anyone else."

Steve reached for his Natasha figurine and clobbered the bear. He attempted to mimic what Natasha was actually capable of, namely death by Black Widow's thighs, but it looked more like they were cuddling than fighting. He persisted and added sound effects that mimicked bones crunching and Bucky howling out in pain.

"You can't steal Steve's girl!" Steve used a girlish sort of voice to allow his Natasha toy to speak. He adopted a low growl to mimic Bucky again, "She ain't his girl, he's a mean faced dope to her!"

Steve sighed and thought about that for a second, the toys smashed together in an embrace.

"But he wants her as his girl, he just can't have her cause he's naughty!" Natasha toy said softly. "He's awful and she got hurt so bad and she's so good and it's not fair!"

Steve stopped playing when his tears threatened again. He had had enough of crying for that day and instead sat back in his chair, clutching both the Bucky bear and Natasha doll to his chest as he calmed himself down.

"You aren't awful, Stevie," a rumbly voice promised before the boy was lifted out of his seat and in a bone crushing hug. Bucky didn't allow Steve to squirm, he just hugged him for all he was worth. "Just like Natalia's not awful for the things that happened to her---and your pal Clint's not awful for what he did---and, and you said I'm not awful. That I'm worth the trouble."

"That's different," Steve protested weakly.

"Not a bit different," Bucky promised. "We got messy, sloppy lives, which is good, because life should be a little messy and sloppy so that it makes the warm, comfortable bits all that much better. If I'm not awful, then you're not awful."

"That's not fair," Steve sighed heavily. "How's a fella supposed to be sad if you make it impossible?"

"Well then, I guess a fella don't gotta be sad," Bucky concluded, placing Steve down on the chair so that it almost felt he was looking down on Steve from 1940. "You spent enough time being sad, pal. Me too. Now we're together again, thick as thieves, and we got every opportunity to get the happiness that those assholes that sold the war to us promised us. Happiness. A kitchen full of food. And beautiful, sweet, smart dames."

"Darcy is smart, and---and beautiful," Steve whispered.

"That she is," Bucky agreed, then immediately held up his hands in a defensive gesture. "I'm not saying I'm sweet on her, cause I'm not. When the two of you grow up proper again, she's gonna be like my little sister, and I'm gonna ride you all day to make sure you're being good and sweet to her."

"She wouldn't know what to do if I was sweet to her," Steve laughed. "I'm always pickin' at her, even when she's not around!"

He went a little sullen then and Bucky patted him on the shoulder.
"I'm going to go check on her, she's been trying to use the toilet for a good twenty minutes now, I'd wager," Bucky sighed. "Too much cheese."

"That's what I said!" Steve agreed. "Her farts smelled like that one town in France that burned all their cheese to keep it from those asshole Nazis!"

"Alright, you stay here, she might get shy if you try to cheer her on," Bucky said dryly before turning on his heel and fairly skipping up the steps to head to the bathroom that was already all Darcy's. Even without the new toys and towels and makeup and fancy soaps they had just bought, she'd made it her own. Her bathtub armada had yet to be painted, but was still beloved, and he'd finagled a step stool out of existing supplies in the garage that she was aching to cover in stickers.

He knocked on the door and said softly, "Princess Sweetpea? How you feeling? Stevie said you had to take a number two."

Silence greeted him and he waited for exactly ten seconds before his gut turned over unpleasantly. He couldn't hear anything in there. Darcy wasn't a quiet girl usually. And that included when she was in the bathroom. He'd caught her singing to herself when she was taking a whizz, about taking a whizz.

"Darcy? I'm coming in," he warned before turning the handle and revealing a dark and empty bathroom.

He had a phone in his back pocket and he had Sam's number dialed before he ran to Darcy's room, checking to see if it was empty or not.

"WHAT? I'm working on making sure your deadly little spider lady makes it to the store safely," Sam answered in annoyance.

"Forget that, she's fine, I need you to do a scan of the house---where'd you see Darcy last?" Bucky demanded, running back down to the kitchen, grimacing when Steve went on full alert at his desperate arrival. He looked at Steve and said, "Steve said she went to the bathroom about twenty minutes ago, and I can't find her---"

"That's cause she's not in the house," Sam breathed out. "There are two heat signatures in the house and it's just you two furnaces. Shit---I'm pulling up the surveillance now---"

"Why weren't you watching?" Bucky demanded anxiously.

"I'm one man, Barnes, and Natasha told me that the only time I had to have my eyes glued on the screen was when you were sleeping or out of the house," Sam answered as he began smacking his fingers against a keyboard hastily. "Forgive me if I had to go take a piss once you all came back and check up on the damned snow storm."

"It's not Sam's fault," Steve breathed out grabbing for her Bucky bear and looking down at it with an anxious, furrowed brow. "I shoulda---I shoulda---where'd she go?"

Bucky put his hand on Steve's shoulder, wincing at feeling the little man trembling as he looked around wildly. He tried to keep Steve sitting when the boy went to leap off his chair, but he'd used his right hand, and Steve was a slippery thing no matter his age and he went off running.

"Get back here, Steve!" Bucky yelled, running after him and grabbing coats and the shoes that Steve had failed to put on his feet. He managed to huff into the phone, "Wilson, please, give me something here..."
Steve had taken off at a gallop, making it the equivalent of a whole city block by the time Bucky had gotten down the front porch steps. Natasha had taken the only car, but the safehouse did have a motorcycle stashed in the garage. It wasn't like Steve's Harley, it was newer, and Japanese and neon green. Bucky didn't spare its looks a moment's thought before he had the engine revving, taking off after Steve.

"Jesus, that kid is---seriously? I want to strangle her," Sam huffed out. "Twenty-four minutes ago, she darted out of the garage with a damned scooter. That little BRAT."


"End of the driveway, she turned right, I'm texting Natasha right now to get her to turn around and meet up with you."

Bucky zoomed the bike in front of Steve, who came to a skidding halt in bare feet as the first snowflakes started to fall. He reached a hand down and Steve took it silently, letting Bucky haul him up to sit on the bike with him.

"Was it a bad guy?" Steve shouted over the high pitched roar of the bike's engine being pushed to its limit.

"No, she just---she just took off," Bucky stated, not really wanting to believe it himself. He handed Steve his shoes and waited for him to put them on before he took off. He felt his pulse hammering through his whole body, unbelievable worry and anger warring within him. After all of Steve's bluster and Wilson's prior complaints, he didn't want to believe that Darcy did these silly things for attention. There had to be a reason why she ran away.

"She ain't got a jacket," Steve lamented. "She's gonna be cold and get sick!"

"She's gonna be fine," Bucky promised. He shook his head and moving his arms to accommodate Steve's own that were gripping the handlebars as well. "She's gonna be just fine."

Darcy whimpered as she fell off the stupid scooter again. She had shrieked the first seven times it had happened, but now her throat hurt from all the screaming and she could only whimper as she fell to the unforgiving concrete, her weight landing on her left elbow and scraping the skin more there. She stayed laying on the ground, crying silently.

Her quick trip to make things right was not working out very well at all when it came down to it.

She was freezing cold and miserable. Her nose was colder than anything and her hair was damp from the snowflakes that had fallen on her head and melted and then begun to freeze over again. She just wanted a warm blanket and a cup of coffee and for Bucky to hug her close while Natasha pet her hair and Steve danced the Bucky bear in front of her face. She didn't want to be a thief or a bad guy or a super villain in the making. She didn't want to go to jail.

She was fairly certain that she hadn't liked it that one time she and Jane had been put in jail for crossing borders when they weren't supposed to.

Darcy felt she would have been better off to just make a run for it to the store. She had hoped the scooter would have made her faster, but she wasn't quite coordinated enough to do it. But her stubborn nature wouldn't allow her to abandon the fancy new scooter, so she kept picking herself up and getting back on and trying to go fast to the nearest town.
She could see the little main street now, it was less than a block away and all she had to do was get
back up and get there fast before anyone back at the safehouse could realize she was gone. She sat
up and sniffled, wiping dirty hands under her cheeks before nodding resolutely and struggling to her
feet and getting back on the scooter again.

The snow was falling quick and heavy all of a sudden, and it just made the scooter that much more
dangerous. The first icy patch she hit had her nearly falling again, and she finally decided it was too
much trouble to ride it, and simply pulled the heavy thing after her as she slipped and slid all over the
street in her ballet flats that were freezing cold and filling with snow.

"This is cause you're BAD," Darcy whispered to herself as she huffed and puffed, sore and tired and
cold and wet. "Cause you can't think with your brain and do the things that are right, that's why God
made it snow on you!"

She carefully propped the scooter up against the bike rack before turning and looking up hopefully at
the general store that she had traveled to. It didn't look like much, certainly it wasn't as fancy as the
Wallymart, but hopefully they would be able to help her. She reached into her pocket and grabbed
the twenty dollar bill she had gotten from the tooth fairy and nodded before stepping forward and
standing on her tip toes to open the door.

The bell jangled and a little old man peered over the counter and furrowed his brow at the child in
front of him.

"Can you help me, please?" the little girl asked before sniffing pathetically. She limped to the
register and held up her right hand shaking a pretty toy bracelet around. "I need to pay for this,
please."

"Well---well," the man was at a loss for words, looking down at the petite little girl, who looked not
much older than four years old. She was a dirty, wet, messy little thing, and her white sweater did
nothing to stave off the oncoming blizzard. And it did nothing to hide the blood from the scrapes on
her arms. His eyes traveled up and down her and he winced at the state of her little legs, which were
wearing tights that were now torn apart at the knees.

"Please?" she whimpered, holding up a twenty dollar bill. "I accidentally stole this from the
Wallymart, and I didn't mean to, but I did and I got this twenty dollars and if it's not enough, I'll---I
can get a job to pay for the rest of it, but I gotta pay for it because I don't wanna be bad!"

"Oh holy hell," the man whispered, slowly coming around the counter and staring down at the girl as
she began to cry fretfully.

"Steve'll hate me, and I'll make Tash sad and Bu--Daddy won't love me anymore," she cried. "I
don't wanna be sent to a home! I just gotta pay for this please!"

"Okay, alright," the old man nodded.

"Darcy!"

Darcy went stock still, frozen in her spot and absolutely would not turn around for the life of her.
She definitely didn't want to deal with HIM and be made fun of.

"How on Earth did you GET here?" the voice demanded, rushing to her and dropping to his knees.
Clint Barton looked down at her with absolute incredulousness in his eyes. "Look at the sight of
you! What on Earth were you thinking?"

"I don't wanna be a thief!" Darcy wailed, holding up her money and her wrist with the bracelet on it.
"I'm not a bad guy!"

"Oh hon," Clint sighed, reaching for her and giving her a big hug. "You're shaking like a leaf."

"I gotta pay for this," Darcy insisted.

"I already handled it, I called the store, and your mom is going to pay for it before she leaves," Clint fibbed easily, with the practice of a seasoned parent. "You're okay."

"I'm not a thief?" Darcy questioned quietly.

"No, but your Uncle Sam is very worried because you ran away. And your Dad and Steve are looking everywhere for you," Clint said softly.

"OH NO!" Darcy began crying again.

"C'mon kid, let's go find your dad," Clint picked her up easily, not surprised when she burrowed into him for warmth. He turned and nodded at the man behind the counter. "I've got it from here, sir."

"Well now, I don't know, that little thing looks hurt," the old man shook his head. "I might think we need to get the police involved."

"Oh man, I was hoping you wouldn't say that," Clint sighed. He put Darcy down and walked very carefully to the old man before blowing something in his face, then immediately supporting him. He walked the man back behind the counter and carefully put him down so it looked as if he were only napping.

"What'd you do to him?" Darcy asked, awestruck and fearful.

"Just gave him a little nap," Clint assured her, putting his hand to his comm unit. "I got her, 312 Main Street. Send Hermione here, because I'm gonna need a memory spell beyond my abilities as Neville Longbottom."

Darcy tensed as Clint came back around to her, and she couldn't help but take a shaky step back as he dropped back to his knees in front of her. He clucked over her injuries and took a look at her as she shivered.

"What did I tell you in New Mexico, Darce?" he demanded, a little harshly, sounding very much like a father at the end of his rope.

"I don't know," Darcy's bottom lip began quivering.

"Yes you do," Clint gave her a disappointed look.

"If---if me or Janie got into trouble that we only had to call," Darcy sniffled.

"No matter what state you're in, you CALL," Clint reiterated. He sighed and pulled her into a hug. "You're the cutest little shit I ever saw, and I'm so glad you're okay---relatively."

"Even cuter than Lila?" Darcy asked hopefully.

"I can't answer that," Clint said honestly, knowing if he answered positively or negatively he was absolutely screwed. He took a deep breath when the sound of a motorcycle coming to a slippery, screeching halt out front rattled the plate glass window of the general store. He patted Darcy's head and nodded.
"Get ready."

"Ready for what?" Darcy blinked up at him.

The door was flung open, causing the jingling bell to go flying. Clint stepped away from Darcy just before she was nearly tackled to the ground. Steve managed to stop her from falling just in time, but kept her lifted off of her feet as he hugged her as tight as he dared.

"You're okay? Are you okay? You okay?" he kept repeating himself, sounding desperately worried. He placed a kiss on her cheek before pulling back a little. His face absolutely dismayed at her condition. "Oh, Sweetheart, no!"

"Holy shit," Clint whispered, looking away from Steve's unabashed reaction to Darcy being found, and safe, and a little scraped up. He stared at the door where Bucky was ambling in and gave a short wave.

The man in question gave a terse nod before stalking towards Darcy and Steve. He stood there for a half of a second before dropping to his knees and wrapping both of the children up in a super strength enhanced embrace.

"Can't---breathe---" Darcy whispered desperately.

"What were you thinking?" Bucky demanded, his voice very quiet, but very clearly angry.

Darcy whimpered at the thought of making Bucky angry.

"S'okay," Steve insisted, his breaths coming a little choppy as he tried to hold back tears. "C'mon, we gotta go home afore she catches her deaf a cold!"

"I got this," Clint nodded at Bucky who let go of Darcy only to take his coat off and wrap her up in it before picking her up again, and then Steve. "We might need a place to crash. And hey---go easy on her, she was trying to be good, I swear it."

"Got it," Bucky nodded, before quickly walking them out of the store. He set Darcy down on the motorcycle and fretted about helmets, before Steve climbed up behind Darcy, nearly sitting on the rear wheel. The little man wrapped his arms around Darcy and basically shielded her with the bulk of his body.

"Don't cry sweetheart, you're okay now," Steve assured her as she quietly cried despite the blank face she had put on. "I'll keep you safe, I promise."

"I didn't mean to get in trouble," Darcy whispered. "M'sorry I stole, I didn't wanna make you a mad
"You're not in trouble," Steve promised. He looked to Bucky hopefully. "She ain't in trouble, right?"

"We'll talk about it when we get home," Bucky said quietly before he settled himself carefully on the bike.

When Bucky got on the front, the little lady was sandwiched so tight between the two of them, that it seemed impossible for anything to happen to her. Bucky still took the one mile trip as slow as he possibly could, and they might have been able to get there faster by walking, but Darcy might have been colder that way. The snow was falling fast and thick but they managed to get to the house's garage just in time to see Natasha speeding down the road and swerving perilously into the driveway.

She was out of the car in a flash and rushed to the motorcycle, extracting Darcy from in between the boys, yanking off Bucky's coat and looking her over for injury.

"M'okay," Darcy insisted stubbornly.

"You're BLEEDING," Natasha whispered, her stomach turning over at the state of her. "Who did this to you?"

"I did," Darcy's bottom lip quivered. "OH NO! THE SCOOTER! I LOST THE NEW SCOOTER!"

"Clint's got it handled," Natasha assured her. She picked up Darcy and brought her into the warm house and stared down at the mess of a child. She had picked out her shopping outfit that morning with excitement. Her turquoise leggings were ripped and stained with lines of blood. The frilly skirt she had put on top of the tights was in tatters and dirty with mud. Her sweater was no longer white and had bloody spots on her elbows and what was worse was it was wet and freezing, clinging to her little body.

Natasha immediately went to work, stripping her while Bucky quickly went to go and get the quilt that had provided warmth for the girl the day prior. He turned Steve to face the wall to protect Darcy's modesty as Natasha stripped her and wrapped her up. Bucky picked the girl up then and
cuddled her close to provide additional warmth while Natasha hurried off to get the giant first responder medical kit that they had just had to break out yesterday for Darcy's lips.

"Why?" Bucky asked.

"I was naughty," Darcy said morosely, absolutely tired of crying. There was nothing left to do now, but to confess and deal with the consequences. She held up her wrist and the bracelet's plastic beads jangled against each other. "I stole it on accident and I wanted to go pay for it afore you knew I was so bad!"

Natasha was quickly back on the scene and she was opening up remedies that were overkill for the scrapes Darcy had, but she really didn't give a damn, squeezing ointment that increased healing on the one knee Bucky had bared for her. She looked back to the kit and wished that they had managed to get one of Cho's mini cradles in there.

Bucky held Darcy tight as Natasha applied ointments and bandages and cleaned out wounds. He was watching Steve though, who was still turned to the scene with his face staring at the wall. His shoulders were moving up and down very fast though, as if he were very, very angry.

"Clothes," Natasha said softly once the last of Darcy's scrapes was tended to. Bucky gave her a look, meaning that he wouldn't move from his spot, as he was staring at Steve with worry. Darcy was clinging to Bucky like a burr, but otherwise was quiet as a mouse, her face carefully devoid of emotion. Natasha nodded and ran off, bringing back Darcy's coziest pajamas, they were just bought that day, and were footsie pajamas that zipped up the front and made her look like a little white cat, complete with a tail and a hood that pulled over her head with ears.

Bucky was the one to dress her and made quick work of it before putting her down on the ground and staring down at her.

"I'll go get my stuff," Darcy said softly before turning away from Bucky and Natasha who were staring down at her with a blend of sternness and concern.

"What?" Bucky asked sharply.

"You're gonna send me away," Darcy shrugged, trying to keep her face blank despite the fear and sadness running through her. "But Fury and Hill won't be able to take me back cause I'm little, so I guess I gotta go into some kinda Shield foster kid house. Unless---unless you gotta send me to kid
jail cause I stole somethin'."

"No!" Steve shouted. He turned from the wall and rushed to stand next to Darcy. He planted his feet like two steel beams set in concrete and wrapped his arms around Darcy, pulling her close. "You can't send her away!"

Darcy's poker face broke at that and she dissolved into tears and turned in Steve's body, snotting all over his shirt. He stuck out that chin, which despite having the layer of baby fat, still was angular and heroic.

"Anywhere you send her, I'm goin' too!" Steve insisted. "She didn't mean to steal, it was on accident and you can't punish her, cause you forgot about the bracelet too, so there! You's an accomplishment!"

"Accomplice," Bucky corrected patiently. And then he smiled real slow. "And in this house, we know that sometimes, people do something by accident, or because it was out of their control, don't we?"

"And we know they don't need to be punished for it," Natasha added, giving Bucky a small, slow smile before turning it on Steve and Darcy, who had stopped sobbing at least, but was still hiding out in the safety and comfort of Steve's embrace. "Darcy, we would never send you away."

"They always send me away," Darcy mumbled into Steve's chest. She tilted her chin up and looked up at Steve beseechingly. "Everybody sends me away."

"Not anymore," Steve promised quietly. "And if they try, I'll just come with you, and so will Bucky and Nat. Honest, sweetheart, I'll come with you."

"That's real nice," Darcy whispered.

"Okay, alright," Natasha breathed, hardly wanting to break up this lovely little moment of peace between the two children. "I see unfinished food on the table out there, and since I didn't get to the store, we really can't waste one small bit of food."

Bucky's phone chirped and he looked down, "Barton's bringing some rations, we should be okay."
"Still, we shouldn't waste," Steve's stomach growled. "Darce, can you give me more taco shells? I want more taco pizza, please."

"Okay," Darcy nodded and pulled away, blushing a little when Steve grabbed her hand.

"That little girl," Bucky breathed out next to Natasha before shaking his head.

"It's worse when she's an adult, because she has the ability to repress it all," Natasha's voice was barely audible. "At least now, it's coming out. I'm worried though what else might come out from Darcy's adult psyche."

"We all need therapy," Bucky sighed, reaching for Natasha's hand and pulling her in for a quick embrace, finally feeling a little calm coming to his gut. He couldn't remember the last time he had been so desperately fearful. Even when Tony was trying to kill him the prior spring, he had some measure of calm, because Steve had been there, and Steve would never let anything happen to him.

If something happened to Darcy, Bucky honestly didn't know what he would do now. Especially since it looked like Steve's future happiness pretty heavily relied on the little girl he was currently helping into a kitchen chair and smiling shyly at.

"Don't say that, Wilson will hear you and then we'll never hear the end of it."

Chapter End Notes

If you could, please refrain from comments regarding Darcy being a brat? I love my small child and she really doesn't mean to be naughty. She just falls into it.

And thank you for reading! I really appreciate it.
Mer-people

Chapter Notes

Howdy howdy howdy!

I hope everyone's summer is super awesome I'm working my tush off in order to pay the balance of my tuition and also have money for general living (toys and comic book merchandise).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Ten: Mer-people

At first, it had been cute. Natasha had resigned herself to this cuteness seeping into her everyday life and not being limited to trips to the Barton farm. It had been cute when Steve had refused to leave Darcy's side for the entire rest of the day. In her current pajama outfit, it almost looked like he was walking around with an overgrown cat that was his pet. He'd grabbed onto her hand after finishing lunch and taken her to the living room, giving her a choice of all the movies they had just purchased.

He'd taken charge of her comfort, bossing Bucky around to get blankets and pillows and burying the little girl in them. Then after the opening sequence to Monsters Inc had finished, he'd pointed Bucky to the kitchen and demanded popcorn and juice boxes.

Then he'd walked her to the bathroom when she'd tried to get up to go herself, standing guard outside of the door, even though it was a stinky number two. When she'd been done, he'd grabbed her hand and returned her to the couch, demanding that Bucky check her wounds and burying his face in a pillow to preserve her modesty as Bucky began removing the advanced bandages that had already healed the deepest of gashes on Darcy's knees.

The snow fell thick and heavy throughout the rest of the day, and Darcy discovered at dinner that she liked Mac and Cheese after all, watching Steve wolf it down had bolstered her confidence and she'd asked for a taste. It helped that the noodles had been shapes of Star Wars characters, and she'd excitedly jumped from the couch to the stack of movies that needed to be organized. Steve had been quick to follow, not giving her an inch of space, and she'd finally dug out the first (technically the third in the movie's storyline) Star Wars movie that Steve had remembered Clint showing him excitedly a few years ago.

"We can have a marathon!" Darcy said excitedly.
"How about a bath first?" Bucky suggested.

Steve furrowed his brow as Darcy squealed at the idea of using the new bath crayons, rushing to the staircase. Steve looked up at Bucky curiously and Bucky shook his head.

"Don't even think of it," Bucky warned.

"But---but," Steve hedged. "We could wear the new bathing suits!"

Natasha came back on the scene, after having looked for Clint and Wanda in the mess of the storm out front. She read what was happening quickly, Steve turned to her beseechingly and didn't really have to say a word.

"Well, it might be good to test out the bathing suits, since we won't be swimming in the pool for a little while," Natasha said softly. "And those bath toys seem to be fun to play together, don't they?"

"Yeah! LEWIS HOLD ON!" Steve shouted, running with super speed after her up the staircase.

Bucky gave Natasha a shrewd look and shook his head slowly at her.

"What?" she demanded calmly.

"All that scolding me about flowers and danglers and the clap! And here you're gonna let 'em bathe together," Bucky sounded betrayed and hurt, but comically so. "Rude, Natalia, just rude."

Darcy had been quite proud of the three swimsuits that had been purchased for her at the store. There was the one that was bright pink and covered in little cupcakes. There was one that was meant to make her look like the little mermaid, with a green bottom and the purple sparkly top part that looked like shells. And there had been the one that was meant for Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, all star spangled and patriotic.
But most importantly, they were all bikinis, not the flimsy triangle shaped bikinis that other, older girls wore, but they were two pieces, for sure. Darcy had been downright gleeful about it, because she knew that when she was grown up, she simply didn't wear bikinis. It was absolutely impossible for her to find one that fit and was decent for the general public.

And Darcy knew she didn't like her wobbly jelly belly when she was all grown up. But it was okay if she was a kid, she was fairly sure of it.

She stood in one of her bikinis, with a hooded towel wrapped around her meant to make her look like a shark. Steve came in with his arms full of bath toys, wearing a hooded towel that made him look like a frog, and he watched as Bucky went about joyously filling the bathtub with bubble gum scented bubbles. The adult in the room was overly impressed with the bubbles, and it seemed he had purposefully used far too much, as there were mountains of the bubbles in the tub.

Steve couldn't wait to dive into one of them.

"I think it's ready now," Darcy offered hopefully.

"Hold your cute horses, Sweetpea, one more bubble mountain," Bucky grinned, turning on the tap again.

"Why don't you go on and get a bathing suit on too, then you can take a bath wif us!" Steve said hotly.

Bucky considered that, but realized taking a bath with Natasha with a mountain of bubbles would probably be a tiny bit more fun. He stopped his bubble mountain creating and turned to the kids, smirking at the little frog and the little shark standing before him, looking eager and happy.

“The last time I took a bath with you was in a barrel full of rain water and it was only cause Frenchie accidentally lit us on fire,” Bucky smiled at the memory.

“Last bath you ever had!” Steve teased.

"You know, sharks eat frogs for breakfast?" Bucky looked at Steve with a smirk.
"Daddy, that ain't true!" Darcy contested hotly. "There ain't no ocean kinds of frogs."

"Not true," Steve shook his head, looking thoughtful. "I remember when we was in Indonesia looking for this chump..."

He pointed to Bucky. "And there was frogs in the salt water and they ate crabs!"

"YIKES!" Darcy blinked in astonishment.

"So frogs eat crabs---and there IS a crab in this here bathroom, ain't there?" Steve narrowed his eyes playfully at Bucky who laughed and stepped away from the bath, going for Darcy first and holding out his hand for her hooded towel.

"Now, this is not party time in the tub," Bucky warned. "You can play, sure, but no horseplay, and when you're pruny or the water goes cold, you're coming out. And you still gotta get clean, you get me?"

Darcy shrugged out of her towel and did a little excited dance. Swimming parties in the bathtub seemed to be the right kind of swimming parties for a person who couldn't swim at all. And the bubbles looked and smelled so amazing. She put the towel into Bucky's hands before making a run for it, eagerly climbing into the tub and dunking her head underneath, coming up with a mountain of bubbles on her head.

Steve stared at her in something that looked like confusion, but his cheeks got all hot and red. Bucky came to stand next to him and held out a hand for his hooded towel. Steve looked up at his oldest friend and opened his mouth to speak, but couldn't find the words.

Darcy had picked out the star spangled bikini to wear in the tub.

It was like she was wearing his colors.

He didn't know if that was a thing modern gals did, as he didn't really go steady with anybody since waking up from the ice. But he remembered that a lucky girl in the neighborhood might get to wear Bucky's favorite colors for a week, whether it be his handkerchief or even a neck tie. It hadn't happened often at all, but it had certainly been a thing.
When a girl wore your colors it meant she cared a lot about you.

"You're okay," Bucky promised, patting Steve on his head.

"Rogers! C'mon! Get you's ass in gear!" Darcy giggled. "I want you to draw wings on my back with a bath crayon and I'll be a flying mermaid!"

"S'that appropriate?" Steve whispered to Bucky fearfully.

"Too late to ask about the appropriateness of taking a bath with a girl you're sweet on," Bucky whispered back, barely audible. "Go on, she'll be sad if you back down now."

Steve nodded resolutely. He would hate for her to be sad. That was out of the question, for sure. He shrugged out of his towel and handed it to Bucky before walking to the bathtub like it might just be a death sentence, carefully climbing in and going under for a long time.

"Holy shitballs!" Darcy exclaimed, completely awestruck after one whole minute had passed. She looked back to Bucky, who was smiling down at her, right hand clutching bath crayons and left hand holding a sack full of colorful and costumed rubber duckies. "Did he drown? OH NO, DADDY PLEASE SAVE HIM!"

At Darcy's first shriek, Steve popped up to the surface, his face covered in voluminous bubbles. He stood immediately and he was a bubble covered boy, shaking them off as he looked around for whatever had made Darcy yell.

"You's alive!" Darcy cried out, walking towards Steve on her knees and wrapping her arms around his midsection.

"Course I'm alive, you got bubbles where your brains should be?" Steve asked her, sounding only a tad bit annoyed at her dramatics. Everything with Darcy was dramatic. And usually he thought it amusing (even when he was bigger), so long as they weren't directed at or about him. It had been funny to see Darcy dramatically telling Tony Stark that if he didn't power down his lab, then she'd activate her override to take over JARVIS, and thereby taking over the world.
Darcy wrinkled her nose and pinched Steve's midsection, but found there wasn't anything to pinch. She shook her head and tried again, but Steve was stone where any other normal kid would have been mush.

"You're one giant muscle!" Darcy exclaimed, standing up and poking at Steve's midsection and chest curiously.

Steve looked to Bucky for help, who was dumping toys into the tub quickly. He got one look in return, it was smug and essentially said 'you asked for this punk, you gotta deal with it.'

"Quit poking me, how'd you like it if I poked at you?!?" Steve demanded as Darcy continued to poke at his muscles, this time his little, but still ridiculously impressive for a five year old pectorals.

"I ain't got muscles to poke," Darcy shrugged, poking and poking repeatedly at Steve's upper body.

Steve wanted to keep being nice to her, he really did. He didn't want her running off again, and he never wanted to see her hurt again. But she was on his LAST NERVE. So he reached down and poked at her belly, then grabbed at it and pinched as she tried to do the same thing with his shoulder.

Darcy gasped out and took two quick steps back and would have fallen if it weren't for Bucky's supervision and steady hand, easing her back down to sitting in the tub. Her face flushed red instantly and she stared down into the tub, reaching down and picking up a red crayon. She looked near tears when she handed it to Bucky and asked quietly,

"Please draw wings on me?"

Steve didn't know what had made her look so sad. He'd never seen that kind of sad on her face. And he'd seen her sad before, as a grown up and as a kid. She'd been sad when she'd heard about the Winter Soldier. She'd been sad when she'd learned that JARVIS no longer existed. She'd been sad when they were at the store that morning and she realized they didn't have pajamas with the Black Widow on them, but they had plenty of Iron Man ones for little boys.

But this was a different sad and he felt bad for it and tried to think of what he had done. He dove under the water again and picked up more bath crayons, before popping up eventually, looking at Darcy hopefully as Bucky drew on uneven outlines of angel wings on her back. He would have liked to color them with the purple and blue he had picked up, but she wasn't looking at him, she was staring down at the bright orange rubber duckie in her hand, making it swerve and dive through
bubbles.

Instead, Steve drew on himself, just squiggles and flowers, until inspiration struck. He did the best he could, but they didn't have a mirror in the tub. When Darcy finally looked up at him he gave her an obnoxious wink.

The smile that broke out on his face at the sound of her uproarious laughter was bigger than any smile he'd ever felt on his face before. Bucky had to catch her again before she fell backwards into the bubbly water as she quickly became hysterical.

Bucky looked at Steve and laughed, because the boy had drawn a purple moustache, thin and curly like a villain in a Western movie. He'd also used the blue to give himself bigger and more terrifying eyebrows, looking very silly indeed.

"Do me, do me!" Darcy demanded when she finally got her giggles under control. She sloshed around in the water to meet an eager Steve halfway and he carefully drew a moustache on her face.

He began laughing as she made a funny face and his own giggles continued as he moved on to making her eyebrows big and arched and pointy. They were a mess of laughter when Clint Barton poked his head into the room and he shared an amused look with Bucky.

"Wanda is down there busting a gut, she said whatever was happening was the happiest she ever felt Steve," Clint admitted. He stepped into the room, his mirth disappearing as he surveyed the bubble covered children. "You don't have to share bathwater, Barnes. We're not in a depression anymore."

"Fuck you," Bucky answered back quickly. "They got bathing suits on."

"How'm I gonna wash my dangler?" Steve wondered, reaching for a washcloth, eager to get it over with.

Darcy wrinkled her nose in distaste, making the soap art on her face look even more hilarious.

"Princess Sweetpea, come on over here, and let me help you shampoo your hair," Bucky advised, turning Darcy so her back was to Steve. He nodded at the boy then and said, "Just shove a washcloth down your shorts and get all the nooks and crannies that way."
"THERE ARE NOOKS AND CRANNIES?" Darcy demanded in horror. "LIKE A THOMAS ENGLISH MUFFIN?!?!!"

"Oh my god," Clint snorted with laughter before running away from the bathroom. Having kids had not prepared him for Darcy staring at Bucky in horror as Steve made an uncomfortable face while he shoved a washcloth down his swim trunks. He was NEVER going to let them live it down once they were changed back to normal.

"DONE!" Steve announced, dropping the washcloth into the tub and instead picked up one of the grenades that Darcy usually used as a bath toy he swam it around with sound effects before shrugging. "And my dangler don't look like no english muffin, Lewis. It's like the hose that---"

"OKAY, ENOUGH!" Bucky clipped out at Steve, holding his hands over Darcy' ears. He sighed and looked down at Darcy, "C'mon, let's get you clean, then you can play till you're pruny."

"Okay!" Darcy chirped before yanking her bikini top clear off.

"HEY!" Steve shouted, turning beet red and immediately diving under the water to avoid going blind.

"What?!" Darcy demanded, looking up at Bucky curiously.

"Princess, that's not decent, Steve ain't looked at a pair of---at uhm, girl parts, ever in his life," Bucky reminded her.

"But they ain't girly yet!" Darcy claimed as Steve stood from the water quickly, his eyes screwed tightly shut.

He pointed at what he thought was Bucky, but was actually the sink and screeched, "You shaddup, you jerk! You know that ain't true, I seen girl parts afore, you said I wasn't unsullied, which means I got to see 'em and probably touch 'em too!"

"GROSS," Darcy hissed. She shivered and looked back at Bucky, "Steve's boobs are bigger than mine right now and he ain't got to cover up!"
"Well---" Bucky hedged.

"But when I'm a grown up, I have bigger boobs than he does, so THERE!" Darcy reached for the soapy washcloth in Bucky's hands and went about cleaning herself up. "I bet all kinds of people wanted to touch my grown up boobs."

Steve dove under the water yet again.

"I remember big ole mean Dick Rumler tried a get me in a hallway and put his hands on 'em," Darcy calmly recounted. "And I got to 'lectrocute his dangler!"

Steve popped up out of the water again, his eyes screwed shut and facing the wall.

"WHAADYA MEAN HE TRIED TO GET HIS HANDS ON YOU?!?" he shouted.

"I made his dangler not work anymore for like-six whole months!" Darcy recounted proudly. "They thought about chopping it off!"

"I'm gonna kill him!" Steve grumbled.

"He's already dead, duh," Darcy reminded him.

"Oh yeah," Steve sighed. "I'm gonna ask God to let the devil poke him in hell extra."

"And 'lectrocute his dangler again!" Darcy stood up and shoved her washcloth in her boy short bottoms, her face truly hilarious with her soap art as she made a concentrated face that was apparently essential to proper flower cleaning.

"All done!" Darcy took her washcloth and threw it to the bottom of the tub as well. She looked at her bikini top and shrugged, using bubbles instead to cover her chest, forming boobs that might have been a tad bit bigger than her grown up boobs.
Steve turned and sat, laughing at the sight of Darcy before he quickly did the same, giving himself giant bubble boobs.

"Come along, James, let the children play," Natasha announced in Russian at the door. "The witch can monitor if things get indecent."

"There's a witch?" Darcy asked, translating the Russian in her head. "And she's gonna put us on tv?!? And play with Daddy?"

"Play with your toys, Darcy," Natasha smiled at the little girl fondly. She looked at Bucky and shrugged before switching the language to Romanian, "We should be safe with this, she never got the chance to learn before Ultron and her stint with Fury."

"What did Uncle Nicky do to the ambulance?" Darcy wrinkled her nose. She shrugged and said, "I learned a Romanian cause I thought that's where Daddy would be last year."

Steve splashed Darcy with water, causing one of her bubble boobs to disintegrate. He quickly dove under the water one more time, not wanting to see her bits. Darcy in turn shrugged at Natasha and Bucky and speaking in broken and rudimentary Romanian,

"Steve's pretending to be a mermaid. A merman. A merboy."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the short length of this chapter. My mind and fingers have been consumed with typing up an OT3 story that I might publish. It is heavier than my normal fare, so it's a little taxing to be honest.

Thanks for reading!!
Chapter Eleven: Pirate-Sea

Steve still refused to be parted from Darcy after bath time. Not even Wanda or Clint could get him away from her, and when they fell asleep before the start of the second Star Wars movie, Bucky had to carry both Steve and Darcy up to bed, as he had fallen asleep with her in his clutches and his grip wouldn’t budge, even deep in sleep.

Darcy had obviously had different ideas however, and she had danced in her sleep, winding up with her foot on Steve’s nose and her head hanging off of the bed as she lay at a right angle to his body.

The same routine began, Steve followed Darcy everywhere, not giving her more than a few feet of leeway, and that time only came when she needed to potty. Darcy didn't seem too fussed about it, walking hand in hand with Steve all over the house. She seemed to be lording it over Wanda, giving sickly sweet smiles to the young woman at the breakfast table as Steve helped Darcy into one of the high bar stools next to the kitchen island.

"What's that look for?" Wanda wondered.

"Nothing at all," Darcy said primly before reaching for her juice box and taking a little sip.

"Why is she thinking about burying me in snow?" Wanda demanded of Bucky two minutes later, her voice hushed as Bucky flipped bacon with a fork in the left hand, the sensors turned down on it so he couldn't feel the grease splashing.
"Uhm---I dunno?" Bucky shrugged.

"She's---she doesn't like me?" Wanda wondered in disbelief, getting a read off of Darcy's feelings. "Children love me."

"Well, I think that's complicated," Bucky admitted. He reached out and gestured to Wanda's hair. "Your hair used to be redder or brown, actually."

"We're wanted fugitives, the blonde highlights help me to look different," Wanda said defensively.

"Darcy thinks Steve likes blondes," Bucky whispered. "And the both of them, remember you said grownup stuff was still there?"

"Yes."

"Well, they both get jealous real easy." Bucky admitted. "Idiots never acknowledged that they were gone on each other years ago. Covered it up with pettiness and angry words and distance. And now they're too little to know why they keep feeling this way. Now I gotta five year old who glares at me every time his girl shows me some affection, which is ALWAYS, and I got another five year old who hates blondes. And mentions of blondes. And thoughts about blondes. Whatever you do, don't mention---you know who."

"You know what?" Wanda whispered.


"Can we please go play in the snow?" Darcy asked loudly.

"Not until you've eaten some breakfast," Bucky answered quickly. He looked back at Wanda and shrugged, "You better hope Steve doesn't show any preference for you at all, because I'm pretty sure that'll mean Darcy's little green monster might explode."

"Bacon is so gross, Daddy," Darcy whined.
"Good thing you ain't got to eat it," Bucky turned with a smile just as the toaster popped two Eggo waffles that Darcy liked. Plain, unbuttered, without syrup or peanut butter or anything. He popped the two waffles on a plate and slid it under Darcy's nose before going for Steve's first plate of breakfast.

"When can we go outside and play in the snow?" Darcy wondered longingly, staring out at the white covered world where flakes were still falling down.

"You don't have snow clothing," Natasha said quickly, the verbal equivalent of ripping off a bandaid. She knew Darcy would be upset. A quick glance at Steve only showed relief.

"BUT! BUT SNOW!" Darcy whined. "Please, Tash, please, I just want to play in the snow."

"You don't even have a winter jacket, much less a pair of gloves," Natasha was not in the least bit affected by Darcy's heart wrenching whining. She'd heard plenty of it when Darcy had been older and was now an expert at sticking to her guns. "You ran around in the snow yesterday, I would remind you."

"But---" Darcy sighed and looked down at her hands. She had run around in the snow when it had been starting. But there was a big difference between being out in the middle of a blizzard and going out at the end of a blizzard. Namely there was so much more snow to build snow mermaids.

“This is your punishment for leaving yesterday without telling anyone,” Natasha said resolutely. “You know that you’d have to have some kind of punishment, and not playing in the snow is it. You should feel grateful that it’s not worse.”

Steve watched Darcy's reaction and sighed. She was morose, her hand on a waffle, barely a nibble taken off of it. Her eyes were glinting with tears, and Steve knew they weren't fake this time, because Natasha had put her foot down. He looked to Natasha as she ruffled his hair before walking back to warm him up more gruel to compliment the hideous fried pile of grease that Bucky dared to call breakfast.

She was doing this for him, saying no to Darcy for him. He could tell.

Steve hated to play in the snow. He hated the snow and the cold and ice. He hated it so much. He'd rather starve and be beaten bloody than go out and play in the snow.
But if Darcy went out, he'd HAVE to go out.

Cause he knew now that Darcy wasn't fibbing. Stupid things just kept happening to her, no matter how good she tried to be. In fact, it seemed to Steve that the gooder Darcy tried to be, the more stupid the thing that happened to her became.

So he'd just have to stick to her side like glue for the rest of all time so that nothing bad happened to her ever again.

But he really didn't want to go play in the snow. He didn't even want to look at it.

"Eat that waffle or no snow!" Bucky reminded Darcy as he wandered back into the kitchen, his arms full of emergency blankets and the remains of the roll of duct tape. Natasha gave him a glare that he had the good grace to look confused about.

But he still yelped with indignation when she drug him off into the living room and started to speak quietly to him in a fluid and blended combination of Russian, Romanian and French. She hoped that the rapid fire changing between the languages would allow them to have a conversation where Darcy couldn't eavesdrop.

Because the two little ones had immediately gone to the kitchen door and stacked their heads in the opening of the door, Steve on top of Darcy as they watched Natasha manhandle Bucky.

"They are not playing in the snow," Natasha hissed out. "I just had this discussion with them."

"I'm not psychic, Natalia, the psychic is upstairs taking a shower," Bucky teased. "What's the problem? I can cobble together something to keep them warm enough, used to have to do it all the time with uniforms back in the day."

"Steve hates the cold," Natasha admitted. "Since he woke up from the Arctic, it's not exactly his favorite thing."

"Oh---" Bucky furrowed his brow. "But he'll be warm if I can get the kevlar vest sandwiched between the emergency blankets."
"It's not just the cold, I've seen him go catatonic over weather reports," Natasha sighed, her anger flying from her quickly, as it had been prone to do since Steve and Darcy had turned into children. "And if Darcy goes out, Steve will go out and I don't want him putting himself through it. I just---I want him to be, to be."

"Happy and safe?" Bucky finished for her, his face soft and proud as he stared at her.

"Always. Big or small," Natasha gave a hapless shrug of her shoulders. "And the little idiot is in love with Darcy and he'll follow her now forever, including into the lingering blizzard to build snow merpeople."

"HEY! I---HEY!!!" Steve stumbled into the living room, jumping over top of Darcy who looked confused. He pointed at Natasha and wrinkled his nose in annoyance. "It's not for you to say who I'm in love with or not---you can't just go around saying these things, Nat."

"How on EARTH did you understand that?" Natasha demanded.

"Darcy was translating the Romanian and Russian for me, and I understand French, I'm not---a moron," Steve shrugged. He wiggled uncomfortably and said, "What do you mean when you said I'm ---you know?"

"Yeah, what'd you mean?" Darcy echoed. "Can you talk to Thor? Cause maybe with what he knows and what you know, we can know stuff!"

"No," Natasha said sternly, the word a blanket to all of the questions being thrown at her. "Go eat your breakfast, or I'm taking away all of your new toys."

"Why are you sitting in front of the bathroom door?"

Steve looked up from his little sketchpad he was drawing a cartoon on and a genuine and beautiful smile was already on his face, looking like it had been there all day. Wanda felt like the smile had the power to set her back on her feet. She hadn't ever glimpsed such a smile on his face as an adult, not even when Clint and Sam had tried their damndest to set up powerful magnets to pull Tony's suit
(and Tony) off flight patterns during practices. Of course, that had happened before the Accords tore
the team apart.

This expression, foreign and new to Wanda, currently lighting up Steve's face was something bone
deep, she could tell. It was only made less beautiful by the clothespin clamping the boy's nose tight.
She was about to ask why when she smelt it.

"Oh god, did something die up here?" Wanda put her hand over her mouth.

"Sshhhhh," Steve warned sternly, his voice a soft whisper. "Don't make her feel bad."

"WHO?" Wanda whispered back.

"Darcy had to take a shit, and she ate a whole sack of baby bell cheese yesterday for lunch,
member?" Steve shrugged, looking back down at his sketchpad, where he was drawing a picture of
the scene, with a stick figure girl with a huge cheese wheel for a belly.

"Why are you out here in the stink?" Wanda demanded.

"What if she gets stolen and I'm not here to fight off the bad guys?" Steve shrugged.

"We're in a safehouse, and I can literally sense bad guys coming," Wanda reminded him with a smirk
on her face.

"Well, what if she comes out and gets her feelings hurt and decides to run away again?" Steve
suggested. "The snow's still real bad and it'd go up to her ear holes and she ain't got super serums if
she gets frozen she's gonna DIE, and if she ever dies, I'm gonna hate it!"

"Okay," Wanda nodded, holding up her hands in gentle surrender. She smiled down at Steve and
said, "I always thought it was a little weird when someone would bring up Darcy and her security
detail, you got---very strange."

"Strange how?" Steve grumbled. "Do I---"
He clammed up quick and shook his head, his cheeks blazing with red.

"Do you what, Steve?" Wanda asked softly.

"Do I Love Her?" he whispered very very quietly, the words smashed together quick and hard. He shook his head again and waved his hands around, "Nevermind, I don't wanna know."

"Well, okay then," Wanda nodded, taking a seat opposite him as he guarded Darcy's smelly bathroom. "When you think of Darcy, what do you think of?"

"That she eats too much cheese and sings to herself when she's taking a whizz or a shit," Steve said quickly.

"Not about bathroom activities," Wanda laughed. "Close your eyes. Now, think about having a normal day."

"Like an explosion and fighting day?" Steve asked, complying with her request regardless, squeezing his eyes shut tight. "Or this normal, where I wake up with Darcy twisted all around like a pretzel?"

"Both," Wanda shrugged with a thoughtful expression on her face. "Now, it's a good day, you and Bucky and Sam went and took care of explosions. All your friends are going to have dinner."

"Even Tony and Rhodey?" Steve's voice was exceptionally soft.

"Yes, even Tony and Rhodey," Wanda nodded, feeling the sharp sad spike off of him at the thought of the friends who he had seemingly lost.

"Vision can go fuck off, he ain't gettin' none of the taco pizzas," Steve added.

"Yes, I'll agree to that, Vision can go fuck off," Wanda smirked. "It's a great day, and we have tacos
and pizzas and friends and laughter."

"Yeah," Steve nodded, his smile gentle and adorable.

"And just as we're about to sit down to dinner, Darcy comes into the room," Wanda suggested softly.

She took a sharp intake of breath when Steve's smile went into a grin that very well may have hurt his cheeks. The young woman got a wave of something off of Steve, and it was a beautifully powerful thing. The suggestions of happiness she'd set for Steve had been warm and comfortable, but this was full of energy and fire and bone crushing contentment.

"She can empty tacos for more taco pizza," Steve said softly, somehow making the words sound dreamy in his little man voice. "And we can argue and make fun of Bucky and Sam and how they bicker. And then we're gonna dance the jitterbug."

"That sounds lovely," Wanda nodded.

Steve blinked his eyes open and looked at his friend thoughtfully. "So---do I---do I love Darcy when I'm a grown up?"

"The minute you get changed back into a grownup, when you open your eyes, you will know the answer immediately, I promise," Wanda gave his foot a nudge with her own. "And I can't wait to see it happen."

"Okay," Steve sighed. "I know for sure that I do like her though, I don't hate her like I thought I did."

Wanda nodded, realizing that it wasn't a question it was a statement.

"So, you and Wilson and everybody can just---not talk about how I used to complain about her all a time, and how I wanted to put her into Space alone so she was safe," Steve said very quickly, wheedling in his expression. "And definitely no one tell her I kissed Sharon Carter, cause she'll be so so so upset."
"I would hate to make her upset," Wanda rolled her eyes. "Just seeing my face in the same room seems to annoy her, Steve."

"Yeah, I don't think she likes girls that ain't Natasha," Steve reasoned, ignoring the green eyed elephant in the room. His ears perked up and he got to his feet, quickly going to Wanda and yanking her up too. "She started to sing her wipe up song in there, you gotta go before she catches me talking alone with you and gets mad!"

Bucky was sorting out the food situation in the kitchen with Clint and Wanda less than an hour later, when they'd made a request to the archer for provisions, somehow he'd wound up bringing back half of a cow. Literally, a cow cut down the middle and perfectly aged. If they could just figure out a way to cut the thing down with the many available knives in the safehouse, they'd be eating porterhouse in no time.

Darcy came into the kitchen with Steve following closely behind, their arrival punctuated by a snort from Clint.

"Natalia has not changed her mind and that is the end of the story," Bucky mechanically announced. He then looked to the children and laughed.

Darcy had a blindfold wrapped around her eyes, as she was incredibly terrified of the butchering going on in the kitchen. She had told Steve confidentially (and it had been, of course overheard by everyone else in the house at the time), that she was terrified the cow would come back to life, even though it was technically only half a cow.

Cow zombies were apparently something she was terrified of, and she claimed it was due to the fact that she had seen them during her Nick Fury summer camp from hell.

