In the Blink of an Eye
by Ginsteer

Summary

Steve takes Grace out for a driving lesson. What could possibly go wrong?

Notes

After an eternity of not finishing anything, I've finally completed one of my stories. It's just a little something I came up with recently. I'd like to thank my AMAZING group of friends for taking care of all my grammar, spelling and other mistakes! Mahalo imaginary_ibly, IreneClaire and one anonymous little helper. You guys are THE BEST!

Steve was busy wiping down the counters in the kitchen when he heard the front door open. Turning to look over his left shoulder, he saw Grace enter the house with her cell phone in her hand. “Hey,” he greeted his partner’s daughter. “How was school?”

Grace, like any other teenager, huffed out a breath and rolled her eyes. “Good,” she replied curtly, as she dropped her heavy-looking school bag right next to the door and toed off her sneakers.

Steve eyed the heap as he strolled out of the kitchen and pointed a finger at it. “You better clean that up before your dad gets home from court. You know how much he hates stumbling over your stuff.”

The eye-roll was impossible to miss. With a heavy sigh, Grace bent down and scooped everything into her arms, her scowl matching her father’s to a T.

Steve tried to hide a smirk as he watched her stomp down the hallway to her room. Grace was still a
good girl, but, boy had puberty hit her hard. More than once, Danny had reached his wit’s end with her. Steve was positive his partner’s grey hair had at least doubled in the last couple of months.

Steve returned to the kitchen to continue cleaning. For a while, he heard music coming from Grace’s room and he found himself humming along to a Shawn Mendes song.

A while later, he was just about to give the stove a proper wipe down, when Grace appeared in the kitchen again. She had changed into denim shorts, a pink crop top and her long hair was up in a messy bun. “Uncle Steve, when is dad going to be home?” She leaned against the doorframe.

Steve threw the damp towel he was using over his shoulder and glanced at his wristwatch. Danny was stuck in court all day to testify against some low-level drug dealer with ties to the Yakuza. “Not sure,” he stated as he counted the hours in his head. “It might still be a while, though. Why? You hungry?”

Grace’s shoulders slumped, the corners of her mouth drawn downward. “No. I wanted to ask him if he could take me out for a drive. Lucy’s got her license today and I don’t want to be stuck as a back-seat driver for the rest of my life.”

Steve blinked at her. “Lucy’s got her license?” he asked, struggling a bit with picturing little Lucy behind the wheel of a car. He still remembered the two of them stumbling through the humid forest five years ago with a guy holding a gun to their heads. To know she was now old enough to drive a car made him feel awfully old.

“Yes, she did!” Grace moaned dramatically. “And she’s younger than me.”

"Wow, that’s... Really?" He wondered, as if doubting the accuracy of Grace's words.

Grace scowled at the tinge of surprise in his voice, an expression of pure annoyance crossing her features. "Yes, really," she snapped none too politely. "It's humiliating!"

Completely taken aback by the emotional reaction, Steve just stood there with his mouth open, not quite sure what he had done. For a brief moment, he really wished Danny was there to deal with this. Whatever this was. Unfortunately, his partner wasn’t there, which left him to deal with the situation at hand by himself. “It’s not humiliating. It’s not a big deal.”

Obviously, that had been the wrong thing to say, because Grace’s face fell even more. “But it is a big deal,” she grumbled and crossed her arms in a pouty manner.

Steve blew out a breath and tried to ignore the building headache. Handling a hormonal teenager was even tougher than handling a bomb—and he had dealt with his fair share of the latter. “Okay, how about this. I’ll finish cleaning the kitchen and when I’m done we’ll go for a ride. Not without Danny’s permission, though.”

As quickly as she got all worked up, she calmed down again. A beaming smile graced her face instantly after his suggestion and she nodded eagerly. “Thanks, Uncle Steve! I’ll text Danno right away!”

