Finding a babysitter in New York is harder than it should be. Even if you've got a large extended (found) family to rope into watching your kid when you've got plans for a romantic weekend.

Tony's reduced to letting Clint Barton watch his kid. He's not overly happy about this. DJ is thrilled.
“I own an amazing apartment in Paris.”

“Nice,” Clint said, not looking up from his game.

“I have a villa there, too.” Tony stalked across the room, his feet clomping along with the petulance of a child. Clint angled his head to try to keep a clear line to the tv. “A penthouse in Hong Kong.”

“Hey, awesome.” Clint flopped onto his back, aiming his head for Nat's lap. He managed it, more or less, and she glared down at him. He gave her a bright smile. “Hi, Nat!”

“Hello, loser,” she said, but she ruffled his hair with a careless hand.

“I think I still have that ranch in Texas,” Tony said. He paused. “Or was that Buenos Ares?”

“Those are two very different places, Tony,” Nat said, going back to her reading. With her free hand, she reached for her tea cup. “Very different.”

“It involved cows, that's all I remember,” Tony admitted. “I own a ranch.”

“Or you did,” Nat agreed. “Is there a point to this?”

“There's the property in California, and a little island in the Caribbean, and favors I could call in from Abu Dhabi to Zurich,” Tony said.

“There's no point to this,” Clint said.

“I'm getting that,” Nat said.

“The point is,” Tony said, throwing his hands in the air, “that we have options. We have world wide options. There are a hundred places I could go, where I own the place, or have owned the place or COULD own the place if it came down to it.”

“Ever considered just checking hotels.com instead of buying the block?” Clint asked. “Low class, but you can book right on your phone now. There's an app.” He winced as his little digital avatar tried and failed to make a shot. “Oh, come on!” he muttered. “A blind guy coulda hit that. It was harder NOT to hit that than it was to hit it, you dumbass...”


She petted his head. “Not helping your case here, Barton.” To Tony, she said, “No, seriously. What is the point of this little montage of place names?”

His eyes narrowed at her. Nat just arched an eyebrow. “My point,” he said, “is that it's my anniversary, and instead of going to any of those places, we're renting a hotel room across town.” With that pronouncement, he threw himself into a chair. He radiated a comical amount of petulance. Clint considered bringing that up, but decided Tony probably wasn't in the mood to hear it.

“Could be worse,” he said, restoring a saved game instead. “Could be the Jersey Shore.”

“I’ve seen Steve in Atlantic City, that was enough for me,” Clint said.

“That was a mission, that doesn’t count.”

“He talked one of the rolling chair operators on the boardwalk into letting HIM push,” Clint said. “Paid for it, too. The guy never knew what hit him.”

“I do love that man,” Nat said, grinning.

“So do I, hands off, by the way,” Tony said. He waved a hand in the air. “To my eternal regret, I do love him, which is why I’ve actually taken pains to, I don’t know, remember my anniversary?”

“That was a surprise,” Natasha said. “Did you remember, or did Jarvis remember?”

Clint choked on a laugh, and Tony turned a gimlet glare in his direction. Clint busied himself with his controller. “I programmed Jarvis,” Tony said, slouching lower in his chair. “So in a roundabout way, I remembered.” He stopped, clearly waiting for either of them to argue. Neither of them bothered, so he kept going, “I remembered our anniversary, and I have a jet, and multiple international properties, and you know how we’re spending that anniversary?”

“Complaining about it?” Clint muttered.

Tony ignored him. “Weekend getaway in New York! We're a damn cliché. We're middle class white people from the suburbs, all excited to be spending a whole weekend! In New York!”

“Is he still going on about this?” Steve asked, walking into the room. He was barefoot and wearing a well worn StarkIndustries t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants, wet spots visible on the knees. DJ, fresh out of the bath, was clinging to his back, his hair still damp and wearing an oversized pair of pajamas. “Ready, buddy?”

DJ dug both fists into the fabric of Steve's shirt. “Ready!” he said, grinning wide and bright.

“Don’t.” Tony started, even as Steve flung himself over the back of the couch, and DJ vaulted over his head. Steve came down on the couch, catching DJ and pulling him back against his chest. The whole thing took a matter of seconds, and then Steve was sitting calmly on the couch, DJ perched happily in his lap. Tony scraped a hand over his face. “Was that necessary?”