So she had blindfolded herself and was being led around by the hand by Steve, who had massive headphones duct taped over his ears securely.

"WHAT?" Steve shouted over the very loud music Darcy was making him listen to.

"What? As in, what is going on here?" Bucky laughed, eagerly stepping away from the butchering that Clint and Wanda were delighting in.
Darcy pursed her lips and turned her head back and forth.

"Do we got pirate-sea?" She wondered, her voice escalating despite the fact that she could hear a lot better than Steve at this point.

"Well, not really," Bucky admitted. "Steve's standing here."

"I made sure he couldn't hear, and he didn't mind at all, since he can see stuff," Darcy explained quickly and loudly. "Cause I told him I needed a talk to you alone, and I needed pirate-sea but he didn't want me to be out of his sight, but he said it'd be nice not to hear me for a little..."

Wanda snorted with laughter and Darcy spun in a circle.

"I thought we had pirate-sea!" she called out in annoyance. "That fucking witch is cackling!"

"RUDE!" Wanda called out.

"C'mon," Bucky grabbed Steve by the shoulder and pointed him to the living room. The boy dutifully guided Darcy, careful to keep her elbows safe from the swinging kitchen door.

They went to the couch and Steve picked Darcy clear up off her feet, deaf to her little excited giggle as he popped her into the nest he had created after her eventful trip to the store the day prior. He smiled at her and then up at Bucky before doing a little shoulder shake at whatever music he was listening to on the little, cheap mp3 player that Clint had given to Darcy last night after arriving.

"Okay, Princess Sweetpea, we have privacy now," Bucky assured her.

"Oh good," Darcy nodded, keeping the blindfold on just in case the cow came out to attack. She didn't want to see Bucky rip apart a half cow zombie with his bare hands., which she was absolutely sure he would do to protect her and Steve. She'd keep the blindfold on until the cow was chopped up into hamburgers and put in the freezer, just to be safe.
"What did you want to talk about?" Bucky wondered.

"Uhm---well," Darcy was a little at a loss for words and shrugged. "How come Steve won't let me do anything but go to the bathroom alone?"

"I think he's just worried for you," Bucky answered truthfully. "The last time he let you out of his sight, you ran out of the house into a snowstorm and got all banged up."

"I mean, it's nice," Darcy said softly, looking around and hoping she was aiming a smile at Steve, but in fact she was smiling at the tableside lamp. "I like it cause it feels safe and good and---and like somebody cares about me."

"Oh, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky sat right in Darcy's nest and picked her up, cuddling her close. "Lots of people care about you."

"WHATSAMATTER?" Steve shouted, climbing up on the couch and wrapping his arms around Bucky and Darcy both. "DON'T CRY, DARCY!"

"I don't get it," Darcy sighed, leaning her head against Steve's head.

"I don't know if I know how to explain it," Bucky admitted. "But I'll try."

"Is it cause he---does he really love me?" Darcy whispered. "Like Thor said he was apposed to?"

"I don't know quite for sure, and really, when you guys are all grown up again, you should be able to hear it from him first, if it's true," Bucky gave her a soft smile, petting her hair as Steve cuddled up to her other side.

"No one ever loved me afore...you know, like that," Darcy whispered confidentially. "Like how you and Tash love each other. With kisses and bed wrestling."

"That's a damned shame," Bucky told her honestly. "You are nothing if not fun and loveable and sweet and exciting."
Darcy smiled and Steve saw it, relaxing and letting out a loud sigh as he sat back on the couch next to Bucky, content to listen to the extra loud music and stare at Darcy unabashedly, a small smile on his face.

"When Stevie was little the first time," Bucky recalled suddenly. "He swore up and down and all around that he didn't like salt water taffy. Said he hated it."

"Seems like a dangerous candy," Darcy's tongue poked through her missing teeth.

"Well, yeah, sure," Bucky laughed. "And then, one day, we finally got a bit of it after my older sister came back from the shore. And she didn't tell us what it was, just had us close our eyes and take a bite of it."

"Seems stupid," Darcy said bluntly.

"Well, we weren't the most brilliant boys," Bucky admitted with a chuckle. "Well, Stevie thought this was the most amazing thing he'd ever eaten. He went on and on about it being the best candy he had ever ate."

"They are kinda like the cursed tootsie rolls," Darcy nodded in agreement with herself.

"But then when he found out what he liked so much, he didn't know what to do with himself," Bucky revealed. "Salt water taffy had always been something he made fun of. Disdained."

"Dishdrain," Darcy rolled the incorrect word over in her mouth and shrugged. "Steve dishdrained me."

"No, honey, he never did," Bucky promised her. "Not for a minute. But, maybe he didn't ever admit or know how much he actually liked you and wanted to be your friend."

"A special hug friend?" Darcy wondered. "And bed wrestling too?"
"I don't know the answer to that, Sweetpea, you're going to have to ask him," Bucky admitted. He paused and added quickly, "When you're older."

Darcy heard the grumble coming from Steve's tummy meaning he needed a snack. She dove into the crack between the arm of the couch and the cushion, pulling out a little baggie full of little granola bars with m&Ms and chocolate chips inside of them. She waved the bag around and Steve grinned, taking the bag and pulling out two bars at once, opening them and popping them in his mouth.

"THANKS!" he managed to shout around his chewing.

"Daddy, can I tell you a secret since we got pirate-sea?" Darcy whispered confidentially.

"Of course, Darcy," Bucky smiled down at her, his smile blooming a little bigger as Darcy cuddled into him.

"I like Steve a lot," her voice was so quiet and little. "I liked him so much afore. And even when he's a pissbaby, I kind of still like him a lot. If---if he had been nice to me I woulda loved him so hard."

"Yeah?" Bucky grinned into her hair. "Well, that sounds real nice, Princess."

"But---it hurts when he hates me," Darcy sighed. "If we get big again, can you tell him not to hate me, please?"

"If he starts acting silly, I'll be first in line to smack him upside his head," Bucky promised.

"And if he loves me like Thor said he's apposed to, then---" Darcy shrugged and had a cute smile pulling at her lips, demure and gentle.

Steve reached out and poked at the dimple in Darcy's cheek, laughing happily at the sight of it as he chewed on granola bars and danced a little in his seat.

"Well, then, if that's all true," Bucky nodded pretending to think intensely, "Well, I guess you'll just get yourself a happily forever and ever after."
Darcy laughed in disbelief before admitting, "I never had one of those before either!"

Bucky popped a kiss on the top of her head and sighed, "Well, then I think it's about time you both get one."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading! See you next week! Enjoy celebrating Steve's birthday tomorrow!
Grown Up Darcy Problems

Chapter Notes

If you are sensitive to reading about eating disorders or body issues, please skip this chapter. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twelve: Grown-up Darcy Problems

When all was said and done, the snow that had fallen and drifted went right up to the front door of their safe house haven, and Steve had not needed to let Darcy out of his sight. He could stand at the doorway, bundled up from head to toe by Natasha while Darcy played with snow on the porch. She laughed and giggled and squealed as she and Bucky created a little legion of snow mermaids for two hours straight before it looked like her red nose was threatening to fall off and Steve started making concerned faces at the state of Darcy's frozen toes.

They fell into a comfortable pattern over the following week that they were trapped. Darcy and Steve were essentially inseparable, although Steve had finally allowed bathtime to happen separately, even though it was considerably less fun to play with the toys all alone. Clint kept coming up with new and amazing ways to eat the cow he had brought back on that first day, and even Darcy would eat the meatballs, so long as they were completely devoid of any kind of sauce.

Darcy and Steve escaped to their secret special spot in the safe house on the second day, when Clint and Wanda had been gleefully playing butcher, grinding meat into ground beef with a cobbled together mill made from a SHIELD weapon and Wanda's powers. They noticed right away that some things had changed.

"That's how I got out afore," Darcy whispered, pointing to the little exit that had been cordoned off with emergency tape, in addition to being boarded and nailed shut. Presumably the extra precautions were done so that no one could figure out how to get in from that exit, as well as keep Darcy INSIDE the house instead of running out the next time she thought she absolutely had to.

"Well, if we need an escape, I can get that board off real easy," Steve assured her. "And you don't need to be goin' anywhere wifout me, so that's that."

Darcy grinned at him before grabbing his hand and leading them up the winding rock wall to the
little nest. They had improvements to make. Darcy had a bag full of art essentials and paper and candy, and Steve was carrying a bulky safe that he had found in one of the safehouse rooms, declaring it a fine place to put their treasures and keep them safe from anyone who would dare come into the house.

When they crawled into the little room at the top of the house, they noticed right away that someone else had been there. But thankfully, they hadn't done anything bad. Instead, it seemed much nicer than the bare bones room and simple little nest Darcy had made up.

For one, there was a tiny, kid sized couch, the kind made out of blocky styrofoam and covered in cheap fabric, in this case it had all the Avengers on the fabric, from back before 'it all went to hell' (Steve's own words). It held a bunch of pillows and blankets and there was a bright pink rug on the floor in front of it. On the left hand side was a small side table, where the little stereo sat, along with a docking station for Darcy's newer MP3 player.

By the little window was a repurposed gun shelf, made to look like a small desk, along with a high powered interrogation lamp sitting on it. There was already a bunch of paper and coloring books along with containers for Steve to put his art supplies in.

But perhaps the most delightful addition was the tiny kitchen. It was meant for children to play pretend with, but when Darcy clapped her hands together in delight and ran to inspect it, she realized that the fridge was a real working miniature fridge, stocked full of snacks and drinks that both she and Steve liked very much. The small cartoonish sink had running water, and there was a tiny microwave with special instructions taped to it, in little words that they both could read and with helpful crudely drawn cartoon illustrations.

Apparently the microwave was some science experiment found in the safehouse and could pop a bag of popcorn in less than ten seconds.

"That'll be handy when your lion tummy gets the grumblies," Darcy remarked as she explored her little kitchen. There seemed to be an empty space on the tiny pink counter, looking just big enough to house an EZ Bake oven.

Clint pulled himself into the room with a grunt and sighed, "I'm getting old."

"HEY! THIS IS OUR SUPER SECRET SPECIAL SPOT!" Darcy yelled at him automatically.
"It was MY super secret special spot first," Clint countered.

"NUH UH!" Darcy and Steve said in unison.

"YEAH HUH!" Clint teased back.

"NUH UH!"

"YEAH HUH TIMES INFINITY PLUS ONE!" Clint said quickly, knowing that kids could get stuck on that for quite some time. He gestured around and said, "We made this place a little nicer for you. But you gotta promise me something in return."

"Is it you taping us somewhere on a ceiling?" Steve asked warily.

"Is it you making us get tattoos?" Darcy added.

"He made me try and get a tattoo once!" Steve looked to Darcy with one of those bright smiles that were coming faster and faster to his face around her. "My super skin kept making the ink fall off."

"I knocked him out and ran so's I didn't have to have one!" Darcy revealed excitedly.

"Menace to society," Clint accused before walking around the room carefully, going to a new cabinet by the window. He opened it and it still held the crossbow and knives that Darcy had found in the small space before. It also had big black blankets, that Clint held up and shook out for their perusal. "Barnes is pretty handy with a needle, it turns out."

"He used to sew my socks into bigger socks to keep my feet warm," Steve revealed.

"Daddy knows how to do loads of stuff," Darcy nodded.

"Well, he sewed a bunch of kevlar together, and now you have two or three blankets in here. If something bad happens, you get under those blankets, you hear me?" Clint asked in that practiced fatherly way that had both children nodding. "All these weapons in here were approved by Natasha."
"We got a few batons that can stun people..."

"ooooohhh," Darcy stepped a little closer, holding out her hand expectantly.

"They will only be activated if Sam or whoever is doing surveillance on the house deems a threat is on its way," Clint advised. "And really, you only use it if someone finds you and then gets you out from under the blanket."

"Okay, Uncle Clint," Darcy nodded. "Can you go so me and Rogers can---have pirate-sea?"

"What are you gonna do? Kiss?" Clint teased.

Steve went bright red and Darcy wrinkled her nose.

"We was gonna dance, you pervert!" Steve finally found his words.

"Alright, well you can dance in a few minutes, let's run a few drills," Clint insisted.

"But Cliiiiiint," Steve whined. "I wanna teach her a new step---"

"Drills, Cap!" Clint insisted, using the tone he would use on Lila when she'd rather practice her acrobatics than do her homework. "I'm gonna be the bad guy and you're gonna hear me coming---remember, grab the batons, hide, and zap when you have to. Let's do this."

There was about five days of being snowed in, and then all of a sudden, one morning, the sun came up brighter and warmer than it had in quite a bit of time. Steve woke up sweaty that morning thanks to Darcy, the human furnace sprawled out over his legs. By the time lunch rolled around, Clint and Wanda were saying goodbye and Darcy and Steve were standing on the porch where the sound of melting snow was palpable.

"Don't be strangers, okay?" Steve hugged Clint hard, causing the man to lose all of his air from his lungs.
"Yeah yeah," Clint muttered as he felt his back cracking under the weight of Steve's hug. "Maybe, just maybe we'll have a playdate planned?"

"I'm not a baby!" Darcy called out. "I don't need playdates when I got Rogers here to amuse me with his dumb fish face all the time."

Steve wrinkled his nose at her in annoyance, but didn't yell at her. He hadn't yelled at her once since they had found her battered and bloody at that general store.

"See, there's that face," Darcy pointed at Steve with a smirk that didn't really belong on a five year old's face curling her lips.

"You're a menace, be nice to Steve," Wanda told the little girl, who had given her a wide berth during the entirety of their stay at the safehouse.

"You're a buttmunch and your tea makes your breath smell yucky," Darcy sassed back.

"Lewis!" Steve scolded quietly.

"It does make her breath smell funky," Darcy grumbled before heaving a sigh.

Steve rolled his eyes at her before reaching for Wanda, giving her a less heavy handed hug than the one he had given Clint, but Darcy watched as his face went soft and his head turned so that his ear was pressed against Wanda's stomach. He looked happy. And not annoyed at all. Like he LIKED Wanda an awful lot or something.

"I will come back to visit whenever I can," Wanda promised, her hand ruffling Steve's baby fine dark blond hair, delighted when some of it stuck up at odd angles.

Darcy heaved a put upon sigh.
"And make sure you get enough to eat where you're staying, not just that junk you call food but is actually just sugar melted around food," Steve lectured, pulling away to look up at her, his hands still on Wanda's waist. "You're way too skinny."

"Five year old Daddy Rogers," Clint chuckled as Bucky pulled up the car he had taken out to make sure the roads were passable (And pick up much needed supplies from the local gas and go. Steve and Darcy had drunk ten gallons of milk in less than a week).

"Anything else you'd like me to do for you while I'm away?" Wanda teased Steve.

"Hmm...I like your hair, it's pretty like that," Steve picked up one of Wanda's wavy curly tendrils that hung down near her waist. He held it up to the bright mid-morning sun and the blonde tones caught the light, shimmering very beautifully indeed.

Wanda pulled her hair away and gave a grimace Darcy's way, too late, because the girl's eyes had filled with tears and she had made a silent run back into the house.

"You know my whole family is blonde now, Rogers?" Clint asked. "Lila was tickled pink that she got to bleach her hair at twelve."

"I bet she's pretty as a picture, just like her ma," Steve nodded.

"C'mon, get a move on," Bucky ordered as he balanced four new gallons of milk in the metal arm. "You got a window of two hours to get to your safehouse."

Steve came back into the house, looking around for Darcy right away. The fifteen minutes it had taken to wave Clint and Wanda off had been the longest she'd been out of his sight in days. He took a breath of relief to find her laying on her back on the living room floor, her limbs starfished out around her as her eyes squeezed tightly shut.

"I thought you said only babies napped, c'mon Lewis, we got sunshine and bare ground out there, Bucky said he'd put up the tire swing!" Steve said with a cheerfulness that didn't quite translate. What he wanted to say was for her to stop being a mopey moperson who sassed his friends, but he kept that to himself.
He didn't want to make her upset so she'd run away again.

So instead he kept things cheerful as he dropped to his knees on the rug she had been laying on before sprawling himself out, his head laying on her stomach like it was a pillow.

"GET OFFA ME!" Darcy immediately shrieked.

"Nah," Steve laughed.

Bucky peered at them curiously and shook his head at Steve. "She make a nice pillow?"

"The best," Steve shrugged. "Her belly is squishy and soft and full of candy."

"GET OFFA ME YOU DIRTY ASS WIPE!" Darcy screeched like a banshee, so loud that Steve did sit up and stare down at her with an angry face.

The expression quickly melted when he remembered he shouldn't be mean to her anymore. Instead he plastered that smile on his face that he'd used every time he went on stage or shook hands during his USO touring days.

"You lay on me alla the time," he said softly, secretly wanting to scream. But he didn't dare, because she looked like she was about to start crying any minute. He moved away as she scrambled to her feet and watched as she ran out of the living room.

"DON'T FOLLOW ME YOU BIG MEAN FAT HEAD!" she ordered.

Steve was about to disobey those orders but Bucky stood in his way and blocked him as Darcy went for the steps that would lead to her bathroom.

"I gotta go watch her," Steve told Bucky desperately.
"Give her a minute or two, she's upset," Bucky advised.

"What the hell for? I Was being NICE," Steve insisted.

"Sure nice, you were being nice, but you weren't really being Steve though, were you?" Bucky gave the little man a gentle smile.

"I don't GET HER!" Steve yelled. "She's mad at me when I'm nice, she's mad at me when I'm mean! What's a fella supposed to do?!"

"Give her some space," Bucky reiterated. "And just be normal."

"She was gonna cry, and I didn't do NOFFIN this time!" Steve insisted, pouting a little as he crossed his arms in front of himself.

"Pal, you and me ain't the only ones with stuff that might have screwed with our feelings and head and heart," Bucky said gently. "Just give her some privacy to get sorted out."

"You go and give her a hug or somethin' so she stops being sad and miserable," Steve ordered.

"Natalia's got it handled."

Natalia did NOT have it handled.

Darcy had managed to stay locked in the bathroom for some time, despite her attempts to coax her out of there. When she was ready to come out, it was already lunch time, and she marched down to the kitchen immediately, not answering the questioning look on Natasha's face.

Natasha received an inconveniently timed text message and sighed. Nick Fury might not have been able to find much on the truck's plates that had de-aged Darcy and Steve, but Nick Fury was not Natasha's only resource, just as she had not been his only resource all of these years.
“I’m going to take the truck out, test the roads,” Natasha announced softly as she followed Darcy into the kitchen. Her eyes connected with Bucky’s and some silent information was relayed there.

“I wanna go!” Steve said eagerly. “Me and Darcy can go for a ride once lunch is over.”

“It’s not that kind of trip, Stevie,” Bucky said softly as Natasha quickly got together what she would need. Natasha made the rounds, hugging Steve and dropping a kiss on Darcy’s forehead before she was in Bucky’s embrace. “Be careful, Red.”

“You be careful with them,” Natasha murmured. “Something has upset Darcy.”

“Hmm,” Bucky agreed, walking Natasha to the garage and kissing her soundly before waving her off.

It wasn’t like before, he had to remind himself. He wasn’t saying goodbye with the worry that he would never see her again. Or worse, she would come back and he wouldn’t be able to recognize her right away. He felt the warmth from the house at his back as he closed the garage door to the relatively cool air from outside and knew that those days were behind him. Long behind the both of them. And he’d destroy anyone who might try to force them back there.

Bucky took a deep breath and headed back into the house, a smile on his face when he got back to the kitchen. "What’ll it be for lunch time, Princess Sweetpea? We got some mac and cheese you like, and we got meatballs, how about some of that and then if you eat that, I'll sneak you a dish of ice cream at the end?"

Steve watched her carefully as she climbed up onto the kitchen stool all alone. She shot Bucky a little smile and shook her head.

"Can I have an apple please? Cut up into wedgies?"

"That's all you want for lunch, an apple?" Bucky furrowed his brow at her.

"I ate a whole egg white and a banana and a waffle at breakfast," Darcy reminded him, an edge of
sweetness to her voice that meant she was trying to get away with something, but Steve and Bucky noticed that.

"You did," Bucky acknowledged, grabbing an apple out of the basket and heading back to the cutting board he had used to prepare Steve's five meatball sandwiches. He came back with Darcy's apple cut into neat little slices and gave her a hopeful smile, "How about some peanut butter to dip them in?"

"No thanks, Bucky," Darcy shook her head again and carefully bit an apple wedge.

Bucky swallowed and turned away from the children. It was the first time that Darcy hadn't called him Daddy since that first time she called him it in the Walmart. He hadn’t expected her to keep it up for so long, but it had certainly been a pleasant surprise. Every time the moniker left her mouth, he felt a happy warmth in his chest that had felt a little foreign. He shrugged it off silently, not missing a beat and made sure Steve had his fourth helping of mac and cheese while Darcy nibbled on her apple slice.

“D’you wanna learn a new dance?”

Steve made an awkward little dance between his two feet as Darcy came down the steps for what seemed like the fifteenth time that hour.

“Nah,” she shook her head before turning around and starting her climb up the steps again.

“What’re you doing that for?” Steve demanded as he took the trip up the stairs with her. She was sweaty all over her face and her cheeks were bright red. Her brown hair was absolutely riotous, falling out of the braided pigtails, wild curls standing up at odd angles.

"I gotta practice getting better at running up and down stuff," Darcy explained before starting her climb up again, still breathless and clearly tired. "If bad guys come I should be able to run up and down lots and lots of stairs all a time!"

Steve followed her effortlessly, and looked concerned when she became winded just before hitting the second floor landing, swaying on her feet a bit. She made a frustrated little noise as she looked
up the last three steps that she had already gone up and down so many times and Steve couldn't
handle that her eyes began to swim with tears. He reached for her and hauled her up and off her feet,
throwing her tiny little body on his broad shoulder.

"HEY! WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA YOU ASSHOLE?!!?" Darcy demanded, immediately kicking
her legs and pounding her tiny, ineffective fists on Steve's back.

"You don't gotta practice," Steve insisted as he easily began a steady climb up the steps, positioning
her so that her punches hit a nice place in his back that felt really kind of good, actually, like a
massage.

"YES I DO! IF A BAD GUY COMES I GOTTA RUN QUICK TO THE BLANKETS!" Darcy
reminded him hotly.

"No you don't," Steve began RUNNING up the steps rapidly, taking two at a time and not even
getting a little out of breath. They were up at the third floor in no time and he patted Darcy's calves.
"I can carry you."

"Nuh uh!" Darcy disputed, but she was quiet about it, not shrieking anymore as almost all the fight
went out of her.

"Yeah huh," Steve came back cleverly.

"Nuh uh," Darcy sniffled a bit, causing Steve to stiffen up.

"Whatsamatter sweetheart?" Steve wondered quietly.

"I'm too heavy to carry around all a time," she whispered. "You's gonna hurt yourself."

"PFFFFtttt," Steve blew the air through his large front teeth in dismissal. "I got super strength, it
don't matter if you're heavy! I'm strong enough to carry you, Lewis."

They were quiet for a little while, with Steve still holding Darcy, he began walking down the steps
easily. But his words seemed to settle in her and didn't seem to appease her at all, in fact it seemed to
give her renewed strength and vigor and she began squirming against him once more.

"Put me down, please," her voice seemed calm enough, and when Steve complied with her request, he saw that tears were streaming down her cheeks in buckets.

"What?" he looked properly horrified at her desperate sadness. "I didn't do noffin' this time!"

"No, you didn't," Darcy promised before turning and starting her climb back up the stairs. "Just leave me alone."

"But I---"

"Just leave me alone!" Darcy's voice wasn't that powerful shriek, but it wasn't quite a whisper either. She was sad to be sure, and Steve didn't know what to do as he watched her finish going up to the top of the steps then make her way back down.

He sat down on the steps and watched as she went down to the bottom, wiped away her tears and took deep gulping breaths before climbing up again, not looking at him as she mechanically climbed up the steps, her breath coming out in puffs as her face flushed.

He didn't know why she was doing this, but she seemed powerful sad. Steve watched her for another half hour until finally, she stopped on one of her climbs on the floor with the bathroom and went in it. He hugged his knees to his chest and sighed heavily. He really, really missed Natasha.

Chapter End Notes

whew. I promise if we can get through this, I'll give you two of the funnest chapters I've ever written. I promise.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Happy Monday! I apologize for the super heavy chapter. I promise you that next Monday is brighter.

WARNING: Eating and dieting issues are described below. Read at your own risk.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Thirteen: Scar Tissue

"Now, since Natalia isn't here tonight, I feel it's my duty to serve you something wrapped in bacon," Bucky said thoughtfully, looking into the fridge and realizing he could potentially wrap freshly made hamburger patties with the bacon. Steve and he would wolf it down in no time, but it was doubtful Darcy would even look at the meat wrapped meat. "So Princess Sweetpea, what do you want for your supper?"

Darcy had been working on a little legal pad with her favorite purple crayon, intensely concentrating as Steve sat next to her with his own sketch pad, drawing pictures of Prissy Hissy the Cat having random and fun adventures.

"I'm not hungry at all," Darcy advised.

"Well that can't be true," Bucky turned to her curiously as Steve put down his pencil and looked at Darcy with fearful concern. "You only had an apple for lunch today."

"Oh that sounds yummy yummers," Darcy said quietly, carefully counting stroke marks she had made with her index finger. "Can I have another one please?"

"No, you'll have a proper dinner," Bucky advised her. "I could understand the first few days not wanting to eat what we had, but now we have things you like, and you've been such a good, brave girl trying some new things that Stevie likes---"

"I like apples," Darcy said quietly, not once looking up at either Bucky or Steve.
"But that's not a good enough meal," Bucky sounded stern, which was a new tone for him to take with Darcy. "You can have an apple, but you're also going to eat something else. What about those dinosaur chicken nuggets you said you liked?"

"EW," Darcy wrinkled her nose, but her tummy growled.

Steve heard it and he pointed at her accusingly.

"She IS hungry and she DOES want chicken nuggets," he tattled.

"YOU SHUT YOUR FUCKING FACE HOLE!" Darcy screeched at him.

"Your tummy sounded like a kitten lion so you is hungry, Lewis!" Steve accused.

"I AM NOT!" Darcy shouted.

Her stomach grumbled again to dispute with her.

"SEE!" Steve looked back at Bucky for confirmation.

"You're eating dinner," Bucky insisted.

"NO I'M NOT!" Darcy yelled back. She climbed down her stool, holding her notepad and crayon in hand and glared at both Steve and Bucky. "You ain't the boss of me!"

"Darcy, I AM the boss of you," Bucky argued. "Until Natalia gets back, I'm the boss."

"No you ain't! YOU AIN'T!" Darcy stomped her feet. "I'M A GROWN ASS LADY AND I CAN BOSS MY OWN SHIT! YOU AIN'T MY BOSS AND YOU AIN'T MY DAD AND I DON'T GOT TO DO ANYTHING I DON'T WANT TO DO!"
Bucky swallowed down the hurt that Darcy's sudden temper tantrum brought on and he set his jaw, stepping away from the kitchen counter and approaching a trembling, angry little girl staring up at him defiantly.

"Go up to your room," Bucky said quietly. Darcy seemed happy with this outcome and spun on her little heel and stomped to the door of the kitchen, before turning and glaring at Bucky petulantly. Bucky looked to Steve who was about to shuffle off his chair. "ALONE."

"Buck, please," Steve whispered.

Bucky simply grabbed the phone out of his back pocket and dialed one number, staring back down at Darcy as she fumed up at him irritably. Gone was the sweet little girl who he had coddled relentlessly over the last two weeks and in her place was a very angry and upset child. He was great at the coddling, no doubt, but he had little to no clue on how to deal with a temper tantrum. His missing partner in espionage and murder would be better able to help with that.

The best he could come up with at the moment was to give Darcy time and quiet to cool her jets and then have a talk with her when he brought her dinner up. But in the meantime, he didn't trust the little devil an inch not to try and run away again.

"Wilson," Bucky spoke gruffly into the phone.

"Why hello, asswipe, it's been so long since your dulcet growls caressed my earholes and made me want to ear vomit," Sam eloquently sassed on the other end.

"Can it, will you?" Bucky rolled his eyes. "Darcy's heat signature should be in her room—"

The sound of the door slamming throughout the room echoed in the house.

"Now. It's to remain in that room, if she moves further than ten feet, you tell me right away so she can't get away this time," Bucky said gruffly.

"She wouldn't DO that," Steve grumbled from his seat, staring down at Prissy Hissy and her cake adventure that he had drawn. Essentially the round little cat was trying to decide which delicious cake to eat first.
"She already did it once," Bucky reminded, hanging up on Wilson happily. He sighed, running his hands through his hair, feeling like an absolute asshole for sending Darcy to her room. "I just want to keep her safe. Now come on, what do you want for dinner?"

Bucky went to Darcy's room forty minutes later with a tray in hand. He'd made a tiny bit of all of her favorites, feeling terrible at having sent her to her room, despite her sass mouth. Everyone was entitled to feel a little grumpy every once in a while, and Darcy hadn't been grumpy with him at all since she'd been switched to a five year old. He shouldn't have kept her alone for so long, he should have taken her to her room and explained it.

He kept second guessing himself, knowing that if Natalia were there, it wouldn't be a problem. She'd know exactly what to do, having known Darcy longer and as an adult.

Back in Bucky and Steve's day, Darcy would have gotten smacked across her face at least once for her tantrum, but Bucky knew that he'd rather die than raise a hand against the little girl, so a timeout was the only option.

He took a deep breath, hoping that she was calm and not too sad at being all alone, before knocking on the door.

There was, of course, no answer.

He knocked again and waited about ten seconds before going for the doorknob. It was locked, of course.

Steve visibly fretted in the corner of his eye, wringing his hands and biting at his lip. Bucky sighed again before turning the knob forcefully with his left hand, breaking the lock and the doorknob in one easy twist. He pushed against the door, finding that it wasn't easy, because Darcy had barricaded herself in there, using the plush armchair and stacking all of her toys on the chair as added 'weight'.

She was laying on the bed, fast asleep, looking to have kept in one position, actually.
"She looks like a tiny Snow White," Steve whispered as he peered around Bucky's legs as they looked in on her.

She had her hands clasped together on her stomach, as she lay on her back, her head still resolutely on her pillow. She wasn't faking the sleep either, Bucky could tell as her little chest rose and fell, her eyes moving erratically behind her closed eyelids.

"She didn't have a nap today," Bucky said softly.

"Nah, she was doing cala--cal--calastains and shits," Steve shrugged.

"Calisthenics," Bucky gave him a little smirk.

"That's what I said," Steve nodded.

"Maybe she just had a temper tantrum cause she's tired," Bucky said hopefully, not wanting to believe that his sweet little Princess Sweetpea actually hated him.

"Yeah, that's it," Steve nodded eagerly in agreement. He tried to push back Bucky to get into the bedroom. Bucky put a hand on his shoulder though and stopped him. "She gotta eat somethin' Buck."

"She's tired and it's half an hour to bedtime anyway, just let her be," Bucky insisted. "I'll make pancakes for her in the morning."

Steve woke up cold for the first time in over a week, and he sat up with a frown on his face. He hated waking up cold. He hated waking up and feeling like something was missing and his heightened senses making him realize very quickly WHO was missing so early in the morning.

The sun was barely up, and the sky was a beautiful kind of purple and blue as it wavered between nighttime and daytime. Steve climbed out of the bed and ran silently to the bathroom, doing his
morning business as quickly as he could before running from the bathroom. Exactly ten seconds later he sighed heavily before rushing back to the bathroom and washing his hands as thoroughly as his need to find Darcy would allow him.

He checked their super secret special spot first, vainly hoping she'd be there so they didn't have to fight, because they weren't allowed to fight there, he was sure no matter how irrationally angry she was, she would obey that rule. But she wasn't there and Steve went to her bathroom, then the staircase she had been climbing the day before, and the living room, but she wasn't there.

He was about to panic, to run to Natasha and Bucky's room (with his eyes covered, because he wasn't an idiot and didn't need to see his best friend's butt when he was technically a child). But then he heard a little sniffle and his spine went rigid, following the sound of the sniffle to the kitchen.

Darcy was sitting on one of the kitchen stools and in front of her on the island countertop was a box of cereal, the blueberry covered shredded wheat kind, and there were five little shredded wheat squares in front of her that she was apparently sobbing her eyes out about.

Steve opened his mouth to talk, but he didn't know what to say. It seemed inappropriate to make jokes and ask her what the shredded wheat did to her and if he should beat them up. So instead he silently made his way to her, climbing up on the kitchen stool she was on and picking her up so that he could sit and hold her close. She immediately rubbed all of her snot on his shirt, and he didn't mind it one bit, even though it was seriously so very gross, because at the same time she hugged him real tight.

Like having him there made her feel safe and better than crying at cereal alone.

"Whatsamatter?" he whispered.

"I ate too many cereals," Darcy whimpered.

Steve pecked around her hair and saw that the box was very nearly full. He furrowed his brow and wondered if she had eaten a whole box of the cereal and this was her second one. It wouldn't matter if it was or not. Bucky and Natasha had gotten that cereal FOR her, and she would be the only one to eat it. Sure, in a pinch Steve would eat just about anything, but those boxes of Blueberry Shredded Wheat were hers and Steve would let her eat every last one of them.

"How'd you get the second box down?" he wondered. "You ain't supposed to climb, amember?
Cause you got stuck when you tried to climb after me in the living room and I thought you'd a fallen and broke your skull and you promised me you wouldn't climb so high again. Amember?"

"I didn't eat a whole box!" Darcy insisted, pulling away from Steve's embrace. She looked down between them and put her hands on her stomach, wincing when it made a growling, hungry sound almost as loud as Steve's lion tummy.

"Well how many did you eat?" Steve asked softly.

"Don't make me say," Darcy's little voice was a heartfelt plea and she aimed big, tearful blue eyes at him. "Please?"

"Alright," Steve nodded, not knowing how to get the truth out of her when she was making her face extra sad and pathetic. He didn't know what to do and it was frustrating him, because he could see she was hurting and he didn't know how to help her at all. He only wanted to help her so she wouldn't hurt anymore, that's all he ever wanted to do. And he thought a long time ago that meant keeping away from her, but that had proven to be an absolutely terrible idea.

But he needed to do SOMETHING now, so he pulled her into a tight hug once more, and kissed the top of her head. He looked to the left of the cereal box and saw that her little notepad and purple crayon lay there, with a bunch of stroke marks made against the fresh sheet of paper. He counted them and figured there were about eighty there, and he wondered if that meant she ate eighty pieces of cereal. That seemed like an alright number to Steve, seeing as she hadn't had anything proper to eat ever since breakfast the day before.

"Wanna watch a cartoon?" Steve whispered into her hair. She only shrugged in response, so Steve took that as a positive response and jumped down from the chair, holding onto her tight. He finally let go of her when they were in the living room, popping her in her little nest on the couch before going for the DVD's, picking up Lilo and Stitch for her approval.

She wasn't paying attention though, instead, staring down at her tummy with a frown. Steve put the movie in and went back to her on the couch, climbing into the next of pillows and blankets with her as the movie started. She was still staring at her tummy with a frown and Steve thought that meant she had a tummy ache from all of her cereal, so he put his hands on her belly and began rubbing it in little circles.

Bucky found them like that before Lilo could even make it to dance practice, and he smiled as Darcy hid her face in Steve's shoulder as he rubbed her belly and frowned at the movie on screen.
"Good morning," Bucky said softly.

Steve tensed as Darcy began to silently cry and he looked back up at Bucky and shook his head no ever so slowly.

"Princess Sweetpea, can you look at me?" Bucky wondered.

"No Daddy," Darcy's muffled response came from Steve's shoulder.

Bucky felt his heart clench at the heartbreak in her voice, and he honestly didn't know what to do. This child was hurting something fierce, tortured by what, he didn't know, but it could very well have been something from when she was a grownup, and she didn't know how to give voice to it. Steve wasn't about to force her to confront anything, the little man would rather be tortured than to make Darcy more upset.

"I'm sorry I was an asshole to you," Darcy whispered as she continued to cry, the words muffled against Steve's shoulder.

"What?" Bucky asked.

"She said she was sorry for being an asshole to you," Steve translated. "But I don't think she got to be sorry, cause this might be your penance for being an asshole to me. And she wasn't an asshole, she was just cranky."

"Sure, sure," Bucky agreed easily, hoping it would get Darcy to stop crying and look at him.

"And I love you very much, Daddy," Darcy whisper cried into Steve.

Steve translated for her without having to be asked, "And she loves you very much. As a friend. She don't want to be your second girlfriend, no matter how much that was your dream when we were teenagers."

"Well---I love you too. As a friend," he quickly clarified when Steve's gaze went slightly suspicious. Bucky bent down and kissed Steve on the top of his head twice. "Give one of those to her please."
Darcy only cried when Steve passed the kiss to the top of her head. Bucky nodded and offered hopefully, "What does everyone want for breakfast? We can have all the different kinds of cereal in a big bowl if you want?"

"I already ate," Darcy sniffled.

"Now---I don't---"

"No, she did!" Steve promised, holding Darcy closer, feeling her tense at Bucky’s suggestion. If she didn't want to have another breakfast, then Steve wouldn't let anyone force her to. "I saw her."

"Okay, alright," Bucky promised. "I'll go warm up some of those breakfast burritos you liked so much, Stevie."

"Thanks," Steve smiled softly, knowing he could eat his food one handed and still keep Darcy close.

Bucky made it to the kitchen before pulling out his phone and texting Natasha. He was smart enough to admit that he had no idea what was hurting Darcy so and he didn't know how to make it better. He got no response the entire time he had warmed up breakfast for Steve, taking Darcy's cereal box and closing it up, popping it on the low shelf that had all of her favorite things on it.

On a lark he tried to call Sam.

"Hello?" a feminine voice came through instead.

"Who in the hell?" Bucky demanded.

"It's Carter, Barnes," Sharon Carter answered. "I've come to help Wilson out, didn't Romanoff tell you?"

"No, she's been on a mission of sorts," Bucky admitted.
"Surveillance of the surrounding area looks clean, the house is showing three heat signatures, two running higher than the third," Sharon reported. "Anything else?"

"Do little girls diet?" Bucky blurted.

"Uhm--what?" Sharon audibly shifted over the other end of the phone.

"Darcy ain't had nothin' proper to eat since yesterday morning, and Steve caught her doing exercises and she's got a pad with marks on it that I think she's counting calories on," Bucky blurted. "Natalia isn't here and I need her here. What do I do? What put it into her head that she needs to lose weight, she's a damned five year old!"

"Okay, wait, hold on," Sharon blurted out. "Barnes, if what the reports say is correct…"

"Reports?" Bucky repeated in confusion.

"Gossip," Sharon clarified in a way that Bucky didn't believe for one second. "They’re still presenting their adult psyches, traits, problems, just---a child version."

"Right," Bucky acknowledged.

"The one time Darcy Lewis has ever been hospitalized in her life, according to her file, was at the age of nineteen, when she passed out at a step aerobics class in the university gymnasium. She'd been starving herself for days and over exercising."

"Jesus Christ," Bucky breathed out.

"She had to take two semesters off of school, it's why she signed up for the internship with Foster in the first place," Sharon revealed.

"Why are you such an expert on her file?" Bucky questioned, unable to verbalize Sharon's bombshell.
"I'm good at my job, Barnes," Sharon reminded him.

"Sure, yeah, I know," Bucky nodded, although he didn't believe her for a second. Peggy Carter wasn't great at telling the small whoppers, and it seemed that the trait ran in the family. But he didn't have the luxury of interrogating Sharon at the moment. "What the hell do I do to get her to stop? She was fine a few days ago, eating new things..."

"It's not like we know how this works here," Sharon reminded him. "If the condition came down and was exacerbated into presenting, then maybe the therapy came down to her age too, she just has to---rediscover it."

Bucky closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. The last thing he wanted was to see that little girl hurting in any way, shape or form.

"Barnes, taking this girl to a hospital is not an option," Sharon reminded him.

"I know that," Bucky said flatly. "You got any ETA on Natalia?"

"Whereabouts unknown, her tracker is off," Sharon said calmly.

Bucky trusted Natalia. He trusted her with anything and everything. Her tracker being off didn't worry him one bit. What worried him was how he was going to make sure Darcy had enough calories to live off of. He had worried about it when she had first been switched into a child, but now it seemed so much more real than a picky kid who only wanted candy and milk and cheese.

"If it gets worse, we'll have to bring her to the helicarrier," Sharon's voice wasn't quite so hard as it had been before. "Maybe we should have put the kids there in the first place."

"So new SHIELD could have poked and prodded at them? No thanks," Bucky muttered. "Gotta go, Carter."

He finished up Steve's breakfast quickly and cut up three apples into wedges, before going back into the living room with a big smile pasted on his face.
"I know you said Darcy ate, but I forgot," Bucky, unlike Carter, was great at lying to people's faces. He sat down next to the children and allowed Steve to grab for a burrito before trying to get a better look at Darcy's face. He smiled at her when she finally looked at him with red and puffy eyes. "Princess Sweetpea, can you help an old man out so we don't waste the food?"

He poured every ounce of charm he had left in his old bones and waved the plate full of apples in front of her face.

"Okay," Darcy said softly, reaching out and grabbing a wedge, nibbling on it delicately.

"Good, thank you," Bucky said softly. He leaned forward and put a soft kiss on her forehead before pulling back and ruffling Steve's hair.

He'd figure this out on his own. He had to.

"Stevie, get your ass down from there, you little shit," Bucky ordered from the ground as Steve walked calmly along the third floor turret roof, clearing out leaves from gutters.

"Nah, I heard the snow melting all night and it was annoying," Steve insisted as he continued to put his gloved hand into gutters and pull out huge globs of old, wet, gross leaves and throw them to the ground below. Darcy was making sounds of disgust and laughing at the same time as Steve tried to throw the globs at Bucky as he worked at putting the tire swing up for them.

"You think this is funny, little lady?" Bucky demanded.

"It makes a gross sound when it hits a ground," Darcy admitted as she held onto the tools Bucky said he would need. "Splat squish!"

"You are, without a doubt, the cutest little button that I ever saw," Bucky smiled down at her.

Darcy beamed up at him at first before she shrugged and pointed her face down at the ground, gently kicking the tire that Bucky was about to string up on the tree. She wasn't little though. She knew that. She knew that very well. She'd never been little when she was a grown up. When she had
money to buy her own food, she ate the things she liked until she was rounded and soft all over.

But she'd figured out when she was a grownup how not to be rounded and soft all over when she thought it was a bad thing. She knew she was round and soft now again, and Steve was made of muscles. And Wanda was skinny. And Bucky was made of metal AND muscles. And Natasha was so beautiful it hurt to look at her some of the time.

"What's going on in that smart noggin of yours?" Bucky asked, soft and soothing in a way that didn't quite seem possible. "I'm here to listen to whatever you want to talk about, any time you want, and I won't ever tell no one, either. I promise, Princess."

"I gotta soft belly and it's squishy and full of candy," Darcy muttered.

"I would hate to dispute with you when you seem so sure," Bucky said calmly, approaching the entire situation as if Darcy were a skittish horse. "But I know you haven't had candy in a few days since Natalia caught you and Stevie with a bag full of Hershey's kisses in bed four days ago."

Darcy blushed at that. Tash had run into the room, waving her finger around wildly because Clint had heard Steve say 'Give us a kiss, sweetheart', and Darcy had been SHOCKED that her friend would think she would kiss a boy in bed when they'd not gone out for ice cream together or anything yet.

Candy in bed had been forbidden, and as punishment for having snuck treats after brushing their teeth, Natasha had locked all of the candy up in a safe and would only give it out in case of emergencies. (Emergencies included, but were not limited to: Steve's puppy dog eyes, Darcy falling off the couch laughing at a pun from Bucky, Steve and/or Darcy remarking that Natasha smelled nice, and Darcy managing to not scowl at Wanda for a full hour).

"You know what I mean," Darcy said softly. "I don't got muscles."

"That's not true, neither," Bucky bent down in front of her and put his metal hand on her right bicep. "That's a mean little muscle there, lady, I bet I could teach you how to punch a guy out, no problem."

"REALLY?!?!" Darcy said with excitement, before calming immediately and shrugging. "I'm better at kicking than punching, Tash said we should always go with our strengths and I got legs that are stronger than a horse."
"I bet you do," Bucky nodded. He sat his behind down on the edge of the tire and pulled Darcy up into his arms to sit in his lap. "Why you gotta have muscles, kid? We have tons of muscles everywhere around here, but you know what?"

"What?" Darcy whispered into Bucky's collarbone.

"We never had a Darcy before," Bucky sighed. "Someone short and strong even without big muscles, with legs that are stronger than horses and arms that are really good at hugging."

*SPLAT SQUISH.*

"Dammit Stevie!" Bucky hollered up at the roof, because a big handful of wet leaves had smacked against Bucky's back, cold and slimy and smelling absolutely disgusting.

Steve, to his credit, glared down at Bucky, who was holding on tight to Darcy, who was giggling and holding her nose at the same time. Those leaves were seriously smelly. Darcy was placed on her feet and Bucky pulled off the gray henley that would have to be burnt to get the smell out.

"Aw hell!" Steve cursed before scrambling down from his place on the rooftop. He'd forgotten what a dangerous thing it was for Bucky to be shirtless in front of a lady. They tended to lose their heads. He remembered a stampede of girls one day when Steve had 'accidentally' fallen into the harbor and Bucky had put his top half into the water to yank him back out.

That gang of girls had been so loud as they chased after Bucky.

When he got down to land after some seriously impressive tiny child parkour, it wasn't to see Darcy cooing over muscles and bare skin. Bucky was sitting on the tire again, and Darcy was standing next to him, her fingertips tracing a nasty looking scar that ran around the place where the new Wakandan arm met his flesh.

"It looks like it hurts all a time," Darcy whispered.

"It don't, I promise," Bucky assured her. Steve stiffened when Darcy started to silently cry and Bucky shot him a look to get him to stay right where he stood. "Does it scare you, Sweetpea?"
"No, I just don't want you to hurt ever, even a hundred years ago!" Darcy squeaked out.

"The way I gotta look at it, is that I earned every single scar," Bucky admitted. "Each and every one may have hurt, but without them, I wouldn't be here where I was. Every one is a reminder that I made it through, right?"

"Yeah," Darcy agreed and Steve nodded eagerly.

"And so I love those damned lines," Bucky admitted. "They're mine. They're my body. And they brought me here. So they can't be too bad, cause I got a smartass best friend who throws smelly shit at me, I got a beautiful red headed brilliant dame who bosses me around and loves me an awful lot, and I got you, a strong little lady who has a good and true heart."

Steve nodded again as Darcy hopped onto Bucky's lap, he approached them and climbed up on Bucky's right thigh, placing his head against Bucky's flesh shoulder as Darcy put her head on his left.

"Darcy, I know you have thoughts swirling around in your head that are probably from when you were a little older, and they're telling you bad thoughts," Bucky smiled as Steve reached for Darcy's hands and held them in his. "And it's hard to fight that voice telling you something that isn't all that true. I know. I really do."

Darcy nodded against his metal shoulder.

"You are absolutely perfect, just as you are, whether one day your belly is squishy and full of candy or the next day it's full of apples and waffles," Bucky whispered. "Do you remember learning that when you were a grown up?"

"Yeah," Darcy sniffled.

"You wanna be able to talk to someone about it again?" Bucky offered. "We can find someone you can talk to on the phone."

"Okay," Darcy agreed.
"Good," Bucky sighed in eager, sweet relief. "Now, I need a new shirt, and we need lunch before this tire swing can go up. Let's go have something really good, okay?"

"Alright," Darcy's whisper was a hesitant thing, but she didn't argue or try to bargain herself out of the situation. Bucky stood, still clutching both children to him before walking to the house. "Daddy?"

"Yes Princess?" Bucky smiled.

"You got the candy safe combination? Cause I think Rogers and I deserve a kiss or two."

Chapter End Notes

I need Nat to come back. Don't worry. She'll return next chapter.

Thank you for reading!
Bucky should have been surprised when Darcy came into the kitchen the next day with Rogers in his headphones again, this time, thankfully, the little girl didn't have a blindfold on anymore. That didn't stop Steve from guiding Darcy around and lifting her up on the kitchen stool before climbing up on his own to sit right next to her at the kitchen island.

But he wasn't surprised. Steve's hovering presence was now even more ridiculous somehow, now that he realized that not only was she in danger from outside forces, she was in danger of making herself sad all on her own. Darcy had shrieked at him in the bathroom earlier, when he had insisted on wearing the blindfold and the headphones while she took a whizz. He'd been thrown out of the previously private bathroom time on his ear and had taken it all with the same, placid show smile on his face.

It wasn't that Steve was no longer bothered by Darcy's behavior. Bucky could see that when Darcy was being a little too obnoxious and bossy, or said something that Steve didn't quite agree with, the little man would tense up, his bottom lip wiggling as if an argument just wanted to blast right out. As much as Bucky enjoyed not hearing them screaming and hurling insults at each other, there seemed to be something missing.

And Darcy noticed, because she was a clever little thing.

"Hi Daddy, can we have oranges and chocolates please?" Darcy asked sweetly. Natasha had promised that candy could always be earned with something healthy. And neither kid seemed to mind the nearly bitter dark chocolate that both Natasha and Bucky liked so much.
"That's a really good snack," Bucky nodded as he reached for four oranges from the bowl on the counter and brought them back to the island where he set about starting the unraveling of the peel with a careful left hand. "I think I'll have some with you."

Steve swayed in his seat, his eyes closing as the song he was listening to played extra loud in his ears.

"What are you playing him today?" Bucky wondered.

"Nsync," Darcy replied with an evil glint in her eye.