Her smile was contagious and Steve couldn’t help but grin as well. “You’re welcome. Go do your homework. I don’t want Danny to come home and complain about me taking you out on a school night when your homework’s not done.” He expected a bit of a protest on Grace’s part, but none came. Instead, she just spun around and rushed off to her room. Maybe this whole teenager thing isn’t as hard to deal with after all. He just needed to know what triggers to avoid.
Half an hour later, and with Danny’s blessing, they were driving down a relatively quiet street near University of Hawai‘i. Despite only recently having started her driving lessons, Grace was doing very well and Steve was impressed. He’d never taken her out for a drive before, as Danny was very passionate about teaching her – not to mention slightly terrified that Steve would pass on his occasionally not-so-civilized driving skills. The thought made Steve smirk a bit.

“Where to?” Grace asked when they pulled up at a red light. The engine of the Silverado purred and Grace seemed to enjoy the feeling of sitting in the powerful truck. Until now, she’d only ever been in Kono’s old car, which she borrowed for this purpose. Under no circumstances did Danny allow his daughter behind the wheel of the Camaro.

Steve looked around, noticing a traffic jam to their left. “How about up Tantalus Drive? Ever driven up there?” The road was rather narrow, but definitely wide enough for the truck. The top of Tantalus Drive was one of the most beautiful places on the island and a lot of tourists went up there every day to take pictures of Honolulu and Diamond Head.

Turning her head, Grace eyed the curvy road that led up the hill. “Not yet,” she replied but set the indicator to turn.

“Just go slow and stay in the right lane,” Steve instructed as they started to drive upward.

The first half of the drive went without a hitch. In the beginning, Grace drove very slowly and carefully, taking her time around each and every turn. After a while, she gained more confidence and drove up the hill as if she’d done it a thousand times before.

When they reached the outlook on top of the hill, they got out and snapped some pictures. Grace made Steve take at least two dozen of them, so she could post the best one on Instagram.

It was almost six o’clock by the time they made their way back down Tantalus Drive. Because both of them were starving, Steve suggested they get a pizza from their favorite place, which Grace was immediately on board with.

They were talking about what to get Jerry for his upcoming birthday, when Steve noticed their steadily increasing speed. He didn’t want to criticize Grace’s driving, but when she took a curve a bit too quickly and they ended up halfway on the other lane he was forced to say something. “A bit slower, Grace,” he instructed gently, trying not to appear didactic.

“I know what I’m doing,” she replied, subtle annoyance coloring her voice. He had already guessed that she would not be happy about him criticizing her after praising her before, but her safety was more important than her continued good mood and he didn’t mind ruffling some feathers if it meant keeping Danny’s daughter safe.

For a while, Grace stuck to Steve’s instruction to go slower but about halfway down the hill, the speed increased again.

“Grace. Slow down,” Steve said, voice sounding firmer now.

She was going faster than before and they were about to enter a particularly curvy patch of the road. “Uncle Steve, I know what I’m doing,” she snapped back and glowered at him, making the car swerve onto the oncoming lane. “I know how to—“

“Grace!”
Steve saw the black SUV coming their way a second before Grace did. Grace’s eyes widened in shock and she froze. Reacting on instinct, Steve reached over and jerked the steering wheel to the right, just barely managing to avoid a head-on collision. Unfortunately, the drastic maneuver caused the Silverado to lurch sideway and from his position in the passenger seat Steve was helpless to do anything. “Brakes, Grace!” he shouted, staring at the tree line that rushed toward them.

In the last possible second, Grace understood what she was being told and hit the brakes.

But it was too late.

The scrunch of metal was deafening when they crashed head-on into the thick trunk of a large tree. Steve squeezed his eyes shut as his temple collided sharply with the side window, causing the glass to shatter like a spider web.

He must have blacked out, because when he opened his eyes again, they weren’t moving anymore. His ears were ringing and the crackling of his damaged car sounded muffled in his skull.

Shaking his head to clear away the cobwebs, Steve took stock of his surroundings. “Grace,” he breathed out and tried to turn his pounding head. Pain shot up and down his back and neck and he had to bite back a groan. “Gracie,” he repeated hoarsely when the teenager didn’t answer right away.

Steve was expecting the worst and a small breath of relief passed his lips when he saw her sitting awake next to him. Her brown eyes were blown wide and she was staring straight ahead, shocked. But she was conscious, which was an enormous relief.

“Grace, are you okay?” Steve started fiddling with his seatbelt, trying to unclip it. After a few unsuccessful try, the belt sprang open and he attempted to lean over to check on her. He hissed when pain shot through his pelvis and up his torso. Looking down, he only then noticed that the console of the truck trapped him. “Shit.”