“No, but it was fun,” Steve said, leaning over to press a kiss to the top of DJ's head. Giggling and squirming, DJ kicked his feet in mid-air. “Ready to spend the weekend with Uncle Clint and Auntie Nat?” he asked Deej, who grinned up at him.

“Ready.”

Natasha's eyes slid towards Clint, and he flexed his fingers against his stomach, an old signal they'd worked out in the field. Her lips pursed tight but she didn't say a word.

“Weekend in New York,” Tony groused. “Soon we'll be moving to a nice McMansion in the suburbs of Connecticut.” He shuddered. “In that Connecticut IS a suburb. The whole state. It's a waypoint on the way to somewhere ELSE. It's a place where people live because it's convenient. To, you know, the highway or the train that will take you OUT of Connecticut.”

“Tony-” Steve started.

“It's our first time being away from him for anything other than a natural disaster,” Steve said, unruffled. “I think it's best that we stay close.”

“I can watch him for a whole weekend,” Clint said, giving up on his game and turning it off. “Like. A WHOLE weekend. I'm not that inept.”

“You're on deck because Thor and Jane are in Asgard, and Bruce is at Princeton, lecturing,” Tony said. Steve cleared his throat. “And we appreciate it,” Tony said, grudgingly.

“I expect you to leave behind money for pizza,” Clint said, tossing his controller towards the coffee table.

Tony held out his hands, and DJ wriggled out of Steve's arms, scrambling across the floor with a great deal of speed and no grace. He almost crashed into Tony's chair, and Tony scooped him up. “We're going away,” he said. DJ nodded, bracing his feet on Tony's knees, his hands locked in Tony's. He leaned back, and Tony let him swing out. “But not far, and we'll be back soon. In three days. Jarvis will let you know how much time is left, if you ask him.”


“And we'll be back on Sunday night,” Steve said, smiling. “What do you say, buddy?”

DJ's head fell back, considering Steve from that upside down posture. “Have good sex,” he said at last, and Clint choked on a laugh. Above him, Nat's lips twitched, but she managed to keep a straight face. Clint didn't bother to try.

“I love this kid,” he said.

“Thank you, DJ,” Steve said, pressing a hand to his eyes, his lips twitching against a smile. “That's-Thank you.”

“Inappropriate, but accurate,” Tony said. He looked down at DJ. “Inappropriate.”

“Yes,” DJ agreed, unrepentant.

“I think he knows we have sex,” Steve said, smiling at Tony. “Kind of... Something he knows.”

“Something everyone knows,” Clint muttered, and Nat smacked him in the face with her book. “Ow!”

“Inappropriate,” she said.

“Right,” Tony said, pulling DJ back up and then standing. “Right. Okay. This is- Right.” He stared down at his son. DJ grinned up at him. “Menace,” he said. DJ leaned back again, pulling on Tony's hand, and Tony sighed. “Bedtime, you brat. Say good night.”

“Good night!” DJ said. He presented his hand to Natasha, Clint, and Steve in order, claiming a high five from each of them and a kiss from Steve. Then, he bounced out the door, nearly tripping on his pajama legs on the way. Wincing, Tony followed him.

“Kid's a pistol,” Clint said.

“We're a unique family, that's for sure,” Steve agreed, leaning his elbow on the arm of the sofa. “You sure you're okay with this?”

“It'll be fine,” Clint said. “You're going twelve blocks away, Steve.”
“A little further than that, but-” He shrugged. “I suggested it.”

“Uh-huh,” Natasha said, her head down over her book. “And how long did you let Tony make increasingly ornate and panic driven plans before you 'suggested' it?”

Steve paused. “It took me a while to see the pattern,” he admitted.

She smiled, just a little. “Sometimes, it's hard to see the problem, he's so busy putting on a show to cover it up.”

Clint looked from Steve to Natasha and back. “What am I missing?” he asked at last.

“Nothing,” Steve said.

“Tony's the one in the middle of a 'can't leave my child' freakout,” Natasha said. “Which he was covering up by planning on renting out Tokyo Disney Land for his anniversary, because anything can be solved if he throws enough stubborn effort and money at it.”