"God must have spent a little more time on you!" Steve crooned as he held his hand out for one of the started oranges and proceeded to peel off the rind in long strips.

"I'm glad you aren't in charge of my music education, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky eyed Steve warily as he swayed back in a dreamy haze.

"I know lots of good music," Darcy pouted, taking an orange piece that Steve handed her and popping it into her mouth. She chewed thoughtfully before shrugging and looking up at Bucky with a very serious face, "I needed pirate-sea with you Daddy, because I have a problem."

"Alright, Sweetpea, whatever the problem is, we'll solve it," Bucky promised, feeling a little nervous. Yes, she had seemed to be doing well since her breakdown in the yard yesterday. Bucky had made her assist in putting together dinner, and they had gone over all the different aspects of it and why it was good to put good fuel into their bodies. (Steve had waxed poetic about feeding Bucky motor oil to fuel his metal arm better).

But if another problem came up for Darcy, Bucky wondered if he'd be able to handle it without Natalia. He didn't WANT to handle anything else without her. He came upon a moment of clarity in the big, lonely bed the night before. He was absolutely through with a solitary life. Sure, there would be times when he'd have to be away from Natalia and Darcy and Steve (especially when the two little ones were back to their normal states of being). But he didn't WANT to be alone.

He didn't need to be alone anymore.

He wanted to lean on Nat when things got too hard. He didn't think he'd ever wanted to lean on
another person, not even before the War. He'd always been stubborn about being a pillar of strength, the man of the house in a family consisting of him, his mother and his sisters only. He was the one who straightened things out for others, smoothed the edges, took care of a person.

It had taken seventy years of torture and a few weeks with his lady and two foul mouthed five year olds to realize he didn't need to be that person all the time. Some of the time, he got to be the good guy, the fun guy who administered bath time while Natasha went and took care of the harsh business of their lives.

It was nice. And he really wanted his partner in crime to come back and help, just in case things got dicey again.

Steve wordlessly vocalized a part of the song, slightly sharp and sounding silly without any backing music, but he seemed to be enjoying himself, so Bucky would let that go easily. Darcy looked at Steve fondly and sighed when he opened his eyes and gave her a big, easy grin.

She held up her thumbs and made a big show of pointing them down, hoping to convey that his singing absolutely stunk.

Steve blinked at her, his bottom lip wobbling before he began to shimmy as the next song began to play, ignoring her teasing entirely.

"That's the problem," Darcy looked back to Bucky with a sad face.

"Well, I mean, he's not a professional singer, for sure, but he's got a sweet little voice," Bucky defended easily. "And you like my singing, and Princess, I gotta tell you, I'm awful at it."

"No, his singing is LOVELY. It makes my insides get filled with butterflies," Darcy insisted. "It's--he don't get mad no more."

Bucky laughed and went to the candy safe, pulling out a bar of dark chocolate and bringing it back as Steve continued to peel oranges like a pro. He broke apart the chocolate, dividing it fair and square into three little piles.

"I try to yell at him, and nothing but that creepy doll smile," Darcy fumed. "I tried to make him grossed out when he was eating his oaty meals this morning, and he just gives me that dumb smile,
"not even rollin' his eyes once!"

"Darcy," Bucky said sternly. "Stop TRYING to make him mad."

"It used to be that all I had to do was walk into the room and he'd get his panties all bunched and stuff and now NOTHING!" Darcy complained.

"Why do you want to fight with Steve?" Bucky shook his head in confusion.

"It's not fighting, it's--playing," Darcy grumbled. "I like the way his face gets red and his eyebrows do that thing."

She played with her eyebrows, forcing them down in that way Steve’s did usually do when he was angry.

"But after we got done--playing, I always felt accompanied," Darcy shrugged.

"Accomplished?" Bucky offered.

"Yes," Darcy agreed. "Cause he's real smart and clever, and I always made sure that I kept up and made him frustrated, and I think when I was a grown up, it might have been nice for kisses and bed wrestling after it, but we never did that. But we could--"

"NO YOU CAN'T!" Bucky said resolutely and sternly. "You can't kiss anymore and you can't bed wrestle until you're grown up."

"But---"

"Absolutely not, if you kiss ONE more time and bed wrestle to boot, then you'll have to get married!" Bucky said with an extra pinch of drama.

"I'm five!" Darcy argued.
"Married," Bucky repeated. "Kissing and bed wrestling is how babies are made and you can't have one without getting married."

Darcy's eyes went wide with alarm.

"But I want getting married to be romantical," Darcy pouted.

"Then you'll have to wait for kissing and bed wrestling, then," Bucky said with an ounce of smugness coloring his words. Natalia would be so proud of him.

"Okay," Darcy sighed. She thought getting kissed on the forehead or cheek would be really nice, actually, but she didn't want to risk not having a romantical proposal and wedding when she was a grown up. "But how can I make Rogers a little bit of a pissbaby again 'stead of this wimpy puppy that keeps trying to watch me go take a whizz?"

She reached out and took one of Steve's chocolate squares, bold as brass. She had her own pile, of course, but wanted to see what he would do. He turned to glare at Darcy but quickly tamped down on it and there went that creepy smile again. Darcy wrinkled her nose and popped the chocolate in her mouth miserably.

"He'll break eventually, just stop pestering him," Bucky promised. "You'll have the spark back in no time."

"What's a spark?" Darcy asked shrewdly.

"It's when two people who are perfect for each other do something they really like together, like---shooting things," Bucky offered.

"Or arguing?" Darcy perked up.

"Sure, that's a little weird, but sure," Bucky shrugged.
"Okay, and shooting things ain't weird at all," Darcy grumbled sarcastically.

"Anyway, there's a spark, and they just want to spend a lot of time together and make the spark into a great big fire," Bucky smiled, a far off dreamy look in his eyes.

Darcy looked up at him shrewdly. "Why ain't you and Tash married?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, you kiss all a time, and you bed wrestle, cause Tash once told me that you was the best bed wrestler ever," Darcy recounted.

"She did?" Bucky got a smug look on his face.

"And she grabs your tush and you like it an awful lot," Darcy continued. "So I think you gotta be married, or else you're breaking the rules."

"Huh. You're right," Bucky nodded. He reached out and patted the top of Darcy's head fondly, "Thanks Sweetpea. I'll get right on that."

"Your eyes are brown."

Steve blinked at that as he swung Darcy on the tire swing. They had been enjoying it for ten whole minutes, the springtime air, the sunshine, the mutual humming of a song that they both now knew (Seven Nation Army from the White Stripes, Bucky had been amused while they sang it).

"Lewis, my eyes are blue," Steve corrected her as he slowly spun the tire so that the chain would get twisted up tightly while Darcy sat on it. He would easily make the jump up to her when he let it go. He would hold her tight and they would have a big fun spin. But if Darcy kept up her shenanigans, Steve would---well he didn't know what he'd do.

She'd been poking at him all damned day.
Stealing his favorite bits of food, even though she didn't actually eat it and would have to forfeit it back to him anyway. She let him listen to her high pitched boy singers earlier that morning, and then went ON and ON and ON about how she was going to marry the one with the extra squeaky voice someday. She'd woken up during their (unofficial) nap time on the couch, and put sparkly gel in his hair, making it stand up in a mohawk.

And he'd had to endure her shit all day with a smile on his face, cause he was terrified of hurting her feelings now. Bucky had quietly explained about how Darcy had some trouble when she was a grown up with bad thoughts about her body and the food she ate. Now Steve was a mess of panic inside. He had been the one to poke at her tummy and call her soft and squishy. He'd made her think she needed to be skinnier, even if he hadn't meant to at all.

He clearly remembered being a grown up and very blatantly watching Darcy whenever he had the opportunity. He liked how soft and squishy she was, a whole hell of a lot. He wanted to do stuff with his hands to her squishy soft parts, but he couldn't remember exactly what. He tried to remember, but settled on maybe just wanted to pat them gently.

Steve didn't want to accidentally say something to her and bring down any more of her grown-up sads. He never wanted her to be sad again, if he could help it. So he would just smile and let her get her brattiness out for fun. But really, she was being downright relentless.

He wished Natasha were back. Bucky was great and all, and Steve loved him loads, but Natasha could make people get right to the point of their sadness or madness or anything really. She was great at making a person admit how they felt, no matter how much they had tried to hide it. She'd been working for years now on getting Steve to open up, and he was the most stubborn person in the whole world, and she had managed to do it.

Being a five year old helped, definitely, but Natasha had done a lot of the work.

"They are the color of shit," Darcy announced. "Brown brown shit."

"Why are you being so dumb right now?" Steve wrinkled his nose slightly.

"Captain America don't like liars," Darcy shrugged.

"You don't want me to like you?" Steve said quietly, stopping in his continuous turning of the tire
swing. He looked down at the ground, feeling sad and cold all over all of a sudden.

Darcy's eyes widened and she jumped down from the swing. She launched herself at him, her arms going around his middle so forcefully that he let go of the swing completely and it swung in a too fast circle.

"Don't be sad!" Darcy whined. "Just be mad, I don't want you to be sad, please don't be sad, just yell at me god damm---OW!"

The tire swing had swung and it had smacked her in her bicep. The problem with a super powered five year old winding up the swing, was that when it released, it swung fast and hard. Darcy would have fallen to her knees if Steve hadn't wrapped his arms around her and yanked her out of the way. She was whimpering though and Steve felt his stomach turn to stone as he looked down at her arm.

The swing had ripped her long sleeved t-shirt and the rubber of the tire had scraped her arm obnoxiously, little drops of blood standing out bright against her skin.

"Son of a bitch," Darcy hissed out in pain.

Steve picked her up quickly, holding her in a fireman's carry as he rushed back to the house, where Bucky was already at the front door. "BUCK! HELP! DARCY'S HURT AGAIN! GET THE KIT!!"

Steve was back at it again, even harder than before, if that were possible. Although Darcy's injury was the equivalent of an annoying brush burn, he was treating her as if she were on her deathbed. He absolutely refused to take her back outside again, and had actually asked Bucky to take down the tire swing (thankfully Bucky had said 'Hell no, that was a bitch to put up!').

Steve had relented when Darcy had sweetly whispered to him that they should go to their super secret special spot before dinner, but he hadn't let her walk on her own, instead, making her climb up on his back and cling tightly to him as he ran up the rock wall to their private place. He didn't place her down immediately, instead, he walked her over to the small styrofoam couch and placed her there, before looking down at her with thoughtful contemplation. He then ran to the weapons closet and pulled out a kevlar blanket and brought it back to her, throwing it over her shoulder like a cape and draping it in front of her.
"We got bulletproof walls!" Darcy screeched at him as he flipped on the stereo system, where Big Daddy Cool (Coul) was talking about getting shook all night long by Lady M.

"You never know," Steve smiled his creepy, not real smile. The song began playing a long drawn out guitar note then a little melody before the drum kicked in. "And remember, you ain't allowed to fight with me here."

"That's horseshit! Who comes up with a rule like that?!" Darcy made a move to get out of the kevlar blanket, but was actually a little chilly, so she didn't actually want to get out of the toasty warm kevlar blanket.

"You did," Steve blinked at her, clearly biting his tongue to keep a sarcastic response at bay.

"BE NORMAL!" Darcy ordered.

"Stop yelling or we can't be up here in our super secret special spot," Steve said pleasantly enough, turning his back on her and heading towards their little fridge. "Wanna juice?"

"I want you to be FUCKING NORMAL!" Darcy screamed at his back. "Stop being so nice!"

"Every time I'm not nice to you, somethin' bad happens," Steve said quietly as he got them juice.

"That just ain't true! That's horseshit, you're horseshit!" Darcy accused as he smiled at her while he brought her back a capri sun. "You're a zombie! Somebody stole my real Steve and made him a creepy smiling' zombie instead!"

"I don't want to hurt your feelings so you run away again, and I don't want to make you sad," Steve said quickly, his voice rising up just a little with every word, clearly trying to keep a handle on his emotions and not get mad. "I just want you to be safe and happy, Lewis. Please?"

Darcy could hardly argue with that.
Except that she totally could.

"That's HORSESHIT, ZOMBIE STEVE!" Darcy screeched, standing up on the styrofoam couch so that she could look at Steve in the eye. Her kevlar blanket fell away and she glared at his smiling face. "GIMME MY STEVE BACK! GIMME HIM BACK! STOP BEING A ZOMBIE! I MISS MY STEVE!"

"I'm still your Steve, I just don't want to see you cryin' or hurtin'," Steve insisted.

"ZOMBIE ZOMBIE YOU'RE A FUCKING ZOMBIE!" Darcy yelled. She reached her hand up and for a moment Steve thought she was going to try to hit him, to provoke him into a more angry response. Instead, a steady stream of sugary sweet juice landed in his face as she brandished her Capri Sun like a weapon, squeezing it all in his face.

He sputtered and rubbed at his eyes before staring down at her, the creepy smile gone and blank confusion remaining.

"What the fuck, Lewis?" he demanded, yanking off his little shirt with the cartoonized Falcon on it. He used it to wipe his face, and when he was finished, she was standing there with another fresh capri sun, HIS capri sun in her hand, pointed right at his face. He spluttered again as she squeezed that one in his face too. "YOU LITTLE SHIT!"

"AHHHH!!!!!!!" Darcy screamed before taking off at a run.

Steve wiped his eyes again with the shirt before throwing the wet fabric down on the ground and taking off after her. He caught her before she could climb onto the rock wall and he grabbed her hands and pulled her back up.

"Why do you always gotta keep pushin', huh? Why can't you ever let somefin be good enough? HUH?" Steve was letting quite a few days worth of suppressed emotion bubble up all at once and his face was getting a little red as he scolded her. "YOU DON'T STAY SAFE, LEWIS CAUSE YOU GOT COTTON CANDY WHERE YOUR BRAIN SHOULD BE!"

"YEAH?" Darcy's yelled back at him, her voice piercing and enough to make the bullet proof walls quiver. "You ain't even got cotton candy, you just got HORSESHIT, ROGERS!"
"I'm gonna give you lectures for an HOUR, at least!" Steve hissed at her.

"NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!" Darcy yelled at the tippy top of her lungs. Big Steve's lectures were the stuff of legend. Darcy remembered being subjected to one when she was bigger, at the very beginning when she accidentally got a building exploded on her when she was trying to save Jane's research from bad guys. She had only gotten out of the lecture because she had taken the taser to her temple and threatened to shoot herself if he didn't go away.

Grown up Steve had been so pissed at that, too.

"DADDY!" Darcy's voice could be heard from space at that point, and Steve knew he would be in trouble, if Bucky had to separate them. It would be even worse if Natasha were home like Bucky had hoped. He didn't want to get in trouble with Natasha, not even a little bit. "DADDY HELP! DAA-mppph"

Steve pressed his lips to hers, but her mouth had been wide open, so really, he was just putting his puckered lips into her mouth, but she closed her mouth quickly, right around his pucker and they were sort of stuck like that. Darcy's eyes went wide and she stared at him, and thankfully, this time he didn't have his eyes closed like a creep. He was staring back at her, his nose wrinkled at this very uncomfortable and strange kiss.

Darcy's nose started to wrinkle and he managed to pull away and look very contrite at his hastiness in trying to get her to shut up.

"You just France kissed me, oh my GOD!" Darcy whispered. She began panicking very quickly. "OH NO! OH NO! OH NO! I'm GONNA HAVE A BABY CAUSE YOU FRANCE KISSED ME!"

"WHAT?!?" Steve gasped and very quickly lost his balance as Darcy tipped backwards. He managed to keep a hold of her, pulling her in close as they tumbled down the rock wall. He was certain he kept her safe, because he held her tight against him and he felt her mouth hit the bare skin of his chest.

"OH NO! IS YOU OKAY?" Darcy demanded once they hit the bottom, her lips moving against his skin and tickling him.
"I'm okay, are you okay?" Steve wondered.

"I kissed you on your boobs on accident," Darcy whispered. "Six times!"

"Shhhh!" Steve begged. He knew, without a doubt, he absolutely knew that Bucky would MURDER HIM DEAD should he find out about the France kiss and the boob kisses.

"I'm gonna have twin babies now, oh no!" Darcy fretted. "Daddy!"

"SHHHH!!" Steve scrambled to his feet, and hauled her over his shoulder as he made a run for their room.

"YOUR HAND IS ON MY BUTT!" Darcy wailed. "TRIPLETS! OH NO!"

"You can't have babies from butts touching," Steve insisted.

"MY TRIPLET BABIES HAS A MORON FOR A DADDY!" Darcy wailed out as he barreled into her room, throwing her unceremoniously on the bed.

"We touched butts afore and you didn't get no babies," Steve reminded her. "I'm not a moron, YOU'RE the moron! You beautiful dumb moron!"

"YOU STUPID HANDSOME HORSE SHIT!" Darcy yelled back. "THAT'S IT! I'M MOVING TO CANADA! I DON'T WANT TO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH 'MERICA IF YOU'RE THE CAPTAIN OF IT!"

"You can't just move to Canada," Steve disputed, jumping up on the bed and standing above her as she rolled around and whined about horse shit captains. "I can't marry somebody from Canada! I'll lose my driver's license!"

"GOOD, YOU IS AWFUL AT DRIVING ANYWAYS!" Darcy scoffed.

"You once needed to be rescued cause you drove an RV halfway off a cliff!" Steve reminded her.
"I WAS TRYING TO SAVE A RACCOON!" Darcy insisted. She stood up again and glared up at Steve willfully. She took a deep breath before singing at the top of her lungs, "OH CANADA! MY LAA LA LA AND LAND!"

"LEWIS!" Steve waved his hands around in a panic.

"MAPLE AND HOCKEY AND MOOSE!" Darcy sang the words in the vague melody of the Canadian national anthem.

Steve didn't know how a person gave up being an American, but he figured scream singing the anthem of another country could have counted. And he didn't want Darcy to be Canadian, he needed her to stay American. So he grabbed for her and kissed her again, this time when her mouth was shut, thankfully. But when she brought up her knee into his groin, he fell into her, his mouth opening around hers as she went sprawling on the bed.

"You france kissed me again!" Darcy whined. "It's so gross and spitty."

"Stop wiggling!" Steve demanded as she tried to push him up and managed to a bit so that they rolled around in the bed.

"This is your fault for being a zombie!" Darcy accused, scrambling around so that she could try and pin Steve to the bed. "If you let things out like a normal person, this stuff wouldn't happen!"

"Stop wiggling! We---we---we're bed wrestling!" Steve stammered out nervously as they turned again in the bed so that Darcy was now sitting on top of him. She looked down at him with wide, frightened eyes and he swallowed nervously. He reached up and put a shaky hand on her face. "S'okay, Sweetheart, we'll fix it up, okay?"

"Ahem."

"Oh shit," Darcy whispered, turning to face the door where Natasha was standing, an absolutely gobsmacked Bucky behind her. She did NOT look happy at all.
"You said they were fine," Natasha murmured, aimed towards Bucky.

"I---I---," Bucky gave a barely perceptible shake of his head at what they were looking at. He had been sure that the kids were fine while he welcomed back Natalia properly in the bench seat of the truck, perhaps getting a little too far involved.

"Does this look fine to you?" Natasha turned to look at Bucky with an arch of her eyebrow. Steve picked Darcy up and off of him and sat up next to her, shirtless and clearly winded.

Both super soldiers looked terrified as they uttered one word.

"Shit."

Chapter End Notes

I hope that this gave you a Monday giggle or two. France kissing . Heh.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Are you guys ready???? I mean....really, really, really ready?!?!?

When we last visited the tiny terrors, they were bed wrasslin and france kissing and were caught red handed by a red headed assassin and her handy helper, Buckbuck.

So you ready for the next step??

You're probably not, but ...here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Fifteen: Romantical

There was nothing but silence in the room as hard, squinting green eyes stared down at big blue ocean colored eyes, made to look extra pathetic and innocent. The room was filled with silence that was palpable, one could almost hear the pitiable wobbling of a pouting lower lip, that was wobbling quite a lot as the ocean colored eyes began to fill with glassy tears.

"Don't even try that with me, I'm immune, I'm sure that information filtered down to you, little Darcy," Natasha said softly, but not soft in a way that would put anyone's fears at rest.

"I thought I was cuter now so it'd work," Darcy admitted pitiably. She sighed heavily and looked up at one of her caretakers with a wrinkled nose, "I didn't mean to bed wrestle with naked Steve, it just happened in a heater moment."

Natasha crossed her arms in front of her as she continued to stare at Darcy. The children had been immediately separated, with Bucky taking Steve downstairs to the living room and Natasha keeping Darcy in the bedroom. The adults had communicated silently, not even trusting a bunch of random languages around the too clever children. The end goal, or so Natasha thought, was making sure the children understood that they were not to engage in adult activities they didn't understand.

Natasha was very clear on what she needed to do.
"If you cannot keep your hands to yourself, we will start making you wear mittens all of the time."

It did not mean it was going to be easy. And it did not mean that her brain would cooperate.

Darcy gasped out in shock at the calm edict handed down from up on high, "How am I apposed to wipe my ass, Tash? HOW?!

"We will get a bidet," Natasha shrugged nonchalant as she pleased, although her eyes were darting back and forth ever so slightly as she tried to maintain her composure.

Darcy screwed up her face in confusion. "What the hell's a bidet? Is that like a France word?"

"Well, I suppose that would count as a---a France kiss," Bucky screwed up his face as Steve looked up at him from his spot on the living room couch that Bucky had brought them to. The little guy was still shirtless, but now had a blanket wrapped around him like a cape. "Did---did your tongues touch?"

"Gross," Steve gagged.

"Here's the thing pal, you and Darcy can't go around horse playing around like that, it ain't proper," Bucky insisted. "And if you get caught at it again, Natalia will murder me in my sleep."

The pair remained in silence, completely not accomplishing any of the goals that Natasha had hoped that they would. Steve went over the events of the last couple of hours and sighed, tugging the blanket closer to himself.

"If Darcy gives up on being American and becomes a Canada-can, does that mean I can't marry her?" Steve whispered.

Bucky's eyes went wide and he stared down at the earnest, desperate question.

"Stevie, do you want to marry Darcy someday?" he countered.
Steve shrugged, but was blushing beet red. His brain wandered away from him and Bucky could see the little guy building dream castles in the sky. Steve's lips started to curl up just a little bit as his gaze went gauzy and hopeful.

"She says it should be romantical," Steve whispered.

"Well it should be," Bucky agreed. "One day, when you're older, I'll help you plan out a real nice date where you can ask her properly."

"I can take her to Coney Island!" Steve said excitedly. "On the bumper cars!"

"Is that really---romantic...al?" Bucky questioned.

"She can smash into me and go crash and then I can say HEY IF YOU LIKE CRASHING INTO ME WIF A CAR YOU SHOULD CRASH ME INTO A WEDDING!" Steve said with sudden excitement, a grin lighting up his face. "And if she wants to say yes, she can crash into me twice, and if she says no she can just drive away."

"Seems like a surefire way to communicate," Bucky nodded.

"After and if she says yes, we can get cotton candy and make our lips like candy and then---" Steve blushed bright red again. "Try france kissing out again."

"When you're a grown up," Bucky reiterated.

"Duh," Steve shrugged.

"Just making sure," Bucky held up his hands in a surrender gesture.

"And after we france kiss, we'll go and bed wrestle and then she can kiss me right here again, cause it was nice," Steve pointed to his hard little right pectoral muscle. "And then we'll have BABIES."
"Woah, woah, woah," Bucky put his hands on Steve's shoulders and shook him just a little. "Darcy kissed you where?"

"It was on accident."

"All kinds of terrible things can happen by accident," Natasha warned Darcy. "But I've never accidentally bed wrestled with anyone."

Darcy's face was screwed up still, but she was sweating a little, about to crack at any moment. Natasha had a fleeting moment to realize that perhaps they should not have divided up the way they had. Just because she was a woman didn't mean she was suited for this with Darcy. She loved Darcy, as an adult or a child, to be sure, but she never coddled Darcy outright.

She didn't want to have the birds and the bees talk with her. And now instead of actually having that conversation with her, as she was sure Bucky was doing with Steve downstairs, she was using intimidation tactics in order to get Darcy not to touch Steve again. Or allow Steve to touch her again.

"It was an accident," Darcy sighed. She shrugged, "But it was so fun."

"Darcy!" Natasha scolded. "It was not fun!"

"That's a damn lie, you bed wrestle with Daddy and you told me that you never forgot it cause it was so fun and nice and perfect!" Darcy yelled back. "And I didn't grab Rogers' tush, but the wrestlin’ was still a lot of fun and I CAN'T WAIT TO DO IT AGAIN!"

Natasha physically could not hide her visceral reaction as her eyes widened and her mouth dropped open at Darcy’s declaration. The child was staring up at Natasha with her hands on her hips, a defiantly bratty look on her face. Natasha mirrored Darcy’s stance and glared down just as fiercely.

"I'm locking you in a closet!" Natasha shouted.
There was a silent pause, and the pair continued to glare at each other, each one of them just as stubborn as the other. Neither of the females blinked, and one could hear a pin drop in the small bedroom. Natasha didn’t even get to take a step towards Darcy, she simply lifted her foot.

"AHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Darcy shrieked at the top of her lungs, jumping down from the bed and making a run for it.

Natasha winced at the incredible volume and nails-on-a-chalkboard screech assaulting her ears and just managed to miss getting her hands on the girl as she darted for the door. The older woman gave chase, but Darcy was in the hallway in no time.

"What the hell is goin' on up there?" Bucky demanded.

"Rogers! HELP!" Darcy screeched.

Natasha cursed at the same time as Bucky. The stomping of little feet could be heard and Steve was flying up the steps to meet Darcy on the landing, picking her up and hauling her over his shoulder before avoiding Natasha by jumping over the staircase railing. Bucky had been halfway up the steps to retrieve both children and stopped in his tracks as he watched to make sure Darcy was okay.

He should have known Steve wouldn't allow harm to come to Darcy.

"Whatsamatter sweetheart?" Steve questioned as he took off running with her over her shoulder, going for the front door at high speed.

"Tash said she was gonna put mittens on me and lock me in a closet!" Darcy tattled as easily as she breathed.

"Out of context!" Natasha shouted after them. Darcy managed to get her head up and stick her tongue out at Natasha before Steve ran out the door. Natasha immediately took out her phone and texted Sam and Sharon to make sure that the surveillance was up and running and monitored before looking down the staircase at Bucky, who was looking at her in confusion. "What?!!"
"We were supposed to have a talk with them about waiting until they're older and whatnot," Bucky reminded her. "And you're talking about locking my Sweetpea up?"

"It got a little out of control."

"We'll be safe up here," Steve insisted, finally placing Darcy down on the branch of a tree at the edge of the property line. "What happened? Or were you being a fibbing fibber again?"

"Fuck you, Rogers!" Darcy gasped.

"You fib loads," Steve rolled his eyes at her. He knew she didn't lie outright, but she did exaggerate an awful lot.

"Still, you don't gotta point it out," Darcy clarified. "Tash was being rude about our bed wrestling. She was being a hippopotamus."

"Buck wasn't rude, he was super helpful," Steve admitted.

"You're a lucky bastard," Darcy sighed, putting her head against his shoulder.

Steve smiled, wrapping an arm around her and putting his cheek against her hair.

"Yeah, I am."

They remained silent as the sun began to slowly descend in the sky, they had about an hour before they'd have to sneak back into the house, hoping Natasha wouldn't want to do any damage to them. Steve kept a tight hold on Darcy as they gazed at the lake in the distance, the weather starting to cool. Steve still felt warm though, with Darcy held tight, she gave off plenty of heat, usually. Or maybe he just felt warmer from inside because she was close.

"Me and Buck got a plan, it'll be romantical for you when the time comes," Steve promised.
"That's nice," Darcy sighed. "I feel real accompanied right now."

"Huh?" Steve's confused sound ruffled Darcy's hair a bit.

"I like it when you isn't a zombie," Darcy explained calmly. "I like it when sometimes we tease each other, it feels like playing a game."

"I don't wanna hurt your feelings," Steve admitted.

"I'll tell you when you are," Darcy promised. "And I won't be mad. But I like it when we can be---be not liars, but be the real Darcy and Steve. And after we argue, it's special that we don't hate each other, but---but like like each other instead."

"Yeah," Steve sighed happily.

"I think it's real important that you don't keep things inside a bottle," Darcy tried to articulate, pulling away from the embrace slightly to look up at him with a soft, encouraging smile. "If you don't say stuff out loud and feel your feelings out loud, you can make yourself sick on the inside and I don't want you to ever feel sick on the inside, so when we gotta argue, we just gotta, okay?"

"Okay," Steve whispered, staring at Darcy in awe and wonder.

"And I'll still like you plenty," Darcy promised earnestly, a little blush coloring her cheeks. "I always liked you plenty afore, when you were a pissbaby all a time. I promise even if you gotta scream, I'll remember not to stop liking you a ---"

Steve leaned forward and waited for her mouth to close before placing a sweet, little kiss on her lips. Her eyes were open, but blinked closed as they pressed puckered lips together very gently. It was just a peck and it was over very quickly, but it finally felt like a proper real kiss. Darcy beamed unfettered affection back at him and grinned wide.

"Instead of bed wrestling, we should just stare at each other," Steve said wisely. "And make it real nice and caring."
"Okay," Darcy nodded and she stared at him with every ounce of care she had in her little body, which was quite a bit. Steve was no slouch and stared back at her extra hard. Finally, the chatty Darcy opened her mouth, unable to just stare silently, "What if we was married before we got grewed up?"

"Huh?" Steve gaped like a fish at her.

"Then we would be able to kiss each other once a week and not have to worry about babies," Darcy logically concluded. "And when you's married you can have all the cheek kisses you want and not have to worry at all."

"Really?" Steve breathed in awe. He looked around curiously, the lake was glittering with the sunset, the little buds of spring were popping up everywhere and it felt like a nice, romantical kind of moment. "Darcy---will you---wait."

He shrugged and admitted, “I had a real good plan that Bucky was gonna help me wif.”

“What was the plan?” Darcy wondered.

“I was gonna take you to Coney Island on the bumper cars and ask if you like crashing your car into me, maybe you could crash into me wif a wedding,” Steve rambled. “And if you said yes, you’d a crashed into me two times and if you said no, you’d a just drove away.”

“That’s SO romantical!” Darcy cooed. “But we can’t wait till we’re old enough to drive bumper cars, cause we gotta make sure we don’t make any accident france kissing babies.”

He nodded eagerly in agreement before looking down at the branch and wondering if he could get down on one knee. He didn't think it wise, as that would mean letting go of his grip on Darcy, so he decided instead to hunch down so that he was looking up at her instead of looking down. It felt almost like getting down on one knee.

"Darcy, will ya marry me?” he asked very quickly and very breathlessly.

"If you turn into a feelings zombie again, we're gonna have to break up,” Darcy warned him.
"Cause I like you more when you're sassy and fun, but not mean."

"Okay," Steve nodded. "And I like you when---I like you alla time."

"Good answer."

The two children jumped in surprise, and tipped forward precariously on the branch, tumbling off. 

"Oh shit!" the newcomer hissed from beneath them and held out his arms to catch them, but didn't quite manage it as Steve did some mid-air parkour, holding Darcy close as he came down and somehow miraculously landed on his feet. 

Darcy looked at the man in annoyance and squinted, "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm---my name is Scott Lang?" the man asked, as if it were a question. "I have a delivery of supplies for---for holy shit, you are mini-Steve Rogers. Look at your arms, man!"

Steve smiled with a bit of fondness as Scott Lang dropped to his knees and poked at his biceps. A throat cleared and Steve looked about fifteen feet away, and there stood three more men, arms loaded with boxes. He recognized one of them as the chatterbox Luis that he and Bucky had run into a few months ago on a mission, but he didn't recognize the other two men. The five year old tensed and stepped away from Scott, putting Darcy firmly behind him, ready to protect her in a heartbeat.

"HEY! THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY, GET OFF MY LAWN!" Darcy yelled at the trio holding boxes. 

"Lang," one of the men whispered warily. He was wearing a baby blue beanie cap halfway on a bald head, and had a ridiculous tuft of hair on his chin. "Lang, I didn't sign up to be beaten to death by tiny Steve Rogers, man."

"Aww, look at them, they're so cute!" another man, this one with a goatee as stylized as Tony Stark cooed. "Seriously, like the both of them could do, like, print work, you know. My ma tried to get me into that mess when I was a young buck, but the Barbizon lady at the mall was like, nah son, he's too ethnic. And let me tell you, you don't tell a half Puerto Rican, half Dominican woman, with a one quarter Puerto Rican, one quarter Dominican and one half Mexican son that he's too ethnic. What's that noise anyway, we lived in southern Cali, it's not like white people aren't the minority"
"Fight the power," came the last man, an accent tinting his deadpan words. He was taller than the other two, but that could be because of the four inches of hair that formed the pompadour on top of his head. His sideburns were as ridiculously styled as the goatee guy and the tuft of hair guy.

All in all, they had serious issues with facial hair.

Natasha and Bucky sprinted onto the scene. They had been fine with keeping an eye out on Darcy and Steve from the house, giving the children their privacy. Bucky had had to physically restrain Natasha from bull rushing them when they had shared an innocent little peck. But once Darcy screamed, it was all hands on deck.

"Uhm, hi guys," Scott stepped in front of Bucky and Natasha with his hands held high in the air. He shuffled from foot to foot under their scrutiny. "These are my friends, and we're here to, you know, make a delivery. Please don't murder me."

Steve was a little put out that the four guests would have to stay overnight at the very least before their transporter schedule had them on the road again. He wanted to get a minute of privacy with Darcy alone to sort out their upcoming marriage, but once Bucky and Natasha had deemed the quartet of visitors safe and welcome, time with Darcy was scarce. Once the novelty of Steve and his tiny muscles was gone, the clear attention grabber of the day was Darcy.

Steve could understand, for sure. Darcy grabbed all his attention for years now, with just the mention of her name, he'd zero in on her and just day dream with a scowl on his face a few years ago. Think about what he would have done differently. Think about how if she were standing in front of him how she'd say something challenging and sassy and how his mouth would just sass her right back.

Steve sighed heavily as he watched Luis and Kurt marvel over Darcy as they created ice cream sundaes for dessert. He jabbed the ice cream scoop into the huge five gallon bucket of neopolitan that Natasha had returned with, taking an enormous softball sized scoop out and putting it into his already overfull bowl.

"Say it again?" Kurt prompted Darcy.
"Keep your shitty trap shut!" Darcy giggled.

"And you said that to Tony Stark?" Scott smirked from across the table.

"Yup, he was being a doody faced bastard bucket," Darcy nodded. "And Thor says I can say whatever I want cause I'm royalty and when Jane's not here, I'm an Asgard boss lady."

"Doody faced bastard bucket," Scott chuckled. "I'm keeping it."

Steve jammed the scoop into the ice cream again, but found that he didn't have anymore room in the bowl. So he just brought the scoop right up to his mouth and took a big bite. Natasha sat next to him silently, taking his bowl and adding it back to the bucket before handing him a big spoon and letting him eat straight from the bucket. She reached for some of the fixings and began sprinkling it onto the Steve sized sundae.

"You alright?" she murmured.

"If Kurt pats her hair again, I'm breakin' his arm," Steve warned before shoving another big bite of ice cream in his mouth.

"You are not allowed to break anyone's arm," Natasha smirked.

"I am going to put you in my pocket and take you everywhere," Luis laughed after Darcy finished describing what Asgard was like (Beefy muscles and loudness and beer). "Like a running commentary from the foulest mouthed little lady in the world. It's like Lewis Black in an adorable little girl, and that's just cool, man."

"S'my Darcy," Steve grumbled.

She didn't hear what he said, but she looked around her bowl down to the end of the table to Steve and gave him a sweet, but impish smile. He grinned back at her, his mouth full of ice cream. Natasha couldn't help herself, she reached out and let her hand pet through Steve's hair. She'd been waiting for years to see that kind of happiness go across his face.
"I'm never letting you go back to how it was before," Natasha warned him. "When we finally go back to normal, don't think for a second of not being happy every single damned moment."

"Okay," Steve nodded eagerly. "When—when do you think we'll go back to normal?"

Natasha's face down turned and she produced her own spoon, taking a little scoop out of Steve's bucket, her expression turning thoughtful.

"It's a mystery?" Steve whispered, knowing that expression.

"There is no bad guy out there right now with the capability to do this," Natasha said carefully.

"There's always a bad guy," Steve furrowed his brow.

"I didn't find one," Natasha admitted. "Not Hydra, not AIM, not even otherworldly bad guys according to Heimdall."

"So it was a good guy?" Steve shrugged, taking another spoonful.

Natasha sat back at that, her spoon hanging out of her mouth as she processed Steve's words. She'd been so focused in on finding out who had done this, she hadn't spared one moment to think about why they had done this. She had assumed it was for nefarious reasons. She watched as Steve grinned at Darcy again as she waved a full spoon of ice cream at him and then blew him a kiss with her fist.

It wasn't for nefarious reasons.

Natasha shot to her feet and Bucky was right there in the doorway, his left arm leaning against the doorframe as he watched the scene with a fond expression. He went straight though at Natasha's expression and took two steps back into the kitchen, Natasha following closely.

"I have three ideas," Natasha whispered.
"Hit me," Bucky nodded.

"I'm going to need to head to New York---and I'm going to need you to get an ear on the helicarrier," Natasha revealed. "Immediately before they figure out what I'm suspecting."

"Okay, we can do that, but the kids, Red," Bucky reminded her.

The four grown men laughed uproariously in the dining room and even Steve had joined in on the laughter now as Darcy held court adorably, retelling a story about how she had accidentally made Fury attend a practically medieval wedding in the hills of Eastern Europe. Fury had had to bring a goat in order to get in.

"Baaah baaah motherfucker baaah!" Darcy did her best Fury goat impression.

"They can handle them for the next sixteen hours, come on. Let's go."

Chapter End Notes

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
So many things happened this chapter.
I hope you enjoyed it. Thank you for reading!
Happy Helper

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday!!! This is a little shorter chapter than usual, but has a few things I'm pretty proud of. : )

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Sixteen: Handy Helper

Steve was really very worried. He had noticed Natasha and Bucky giving instructions to a very alert and eager Scott Lang about an hour ago. Then Bucky had come over and given him a tight, left armed bear hug, and Natasha had kissed his forehead and ruffled his hair. Then the both of them had fairly slobbered over Darcy with kisses.

Kurt had held his arms open to both of them, hoping for at least a hug. He'd gotten a smirk from Natasha and a tight, firm handshake from Bucky. And he was certainly considering that a win.

But Darcy hadn't noticed that Bucky and Natasha had left an hour ago. She was still holding court with Lang and the Three Wombats as they all watched the Troll Movie. Darcy was providing inappropriate commentary, shouting swear words at the screen. When song numbers came up, she'd hop up and dance to them, as well as sing modified lyrics containing curse words at the top of her lungs.

Steve had grinned at her and laughed the entire time. She had a really lovely voice, or so the besotted Steve had thought. When he wasn't entranced by Darcy, he was watching their guests carefully, to make sure no one tried to make fun of Darcy when her voice warbled or went completely flat. But everyone seemed to be enjoying the Cabaret of Darcy, so Steve knew he would not have to have a stern talking to with anyone later.

But sooner rather than later, Darcy was going to discover that their guardians had left them. Steve understood, but didn't know if Darcy did, that Natasha's very important spy work and Bucky's assisting in her very important spy work was... very important. And while having Bucky and Natasha close at hand was a great thing, there were going to be times when they'd have to disappear for a little.

Steve knew they would return, and he wagered at least one of them would come back with
something nice. When Natasha had left for a few days, she'd returned with the huge buckets full of ice cream and a new set of fancy crayons for Steve. Now, Steve wondered what they might return with this time.

 Perhaps it would be a way to be made bigger. That would be nice. Because he kind of felt like he and Darcy were ready to be made big again. He would definitely no longer push her away and be mean to her and ignore her. And she wouldn't be hurt or sad or lonely anymore, because Steve would marry her and they'd do so much bed wrestling and have loads of babies together.

 Steve smiled at her again as she popped off her seat next to him for the credits song, yanking him out of the seat as well so he could dance with her.

 "Holy shit, they're doing Dancing with the Stars dancing," Luis laughed as the kids did do the jitterbug together. "Scottie, go and find fancy judge's paddles so we can score them."

 "How do they know how to do that?" Dave asked in amused wonderment. Because they were both really quite good.

 "We practice in our super secret special place, which you ain't allowed to go to, no fences," Darcy chirped out in that cheerful way of hers that the men in the room couldn't help but smile at. "Steve's a real good dancer."

 Steve grinned at her in thanks and they continued to dance.

 "Daddy taught him, right Daddy?" Darcy called out.

 Bucky didn't answer her and Steve's face went a little guilty and hesitant as he spun Darcy around the living room. Darcy stopped dancing altogether and furrowed her tiny brow, looking around.

 "Daddy? Tash?" she called out loudly.

 "Uhm, they had some things to take care of," Scott explained. "They'll be back in twenty-four hours, but they really needed to go out now, for---I guess the element of surprise or something?"
"They left us?" Darcy questioned, looking up at Steve with her big, curious gaze.

"They'll be back, they promise," Steve insisted. "And if not, we'll go find them."

"So---we're all alone for a whole day?" Darcy asked.

"Well, I mean, we're here," Scott clarified. "I'm totally capable of watching kids. I mean, I have one, if that helps."

"I used to work at a daycare center before it got closed down because of a huge sinkhole," Luis revealed. "Don't worry, the sinkhole happened at night when no kids were there. Although, I wouldn't have minded if it had gotten some of those kids. Just the really shitty ones though, the ones who hit other kids and called me racist names. I'd have liked those kids to fall into the sinkhole like that 80's well baby. When I realized I had those kinds of feelings about evil bastard children, I kind of made a decision to find a new part-time job, something more suited to my sensibilities."

"Crime?" Dave smirked.

"Not in front of the little princess, man," Luis complained.

Steve watched as Darcy processed something very quickly. She didn't look sad. And there were no tears popping out of her pretty eyeballs. And very slowly, a pouty little mouth turned upwards, revealing a mischievous little smirk.

"Uh oh," Kurt said out loud. "She resembles a kitten who is about to fuck everyone's day up."

"Let's uh---let's do bathtime, yeah?" Scott offered. "Natasha said you could have swimsuit baths tonight, so you know, let's do that and not fuck anyone's day up. Especially mine."

Bucky knew he was going against Natasha's plan, but he had a hunch that he hadn't been able to completely explain to her (explaining why half naked bed wrestling wasn't an appropriate activity for the kids seemed to have taken priority). He was sure she wouldn't mind too much, and this way, he'd save himself from the trouble of getting onto the helicarrier.
He waited with the patience of a sniper outside of the small townhouse that was acting as a safehouse. There wasn't a lot of surveillance going on inside, which was understandable, seeing as Bucky and Natasha weren't in the safehouse, and they only had to monitor that there were six heat signatures sticking close.

But really, Bucky hadn't signed up for having to watch what he was currently having to watch. He almost longed for the blissful blankness of a mind wipe. Because Sam Wilson was currently being very thoroughly kissed by one Sharon Carter. The surveillance was on at least, so Bucky could get a glimpse of his Princess Sweetpea singing and dancing along to a movie, but in order to see that screen, he had to watch Sharon's fingers grasping and caressing Sam Wilson's obnoxious ears.

Bucky sent up a thank you to the heavens that the walls and glass in Sam's tiny safehouse were soundproof, because he did not want to be hearing the smacking of lips or God forbid, male moaning.

This was something new, Bucky realized. Because last time he had seen Wilson and Carter together, it had been Steve kissing Carter. And now Steve was a damned baby kissing baby Darcy and Wilson was pulling Carter in close so that she straddled his lap. He supposed there wasn't anything wrong with it, aside from the fact that Wilson was annoying, and also dumb enough to put his lips on someone Steve put his lips on. Even Bucky wouldn't drink from the same cup as Steve, he'd nearly gotten pneumonia when he had done it at the age of 15.

"Disgusting," Bucky whispered, looking away for the time being while he tried to find access points into the safehouse. Hopefully, Wilson and Carter's shenanigans would be at a conclusion by the time he made it inside.

He easily made it into the house through a secret access point that would have been better suited for someone Barton's size, but Bucky managed it in good time, only to realize his mistake as he heard Sam moan out again from inside the house this time.

"Oh Hell yeah."

Bucky wrinkled up his nose and just barely stopped himself from smashing his head against the wall. Just barely though.
"C'mon sweetheart, I'm tired," Steve admitted after bath time and then eight different bedtime stories from Luis and Kurt, three lullabies from Scott, and Dave bringing four different cups of water, two extra pillows, and even going so far as to make Bucky-bear a tiny little pillow of his own, which he was now using, even if Darcy was singing to herself as she looked out the window.

It had been a really long day, as far as Steve was concerned. They'd bed wrestled and kissed a bunch and gotten engaged all before bath time. He wouldn't mind having Darcy curl up on his legs again like a kitten, cause his toes were actually a little chilly.

"I wanna marry somebody, I wanna give a kiss to somebody," Darcy whisper sang out the window to the tune of Whitney Houston’s ‘I wanna dance with somebody’, watching the stars twinkle. "With somebody named Steven."

Steve grinned at that and went for her with his gigantic muscular five-year-old arms, his intent was to wrap her up in a tight hug and kiss her hair a lot and then stare at each other very quietly and very meaningfully. But she hopped right out of bed and away from him, going towards her little unlocked safe that Clint had set up as a toybox for her. She carefully dug into it and then pulled out her treasure...

"You stole Mr. Dave's cellphone?!" Steve demanded. "Dammit, Lewis, he's the only one that might get mad at us, why'd you steal his cellphone? Luis woulda given you his cell phone if you gave him a smile or two."

"Mr. Dave's cellphone is jailed and broken," Darcy shrugged, jumping back up onto the bed and unlocking the non-password protected phone.

"What's that mean?" Steve wondered. "Is it cause he was the only wombat not in jail?"

"No, it just means I can do fun things I remember!" Darcy showed Steve as she pressed buttons and letters and brought up a big black screen with blue letters on it. "Read this for me?"

"How come you can press letters and numbers in but you can't read gooder, Lewis?" Steve demanded. "You're smart as a damned tack."

"I don't like reading out loud, cause if I make a mistake I'll look silly," Darcy shrugged, blushing a little. "I don't want you to laugh."
Steve's mouth got pinched and his shoulders straightened out and went rigid, "I'd never laugh at you, sweetheart, not unless you was doing somethin' funny like when you make your waffles have a german accent and dance around before you eat them."

"And I just amember the numbers and letters cause I used to do it all the time, my fingers just do it," Darcy shrugged.

"My muscles amember stuff too, like dancin' and throwing stuff at people," Steve nodded. He shrugged and looked down at the phone and read for her, "Hello Miss Lewis."

Darcy accessed the microphone option on the text bar and spoke quietly into the telephone, "Hi Friday! It's me Darcy Lewis."

The text appeared and she hit send. Steve's eyes widened and he looked up at Darcy in a panic.

"Friday, like Tony's Friday?"

"Uh huh, I got unlimited access but Tony don't know that," Darcy grinned, looking a little demented with her tiredness. "I can do all kinds of stuff and Tony never knows. Friday is like a happy helper. She's a better happy helper than JARVIS was cause she don't know when I'm doin' stuff that's not allowed."

"That's naughty," Steve accused.

"I don't do it for really naughty things, I just used to use it to shut down his power and make him go to sleepy byes," Darcy insisted. "And sometime I'd make it so his suits fit funny so he thought he was getting taller."

Steve didn't know if he should scold her or hug her. He was familiar with that feeling, because he'd often felt that way when they were grownup. Except when they were grown up, he'd ALWAYS scold her. And fight with her. And be mean to her.

So he decided to let this one drop and read Friday's response.
"Hello again Miss Lewis. What can I do for you? Are you in need of a rescue? The Avengers cannot ass-assemble at this time, but I can dis-dispatch a member of the Iron Leg….Legion to your---your cordial nets."

"No, no, don't do that, I'm okay," Darcy scream whispered into the microphone. She paused and hit send before talking again into the phone. "I need help in getting married, please and thank you."

Steve couldn't help but grin and do an excited little dance as he sat on the bed next to Darcy.

"I will file the necks and scary paper work right away. I will need the name of your partner in order to complete the lie---the lie scans."

Steve pressed the microphone button this time and very carefully pronounced, "Steven Grant Rogers wants to marry Darcy Grace Lewis, please. Right away as soon as possible please."

"You know my middle name?" Darcy asked in wonderment.

"Course I do," Steve puffed up with pride. "It starts almost the same as mine, but yours is prettier and sweeter."

Darcy leaned forward and hugged him tight around his middle. Steve smiled and shrugged a bit in her embrace before admitting, "And I used to make fun of you in my head, cause a girl with Grace in her name shouldn'ta gotten kidnapped so many times or gotten into so many scrapes."

"I thought that all a time too!" Darcy agreed.

Friday sent a message back to them and Steve peered around Darcy's body to read it. His voice rose with excitement with each word, "The lie scans has been app---approved and will need to be singed by Steven Grant Rogers and Darcy Grace Lewis in front of an off---an awful ant?"

"Is Ant-man an awful aunt?" Darcy wondered.

“I don’t think so, he seems nice all a time,” Steve admitted.
"Friday, how do we get one of those? And flowers? And cake? And a pretty dress but really smaller than I used to be?" Darcy asked rapidly before hitting send.

"I have it handled, Miss Lewis. Relax and enjoy your last night as a single lady," Steve read. He pulled back and stared down at Darcy with a big, bright smile. "We better get to sleep, we're gonna need it to get married tomorrow. Clint said that his wedding night nearly killed him and made him throw his back out the door."