“Uncle Steve…”

Grace’s broken voice spurred him on. Forcing the physical pain he was in to the back of his mind, he pushed against the console with all his strength. Sweat broke out on his forehead, but he managed to create enough room for his legs and hips to slip free. Thankfully, the passenger door was still intact and not wedged shut. Steve shoved it open and slid out of the car, hanging onto the door when a dizzying head rush threatened to take him down and pain wrapped like a belt around his hips and abdomen. Gritting his teeth, he pushed off the door and limped around the wrecked car.

“Grace,” he called for the third time. His heart was pounding inside his chest, worry for the young girl consuming his entire being. “Just hold on. Everything is going to be okay.”

Grace whimpered when he pulled the door open and she stiffly turned her pale face toward him. “I’m sorry… I didn’t… I don’t…” she stammered as tears ran down her colorless cheeks.

“It’s okay, Gracie. It’s okay.” Steve tried to soothe her. He put a hand on her cheek, trying to calm her down. “Can you tell me if anything hurts?”

“M-my arm,” she said and looked down.

Steve followed her gaze and instantly knew that her left arm was broken. It was already starting to bruise and swell spectacularly. “Everything’s going to be fine.” He smiled reassuringly. “What else? Does anything else hurt? How about your legs? Can you move your legs?”

Grace nodded. “Yes,” she replied, proving so by moving her legs under where the steering wheel
was pressed against her lap. “But my head hurts.”

Just then, Steve heard a voice. Turning around, he almost lost his footing when his head spun and the green forest swirled and dipped around him. Momentarily closing his eyes, he needed a second to get his equilibrium back. When he opened his eyes again, a man hurried toward them. Probably the owner of the black SUV they almost hit.

“Are you guys all right?” he asked worriedly. “I already called for an ambulance,” he added and Steve was grateful for the man’s quick thinking.

“Thank you,” Steve replied and then turned back to Grace when she tugged at the hem of his shirt. “What is it, Gracie?” He asked, fingers combing through her brown hair.

Grace swallowed. “I feel sick. I want to get out.”

His heart went out to Grace, but he simply couldn’t allow her to get out of the car. Not until someone had made sure she hadn’t suffered any injuries to her back and spine. “You gotta stay put for a while longer, okay?” Her grip on his shirt tightened, and he felt her nails bite into the skin of his stomach. “Hey, hey. Relax. I’m here. I’m not going to leave you.”

As promised, Steve remained by Grace’s side until the ambulance and a police car pulled up and he was forced to make room for the EMTs. The guy in the SUV had handed Steve a blanket when Grace had started to shiver and Steve was now clutching said blanket in a death grip. With his heart still beating wildly and adrenaline coursing through his veins, Steve watched them load Grace onto a stretcher. Despite her age of sixteen, she looked so small and fragile. Steve felt physically sick.

“We’re going to take her to Queens,” one of the EMTs announced, as they carefully maneuvered the stretcher up the small incline and to the parked ambulance at the side of the road. Without being prompted to, Steve followed them with a painful limp. He told one of the officers on scene to call Five-0 before he climbed into the back of the ambulance and folded his larger frame onto a seat next to Grace’s gurney. She was still trembling and the tears hadn’t stopped.

The female EMT—Steve didn’t even know her name—quietly asked Grace a few questions while inserting an IV and provisionally splinting her broken arm. Steve watched them talk and tried to force down his raising nausea and the sharp pain in his lower upper body.

“I will check on you in a minute, sir,” the EMT promised.

But Steve waved her off. “I’m fine.”

The woman looked like she was about to protest his self-diagnosis, but Steve didn’t give her time to argue. Instead, he leaned forward and clasped Grace’s hand. “You’re doing great, Gracie.”

By the time they reached the hospital, Grace had stopped shivering and some of the color had returned to her cheeks. “Dad is going to kill me,” she muttered with a sigh that gave Steve a sense of some kind of normalcy.

He couldn’t help but smile a bit, despite the seriousness of the situation. “Probably,” he replied and bent down to kiss her forehead. “But only because he’s going to hug you to death.”