Clint sat up. “But he's left DJ before. This isn't the first time.”

“He's left DJ for StarkIndustries business, or Avengers work,” Steve said. “Those are things he has to do. Taking a trip to Paris for our anniversary is something he wants to do.” He sighed. “Wants to do. But feels guilty about, apparently.”

“Because wanting that translates to wanting to get away from his child,” Natasha filled in.

“Which is kind of, I don't know, normal?” Clint asked. “Everybody's gotta have some 'me' time.” He shrugged. “Every parent in the country takes vacations without their kids.”

“Feel free to tell him that,” Steve said, with a faint smile. He stopped, and held up a hand. “Actually, don't. I do not need to deal with that.”

“It wouldn't matter if you told him,” Natasha said, closing her book and setting it aside. “It's not rational. It's a fear. Based on family history.”


Steve smiled. “I'm fine with it.” He stood. “Gonna go talk him off the ledge and maybe see if I can pack something. Anything.”

“Okay,” Clint said.

“Have good sex,” Natasha said with a sweet smile.

“You think you're funnier than you are,” Steve said, but he was smiling. “Good night, you two. Thanks for agreeing to watch DJ.”

“Sure,” Clint said. Steve left, and he exhaled. “Guess I should be going, too, late night, I'm gonna-”

“Don't even.” She stared at him, her eyes narrow. “I have a training mission this weekend. With Phil.”

Clint shrugged. “I know.”

“Tony and Steve don't seem to know.”
“Yeah, they're a little more fuzzy on the details,” Clint said. “In my defense-”

“Oh, this is going to be rich.”

“In my defense,” Clint repeated over her. “I never said it was going to be you. I said, when Tony was like, 'no way you're going to be responsible for my child for multiple days, you can't even feed yourself for three days without adult supervision.'” He paused. “I feed myself just fine. I wanna point that out. He's the one who can't cook worth a damn. Hell, DJ's fed him more often than he's fed DJ, when there were smoothies and a blender involved-”

“Clint,” Natasha said.

“Right. Anyway, I said that no worries, she and I would be happy to watch him.” He paused. “They just assumed 'she' was you. Not my fault they're sexist assholes and don't know many women.”

She pressed a hand to her face. “Clint...”

“It'll be fine.” Clint rolled to his feet. “Go. Train it up. Keep an eye on Phil, he's gonna get in trouble with the junior ducklings, he always does.”

“Clint-” She looked at him. “Who-”

“I have backup, don't worry about it. See you on Sunday!” he said, almost to the door. He stopped, a hand braced on the door frame. “Uh, Nat? Don't-”

“I will not tell them because I don't want to see Stark have yet another meltdown,” Natasha said, reaching for her tea cup. “I will get you for this later, though.”

Clint grinned. “Never doubted it!”

*

“Do you have your instructions?”

“Dear God, what TIME is it?”

Tony snapped his fingers in front of Clint's nose. This won him one partially opened eye. He considered it a victory. “Instructions,” Tony repeated, drawing the word out. “Do you have them?”

“He has them,” Steve said, sounding too amused for Tony's peace of mind. He set the suitcases down on the floor by the elevator. “It's fine.”

“Not fine,” Tony said. “Clint. Focus. Instructions.”

“Why am I awake?” Clint mumbled, squinting at nothing. He shoved a hand through the tangled rats nest of his hair. His pajama pants slipped low on his hips, and he dragged them back up with a yawn.

Tony threw his hands in the air, and Steve ducked his head to try and hide a smile. “Because you're going to be responsible for DJ in about fifteen minutes,” he said. Clint turned his squint in Steve's direction, his face a mask of confusion, and Steve patted him on the shoulder. “Let me get you some coffee.”

“I don't think coffee's going to do it, I don't think a brain transplant would do it,” Tony pointed out.

“It'll be fine!” Steve said, heading back up the hall.
“Not fine,” Tony groused under his breath. “Absolutely not fine.” He leaned in. “Clint. I am trusting you right now.”

“Well, that's your fucking mistake, isn't it?” Clint asked, stretching, and nearly lost his pants again.

“Those things come with a drawstring, don't they?” Tony asked.