"Oh, okay, good night soon to be husband," Darcy nodded, smacking a little kiss into the air by his cheek. "Tomorrow, we can kiss on the cheek all we want!"

"That sounds nice," Steve sighed, laying back in the bed and holding Darcy close, knowing it wouldn't matter because she'd start rolling around when she fell asleep. "That sounds so so so so nice."

Chapter End Notes

So, the Wombats are bomb ass babysitters—except for letting Darcy get her sticky fingers on Dave's phone.

... uhhoh.

Thanks for reading!
Guests

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday. This is a shorter chapter than normal, but I had a very, very busy weekend, so my apologies.

But still, a lot of fun little moments, and we're setting up for something big in the next few chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Seventeen: Guests

Natasha was not used to coming up empty handed so often when working. She'd once walked into a major crime lord's palatial estate with nothing but a bikini on, and she'd walked out with enough evidence to put forty people behind bars, and half an ammunitions factory stashed on her person, with nary a hair out of place. She was exceptional at taking very little and turning it in her favor, no matter the danger involved. There was a reason why she had been the most successful and historied Black Widow in Red Room history.

And now, she couldn't get her two former adult friends who had been turned into two cute five year olds to stop touching each other, inappropriately or not. She couldn't get one good lead on who had turned her fully grown adult friends into two five year olds who couldn't stop touching each other. And now, she couldn't even track down one of the 'good guys' who might very well have been the one to turn her fully grown adult friends into two adorable and troublemaking five year olds who couldn't stop touching each other.

"What do you mean, he's gone?" Natasha demanded of Rhodey as he worked at a bench full of gears and circuits.

"I'm not his damned babysitter, Romanoff, and you damned well know it," Rhodey gave Natasha an exasperated look as he toyed with what was clearly the exo-skeleton for his legs. "If I were his babysitter, maybe I'd be able to get him to stop trying to make my damned legs have disco lights and a fog machine."

Natasha smirked and shrugged, "The fog would add a mysterious kind of effect."
"What are you doing here, Romanoff?" Rhodey sighed as he began to quickly reassemble his machinery. "Last we heard from you, you were stringing up Hydra retirees by their toenails to get your guy out of the freezer. Tony wasn't impressed."

"I know, he tried to stop me quite a few times," Natasha shrugged.

"Do you blame him?" Rhodey wondered. "Your guy killed his parents."

"His hands did, yes," Natasha acknowledged. "And the big question is, how should he pay for what his hands were forced to do?"

Rhodey sighed and began putting on his walking apparatus again, minus disco lights and fog machine. He stood and gave Natasha a slight smile.

"I realize that Barnes was compromised when it all went down," Rhodey said quietly. "I've tried to speak to Tony about it. I mean, Vision was the one to shoot me down. Now I need a damned machine to move my legs for me. But it was me who told Vision to take the shot. Not the same situation but I was hoping to draw the parallel."

"How'd that conversation go over for you?" Natasha wondered softly, her face sympathetic, thankful even for Rhodey trying to make inroads with Tony.

"Disco lights and a fog machine," Rhodey gestured to the bits and bobs leftover on the workbench. He shrugged and sighed, "Look, one day, we're all going to have to come together again. I'd much rather we figure out how to do that before something so big and bad comes along that we're all scrambling to figure out how to be in the same room with each other and the Earth goes boom."

"I'd be willing to try, if I could get some kind of guarantee that it wouldn't be a shoot on sight scenario," Natasha admitted.

"Yeah, well, you'll have to try and talk to him face to face next time," Rhodey was downright encouraging. "He flew off with Pepper an hour ago in the jet, didn't get a chance to tell me where they were headed."
"Pepper?"

"You know, the reason you always know everything is because you're a horrible gossip, right?"
Rhodey chuckled a bit and shook his head. "My convalescence seemed to have bridged a gap between them. Glad it's good for something."

Natasha didn't say she was sorry. Rhodey already knew that she was. Everyone was sorry. That didn't give him control of his legs back. She put her hand on his shoulder and squeezed before nodding and turning to walk away.

"Romanoff?" Rhodey questioned. He gave her a smirk and shrugged, "You do know that the disco lights and fog machine were Tony's way of saying I was right about my thinking on Barnes and what's been done to him, what his hands have been forced to do, right?"

"Tony hates it when other people are right," Natasha shrugged. "But thank you. I'll---we'll work something out before bigger, badder things can come down."

Bucky had lived through a lot in one hundred years. He remembered every bit of it with gut churning clarity. At the moment, after nearly forty-five minutes of torture, he would volunteer to go back into the chair to get the atrocities he had just witnessed erased from his memory.

He didn't need to know that Sam Wilson, according to Sharon Carter at least, was so god damned good with his mouth. He definitely didn't need to remember the grunting noises that Wilson made. And he never ever wanted to think about the almost giddy, very high pitched moaning the man did when he reached his conclusion.

Bucky would very, very much like to never think on it again. He'd clearly made a mistake thinking Carter would talk about shop, and he had found his way inside of the townhome's ventilation system to get a better listen. He'd been so very very wrong.

But now, Wilson was passed out in the bedroom, and Carter was watching the surveillance, pulling out her phone and dialing as she watched three monitors: one showing the heat signatures showing the sleeping Wombats and Darcy and Steve, another showing a composite view of all the cameras in the house, and the last monitor showing a composite view of all the cameras outside of the house. All was clear. All was good.
Bucky felt calm at that. He'd been worried to leave the kids behind, no matter how capable Natasha had deemed Scott and his merry band of sticky fingered friends. It was good to know that everything was going smoothly, and if he could just get the info from Carter, then he'd be able to go home and make a big stack of pancakes and bacon for breakfast, letting Darcy and Steve's chatter and adorableness chase away the awful atrocities he had been forced to witness.

"Hill, it's Carter."

Bucky perked up at that, focusing on listening intently and memorizing to report back to Natasha.

"Lang and his people are at the safehouse. Barnes and Natasha are MIA," Carter reported, her tone so unlike what it had been with Wilson. She was all business and work and dedication here, where before she had been an all too enthusiastic and encouraging lover. "Barnes headed north, but he doesn't have an active tracker on him. Natasha headed East---wait, she showed up at the Avenger's facility? How'd she manage to do that?"

Bucky smirked. He knew that Natasha had the quinjet she had used to ferret Darcy back to the states well hidden at one of Barton's old properties, waiting and ready to take her wherever they should need to go.

"I don't know, she was dancing and singing to a movie so she seemed plenty happy. Ate ice cream, so I think her therapy is trickling down. There isn't any sound, Natasha wanted privacy. Tell him that I guess they're getting along?"

Bucky considered that. Sharon wasn't giving a status report on their safety. She was giving a status report on the relationship between Darcy and Steve. More specifically, she was giving Maria Hill a detailed report on Darcy's well being, specifically. He didn't have to think too hard on who the HE was that Carter was referring to. Natasha had told him enough, and the Winter Soldier had known very well who the him that Carter referred to was.

Bucky'd tried killing him a few times, after all.

"Well you know what, if he's so damned curious about how adorable they are, then he should stop being a fairy fucked up godfather from afar and just come down and pay a visit," Sharon snapped. She huffed out a sigh and Bucky could hear the frustration ebbing out of her with the air she blew out. Her voice was softer when she said, "Steve's happy. Really happy. It's pretty adorable."
A pause and Sharon laughed.

"Yeah, kind of lets me off the hook for hooking up with Big Bird. Alright. We're good. Talk to you tomorrow."

Bucky didn't have a phone to notify Natasha, and he couldn't make his way out of his hiding space with Carter up and watching the surveillance. She was a damned Carter, so he doubted she would slack on her duty. He would have to wait for Wilson to switch shifts before getting out.

It would give him a lot of time to think. Namely, why Nick Fury would want to turn Darcy Lewis and Captain America into children, and more importantly, if he even knew how to turn them back.

Steve woke up cold again, and he knew immediately that it was because Darcy wasn't sprawled haphazardly in the bed. He didn't panic this time. Darcy had been happy as a clam, and was probably entertaining their 'babysitters'. So leisurely, he sat up and wiped sleep from his eyes before stumbling out of the bed and walking like a tiny little stumbling blind person towards Darcy's bathroom. He quickly did his morning routine, remembering to wash his hands and even used some of the god awful pink bubble gum mouthwash that Darcy loved so much.

He washed his little face, careful to get the crusty sleep boogers out of his eyeballs and looked up into the mirror to make sure he had gotten them all. Lewis was ruthless when it came to eye boogers. She teased Natasha something fierce about them. The mirror wasn't shiny and clean like it had been every morning since they had arrived, it was covered in red lipstick.

"Hey Rogers. We is gettin' married 2 day," Steve read and then grinned. "Yous can't see a bride on a marrying day. Make youself pretty and then we'll get married and has taco pizzas."

The letter was signed with a tiny kiss mark and the letter 'D'. Steve shimmied on his feet with excitement before crawling up onto the sink and blushing as he pressed his lips to the red kiss mark on the mirror. He giggled to himself when he pulled away, thrilled to the tips of his fingers.

"Holy shit."

Steve looked up to the door of the bathroom, wondering how long he had had company, and figuring that they had DEFINITELY seen him kissing Darcy's lip marks. Cause the unannounced
visitor was clearly amused, and looked like he wanted to start teasing. Steve heaved a heavy sigh and shrugged.

"What're you doing here, Tony?"

Maria Hill had warned Pepper Potts that she would be shocked when she saw little Darcy Lewis. Friday had divulged to Pepper and Tony (spending a quiet evening alone binge watching Parks and Recreation while dining on an overabundance of Indian takeout), that Darcy had requested assistance in getting married. Pepper had immediately called the very long number that she had memorized for Maria. The last Pepper had known of Darcy, who she had always very much appreciated ever since she and Jane had stomped into Stark Tower after the Chitauri attack, had been that the young woman was under the care of Maria Hill and Nick Fury, traveling the world, safe from the various kidnapping attempts to her person.

Hill had assured Pepper that Darcy was fine, physically fine. But also much smaller than she used to be.

When the former SHIELD member had advised Pepper that anything she would order for the girl based on what Pepper had known about her personal tastes would have to be ordered in miniature, Pepper hadn't been able to comprehend it at all. Hill had tried to explain to the CEO of Stark Industries that Darcy was now a five-year-old.

That fact hadn't quite registered with Pepper until she was staring down at a wide-awake little girl, holding a too large mug full of what looked suspiciously like coffee as she looked through a former gun case that had been turned into the world's most bullet-proof kaboodle full of children's makeup products (complete with adorable shiny and sparkly stickers on it).

"Uhm," Pepper managed to get past her lips, staring down at Darcy as she took a healthy swig of DEFINITELY coffee before placing the mug on the kitchen island and carefully climbing off the stool. A small pair of arms encircled Pepper's knees and a little head rested against her thigh.

"Peppy, I missed you so much!" Darcy squealed. "I didn't know Fridays was gonna send you, that's SO good, cause nobody does stuff so good as you, I'm so excited I could fart! Like all the farts, but they'd be full of rainbows and glitter and 'citement instead of poop!"

"Uhm," Pepper repeated, reaching down and awkwardly patting at Darcy's very wild brown curls
(Scott was not so adept at braiding hair as Bucky). "Darcy?"

"I'm the BRIDE today!" Darcy squealed. She pulled away from her embrace and stared up at Pepper curiously. "Hey, where's my dress?"

Chapter End Notes

Bring a hanky to the next chapter, FYI.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Happy Monday!
Get your hankies, just in case....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Eighteen: Make the Mends

"Holy Shit."

Steve sighed and looked up at Tony with a shrug. They'd been repeating those two simple actions for the last five minutes. Tony just stared at Steve, shock and amusement written on his face, he'd say HOLY SHIT, and Steve would sigh and shrug. Steve kind of hoped it wouldn't last much longer. He had to eat so much breakfast before he got married. He figured a good, healthy breakfast was probably one of the most important things about a wedding day. He wondered if the wombats knew how to make Natasha’s grey delicious slop.

"Holy Shit," Tony shook his head this time. "HOLY SHIT, are you---you aren't. Are you tiny Steve Rogers, or does Steve Rogers have a fucking kid that I don't know about?"

"HEY, I don't got kids, I'm not irresponsible, I wouldn't get Darcy into trouble or anyfin!" Steve insisted strongly. "You gotta get married first and fen you can kiss and bed wrestle and have babies."

"Holy SHIT," Tony laughed uproariously, looking around the room desperately. "Where's little Lewis? She owes me twenty bucks and she better pay up or she's a no good welcher, cause I told her in 2013 that you didn't hate her and you secretly wanted to put your star spangled sperm into her baby box and she was all naaaaah, let me make your suits smaller and hack into your artificial intelligence."

"She's gettin' ready for our marriage," Steve shrugged. "I ain't allowed to see her till later."
"Oh my god, please tell me she's little too?" Tony demanded eagerly, spying into the bathroom and seeing all manner of toys on the bathtub ledge.

"I can't marry a grownup that'd be illegal!" Steve gasped. "Course she's little like me too—littler than me, but only cause she ain't naturally a big and strong person. She's tiny and strong, though."

"That she is," Tony shook his head in disbelief again. "Holy SHIT."

Steve nodded and looked a little confused before his nose wrinkled up and his brow did a tiny furrow that made Tony laugh and swear very quietly.

Steve opened his mouth and then shut it very quickly. He did that a few times before finally blurring out, "So—what's a sperm and how do I get it into a baby box?"

"C'mon, Rogers' lion tummy is probably growlin', and he'll come downstairs for breakfast and second breakfast and breakfast dessert," Darcy chatted brightly as she packed all of her glitter based makeup into the converted and sticker covered gun case. "And I don't want him seeing me at all until we gots to say 'YES I'll marry the crap outta you'."

Darcy grabbed her coffee mug, and managed to lift the gun case as well. Pepper stopped the clearly overly caffeinated child from refilling her cartoonishly large coffee mug though, taking the fresh pot and hesitating only a moment before placing it right on top of the fridge.

"Rude," Darcy accused.

"You are---what, four?" Pepper demanded as she chased after Darcy through the kitchen doors.

"I'm FIVE, you can't get married when you's four, you're still a baby when you is four," Darcy explained with a beleaguered sigh. She continued to walk until they were nearing the garage. "I asked my fun new friends to make the garage a nice place for me to play dress up in today."
"Fun new friends?" Pepper repeated. "Where is Natasha? Maria said she would be here."

"She's doing spy work, very important," Darcy said with a wave of her nearly empty coffee mug. 
"And Daddy is assisting, because he's her special handy helper."

"Daddy?" Pepper questioned, feeling absolutely out of her depth. She wasn't used to being so behind the eight ball. After so many years dealing with Tony Stark, she'd gotten really good at preparing for all of the worst case scenarios: Alien invasions, accidental adoption of fifteen year old superheroes from Queens, PTSD-apalooza, and alien invasions.

She had not been adequately prepared for a five-year-old Darcy Lewis.

"Uhhhh---yeah, my Daddy," Darcy shrugged, suddenly remembering that Pepper loved Tony very much, and Tony hated Bucky a lot, and maybe just maybe, that meant Pepper would hate Bucky a little too. And Darcy wouldn't be able to deal with that at all. She was absolutely distraught down to her toes at the thought that anyone could hate someone so good as Bucky was to her.

She wondered if she hadn't of made a big mistake by asking Friday for help, and thereby getting Pepper and Tony at their safehouse. They looked into the garage and Kurt was unfurling a bright pink, incredibly fluffy pink area rug before Dave came over and placed a vanity down. The thing was bright pink and purple and made out of very heavy duty plastic. It was a children's toy, to be sure, but Darcy squealed in delight and ran into the room.

"It's like a salon!" she squealed, taking one of Kurt's hands and one of Dave's hands as she danced around with her excitement. They followed her lead, Kurt certainly more enthusiastic than Dave, who was eyeing the very polished woman staring at the scene from the door.

"Kurt?" Dave whispered.

"Dance for the child, man, she is so happy!" Kurt ordered as he shook himself like a fully grown man-sized muppet as Darcy continued her dance of joy.

"Kurt, don't look, but I think your one true love is standing in the doorway," Dave said very quietly, not surprised when his friend stopped completely in his tracks, one of his hands up in the air, frozen in mid-jazz hands.
"Holy Mary, mother of Luis, that is Pepper Potts," Kurt gasped out, dropping Darcy's hand and going for his pompadour. He bent down uncomfortably to get a better look at himself in the mirror on the Little Tykes vanity set, even going so far as grabbing one of the toy brushes with three bristles on it and running it along his sideburns.

"HI! LET'S SING A SONG!" the brush called out loudly, before it began singing a song about happy shiny days. Kurt stared down at the brush in horrified fascination before putting it in his pocket hastily, where the toy hairbrush continued to sing from the safety of his pants.

Pepper's eyes were darting around as two more men began bringing in boxes of things from a truck out in the driveway. The man with the ridiculous pompadour was now sort of awkwardly dancing to the song playing from his pants. The CEO of Stark Industries sighed heavily and her question was wary and quiet, "Darce, please tell me that guy isn't your ---your Daddy."

"Please stop poking me?"

Tony ignored Steve's polite request and continued to poke at his biceps as he bent over to get a better look at the five year old. They hadn't made it past the bathroom at that point, with Tony's insatiable curiosity and Steve's endless patience and prior guilt from their grownup dealings at the forefront.

"I just can't believe the vita-rays shrunk down and stayed with you. I mean---really, no one can figure out how my stupid Dad did it, and it's a good thing, because I mean---look at you, can you still lift a motorcycle above your head?" Tony demanded as he took out his phone and snapped a picture of Steve's bicep with his hand wrapped around it for an accurate measure.

Steve felt cold all over all of a sudden and suddenly longed for Darcy to be right there with him to warm him up by sprawling out on his feet. Or even just holding his hand.

His mind wandered as Tony kept poking and snapping pictures and measuring. Sure, Tony had said STUPID DAD, but he didn't mean it totally. Tony loved his Dad, no matter how much of a jerk Howard had been, because Howard was his DAD.

Steve remembered two things that had made him feel so terrible when he was a grownup. One, was everything involving Darcy. He hated that he had been responsible for Darcy's first horrible kidnapping in the Alps. She'd been so bruised up and tired and hurt and bleeding, and Steve wanted
to throw up about it right then and there, but his stomach was completely empty and grumbling loudly.

Tony made a delighted sound and flipped on the recorder on his phone to take recordings of the noise.

The other thing that had made him feel guilty in the last little bit of time was when he'd found out about what Hydra had made Bucky do to Tony's Mom and Dad.

It was awful what he had had to do. Not just because they were Tony's Mom and Dad. But Howard had been Bucky's friend too. Howard had said at the time that when they all got home, that Bucky had a job at Stark Industries waiting for him, since he was so good with machines and had a real smart brain for math and stuff. Howie and Bucky used to have drinking competitions to see who could do math while being the most drunk.

Bucky always won.

And Hydra had done all the awful things to Bucky, and then made him do the worst of all things.

"Holy shit, you're crying," Tony whispered, going to stand up right away, but losing his balance and falling onto the bathroom floor on his behind.

Because Steve was crying. He hated to think about it. He usually kept those kinds of feelings really tightly under wraps and then buried and then covered in cement. Then he put a lock on the whole mess of it.

But Darcy had said not to bottle stuff up anymore. He wasn't allowed to be a feelings zombie anymore.

"M'sorry!" Steve cried out before making a dive for Tony, wrapping strong arms around Tony's torso, placing his head against the man's shoulder.

Tony's eyes went wide with trepidation, and he tried not to waste the brain power on the idea that an eight thousand dollar suit jacket was currently being snotted on by a leaking child. He had his hands up in the air and brought them down slightly to pat against Steve's back awkwardly.
"Wh---why are you sorry?" Tony's voice was a monotone, quiet thing.

"You're my friend. You are," Steve sobbed, feeling absolutely out of control as his emotions poured out of him by the bucket. He really wished that Darcy was right there with him. Or Natasha.

Not Bucky though. Steve had a moment of realization, thanking his lucky stars that Bucky wasn't right there, right now. He'd hate to see his friends fighting. The thought of it made his whole stomach flip a few thousand times really quick.

It was way worse than the Cyclone had been.

"I didn't know what to do, I didn't---I didn't," Steve sniffled pitiably. "All I knew was that you couldn't find out about Bucky, cause then you'd hate him and want him in jail and I just wanted my best friend, cause---cause---"

He broke down again, his words lost to sobs.

Tony stiffened at the first mention of Bucky. Steve might have been listening to Darcy's advice in not keeping things bottled up, but Tony was trying to channel the therapist that Pepper had demanded he begin seeing. Well, the third therapist in the span of six months. He'd tried to sort out all of the very complex feelings with his newly learned coping techniques. It wasn't quite working as he didn't know how to deal with a distraught child.

"He didn't mean to, and he couldn't stop it, and if you saw---if you saw what they did to him, you'd understand," Steve found his words again. "He still gets bad dreams about the stuff, even after T'Challa fixed stuff in his brain. He's gonna pay for it the rest of his life and he'd a never done it, he wouldn't a done it if he had a say."

"Enough," Tony said softly.

"No, cause I got more feelings to spill out," Steve insisted, wiping his nose on Tony's shoulder. "I ain't allowed to be a zombie anymore."

Tony furrowed his brow and pulled away with some difficulty. The little bastard was really very
strong. He looked down at Steve and shook his head, "Lewis used to call me a science zombie."

"She's got a way wif words," Steve's mouth tilted upwards for a second. "And she's right, sometimes you are a science zombie."

"Yeah," Tony nodded.

"I didn't wanna tell you cause I was selfish," Steve whispered, his little voice sounding more heartbreaking than when he had been sobbing. He was staring down at the ground forlornly. "I wanted to keep you as my friend, even though we fought sometimes, we still were friends. But I can't give up Bucky or turn him in or anyfin, and I'm sorry. I ain't never tried to be selfish before, but I had to be."

"You did a good job, take it from someone who is routinely selfish," Tony said quickly.

"I can make the mends," Steve promised. He stood up as tall as he could, his chest puffing out, looking like an exact miniature replica of Captain America from propaganda posters. "I'll do it. Whatever you want!"

"Will you?" Tony's mouth stopped being a grim straight line, curving up a bit. "Will you---hop on one foot and pat the top of your head?"

Steve immediately began doing what was asked of him, with picture perfect precision.

"Will you finally go on that cooking reality show with me?" Tony demanded.

"Sure, but I ain't allowed to use a stove," Steve admitted while he continued to hop and pat.

"Hmmm---will you bring Lewis back to the upstate facility in New York and let me figure out why you're small?" Tony demanded.

"I gotta ask Lewis first, cause that seems like a question you gotta ask your wife," Steve admitted. "But I'm sure she'll say yes cause we wanna be bigger so we can---you know."
"Right, france kissing. Sperm. Baby boxes," Tony nodded, waving his hand in dismissal. He got a mischievous look in his eye as he wondered, "Can I redesign your suit?"

"Ohhhkay," Steve's response was only a little bit wary.

"What if I say, that you can't marry Lewis?"

Steve immediately stopped jumping and patting and looked up at Tony in abject horror. His pouting bottom lip jutted outward and a pained sound echoed from the back of his throat before he began crying. Or more accurately, explosively sobbing. His shoulders shook with the force of his crying and a low keening sound started to get far too loud in the house, surely alerting the adults that were supposed to watch him. Steve managed to begin shaking his head in the negative, and then spouting words about love and can't leave her ever and wanna marry her more than anyfin.

"Please don't make me make that mend!" Steve wailed. "Please I can't, pick somefin else!"

"Oh shit, no, I didn't mean it, oh god," Tony panicked. "Stop crying, you can marry Lewis. I'm sorry."

Steve drew in a shaky breath, looking terrified, but he had at least stopped crying as he stared up at a clearly repentant Tony warily.

"Look, I don't know how much of this you'd understand, being a small fry and shit---sorry, stuff," Tony corrected himself quickly.

"No, shit is fine. Me and Lewis say shit all a time," Steve shrugged. "It's the best word to describe---shitty stuff."

Tony snorted a laugh and shook his head in disbelief. "I'm working on my own shit right now, I got a lot of years of SHIT to undo in my brain. And most important, I've got to make sure I'm right with Pepper. We're going to get married too, you know?"

"Congratulations!" Steve's entire face lit up like the Fourth of July.
Tony smiled, knowing that everyone else he had told, he had been looking for that reaction. Only someone from the 1940's could be that excited about people getting married nowadays, it seemed.

"I got that kid, Parker, that I'm looking after and whatnot—mentoring, if you will," Tony shrugged. "And yeah, I've been looking into what Hydra did to Barnes, as a way to try and work past it. Because I know that with the way our lives are, we're going to have to come together again someday."

"It'd be better to smash the shit outta bad guys than smash the shit outta each other," Steve said wisely, looking very hopeful.

"Rhodey told me that," Tony admitted. "Best friends named James, am I right?"

"Yeah," Steve nodded. "Bucky told me that I can't france kiss Lewis till we're older and we definitely can't bed wrestle. And he told me that I always gotta tell Lewis the truth, even if it hurts."

"Too bad that lesson didn't come before we destroyed the Berlin airport," Tony snorted. "So, you want to get married to Lewis, huh?"

"Yes," Steve said decisively, before getting a dreamy little smile on his face.

"I thought she was your kryptonite, though, always got your star spangled panties in a bunch," Tony admitted.

"I don't wear star spangled panties, I wear briefs with balls on 'em!" Steve pulled his pajama bottoms down to show the sports themed briefs he wore.

"Yikes," Tony blinked, shaking his head back and forth to get the image from his head. "Still, ever since the Alps, you and Lewis have been like really entertaining oil and water. Like the world's best vinaigrette."

"I was just not good at feeling good feelings," Steve shrugged. He sighed heavily and said, "I should talk to her 'bout that before we get married. Cause if not, it might get all bottled in my brain again."
"Bottling is bad," Tony acknowledged. He stood up and pulled out his phone and pressed a few buttons. "Okay, your measurements are in the cloud, and we will have a suit for you in two hours. You gotta color preference?"

"Lewis said blue is our best color, like the ocean blue. Like her eyeballs," Steve nodded. "Before I talk to my bride, maybe we can have breakfast? I'm kind of starving."

"Huh, well, that seems normal for you. C'mon, let's go. I brought donuts."

What exactly are you playing at, Mr. Lang?"

Kurt made a happy humming sound as his eyes darted between Pepper and Scott. The CEO of Stark Industries had her hands on her hips, looking like a fearsome angel of retribution and 10,000 dollar business dresses as she stared down at a gobsmacked Scott. Their conversation was quiet, as Darcy was about fifteen feet away in the garage turned, tiny tot beauty parlor. Dave was carefully setting the girl's hair in rollers, a skill he had picked up being the oldest brother of six little sisters.

Scott plastered a big smile on his face and pointed at his mouth.

"First off, stop looking like a harpy about to try to eat me, Gingersnaps," Scott said with buoyancy and cheerfulness. "If you sound happy and look happy, the kid will tune you out and won't get scared that her pal Scott and her Aunt Peppy are having a disagreement."

Pepper stepped back at that, a little surprised as she looked between Scott and Kurt, who both were smiling big with their mouths. Kurt's eyes were adoring on her, and Scott's were suspicious.

"Who’s gettin my future hubbers breakfast?" Darcy called out. "He ain't great at using a microwave, he makes it all too hot!"

"Tony has it handled," Pepper reported. Tony had indeed, texted her that he was taking Rogers out to see how many Denny's grand slams the boy could eat.
"Tony's here?" Darcy stood quickly, and Dave anticipated it, making sure not to yank at her hair by following her with the pink foam roller wrapped halfway up her hair. "Oh no! Oh no!!! But he an Rogers were upset---"

"No---no, it's fine, hon, it's fine I promise," Scott placated her with an easy grin. "They buried the hatchet and are gonna celebrate with pancakes. You know---cause that's how friends make up after having a fight."

"Scottie got us all pancakes after he came back from the raft," Luis chimed in from his corner of the garage where he was taking a lot of flowers that one of the Stark Industries security members had delivered from a warehouse. He had a fair hand at arranging them, and was currently working on centerpieces. "They were as big as a trashcan lid and were filled with stuff."

"Ham and pineapple and cheese in mine---truly a magical experience," Kurt nodded in agreement.

"Oh---okay," Darcy grinned big at Scott, before allowing Dave to pick her up one handed and put her back in her tiny chair that he was kneeling behind to continue to set her hair up in the rollers that she had demanded.

Darcy had been very particular about everything on her wedding day, after all. Her breakfast had been coffee, blueberry frosted miniwheats and a whole banana. The bouquet that Luis had beautifully made for her contained only pink daisies and was wrapped up in a ribbon. Her toenails and nails had been painted a matching pink, and she absolutely had to have the right kind of curls for her hair. Not her normal curls. FANCY curls. Hence, the pink spongey curlers of annoyance that Dave was patiently and expertly wrapping her hair up in.

Kurt had been working on the 'venue', a small little altar down by the lake. And Scott had been working on the food, proving to be surprisingly excellent at make tiny canapes. The babysitters were eager to allow Steve and Darcy to get pretend married. It seemed like an excellent sort of project that would take them all day, and therefore, not allow Darcy to con baby Captain America into doing anything illegal or bad.

Scott's smile faltered for the first time and he took a step towards Pepper.

"You let Stark take Steve off the property?" he whispered.
"I---Steve wanted breakfast," Pepper defended herself.

"They're not allowed off the property, that was the one thing I was supposed to do aside from, you know, keep them breathing, happy and well fed," Scott's whispered words were fast and quick like shots from a rapid machine gun. "I can do breathing, happy and well fed. I can do that in my sleep! And you let Stark take him off the reservation?!? Do you know what the bad guys would do if they figured out Captain America was FIVE YEARS OLD?"

"Oh, Ms. Potts," Kurt shook his head, the smile on his face fading a little as Pepper looked aghast at the golden tarnish getting smudgy on his one true love and idol.

"They're fine, I'm sure they're fine," Pepper waved off Scott's concern. She panicked though and reached for her phone, quickly dialing Tony's number.

"My love, my life, my breadwinner?" Tony answered on the first half of a ring. "By the by, I might need to delve into the coffers in order to square up with the bill at this fine establishment. Rogers has eaten twenty pancakes. He's about to get his picture put up on the wall of fame."

"Tony," Pepper sighed. "Don't let them put your picture up on the wall of fame."

"Oh, too late, I posed with everyone," Tony laughed. "I also figured out the crane game---hopefully they have enough room for one hundred and seven stuffed animals."

"Tony," Pepper repeated. "Apparently, Steve and Darcy were supposed to remain at the house. There's a---just shut up Mr. Lang, stop crying Kurt, they're fine!"

"Who is Lang?" Tony furrowed his brow.

Steve took his twentieth pancake and placed a syrup soaked log of sausage on it before taking two careful spoonfuls of cheesy scrambled eggs and covering the log. He then very patiently rolled the whole thing up like a cigar and put it into his mouth. Tony laughed and shook his head before focusing on what Pepper was saying.
"---the babysitters are currently wetting themselves about Steve being outside of surveillance. Apparently, they aren't just here to vacation, they're here because of outside threats. Just---just get it all to go and come back, please."

"Fine, yeah, sure," Tony agreed. Steve had been very hesitant to leave the house. Tony had had to make a sad face and say something about most of the mends would be made if they could finalize the deal at a breakfast table. The boy had insisted on calling Sam, making sure that the surveillance was up. And Steve had insisted on an half hour time limit, not willing to risk Darcy's safety for longer than that. And Steve had been far more reassured by some low level thieves watching Darcy rather than Pepper. All in all, Tony had been very put out by the whole deal. A plate of burnt toast was put in front of his face and Tony wrinkled his nose before looking up at the waitress who had slammed the offensive food in front of his face.

"Hi, Wanda!" Steve's greeting was muffled around his pancake cigar. She had on another face veil, but he'd recognize that pretty hair anywhere. His friend was currently glaring holes into Tony. Steve chewed and swallowed as quickly as physics would allow before giving her a hesitant smile, "I'm sorry?"

"Get him out of here, I'll handle the memories," Wanda hissed at Tony. "Take him right home, you moron."

"Rude," Tony grumbled, picking up a piece of burnt toast and taking a bite out of the acrid, former food. "Just like I like it. Burnt and slathered in butter."

Red whisps flew from Wanda's fingertips, and Steve's eyes went wide as saucers as he quickly hopped down and went under the booth before appearing on Tony's side. He grabbed his hands and yanked him up to standing. The little boy gave a quick hug to Wanda before dragging Tony out of the restaurant.

"Bye, Wanda, see you at my wedding!"

---

Chapter End Notes

So---what do you think? Tony is kind of a jerkwad, but I like to think Tony is kind of a jerkwad because he's so bad at social interactions. I like his jerkwad-ness for the most part.
Do you think this pretend wedding gonna happen or what?

I hope you enjoyed reading this! Thank you!
Warm Feet

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday, guys! We are gathered here today....not for a wedding...yet.

Warning for tiny child feels, vague speaking of kidnappings and torture, and a huge guilt complex.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Nineteen: Warm Feet

"Dear Heimdall, I don't know if you know I'm down here and am a little girl right now, but I still remember when we met at the Asgard party about celebrating Thor's mommy, and it was real nice. And you said if I ever needed you, all I had to do was go to a place with big skies and say YO DUDE HOW IS YA, and if I ever needed a help, I would scream and stuff and call your name and you'd know."

Darcy paused as sat on the tire swing, her (third) cup of coffee in her hands. While her friends, the Wombats, got her wedding together, they had allowed Pepper to be in charge of snack time only, cause she had asked to help to prove that she wasn't incompetent to the Wombats and Mr. Scottie after the whole incident with Tony and Steve. Pepper had been great at cutting up apple slices, but she hadn't been so great at guarding the coffee pot.

Scott was about ten yards away, giving her pirate-sea to talk to her sky friends. But he had a kevlar blanket ready to throw on her in a heartbeat if bad guys came. He had a moment of panic when Hawkguy had come in with Wanda and the rest of the Bartons, but had awkwardly waved at them a half second before he would have thrown Darcy to the ground and covered and protected her with his own body. Clint had come down with the blanket after that.

"I'm not in trouble, and I got loads of help all over the place," Darcy assured the sky. "But---I'm super duper happy, and I need your help to be the happiest girl in the WHOLE nine realms, please and thank you."

Darcy took a deep breath and tried to look as adorable as she possibly could, thereby increasing her chances of getting her way. Sure, Natasha was immune to her big eyes and pouty lips, but no one else had been so far.
"Please send Thor and Janie down so they can watch me get married to Rogers. Please?"

"Darcy! Darcy!" Dave called out from the garage. "C'mon sweetie, your dress is here, let's get those rollers out."

"YEEEEEEE!!!!!!!" Darcy squealed and hopped down off the tire swing before making a run for it. Scott sped off after her and both he and Darcy ignored Tony as he stood in the driveway, trying to look as intimidating as possible.

"Shorter stack," Tony called out.

"Not now, shit head, I got to get dressed!" Darcy waved him off.

"Yeah, not now shit head," Scott grinned at Tony.

"Are you the nanny?" Tony asked in that supremely condescending manner that had gotten many drinks thrown at his face throughout the years.

"He knows who you are Scottie, he had a file about you and was thinkin' bout adding you to San Francisco Stark playland, but you never answered him cause a jail, and he got his feelins hurt," Darcy rattled off quickly.

Scott's entire face lit up in delight, his eyes wide with sparkling laughter and his mouth pushing up into a near grotesque grin as he stared and brought both index fingers up to point at a very perturbed Tony Stark.

"Haaa haaa haaaa," Scott breathed out in maniacal, quiet joy. "haaa haaa haaa...you KNOW MY NAME!"

Tony turned towards the garage turned Bridal preparation area and gave an amused Pepper a very exasperated look as Darcy marched behind a little privacy curtain made out of kevlar blankets and began tossing her clothing out piece by piece.
"You're a pain in my ass, Lewis. Little or littler."

Darcy giggled and simply responded, "Duh, moron."

Pepper snorted as Tony stewed, and finally he turned around and looked disdainfully at Scott, who was still leaking out soft 'ha ha's ' as he pointed at Tony with his silly, gleeful face.

"I'm gonna make you pay, Littlest Lewis!" Tony promised.

"Whasgoin' on?" Steve wondered as he ran up to the door of the garage, all dressed up smartly in a little dark tuxedo, with a bright blue bow tie and cumberbund. His hair was still sticking up at odd angles, as he had never been that great at getting the fuzzy strands to stay in place. He needed Bucky or Natasha's help, but they weren't there yet.

"YOU CAN'T SEE ME!" Darcy screeched. "I AM GETTING DRESSED! GO EAT A TRAY OF PIGS IN BLANKIES, ROGERS!"

"Calm down, Lewis, Jesus," Steve sighed. He looked around and saw that Pepper was now behind the small curtain, seemingly helping tie and button and zipper. She waved Dave over, and the man started to pluck out pink sponge rollers carefully. Steve shuffled his feet, wondering just what she looked like.

His imagination was trying to put together what she looked like. He knew she'd be beautiful, but he wondered if her dress would be something simple and pretty or if she'd be an angel of a girl in a big poofy dress with pretty curls like a halo around a beautiful face. He hoped she wore the pretty rainbow colored bracelet that she had thought she had stolen. When she'd left the safe house to pay for it, Steve knew right away that he liked her so much and he would never ever be mean to her again. He hoped she also wore that bubblegum pink nail polish on her toes and fingers, because he liked that it also smelled like sweet, sugary bubble gum. Although it did make him want to nibble at her fingers.

"Is he gone?" Darcy whispered from behind her makeshift privacy curtain.

"Nope," Dave shook his head in amusement. He hedged and shrugged and admitted, "And sorry kiddo, I can't physically remove him. Like---seriously, I can't do it. Not only is he too cute with his dopey lovey face on, but he can probably physically wreck me, and I didn't sign up for that."
"Rogers, are you being a pissbaby?" Darcy called out.

"Darcy," Pepper scolded.

"I'm not," Steve answered, shaking himself out of his daydreams about bubblegum fingers and toes. "I'm not being a pissbaby."

"Are you being a feelings zombie again?" Darcy fretted.

"No, no sweetheart," Steve promised.

"Are you gettin' cold feet?!?" Darcy's voice rose very quickly and sounded wobbly by the end of her question. "Please don't let your feet get cold...go on and put on another pair of socks and Daddy's fuzzy piggie slippers so your feet stay warm---"

"Darcy, calm down," Pepper whispered as clearly Darcy was doing a very twitchy sort of dance behind the curtain as Pepper tried to get her more securely into her dress.

"I'm not gettin' my feet cold," Steve promised. "I wanna be your husband and I want us to take care of each other forever and ever. I promise."

"Damn, that's sweet as hell," Dave sighed. "I'm gonna steal that line."

"Can---can you guys give me and Rogers pirate-sea?" Darcy asked hopefully.

"Okay, sure," Pepper nodded, giving a bow one last secure tug. She rose to her feet and smiled down at Steve reassuringly. "Ceremony is set to start in twenty minutes, though. And you wouldn't want your guests to be kept waiting. Especially not these superhero sorts."

"Okay," Steve nodded, sitting himself right down on the edge of the curtain, so he wouldn't see her but he could FEEL her right there.

The adults left the room, leaving Darcy and Steve to themselves, separated by a curtain of kevlar.
Darcy put her hand around the curtain, and sure enough, the rainbow bracelet was wrapped around twice and her fingers looked like they were tipped with bubble gum. Steve reached for her hand and brought it up to his mouth, little lips pursing and pressing hard against her knuckles, lingering while he took a big inhale of the bubble gum scent.

"Tickles," Darcy giggled. "Whatsamatter Rogers?"

"I'm sorry," Steve whispered, holding onto her hand with both hands.

"What do you gotta be sorry for?" Darcy questioned. She sounded so upset, and not the dramatic, hysterical fake kind that she was so quick to use when she was just being normal Darcy, professional shit stirrer. She sounded genuinely dismayed, and fearful. "Do you want to cancel our marriage?"

"NO, NO, not at all," Steve said quickly. "I wanna marry you more than anything, I promise. S'gonna be so lovely to share stuff with you for the rest of our lives."

"You gonna share ice cream this time?" Darcy asked hopefully. "I'll share cursed candy if you share ice cream."

"Uh huh, I promise," Steve nodded eagerly. "But--but Lewis, I gotta tell you the truth so you know, and can make an uniformed decision."

"What? Just say it, say it quick like you're ripping away a bandaid," Darcy suggested helpfully.

"Yeah," Steve's little voice wobbled and he took a big wavering breath as Darcy squeezed at his fingers supportively. "Did you---do you know that I love you?"

Darcy took a little gasp of breath and Steve squeezed her fingers.

"It happened a long time ago, I think," Steve admitted. He sniffled and blinked the tears out of his blurry vision and concentrated on how nice it felt to have her hand held in his. "It's my fault, Lewis. It's my fault you got hurted in the Alps all those years ago. I was supposed to help you, and make sure you wasn't taken. And then you was taken and you got so hurt and I felt like it was me that got hurt too. And I'm so sorry. I didn't---"
"That's a lie!" Darcy interrupted.

"No, no, and I understand if you don't want to marry me now, and if you never wanted to see me again, but you said I can't be a feelings zombie anymore and I couldn't let you marry me without knowing the truth," Steve babbled.

"It's not true though," Darcy disputed.

"I was real sad after the Ch-atari," Steve made a big sniff and wiped at his eyes with his free hand. "And Tash wanted me to help take you to safety and I couldn't cause I was asleep. Like---a real bad sleep that I couldn't wake up from cause of all my sad. You can hate me for it. You can, and you deserve to. But I'll love you from real far away for the rest of my whole life."

"Steve, just listen to me," Darcy pleaded, her grip on his fingers nearly as strong as the grip of Bucky's vibranium hand. "You rescued me."

"But I coul'da stopped it!" Steve insisted.

"NO YOU COULDN'T!" Darcy shrieked at the top of her lungs, the only way to be sure that Steve would actually listen to her words instead of rolling around in his comfortable guilt blanket. "You couldn't made me safe. I was gonna get kidnapped no matter what."

"You don't know that, don't be stupid," Steve sniffled.

"I'm not stupid, you're a pissbaby with all your pissin' and babyin'!" Darcy yelled back.

"You're just saying that to make me feel better!" Steve accused.

"I AM NOT!" Darcy screeched at the top of her lungs. "I GOT KIDNAPPED CAUSE I DID IT ON PURPOSE SO NOBODY COULD GET TO JANE!"

"What?" Steve whispered, feeling her try to take her hand away. He held on fast this time. "What
"I knocked out the guy who was watching us for SHIELD, and I ran to the guys who were gonna get us. And I said *Hey, I'm Jane Foster*, and they believed me and took me away," Darcy rattled off quickly. "It was dumb, but if you'd a been there, I'd a done the same thing to you."

"You can't knock me out," Steve disputed.

"I could to!" Darcy insisted. "I could knock you out right now, right on your ass, Rogers! I used real strong knockout gas that I wasn't supposed to have and boom, that guy didn't wake up for three days."

"Why'd ya do something so STUPID?" Steve demanded.

"Cause I'm tough, and Janie's not tough, and Thor and Erik asked me to take care of her, and so I was taking care of her," Darcy revealed. "And I got kind of scared that I made a mistake and everything hurt and I thought I was gonna die, but then---then you saved me."

The two tiny children made big sniffling noises as they got their emotions under control.

"I'll always save you, even if you knock me out," Steve promised.

"I won't knock you out, just pinch you if you'se being annoying," Darcy promised right back. "Will you stop feeling bad about it now? Cause it wasn't your fault, and you can't help if you were in a real sad place."

"Yeah," Steve nodded, and somehow he knew it was true. He had held onto it for so long, but unburdening his heart to Darcy had made it feel lighter. And knowing that his foolhardy girl would have gotten kidnapped or not made it all the better.

"And I love you too," Darcy added, almost glibly.

"Oh," Steve whispered, his entire face breaking out in an ear splitting grin.
"I'm gonna kiss this curtain and you should too, so it's like we're having a kiss but not really," Darcy ordered and made an obnoxious lip pursing sound.

Steve quickly scurried to his knees and pressed his lips to the curtain. They couldn't make much out, seeing as it was made out of kevlar, but he liked to imagine that his lips were pressing against hers, and hopefully she was wearing the tootsie roll chapstick.

"Red," Bucky nodded as Natasha pulled the pickup in front of the large safehouse.

She was just as shocked as Bucky was. There were quite a few more cars than there had been beforehand. Namely, one Masarati, the Barton's and their mini-van, as well as the pickup truck that Sam had been driving around. Bucky had been waiting in the wings ever since Tony Stark had brought Steve back to the house in the Masarati. He was unsure if it was safe to go into the house. The last thing he needed was for something to happen to Darcy in the crossfire or a melee between he and Tony. And no doubt Steve would try to join the fight if Tony was still apt to fly into a warranted rage at the sight of Bucky. It had just felt right to stay on the outside, looking in. But he had gotten quite an eyeful being on the outside.

For one, he'd seen Scott take the Masarati out, at a truly ridiculous speed for the small, country roads of Wisconsin, and return in about half an hour with three huge boxes full of what Bucky had glimpsed as cupcakes. Then Kurt had taken the Masarati out and returned even faster with garment bags. Dave had run out and screeched in delight as he drove off in the Masarati and returned with one single can of hairspray.

And then Luis had come out, driven the car around the lake and promptly returned, a breathless sort of grin on his face.

There was an altar of sorts being set up by the lake, and there were a lot of flowers.

And there were guests. And he couldn't help but really suspect that this was a wedding of some sort.
"What's going on?" Natasha furrowed her brow as she assessed the chaos as Bucky got into the bed of the truck, hiding as she pulled into the drive.

"Are we gettin' married, Red?" Bucky whispered.

"Usually a person would have to ask first," Natasha smirked into the rearview where she could just make out the side of Bucky's chin.

"Well, usually a person would have the opportunity to make it romantic.... romantical," Bucky smirked, thinking of how Darcy and Steve would say it.

"Usually a person managed to make a barbaric torture chamber in the cold wild of Russia romantic... al," Natasha bantered back.

"Usually a person didn't have two babies thrown into the mix to complicate matters," Bucky huffed.

"Usually a person doesn't make so many excuses--"

"Well usually a dame would give some hint on whether a fella would be said yes to!" Bucky clipped out, then laughed and shook his head as Natasha put the car in park. He got a closer glimpse of what was going on. It was definitely a wedding. Sam Wilson was standing at the altar in a penguin suit.

Bucky's mind was racing. He felt that he knew Darcy well enough now, to know that, YES, she was entirely capable of planning and pulling off a wedding without any adult knowing the wiser. And YES, she absolutely thought that Bucky and Natasha ought to get married. And YES, she would definitely do this and then use her adorable wiles in order to get the wedding to happen.

"Red?" Bucky whispered.

Natasha hummed blithely in response.

"Red, will you marry me?" Bucky whispered, sounding only a little nervous.
"Of course, don't be an idiot," Natasha warmly replied. "But this wedding is not for us."

"What?" Bucky looked around in confusion. "Sharon and the bird boy can't get married, it's too fast."

"Sharon and Sam?" Natasha repeated. "How did you know that Sharon and Sam---"

"I didn't go to the helicarrier, Nat, I went to Sam's safehouse and endured the most horrific torture I've ever had to endure. I had to watch Sam high pitch moaning his way through a very hands on training session with Carter. I'd go back in the chair after that."

"Why---"

"I had a hunch. Carter wasn't entirely truthful with me on the phone. She knew too much and seemed to interested in Darcy. And I thought about who Carter more than likely reports to now," Bucky explained. "And she IS still reporting to Hill."

"And Fury," Natasha shook her head in disbelief. "It was Fury."

"Yeah, I don't know the how of it all or the why of it all, but it was Fury who made Darcy and Steve into children," Bucky revealed. "Seems highly invested in them being happy and safe though, so I can't really be too mad at him."

Natasha made another humming noise. She peered into the garage and saw Steve kneeling in front of a kevlar blanket that Bucky had created, his back turned to her. He was dressed in a suit similar to Sam's and it looked a bit like he was praying. And then he brought his hands up and went to wrap around something on the other side of the partition and fell forward.

She was out of the truck and into the garage in no time, vaulting over a small, pink, very plastic vanity and looked down at a mess of giggling children. Steve was laying on top of Darcy, presumably, but she was covered by the blanket and what Natasha could only presume were one thousand yards of taffeta.

"Rogers your hand is on my ass!" Darcy cackled. "That's where I poop!"
Steve laughed and poked with his index finger in response.

"Really?" Natasha demanded and Steve looked up at his friend and caretaker warily.

"It's okay, Romanoff, really," Steve promised her. "We're engaged to get married now. And Tony explained about sperm and baby boxes so I don't think we gotta worry about having accident babies yet. Cause--- yuck."

Chapter End Notes

Alright, next time, we are definitely getting some sort of wedding. I think. I'm pretty sure.

Thanks so much for reading!

PS. read through the comments for bonus features
Sorry about the hiatus guys. I was having some troubles and I couldn't do the writing thing. Please forgive me?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty: Bucky Bear Inversion Therapy

“The bride needs to see you, Oh Great Obnoxious Employer who might have been.”

Tony snorted his champagne right through his nose, and consequently began choking. Champagne, out of all liquids, was probably the worst to be snorted through the nose. The bubbles lingered. And it made sense that the even more obnoxious than before Scott Lang had waited until Tony had switched to champagne after his last drink (the groom’s drink prepared by bartender Clint, which was capri sun mixed with vodka and then put back into the pouch). Scott had no love lost for him, and his three sketchy amigos were cackling with glee as they offered canapes to the very few guests that had arrived.