Grace returned his smile weakly. Then she was wheeled past Steve into one of the treatment rooms. Taking a second to gather his thoughts, Steve didn’t notice a nurse who approached him until she cleared her throat.
“Sir, we were informed that you were in the car accident on Tantalus Drive as well.”

Surprised, Steve looked down at the nurse who was at least two heads shorter than he was. “I’m fine,” he replied, brushing her off. He took a few painful steps toward the waiting area when an unexpected wave of dizziness crashed over him. Closing his eyes, he swallowed back a surge of nausea and locked his wobbly knees. Adrenaline dump, he berated himself and changed course to the restrooms.

Shoving the door open, he limped over to the sink and braced himself with both arms on the cool porcelain surface. His head, hips and stomach were hurting fiercely. Closing his eyes and letting his head drop to his chest, he took some deep breaths. All the aches and pains he had managed to lock away before were returning with a vengeance and he suddenly regretted turning down the nurse, because he could certainly do with a painkiller or two.

Steve leaned forward to turn on the faucet and hissed when the edge of the sink dug into his tender abdomen. The pain was agonizing and he almost threw up then and there. Reaching for the hem of his shirt, he lifted it and grimaced at the livid bruise that was spread across his lower stomach and hipbones. With careful fingers, he traced the edge of the discolored skin. “That’s gonna hurt for a while,” he muttered under his breath before dismissing the injury and splashing cold water on his face to ground himself.

He didn’t know how long he’d been inside the restroom when a familiar voice just outside caught his attention and he straightened up. He quickly grabbed a handful of towels, dried his face and then hurried out.

The second Steve laid eyes on Danny, his pulse accelerated again. His partner looked panicked, pale and on the verge of freaking out. The emotional hurt in those bright blue eyes tore at Steve’s heart and he had to swallow down a lump before being able to call out. “Danny.”

Upon hearing his name, Danny whirled around. He looked at Steve, and the shift that took place in Danny’s eyes made Steve’s head spin. Fear was replaced by anger and Steve took an uncertain step back when his partner stalked toward him.

“What the hell were you thinking?!” Danny snarled, getting in Steve’s face. “You had no right, no right to do this!”

The fury was coming off of Danny in strong, powerful waves and Steve didn’t know what to say. He knew how angry and furious his partner could get, but never before had those emotions been directed at him. He’d never been on the receiving end of Danny’s immense rage and it stunned him to his core. “Danny, I—” He tried to explain himself, to tell his partner that it had been an accident. However, the voice of Grace’s doctor cut him off.

Danny looked over Steve’s shoulder at the doctor before glaring back at him. “We’re not done yet,” he growled warningly before pushing past Steve.

The jostle sent a ripple of pain through Steve’s middle and he stifled a grunt. Stiffly, he turned around and watched his partner follow the doctor down the hall. With a lump in his throat, Steve stood stranded in the hallway, ignoring the nurses’ curious and compassionate looks.

As soon as the doctor opened the door to his daughter’s treatment room, Danny squeezed past and rushed over to the stretcher. Grace was sitting on the edge of the gurney, arm propped up on a pillow.
with a young nurse prodding the purpling skin. There was a fist sized bruise on Grace’s left temple and her face was smudged with make-up. She had obviously been crying.

“Grace,” he breathed, pulling her into a gentle hug. “Are you okay?”

The second his arms wrapped around her smaller frame she started to sob uncontrollably. Holding her closer, Danny tucked her head underneath his chin and tried to hush her with comforting words. He knew from the doctor that her injuries weren’t serious. A broken arm, a minor concussion and some bumps and bruises. One overnight stay at the hospital and then she would be able to go home. Nonetheless, his baby girl had been hurt. His heart had stopped inside his chest when he’d been pulled out of court by an HPD officer who had informed him about the accident. He had left a voice message for Rachel, who was on the mainland with Charlie, before speeding to the hospital.

“It’s okay,” he whispered into her hair, inhaling the smell of her rose shampoo.

Grace suddenly struggled to free herself from his embrace. “No, it’s not okay!” She almost screamed, surprising Danny with her outburst. “It was my fault.”

Confused, Danny wiped a tear off her cheek. “It was an accident. Steve should have never taken you —”

She sobbed again. “You don’t understand,” she cried. “I told Uncle Steve you said yes to him taking me driving.”