“Broke,” Clint said. Tony stared at him, nonplussed. “How do you keep them up normally?”

Clint shrugged. “I tuck the waistband into the top of my underwear.” Tony stared at him. Clint stared back. “What?” he asked, hitching his pants up.

“I suppose I should be thankful that you're wearing underwear,” Tony said.

“Living the dream,” Clint agreed. He scratched idly at the plane of his stomach. “Shouldn't you be leaving now?”

“Leaving,” Tony said, his voice flat.

“Yeah, leaving?”

“Leaving. Leaving the building. Which would involve leaving my child, a very delicate child, in the care of a man who tucks his pants into his underwear?” Tony asked. “That's what you mean by 'leaving'?”

“I mean, get the fuck out,” Clint said, his head tipping forward. He gave Tony an unimpressed look. “Your very delicate kid? Would that be the one who needs to be reminded of the 'pants' rule about six times a day?”

Tony's eyes narrowed. “Your point?”

“My point is I got like, double pants, I'm a fucking great role model, and he's a hell of a lot less delicate than you've chosen to believe he is.”

Tony gave a quick, sharp nod. “Right,” he said, fishing his phone out of his pocket. “Right.”

“Right?”

“You're an idiot,” Tony explained, pulling up his scheduling program.

“If you are attempting to cancel our reservations right now,” Steve said, walking back up with a cup of coffee in one hand and DJ clutching tight to the other. DJ hopped along next to him, bare feet slapping loudly on the floor, a folded paper hat wobbling on his head with each bounce.

“Not cancel, reschedule,” Tony said, as Steve handed Clint the coffee. DJ went along willingly, hopping around Clint's legs with a broad grin. Clint gulped the coffee and fumbled out with the other hand, trying to pet DJ on the head without actually looking down. He only managed to bump the hat to the side, making DJ giggle.

“Don't you dare,” Steve said, reaching for the phone.

Tony dodged, knowing the way that Steve moved, knowing Steve's instincts and strengths, and using every bit of that knowledge to his advantage. “Just putting it off until we can get reliable childcare,” he said, his voice arch. Steve snagged him, an arm around Tony's waist, dragging him
back. Tony struggled, just because he felt like it, but Steve's arms were warm and familiar, and he leaned back against Steve's chest. “Look at him, Steve.”

“Hi,” Clint said, waving a hand at them. Luckily, the coffee cup was empty. And his pants stayed up.

“DJ loves him,” Steve said, his mouth up against Tony's temple, almost a kiss. “And you know it.”

“I am loveable,” Clint said with a grin. “All sortsa people should've killed me by now, but I'm loveable. Nat alone.”

“DJ loves Furbro, too,” Tony pointed out, “and I'm not going to let him babysit, either.”

“Sorry, buddy,” Clint said to DJ. “There go our plans for Saturday.” DJ leaned against his leg, one little hand catching on the fabric at Clint's knee. Clint made a grab for his pants.

Tony looked at Steve. “Postpone.”

Steve's eyebrows arched. “You can do that,” he said.

Tony knew enough to be suspicious. “Thank you?” he managed, his finger hovering over the surface of his phone.

“But I'm going with or without you,” Steve said. He gave Tony a bright smile.


“This is getting interesting,” Clint said to DJ. DJ reached for his coffee cup, and Clint held it out of reach. “I'm not even letting you lick the last drops, not a chance, no.”

“He's a Stark, that little caffeine probably won't even register,” Steve said.

“He's already fueled by gunpowder, electricity and pure sass,” Clint said. “For my personal safety, I'm not adding caffeine to that, Cap.”

“Probably wise,” Steve agreed. He looked back at Tony. “So. Are you going to kiss your kid good bye, grab your suitcase, and go away with me for the weekend? Or am I inviting some random person from the lobby?” he asked with a grin. “Friday morning. Gonna be busy down there. I'll have a lot of choices.”

Tony wondered if glaring would be appropriate here. Probably not, because Steve picking up a random person in the lobby was almost comical. It was almost enough to make Tony want to call his bluff, except for the fact that daring Steve to do something he shouldn't NEVER worked out well. “It's our anniversary,” Tony said, instead, trying to keep a straight face.