Tony was getting glares from all over, actually. Wanda was preoccupied with helping the Barton children with something, but every time she looked up and caught his eye, her happy, carefree look plummeted into a glare. Sam had given Tony wide berth, which Tony assumed was a good thing. He’d given Sam his word he would be going to Siberia as a friend to Steve, and he’d left Siberia on decidedly unfriendly terms.

The person who concerned him the most was Mrs. Laura Barton. She was being downright cheerful to Tony. By far the most accommodating and friendly of all of Team Cap. She’s hugged him when she’d arrived and then had been chatting Pepper’s ear off for the better part of an hour. Tony feared what Barton’s wife was capable of.

Tony didn’t know what he feared more in that moment: Laura convincing Pepper to leave him or worse convincing her to start a brood similar to the Barton brood. His anxiety was unfounded, as Pepper has repeatedly said she had never wanted children since she had HIM to look after, but you didn’t have to spend a lot of time with Laura Barton in order to know that the woman was dastardly in her abilities.
"You know if you keep a bride waiting in certain cultures, it's punishable by head shaving," Scott said jovially. "I think you could pull off the cue ball look though, so please, keep waiting."

"I'm gonna figure out a way to annoy you tiny robot man," Tony warned before stalking away from Scott and going towards the garage of the safe house. He saw Natasha standing at the door and gave her a nod of acknowledgement that she returned. She had changed into a very demure dress, looking like a lady out and about in downtown Manhattan in 1945, the sweetheart neckline of the pretty blue dress just one small inch away from being dangerous. "How's business, Natalie?"

"Booming," Natasha shrugged. "I hear you're going into the dance floor engineering business. I would advise you take it, and not get into the business of teaching children about sexual reproduction."

"Yeah," Tony came back quickly, clearly surprised at the venom in the last part of Natasha's statement. He had thought he had done an excellent job in teaching Little Rogers about the birds and the bees. Apparently Natasha did not agree, and he didn’t want to open that can of worms at the moment. The hint of a smirk began pulling at his mouth. "If you think disco lights and some fog are exciting, wait until you see me put the foam machine in those legs."

Natasha huffed out a laugh, knowing that she was going to get some sort of correspondence from Rhodey in the next few weeks complaining about the fantastic additions to his legs. She heard Darcy giggling and laughing from inside the room as she went over music selections with Sam and her face went serious suddenly. She was contemplative and concerned, her eyes darting down to Tony's fantastically shined and ridiculously expensive shoes while she tried to think of the best way to frame her request.

"OH, hey assmonkey! C'mere, I gotta have a talking with you afore we start this wedding!"

Natasha laughed, unable to help herself as Tony bristled at being called assmonkey by a five year old child, who was waving from her seat by her Little Tykes pink vanity set. She walked side by side with Tony and managed to get in one very quiet,

"Please be patient with her."

before melting into the background, refusing to leave even as Sam gave Tony a small nod before walking off with all of the songs he had programmed into a playlist for Darcy. It's not that Natasha didn't trust Tony. She had no doubt that Darcy would be physically safe in his care. But Darcy was
five, and lacking in the smallest amount of social graces she had as an adult. Which had her pretty evenly matched with Tony at the moment, who never had an abundance of social graces himself.

"Little Lewis," Tony nodded down at her. "You look very lovely."

And she beamed at the praise. Her dress was big and poofy, just as she had always wanted, with yards and yards of gauzy looking white material creating a skirt that made her look like a Disney princess. A little white sweater over top of the sleeveless white bodice and a lovely wide ribbon of blue, bright ocean blue that would match little Steve's bowtie and cumberbund perfectly was tied around her waist, the perfect bow on the back trailing slightly down into the voluminous skirts.

"I know I look AMAZING!" Darcy agreed, hopping up from her vanity and doing a spin. She shrieked with happy giggles when her skirt poofed out around her. She did another spin and became a little off center, swaying on her feet as she stared up at Tony with pink cheeks. She nodded and her smile melted, her expression looking just as it had that time Tony had watched Darcy forcibly pry her way into JARVIS' server bank in the Tower and attempt to reprogram him to stop Tony, Jane and Bruce from collaborating ever again. "Please have a seat Mister Craps."

"Mister Craps? Really, Lewis?" Tony scoffed. "You can do better than that."

"Okay, sorry Senor Shitface, sit down," Darcy gestured to the seat she had just vacated.

It was a very small, very pink, very plastic little stool, and Tony seriously doubted his left ass cheek would fit onto it. But Lewis was gesturing to it very insistently, and Natasha was standing in the corner of the room in the dark, ready to whoop his ass should he not keep the tiny child happy. Not only that, but Rogers had super strength still, and he was at the perfect height for nut busting, and Tony quite liked his nuts UNbusted.

And to top it all off, as inept as Pepper had been with monitoring Darcy's caffeine intake, she had been endlessly enamored with the child. And if Tony made Darcy make unhappy baby noises, he was sure that there would be more than hell to pay. So he decided to play nice and sit himself down on the stool.

Darcy nodded and turned to her caboodle container before whipping out a stuffed animal and shoving it right in Tony's face. It was brown, wearing a one sleeved leather jacket, and it's left arm was covered in silver duct tape. There was a spot on the top of the bear's head where the hair seemed to be slightly matted with something gloopy and glittery and Tony realized it was probably lip gloss from very frequent kiss marks.
"Uh, what the hell?" Tony furrowed his brow.

"Shhh!" Darcy insisted, waving the bear in his face. She was very, very serious at the moment, which was jarring, as she had not been serious the entire time Tony had been in her company. "Does this nice bear make you angry?"

"No?" Tony ventured, not wanting to give the girl the wrong answer. She seemed to be right on the edge of tears, and Tony did not know or understand how to stop them. And he certainly didn't want them to slip down her rounded and adorable cheeks.

"Are you sure?" Darcy questioned. "This is inversion therapy, and if you can stare at the bear a little longer, then I'll let you hold him. And if you can hold him without hurting him, then we'll move on to the next step."

"I'm not going to hurt your stuffed animal, kid," Tony promised, because her tears were brimming and big blue eyes that took up half of the kid's face were swimming and ready to drown him.

"Please, Tony, please make sure the bear don't make you angry, look deep deep deep down in your heart," Darcy urged.

Tony heaved a heavy sigh before plucking the bear out of Darcy's hands and staring it down.

"Please, don't HURT him!" Darcy whispered.

Natasha moved forward at that. It hadn't been a shriek. It hadn't been a scream. Those Darcy branded noises she was used to. Darcy shrieked her head off at Steve constantly. She screamed at Natasha more than a few times. But the tone of Darcy's whisper was something that Natasha remembered. She'd heard Darcy use it when the girl was having nightmares shortly after the Alps.

Tony stiffened at her desperate whisper as well and gave her a long, soft, questioning look before he held the Bucky bear against his chest, giving it a half hearted hug.

"I won't hurt him," Tony promised.
"But---but they made him do bad stuff," Darcy shrugged. "Sometimes real bad things happen, and he had to do those bad things some times, but he's not gonna do it no more. He's---he's a good person and I love him a lot. And he--I just don't want you to hurt him, even though you got hurt so bad too. He's the only Daddy I ever had and you can't hurt him, please? Even if you's hurting real bad inside. And it's NOT FAIR. It's not! And--"  

"It isn't fair, you're right," Tony interrupted, clutching the bear to his chest as the child in front of him began to cry silently. He nodded and held out the bear to her and she wasted no time in grabbing it back and holding it tight underneath her chin, her lip gloss shellacked pout pressing against the often kissed spot. "My Dad always told me life wasn't fair. What a crock, right? I mean, I was born with more money than some countries have and he had the audacity to tell me life wasn't fair. How much more fair could it have gotten for me?"

"No fences, but your Daddy was an asshole," Darcy muttered against the Bucky Bear's head.

"I'm not gonna hurt Barnes, kid," Tony said softly.

"Cause my Bucky bear inversion therapy worked?!?!" Darcy asked, suddenly very excited and hopeful.

Tony couldn't find it in his heart to let her down. He didn't know how to tell her that he'd spent an awful lot of time in therapy. He'd spent a gut churning amount of time looking into what Hydra had done, to Barnes specifically. He'd spent a mind blowing amount of time thinking about it all. Yes, Barnes killed his mother. He would never be able to look at the man without flinching.  

But Steve had been right. It wasn't him.

"It worked," Tony gave her a smile.

"Oh good, cause you can't have fights at my wedding. Not unless it's food fights," Darcy sighed in relief. Her eyes went wide with panic. "Don't tell Barton that! He'll throw the pizza tacos around like a caveman who don't know how to use forks gooder."

"Okay, I won't," Tony promised. He put his hands in his pockets and shrugged his shoulders up and down, "So a few months ago I got made a shaman somewhere in India. It was a whole big deal or whatever."
"Cool, I always wanted to get magic witch powers," Darcy regarded Tony with an inch of respect."

"Yeah, well, one of the powers I got was to be able to marry people," Tony admitted.

"REALLY!?!?" Darcy squealed in excitement, jumping up and down, the taffeta and layers of her dress making a symphony of sound in the little garage. "OH GOOD CAUSE BARTON SAID HE COULD PULL UP A VIDEO ON YOUTUBE BUT THIS IS SO MUCH BETTERER!"

Natasha began to step forward at that, giving Tony a very precise squinting of green eyes. He smirked at her and pointed to the tiny child that was a big ball of white fabric, brown curls and cotton candy scented makeup products.

"Gotta give the bride what she wants on her wedding day, Natalie," he warned. He got up from the tiny stool slowly, his bones and joints protesting painfully. "Jesus, that's hard on the old body. So, I'll just be waiting at the end of the altar. And I promise no violence."

"Thank you, Senor shitface, that's real nice of you," Darcy launched herself at his legs, wrapping her arms around them.

"Hey man, come on," Tony admonished.

"I'm sorry, I mean, Reverend Shit face."

Steve had watched Thor come down to Earth many times when they had been at the upstate New York facility. He remembered always being so impressed with the lights when the Asgardian used the rainbow bridge. They were beautiful and amazing and ethereal and if Steve had all the paint colors in the entire world, he would never ever be able to recreate it (interestingly enough, Steve felt the same way about the ocean blue green depths of his soon to be wed beloved's eyeballs). But there were times even, when Thor didn't use the rainbow bridge, and instead arrived on the scene from parts unknown via his magic hammer Mjolnir, wind whipping through golden blond locks, a battle cry in the air.

Thor's arrivals were always a thing of beauty.
And this time, he didn't disappoint, zipping through the air at a ridiculous speed, low enough to miss any human radar, but high enough to not be seen by the locals.

"What in the hell?" Bucky whispered at Steve's side, having quickly changed into the dancing monkey suit that Sam had thrown at him before trying to track down the impossibly small groom to be.

"Thor!" Steve squealed in excitement as he jumped up and down, his powerful little feet pounding against the ground in glee. "Buck, wait till you meet Thor, you're gonna LOVE him. He flies and wears a cape and has a hammer that no one can lift but him. Well, I can lift it, but I fibbed about it at a party cause I didn't want to be a showoff and have Tony razz me."

"What?" Bucky squinted his eyes and gave a shake of his head in his bemused confusion. "First Wilson and then the guy who shrinks down and then goes giant, and now a flying cape wearing fella with a magic hammer? Honestly, I leave you for seven decades and this is the crowd you come back with?"

"Aw, lay off, jerk, you're gonna LOVE Thor," Steve promised. "He's like Darcy's big brother and she's gonna be SO happy he's here to see us get married."

Steve ran off to greet Thor as he elegantly touched down by the small lake, Mjolnir in his right hand and a big piece of pretty clear purple glass, the size of telephone book in his right.

"Now wait just a minute, punk, we need to talk about this getting married business!" Bucky called after him as he gave Steve chase away from the driveway that Steve had been waiting at down towards the lake where Thor was now shaking hands with Clint and being introduced to a very, very impressed Lang and the Three Wombats. Luis actually looked like he might faint at any moment and Scott was being downright inappropriate as he caressed Thor's gigantic biceps.

The purple glass lit up suddenly and Jane Foster's face appeared on the surface of it, looking beautiful but quickly annoyed as a stranger continued to feel up her man.

"HEY, mouth breather, hands off the goods!" she warned, her voice clear as day and her tone very well practiced as a woman who had to constantly warn others away from touching her man. She looked around and demanded, "Heimdall said Darcy was here, where is she?"
"She's gettin' ready, Doctor Foster!" Steve announced.

"What in the hell?" Jane looked around from her purple glass and then looked down as Steve pushed through the legs of Barton and Kurt. She peered down at Steve and then obviously moved a little closer to her end of the fantastical, magic, otherworldly ipad and wrinkled her nose. "Does Steve Rogers have a son?"

"Not yet," Thor assured his beloved with a grin. "Although he is destined for sons. And they shall be great and honorable men just as he is. His progeny and seed will live on---"

"Now hold on a second pal," Bucky urged very quickly and nervously, looking around for Natasha automatically. "Ixnay on the eedsay talk, alright?"

"Don't worry about it Buck, Stark taught me all about the sperms and the baby boxes and I think that's gross right now, but I think when me and Darcy are growed up again, it'll be real nice to figure out a way to get my sperms into her baby box without having to mash any of those gross parts together," Steve said with clear enthusiasm. He giggled a little to himself, clearly euphoric. "But it is gonna be so fun to kiss her all a time. Maybe even France kissing."

Buckys' brain short circuited as he stared down at Steve in complete and utter dumbstruck horror.

"When you and Darcy are growed up again?" Jane repeated. "What's happened to my Darcy, where is she?"

"I shall bring her to you, my love, please stop stroking me, Mr. Lang," Thor said gently. "While you are a handsome man, my beloved does not take kindly to thoughts of sharing me."

Scott Lang and the three Wombats were called off of canape and ushering duties shortly after Thor and otherwordly facetiming Jane found Darcy, as there was an emergency in the Bridal garage that only they could take care of. Steve and Bucky both had to make sure the other didn't run off to the garage to take care whatever the problem was, but Natasha was standing guard, throwing subtle little winks Bucky's way and warm smiles towards Steve, so everything had to be alright.
The two soldiers from World War Two grabbed a few handfuls of capri suns (both spiked and regular) and found Clint and Sam by the lakeside as the warm afternoon sun glinted off of the perfect, calm water. Bucky glared at Sam as he approached and physically shivered in disgust at the picture perfect memory of Sam Wilson kissing and sighing and cooing like a dove.

"What?" Sam demanded in annoyance. "What's the geriatric one's problem? I didn't do anything yet."

"You're disgusting," Bucky muttered. He looked down at Steve and gleefully tattled, "Did you know you know that your fine feathered friend is providing a lovely lady Carter with joy and comfort lately?"

"That's nice!" Steve's eyes lit up in excitement. "I don't know how you give comfort and joy when it's not Christmas. And I don't think Carter is too keen on hugs."

"She's keen on other kinds of touching," Bucky grumbled, his icy blue glare was sharp enough to punch all kinds of holes into Wilson.

Steve turned to Sam in confusion as Bucky's innuendo leaked through. His face was thoughtful as Sam shifted his weight from foot to foot. Sure, the bro code wasn't exactly something that might have existed in the 1940's, and yes, Sam was currently attending the toddler wedding of Steve and Darcy, but he still didn't know if Steve would be upset that Sharon had moved on very quickly from her barely there dalliance with Steve.

"Are you gonna put sperm in her baby box? Cause I don't think she wants that sort of thing," Steve said warily. He shrugged and looked almost contrite to admit it, "It was one of the reasons why we decided it was a bad idea to try and go on dates and stuff. Cause me and Sharon never wanted the same stuff like getting married and having babies and that kind of stuff."

"No, no sperm. No baby boxes, I'm cool," Sam assured him.

"Oh, good," Steve nodded, before grabbing one of the Capri Suns in Bucky's hands and patiently poking the straw into the juice pouch. He missed the irritated looks above his head between Bucky and Sam, as he was too caught up in his own little happy, expectant bubble. He sighed dreamily and looked to Clint, who was skipping rocks calmly onto the lake. "I can't wait to be grewed up again."

"Yeah?" Clint nodded. "You about ready for your happily ever after, Cap?"
"Uh huh," Steve nodded eagerly before taking a long and greedy sip that emptied his entire juice pouch. He looked conflicted for a moment before sighing and shrugging.

"What's on your mind, kiddo?" Clint asked quietly.

"Well, I mean, now I fink its gross, how you have to go about doing baby making," Steve admitted in a soft, hushed tone that the glaring Bucky and Sam could hear. "But I guess---I mean, grownups like it, right? I fink I liked it, maybe?"

"If it runs in the Carter family, you definitely liked it," Sam muttered jovially.

"Disgusting," Bucky pointed a metal finger at Sam in warning.

"Seriously, really gross dude," Clint agreed.

"But Darcy is unsullied like a freshly fallen snow, and she might not like it!" Steve admitted, sounding only a little panicked. "How do you make sure a person likes it if they want to---do that sort of stuff? I don't wanna disappoint her or make her hate it..."

Bucky's warning bells were going off in his head. Sure, his beautiful Natalia was preoccupied with the tiny adorable bride at the moment, but he knew that between Clint and Sam, Steve could get even more turned around about physical relations than what Tony had managed to do. Bucky quickly squatted on the ground to be at eye level with the small boy version of his best friend and traded out Capri Sun juice pouches as he gave him a very encouraging smile.

"You're too little right now to understand it," Bucky began. "But there will come a day where you might have to worry about making a girl like freshly fallen snow happy. And I promise you, that me? This guy---"

He pointed to Clint who nodded, taking one of the spiked Capri Suns from Sam.

"And even this bird brain," Bucky jerked his head in annoyance at Sam, who gave him the middle finger in return. "We're gonna be here for you. We're gonna rib you plenty, cause there's so much we have stockpiled now."
"So much," Sam nodded in agreement a delirious sort of light igniting in his eyes.

"A whole lifetimes worth," Clint laughed.

"Awwww," Steve whined, knowing well enough that the three people present would definitely pick on him for as long as humanly possible.

"What kind of stuff do you guys have on him?"

Three bodies stiffened and Bucky went from squatting in front of Steve to standing, rigid and unmoving, his body angled in front of Steve's to protect, his eyes suddenly wide and hard and assessing.

"I mean, we just had the morning together, and I already know that I will forever be able to pick on him about the fact that he secretly calls Darcy his sugar farts," Tony Stark revealed, standing with his hands clasped in front of him for all to see.

His presence wasn't a surprise to anyone, they all knew he had been milling about the safe house. But his proximity to Bucky was certainly a surprise. Clint's head sharply went back towards where the wedding reception area was set up, catching Wanda's eye and giving her a nod. Sam went to the other side of Steve, buffering him between he and Bucky.

"I TOLD YOU NOT TO SAY THAT OUT LOUD EVER AGAIN!" Steve shouted. He looked around at his other friends anxiously. Not even Darcy knew that he called her sugar farts in his head. He wanted to make sure they kept their trouty mouth's shut, but all of his friends were all looking ready to fight. With Bucky looking nearly devoid of all the things that made him Bucky. "Guys? It's okay..."

"Unclench, please?" Tony offered. "I come in peace. You don't mess with the Bride's big day unless you want your Iron Man suits tailored too small for you. Or your world reprogrammed into Farsi."

"I'll go check on Darcy," Bucky said to Steve softly, nodding at Tony and willing to give the man time with Steve and his other old friends.
"No, just---hold on, wait," Tony waved his hand impatiently. "Look---I'll never be able to look at you and not see that video."

"I'm----I'm sorry," Bucky whispered, suddenly feeling too small and too large at the same time. He felt a pressure on his left hand and saw that Steve was clinging to it, squeezing it as hard as he dared.

"I know," Tony nodded. "And I'm going to be the bigger man here, very magnanimous, if you ask me. And this is what we're going to do. We're going to be okay. When I see your face, I'm gonna see that video, I'm gonna remember what you did. And when you see my face, you're going to be sorry. And that's just how it'll be. That doesn't mean I can't see you. Or you can't see me. It is what it is."

"I---yeah, that seems right," Bucky nodded. There was no magic eraser. There was no apology that would bring Tony's parents back. And there was no magic spell to undo how Tony reacted to the knowledge of his parents' murder.

"Besides, Little Lewis will cry if I make you cry, and Rogers could probably obliterate my nuts, and no one wants that on a special day," Tony quipped. "So, Manchurian candidate...the bride wants you to walk her down the aisle, and the rest of you no good vigilantes are needed at the altar to get this show on the road."

Chapter End Notes

Okay. This story doesn't actually have that many more chapters to go, actually. Maybe up until thirty?
A Proper Wedding, Objections and all

Chapter Notes

One of these days, I might get sick of writing weddings.

TODAY IS NOT THAT DAY.

I really hope you enjoy this absolute ridiculousness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty One: A Proper Wedding, Objections and all

Steve had thought that the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in his life had been his mother's pearl necklace, which she had sold for good back in 1933, when they had nothing but air to eat and the promise of plenty of that air when they were kicked out of their apartment. The slightly imperfect round spheres had been a prismatically luminescent ivory color, about the size of peas, and the clasp of it had been silver and shiny and so intricately designed that Steve could find himself staring at it for hours, and hours and hours and still find something new about it.

Now he stood at the front of a little aisle made out of a carpet of shiny silver emergency blankets, with the sound of their song, or what Steve thought was their song. It was the first one that they had danced to, and the lyrics, about being driven crazy about a girl seemed to fit to Steve's current situation. Darcy was bopping around at the end of the aisle, Thor and Jane and Natasha had already walked up the aisle, looking very lovely.

Jane, or the purple stone tablet that displayed Jane's countenance, was placed on Darcy's dress up stool, and had been rigged up with a floofy blue skirt and Thor was dragging the stool along via a fancy, extra stretchy bungee cord that one of the Wombats had found in a supply room. She and Thor shared the maid/man of honor position and Thor patted Steve's head hard enough to make him feel a little dizzy.

And then their special song started and there she was, a vision in a lot of white material, holding Bucky's left hand, bouncing and dancing around to their song. Steve knew that his memory was a little less than perfect since being turned into a small child, but he knew without a doubt that shrink rays or crazy magic or whatever it was couldn't have made him forget being this happy. He watched as Darcy and Bucky began meandering down the aisle, pausing for Darcy to wave enthusiastically at her guests (namely the Bartons) and scowl at Wanda only slightly.
She was still dancing, and Bucky, a grin on his face was doing his best to keep up and not look like a total fool. At one point in the middle, when the chorus of the song really kicked in, Darcy stopped and reached for both of Bucky's hands, shaking and shimmying and having a blast.

Steve had never been so happy, truly, and he didn't really know if he ever did anything in his life to deserve it. But the best part was, that he didn't really care, he was going to grab onto Darcy with both hands and they were going to be happy no matter what anyone dared to throw at them. Sam slapped a gentle hand on his sturdy little shoulder and Steve just continued to grin.

Natasha stood next to Sam behind Steve, and she knelt down to be at his eye level, green eyes just barely swimming as she surveyed the big, dopey grin on Steve's face, memorizing every single last detail. This was all she had ever wanted for Steve. True, real, unshakeable happiness that would tie him down to reality. Something and someone wonderful to make sure he would come home again after every mission.

She turned her gaze to where Steve was still staring and Natasha felt an odd tug in her chest, something she wasn't quite used to feeling, truth be told. Bucky had lifted Darcy off of the ground, poofy skirts and all, and was spinning her around as she laughed wildly. Bucky's grin was something familiar to her, even though she knew the original memory of it had been stolen from both of them once upon a time. But his expression was still familiar, a warm embrace on a cold night, soft words whispered in her ear as she drifted into comfortable, safe sleep.

Natasha smacked a kiss on Steve's temple before standing back up and straightening herself out. She looked at Tony, who was very neutrally staring at the tiny bride being jitterbugged down the aisle by the former Winter Soldier. She gave Tony a slight nod and he put up his hand and made a back and forth gesture to indicate he was okay. Natasha would deny it to her dying day, and everyone had been so intent on watching the spectacle of Darcy and Bucky, but the Black Widow very well may have taken a small step towards Tony and placed a kiss on his cheek before whispering Thanks.

Somehow, Tony managed to get over his astonishment in order to notice Bucky and Darcy reaching the end of the aisle and pulling Steve into their manic dancing. He cleared his throat obnoxiously and waved his hand around for the trio's attention.

"Reverend Shithead!" Darcy waved, causing Scott Lang to fall over into the aisle laughing uproariously. "Hi, remember the BEAR, okay."

She pointed to the little blue sash around her waist, which contained the adorable Bucky bear, and then she gave Tony a thumbs up and a wink. He rolled his eyes but said,
"Dearly beloved and those that I have shot at or incarcerated in the last year," Tony said loudly.

Laura Barton had the decency to laugh. Tony shot her finger guns in thanks.

"We are gathered here, to marry two five year old kids. This cost approximately fifteen grand, but hey, who is counting when Capsicle has finally met his match?" Tony shrugged. Warm, knowing smiles were beamed back at the two little ones, where Steve was still grinning like a big dope at Darcy. "So, who gives this little lady for sacrifice at the altar of patriotism and self-righteousness?"

"Keep to the script, Reverend Shit for brains!" Darcy ordered very quickly before going back to smiling at her bridegroom.

Scott had just managed to get back in his seat before falling to the ground with hysterical, high pitched giggling.

"I'm giving her," Bucky piped in. He cut a quick look to Natasha, who had arched a playful eyebrow. "She's---she's a girl all on her own, and no one owns her, but---she's my responsibility. I mean."

"Oh my God, Robocop, this is a wedding for five year olds, no need to reinvent feminism," Tony snorted.

"Natasha and I say that the kids can get pretend married," Bucky said with quiet resolution. "And Thor and Jane said it was okay too. So---there's that."

Darcy grinned and held up her hand to Steve for a quick high five.

"Alright, alright, go stand next to Natalie," Tony waved Bucky off.

He didn't go to stand next to Natasha right away though, he dropped to his knees and enveloped both of the five year olds in a tight hug and then placed a kiss on both of their foreheads. When he did take his place next to Natasha, she reached out and grabbed for his right hand, holding it as tenderly as she dared.
"Alright, we're gathered here, for a union. A union of a pain in my ass, with another pain in my ass. So that they might unite, and eventually grow back into their original forms of GIANT pains in my ass," Tony nodded, looking in a small book, but clearly not reading any of the words. "In hereby agreeing to allow me to marry them, the aforementioned pains in the ass grant me the ability to name their future progeny."

"Wait!" Steve finally stopped grinning at Darcy to look up at Tony warily.

"HELL NO IRON BUTT MUNCH!" Darcy screeched.

"Okay, one, ow, that's an inhuman noise you just made tinier pain in my ass," Tony rubbed at his ear in annoyance. "And two, no one cares about what we say here, it's all pretend anyway right?"

"But---it feels nice and real," Steve shrugged. "So stop being stupid."

"Okay, fine," Tony sighed. He made a wavy hand to the man and maid of honor standing behind Darcy. "At this time, your good buddy Thor would very much like to do a proper reading of some kind of psalm or---hand wavy science magic bonding handfasting---"

Natasha looked alarmed and glared between Thor and Tony.

"Ohhhhh!!" Darcy cooed, reaching for Steve's hands and slowly shuffled the both of them and Darcy's many layers of noisy taffeta closer to Thor and Jane. "Fancy science magic, please?"

"Of course, little one," Thor grinned congenially. He looked to Steve as well and shrugged, "Little ONES. Please keep your hands joined."

Natasha stepped forward as Darcy and Steve did what they were told, trying to put a stop to the whole thing, but Thor said something unintelligible and powerful and there was a flash of light between the hands of the children and there hadn't been one moment to stop it.

"Are you kidding me?" Natasha whispered, glaring between Thor and Tony. Thor had the grace to look a little chagrined at having gotten caught doing something potentially naughty. But Tony looked absolutely delighted with himself.
"What happened?" Bucky asked softly, his eyes trained on Darcy and Steve, who were no worse for the wear for whatever Thor had done. They seemed especially euphoric, actually, their hands clasped together as they swayed back and forth to a tune only the two of them could hear. "They're alright, Red. It's okay."

"It's very much not okay, we are their caretakers and when they grow up---"

"It'll be alright," Steve's voice was just a little pinched, his eyes swimming with happy tears. "It don't matter, grown up or not, Tash. I'm good. I'm---I'm---"

He paused and shrugged his shoulders, his hands still attached to Darcy's, his face stunned and dazed and so unbearably happy.

"I'm real good." he finished simply.

"No take backsies!" Darcy nodded eagerly before leaning forward and placing a kiss on Thor's cheek. She then looked up to Tony, who seemed kind of miffed that the surprise other worldly handfasting portion of the festivities hadn't made Steve or Darcy take pause at all.

He wasn't too fussed though, he had plenty of surprises up his sleeve. Even Natasha seemed to be recovered from her initial dismay at the very real, lifetime commitment that Tony had convinced Thor to perform for the 5 year olds in front of him.

"They're bound," Natasha whispered to Bucky. "Through Asgardian law which is---kind of non-negotiable."

Bucky blinked at that before very slowly nodding. He gave Natasha a small smile and shrugged, as if to say that those two characters he had been looking after for weeks were already stuck together. In fact, he would have been dismayed to have it any other way.

"Alright now that the spies are done eye fu----"

Laura Barton was the one to cough loudly to derail Tony's inappropriate comment.
"Spy---talking to each other with their eyeballs," Tony covered. "Tiny Darcy Lewis?"

"Present," Darcy acknowledged.

"Sure, sure, do you, take this tiny Steve Rogers, to be your tiny husband, forever and ever?" Tony demanded.

"You're not that bright. Duh," Darcy shrugged, looking down at their clasped hands.

"Screw you tiny Lewis," Tony clipped out.

"HEY!" Kurt yelled from his place behind the camera. "Respect the child!"

"Ease up, Pompadour," Tony waved him off. He looked down at Darcy and smirked, "Did you have something to say, like, vow wise?"

"Yes, I did," Darcy said in that prim, condescending way of hers that she had always managed to hide as an adult, but as a child let loose and free. She let go of Steve's hands and dug into the little blue sash around her waist and pulled out a crumpled and weathered napkin.

Jane's surprised gasp was noticeable from her purple stone ipad's perch on the little tyke's vanity stool. She knew what that little napkin was. She'd been the one to hand Darcy the napkin from a diner years ago when they'd both gone out for drunken pancakes after Darcy had recovered from her first kidnapping. It was covered in red writing, loopy and cursive that Darcy definitely could not read in her current state.

But she did her best anyway.

"I'm Darcy God Damned Lewis, and I saved the future queen of Asgard's bacon. And I don't need no man to make me feel like I can do anything and everything I want. Like eat pancakes at ten at night with a glass of wine."

She paused and shrugged, "Only I can't eat pancakes at ten cause I gotta bedtime of nine o'clock sharp and wine smells disgusting."
Steve nodded in eager agreement. They were never fans of Natasha's wine breath after she'd had a glass of something red during their bathtime.

"But anyway. Someday I'm gonna have the right guy and he's gonna love me more than he loves ice cream," Darcy's smile was small and playful and Steve sighed happily, each remembering that first horrible day in the car where Steve had stolen her ice cream and eaten it all. They had come a long way, the both of them. Darcy looked down to her napkin and wrinkled her nose. She turned to Jane with a disgusted face, "Why'd you let me write all this stuff about all the PARTS, Janie?! I don't want to talk about hands and boobs and butts!"

"You used to," Jane shrugged.

Darcy was horrified as she caught glimpses of words, her eyes were huge and full of revulsion.

“What does it mean he’s gotta be good with his fingers?! FOR WHAT?!”

“For apple picking,” Jane fibbed. “And opening tightly screwed jars.”

“Screwed,” Sam snorted.

"Alright, grownup stuff can be ignored for now," Tony facilitated as Natasha shot daggers straight out of her eyeballs right at his jugular. "So you do want to marry this one hundred year old five-year-old?"

"Duh, what do you think we're here for, doofus balls?" Darcy scoffed.

"Duh, there's your answer, that's your vow to him. Forever and ever," Tony mocked. He made a sharp turn of his body to face Steve. "Do you want to say anything before you say DUH too?"

"Uhm. uh..." Steve panicked slightly. He hadn't written anything down. Darcy had written words and he had nothing. He was obviously going to be screwing this whole husbanding thing up, and often if he couldn't even have fancy words of love written down to speak in front of everyone.
He felt a strong metal hand on his shoulder give a gentle squeeze and looked out of the corner of his eye to see Natasha giving him one of those barely there smiles that really never failed in setting his feelings to right, whether he was big or small. He took a deep breath before looking back at Darcy, who was doing her very best to wink at him, but was in fact, blinking both eyes at the same time in a silly and exaggerated manner. He huffed out a laugh and shrugged.

"When I opened that door in the Alps, you tried to smash my head in wif a weapon you made yourself out of floor tiles and your pants," Steve blurted out. He shrugged and said with all the earnestness his little body contained, "I knew then that I could love you as easy as breathin', and now, now I can."

Darcy made an awwing sound, staring up at Steve like he was the world's best poet.

He puffed out his chest a little in the pride of it all and promised, "And I do."

The Three Wombats awwwed at that.

"And I will. Forever and ever and a million and one years after that too," Steve promised.

"Oh sweet, baby, Jesus, you're gonna make the rest of us look bad," Tony huffed out, although his tone was a soft thing, full of wonderment and astonishment. "So---I'm gonna take that to mean that you do, and you will take this tiny terror to be your lawfully wedded tiny terror."

"Lawfully?" Sam spoke up this time, saving Bucky and Natasha to do it themselves.

"I do!" Steve insisted.

"Now, does anyone here have any objections to these adorable children pledging undying love to each other?" Tony asked airily, arching an eyebrow at Natasha, whose eyes were narrowed as she tried to figure out Tony's game.

"Yes, I have some objections!"

Everyone turned to the shouted, angry sound. Nick Fury stood at the end of the aisle, leather duster,
eye patch and all, his hands fisted at his hips as he glared at everyone in attendance.

"One," he held up an angry finger. "I was not invited to the festivities that I'm claiming responsibility for."

"You were IN HIDING!" Darcy defended herself. "I sent an SOS like you taught me, you one eyed jerk nugget!!"

"Two," Fury held up another finger, well practiced in letting Darcy’s insults fall by the wayside after so many years of looking out for her well being. "Whether Barnes is her new Daddy or not, I think that keeping her alive for so long gets me a trip down the aisle to give her away."

"You can't have her back to protect her, it's my job now!" Steve shouted. "Go and find your own Darcy!"

"Three," Fury held up his third finger, the hint of a smirk leveled right at Tony Stark. "I think I'd like to object to the very legal marriage license your AI filed for the two toddlers getting married right now."

"WHAT?!" Natasha hissed, stepping forward to approach Tony.

"Sorry, Objection overruled!" Tony shouted back and very very quickly blurted out as he held up his hands, Iron Man gauntlets unpacking from his watch and cuffs. "I now pronounce Darcy Lewis and Steve Rogers to be married and hand fasted in the eyes of the law and Asgard and there's nothing anyone can do about it. SUCK ON THAT."

Natasha began to chase and Tony as he powered up his portable gauntlets, heading to the sky as fast as he could, but not fast enough as Natasha grabbed his ankle. Meanwhile, Steve and Darcy, completely oblivious to the melee that was rapidly breaking out as Thor attempted to free his coconspirator from Natasha’s grasp, stepped towards each other and began kissing each other all of their faces.

“We can kiss ALL A TIME NOW!” Steve squealed in between kisses of Darcy’s eyebrows.

Darcy wiggled in her excitement and kissed Steve’s chin. “NO TAKE BACKSIES!”
Chapter End Notes

With a ceremony like that, I wonder what's in store for the reception!

Also, check out this awesome art of little Darcy in her wedding dress!! Thank you biblioworm!!

Thank you so much for reading!
"Red, c'mon now, you can't...Red!"

Natasha turned with a glare to Bucky as she continued to try to out muscle the ridiculously powered gauntlets that Tony was trying to use to escape her wrath. Bucky held up his hands cautiously, approaching his girlfriend---no, she was his fiancee now. She was his intended. He intended to marry her, just as properly as the two kissing five year olds were now married. Hell, that handfasting seemed to look pretty enjoyable too, and he wouldn't say no to another layer of official when it came to the fiery, angry hellcat of a woman gripping Tony's ankles as he tried to fly away from her.

"They are MARRIED," Natasha ground out.

"Well, yeah, it still doesn't make them not five year olds," Bucky shrugged. "And you know they don't want to do no more than kiss, really."

"FRANCE kissing and touching body parts together, Darcy said that the first time a boy tried to touch her inappropriately was when she was seven years old," Natasha bit out, yanking on Tony's ankles that little bit harder that had him yelping out in very real, very palpable fear.

"Stevie wouldn't do that, and you damn well know it," Bucky said very seriously, sounding stern and admonishing.
"uhoh, Robocop, you've done it now," Stark cackled. "She's going to cut off your manhood and get T'Challa to replace it with vibranium."

"Too soon, idiot," Natasha hissed, yanking again, and one of the glove gauntlets had a power dampening and she managed to swing Tony back and in a semi-circle, his head veering dangerously close to the ground.

"Hey!" Pepper shouted as she ran up to the trio. "Can you please not smash my future IDIOT husband's skull in? I kind of like it in the current formation."

"He should have thought about things like his skull before he legally married two people who have limited capacity to make those decisions," Natasha bit out quickly, swinging Tony again, this time in a full circle that had him making a grunting, gulping sound that indicated he was susceptible to some kind of motion sickness without the helmet on to stabilize things.

"I can get it annulled," Pepper promised earnestly, taking another few steps to stand next to Bucky, who looked to her in shock and horror.

"What? WHY?" Bucky demanded. "You can't---"

"They're FIVE," Pepper reminded the man needlessly, turning to look back at the altar that Tony had been trying to get away from, where Darcy and Steve were accepting congratulations from their friends and Nick Fury, and exchanging kisses on cheeks every ten seconds with each other. Pepper couldn't help the fond smile as Steve fairly cooed at Darcy's kiss. "I mean---they're adorably five. I could have it annulled by the end of the reception."

"No," Natasha sighed, watching the same scene that Pepper and Bucky were staring at. "Steve would be devastated, and Darcy would very likely destroy your entire world if it happened."

Bucky smiled fondly and shrugged.

"They can remain married, but if there are repercussions when they turn older, you are answering for them," Natasha warned Tony.

"Sure, fine, WHATEVER," Tony heaved an obnoxiously put upon sigh. He gave Natasha a bit of a sneer as his body was still planked out at a right angle to her own body, her hands tightly wrapped
around his ankles. "Shouldn't the guy responsible for making them tiny be held accountable for repercussions before me though? I mean, you HAVE figured it out by now, Natalie, that if it wasn't me that made them tiny terrors, then it was probably YOUR one eyed dad figure over there."

"He's not wrong," Bucky muttered, though he did look a little annoyed at having to admit it. He'd wanted to confront Fury right away, but he feared that his beautiful Natalia would have destroyed Stark's kid before he got a word out of the former Director of SHIELD.

"Jesus, Robocop, keep agreeing with me, I like it," Tony laughed, only a little maniacal. "I mean, if you hadn't of offed my parents in a Hydra murder trance, we might have been able to actually get a--oh shit!"

Natasha waited until he was properly distracted before planting a serious foot on the ground at a perfect angle to swing her, and by extension Tony, around in a perfect, Olympic Shot Put arc, and Tony didn't have time to try and get control of his seriously waning gauntlets before he went flying headfirst into the icy cold lake.

"Really? That was new Hugo Boss," Pepper sighed as she shrugged and accepted Natasha's little smirk. Tony had popped his head up and above the water and was screaming about his too cold giblets, so Pepper begrudgingly walked towards the water's edge. "Swim out, idiot, I'll warm you up."

"Wait, don't interrupt them."

Nick Fury glared down at his former best sniper and his wife. He had been intent on being the next in the highly unorganized and joyous line of reception to the newlyweds, but Laura Barton had placed a hand on his arm and Clint had uttered his warning. Currently the five year old versions of Steve Rogers and Darcy Lewis were being swamped by the other children at the party, i.e. the Barton children.

Fury had seen pictures and surveillance of Steve and Darcy, and plenty of it, since the moment they had been forced back into their de-aged state. It was his investment, so he had justified it at first as making sure his investment paid off. And then it had become a calming experience for him, seeing the children and their 'parents' interacting at the store, seeing them sitting down for a breakfast of thin gray gruel and too much fried bacon, watching some bedtime stories and sweet tucking ins of tiny, sleep precious children. Now was the time for payoff, he got to reap his rewards face to face.
"Why do I have to wait?" Fury muttered. He not so secretly adored Darcy Lewis. His loyal SHIELD staff that still traveled the world with him on the floating city of the helicarrier had referred to her as 'the apple of Fury's one eye', and he had to admit, the girl had been spoiled shamelessly over the course of her stay with him.

Maria Hill had told him that grown or small, Darcy Lewis was practically his granddaughter and heir apparent. And Fury had spent enough time around the girl to realize that not only was this true, that he was damned proud of that fact.

"They're determining the alpha child," Laura advised him.

"Very scientific stuff. Lila has won out as the alpha twenty-seven times in the last two years meeting other kids," Clint revealed with a paternal pride in his smirk.

"She duct taped Cassie to a ceiling. It was awesome," Scott agreed.

The girl in question was currently cooing over Darcy's dress. The eleven year old was taller than Darcy by two heads and Steve by one and was using her height to determine dominance. Darcy was pleased with the attention, loving her fluffy confection of a dress very, very much. But then Lila cooed over Steve's cumberbund and bent to give him a hug and Darcy's entire face went sour.

"Uhoh," Fury snorted, the barest hint of eager glee lighting up his uncovered eye. "Girl's got a possessive streak a mile wide, did you know that?"

"Uhm, Wanda might have mentioned something," Laura was distracted as she watched Darcy close in on her daughter with an absolutely placid, terrifyingly predatory glint in her eye.

"She once used a really advanced polymer to attach a very inappropriate cadet to the bottom of the helicarrier," Fury cheerily recalled as Darcy put an arm on Lila's shoulder and said something in a cheery voice. The adults couldn't make it all out, but clearly it was something serious as Lila went ramrod straight. "I believe because the cadet had said that Captain America was a fine piece of ass, but too dimwitted to keep around for longer than the time it took to get her rocks off."

Darcy was now whispering in Lila's ear and the older girl shivered in fear, took a few steps away and folded her hands behind her back. Darcy grinned cheerily and placed another possessive smack of a kiss on Steve's cheek before looking down at Nathaniel and patting the boy on his head. Cooper was wide eyed at the whole thing, and his shoulders went a little rounded as his posture went
deferential towards Darcy.

"A new Alpha is crowned," Fury chuckled before taking a few steps forward. His bark was authoritative and commanding enough to have Steve standing at attention, his body jerking to move in front of Darcy. "Lewis!"

"What's up Pop-pop?" Darcy questioned, looking extra innocent and harmless. Lila and the rest of the Barton's made their eager getaway to the chocolate fountain that the Wombats were setting up. "I wasn't doin' nothin' and you can't prove ANYTHIN'!"

Steve stood down at his new wife's screeching. It was her comfortable, playful tone of screeching. She wasn't scared or anything. He still looked at Fury warily, his round blue eyes squinting a little in suspicion.

"Why's he looking at me like a bad guy, Lewis?" Fury demanded. "Who pissed in your cheerios, Rogers?"

"I don't EAT cheerios," Steve huffed out. "This morning I had five Denny's grand slams."

"I know, and Wanda had to modify twenty-five memories, so I hope the rootin' tootin' pancakes were worth it," Fury retorted. Just then they heard the yelping of Tony as Natasha threw him into the lake and Fury smiled at his red headed pseudo-daughter from a distance. Steve didn't change his scowl at him though, and for some reason that rankled Fury terribly. He pursed his lips and stared down at the stocky, muscular five year old that Darcy was clinging to, her little arms wrapped around Steve's midsection as much as her poofy dress would allow. Her head rested on his bicep and she had a peaceful smile on a gorgeous little face. "Seriously, Rogers, why are you glaring at me?"

"You objected, but you can't have her back no more," Steve's voice was a low little rumble, his eyebrows moving in and making that terrifying, indomitable Captain America face, despite the rounded edges of youth. "She's my wife now, and I'm keeping her forever cause I love her so much, you got me, Fury?"

Fury would have laughed at the sound of the high pitched Captain America voice, but Darcy went a little liquid at it, leaning into Steve heavier as his arm went up and wrapped around her for support, allowing her head to mash into his chest instead. Maria liked to joke that his heart was as shriveled and useless as the thing behind his eye patch, but really, there was room in a shriveled and useless heart for satisfaction.
Witnessing Captain America straight out of the ice, his confusion, his heartbreak, his melancholy had not been easy. Witnessing the struggle Darcy went through, being so important and not that important at the same time, the recovery when she was injured, the longing she felt in her heart had not been easy. The solution was simple, but Rogers was too damned stubborn and Darcy too damned skittish to try. Thor had consulted with him shortly after Ultron, the surest way to secure both of their happiness would be to stop being separate.

According to the Asgardian, they were fated, and fighting fate had not be an easy thing.

So Fury did what he had to do, and this one time, it hadn't of sucked so hard.

"I would NEVER take you from each other," Fury promised, so heartfelt and sincere that Steve's eyebrows unfurled and his gaze went wide with wonder.

Fury felt an unnaturally strong hand on his shoulder, and when he turned his head, sure enough, Natasha and her big guard dog had him effectively roped off. Bucky's vibranium hand lay on his shoulder and the man had determined look in his eye. Fury shrugged and his mouth did a playful, smirking purse.

"Not like I'm gonna fight you, Sergeant, I've already died a couple of times."

"Rogers!" Sam called out. "King T'Challa is on the phone, he wants to give you well wishes."

"COOL!" Steve shouted back. He looked down at his awesome little wife and said, "T'Challa is gonna love you, honest."

"Fury," Natasha said evenly as Steve rushed Darcy and her dress towards Sam's video call. "Let's go have a little chat."

"No need for the muscle, Romanoff, tell your lover boy to ease up," Fury huffed out, sounding slightly pained as Bucky manhandled him into the kitchen where Scott and the Three Wombats were busy orchestrating a catering endeavor that was precise and plentiful.
Each of the three Wombats had silver trays, which looked suspiciously like the shelves that had been used to house ammunition in one of the weapons rooms of the safe house. Each tray contained a vast array of finger foods. One tray was entirely made up of small shot glasses filled with the gray gruel that Steve preferred to eat at breakfast time. Another tray held small dixie cups full of Darcy approved cereals. Another was entirely covered in candy.

All in all, it appeared that Scott had been a dedicated and attentive caterer. The man in question was carefully arranging a bunch of Taco Bell wrapped tacos on another tray, just ready to be unwrapped and deconstructed by Darcy. He looked up at Natasha and Bucky manhandling Nick Fury into the room. Scott automatically put his hands up in the air in a gesture of innocence.

"I didn't know the wedding was for real, I swear, I thought we were just doing play time with a really big budget. Like—a huge budget. And don't tell Stark or anything, but I used the credit card that Pepper Potts handed me and had a big huge candy bouquet sent to my kid. And a weird teddy dog monster hybrid stuffed animal that's as big as a Prius," Scott stammered.

"I knew the wedding was for real, but I thought it was super fucking cute, so I didn't care," Luis added. "And also I used that unlimited Stark card to buy my homies pizza. Like—all the pizza. I mean, the domino's website broke because I ordered all their pizza, but still, I don't think that Stark will notice because dude is like—richer than God, man. And Pepper Potts said spare no expense, so...and my Uncle really likes Domino's wings, even though they aren't—"

"It's okay, pal," Bucky cut in quickly. "Why don't you guys head out and start feeding people, we'll be out in a second."

"Okay, hurry up, cause Darcy wants the dancing to start after the first round of appetizers," Dave reminded him like a seasoned wedding planner. He'd remembered seeing the news footage of the Winter Soldier and declaring the dude scary as fuck, but then he saw him interacting with Darcy and Steve, and he was reminded of his own Dad, who was scary as fuck, but when you got to know him, he was secretly a giant fluffy teddy bear who just loved adorable things.

Scott and the Wombats went out of the safehouse to begin allowing the very limited number of guests to feast, leaving Natasha and Bucky to glare at a smirking Nick Fury in the kitchen. He looked around the nicely appointed kitchen and his smirk turned into a genuine smile when his eyes landed on stainless steel refrigerator, which was covered in artwork from Steve. A fat purple cat was featured in a lot of the pictures, as well as cartoon representations of Bucky and Natasha.

"I don't see why the two of you are so upset," Nick casually opined as he took a step closer and looked at one of the pictures that showed four people, hand in hand. Bucky, Steve, Darcy and
Natasha, all lined up in a row, big grins on their faces and shiny red heart stickers placed all around them.

"You---you don't, I---" Bucky faltered and gave Natasha a look of incredulity and confusion, as if to ask her wordlessly if this was REALLY her mentor.

"You turned Captain America in a five-year-old," Natasha said calmly.

"Technically, I didn't, I just found the person out there with the ability to do that," Nick smirked.

"Where is that person?" Bucky demanded. "And how fast can you get them here so they can change them back to normal?"

"Oh, no, that's not how it works, Barnes," Nick laughed. "The sorceror we used escaped, and is presumed dead, so that's not going to work."