The words made Danny freeze and he stared down at his daughter. “Grace, what are you talking about?” he asked, dread gripping his stomach.

Grace glanced down at her lap. “I texted you if he could take me driving, but you didn’t respond. So I just told him you said yes.”

The confession stunned Danny into silence. He didn’t even have words.

“I’m sorry, Danno,” Grace wept and dropped her head. Large tears were rolling down her face and Danny couldn’t do anything different than hug her again. He was upset about what she’d done. And guilt gnawed at him like cancer when he remembered the lost expression on Steve’s face when he had yelled at him. Because Steve had no idea what he’d done wrong. Danny cursed under his breath.

“We are going to talk about this, Grace,” he said sternly. “But not now. Not here.”

A commotion from outside the treatment room momentarily distracted Danny before he turned his sole focus back to his daughter. “What you did was not okay, and you will apologize to Uncle Steve.” Right after I do, he added in his mind when he remembered his own harsh reaction. Steve hadn’t done anything wrong. For all he had known, Danny had given permission. Danny ran a hand though his hair, feeling guilty.

“Listen, Grace. I’ll be right back. I need to talk to Uncle Steve.” She was still distraught so he gave her a small smile. He was disappointed about her behavior but now was neither the time nor the place to discuss it.

“Is Uncle Steve okay?” she asked. “He was bleeding.”

The lump in the back of Danny’s throat grew even larger. He’d seen the blood on the side of his partner’s face and the stiff way he was holding himself. “I’m sure he’s fine. But I’m gonna make sure a doctor takes a look at his hard head.”
Danny excused himself from the treatment room and went to find Steve. When he stepped into the busy hallway, he was greeted by the sight of a short nurse trying to wrangle his stubborn partner onto a gurney. Steve was already in a more or less reclining position—still struggling and vehemently insisting that he was fine—when their eyes met.

“Danny,” Steve said and his fight increased. He somehow managed to slip out of the nurse’s grasp and lurched back to his feet. He attempted to sidestep the irritated looking woman but she seemed to be stronger than she looked.

“Commander McGarrett, please stay down,” she grit out with a heavy dose of frustration and a tad bit of annoyance in her firm voice. When Steve refused to listen and tried to stride toward Danny, she stopped him by putting her arms against his chest. Danny almost had to smirk at the battle of wills—Until the nurse bodily pushed against Steve’s stomach to get him lying down. Steve cried out in agony, doubling over and pressing his hand to his abdomen. The sound cut Danny to his core and he watched, shocked, as Steve’s knees folded and he collapsed to the floor with a dull thud. The nurse apparently wasn’t expecting the sudden fall either, as her hands desperately clawed at Steve’s shirt before she fell to the ground alongside him.

“Steve!” Danny shouted in alarm. Before he was aware of it, he had crossed the hallway and was kneeling next to his partner on the mint green linoleum floor.

Despite the agony he was evidently in, Steve lifted his head and focused pain-glazed eyes on Danny. “I’m sorry,” he pressed out, voice sounding strained. “I shouldn’t have…” He broke off with a groan and curled tighter into himself. Somewhere in the background, Danny heard the nurse call out for help. He touched his partner’s cheek and ordered him to open his eyes.

“Stop talking, you idiot!” Danny snapped, but his gentle touch belied his sharp tone. He took in his partner’s bloodless face, the pained grimace and the way he was rigidly holding himself semi-upright. Heart pounding inside his chest, Danny looked up to see a doctor hurry toward them.

The large man dropped to his knees as well and expertly maneuvered Steve into a position that allowed him to better evaluate the situation. The nurse rattled off what just had happened and Danny wasn’t surprised to learn that his partner had fervently declined any kind of medical attention up to this point. Not thinking for long, the doctor pulled Steve’s shirt out of the way and started palpating his ribs and stomach. Steve groaned and tried to roll away from the touch. “Abdomen is rigid with extensive bruising. I need to perform ultrasound, now.” Everything was happening so fast, Danny’s head was spinning. The doctor’s words struck him like a train and he stared down at Steve, shocked. “Why didn’t you get checked out in the first place?!” he snapped again, worry fighting with frustration for dominance.

Steve’s answer was only one single word but it made Danny’s breath hitch.

“Grace…” Steve whispered quietly, just as he was lifted onto the waiting gurney. This time, he didn’t protest. Instead, he melted against the thin pad and closed his eyes. An oxygen mask appeared from somewhere and was placed over his nose. Utterly helpless, Danny was forced to step aside as two nurses and the doctor moved the stretcher past him and down the hallway. The last thing he saw was the top of his best friend’s head before he disappeared behind a large double door.
The return of consciousness was slow for Steve. Fighting through a thick wall of fog that clouded his mind, he battled his way to awareness. Before he had even opened his eyes he became aware of a dull ache in his abdomen. There wasn’t pain per se but rather an unpleasant pressure that felt like something was pushing down on him. What wasn’t just an unpleasant pressure was the thumping in his head that grew stronger with each passing second he spent awake. He tried to fight his body’s demand to wake up but the more discomfort he became aware of, the harder it got to stay in that sweet, almost floating state.

“Steve?”

The familiar voice made Steve pause and he flinched when a hand touched his shoulder.

“Babe, are you awake?”

He was now actively fighting the haze in his brain and managed to roll his head toward the source of the voice. The movement sent a stab of pain through his skull and he groaned hoarsely.

“Easy. Take it easy,” Danny said quietly, hand now moving down his arm to his hand.

Steve fumbled with the familiar fingers and wrapped his own around them. Slowly, he cracked open his gritty eyes.

“Why’re you not in bed w’me?” Steve asked and cringed when he noticed how rough and croaky his voice sounded. Everything was blurry and he had to blink a couple of times to see the shape of his partner.

Danny squeezed his hand and leaned in. “You’re not in your bed, Steve. You’re in the hospital.” He spoke slowly, yet it took Steve’s brain a few long seconds to process the words.

“Hospital?” he repeated as he started looking around. The room was only dimly lit and when he looked through the window opposite his bed, he saw nothing but dark night. “Time’s it?” he murmured. His mouth was dry and he longed for something to drink but something told him that the underlying nausea would not benefit from that.


Thinking hurt his head but Steve attempted to sort through his jumbled memories. He had snippets in his brain but was unable to bring them in any kind of order that made sense. He gave up with a frustrated huff and palmed his forehead. Sharp pain shot through his abdomen as soon as he lifted his arm too high and he jerked in pained surprise. His hand went down to his stomach, fumbling with the thin covers of the bed.

Danny batted his hand away. “Don’t touch that. The doctors just put you back together,” he warned.

“I know what I’m doing.” The second those words left his mouth Steve had a vision of sitting inside his truck with Grace. Foliage was rushing toward them and he heard the loud crunch of metal. He grimaced and squeezed his eyes shut when a picture of Grace—looking pale and shocky and hurt—appeared in his mind’s eye. Accident. They’d been in an accident.

Somewhere in the background, an alarm started to blare. Steve didn’t pay it any attention as he tried to comprehend that Grace had been in an accident. And it had been his fault. He had suggested Tantalus Drive even though he had known that it was a curvy and narrow road.

Steve didn’t become attentive of anything else until a pair of calloused hands gripped his face and forced him to lift his head. Opening his eyes, he stared straight in Danny’s deep blue eyes. “Danny…
I’m sorry…” He stammered.

“Calm down,” Danny replied quietly. “If you don’t calm down, the doc is going to kick me out. Do you understand?”

No. Steve didn’t understand. Danny should be yelling at him. Should be threatening to kick his ass to hell and back. He should be furious. But he wasn’t. All Steve could see in his partner’s expressive eyes was worry and… guilt?

“I should be the one apologizing,” Danny continued, unable to meet Steve’s eyes. “Hell, I am apologizing,” he added. He looked up. “I’m sorry for the way I treated you earlier. You didn’t deserve any of it.”

A flash of Danny’s angry eyes appeared in Steve’s memory and he grimaced. He now remembered bits and pieces of his partner’s outburst in the ER hallway. “I should have paid better attention…”

“It was an accident,” Danny cut in. “Accidents happen.” He sighed and ran his free hand through his hair. “I yelled at you because you took Grace out without my permission.”