"They're STUCK this way?!?" Natasha's voice rose, clear panic evident in front of the only two people she had ever trusted with her fear and panic and worry before. Her eyes were wide as she stared between a concerned Bucky and a nonchalant Nick Fury. "They---what if something happens? Do we---are we going to be raising them? Will Steve age slower than Darcy? God---if they---"

"Sssshh, Natalia," Bucky abandoned all pretense of being intimidating and menacing to Fury and instead went to his girl, wrapping her up in an embrace. He pressed his lips to her temple and then rested his chin on the top of her head. "It'll be alright. We'll handle it."

Bucky soothed her, and Nick watched as every stroke of the metal hand down Natasha's back made the rigidity ease from her stature, she leaned in on him heavily, allowing the burden of standing to fall on Bucky alone for a few precious seconds. Nick found himself full out grinning at the scene playing out in front of him.

"What was your game, Fury?" Natasha asked, her voice muffled from the confines of Bucky's embrace. "How do we get them back to normal?"

"The game was to keep Darcy Lewis safe," Fury shrugged. "During the weeks that she's been hidden here, Hill and I have eliminated about eighty percent of the people who had an interest in
finding her. No one was looking for a five year old."

"And Steve?" Bucky demanded. "Was he just in the way?"

"No, I could have turned Lewis into a five year old before I handed her off to Natasha. I waited for you to rendezvous with them before I allowed it to happen," Fury was still grinning, clearly proud of himself.

"WHY?" Natasha demanded.

"You've been happy," Fury remarked.

"Fury," Natasha warned, and instead of sounding threatening, she sounded just a touch like she was pleading with him.

"I have a lot of stubborn people in my life. You know this, and you four, you are the most stubborn," Nick shrugged, taking a step closer to the fridge and smiling at the pictures again. "Determined to the cause, determined to wipe out your ledgers, you'll throw everything else out before you take one damn moment to tend to your own needs and wants."

"You meddling---"

Fury cut her off with an incredulous look. He laughed and shook his head, pointing at Bucky.

"This one was too terrified to be near you for fear that he'd taint your progress somehow."

Bucky took a deep breath, and Natasha felt the shuddering at the end of it thanks to his embrace.

"Sure, he would have shacked up here with you while you played your matchmaking games with Lewis and Rogers," Fury nodded, knowing that had been the original plan. "And then he would have taken off into the wind, determined to protect everyone for their own good and find some kind of redemption in loneliness and misery."
Bucky didn't have to confirm that as the truth. Natasha knew he would have tried. And she would have chased him to the ends of the Earth to stop him. She could see the brilliance in Fury's mad plan. By placing Steve and Darcy in such a state, Bucky couldn't run away and hide from what made him truly happy. And by making Darcy and Steve so small and relatively helpless, Fury had created a family. And it was a family that Natasha would nurture and protect with her dying breath.

"No one was looking for two parents and a couple of cute kids," Nick explained calmly. "Ms. Potts is making headway with Tony, and the Accords are nearly abandoned. Give it a few more weeks, and the four of you should be fit to enter regular society again."

"A few weeks?" Bucky asked. "Will you have a solution by then?"

"I always had a solution, Barnes, don't insult me," Fury swiped back haughtily, and Bucky understood where Darcy got her high and mighty attitudes sometimes. He looked pleased with himself and revealed, "It will wear off. The spell is temporary. Three months, max."

Natasha blew out a relieved breath, letting it hit Bucky's neck beneath the tuxedo collar. Bucky let his hands take another pass over the soft lines of Natasha's back and they both went over the weeks they had been keeping Steve and Darcy happy, well fed, safe and loved. They could do a few weeks more.

"The kissing is going to be unbearable," Natasha bemoaned, realizing that they had two very married five-year-olds on their hands.

"I was hoping to get here to stop it before it came to that, but what's done is done," Fury shrugged, reaching out and grabbing one of the boxes of pizza that he had brought to the festivities. "Besides, in all reality, the wedding is only a few weeks earlier than it would have been."

"How could you know that?" Natasha began to ask as she pulled out of Bucky's embrace and turned to face Nick. She smiled and nodded. "Yeah, I get it."

"Now, if you want me to go put the fear of God into Rogers, I'll tell him the kisses have to be kept at a minimum until they're grown up or it will---" Fury waved his pizza filled hands around a bit, "mess with the science of it all."

"Princess Sweetpea will have that debunked before it even gets out of your mouth the whole way," Bucky said knowingly. He turned and looked out of the little kitchen window, and he could see
down by the lake where Darcy and Steve were swinging on the tire swing together as their 'photographer' Laura Barton took wedding photos. Steve was grinning at the camera as Darcy kissed his cheek. Bucky couldn't help but smile. "Just let them be, in a few weeks, I'll just threaten to obliterate his balls when he's a grownup again."

Chapter End Notes

So now we just wait it out a few weeks (chapters) and we'll have a grown up married couple. right?

Next up...the rest of the reception and the honeymoon?
Happy Monday! Let's continue this fluffy fun fest.

Chapter warnings: There was a moment in here that I really needed. It was straight out of a made for tv family comedy movie with all the cheese included. I needed it. Also song links in the chapter. Also so much fluff and cheese.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Three: Dance Party and Naptimes

"Now that everyone is done with secret meetings, and flinging people into lakes, and trying to impress CEO's that aren't SINGLE," Dave said pointedly to Kurt, who had the good grace to blush.

Dave was speaking into a toy microphone that distorted his voice slightly as he stood next to the speakers that Darcy and Steve would stick their found MP3 player into in their secret room. Sam was ready to bring up songs as necessary, playing his part as DJ, but Dave had declared himself... Party Master General, and as such, he wasn't giving up the bejeweled, battery powered microphone that made his voice more akin to autotune than just plain loud. He didn't seem to mind at all, as his only audience currently were the Bartons, (a very wet) Stark and Potts, and that hot looking young woman with the cute accent.

"I'd like to introduce today's wedding party. Because Darcy and Steve are very, very fair, there aren't any normal bridesmaids or groomsmen, they're all OF HONOR," Dave smirked. "So, the bridal party, everyone."

Sam hit play on the MP3 player, allowing the surprisingly loud sound of a driving piano tune to begin playing before rushing over to the edge of the makeshift dance floor that was five feet by five feet and made up of triangular ceramic tiles that were usually used for target practice by bored archers trapped in boring safe houses. Everyone recognized the song before the lyrics started, even the little Barton kids thanks to their obsessive love of Gnomeo and Juliet.
Tony was the only one to voice complaints, "Really? Really? Crocodile Rock is the best song you could come up with?"

"It's a classic, you savage," Kurt hissed out before opened the makeshift curtain of kevlar blankets to allow the wedding party to come in.

Or rather dance in.

Apparently Darcy had deemed this of the utmost importance, and they had taken her hasty but urgent request of ten minutes ago very seriously. Thankfully Sam was a cheesy cornball, Jane didn't actually HAVE to dance since she was attending via magical, alien ipad, and Thor absolutely didn't mind performing a complicated grapevine step in tandem with Sam since it was part of his beloved little lightning sister’s adorable culture. To her credit, Jane's image was held between the men and she was laughing her head off and bopping her head in time to the song.

Darcy and Steve were peeking from the side of the kevlar curtain, in plain view of everyone, but too curious to see what their friends had come up with to care. Sam and Thor were spinning in circles, their hands meeting with ipad Jane in the middle.

"They look like really buff ballerinas!" Darcy shrieked in excitement, clinging to Steve and making them both hop up and down in glee.

"Just wait, sweetheart, you'll see," Steve couldn't help the big grin on his face. This was the literal best. He couldn't think of anything better. His friends were here and they were happy. He was married properly to the girl of his dreams. And it was a fun party with delicious food and really fun music. Nothing could yank him from his mood.

Thor and Sam proved to be very compatible dance partners. It helped that both of them were adept at their own planet's customary dancing, making it easier for them to pick each other's choreography up. Thor led Sam in a twirling sort of line dance that he had taught him very quickly, Jane's pad now hoisted on his shoulders as they did an Asgardian move that resembled something out of a Victorian period piece.

"Break it down big guy!" Sam shouted over the surprisingly loud music right before the chorus. The brought up their hands and raised the roof while shimmying their hips and made way for Bucky and Natasha to appear in the curtain.
Steve squeezed Darcy extra tight. Sure she had seen Bucky dance a few times. Bucky had even taught the two of them quite a few steps in the last few weeks. But Steve was pretty sure that Darcy had never seen Natasha dance. Much less Natasha and Bucky dance together. Steve had stumbled upon Natasha dancing only the once when they were grownups, and it had been such a thing of beauty that he couldn't even speak.

And more recently, he'd seen Bucky spinning Natasha out and then back in when they were supposed to be doing dishes in the kitchen one night. The two of them were both born with a natural grace that you couldn't replicate, and when you stacked them on top of each other...

"Wow," Darcy whispered as Bucky spun Natasha out onto the little dance floor where Sam, Thor and Jane were now doing a jazzy little shuffle. The circles Natasha's body spun around in were tight and controlled and along with her blue skirt and raised arms, she looked like a ballerina that you would find on the top of a really expensive music box. "Wow Wow wow."

They didn't dance slow, and they didn't dance modern. It was a combination of swing dancing and quick steps and fox trots and all the coolest dancing that anyone could do back in 1950. Bucky and Natasha moved around the little dance floor like they'd been practicing for months.

"They're so beautiful," Darcy sighed, finally stopping her excited dancing and just clinging onto Steve for dear life.

"Yes, they are."

Darcy and Steve both looked up to where Nick Fury was standing next to them with the closest thing he had to an indulgent smile on his face. He watched Natasha especially, whose smile was brilliant and more real than anything they'd ever seen before as Bucky whipped her around expertly.

"I've been waiting a long time to see her like that," Fury admitted.

"That's nice, Pop-pop," Darcy nodded, looking at her dancing friends as if she wanted to memorize every movement. The song was coming to an end, and she didn't want it to, because she wanted to watch Jane laughing merrily from light years away, and Sam and Thor trying to mimic the spins and twirls that Bucky and Natasha were effortlessly pulling off.

"That's how Tash feels about me," Steve puffed up, more than a little proud that he had someone so capable to help protect his feelings and promote his happiness. "She just wants me happy."
"You know what they say, Rogers, the apple don't fall too far from the tree," Fury shrugged. "And she's not the only one that wants you to be happy."

The music came to an end and the small group of people clapped and cheered as loud as they could (with the exception of Tony, who was doing a slow, lazy clap that spoke more to his jealousy of not being included in the dancing than any held over anger to any of the dancers). Pepper wolf whistled to make up for Tony's rudeness.

Sam eased himself out of the dip that Thor had managed to get both him and Jane into before he rushed over to the MP3 player and went to pull up the next song. Dave stood and shook his head in disbelief.

"Wow. That was...kind of really corny and incredible," he admitted. "If someone had---you know, secret footage of that---"

He eyeballed his cohorts, who had the good grace not to hold up all of their thumbs, but instead, gave discreet nods.

"You could make a fortune out of blackmailing," Dave muttered. "But anyway, will everyone please give your cheer and applause, for the first time as five-year-old, weird voodoo handfasted husband and wife, for their first dance, Darcy and Steve Lewis-Rogers."

"Really, you hyphenated?!" Tony called out in disbelief. "You were born in a different freaking time period!"

"Can it, you inferior haired, tin bucket!" Kurt yelled, just for the sake of insulting Tony.

A lady's pretty voice cut off Tony's response and Steve took Darcy's arm in his as he lead her back and around the kevlar blanket that Kurt had closed and then immediately pulled open to reveal them. Darcy gave a happy wave to her friends that were clapping for her before she stared up at Steve so she could watch his reaction to the song she had chosen for their first dance.

"Your love is better than ice cream, better than anything else that I've tried."
Steve turned to her and put his arms on her shoulder and waist just as Bucky had taught them in order to do a proper waltz. He took a deep breath and began the steps, all the while looking down at her in amazement.

"I mean, I really love ice cream," Darcy reminded him helpfully.

"Me too," Steve nodded in eager agreement as he went through the careful three steps as they waltzed around the little square. He wanted to do all kinds of dances with Darcy until they left for their honeymooning, but it seemed nice to start with the easier and simpler waltz.

Baby steps, Bucky had called them.

"So that means I think you're kind of the best," Darcy stage whispered.

"Yeah?" Steve felt his heart could burst. No one had felt like that about him in such a long time.

"Duh," Darcy giggled.

The song was short and sweet, just like her, and at the end the two children hugged as tight as Darcy's poofy skirt would allow. There were flashes going off from everyone's camera phones as well as the actual camera that Luis had mysteriously acquired on one of his trips out in Tony's fancy car.

"I love you better than ice cream too," Steve promised.

"Good. Now let's PARTY!"

Unfortunately, nap time severely cut into dancing time. Both Darcy and Steve were very quick to point out that they were not babies and did not need naps every day. But Steve was the one to take
Darcy to the side and explain that normal days were a lot different than wedding days. And that they had both been busy bees for a good eight hours at that point, and had just eaten a lot of appetizers and taco pizza and and now were clearly ready for a good nap.

"And asides, if you get a good nap right now, then we can cut cakes and be rested up proper for our honeymoon, sweetheart!"

And that sold it for Darcy. And it caused the eavesdropping Bucky to go into a panic and look for Natasha, who had slapped her palm hard against her face. Steve gave a wave to Sam, and the music switched from an eclectic mix of upbeat songs and love ballads from the past seventy years into acoustic piano versions of Disney songs. Darcy led the way across the dance floor to where Thor was sitting on one of the lounging chairs, giving Jane a proper view of the celebration and a play by play commentary.

"And now, the young, happy couple have come to visit us, my Jane, does our lightning sister not look beautiful in her joy?" Thor pondered softly.

"You're always such a sappy sapperson when love is in the air," Darcy accused jovially before climbing up onto the reclining lounge chair and crawling up Thor's reclined body so that she could take a seat right on one of Thor's pecs.

"S'cause he's a god of love or some shit," Steve shrugged before following in Darcy's wake and taking a seat on Thor's other pec. He waved happily at Jane and asked, "Are you havin' a good time, Doctor Foster?"

"It's been awesome, I really want to try that taco pizza when I come home," Jane assured the little boy who was following Darcy's lead and situating himself in such a way that his body was on the chair and his head was comfortably pillowed on Thor's chest as his hand reached out to grip Darcy's. "Thor, put me back on my throne, I'll keep a watch out."

Thor threw his own beloved a wink and did just that before bringing up his massive arms and wrapping them around the children who were rapidly succumbing to their need for sleep. Thor took in a happy sigh of contentment and beamed a blinding smile at Jane before looking up to see two shadows standing above him. He gave James a nod before giving Natasha a full fledged smile.

"We can take them inside, to the couch," Natasha offered.
"It's of no bother at all, Darcy and Jane would often nap on me at various times throughout the day, even Selvig has been known to doze off and use my shoulder as a comfortable pillow, " Thor assured the de facto parents, and as if on cue, Darcy began to try and dance in her sleep, but was outpowered by the gentle hold of Thor's massive bicep. He looked to James specifically and apologetically offered, "I suspect they came to me for comfort due to being in the chair already, and that measurement wise, I offer the most...area."

"You're not wrong," Natasha agreed, her hand settling comfortably on the small of Bucky's back. "Although my guy isn't too shabby in the area department. I've never complained."

"There is no need to," Thor agreed. He smiled as a lovely soft song came on. "And I suspect, that if you are free during this naptime, the children would probably want you to dance more. One of the minions of Lang shall record it for them to coo over later."

"Hey!" Dave shouted from a few feet away, where he had indeed, been recording the cute moments on various forms of media. "Business partners, not minions."

"True," Bucky chuckled softly. He shrugged off his suit jacket however and draped it over the truly tuckered out children to provide them with additional warmth, covering Thor's torso as well. "Just let us know if we can bring you anything while they sleep."

"I'd be willing to hand feed you," Scott said nonchalantly, popping up out of nowhere and staring over Bucky's shoulder at Thor. "I mean---as a thorough food service worker, not to be. You know. Creepy?"

"I shall enjoy it," Thor nodded in magnanimous agreement.

Jane groaned out loud from her perch and gave a well practiced admonishment, "Thor, no! You can't keep letting people do that!"

"You know, Lang and his minions ARE pretty great wedding coordinators," Natasha said softly as Bucky danced her around the floor.
"Hmmm," he hummed into her hair, giving her a twirl before pulling her back in tighter and closer. "Back in my day, the wedding coordinator was the man in charge of the trolley that ran outside the courthouse. He dropped you off, and boom, your wedding was coordinated."

"I am NOT getting married in a courthouse," Natasha sniffed delicately. "Besides, any of us would be wanted in a courthouse, probably."

"Aw, come on, my Princess Sweetpea could be allowed in a courthouse," Bucky argued playfully.

"She's the worst out of all of us, her kidnappings and arrests went hand in hand," Natasha assured him.

"What's my pal Stevie gotten himself into?" Bucky asked, though his tone was prideful and happy and he turned Natasha out slightly so they could both get a clear glimpse of Thor, with the children firmly held in his grip. They'd been out like lights for over an hour now.

The Barton kids had been astonished at the voluntary nap time that had happened, but like good Beta children respecting their new Alpha, they followed suit and were sprawled out inside of the house on one of the couches. The adults were all dancing and having a more sedated celebration as the children napped, but that looked to be ending soon, as Scott began preparing the 'cake', which was actually a three tier stand filled with cookies, little debbie snack cakes (that Steve was particularly fond of), and artfully arranged candies that either of the children would eagerly gobble down. And there was a single tier of cupcakes, half of them with the icing scraped off (because Darcy abhorred it), and the other half with double the icing (because Steve would eat anything that Darcy didn't want to eat). Kurt was following him with his arms loaded with ice cream gallons.

"He's gotten himself into a happily ever after. With a lot of help from his friends," Natasha whispered, the hints of happiness tinting at the edge of her voice something that she very rarely let anyone else hear. "I'm proud of them."

"I know you are," Bucky chuckled. He kissed her forehead and insisted, "I'm proud of you too."

"And we are going to have to figure out what this five-year-old honeymoon nonsense is about," her voice was no nonsense there and had Bucky rapidly nodding in agreement.
"They want to camp outside with the stars," Bucky revealed. "Luis took the Maserati out to get a big enough tent for all four of us. And Fury is working on the surveillance."


"Red, I'd marry you in a sewer," Bucky promised. "Or anything the Wombats could come up with."

"Oh no, I don't want a sewer. You and I will say I do somewhere private. On a beach, maybe, with Darcy and Steve there to witness, and Fury to officiate," Natasha said casually, as if she had been planning it forever. "I'm thinking that Stark could use a wedding planner... or four. It might stop him from telling innocent ears about the birds and the bees."

"Red, I truly do love the way you think."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, going into the last leg of this story now. Almost there!!!
Happy Monday, everyone!

Here's a bit of a filler chapter before we get into the last little arc of this story. I hope you enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Four: The Honeymooners

Normal bickering and sniping started almost immediately. The cake and various desserts had been eaten. The guests had left. The Wombats, who at this point, deserved to have Tony's Maserati free and clear, had begun to swiftly clean up all evidence of the party. Despite their nap time on Thor, the five-year old newlyweds were very tired by the time the sun sank into the sky.

"YOU GOTTA EAT SOMEFIN GREEN! JUST LISTEN AT ME FOR ONCE IN YOUR LIFE!"

"I DID EAT SOMETHIN' GREEN, YOU BIG GOON!"

"SWEDISH FISH DON'T COUNT, YOU CRAZY GIRL! YOU'RE GONNA GET SCURVY!"

"I AIN'T A PIRATE, TAKE IT BACK, YOU STAR SPANGLED SHITHEAD!!"

Natasha watched as the happily wedded and handfasted Steve and Darcy screamed at each other in front of an open refrigerator. She should have known that the lovey dovey, touchy feely, sickeningly sweet behavior to each other had an expiration date. A finite amount. Darcy and Steve, as people, were built on argumentative drama. And there was nothing really wrong with that.

After all, Natasha and Bucky were built on longing and prior pain and shared trauma. Yes, there was love. But that didn't mean that it couldn't have other ingredients thrown in to make things
interesting. Natasha was fairly certain that these toddler sized screaming matches would eventually mutate into something more related to bedroom aerobics when they were grown, but right now, the buildup came out in screaming matches. And she didn't really know how to deal with their shouting at the moment.

It had been a long day for Darcy and Steve, to be sure, but it was also a long two days for her, between rushing off to try and find the person responsible for Darcy and Steve's deaging, then only to find out that it was her own mentor and deranged parental figure that had managed it. In addition, it was never easy to deal with Tony, she always had some sort of flashbacks to a few years ago with her turn as Natalie Rushman whenever she was in close quarters with the man. And she had been tense all day in worrying about how Tony and James would coexist.

They'd coexisted well after all was said and done. Tony might have been outwardly flippant, but one could see that he didn't want to make things worse, which was pretty impressive when all was said and done. Natasha had been waiting for the other shoe to drop, all the way up to the point where Tony drove the Maserati away at the end of the night, complaining that it smelled like Cheetos and Drakkar Noir in his car.

And now, after perhaps too many hours of peace and kisses and sweet, sweet, innocent love, Darcy and Steve were like two powder kegs ready to explode all over each other.

"She would make a funny and cute pirate though," Bucky announced gaily as he finished wrapping up one of the little snack cakes that had been part of Darcy and Steve's wedding cake, reaching over the two bickering little ones to place in the freezer. "You'll eat that on your first anniversary. It's good luck."

"Daddy, tell this blockheaded asshole that we ain't gotta have vegetables, I just wanna bath and go to our wedding night cuddles," Darcy whined.

Steve turned bright pink immediately and looked to Natasha warily, as if he had gotten caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

"We ain't gonna put any sperm anywhere!" Steve insisted.


Natasha sighed heavily and looked to Bucky, who gave her a shrug and tried in vain to hide his own
amused smirk. She shrugged and reached for the keys. "Put them to bed, I'm going to go and kill Stark."

Steve was displaying high levels of distress and anxiety the next day at breakfast, absently spooning the gray gruel that Natasha endlessly supplied him into his mouth. He kept stealing glances at Darcy, who was taking one Blueberry Mini-Wheat at a time and dropping it into a bowl full of milk. She was muttering fiercely at it, in some sort of cereal water torture, pretending to interrogate it about its antics with the poptarts. When it had given up the goods (or was properly soaked in the milk), she would then fish it out and condemn it to a life sentence in her belly.

Steve was beguiled with her and at the same time a nervous wreck. Natasha gave him another bowlful of gruel then leaned over the counter to look him in his concerned little face.

"What is it?"

"Noffin," Steve said miserably.

"TELL US WHAT YOU DID WITH THE STRAWBERRY FROSTED POPTARTS OR YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO KEEP YOURSELF TOGETHER UNDER ALL THIS MILK!" Darcy whispered fiercely at her cereal.

"You know, as an adult, you were pretty terrible at hiding your emotions," Natasha reminded him. "Now, you're even worse."

Steve heaved a sigh that seemed too big and too bone rattling deep for his smaller body then looked up at Natasha and shrugged.

"She deserves a proper honeymoon."

"TO THE BRIG WITH YOU!" Darcy shouted. She held up Bucky Bear and nodded at him very seriously. “Next time they’re so resistant, I’ll tag you in Bucky Bear, you’ll be great at interrogatin’.”

"Well, when you're grownup again in a few weeks, then Thor said you could take her to Asgard,
where royalty honeymoons," Natasha reminded him.

"Still, couldn't we just---couldn't we go somewhere fun?" Steve wondered.

"Steve, the only places we can go are Wal-mart or the Lake, you know this," Natasha gently reminded him. While the coy planning of Fury had ensured that there was some level of safety in disguising Captain America and Darcy Lewis as children, she didn't want to risk too much. Bucky had wanted to bug out of the safehouse first thing this morning, taking the kids to another place.

And she had to agree, there was some sense in that. There had to be someone out there that had taken notice that not only had Tony Stark and Pepper Potts spent the day in a sleepy vacation town in Wisconsin, but Thor's arrival could have been caught on any number of enemies' radars. Bucky was currently working with the Wombats, trying to identify another safe place to go to should the need arise.

"TELL US WHERE THE COFFEE IS!" Darcy demanded of her milk covered shredded wheat. "GIVE US YOUR COFFEE OR YOU'LL BE SORRY!"

Steve gave Darcy a beaming, happy smile as she winked at him (two eyes blinking shut, Darcy style), before taking her tortured shredded wheat into her mouth with a big bite. As soon as she looked away, his entire face and body deflated, and he looked up at Natasha with the biggest, bluest, saddest eyes that had ever existed. Natasha arched an unimpressed eyebrow in return.

"Just wanna show her how much I love her," he whispered, sounding extra pathetic. "Scotty said there was a McDonald's with a playland on the edge of town---that outta be safe?"

"A McDonald's playland?" Natasha repeated dubiously.

"It's a Big tree with TWO slides and a net to climb over and all sorts of fun things," Steve said quickly. "And Darcy'll eat a happy meal..."

"DO YOU SEE WHAT'LL HAPPEN TO YOUS IF YOU DON'T GIVE ME WHAT I WANT?!" Darcy screamed into the cereal container. "TELL YOUR FRIENDS!"

Natasha snorted at her antics and ruffled Steve's hair. "I'll talk to James. Let's hope she doesn't use ketchup to torture her french fry suspects."
"If you don't eat some of your happy meal, you can't go into the treehouse," Bucky announced as Darcy dug into her little McDonald's box for her toy. He looked to Steve and was not surprised to find him face deep into his super sized french fry container. "Stevie...carry on."

"They're so good," Steve's little voice was rapturous, but the words were seriously mangled around his mouthful of deep fried potato strings.

"I forgot how much you like those," Natasha placed their drinks in front of them before sitting down and grabbing a french fry of her own. "Security at the tower would always complain when Stark had them delivered for you. The french fry smell from your ten pound snack would stick with them for days."

"I didn't eat ten pounds of french fries!" Steve disputed petulantly.

"Right, there were chicken nuggets as well," Natasha chuckled.

"Dipping sauces are good," Steve shrugged, taking one of his chicken nuggets and dipping it into the vast array of sauces that Darcy had requested on his behalf. He looked to his new wife and wrinkled his nose to see that she was ripping at the plastic on her toy rather than dig into her lunch. "You oughta eat afore you get a toy, sweetheart."

"But it's a Hello Kitty TEAPOT!" Darcy finally got the bag open and let the papers inside fall to the floor so she could hold the incredibly small teapot up high in victory.

"You're makin' a mess!" Steve accused, hopping down off of his chair and picking up her papers.

"Your FACE is makin' a mess!" Darcy accused right back, taking her teapot and opening it then making grabby hands at her little juice that Natasha had put in front of her.

"You can't drink out of a teapot that ain’t washed, it could be full of germs!" Steve scolded.
"Your FACE can't drink outta teapot cause it's full a germs!" Darcy parroted back.

"STOP DOING THAT!" Steve stomped his foot.

"STOP DOING THAT!" Darcy mocked again.

"Uhoh, trouble in paradise," Bucky muttered, hiding his smirk behind a big mac. "I guess Nat should ask Pepper to file for that annulment...right away."

"HOW DARE YOU!" Steve shouted before throwing his food down on the tray and moving towards Darcy, who in turn rushed to him and immediately cuddled into his embrace. "Anybody wants to take my wife away from me is gonna get bashed on their heads! Even you, jerk!"

"Husband, would you like some tea?" Darcy asked, reaching around Steve's arms to grab her teapot.

He made a conflicted face, clearly worried about the state of the toy, but she looked so darn cute, with a little smirk on her lips that said she was being a shit stirrer. He really liked that smirk of hers. He took one arm off of her and took her teapot, taking a sip out of it.

Darcy watched him carefully as he put the pot back down and gave her a happy smile. She nodded and went to take a drink out of it herself.

"Guess since it didn't kill you, it's safe for me to eat now. Thanks, husband."

Natasha reached over and ruffled Darcy's brown curls, clearly pleased with using Steve as a poison tester. She gave her a wink and said, "Eat up, Darce, those slides look really fun."

The slides did look really fun.
Darcy had hesitated going into the big plastic tree at first, until Steve promised to help her up the big steps should she need it. He clung to her hand and pulled her up until they were up in the top of the jungle gym playset, a good fifteen feet above the ground. He had helped Darcy to clamber up into the little square room area that had an old fashioned 'telephone', basically two metal cones that looked like the pavilions on the old record player he and Bucky had used from 1935 until 1942 and they were connected with a metal pipe.

Darcy put her whole face into the horn and shouted, "DADDY! DADDY! CAN YOU HEAR ME? OVER!"

Bucky knelt to speak into the other end, "I can hear you Princess Sweetpea, you go and have fun now with my best pal, alright?"

"You gotta say over!" Darcy shouted.

"Over and out, Sweetpea," Bucky acknowledged.

"Rogers, go and scout out the tunnels, I'll relay what you find back to base!" Darcy ordered, clearly not wanting to stop playing at the old fashioned communication unit. "DADDY I SENT ROGERS ON A SCOUTING AVENGER AND HE'LL REPORT BACK. OVER!"

Steve did like the tunnels an awful lot. One of the little areas was basically netting that he had to carefully crawl over to get to another curved tunnel with windows in it. He waved down at Natasha, who was watching over them all as she idly sipped at her milkshake. He went back and forth through the tunnels, reporting to Darcy that it was all clear, which she in turn shouted back to Bucky.

"DADDY, me and Bucky Bear are gonna slide now, OVER!" Darcy screeched into the metal cone. "CATCH ME AT THE BOTTOM. OVER!!"

"Roger that, Sweetpea," Bucky reported back before turning around and walking to the slide. He looked up and saw the shadow of Darcy moving over the plastic jungle gym quick. She took the non-tunnel route, which was just a bunch of little plastic rooms with other fun little activities in it. He saw her sit down at the mouth of an extra windy slide and waited patiently for her to push off so that he could catch her.

She didn't push off though.
"Princess?" he questioned after a few moments. "You scared?"

"N---no," Darcy answered back, hesitant but still sounding willful.

"Stevie, go and help Darcy down the slide," Bucky suggested.

"NO! Don't send him!" Darcy insisted.

Bucky furrowed his brow and shared a look with Natasha, who was now scanning the area heavily. There was one other person on the outside playground court, a man who seemed to be eating while his children played. But the only two children on the playground were Darcy and Steve.

"I don't wanna slide, I wanna---I'll go climb in the tunnels!" Darcy said quickly, getting back up on her feet and standing there with her arms crossed over her chest.

"But you wanted a slide, you said you were so excited you could pee!" Steve accused from the other side of the jungle gym.

Bucky had laughed when she had said it, and knew that she had been very excited about sliding down 'a million and a half times'. He bent forward and listened closely at the mouth of the slide, and sure enough, he heard breathing.

"Sweetheart, just slide, you like it!" Steve urged.

"I DON'T WANNA!" Darcy stomped.

Then Bucky heard it, the little, vicious whispers from whoever was stuck inside the slide that Darcy had tried to go down.

"Don't come down here, ugly, we'll eat you!"

Bucky really couldn't help himself after that.
He was halfway up the winding, spiral shaped slide in a second, before quickly realizing that he was now very much stuck thanks to the size of his shoulders. But he didn't let that deter him, reaching up with his veiled left arm and smacking against the plastic.

"You get outta there right now, you creeps!" Bucky roared into the slide.

There was the sound of prepubescent screaming and clamoring of limbs against plastic as they rushed up to the top of the slide and suddenly there were two thirteen year olds towering over Darcy at the top, trying to appear cool and intimidating and nonplussed despite having nearly wet their pants.

"You leave me alone, or I'm gonna bust your eardrums and then my husband is going to pound your faces in!" Darcy warned, her voice shaky and wobbly.

"You're FIVE, and UGLY, who would want to be married to you?" the teenaged girl demanded. She sneered down at the teddy bear clutched in Darcy's hands. "And your bear is seriously stupid. And ugly just like you."

Darcy was a brave soul. She'd been kidnapped by forces far more nefarious than teenaged assholes at a McDonald's. And if an AIM lackey were in front of her, she might have sassed back or stomped on their feet or fought back in anyway. But she didn't like teenagers. She'd never liked them. Being a foster kid and dealing with older, angry teenagers had not been a lot of fun for Darcy in her youth.

And they'd called her ugly, which was something she never took to well. Grown or small.

She felt her eyes well up with tears and her bottom lip trembled.

"My husband is the best guy in the whole planet, and he says I'm pretty as a picture," she whispered, looking down at her feet as tears welled up and fell down her reddened cheeks.

"This kid is fucking nuts," the boy laughed. "Who'd you marry, Tony Stark?"

"I married CAPTAIN AMERICA!" Darcy screeched back at them. "And he says I'm not ugly so there! AND YOU TWO ARE MEAN AND RUDE AND NEED BETTER PARENTS!"
The teenagers were bent over with laughter at Darcy, which only made the girl cry more. Meanwhile, thundering feet could be heard as Steve rushed to her. He immediately ran to stand in front of her before glaring up at the people who had made her cry.

"Oh my god, is this your HUSBAND?" the rude girl asked. "He's a little smaller than Captain America...and you know, he's not in jail."

"Get. Out." Steve growled at them.

"Free country, Captain America, thought you knew that," the teenaged boy smirked down at him.

"Tommy, Ashley! Get down here now, we're leaving!"

The man who had yelled it had sounded like it was their dad, but he was definitely terrified. The two teenagers looked through one of the little windows of the playhouse to see their Dad with a wet spot on the front of his jeans and a blonde lady casually sipping a milkshake as she stared up at them with a casual smile on her face.

"NOW!" the father yelled before abandoning his children and running off of the playground.

Steve immediately went for Darcy as the teenagers ran for the tree steps that had led them on the playground. He wrapped his crying wife up in his arms and tried to soothe her.

"I'm not ugly, right?" she sniffled.

"NO, NO!" Steve insisted. "You're the most beautiful girl in the whole world, I promise. I love you so much and you're just---you're so beautiful it makes my whole heart feel warm on the inside. You’re beautiful in your face and in your guts and your brain. All of you."

"Thanks," Darcy whispered, cuddling into his embrace and sighing heavily.

"Red, a little help?" Bucky called out and the sound of metal scraping against plastic could be heard.
"I may have underestimated my shoulder width."

Chapter End Notes

The awful teenagers in the slide at the McDonald's was a true story. They were thirteen and they wouldn't let my little sister down the slide.

...I may have made them cry with vicious words in retaliation. It's not my finest moment, but let's be honest, I'd probably do it again.

And I would pay good money for a snapshot of Bucky Barnes' butt sticking out of a windy spirally slide with Nat laughing at him while Steve and Darcy decide the best way to get him out is to slide down feet first into his face. Cause that's what happened. It almost worked too. But they had to do it a second time with Natasha tugging him out. They all are banned from McDonald's playland now cause grownups shouldn't try to play in it.

Thanks for reading!
Happy Monday, guys!

Are you ready to jump into the last arc of this? Big things coming before the end! And as always, more five year old adorable kids screeching at each other.

Warning: Fox News bashing somewhere in this chapter.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Pop-Pop on Call

"LEWIS! STOP TALKING OUTTA YOUR ASS! YOU CAN'T DO THAT! I WON'T LET YOU!"

Steve's shouted proclamation had exactly the opposite effect he had intended it to. He had hoped to make his beloved little wife understand that she was being a little silly, and the shout had been to try and drag her back down to Earth. But Darcy had only really heard the 'I WON'T LET YOU' part of it all and Steve should have known better, because if someone had said the exact same thing to him, he would have done exactly what she had done too.

And what she had done was hop down off of their cuddle spot on the couch, where he had been drawing pictures for her as she told fantastical stories to go along with said pictures. She turned neatly, her skirt that was really more of a fluffy purple tutu making a violent swishing noise. She put one balled up fist on her hip and pointed at him with a maniacal look in her eye.

"Steven Grant Rogers, I am a modern woman in the new century and I know that you know that you can't just tell me what to do or not to do!" Darcy said with quiet steel in her voice. She then reached out to the coffee table and picked up her Capri Sun, waiting for Steve to cover up the sketch book quickly before squirting it into his blushing face. "I WILL DO WHATEVER I WANT AND YOU CAN'T STOP ME, ROGERS!"

"Stop---blah---you're gonna---pffft," Steve sputtered into the stream of juice in his face. He sighed heavily and smartly just decided to let her get her aggression out before looking at her with apology. "Sweetheart, course I can't tell you what to do, but wif stuff like this, we gotta come to an agreement
or else our whole marriage ain't gonna work."

Darcy put down her empty Capri Sun and thought that over for a bit. Meanwhile, Steve eased his way off of the couch and went for a nearby tissue box to try and dry himself off. He would have to change his shirt, because he didn't want to wear a sticky shirt, but first he had to make sure that this disagreement between them would be settled.

In their seven days of wedded bliss, they had been having a lot of their normal little arguments, but now both of them were more devoted than ever to just getting out the quick anger and fixing what their disagreement was before cuddling and holding hands. Natasha had deemed it very healthy, and had even volunteered Nick Fury's phone number and a dedicated burner phone for them to use.

Every time they needed a dispute negotiator, they called up Pop-pop Fury and he fixed it up right quick. So far, said disputes consisted of: Steve using too much shampoo at bathtime, Darcy not really LIKING the Wizard of oz movie, whether pineapple should be on pizza or not, and whose farts sounded better over the phone (Bucky won that one, and the children regretted it immediately as he really did have toxic death gas coming out of his rear end).

Steve reached for the ever present phone and quickly dialed the only number programmed in and put the call on speaker.

"Pop-pop?" Steve questioned after the third ring.

"Rogers, I told you that I'm not YOUR grandfather," Fury sighed heavily into the phone.

"Hi Pop-pop!" Darcy said cheerily.

"Hello Lew-Lew," Fury answered back automatically, sounding a margin softer. He then cleared his throat and demanded, "What is it this time? Can't decide the best shape of pasta?"

"Corkscrew!" both children shouted in unison.

"I prefer angel hair, but whatever," Fury answered back.
"Disgusting!" Steve whispered to Darcy confidentially, and she eagerly nodded. She didn't want to eat hair of anything.

"I can hear you," Fury reminded them with as much patience as he could. Natasha had told him repeatedly that since this was HIS bright idea, then he could deal with the more annoying aspects of Steve and Darcy's childhood. He was officially the referee, and he had to be on call twenty-four hours, seven days a week.

It had only been seven days so far, and he was already begging for early retirement.

"We was making pictures of our future and we was naming the dog and the babies," Darcy looked to the picture book that Steve had started for them, smiling at the cartoon versions of herself and her husband, along with seven little people, girls and boys lined up next to them. Along with one dog. And one fat purple cat. And a Bucky bear for good measure, held by the littlest of the curly, fair haired babies. One third of the baby cartoons was fair haired, another third was brown haired, and the final third was some unholy amalgamation of blonde, brunette and redhead.

"You're a cat person, Lewis," Fury reminded her.

"I knew that!! We got Prissy Hissy already!" Steve said quickly, his tone defensive and petulant. His only quirk in this new life of wedded bliss was he immediately and always got incredibly upset when anyone else presumed to know his wife better than him.

Steve was very lucky that Jane Foster was currently off planet, because she wouldn't back down the way Natasha did with a fond hair ruffle. Jane Foster would cause tiny Steve Rogers to wet his pants in a competition of 'who knows Darcy Lewis better?'

"You gonna dye the cat purple and overfeed it?" Fury snorted, having been privy to a twenty minute multimedia presentation about Steve and Darcy's brilliant comic book creation of Prissy Hissy, the fat purple cat.

"Duh, of course," Darcy shrugged, as if that were the only reasonable thing TO be done to a cat.

"So what is the dispute here? Can't figure out to name the dog Fido or Spot?" Fury questioned, his tone amused and almost lilting. He would never admit it, and didn't really have to, but he really did enjoy Darcy and Steve's antics.
"Blarknork is too hard to say!" Steve insisted.

"Blarknewrk, and you'll learn to say it proper when you're growed up again!" Darcy advised him.

"Which will be in two blissful weeks," Fury sighed.

"What was that, Nicky?" Bucky suddenly popped into the room out of nowhere. "Were you expressing regret, Pop?"

"Barnes...stop calling me that," Fury advised. He quickly decided that he would rather entertain the children for hours than to admit to Bucky or Natasha that he'd been foolish or god forbid even wrong when he had had Steve and Darcy turned into five-year-olds. "Okay little Lewis-Rogers people, we can table the dog name dilemma until you both can pronounce all letter and vowel sounds. What else do you need assistance with?"

"Simba," Steve said flatly.

"---Simba is the name you want for the dog?" Fury prompted. He could HEAR Barnes laughing in the background, just barely.

"NO!" Steve gasped.

"He wants to name our third son that!" Darcy accused, her voice halfway to full blown screeching.

"Simba is a name for a brave and clever person!" Steve insisted. "YOU wanna name him Steve Junior Junior. That don't even make sense, Lewis!"

"You can't name our baby an African name if we ain't African, it's disrespectful to Africans!" Darcy started to get red in the face.

"IF THERE AIN'T A STEVE JUNIOR THERE CAN'T BE A JUNIOR JUNIOR, THAT'S PLAIN OLD MATH, LEWIS!" Steve roared back. "AND YOU GOT TO NAME YOUR
"Good luck there, Pop," Bucky said cheekily before heading right back into the kitchen to report to his precious Natalia what the yelling was about. Really, having Nick Fury take culpability for the crime of shrinking Darcy and Steve had been one of the best things to have ever happened. It freed up so much more time when the kids got into nonsensical screaming matches.

"Pop Pop?"

"Lew-Lew, it's three-fifteen in the morning."

"I know!" Darcy answered back cheerfully. "Rogerses tummy is grumblin' so loud in his sleep, cause he gave up second dessert time in order to spend extra time on the tire swing with me last night and now his tummy is missin' his second dessert."

"Lew-lew, just close your eyes and rest up," Fury advised. "If you want, I'll even sing you a lullaby."

Fury took a heavy sigh, and Darcy knew in that moment that Pop-pop Fury didn't know any lullabies.

"His stomach can't be that loud," Fury disputed.

"OH YEAH?!" Darcy hissed into the phone before turning and twisting on the bed. She obviously put the phone to Steve's stomach and suddenly the sound over the line was indeed a roaring, whining sound.

"Like a damned lion," Fury marveled.

"RIGHT?!" Darcy agreed with far too much excitement. "So I gotta idea to make rumbly lion
tummy go away, but I need your advising please?"

"Wait---what ideas?" Fury questioned warily.

"So I can get his mouth open and stick this funnel inside, and the oil in in the funnel will only make
the food slide down easier, right?" Darcy yammered quickly. "And then I thought Tash's breakfast
gray poopy slop would be best, but she never lets me see her make it, and Rogers always eats it all---"

"Lewis, don't put a motor oil funnel in his mouth!" Fury shouted. "Don't put that thing in his
mouth!"

"And I can't use a blender cause it's on the top shelf, and I can't wake up Daddy, cause he's making
his happy sounds in the bedroom with Tash, so I think I can slide this yoghurt down into his mouth
and then boom, no more rumbly tummy!" Darcy excitedly. "But I thought I'd call you to make sure
that it's a good idea, or would mayonaise be better?"

"For Christ's sake, Lew-Lew, stop trying to poison your husband."

"Hello Fury? This is your grandson-in-law, Steven Grant Rogers speaking," Steve announced on
the phone.

"Yes, I'm aware," Fury assured him. It had been twelve days since the wedding. Twelve days and
three hundred and seventy-two calls from two five year old's. He'd taken himself off of anything
resembling active duty and now devoted his entire day to making sure that the two five year old
urchins he had essentially created were never left wanting for an answer.

Any answer to any of their incessant questions.

Fury often wondered what Barnes and Romanoff were doing all of the times that the children were
preoccupied with him. And then he thought better of that question and decided that he didn't want to
know. Or think about it. Or envision it at all.
"What can I do for you, tiny Rogers?" Fury wondered, for nearly the two hundredth time. Most calls were with Darcy, or with Darcy AND Steve. Steve called by himself plenty though.

Mostly he wanted to know about new and interesting ways to get his sperm into Darcy's baby box without having any 'icky' bits touching. The former Director of SHIELD was quick to let him know about artificial insemination, although he highly doubted the adult version of Steve Rogers and Darcy Lewis would want it to be that way.

"So, I got a dangler and Darcy's got a flower," Steve began, his voice low and confidential.

"Right," Fury's voice was tight, although most of Steve's solo calls started with that line. "I'm aware."

"So---like right now, I'm taking a shit," Steve casually admitted. "And I was worried how the shit works when a fella's gotta flower instead of a dangler. Do I gotta get a special sort of toilet or paper for when Darcy and I live together alone as grownups?"

"Rogers, are you fucking kidding me?" Fury demanded.

"HEY, WATCH YOUR FUCKING MOUTH, FURY! AND DON'T TRY TO FROW WATER ON MY CURIOSITY. DARCY SAID YOU WASN'T ALLOWED CAUSE YOU WAS NAUGHTY!" Steve quickly barked out.

"You live together with Darcy right now and you don't have to do anything special, toilet wise in regards to taking shit and her flower," Fury reminded him, sounding only a little maniacal in doing so.

"I don't watch her take her shits, Fury!" Steve disputed, sounding very shocked and offended. He paused and there were two successive audible plopping sounds of something hitting the toilet water. "She's a lady and that's private!"

"And they're smelly," Fury finished for him. Steve had called him five times in the past twelve days because he was concerned that Darcy's number two bathroom activities were unnaturally smelly.

"Oh, we figured that out. She wasn't using the V I Poo," Steve acknowledged. "I tried pooping
once without it and it was way smellier than Darcy's."

"Fantastic," Fury sighed. "Rogers, I promise, you won't have to do anything special for Lewis when you're grown up in the bathroom."

"OH! Good," Steve's smile could be heard over the phone.

"Except put the toilet seat down when you're finished. It's the only thing ladies ask of us, really," Fury said truthfully.

"What kind of asshole you think I am?" Steve scoffed, clearly upset at the suggestion that he WOULDN'T put the seat down. "Right now we got a special toilet seat anyway, cause our butts are way smaller than they normally are. And Tony said he'd build us one that automatically came down as a wedding present!"

"Don't---just don't let him do that."

"Pop-Pop!"

"What is it?" Fury jumped up out of his seat, pulling down the nearest holoscreen, looking at the surveillance reports from the safe house.

Everything was fine. But Darcy Lewis was currently on the phone, sobbing and sounding distressed. In seventeen days, she had not called sounding so distressed. Annoyed, yes. Angry, absolutely. Playful and silly, those were his favorites. But distressed, crying and clearly anxious? Absolutely not.

"People are mean!" Darcy answered.

"Where's Nat? Barnes?" Fury asked, seeing that their heat signatures showed that the other three occupants in the safe house were all in the kitchen. Darcy was in the living room alone. "Was
"Rogers mean to you?"

"HELL NO!" Darcy quietly wailed, ever aware that three sets of super ears could easily eavesdrop if she got above a whisper. "YOU STUPID OR SOMETHIN', POP-POP?!?"

"What is it? Who is being mean?" Fury asked, seeing no other threat anywhere on his screen.

"The people on the tv is being so mean. They are breaking my heart," Darcy whimpered. After a long stay in the safe house, the little had finally gotten cable a few days ago. If anything it increased the amount of times Darcy and Steve would call the former Director of SHIELD.

"Lew-Lew, I told you not to watch the mean cooking shows. I told that to you when you were a grown up," Fury sighed.

"NO, I wanted to watch nickelodeon and hit channel fifty-seven cause that is nickelodeon but it's not and they is saying such mean things about my husband," Darcy hissed. "I want to bash them, and then get Thor to bash them and then get Hulk to bash them!"

"No bashing," Fury ordered straining to hear what she was listening to on the television. It sounded like a twenty-four hour news network. And that made perfect sense, as most of those news networks devoted at least eight of their hours of airtime to the Avengers. Or in Steve's case, the FORMER Avengers.

"I am going to write a very angry letter!" Darcy insisted.

"Okay, you do that, call up Friday and dictate a letter, alright kid?" Fury smiled. "I'll make sure it gets there."

"Okay Pop-pop, thank you and I love you and bye."

Darcy hung up the phone and quickly jammed her fingers on the old flip phone (Nat refused to give her access to smartphones that she could break).
"Hi Mrs. Lewis-Rogers, what can I do for you?" Tony Stark's AI sounded like a nice teacher to Darcy. But from a different country. Steve said that Friday sounded like his ma. Either way, she was nice, and she always gave Darcy what she wanted.

Darcy didn't have to hack Stark technology anymore. She just asked it to do what she wanted, and it did it. Friday was SO much better than JARVIS.

"I need to talk to Fox News, right now, there's a mean guy on the television and he needs to shut his shitty face up!" Darcy whispered quickly. "Please. And thank you."

"Sure thing, you'll be talking to Fox News in five---four---three---two---"

"Up after the commercial break, we're going to the White House live, where a press conference is about to begin about the ridiculous, baseless accusations that the President has a secret account on Daily Stormer---and nevermind, he just tweeted that he did, and that he also has a Richard Spencer body pillow. Uh---"

"Hello? Is this Fox News?"

The reporter on air looked a little frozen, her overly whitened smile frozen in place as she looked around suspiciously. They didn't normally TAKE phone calls. Especially not from little girls that were sniffing.

"Uhm, can I help you?" the reporter asked.

"YES, You can help me by taking a big fat fucking leap off a big fat fucking building lady. HOW DARE YOU?! My Daddy is a good man, and my husband would never hurt people on purpose. YOU ARE MEAN! AND LIARS. AND YOU'RE BREAKING MY HEART INTO PIECES WITH IT!"

"Uhhh-----"
"AND YOUR TEETH ARE SO WEIRD!! It makes me so angry!"

"Did you---did you mean the segment on Bucky Barnes and Steve Rogers, fugitives from the law?"

"TAKE IT BACK!"

"Young lady, which man is your ...Daddy?"

"The greatest Daddy in the whole wide world, Bucky Barnes."

"And your husband would be---"

"Steve Rogers and he's the best husband in the whole world---Hey, Steve--what are you---"

"Darcy, no!"

The call disconnected and the reporter looked up at the camera, as the producer began throwing new graphics up on the screen about Steve Rogers...child bride...illegitimate super soldier love children.

In less than five minutes, the name Darcy Lewis was scrolling across the breaking news bar.

Chapter End Notes

....uh oh.

Buckle up Buttercups! We're in for some fun!

(Gentle reminder, I don't care for concrit. Any grammatical/logistical/taste errors, you will just have to accept my sweet begging for forgiveness).
Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween Eve!

So the fantastic morrib made manips after the last chapter...
I think she NAILED IT. Thank you morrib!!! Anytime you want to do any more phone with photoshop, you go NUTS, I'm 10000% gonna love it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Twenty-Six: Fight or Flight

Pepper Potts was having quite the morning. She had woken up and had one appointment on the books that had been made by one, Natalie Rushman, and had been scheduled to take up eight hours
of her day. Pepper had hoped in vain that the meeting was Natasha and Bucky bringing the adorable children by for the day. There wasn't a lot of time left before Darcy and Steve were to magically grow up to their normal forms, and while Pepper never wanted to personally raise children of her own creation, that didn't mean that she didn't actually like children.

She loved children. And she loved spoiling children, as was evidenced by the lavish wedding she had thrown for them and the fact that she couldn't keep Darcy away from the coffee for half of the day. She'd actually been asking Tony if they shouldn't go back to the safehouse to visit, or send the jet to pick up the unconventional family to bring them to New York before they grew.

Tony resigned himself to knowing that while his fiancee was brilliant and brutally capable in nearly all things, tiny tots were her weak point and made her a little irrational.

But Pepper's eight hour meeting hadn't been a lovely meeting with the children (one that she had hoped to spend spoiling them rotten by renting out an entire local Toys R' Us store and letting them go bananas). Her assistant had ushered in four people she had not planned on seeing again so soon.

Scott Lang and his band of merry Wombats had been in her office now for six hours, and they had been surprisingly good at meticulously planning out the eight months that would lead up to her wedding. She'd only had to discourage Luis from using his own 'special' vendors for exotic flowers a few times. Dave had been content when she told him he could MC all of the main events at the wedding. Scott had only wanted to make sure that he had been legitimately invited and that he would have maximum facetime with Reverend Assface. And Kurt had only minimally mocked the groom to be, so Pepper was counting the entire event as a success and made a mental note to send Natasha a thank you note for loaning out her secret weapon event planners.

After a very nice lunch of the finest and greasiest shop pizza that could be delivered, they settled back in to start planning out the strategic cake tastings that would have to happen for the next two months, the television flickered off of the ambient orchestral music that Luis had insisted on and instead turned on Fox News.

"Friday, not now, tell Rhodey I don't care what some idiot has said that has incensed him," Pepper sighed.

"Oh shit, son, that is like---the very opposite of good news," Luis gasped pointing at the television. Some blowhard was rapidly speaking and rapidly becoming red in the face as a graphic of Steve Rogers next to a stock photo of a tiny child bride displayed on the screen. The news scroll at the bottom of the screen was filled with accusations against Steve taking a child bride and the Winter Soldier being used in a breeding program.
'This just in, we've obtained the actual marriage license with the name Steven Grant Rogers and Darcy Grace Lewis---just a moment, breaking in---'

"Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit," Scott muttered repeatedly, immediately coming to a stand and looking around in the way all the superheroes in Pepper's life so often did. Usually when the klaxons began ringing, they all become jumpy, ready to suit up and join the fray. Scott looked that way now, but also unsure about what to actually do.

'We have the previously deleted Facebook profile of Darcy Grace Lewis, the last picture being one of the supposed Prince of Asgard, Thor. She is twenty-seven years of age if this is to be believed---'

"We need to do something," Dave furrowed his brow as the correspondents on the screen began shouting at each other that the little girl who had called in and claimed to be Steve Rogers' wife and Bucky Barnes' daughter could be the original Darcy Grace Lewis' daughter due to a super soldier breeding program.

News was coming in faster than the overly blonde news anchor could announce it, and Pepper moved away from the comfortable couches she and her wedding planners had been sitting at and went to her desk, pulling down holoscreens and bringing up her entire media department.

'Could THIS be Bucky Barnes? A picture taken a few weeks ago at a local McDonald's shows someone resembling the Winter Soldier with two children and an unidentified blonde woman.'

"Friday, just---mute Fox and bring up the other 24 hours news channels," Pepper ordered. She pointed a finger at all three of the Wombats and Scott as well. "Wedding plans on hold, you are all now employees of my damage control department. We control the narrative here and---"

"MSNBC has a theory and it's---it's pretty much the truth," Scott reported as he watched that screen while the other Wombats covered the other screens. "They think it's shrink rays from Tony Stark."

"Good---good, we can work with that," Pepper nodded.

"Problem, this picture kind of gives away their location," Luis sighed. "If they were turned into kids to get away from bad guys---don't the bad guys kind of know that they're little now? And that they're small and shit?"
"Right---I'm sure Natasha has that under control, we work at making sure we control what else gets out so they can't paint Steve as a CHILD MOLESTER," Pepper looked nauseous at that. "Ideas?"

"Shrink rays---Stark's fault---he's working on it," Scott offered.

"You could say it was a play wedding but a clerical error led to the paperwork filed?" Dave shrugged.

"They were stopping in Wisconsin on a road trip," Luis clapped his hands together. "And they're---somewhere else now? Like some place you guys could use as a trap?"

"I'm sure the idiot Stark man has an island of some sorts that would work for a trap," Kurt nodded, only lingering a little to wrinkle his nose at the idea of going to Stark for anything."

"---I---yes, that'd. Yeah," Pepper agreed, her fingers flying on the holoscreen to get her orders out. She paused and looked at the men assembled in front of her and a small smile pulled at the corners of her lips. "Do you guys want a job?"

"I didn't mean to be bad," Darcy whispered, clutching her Bucky bear to her chest as she watched the adults speaking from across the room. Steve had tackled her to the couch and put his hands over her mouth while Bucky quickly plucked the phone out of her hands and crushed it instantaneously.

Steve had taken one look at the screen, reading the words as fast as his much younger eyes could before he took off into the house running. Meanwhile Bucky had thrown the demolished phone away from them and immediately stalked towards Natasha, who had put the television on mute. That had not stopped Darcy from trying to read the television's news as best as she could, but the ticker on the bottom was going too fast.

She recognized her name though.

And she realized that they were now not only insulting Steve, they were now insulting Bucky. And accusing them of naughty things. And she had made things SO much worse when she had only wanted to let everyone know just how good Steve and her Daddy were.
She began softly crying, her chin buried as far into Bucky bear's head as she could go as she watched the words and then saw her grownup picture thrown on the screen.

"I didn't mean to be bad," Darcy repeated.

She NEVER really meant to be bad or naughty or careless. She never meant to get into trouble. Her nana used to tell her that trouble was a friend of hers and would follow her and the only thing she could do was shake its hand and try to wave it goodbye before dinner time. But now she'd REALLY done it. Steve couldn't stand to look at her and had run off. Natasha's entire body was a rigid line as she talked with Bucky.

And the whole world was going to think even more awful things about Steve and Bucky now and it was all Darcy's fault.

"Stay or go," Natasha whispered to Bucky, trying to center him as he stared at the news screen as well, watching their carefully constructed safe space shatter.

The picture from McDonald's came up on the news, of them in the background of another group's shot was blown up and enhanced on the screen, showing him hugging a laughing and smiling Darcy and Steve to his body, the look on his face was blissful and foreign. The correspondents were speculating now about Steve being young too, and he knew without a doubt they weren't safe. Not where they were and not on the run.

The only missions that he had assigned himself in the last chunk of time had been to keep Darcy and Steve safe and appreciate every moment he got to spend with Natalia in this blissful bit of serenity they had found for themselves. And now he knew, that whatever forces the nearly decimated Hydra could muster, they would and they would be coming for them. Not only Hydra, of course, but Bucky KNEW what the end goal would be for Hydra. He'd been their unwilling guinea pig for decades, after all. If Hydra got their hands on a young, impressionable serumed Steve Rogers and also had their hands on the thing he loved most in the world...

Bucky's right fist went through the wall before he could stop himself and before he could even extract it from the plaster, Darcy began to weep openly on the couch. Natasha gave Bucky a look, full of both understanding and reassurance before moving quickly to Darcy, who was now choking on half formed sobs, her breath coming in hitches.

"Darcy, my sweet girl, it will be alright," Natasha reassured her, sitting down and taking her limp
and despondent form into her arms.

"N-no it won't and it's cause I'm so dumb!" Darcy managed to gasp out around sobs and deep, harsh gasps for breath. "I didn't mean to, I didn't, I just wanted 'em to know how awful they were and how g-good Daddy and Rogers are. It ain't fair they get to say such mean things! But I didn't do it right cause I never think right before doing shit and I'm so dumb and so sorry."

"You are NOT dumb." Natasha insisted, her one hand running passes up and down the child's back while the other rested in wild brown curls. "You feel things with your whole heart, my sweet girl. You love with your whole heart and it's a beautiful thing. And there are times you do jump feet first into things---"

"I'm stupid and worthless and dumb," Darcy moaned out on a sob.

"You are brave and good and kind," Natasha disputed. "And don't worry, everything will be made right, I promise. I promise you, Darcy. Everything will be made right."

"I'm sorry," Darcy whispered.

"It will be okay," Bucky added his reassurances. "But you have to be brave now, and do exactly what Natalia or I say, understand?"

Darcy tensed and cringed in Natasha's arms and the older woman looked up at Bucky in concern at her reaction.

"Okay."

The reply was muffled and soft and didn't sound like the little girl who Bucky had come to love so much. Before he could clarify any further, thundering footsteps shook the foundation of the house as Steve came running back into the room, his hands full of very many things. One of the things were two child sized backpacks that had been gifted to them by the Bartons, one of them covered in bright and colorful art of the Disney Princesses and the other one plastered with characters from How to Tame Your Dragon. Steve's hands also held quite a lot of other things: sketchbooks, a stereo dock, a change of clothing for Bucky bear, pajamas for both he and Darcy, a bunch of the snacks that had been in their personal playroom fridge, and the bulkiest of all the items, a crossbow, the toilet perfume the children (and Bucky) were obsessed with, a bunch of brightly colored hair elastics, two electric stun batons, and one gigantic reinforced kevlar blanket.
Natasha placed Darcy on the couch with a kiss to her forehead before staring down at Steve, wondering what on Earth he thought he could do with a container of bubble bath if they were to go on the run, but decided against trying to argue with him. He was so earnest and seemed proud at his quick preparation and far be it from her to deny him his moment of accomplishment.

"Okay, get under this, Lewis," Steve advised, tossing the rest of the items in his arms down on the ground before shaking out the kevlar blanket and putting it over Darcy. He then put the stun batons in the Dragon duffle backpack along with Darcy's pjs and Bucky bear's change of clothing. The snacks and the crossbow went into the Disney Princess bag (which he had claimed as his own, since he thought princesses were very very interesting) and he looked around the living room. "What else do you want, Sweetheart, what snacks should I pack?"

"I'm okay," Darcy whispered from underneath the blanket.

"Are you cryin'?" Steve sounded panicked and climbed up on the couch trying to find the end of the blanket to crawl underneath with her. He managed to find an edge and wasted no time in diving under, one lump under the kevlar blanket becoming two.

At the first sounds of kissed cheeks, Natasha smiled and turned to Bucky, not surprised to find him already gone to make his own preparations before they would hit the road. She turned to the television while Steve murmured sweet reassurances to Darcy under the blanket as she cried. Natasha's phone buzzed and she looked down to see messages from Fury and then another from Pepper moments before a new source was revealed on the television as both formidable allies quickly tried to control the information.

Steven Rogers and Darcy Lewis were victims of a rogue science experiment, and were now five year old children. The wedding had been pretend, but a clerical error had led to the official license being filed. They were now in a safe house in the Caribbean enjoying a pretend honeymoon and waiting until Stark Industries could come up with a solution to turn them back into their original form.

The commentators on the news network immediately began trying to tear down the words and Natasha turned the television off completely.

She knew getting cable had been a big mistake.
"Gassed up, ready to go, Cap," Sam followed Sharon out of the RV, tossing the keys at Bucky's head with only a minimal amount of force.

"Yes, but are there enough Capri Suns?" Steve looked up at Sam and Sharon skeptically.

"As many as we could fit in the fridge," Sharon smirked down at the small boy she had once imagined would be the love of her life.

"Well what about the other stuff that's gotta go in the fridge? Did you get the cheese?" Steve worried.

"Rogers, we got everything on the list that was necessary," Sharon assured him, fighting between the urge to ruffle his hair and box his ears.

Steve finally nodded and felt the kevlar blanket covered person behind him bump into his back a little. He spun around and managed to adjust the bullet proof blankie so that Darcy could see. He immediately regretted it as Darcy stared up at Sharon Carter with the hint of suspicion.

"Hey," Sharon waved. "Good to see you, Lewis. Nice to see you safe and not tied up in a torture room."

"Thirteen," Darcy nodded. Darcy liked Sharon usually. But right now she was blonde and pretty and staring down at Steve with a smirk on her face. It didn't take much for the five year old's little green monster to come out to play. This was probably more than enough to get her jealousy going.

"Last time I saw you was Tokyo, right?" Sharon squinted her eyes in remembrance before snorting with laughter. "No one still knows how you managed to accidentally start a gang war."

Darcy pouted at that and looked around warily, seeing that Bucky had heard as he came off of the big RV that they would be using until it was safe enough to stop. The man she had been calling Daddy for weeks wasn't smiling with his mouth, but his eyes sparkled at little and he came close to Steve and Darcy to grab their bags. Darcy looked down at the ground and pulled the kevlar blanket up again to make her a ghost.
Bucky took her her hiding in stride and grabbed the bags before turning and giving Natasha a single curious look. The woman was wearing her blonde wig again and was handing the keys to their pickup to Sharon.

"You two going to be okay?" Natasha questioned.

"Yeah, I mean, we're going to have robokids. Seems fun," Sharon laughed as she reached for Sam's hand.

Darcy peeked out from around her blanket and made a cute little happy squeaking sound. Natasha nodded and gave the duo a small smile. Sam and Sharon would be taking the pickup that she and Bucky had been driving for weeks. The windows were now tinted with nanoveils to make it look like Bucky was driving. And there were two small 'children' in the car that Tony had sent to Wisconsin express, which were two slightly compacted Iron Man drones.

If anyone came after the pickup in hopes of getting their hands on small, tiny, five-year-old Steve Rogers, they were in for a surprise.

The large RV vehicle they were to take off in was currently being worked on by a small army of miniscule robotic Stark drones. Cloaking technology, bulletproof coating, and to Bucky's great delight, an awful lot of firepower was getting built into their new home on wheels.

They seemed to be almost done, as most of the drones were taking off into the sky to return to wherever Tony kept the things stashed. Some of the small robotics were embedding themselves into parts of the large vehicle, much to Bucky's fascination as he watched the robots seamlessly become part of the RV.

"Stay safe, Cap," Sam encouraged before letting out an explosive breath of air as Steve launched himself at his legs, a small hard head hitting his hip and forcing the breath out of him. "Cap, I need--circulation in my legs, man."

"Thanks, Sam," Steve said. He pulled away and looked at Sharon, before offering a hand for her to shake. "Thanks, Sharon."

"No problem little guy," Sharon assured him softly. "Just following in well tred Carter footsteps of trying to save your bacon."

"You guys have any idea where you're heading?" Sam asked Natasha as Bucky started the RV up and Steve began leading a blind, blanket covered Darcy up the small set of stairs.

Natasha honestly had no idea. She knew that James was in a heightened state of worry and panic, absolutely terrified that something would happen to the three people he now considered his family. Darcy was having some sort of existential crisis about what she’d done and was typically bottling it up for a later explosion. And Steve was being so adorably prepared that it just might drive her up a wall within the next hour.

And Natasha...she just wanted what she had always wanted. Safety and happiness were the only goals she ever had for people she cared about. People that she loved. People that were her family now.

"Somewhere safe."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, we're getting closer to the end now. It's in sight!

Have a great Halloween!!!
Shitty Day

Chapter Notes

Happy Monday! Here we are again.

The fanfiction equivalent to a jumpscare in the first scene, be warned. Remember I would NEVER hurt my precious babies (aka all of the characters in this story not just the actual babies).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Shitty Day

The sound of a child crying tore through the chilly air. Northwestern springtime was a fickle thing, and the air was cold and damp as an elite task force of eight Hydra approached the small shed where the sound of the crying was coming from.

"Please--please don't hurt me!"

The little child was already calling out before the Hydra forces could get to her. She was terrified, and her voice warbled in the air. They'd tracked the 'family' for a week, finally finding them in Montana. The bunker that the Widow and the Soldier had taken the children to was burning to the ground, a pyre made in Hydra's honor. The Soldier and his Red Room whore were still inside, but their burnt remains could be dealt with later.

The children were the only thing that mattered. The two of them had flown into the night away from the burning bunker, their escape had been unnaturally fast, but they were still just children.

Malleable, innocent, impressionable children. One of them with Erskine's most perfect serum running through his veins. The perfect serum which meant he would heal from the gunshot wound that one of the snipers had taken in order to slow them down. The two children were now huddled together in a dilapidated shed, and the female child was crying and sniffling and pathetically begging to be left alone.

The Hydra team leader held up a fist before bringing it down, and all eight team members advanced
on the shed at once, stun batons and tranquilizer darts loaded into guns. The door was kicked in and two bright blue circles of light stared back at them unblinking.

"Please, please, don't hurt us," the voice, which had sounded like a little girl from a distance, sounded a lot more like a man's voice imitating a girl's voice, and it was distorted through robotics. "Oh no, stinky Hydra shitheads, whatever will we do robot Steve?"

"I'm not playing along with that," a deeper voice came from the other robot, bright blue lit eyes appearing next to the other one.

"Aww, come on Rhodes, this is fun, like an awesome video game," the first robot whined.

"Tony, they're going to retreat," Rhodes warned, before the small drone robot, because that's what they were, clearly as more light was brought up in the small shed.

Two small robots, child sized, but clearly members of the Iron Legion as they held up four hands, repulsors glowing blue in warning as the whining, high pitched sound coming from the potentially fatal energy blasts began to screech higher.

"Retreat!" the commander barked out.

"Naaaaah," came the response from outside the shed.

The sniper turned, ready to let loose, when a capable fist met his face, causing him to crumple. Agent Thirteen's punch was unmistakeable, she'd done plenty of punching of the Hydra goons that had had the misfortune of being a SHIELD strike team. The assault from her and the Falcon from behind and the two Iron Legion from the front was overwhelming, fierce and quick.

"Boring," Rhodes sighed. "I'm handing the remote back to Vision. Call me when there's a boss battle."

"Fury, we need a cleanup crew in Montana, it's Hydra," Sharon reported.
"We'll get there when we get there, Carter," Fury reported back over the comms. "Kind of busy with what the Bartons have managed to bait out and destroy in Disney World."

"They only did that for the free vacay, honestly," Tony's voice came out of the little robot meant to appear like Darcy. "Those little Bartons are opportunists."

"How many Hydra are left now?" Sam began tying up the prisoners himself, knowing that even Coulson's team was overtaxed with cleanup of dastardly organizations that were trying to obtain one Steven Grant Rogers, aged five. It had been a very exciting and busy week, no matter what Rhodey said about boredom.

And Sam was not so obtuse to not realize that he REALLY enjoyed watching Sharon do her thing. It was a really impressive thing.

"That's the last official Hydra cell," Fury announced. "If they come again, it's a rogue group."

"Oh, hey, Rhodey. Rogue groups are always more fun!" Tony stated with excitement. "And I want to work on something super creepy where I sing nursery rhymes at bad guys. What's creepier? Itsy Bitsy Spider or Mary Had a Little Lamb?"

Hiding in plain sight was definitely really a thing. It had never, ever been Bucky's favorite thing. It had been the thing that Natasha excelled at, above all things. It was ironic, really, because for Bucky, Natasha was the only thing he wanted to look at in a room full of thousands of people. He saw her, always. She was sparkling, blazing fire in the darkness and he would always be the stupid moth that flew straight for her warmth.

But everyone else's eyes seemed to glaze over the truly stunning Black Widow, when she wanted them to. Somehow, she blended and could walk through an Avenger's fan event unnoticed if she should so choose. Bucky managed to do nearly the same, although he always could see when someone took a lingering look on his backside as he walked away (He was one hundred years old, not dead).

If it had just been Bucky and Natasha, they could have hidden forever together. Even with Steve, they might have managed it for a little while at least. Steve was just fine with keeping his ball cap
pulled low and listening to whatever Natasha told him to do. On his own.

But for the last week they were not just a duo or a trio. They were a quartet. A family of four. And their fourth family member was a bright neon sign stuffed inside an adorable five-year-old girl. Darcy’s incandescence, which Bucky had not been witness to directly in the last week, was legendary and infectious. In Steve’s case it was very infectious.

They’d been recognized three times and had to make a quick, stealthy getaway in their getaway RV. The first time had been at their first stop to fill up on the gas. Darcy had gotten a glimpse of a newspaper on the stand and had stomped her feet in anger and let out an impressive string of nonsensical, angry cursing. Steve’s reaction had been to jump away from the candy shelf he had been perusing, throwing a hissing mad Darcy over his shoulder and sprinting back to the RV that Bucky had been trying to put gas in.

The second time was when they were at a stop light. Steve had been so concerned that Darcy was upset and forlorn (and to be honest, Bucky was too), that Steve had decided that in order to cheer her up they should have a song and dance party. They’d been in the middle of a verse of a song Bucky didn’t know, but could appreciate, called ‘Baby Got Back’, when the passenger in the car next to their RV pointed at them, screamed in absolute delight and then fumbled for their phone.

Bucky had managed to drive off and evade them before they could ask for an autograph.

And the now this last time. They had been at a campsite they were hoping to stay at for one full day, giving the car a rest and the adults a chance to plan rather than simply react and run. They had been managing driving all through the day except for stops for gas, following a meandering route back and forth that was planned obsessively by Nick Fury in the skies above, but for as high tech as the recreational vehicle was, it’s toilet and attached septic system could only hold so much. So they stopped at the campsite that was not very busy at all for it being so early in the season, and Bucky donned a special set of sunglasses that allowed Tony to take a look at what he was doing and direct him on how to empty the tank.

To his credit, Tony only allowed himself the indulgence of causing one moment of real fear on Bucky’s part, by having the toxic sludge get just a little close to spraying all over him. It said quite a lot about how well Tony and Bucky would be able to work together in the future, for sure.

Steve had been adamant that he be able to watch, because he wanted to make sure all the poop went away and never came back. He and Darcy had outfitted themselves in two layers of clothes that covered every inch of their skin, as well as the kevlar blanket around their shoulders. Natasha had fashioned ‘gas masks’ out of sunglasses, kitchen towels and bungee cords, so standing together under the blanket, the children were camouflaged well enough as they watched Bucky follow Tony’s secret direction through the comm unit in his ear.
"This is the most grossest thing I've ever seen!" Darcy whispered to Steve with the most excitement and glee she had had in days. “There is going to be SO MUCH shit!”

Steve had been very concerned that ever since they started their life on the run, his perfect, loving little wife had not quite been herself. She let glimpses come through from time to time, but truly she was a more subdued, gray version of the vivacious, irrepressible little lady he had married. Especially around Bucky. It tore at Steve's heart and he constantly reminded her that she wasn't allowed to bottle things up if he wasn't.

He'd stopped pestering her about it when she broke down in silent tears one night under the blankets of the little cot they shared on the RV. Instead he'd held onto her tight and whispered small reassurances about how much he loved her.

"That's all our poop!" Darcy exclaimed as Bucky flicked a switch and jumped back away from the spritz of regular water that Tony had managed to magic out of the system from so far away.

"It might take DAYS to empty out," Steve wagered, shaking his head in agreement with himself. "We shit a lot."

"I don't shit a lot, I shit a normal amount," Darcy disagreed. "You shit huge logs from the Redwood forests!"

They'd driven through there a few days ago, and were now on their way back across the United States towards the East Coast. While it wasn't the most interactive of road trips, they had managed to see quite a bit from the safety of the reinforced RV. And they had also managed to eat quite a bit of different food from all over the country, with Natasha making daily trips to various eateries and bringing back catering trays in order to feed everyone.

And Darcy hadn't once complained about not liking something. It was yet another thing that had changed about her since the disaster with Fox News.

"I thought this would be more exciting," Steve sighed in disappointment as the pumps went about their boring business moving waste from one receptacle into another.

"Nothing wrong with the mundane," Bucky assured him, stepping back and taking a seat atop a
picnic table. The camp grounds were empty except for them and another RV about fifty yards away. Natasha had run out to replenish their food stores, leaving Bucky alone to handle a potentially disastrous poop incident. "Thanks, Stark. I think I got it now."

He pulled off his glasses and placed them on the table before smiling down at the children in their protective get up.

"I'm hot," Steve complained. He shrugged the blanket off his shoulders and turned to wrap Darcy up more securely. He looked ridiculous in his mask, but left it on, just in case. "I'm gonna go take off the top layer of clothes and get some juices for us, sweetheart."

"Okay," Darcy was suddenly quiet, any joy that the shit moving had induced in her now gone.

Bucky watched her, her little sunglasses fogging up a bit with every breath. She stood still where Steve left her, swaying only slightly every once in awhile, silent as a church mouse.

Bucky really missed hearing her infectious giggles and ringing laughter.

"Princess Sweetpea?" Bucky asked quietly. Her response was a half muffled little whimper. "Sweetpea, you gotta tell me what I did wrong. I know this is scary, but I only want you safe and happy and loved. Do you understand that?"

Kevlar covered shoulders went up and down in a shrug.

"Princess, talk to me, please," Bucky entreated, his whole face soft with pleading and earnestness. He rose from the picnic table and walked towards her slowly before kneeling in front of her, seeing tears streaming out of her eyes behind her sunglass lenses. He whispered so only she could hear, "Darcy, please just tell me what's got you so sad?"

"I was bad."

Bucky furrowed his brow at the small, whispered declaration. He tried to think of the last time the girl had been naughty. She'd not been screeching at Steve. She'd not been sassing Natasha. And she'd not been so much as making a peep about eating something strange and new. The last time she'd even been remotely naughty had been just before she called Fox News up and spilled all the
beans. And spilling the beans hadn't been the naughty part.

"Do you mean when you flushed a corn dog down the toilet at home?" Bucky questioned.

"NO!" Darcy shook her head, the blanket rustling with the movement. "Well---yeah, that was bad, too I guess. But it LOOKED like shit, so it should have been flushed like shit."

Bucky smirked a little at that, the little spark of what Darcy had been a week ago. He picked her clear up and off her feet, leaving the blanket behind and carried her to the picnic table. He kept her cuddled close as he pulled her sunglasses and makeshift mask off, using the kitchen towel to mop up the tears on her cheeks.

"Thanks, Daddy," she whispered softly.

Bucky felt something in his heart shift back to right at hearing her call him that.

"What did you do that was so bad that you don't talk to me anymore, Princess Sweetpea?" Bucky questioned.

"I called the bitch-heads at the news and yelled at them," Darcy whispered forlornly. "And I made you so mad you punched a wall, and I made us have to run, and you and Tash can't sleep in a bed together no more, which means you can't bed wrestle and share sweet sweet kisses all over your faces and I ruined everything, cause that's what I always do!"

"No, Darcy, no," Bucky said insistently, hugging her swift and fierce before pulling away and giving her an unwavering, steely, loving look right in her eyes. "You shouldn't have been able to call a news station and talk right to them. Stark said that it was some programming in Friday that you did as a grown up and you were taking advantage of now."

"Friday is my bad ass bitch, I remember that," Darcy shrugged. "She's better'n stinky butt Jarvis."

"Well, we should have all known, as the grownups, that we needed to turn those parts of Friday off," Bucky assured her. "We should have done it before you planned a real wedding to Steve, and had Friday file the paperwork."
"But then I wouldn't be Steve's wife and that'd be a REAL tragedy, Daddy!" Darcy's voice rose slightly in her panic. "He's gotta love me air conditionally or else!"

"He will, or else," Bucky nodded in eager agreement. "But Princess, me and Natalia? We love you unconditionally too."

Darcy blinked in confusion at that.

"I don't gotta be good to be loved and have a Mommy and Daddy?" she asked, not really understanding the concept.

"Well, we would prefer you to be well behaved, but we would really like it much more if our Darcy would be OUR Darcy," Bucky's lips pulled up at one side. "Because OUR Darcy is good. She's kind and good and funny and smart. And yes, sometimes she yells and sometimes she's a foul mouthed little bossy thing, but that makes me love her even more. And in a couple of days when she wakes up to be a few inches taller than she is now, I'm still gonna love her. You know why?"

"Why?" Darcy's smile was very small, but genuine as Bucky wiped at her tears again.

"She's the most perfect little lady in the whole world, the perfect matching piece to my best pal," Bucky shrugged. "And she'd throw away any chance she had at safety to protect people she cares about. And she's clever and smart and pretty as a picture. You're my Princess Sweetpea. Nothing you could do could make me mad enough to not love you, kid. You're as good as my kid. Me and Natalia's."

"You and Talia can adopt me for real, cause I ain't got real parents, remember?" Darcy said with excitement, squirming so that she was out of Bucky's lap and standing on the bench to look him in the eye. She reached for his high tech sunglasses and put them on her face. "TONY, lemme talk at Friday, I need a lawyer to get adopted!"

"Darcy, no," Bucky laughed, pulling the overly large sunglasses from her face. "Cancel that, Stark. Thanks."

"NO TAKE BACKSIES!" Darcy pointed at Bucky with as much ornery threat she could put in one little finger.
"Never," Bucky assured her, pulling her to sit back in his lap again and cuddle her close. "No matter how weird it's going to look in the family portrait with my son-in-law."

"What'd I miss?" Steve demanded, jumping out of the RV. "Did the shit go everywhere?"

"I'd a screamed for you if the shit went everywhere!" Darcy gasped audibly. "WHAT KINDA WIFE DO YOU THINK I AM YOU GOOF-FART?!!"

Bucky jumped up from the table immediately at Darcy's accidental shriek and tossed the girl to Steve. Just in time too, as the family fifty yards away stopped their barbecuing and looked over at the commotion.

"Stevie, start the engine while I get this unplugged," Bucky ordered, fighting a smirk as Darcy couldn't help the gleeful giggles getting thrown fifteen feet away had inspired.

"What about Na---Momma?" Steve asked, jostling Darcy in his arms to get a better grip on her.

"We'll grab her down at the concession stand," Bucky waved him off before picking up the glasses. "Stark? How do I turn this shit---with the shit off?"

Chapter End Notes

Three more chapters, people!! WHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!!!!

Thanks for reading you guys are the bomb dot com.
"I'm itchy."

Silence greeted the annoyed whine and Steve couldn't help but feel personally attacked by the silence. He shimmied in his spot in front of the cot as Bucky handed him the little old man pajamas that Darcy loved because they were soft and always smelled like peppermints. She usually stopped her bed acrobatics in her sleep once Steve got a good hold on her when he was wearing them, just to smash her face into the flannel fabric.

"Buuuuuuuck, I feel itchy all over," Steve whined harder as his older, oldest friend held up the pajama top for Steve. One metal left hand gestured for the five year old to put his arms up. Steve sighed and decided asking to be allowed to sleep shirtless was out of the question.

As nice as being married to Darcy was, he doubted their pseudo-parent caretakers would be too keen on nudity on their small cot. According to Natasha, it was already bad enough that Darcy refused to be still in her sleep and usually wound up halfway laying on top of Steve. Steve hardly seemed to mind. His pretty little wife was like the world's most fascinating kitty cat, and he liked when she curled up on top of him.

But she also drooled, and he didn't feel like having her spit on his skin, so that was definitely a downside.

He whined when the usually supersoft fabric of the shirt rubbed against his skin. He felt like he was about to burst with the itchiness of it all. He'd been feeling absolutely uncomfortable and yucky since after dinner and wondered if he shouldn't have eaten the mystery meat patties that Natasha had
concocted for Bucky to grill up. Or maybe it was the soap he had had to use in the shower of the RV. He'd run out of his ivory bar soap and was forced to use the smelly liquid kind Darcy had been using that made her smell like bubble gum.

"I'm so itchy!" Steve whined, and immediately began scratching himself all over very rapidly. His hands, his face, his neck, his belly and finally, shoving both hands down the back of his pants to vigorously scratch his butt.

"Quit it, alright!" Bucky bit back the urge to laugh at the sight of a red faced five year old Steve Rogers standing in front of him, squirming back and forth on his feet, with both of his hands scratching insistently at his ass. "It's just the water from the RV."

"OH MY GOD, IS IT PEE WATER?! GET MY WIFE OUTTA THE SHOWER!! ARE WE USING LEFTOVER PEE WATER FOR SHOWERS?!!?"

"No, Punk, we're not, it's just a hard water," Bucky explained. "It's rough on your sensitive Irish ass."

"Fuck off, Buck," Steve grumbled irritably, still avidly scratching his ass. "I'm uncomfortable and your dumbass face is making it WORSE!"

Bucky was past his limit with Steve for the moment. The little shit had been becoming even more of a bigger shit the past eighteen hours or so. It felt like he was reverting back to his normal, adult sized sass, but was still trapped in a tiny body.

Requests fielded to Fury for more information regarding the magic that had transformed Steve and Darcy into children were seemingly being ignored. Bucky knew that all of their allies and friends were currently busy with flushing out all the threats to Darcy and Steve, as well as throwing out as many wild theories and false sightings as they could, in order to give the actual set of five year old's and their caretakers as much cover as they would need. But still, Fury had no answers to give about the how and the what and the when Steve and Darcy would be returning to their natural states.

It would be soon. That was the only answer they had.

"ITCHY!" Steve whined.
"Did you and Darcy get up to anything you shouldn't have outside?" Bucky wondered, putting a stern, calming hand on Steve's jittery shoulder and giving him a critical, assessing once over. "Red said there was some poison oak she saw by the outhouse down the lane."

"Lewis won't use an outhouse, cause she's afraid it'll be a baby in a really stinky well situation," Steve shrugged. "And I don't wanna go near it, cause what if'n there's an earthquake and the shit just spews out like a geyser!"

Bucky narrowed his eyes at Steve in assessment as he continued to itch and dance in his discomfort. The little man looked like he was about to burst out of his skin. There wasn't anything Bucky could do to help him if there wasn't anything physically causing his current state. He'd confer with Natasha after the kids went down for their night's sleep about whether this meant everything was about to be set to right again.

Not a moment too soon, either. Bucky had noticed that they had picked up a very dedicated tail about two hundred miles north of where they were currently making a pitstop for dinner and placing the kids down for the evening. He'd be driving through the night again, switching with Natasha in the morning to continue on their meandering, pre-approved path.

He didn't know who was following them, but they were persistent. And they had not been swayed by the Sharon and Sam decoy trap they'd rendezvoused with a few hours ago. And the tail had evaded being picked up by some of the young SHIELD whippersnappers too.

Natasha and Bucky had planned for that. They knew eventually they would have to engage with an unknown enemy. They had hoped, errantly, that they could outrun the most persistent of their pursuers until good ole Captain America was back to factory standards. But they were confident that they could manage, if little Steve and Darcy would just follow simple directions.

And they both knew how unlikely THAT would be.

"Sorry, punk, I'd rub you down with calamine lotion if we had any, just like the summer of 37 when you fell face forward into that poison ivy," Bucky smirked.

"FUCK YOU," Steve stopped his itching in order to flip both middle fingers up in the air at his best friend. He wrinkled his nose and grabbed for the Bucky Bear that Darcy had lovingly placed in the cot that they shared for a bed. He took the bear by the duct-taped metal arm and smacked it against Bucky's side. "FUCK YOU, JERK. YOU DON'T GOTTA BE ITCHY AND UNCOMFORTABLE AND FUCKING FIVE, YOU JACKASS!"
"Alright, alright," Bucky reached out to ruffle the feather fine blond locks on Steve's head, which only had Steve smacking the bear more insistently against Bucky's midsection, getting dangerously close to his groin.

"NO, FUCK YOU! YOU GET TO KISS YOUR GAL AND I KNOW YOU PUT YOUR HANDS IN HER PANTS YESTERDAY WHEN ME AND LEWIS WAS NAPPING AND IT AIN'T FAIR!" Steve roared out.

"Why'd you let him have his hands in your pants?" Darcy questioned of Natasha as they got out of the closet sized bathroom on the RV, fresh, clean and pajama'd. She looked up at Natasha with big, blue, inquisitive eyes and her pouty little mouth pursed and slanted slightly upwards. "Did you get a bug down there that needed swatting?"

"Yes," Natasha answered with quick conviction.

"That's a lie!" Steve sneered. He wrinkled his nose as he tried to remember why Bucky would have been so eager to put his hands down Natasha's pants but it flitted from his mind and his entire body shuddered and he managed to toss Bucky bear at his namesake's face before starting to itch himself all over again. "I'm so itchy!"

Natasha furrowed her brow and looked down at Darcy, who didn't seem to be exhibiting any of the same effects that Steve was. Steve had been visibly uncomfortable in his own skin for a day and a half. His lisp had magically begun to ebb away, his vocabulary was increasing as well. And according to Bucky, suddenly it felt like there was entirely too much sass in his small body.

Natasha did not notice the sass factor. To her, Steve was always ten gallons of sass in a one pint bucket, no matter his size. It’s why she liked him so much.

Darcy, on the other hand, seemed absolutely fine. If anything, she had gotten calmer as Steve's irritation with his shrunken state grew. Instead of shrieking at the ill usage of her precious Bucky bear, she simply skipped over and picked him up and off of the floor before smothering him with kisses and hugging him close. She then skipped to Steve in the small cabin of the RV and made Bucky bear kiss Steve's cheek.

Steve managed to stop itching as Darcy hugged him full force very suddenly, his chin resting happily atop her head, he felt more comfortable in that moment than he had since she had hugged him before dinner. His eyes closed and he took a happy sigh, ignoring the itchy feeling under his skin as Darcy
started to hum a song and Steve decided to sway them back and forth in a rhythmless slow dance. Natasha smiled at them before looking up to Bucky, whose eyes were sparkling in reaction to the precious scene in front of them.

"When I grow back up, am I gonna get bugs in my pants that Steve needs to swat?" Darcy's question was muffled by the children's embrace, but it was heard nonetheless and Steve's eyes opened and looked between Bucky and Natasha for an answer.

"NO!" Bucky insisted vehemently at the same time Natasha shrugged and answered, "Sometimes."

Darcy made a cartoonish retching sound before muttering, "Disgusting."

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Steve was having trouble falling asleep, despite the fact that they were driving into the night, and usually the soothing rattling of the RV on the road was like being rocked in a gentle cradle. He'd suffered through two hours of alert wakefulness, despite the fact that Darcy had immediately gone into deep, restful sleep on their cot, and then had immediately disentangled herself from him, turned in such a way that her butt was resting on his elbow and her upper body was sprawled out over his legs. He had been patting her right ankle under the covers for the past forty-five minutes, as his mind refused to shut down and take comfort in Darcy's warm sleepiness.

He was still an entire body full of itchiness, but that was the least of his concerns. Now he was worried too. He was worried that when they were set back to rights in their adult bodies and brains, that somehow grownup Darcy would have not forgiven him for all the wrongs he had done to her in the last few years. As children, they had forgiven so easily. They had fallen into their comforting relationship as 'husband and wife', bickering in one breath and hugging in the next, so easily that Steve knew that it could not always be this easy. Surely when Darcy grew up, some part of her psyche would realize how hurt she was about how Steve had treated her in the past.

It was easy to forgive at the age of five. Twenty-seven didn't seem so forgiving.

Steve didn't know why he hadn't thought of that before, and he definitely didn't know why he was thinking of it now. For the past day, it felt like his brain was throwing things at him that he didn't quite understand, but had to work through nevertheless. Steve had eavesdropped on a nearly silent conversation between Bucky and Natasha an hour ago about how they suspected it was because Steve was about to switch over into adulthood soon, magically.
He hoped not. Not only was Darcy exhibiting none of the symptoms he was, which meant that she was not ready to turn into an adult yet, and he didn’t want to be a grown up without her, but also because he just wasn’t ready yet. He didn’t want stupid, grown-up Steve to somehow insult Darcy and lose her forever.

What he really wanted to do was punch stupid, grown-up Steve in the nuts, honestly.

"And this is baby Simba," Darcy mumbled in her sleep. "He looks like Steve except for his curly lion hair and the pickle necklace."

Steve patted Darcy’s ankle again and tried to drift into sleep once more, focusing on breathing exercises he had learned a few months after being pulled out of the Icy Arctic sea. Deep, long breath in through the nose and hold it for just a little before blowing it out through puckered lips, slow and steady. Another ankle pat accompanied the thought of just how much he loved Darcy and what a ninny he had been to keep it hidden and locked away for so long.

Deep, long breath in through the nose and hold it for just a little before blowing it out through puckered lips, slow and steady. He imagined how nice it would be to be properly strong enough to hold her the way grownups held each other in sleep. He thought of the feeling he got when he hugged her and wondered why it felt like warm, golden honey dripping off a spoon in a thick rivulet.

Deep, long breath in through the nose and hold it for just a little before blowing it out through puckered lips, slow and steady. His dreams were suddenly full of baby Simba with his crazy curly hair and his pickle necklace, getting into all sorts of silly adventures with his five other siblings while Bucky and Natasha laughed their heads off at a grownup Steve run ragged by energetic, enthusiastic and wildly lawless children.

"Stevie...Stevie, pal."

"Five more minutes," Steve whined.

"Just stay here, hold tight to my Princess Sweetpea, and stay under the blanket," Bucky’s gentle order filtered through the sleepy, fuzzy goggles placed around Steve’s senses. He squeezed and found that Darcy had moved again, and was now just laying on top of him so that together they looked like a plus sign. His arms were wrapped around her torso, and he held tight as a heavy blanket covered them in darkness.
He heard some rustling outside of the cocoon, the click of a safety on a gun going off along with hushed whispers in Russian that he needed Darcy in order to be able to understand.

"Bring me back somethin' with bacon," Steve urged in a drowsy whisper.

"Of course, Rogers," Natasha whispered back. "You two don't move a muscle."

Steve didn't think that would be a problem. As hard as it had been to fall asleep, he was hardpressed to think of a reason to wake up and face the day now. Darcy was warm and cuddly, even if it wasn't a proper way to sleep. And if he stayed in this sleepy state, the itchiness that was still present wasn't so bad.

But he honestly still felt as if he were seconds away from bursting out of his skin.

Most days a sleeping Darcy was usually warm and running hot, but she felt extra fiery underneath the heavy kevlar blanket. Steve felt his whole body shudder again and an unnaturally bright light creeping in on the comfortable darkness of his sleepy state.

The combined sound of gunfire and the cot beneath him that he and Darcy had called their bed for the past ten days suddenly groaning and giving up the ghost had him startling into a seated position. He smacked his head ridiculously hard on the top of the low RV ceiling above the cot and immediately saw stars.

"Shit that's a concussion," Steve muttered, the low timbre of his voice causing his eyes to open wide. He looked down and saw a tiny little girl sprawled across his chest, perpendicular to his body and he huffed out a laugh. "You're still little..."

Steve swallowed nervously. He was NOT little any longer. He was ridiculously large and Darcy's tiny, five year old stature seemed to emphasis that even more. Along with the fact that he had bust through every last fiber of his pajamas, the remnants looking like they would make the Hulk blush, Steve knew that the magic for the spell that had turned him into a child was over. He carefully maneuvered the five year old Darcy as he managed to stand up among the wreckage of their former cot.

Everything came rushing at him rapidly. The feeling of being a small child, all of the things he had managed to get into in the past few months, the surety and security of Bucky and Natasha being there to take care of him and Darcy, and of course an overwhelming amount of love for his partner in
crime. It was all there, coexisting and blended in perfectly with his original childhood, if not a little sharper and clearer for having just ended a few minutes ago.

He quickly placed her in the passenger's seat to the vehicle, covering her totally with the kevlar blanket and taking a wary look out of the bulletproof windows. Even with his advanced eyesight, he couldn't see Bucky or Natasha, but he could see about fifteen people advancing upon the RV, guns drawn. One by one they were picked off from far away, and Steve knew it was Bucky up in the trees with a sniper rifle.

But even when an overly ambitious goon got close enough to the RV to be out of range of Bucky's shot, they still went down hard, taken out by a shadowy assailant that had to be Natasha.

Steve knew he could be of some use. He understood now that Bucky and Natasha had been playing out the clock, waiting for him to return to his normal size, strength and capabilities. He went to the larger bedroom at the back of the RV that no one had really used during their road trip. Bucky and Natasha had preferred the children to be where they could see them and they also had not wanted to linger too far from each other as well. The package that Natasha had hidden between boxes of pizza was lying on the double bed, and Steve ripped into it to reveal the familiar red, white and blue vibranium shield that Tony must have sent to Natasha a few days ago.

He pulled the shield out and grabbed a pair of pants of Bucky's, coming back through the suddenly too small RV as he tried to ready himself. He got caught up in the blankets he and Darcy had been tucked into the night before, as well as a pillow and the Bucky bear, but he managed to set himself mostly to rights before realizing that he had no shoes to fit his adult sized boats he called feet.

Another round of gunfire, muted from silencers and the indestructible RV walls seemed to echo in his ears and he shrugged off not having shoes, only wanting to make sure that he helped Bucky and Natasha in their quest of keeping Darcy safe.

"I'll be right back, Sweetheart," Steve whispered before heading for the door, shield in hand. "Sleep tight."

"We could use some help."

Tony made an audible gasp of surprise over the comm units that were wide open, containing any of the Avengers, former and current that could be roped into the situation. Fury and Hill were also on
the line, and Natasha had been wary to admit that she and Barnes were outnumbered, but she would do what she had to to make sure the children were safe.

"We're twenty minutes out," Sam promised.

"I'm fifteen out," Tony gloated. "Pop-pop? ETA on the jack booted thug arrival?"

"Fuck off, Stark," Fury grumbled.

"Not in front of the children!" Tony scolded.

"I've got AIM here, along with what I'm guessing is the Secretary of State's own personal task force," Natasha revealed. "They're working together..."

"Natalia," Bucky spoke for the first time over the comm unit.

"It speaks!" Sam mocked.

"Denzlenger is here," Bucky answered quietly, his ignoring Sam's bait was red flag enough to tell everyone else on the line that this was serious. The only other person who would know who Denzlenger was would have been Fury.

Natasha went stiff at the name, her vision going a little dark around the edges. Mister Denzlenger was infamous among Red Room graduates of the last thirty years for his dastardly techniques, rigorous 'training' and a heavy hand in old fashioned discipline. He broke down the girls of the Red Room into tiny, shattered pieces, and rebuilt them in a murderous mold of his liking, throwing out the pieces that didn't fit to his rigid mold.

Natasha hated him. From the age of nineteen to twenty-five she had been under Denzlenger’s tutelage. She had come close to not surviving what Denzlenger had done to her. Had it not been for James being her lifeline, secret and hidden though it had been, she would not have made it through to the other end the same person. She would have been a soulless murder machine. A memory clear as day stole over her brain, of James gently and quietly cleaning bits of SOMEONE out of her hair as she sat on the edge of a sink, catatonic and lost in a world of red.
And now Denzlenger was working in concert with an unknown number of enemies to get a hand on Steve and Darcy. He was within breathing distance of the five-year-olds. She felt a panic creep up her spine the likes of which she had never known before. She'd faced aliens. The Hulk. The world ending multiple times and nothing had made her feel this way before.

She was knocked off her balance by a solid physical blow to her face, but managed to twist away from the ensuing gunshot. She tried to roll away from the danger, but found that one attacker was actually three attackers that had approached in her moment of weakness. She felt a hand grab her by the neck and she tried to assess the situation with her usual unique calmness that she had lost for a moment. James would be unable to assist from his sniper's position, but if she knew James (and she really, really did), he was already on his way to assist. She could disarm the one man and---

The familiar wind rushing sound of vibranium cutting through the air was punctuated by the thwacking sound of the shield hitting a remarkably fragile human skull and the man holding her by her windpipe went down, allowing her to use that momentum to spin on the ground, her leg knocking against another of her attackers. A different vibranium sound echoed through the dark air, and Natasha knew James was there too, his fist meeting the jaw of the last unfortunate attacker who had gotten the drop on her.

"STEVE, you shouldn't have come out here, and you definitely shouldn't have used the shield, god dammit, I---" Natasha automatically scolded before looking up and narrowing her eyes in the darkness at the large mass of a person walking towards them at a quick, silent pace.

Steve smiled at her, fully grown and aged to perfection, before he knelt and lifted his shield back up, giving her a smile full of sunshine, just as he had that morning at breakfast when she had refilled his bowl of gray breakfast gruel. The only difference being that the smile was much higher than it had been that morning.

"I told you I was itchy," Steve looked at Bucky with playful petulance. He then shrugged and looked around, "What've we got?"