“But—“

Danny held up his hand, interrupting him again. “I know. Grace texted me. I never saw that message, though.”

Even in Steve’s concussed brain he was able to put two and two together. “She lied?” He asked, unable to comprehend such an absurd thing. Grace rarely ever lied and never ever about a thing she knew would harm her father’s trust in her.

“She did,” Danny confirmed with a sad sigh. “This probably goes without saying but she’s grounded for the next six months at least.”

“But she’s okay?” Steve dared to ask. He knew her arm was broken and she probably had a concussion.

Danny confirmed his guess a moment later by showing him a picture of Grace sitting in her hospital bed with a cast and a white band aid on the left side of her head. “She’ll be released tomorrow.”

A huge weight fell of Steve’s chest. “I’m glad she’s okay.”

“Yeah. Unlike someone else who ruptured his spleen and failed to mention it to anyone,” Danny said, making Steve aware of the discomfort in his abdomen once more. He touched the spot again, gingerly prodding it. He hissed when a hot spark of pain shot through him.

Danny slapped his hand for the second time. “I told you not to touch it!”

“Sorry,” Steve apologized with a weak smile. “What else? Do I still have all my body parts?”

Snorting, Danny rolled his eyes. “Yes. This time. Beside the tear in your gut, you got a grade two concussion, two cracked ribs and a broad array of bruises in every color of the rainbow. But you’re going to be fine.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” Steve mumbled. He felt his eyelids grow heavier and he fought against his body’s desire for more rest. He battled the heavy pull of sleep until Danny touched his cheek again.

“Go to sleep,” his partner said. “I’ll be here.”
Steve nodded tiredly, before his eyes closed and he fell back asleep.

Music woke Steve. This time around, waking up was much easier and it didn’t take him full minutes to gather his bearings. His vision was a bit unclear, but after a few blinks, things came into focus and with it a beautiful young face. “Hey, Gracie,” he greeted her with a drowsy smile.

“Hi Uncle Steve,” she replied quietly. Her voice was tainted by guilt and sounded far from her chatty self. She was sitting in the chair Danny had occupied the night before and she was playing with the hem of her yellow shirt. She was nervous.

Steve decided to break the ice. “Where’s your dad?” He asked and tried to push himself more upright in bed. He grunted when the movement pulled at his healing abdomen.

“You shouldn’t do that,” Grace piped up and handed him the remote control for the bed.

“Thank you,” Steve said as he raised the head of the bed. It took his body a moment or two to accustom to the new position, but once it did, he felt better right away. He decided to wait Grace out, let her continue the conversation.

“Uncle Steve. I’m sorry about what happened. I should have listened when you told me to go slower and I shouldn’t have lied to you and Danno.”

There were tears in her big brown eyes and Steve knew the teenager was on the verge of crying. Even though she’d made some wrong decisions, Steve didn’t want her to cry. “Hey, come here,” he said, holding out his arm.

With a sob, she lurched forward into his arms. “I’m really sorry you got hurt,” she sobbed into his hospital gown.

Running his hand down her back, Steve pulled her closer, mindful of her broken arm that lay between them. “It’s okay, Gracie. People make mistakes. And I’m sure you’ve learned your lesson.”

They stayed like that until her cries died down. When they did, Steve shifted carefully on the mattress and Grace climbed in bed with him. Wrapping an arm around her, they looked through the magazines Danny must have left behind. They were giggling about some silly comic, when the door opened.

“Is this a private cuddle party or is everyone invited?” Danny asked with a grin as he strolled into the room. He was carrying a brown paper bag and the smell of Cocoa Puffs reached Steve’s nose.

“If you’ve got Cocoa Puffs in there, you are invited too,” Steve joked, already making room for his partner on the other side of the bed. Accepting the invitation, Danny squeezed in on the other side of Steve. The bed was definitely not made for more than one person, but Steve enjoyed the closeness of two of his favorite people in the world.

Steve must have been more exhausted from the ordeal than he thought, because he suddenly found himself half-asleep, head pillowed on his partner’s shoulder. He hummed happily, soothed by the sound of Danny and Grace talking; comforted by the feel of Danny’s fingertips absently stroking the back of his neck, playing with his hair.

With a content smile, Steve closed his eyes and drifted off.
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