"We got a you better go back into the truck and watch over my Princess Sweetpea kind of situation," Bucky sassed.

"She's fine, all locked in and sleeping," Steve promised. He waved around his shield with a little pinch of good natured annoyance on his face. "Besides, don't you think it'd be smart for me to wave the shield around and distract the bad guys?---while you beat the ever loving shit out of them?"

"Denzlenger is there, Romanoff. You need Rogers," Fury said in the comm unit. "Denzlenger will
not back down from getting his hands on what he wants here, and I'm thinking that once he realizes Steve is an adult again, he's going to only want Darcy."

"How bulletproof is that RV?" Steve asked.

"Very," Bucky repeated Tony's answer from the comm unit, but somehow didn't convey Tony's indignation at his craftsmanship being in question.

"Well I'll just stand in front of it with the shiny shield and you guys just---knock them as they come?" Steve offered, looking far more pleased with himself than he had any right to be.

Bucky rolled his eyes and muted the comm so he didn't have to hear Fury's maniacal laughter.

The RV's engine roared to sudden life from a little under fifty yards away and three pairs of eyes spun around to look at the vehicle as it took off at a very high, very unsafe speed very suddenly.

"She wasn't tall enough to reach the pedals when I left her," Steve said quickly, looking exactly as he did when he was five and had accidentally stepped on Darcy's toys, breaking one and causing her to screech bloody murder. "I didn't do it, I swear."

Natasha narrowed her eyes and almost turned her own comm unit off as well when Nick Fury started to cackle even louder over the frequency. She caught a glimpse of wild brown curls above the wheel to the RV and took a deep breath of relief. Darcy was awake, and very much back to normal.

Also, she was nude as a jaybird thanks to outgrowing her pajamas in the big switch.

Out of recently learned reflex, Steve threw both hands over his own eyes at seeing Darcy's bits.

"She's back to normal," Bucky said in disbelief. He pursed his mouth just a little, clearly a little mournful that his five year old was now a grownup. Bucky went to put his hands over Steve's eyes in addition to Steve's own hands to protect Darcy's modesty as she tore off into the field, mowing down a few people who had tried to approach the oncoming RV.

"Yeah, and last time she drove an RV, she mowed down Thor," Fury announced gleefully. "So if I
were you, I'd get on that."

"FUCK OFF, POP-POP FURY!" Darcy's voice erupted over the communications channel loud enough for Steve to hear through Natasha's earpiece. "That was Jane's fault, and you damned well know it. Now someone tell me where my husband and my Bucky Bear is, or there is going to be hell to pay!"

Chapter End Notes

So I was especially happy to publish this today, not only because it is the big switch, but also because somewhere in this chapter is my ONE MILLIONTH WORD of published fanfiction.

I HAVE WRITTEN ONE MILLION WORDS OF DARCYLAND FANFICTION.

...and I couldn't have done it without everyone's encouragement. Your kudos and comments have fueled me greatly, and I hope I can continue to write things that you find interesting and fun and write a million more words!!! THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR READING!!!!
"DAMMIT LEWIS, GET BACK HERE!" Steve roared out, finally pushing Bucky's hands away and watching a Darcy driven RV mow down nefarious kidnappers in a field. "YOU'RE NAKED!"

"Lewis-Rogers," Fury corrected over the comm units. "And three---two---one..."

"Stevie, stop!" Bucky demanded as Steve was off like a rocket with the shield in his hand, running barefoot and shirtless after the RV. Bucky looked around, wild eyed and saw Natasha, standing a few feet away, the bodies of their enemies at her feet.

She was caught in some kind of terror, her face blank, but her green, usually vivid gaze was cloudy and distraught. Bucky let Steve to chasing down his wife and instead went to Natasha, a cool metal hand running up her arm bringing her out of whatever she had rapidly fallen into.

"You're alright," Bucky whispered. "Everyone is fine."

"DAMMIT SWEETHEART! WAIT UP!" Steve shouted in the distance.

"Denzlenger," Natasha whispered to Bucky, the word barely audible. She looked up at him and for the first time in a very long time allowed herself to be vulnerable. "I can't---I---"
"You don't have to," Bucky promised her, his own voice so quiet that even the comm unit in his ear couldn't pick up on it. His eyes searched hers, trying to convey something without words.

"LEWIS---LEWIS-ROGERS! PULL THAT BLANKET UP!" Steve screamed in the distance. Although it did seem that the enemies were a little stunned at the sight of a nude Valkyrie, riding in on her battle steed and dispensing vehicular justice. "COVER UP YOUR BITS!"

Bucky tried to think of better words to give her. Ever since Darcy and Steve had become children, his Natalia had been finding it hard to retain her Black Widow facade. A smile would crack through when Steve or Darcy had done something equally inappropriate and adorable. Frustration would seep out of her when she had wanted to portray calm cool collectedness. And now, when the battle was moments away from being won, she was here, letting the memory of her worst torture poke holes into once formidable armor.

"You don't have to," Bucky repeated. He gave her a soft smile. "I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'll take care of this. You can take care of something else. Okay?"

It had been what they were doing since the beginning. Bucky knew that with his beautiful and amazing Natalia, the strength wasn't in persevering through everything, it was learning to share the load. They would share the pain. Whether it be a punishment from the Red Room handlers, or the punishing questions about anatomy and relations from five-year-old's. If it had been Bucky's turn to stare down a tormentor, he knew that Natasha would take the heavy work. He would do no less for her and allow her the vulnerability that Denzlenger had tried to torture out of her. Natasha took a slow, deep breath between parted lips before finally allowing herself to blink away the haze that had gone over her sight like a film. She nodded very slightly and whispered, "Okay."

"Boom. You're nailing that partnership thing," Clint muttered over the comm unit. "If it's okay with you Romanoff, I'm gonna use your progress at being in a good relationship as a feather in my cap. Namely to impress my wife. Also? Tell Barnes I stole his sniper nest. I'm set up---who do I shoot?"

"Dammit Lewis! SLOW DOWN!" Steve roared out before letting out a loud grunting noise. The sound of something heavy hit the RV and when Bucky looked over, Steve had catapulted his body from the ground onto the moving RV, landing on the windshield and making Darcy shriek in response.

He waved the shield around and grinned in at her.
"Hi sweetheart! Can you stop the car and put on a shirt?"

Darcy slammed on the brakes and twisted the wheel, causing Steve to go flying to the right, crashing right into three people who were trying to outrun Darcy's RV offensive strike. To his credit, he merely laughed as he flew, instead of 'wheeing' through it as he would have ten hours ago.

"ROGERS! OH NO! ROGERS! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?" Darcy screeched.

"Wow, that was a dumb time to turn on the comm unit in the RV," Tony muttered.

"YOU FUCKFACE! WHY DID YOU LET GO!" Darcy yelled as she did her best to ruin the transmission by throwing a still moving vehicle in park. She ran for the door, still forgetting that she was shirtless.

"Sweetpea, stop right there!" Bucky called out, even as Steve quickly scrambled to his feet and made easy work of the bad guys who he had knocked over like top heavy bowling pins.

Darcy paused in the doorway, heeding Bucky's gentle tone.

"Yes, Daddy?" she responded.

"Aww, don't call him that NOW," Steve whined as he bashed the shield against the half witted minions that Ross had brought with him.

"We packed you both clothing, go and put on a shirt right now, young lady," Bucky advised.

"Bad guys, though," Darcy whined.

"Shirt," Bucky advised.
"Yes, Daddy," Darcy sighed and went back into the RV.

"That's gonna be SO annoying," Steve whined as he took his frustrations out on the brave idiots that were advancing on him, at least those that didn't have arrows stuck through them. He glared back at the RV with it's door open and yelled, "LEWIS! DID YOU KNOW THAT WHEN YOU CALL HIM DADDY IT ACTUALLY MEANS HE'S YOUR BOYFRIEND?"

"IT DOES NOT!" Darcy screeched back.

"Again, OW," Tony snarked into the comm unit. "I want to weaponize her screeching, but I also never want to hear it again."

"IT DOES TOO!" Steve argued back. "HE HAD TWO GALS CALLING HIM DADDY ALL THROUGH THE SUMMER OF 39!"

"Fascinating."

Steve stopped his peevish yelling and turned to see that a man in full Hydra regalia, looking impossibly old and impossibly evil, had come to stand twenty-five yards away, surrounded by men that were armed to the teeth.

"Sweetheart? Stay inside the RV," Steve called out, his posture, which had been marked with annoyed slumped shoulders went suddenly square with rigidity.

Behind him, Bucky nudged Natasha towards the RV as well, knowing that seeing Denzlenger was not optimal, but that giving her something to do in protecting Darcy would keep her afloat while he and Steve dealt with what was left. She didn't move far though, staring blankly at the man who had caused her the most torture at such a young age.

"Natalia, this is what has become of you?" Denzlenger intoned. "A whore for a traitor? A minder of children? You were to be my greatest creation. It is a pity."

"Fuck off," Steve growled out.
"You, we will find a way to turn you back into a more docile thing," Denzlenger promised. "You will be reformed, Captain. And we will not have to sacrifice your mental capabilities to do so. We will just take the girl and you will do what needs to be done for her wellbeing."

"Hey, Dickslinger!" Darcy Lewis gaily called out from the door to the RV. She had a shirt on now, it was obviously meant for Steve, and looked more like a dress on her. She was grinning impishly at the monologuing supervillain. "Hot Potato, shit for brains!"

She launched something in the air, something round, about the size of a softball, and blinking with a red light. Steve's eyes widened as what was clearly a bomb went over his head towards the crowd of Hydra and ex-Soviet agents. It wasn't thrown hard enough, not by a long shot, and promised to fall in between them and the bad guys, causing untold damage. Steve turned on his heel and brought up the shield so that it covered him and Bucky and Natasha who were still standing closeby.

"Now, Hawkass!" Darcy shouted.

An arrow zoomed through the air and hit the bomb, and Steve tackled both Natasha and Bucky to the ground, providing as much protection as he could. The sounds of screams echoed in the night air, but Steve felt no explosion. He poked his head around the shield and saw that the arrow had hit the ball, because it wasn't a bomb.

It was the other end of one of Clint's trick arrows. The electrified net arrow.

When it connected to what Darcy had thrown, a large, electric net had formed from the starting point of Clint's bow to the end point of the ball, effectively trapping dozens of enemy operatives and various and sundry ne'er do wells who were now caught in a moderately painful trap, volts of electricity rushing through them.

"That's what you fucking fuck faces get for trying to kidnap me!" Darcy screeched into the night. She planted her feet and put her hands on her hips as she glared at the twitching bad guys. "I hope you all shit in bed and roll in it and DIE!"

Steve hurried to his feet, his face beaming sunshine in the dark of night as he abandoned the shield on top of Natasha and Bucky. He ran to Darcy instead, picking her up and off her feet and swinging her around in a bearhug. Darcy could only laugh as he began peppering kisses all over her face.

"You are like---one giant muscle," Darcy remarked as he continued to kiss her cheek and nose and
jaw over and over again in nonsensical pattern. She poked at his bare pectorals as much as she could in the tight embrace.

"Keep it decent, pal," Bucky advised.

"She is unsullied like freshly fallen snow," Sam's smart ass voice came over the comm unit that was now playing over the sound system in the RV.

"Fuck you guys, she's my wife and I get to kiss her whenever I want," Steve said between his flurry of sweet little kisses.

"No take backsies!" Darcy chorused. "But seriously, I don't have any kind of underwear on right now, so you should probably put me down before this shirt rides up anymore.

When the dust settled, and it settled pretty quickly once Darcy had used the RV as a mechanical sheepdog to pen in the bad guys, the collaborated with Clint as they effectively caught everyone in a taser net, it was decided it best to head to the closest safehouse, which just so happened to be a really ridiculously appointed 'farmhouse' on the line between Pennsylvania and New York State. Fury had insisted that the only people out there that wanted Darcy any longer were ineffectual, small in number and easily dismantled, but in the same breath had also insisted that Darcy should still be kept under lock and key.

And for once in her life, Darcy didn't seem to mind being told to hide and keep a low profile. It was mainly because as soon as they were back in the privacy of the RV, she had been happily sitting on her husband's lap, wrapped up in a tight embrace and trading sweet kisses. Even when they had arrived at the farmhouse that had clearly been a Stark funded and tech loaded safehouse, Darcy and Steve had been inseparable, with him not even letting her bare feet touch the ground.

"How's the france kissing?" Clint called out from the kitchen where he, Bucky and Natasha were sorting out the takeout food that he had obtained for the serum enhanced appetites.

Steve's answer was a muffled groan in response as obviously Darcy did do kissing of the France variety at that very moment.
"Sweetpea, you stop that!" Bucky called out in annoyance.

"Leave them be," Natasha scolded. She looked into the dining room, where Darcy was held securely in Steve's lap as they continued to trade kisses of all varieties. Steve's hands were securely on her waist and Darcy's hands were wrapped around his shoulders.

"Leave them be," Bucky repeated. "I spent WEEKS, Natalia. WEEKS were spent, by ME making sure that little bastard and that adorable Princess didn't talk about flowers and danglers, or accidentally SEE flowers and danglers, or accidentally TOUCH flowers and danglers. I was on constant age appropriate watch, for you, cause I thought my Red didn't want their innocence tainted, and the minute they turn big again, you're letting them have foreplay in the dining room."

"They're not having foreplay," Natasha disputed.

Darcy moaned this time and three pairs of wary eyes looked into the dining room and saw that instead of just halfway innocently sitting in Steve's lap, Darcy was now straddling his thighs with his hands on her rear end, the t-shirt she was still wearing from earlier was riding up and threatening to expose indecent parts. Bucky made a tsk-ing sound of annoyance and threw down the tacos he had been taking out of the bags for Darcy and went to the dining room with the intent to pull them apart.

"Now, the both of you stop this nonsense!" Bucky demanded.

"She's m'wife, and I can kiss her whenever I want, so there," Steve petulantly mumbled, groaning as Darcy shimmied in his lap just once. "Oh hell, Lewis, don't do that---"

"What?" Darcy asked, sounding equal parts innocent and knowing. "I didn't want to fall."

"Darcy Grace Lewis, you stop that," Bucky demanded. "That's what bedrooms are for."

"Oh, yes, we should take this to the bedroom," Darcy said cheerfully, hopping out of Steve's lap immediately, making the shirtless man look for something to cover the indecent state of his tented sweatpants. He reached for a pizza box off the stack that Clint had brought in and quickly pulled it into his lap to cover himself.

"You don't think that's---you don't think that's rushing things a little?" Bucky mumbled. The woman that stood in front of him may no longer be a five-year-old, but to Bucky she was impossibly young,
innocent, and the only person who had ever called him Daddy and meant it in a non perverted way.

And she was unsullied like freshly fallen snow.

"We've been married for weeks now, so I think we waited long enough," Darcy winked at Steve impishly.

"Yeah, and you think you, Mister, oh no what do I do, how do I make her like married relations, is ready for---for that?" Bucky demanded.

"Oh, I'll like it. I'm pretty sure I'll love it, I mean, his butt is like, my favorite butt," Darcy insisted while Steve blushed prettily and adjusted the pizza box in his lap.

"Twelve hours ago you would have said butts were disgusting because poop comes out of there," Bucky reminded her.

"Yeah, but now I know butts are fun to slap and pinch and to grab onto with my hands and squeeze," Darcy rattled off.

"Alright, enough, enough," Bucky stopped her quick. "At least a good dinner first."

Steve's stomach growled at the mention of food and his shoulders drooped in slight disappointment before opening the pizza in his lap and devouring half a slice in one bite.

"Clint got you tacos," Bucky tempted Darcy.

"Fine, dinner first, only because of Rogers' lion tummy," Darcy conceded, before fairly skipping away from Steve and the table to duck under Bucky's extended left arm. She popped up on her tiptoes and smacked a kiss against Bucky's cheek before grinning, "Thanks for looking out for me. I appreciate it, Daddy."

"Aww, Lewis, no, don't say that," Steve grumbled around a mouthful of pizza.
"You," Bucky pointed at Steve warningly. "Stop thinking disgusting things like that or Red's not making you breakfast gruel tomorrow."

Natasha and Steve had taken the new pickup truck, the one Tony had delivered with the second row of seating that was big enough for Darcy and Steve to sprawl out on, out on a short road trip. Steve had hoped Natasha was taking him to a store in order to buy a gift for Darcy, and he tried to hide his disappointed face when they pulled up to the SHIELD detention center. He gave her his most supportive smile instead and nodded.

"Did you bring my shield? I'd like to smack it against that old guy's skull," Steve admitted.

"It's in the back, special compartment," Natasha sounded relieved.

Darcy would have surely found a catastrophic reason to prevent her from being here. James would have insisted on accompanying her and doing the hard parts. Fury would have insisted she see a therapist afterwards. Steve...he would give support and strength in this quick and necessary endeavor.

Steve reached over and patted Natasha on the top of her head with two hard thuds that had her rolling her eyes. They exited the truck, grabbed their gear and made their way through the building, Captain America and the Black Widow, not exactly murder strutting (as the junior SHIELD agents often called it). Captain America was not quite as angry/sad/depressed as he had been known to have been in the past. He smiled and waved at someone he recognized before calmly and happily following in Natasha's wake.

And the Black Widow was still terrifying as she strode confidently through the hallways, but there was a lightness in the set of her shoulders that had never existed before. Sharon stood at the end of the hallway with a half smile on her face. No one would know why that a happy Black Widow would look even more formidable than an unhappy one. But Sharon had the good grace to realize that a happy Natasha had so much more to lose, and therefore projected even more pants-wetting confidence than she usually did.

"So, I think I know why you're here," Sharon announced as they met her at the end of the hallway.

"Sam's a blabbermouth," Steve huffed out a sigh.
"He really is," Sharon agreed. She turned away from the pair and began to lead them down a set of stairs. "But I hate to tell you that Denzlenger's totally dead already."

"What?" Natasha furrowed her brow.

"Well---you see, the guy was ninety-four years old, and not a spring chicken kind of ninety-four like the other elderly men in your life," Sharon quipped as they descended a flight of stairs to the morgue under the building. She nodded at the scientist on duty and scanned her eye to gain entrance. "Lewis and Barton get to share this one on the scoreboard. The voltage on that electric net was just enough to stop a geriatric sadist's heart from slowly beating."

"He was alive when we left," Natasha disputed.

"Well, sure, but then Fury stepped on his trachea," Sharon cheerfully revealed as she pulled out the slab that held Denzlenger's body. She looked up at Natasha and Steve curiously, wondering exactly what she would see. Sam had warned her for anything ranging from tears to hysterical laughter. The kind of torture that Natasha had been made to endure under Denzlenger's hands was the special kind that got a person a one way ticket to special hell.

But there were no dramatics. There was only a pursed mouth as Natasha stared down at the defeated man. Steve was more rigid than she was. And very quickly, before Natasha or Sharon could even blink, he brought up the shield and smacked it against the deceased man's head just hard enough to make a cracking sound.

"Honestly, Rogers?" Sharon sighed.

But Natasha was smiling and turned to Steve, wrapping an arm in his.

"Let's go get ice cream for Darcy and James," Natasha suggested, warmth and indulgence in her voice, speaking to Steve as she would have a few days ago when he was barely more than a toddler.

"Good idea," Steve nodded, giving Sharon a nod of thanks before turning to walk out of the SHIELD morgue. "Is butter brickle really her favorite, or was she just sayin' that just to get my goat and make me feel bad cause I ate it all?"

Natasha smiled warmly and shrugged, "I have never witnessed her eating anything but mint
chocolate chip as an adult, but I have witnessed her being a little shit, so draw your own conclusions."

"Right. Just trying to get my goat then," Steve's laughter echoed in the halls. "God, do I love that woman."

Darcy and Steve did not leave that safe house bedroom for a full thirty-six hours before Natasha and Steve left for their mystery errand. Natasha or Bucky or both would stop in front of their door, give them food and chat for brief moments, but then it was back to business, really. The business of being absolutely sickeningly sweet, madly in love, lustful newlyweds.

After thirty-six hours, Bucky was surprised when Darcy plopped down next to him on the couch, freshly showered and wearing pajamas that had been purchased for a grown up Steve. She looked like a taller version of her five year old self, drowning in clothing that was far too big for her as she held her Bucky bear in one hand and a brush and hair ties in the other.

"Braids please?" she questioned, handing Bucky the brush and hair ties.

"Of course, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky smiled softly as she sat next to him and turned so that he could brush through her hair, split it into two sections and give her loosely braided pigtails. "Where's your stinky shadow?"

"He went on a run with Tash, something about doing interrogating," Darcy shrugged. "They're having a mother son date, roughing up bad guys together."

Bucky laughed a little at that. While he had always been good at interrogation during his time as the Winter Soldier, he hardly ever wanted to do it now. He hadn't liked doing the painful interrogating even when he was a nearly brain dead murder puppet either. Darcy grabbed for the remote of the television and switched it off of the music channels that Bucky had been watching. Instead she brought up the split four screen and hit the mute button, watching four different news channels at once.

"No calling Fox News," Bucky warned.

"Oh no, I handled that already while I was on the crapper," Darcy pointed to the bottom right corner,
where the FOX in fox news had been replaced with a realistic looking graphic that said "FAKE NEWS" that intermittently changed to "FUCK NEWS". "Just wanted to catch up quick."

The news was good. Nearly every channel was telling the truth, for the most part. Steve Rogers had taken a child bride, yes, but he had also been a child while doing it. They were asking for privacy so that they could sort out what had happened and face the reality of being adults once more as well as married. Pepper and her Wombats were doing a great job, honestly. Steve came out of this looking better than he had going in.

"So---how are you adjusting?" Bucky questioned as he tied one braid off and lay it on her shoulder. "You don't think you made a mistake? Ms. Potts said that it'd be no trouble to get the whole thing annulled."

"NO, hell no, no," Darcy resolutely shut that train of thought down immediately. She grinned over her shoulder at him, big and bright. "He's just---it's lovely."

"Hmmph, then I didn't hear you two screaming your heads off at each other eight hours ago?" Bucky arched an eyebrow as he went about carefully braiding the second pigtail.

"He wanted to take my phone away so I couldn't get into any trouble, and he also thought it would be a good idea to have Tony rebuild Friday so I couldn't do whatever I wanted anymore," Darcy grumbled.

"That might not be a bad idea, Sweetpea..."

"I am a small, fragile, breakable human being in a world of superheroes. I need all access to Friday to have an edge," Darcy repeated her argument. "And besides, if Tony fixes it, it'll take weeks for me to break in again, and I'd rather spend that time hanging with the fam."

"The fam?" Bucky was confused by her lingo.

"My awesome husband who will challenge me and argue with me and let me challenge him and argue back at him and we still kiss and hug and do other fun things afterwards," Darcy waggled her eyebrows. "My fucking amazing mom who can murder a guy with a paperclip if she needed to..."

"I'm fond of her too," Bucky interjected, taking her second finished braid and using it to tickle her
"Yeah, and my Dad. Who does the best braids, and is so good, and kind, and brave," Darcy finished. "I think that all four of us, deserve a break, actually."

"You do? You don't think these past few months haven't been a break?" Bucky countered as he sat back on the couch and allowed Darcy to cuddle into his left side indiscriminately, he brought his arm up and over her shoulder, smiling as she brought her bear to dance in front of her. "We were at a vacation house, technically."

"I'm thinking that I want something more---tropical. Like a honeymoon," Darcy admitted.

"Honeymoons are supposed to be for just one couple, Princess Sweetpea," Bucky reminded her.

"Yeah, but I need additional security. Tony has this place in the Caribbean, they're like fancy huts on the beach and they're totally soundproof, so you know, honeymooners and parents alike would have their privacy," Darcy rattled off airly.

Bucky looked down at her in suspicion. He knew his kid enough to realize when she was trying to get away with something. But he couldn't seem to be bothered or care and he patted her arm when she reached for the remote to switch the news to Netflix, scrolling through television shows until she found one about kitchen warfare and picked that.

He knew very well that she was scheming. And knowing her track record and propensity for trouble, the scheming could lead to a little violence and chaos in the end. But he couldn't be too bothered to care in the end. He'd take the moments of chaos if he got to have the soft moments too.

"So, just to let you know, your best friend is AWESOME in the sack," Darcy announced gaily. "I mean, I don't have much experience to be able to compare him to others, but I think it is safe to say he's the best I've ever had."

"Ugh, Sweetpea, no. Don't talk about it. That's not nice."

Chapter End Notes
ONE MORE TO GO!!!!

We're going to get snippets in the next chapter of day to day living, and a future event.

And also, I may do a one shot of the ehrm...flowers and danglers interacting at a later date with a rating upgrade on that one shot. Probably.

THANK YOU FOR READING ! YOU GUYS ARE AWESOME!
Chapter Notes

HAPPY MONDAY!

We have come to the end of another de-agification fic!

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter Thirty: Granny and Gramps

“What in the hell is all that racket?”

“Dude...be older.”

Bucky scowled at Sam as he came up from the farmhouse basement. What had been meant as a temporary safe house for the quartet to stay in after the fallout and recovery from Darcy and Steve’s stint as five-year-olds had turned into a permanent home for the four of them for the last two months. There had been one call for the Avengers to assemble, all of them and not just the secret ones or the official ones. They had worked as a unit, fighting off the bad guys, and if pressed, Bucky would admit to it being a really fun time at work.

Darcy had mostly behaved, staying behind in the old farmhouse turned state of the art safehouse. When Bucky, Steve and Natasha had returned after thirty-six hours away, they had come back to a farmhouse turned safehouse turned into an astrophysicists lab, as Jane came to visit and brought just a little bit of work with her and then refused to leave, even when Darcy was otherwise preoccupied with being further despoiled by Steve.

So it was decided that all four would go back to something closely resembling work, at the upstate New York Avenger’s facility one hour away from the safehouse. Natasha had been pleased there was no longer any danger of mystery portals being opened up in her home.

But the commute was awful.
It didn’t help that Bucky always had to drive them, Steve and Darcy always went in the backseat of the pickup, and there were always disgusting sounds of kissing and male moaning and Steve saying god awful things to Darcy that Bucky could very well hear. Natasha thought it fantastic. All of her matchmaking goals had been realized and seeing Steve and Darcy make time in the backseat of a pickup truck was seeing the end product of years of her hard work.

Bucky had sold Steve pretty well on the idea of living closer to base, but then one day a week ago, Mr. Lewis-Rogers had abruptly changed his mind and insisted that the farmhouse/safehouse was their home and they wouldn’t be moving.

Natasha said she would handle it, and Bucky had thought that would mean his fantastic fiancee picking up the entirety of the Avenger’s facility and moving it closer to their home. But now there were sounds of heavy machinery clawing away at stone and ground, and Sam Wilson had an orange hard hat on his head that made his head look like a big, spooky pumpkin.

“That hat makes your head look like a big stupid pumpkin,” Bucky said out loud, earning an eyeroll from Steve’s other best friend. “What is all the racket downstairs, I just put Darcy down for a nap!”

“She’s a hell of a lot closer to thirty years of age than three,” Sam scoffed. “You don’t need to be putting the girl down for a nap anymore, Daddy.”

“One, fuck off, two, she was running herself ragged planning a trip for us all and she falls right asleep when I sing to her—”

“Maybe it causes hemorrhaging in her ears and makes her nod off,” Sam sassed.

“Three, fuck off. And four, what on Earth is going on downstairs?” Bucky demanded.

“Your woman approved it,” Sam shrugged. “I just came by to look at the tech on the propulsion system, Stark took some elements of the wings and added it.”

“What?” Bucky shook his head in confusion, pushing past Sam and going down the steps to the unfinished basement that he had plans of turning into a vast weapons vault (soundproofed so that he and Natalia could have private moments).
There was an inordinate amount of artificial light and a manless excavation crew working at a large tunnel. One of the Iron Legion was working on a capsule that looked big enough to fit all of the Avengers into it, including the Hulk. Another set of much smaller bots could be seen working on the walls of the basement, finishing it so that it looked like an extension of the cool gray and chrome and bulletproof glass that was commonplace at Stark Towers or the Avenger’s facility.

“What the hell?” Bucky looked around and saw three bots building a set of fancy storage cabinets that would certainly hold a fair amount of weapons.

“Robocop,” Tony’s voice came through the Iron Man suit working on the capsule. “Sorry, not sorry about the noise, but I’ll have this finished in about three hours. And then we’ll see you and the future Missus, and Mrs. America and Spangles in about three hours and ten minutes.”

“Transportation system,” Sam called from the steps to the basement. “The tunnel leads directly to the Avenger’s Facility and it’ll get you there in ten minutes.”

“Woah,” Bucky breathed out in amazement.

“Try not to have an aneurysm, old guy,” Sam teased. “You’re in the future now.”

“I thought I told you to fuck off, Wilson,” Bucky grumbled. “And also? I’m telling Natalia that you called her my woman.”

“Shit.”

“What d’ya got there?”

Steve smirked as he spread mustard on a pretzel roll before adding various slices of cheese, then three different kinds of deli meat.

“You can’t have it and you wouldn’t like it anyway,” Steve said quickly as he took the whole sandwich and put it into the fancy panini press that the Wombats had sent them as a wedding present. “I’ll make you something else that you’re allowed to have.”
“RUDE!” Darcy pointed an accusatory finger at him. “You are being an ass, Rogers! Stop being an ass.”

“I’m not being an ass, Lewis, calm down,” Steve rolled his eyes.

Darcy’s finger moved from being pointed at his chest to being pointed up at his face. “YOU ARE AN ASSFACE! DADDY!!!”

“Oh here we go,” Steve sighed and rolled his eyes pointedly at his unreasonable, screeching wife.

“You hollered?” Bucky poked his head into the kitchen. “Give her what she wants, Rogers, don’t be an assface.”

“You didn’t even hear my side of it!” Steve whined.

“He won’t give me any of his delicious pretzel sandwich,” Darcy tried not to sound like she was tattling, but was one hundred percent, absolutely tattling.

It had been two whole months now since they had been turned back into their ‘normal’ selves, and every day some sort of childish tendency would still rear its ugly head. Natasha swore that Darcy had been better able to keep such impulses at bay before the magic had happened, and they both knew that Steve had been ridiculously good at being stoic and repressed before the change.

Now neither of them could keep a lid on it. Which wasn’t so bad, because Steve couldn’t repress an emotion in his heart, and it was leading to some pretty spectacular relationships with all of his friends and loved ones. And Darcy was physically incapable of holding anything in normally, but it was tenfold now, and made it especially difficult for her to pull off elaborate and dangerous schemes and plots.

Bucky was going to count it as a win-win, even if the married couple would have once a day shouting sessions about ridiculous things that always ended up with Steve putting a hysterically laughing Darcy over his shoulder and marching to their bedroom (and just once or twice to the nearest flat surface). Feelings were very rarely hurt during the shouting matches (just the once when Darcy had accused Steve of loving popcorn more than he loved her), so as far as everyone was concerned, they were allowed.
“She doesn’t like MUSTARD,” Steve reiterated.

“Then make her one without mustard!” Bucky shouted.

“She CAN’T HAVE IT!” Steve shouted as he waved the deli meat around. Darcy burst into tears in response. “SHE JUST CAN’T! SHE’S BEING UNREASONABLE AND IF I COULD GIVE IT TO HER I WOULD! IT’S BREAKING MY HEART NOT TO LET HER HAVE EVERYTHING SHE COULD EVER WANT AND SHE KNOWS IT!”

“Calm down, Steve,” Natasha ordered as she followed Bucky into the kitchen. Bucky went immediately for Darcy, pulling her into a hug as she cried. Natasha went for Steve, who was crying as well, a little more quietly than Darcy’s dramatic sobs. She took the lunch meat from Steve’s hands and opened the panini press, placing the cold cuts on the empty spot. “When it’s toasted, she can have a sandwich too.”

“Thanks, Nat,” Steve sniffed quietly.

She ruffled his hair before going to where Bucky was hugging Darcy. She pet at Darcy’s brown curls before giving a confused Bucky a smile.

“Would you like James and I to go out and get you some of those candies you like?” Natasha offered Darcy as the younger woman tried to compose herself.

“Yes, please,” Darcy nodded, giving Bucky a quick kiss on a scratchy, stubble covered cheek before turning to Natasha and burying her face in her neck. “Thank you.”

“Any time, little one,” Natasha promised.

“And can you give us like---an extra hour? For---after sandwich time?” Darcy suggested.

“Of course.”
Natasha let Darcy go as she rushed to Steve to be embraced as the newlyweds exchanged a flurry of apologetic kisses. Bucky stared at them in confusion before looking down to Natasha, who was pulling him out of the kitchen.

“What in the hell is going on?”

“Princess Sweetpea, are you alright?”

“Mppllblrrggghh.”

Bucky screwed up his face in concern at Darcy’s inscrutable answer. He could hear retching and gagging on the other side of the bathroom door and tried for the door handle again, but it was still just as locked as it had been moments ago when Bucky had first tried to check in on a clearly ill Darcy.

“Was it the scrambled crap that Sam served us for dinner last night at his place?” Bucky questioned. “Breakfast for dinner, what a joke. That’s how he impresses his dame?”

“Mmpahhkknnngrrgg,” Darcy replied with a whine to punctuate her distress. She cleared her throat and said, “Tell Steve I’m tapping out!”

“What?” Bucky shook his head in bewilderment.

“OUTTA THE WAY!” Steve shouted, rushing down the hall, his hand over his mouth. He pushed past Bucky and kicked the bathroom door in. Darcy was out of the way of the toilet with seconds to spare as Steve dropped to his knees and spewed a truly impressive amount of vomit.

“Holy hell, Wilson poisoned us!” Bucky marveled.

“Nah, Thor gave me this thing,” Darcy gestured to a pale pink stone in her hand with a nod while her other hand rubbed up and down Steve’s back as he hured. “Blessed by his mother, the awesome Frigga, it does some cosmic mojo and when I’m feeling yucky, it can switch it to Steve so I don’t have to feel the yucky.”
“Uhhhhhhm,” Bucky nodded as Steve finished up and leaned back on his heels.

“That was a bad one,” Steve frowned at Darcy. “You shoulda tapped me in earlier, Sweetheart.”

“I’m a tough cookie, I can take it. Most of it,” Darcy insisted.

“Buck, close the bathroom door as best as you can,” Steve asked, gaining most of his strength and vigor back within a few breaths. “Me and my beautiful wife are going to brush our teeth and then do unspeakable things to each other in the shower.”

“Dammit, Punk, that’s just not right,” Bucky sighed in defeat as he did his best to close the busted door before hightailing it out of there before he had to hear Steve moaning.

On Steve and Darcy’s three month anniversary, Bucky was abruptly woken at dawn, not by his beautiful red-headed fiancee, but by Steve shaking the bed obnoxiously. Bucky took one of the pillows and hurled it at Steve’s face with his left arm, causing his best friend to let out a huff of laughter after the first hard impact to his face.

“I got four more pillows,” Bucky warned. After a lifetime of hard unrelenting misery, both he and Natasha enjoyed softness and comfort.

“C’mon, get packed,” Steve ordered, dropping a duffle bag on the bed.

“Call to assemble?” Bucky blinked his eyes open and sat up slowly on the bed.

“Yeah,” Steve shrugged. “Sort of. Someplace warm and tropical, and we’ll be there two weeks. Wheels up in twenty.”

Bucky sighed. He would never say no to a call to assemble, especially since his beloved Red and his idiot best friend and even Wilson would probably need his help. But he hated to leave Darcy to her own devices. She’d been sick lately, moody and emotional, and napping more as a grownup than
she had as a child.

But in order to protect her, he had to protect the world, and would follow Steve into whatever fight he had gotten into and simply pray for a quick resolution. He packed his bag, and blearily made his way down the steps and into the kitchen to kiss Darcy goodbye. But no one was in the kitchen, so he figured they were in the basement/transit area.

The sound of machinery echoed from outside and Bucky ran for it, wondering if the threat had come closer to home than Steve had anticipated. There were no enemies on the sprawling, acreage surrounding the farmhouse, but there were unmanned robots and members of the Iron Legion handling lumber and steel beams alike.

“What in the hell?” Bucky asked of the trio of people standing at the garage.

“They weren’t supposed to start until AFTER we left,” Darcy huffed out in annoyance. “It was a present and a surprise and stupid Tony doesn’t follow proper schedules.”

“I can NOT do this, you know!” Tony’s voice echoed from fifty yards away.

“Sorry Reverend Shits-a-lot,” Darcy sighed. “I appreciate you doing me this favor, and as payment I won’t release those pictures that I have of you that you don’t want me to release.”

“Little shit,” Tony huffed out.

“Are they---are they making a house?” Bucky questioned.

“Yes, a cottage,” Natasha answered with a smile. “It will be quite a romantic little place, when all is said and done, I think.”

“You two sick of us?” Bucky looked to Steve for answers.

“No, not at all, but you know, just in case you want a quiet night every once in awhile,” Steve shrugged.
“Your bedroom is soundproofed, I did that the second day we were here,” Bucky reminded him.

“Oh! Plane is coming!” Darcy clapped her hands together before bending down and picking up her large duffle bag. She gave Steve a wink and a blown kiss when he nearly fell over himself to lift the bag out of her hands.

“Sweetpea, you’re coming with us? Is that---safe?” Bucky worried as the quinjet landed on the lawn space between the new cottage and the farmhouse.

“Sure!” Darcy nodded, skipping towards the quinjet and rushing up the ramp. “Hi PopPop!”

“Stevie, this is a bad idea, Darcy can’t come with us on a mission, no matter how clever she is,” Bucky argued as they all boarded the quinjet quickly. He looked to Natasha for backup, but found that his smiling lady was not interested in taking up his cause. “There are bullets on missions. And explosions. And I’m not having my little girl anywhere near that!”

“It’s not that kind of mission,” Steve revealed calmly as he pulled Darcy away from her hugging of Fury so that she could be properly strapped in before they took off.

“It’s not a mission, Daddy, it’s like a vacation,” Darcy insisted. “A babymoon, really.”

Bucky’s mouth dropped open far enough for it to be comical as everything began adding up in his head. He had been foolish for the past two months. He had known that Steve and Darcy had wanted children right away and were certainly trying since the day they had been turned back into their normal selves. His eyes were smiling before his mouth could catch up and he stared at Darcy and Steve in absolute wonderment.

“I’m going to be a grandpa?”

Steve rolled his eyes and sighed heavily, even as Darcy clapped her hands in excitement. “Stop that, it’s weird.”
Bucky didn't want to know what his amazing little Princess Sweetpea was holding in terms of blackmail against Tony Stark. He only wanted to send up a little thanks to the blackmail gods that his little Darcy was so prodigiously talented at what she did and was able to procure what she was able to procure.

They had been on the private island in the middle of the ocean for less than twenty-four hours, and already, they'd had so much rest and relaxation that Bucky didn't think it was quite fair, but also, could not bring himself to be bothered by it even a little bit. There were two huts set up, far enough away from each other on a stretch of sandy beach and jungle wilderness to be private. And when the term hut was used, it seemed to not convey the grandness of the accommodations. Gauzy curtains on windows...big comfortable beds full of softness and comfort...fully equipped kitchen and enough hidden gadgetry to restock the entire Avenger's facility.

Bucky's favorite part was the outdoor shower, it was the fanciest damned shower he'd ever been in, had a bench or two and when you pulled a chain the water came from above and around you, and it was OUTSIDE. He and Natalia had enjoyed scrubbing each other's...backs for a full forty-five minutes the night before. He wasn't so spooked about Darcy and Steve catching them at it, either, because that particular terrible twosome had discovered the little lagoons further in on the island and had come back talking excitedly of waterfalls and hidden caves and surprisingly comfortable rocks.

Bucky rolled out of the empty bed, wondering where his beautiful lady was so early on their second day in Paradise. He had ideas about loincloths and her being Tarzan and him being Jane and finding those comfortable rocks underneath the waterfall that Steve had been waxing poetic last night around a campfire.

"Are you decent?! Do you need more piratesea?"

Bucky chuckled at the shout from the front porch of the hut and searched around for the shorts he had let Natasha rip off of him the night before. He pulled them up and went to the gauzy curtain covered door and smiled at Darcy as she held both hands over her eyes. She had a bag at her feet, and Bucky bent over to pick it up for her, bringing it into the hut.

"Come on in, Sweetpea, I'm all covered up," Bucky assured her, guiding her by her elbow into the living space. He gave her a kiss to the top of her head and wondered, "How's that little lady cooking today? She enjoying the sunshine and ocean breeze?"

"She's good," Darcy patted the little belly she normally sported on a day after a good meal. No one who looked at her would be able to tell she was two and a half months pregnant, but now Bucky knew and it made Darcy a glowing, glimmering beauty in his eyes. "We had blueberry frosted mini wheats for breakfast and it was awesome. Oh, speaking of---Friday?"
"Yes, Boss?"

Bucky wrinkled his nose at the artificial intelligence referring to Darcy as BOSS. They thought that had been programmed out of the resilient computer that seemed to have pledged its eternal allegiance to Darcy.

"Set the kitchen bots to making the bacon and the toast and the eggs and such for my Daddy, please," Darcy asked cheerfully as she took the little case that Bucky had lifted off the ground and placed it on the nearby dining table. She opened it up to reveal a lot of combs and scissors and curlers. She grinned at Bucky and asked, "On a scale of one to ten, how much do you trust me?"

"A one hundred, Princess," Bucky promised.

"Enough to give you a hair trim?" Darcy asked eagerly. "Just a little bit, because you're handsome as sin, and you know it. But the ends are a little raggedy..."

The miniscule kitchen robots were cooking up a storm and Bucky shrugged, knowing that Darcy couldn't be so bad with scissors. She had cut the hair off of one of the Barbie dolls that the Bartons had given her weeks ago when she was still little and had to use the safety scissors. The mohawk had looked nice on the doll.

"Alright Darce, do your worst."

"You really are an excellent painter," Natasha marveled at Steve.

He was laying on his stomach on the floor at her feet, ten bottles of nailpolish opened in front of him as he concentrated very hard on making each of Natasha's toenails as beautiful as he could. His tongue was peaking out between his lips as a result of his intense concentration as he made the smallest stroke with the brush, making the red rose on her pinkie toe absolutely perfect.

"Thanks, Darcy said when we do the nursery at the house, that she wants me to paint Prissy Hissy all around the top of the wall getting into adventures," Steve said quietly as he finished up his painting and blew on Natasha's toes as hard as he possibly could.
Natasha could only laugh and lean forward to ruffle his hair. She eased herself off of the lounge chair she had been sitting on and onto the sand Steve was sprawled out on. Steve turned on his back and the Natasha reclined so that they lay side by side, staring up at blue skies with little puffs of playful white clouds. Steve carefully corked the nailpolishes and threw them into Darcy's caboodle full of cosmetics while Natasha dug into her own little bag, pulling out an entire box of granola bars and placing them on Steve's chest just as his stomach began to rumble with hunger.

"Thanks," Steve said cheerfully as he ripped into the little snack.

Natasha watched as he unwrapped all the bars at once and used his super strength to create a large ball of chocolate chips and granola, about the size of a grapefruit before he gleefully dug in. She reached out and stroked blonde locks off of his forehead and made a happy sighing sound.

"This is good," she said softly.

"Yeah," Steve agreed around a mouthful.

"Back in DC, before SHIELD fell, did you ever think something like this could happen?" Natasha pondered. "To someone like me?"

"I did," Steve admitted. "Didn't know it would be with my best friend."

"To be fair, I didn't know the Winter Soldier was your former best friend either at the time," Natasha smirked.

"Glad it is with Bucky though," Steve smiled his newly discovered carefree, sunshine filled smile. "Never seen him so happy, not even after his first kiss when he was nine."

"Nine!" Natasha pretended to be scandalized.

"He was very advanced, apparently," Steve rolled his eyes. He leaned into Natasha's calm and easy petting of his hair. "Never thought back then that we could be closer than we were. I mean, teammates is one thing...you being my second ma is another level of close, Nat."
"Yeah, I like it though," Natasha said softly as they stared up at one little puff of cloud. The rainbow lights could be seen twinkling from the cloud and she took a deep, long inhale. "Thor's coming."

"Honestly, Darce, I'm just gonna lose the pants soon as I get a moment alone with your ma," Bucky grumbled as the pushy little lady he gleefully claimed as his own daughter pushed him out of the hut.

She'd trimmed up his hair very nicely, then razored his stubble to acceptable five-o-clock shadow lengths before giving him something called a steam mask that really did make his skin feel as smooth as her future baby's bottom. When he'd rinsed it all off, she'd handed him a pair of loose khaki pants and a white button down shirt that she wouldn't let him button up all the way. She'd changed into a fantastically sparkly pink dress, and the way it was cut put a big emphasis on her little round tummy.

Bucky had spent five minutes patting the belly and talking to it, despite Darcy informing him that he was talking to a box of chocolates and frosted blueberry mini wheats.

"What on Earth?" Bucky whispered, looking at the area between the two huts. There was a fire going, and an altar set up, looking suspiciously like the archway that Darcy and Steve were wed beneath, with pink ribbons and flowers instead of blue decorating it. Just beyond that, he could see a quinjet, and from the quinjet he saw the Bartons, Fury, Wilson and Carter approaching.

Bucky looked down at Darcy in realization that the little sneak had gone off and planned a wedding for he and Natalia. The kid could only beam up at him with sunshine and happiness.

"Is there a way me and Natalia can get handfasted too?" he asked quietly, sniffing a bit at the end of his question, his eyes watery with tears.

"I'll need a Thor to make that happen," Darcy nodded. "Good thing I asked my dude Heimdall do to me a solid."

"BUCKY!" Thor boomed from the altar. "Come and let me see you, Darcy got us matching shirts, but I feel they'd be better sleeveless...for both of us, of course. Although mine are admittedly more impressive than yours, the metal surely has its appeal. And being sleeveless would not just be for my benefit, and the benefit of everyone watching."
"You monster," Jane complained from the same space-tech ipad she had attended Darcy and Steve's wedding with. "You know how people get around your biceps, add a metal bicep to it and it's inhuman."

"Indeed," Thor waggled his eyebrows. "Come, Bucky, let's rip our sleeves off together."

Bucky would never, ever forget the moment that Fury walked Natalia down the aisle to him. Darcy had preceded the bride, sprinkling petals onto the ground as she made her way to the altar were Steve stood behind Bucky. His red headed beauty had been wearing a simple slip dress of white, with a sash of pink defiantly tied around her waist.

She smiled at him, and while Darcy had been beaming, and his own smile had been breathless and full of wonderment, Natalia's smile had been exactly what had lingered in a brain that had been too long abused by time and Hydra and electricity. It had been a smirk. Wry. Playful. Holding secrets big and small.

She was the most beautiful thing he'd seen in over one hundred years of living and she was willing to tie her life to his forever.

"Did you have anything to say, as vows? Or shall I say them for you?" Thor offered cheerfully after no objections had been made by the very small congregation.

"I will always hold you in my heart," Natasha promised. "Just in case you get lost again. And I know you'll do the same for me."

Clint Barton and Nick Fury were perhaps crying the most at that point, and didn't hesitate in leaning into each other in support.

"Even when there was nothing in my head but a mission, I still knew there was more," Bucky answered. "I didn't know that there was so much more. But I knew, once upon a time, I had something really good in my hands. And it was you. And it will be you. Forever, Red. Forever, my Natalia."
"Oh god, thank fuck he didn't get the sleeves off," Jane muttered from the tablet that she had assumed was on mute.

"Join hands," Thor encouraged. "By the power vested in me, by an ordained church that Darcy signed me up for at the cost of forty-nine dollars and ninety-nine of your Midgardian cents a year, as well as being the rightful ruler of all nine realms and everyone's---"

"It's cool, dude, proceed," Darcy whispered.

"I proclaim you handfasted. May my mother Frigga bless your union with love and warmth and bliss," Thor answered, smiling at the flash of light that proclaimed the pair handfasted. "And in the eyes of your silly Midgardian laws, you are married. Forever may it last. And Natasha, should you wish to, feel free to kiss your handsome spoil of war."

Darcy bounced around on the tips of her toes in her excitement and didn't allow Natasha and Bucky to finish kissing before rushing across the altar and launching herself at Steve.

"I TOLD YOU IT WOULD WORK AND THEY WOULDN'T BE UPSET!" she screeched right into Steve's ear as he picked her up and swung her around.

"Well how was I supposed to know that Buck would be so relaxed about it?" Steve demanded in annoyance. "You can't just spring a wedding on two former assassins and think they'll both be okay with it!"

"BUT YOU CAN AND I DID!" Darcy crowed victoriously. "SUCK IT, ROGERS!"

"Kids," Bucky warned. "Keep it down to a dull roar, wouldja? I'd like to kiss my wife a little more in peace and quiet."

"Yes, Daddy!" Darcy replied, before sticking her tongue out at Steve.

"You keep that up, and I'll bite it," Steve warned.
"Promises, promises," Darcy rolled her eyes before continuing to stick her tongue out. He brought his head close to her face and she shrieked in delight before kneeing him in the balls and wiggling out of his weakened grasp. She took off running away from the altar, Steve in hot pursuit.

"LEWIS! LEWIS GET BACK HERE!" Steve shouted as she ran towards the calm waves of the ocean. "You're gonna get kidnapped and taken off by a bunch of dolphins. GET BACK HERE!"

Chapter End Notes

Now. The question becomes---do I make it a hat trick???

I'm thinking Darcy and Bucky raising up some de-aged Asgardian Princes?
Hmmm....I'll see you in this spot on Mondays after Christmas!!!

THANK YOU FOR READING! I COULDN'T DO THIS WITHOUT YOU!

End Notes

This story updates every Monday. Thank you so much for reading!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!