“Yep. Bet you've got champagne chilling at the hotel and everything,” Steve said. He leaned in, his lips light on Tony's, his body a constant temptation. Almost against his will, Tony found his hands slipping around Steve's waist. Steve kissed him again. “Give DJ a hug. He knows we'll be back—” His head turned. “Deej? When will we be back?”

“Sunday,” DJ said, hopping up to grab Clint's elbow. Grinning, Clint lifted him off the ground. DJ twisted around, trying to hook a leg onto Clint's arm.

“Hey, monkey boy,” Tony said, pulling away from Steve, but Clint got there first, swinging DJ up onto his hip.
“I got this,” Clint said. He grinned. “Really. I got it.”

“Where are his instructions?” Tony asked.

Clint picked the paper hat off of DJ's head. “Got 'em right here.” Tony stared at him, words completely failing him, and Clint shrugged. “What? I left 'em with the kid, that's practical, that is me being very practical.”

“I hate you so much,” Tony said.

“I'm okay with this,” Clint said. He looked down at DJ. “Say good-bye, Deej.”

DJ leaned his head on Clint's shoulder. “Bye,” he said, grinning. Turning his attention back to Clint, he said, “Burrito?”

“We can have breakfast burritos,” Clint agreed.

DJ stuck out his tongue. “Normal burrito.”

“We're not having normal burritos for breakfast. We will have eggy potato cheesy burritos!”

“Salsa,” DJ bargained.

“Maybe salsa.” Clint looked at them. “You can go. Any time. Really.”

Tony stood there, and Steve's arm slid around his waist. “Deej, can I have a hug?” he asked, and DJ broke off his argument in the favor of cilantro long enough to wiggle out of Clint's grip and bounce across the floor. He threw himself into Steve's arms, and Steve scooped him up in a huge, all-encompassing hug.

Tony watched, his hands tucked in his pockets, hiding the way his fingers twitched with some emotion he didn't really want to put a name to. He just watched, always finding a simple comfort in the way that DJ clung to Steve's neck, the way he grinned and laughed as Steve pressed kisses to his forehead and cheeks, the way he wiggled and kicked when he was done with being held, when he wanted to be put down.

Absolutely confident in the affection he received. Absolutely confident that he could push it away, because it would still be there, no matter when he came back.

He crashed into Tony's legs. “Do I need to check your spacial reasoning again?” Tony asked, and DJ grinned up at him, brown eyes dancing. He held up his hands. Tony arched his eyebrows, made his eyes wide. “What, you want a hug or something? Everyone has been hugging you, I think you've had enough hugs. Gonna have to cut you off.”

DJ considered that. “Your hugs are best,” he said at last, his arms still up, demanding.

“Lies,” Tony said, but he bent over, pulling DJ in for a hug and a kiss. “Be good, you brat.”

DJ pulled away. “Happy-” He stopped, his nose wrinkling, his tongue flicking out. He looked back at Clint. Clint nodded.

“Anniversary,” he said, saying the word slowly, one syllable at a time. “It's a long one. You can break it up.”

“Anna. University.”
“Good try,” Tony said, and Steve rubbed a hand over his mouth to hide his smile. “It's okay. That was a very good try.”

DJ made a face. “Aaaaaaaaanniversary,” he managed at last.

Tony nodded, smoothing a hand over DJ’s cheek. DJ leaned into the contact. “Yeah. You're a stubborn one, aren't you?”

“Wonder where he gets that from,” Clint said.

“I'd point at Steve, but I'm pretty sure he's already pointing at me,” Tony said. He looked down at DJ. “Is he?” DJ nodded. “Canceling our reservations now, Rogers.”

“Do you know how hard I had to work to make sure we both had this weekend off?” Steve said. “You're a very busy man.”

“Please, you just smile at Pepper and she does whatever you want her to,” Tony said, making Steve laugh. “No. Really, I don't know how you manage it, she's nothing but spite and stubbornness with me, but with you, it's like you hung the moon. It's infuriating. I've known her for years, and you just showed up, and she's already far more loyal to you than she's ever been to me.”

“You've had so much more time to piss her off,” Clint said.

“You shut up now.”

“Go eat breakfast,” Steve said, and DJ was off like a shot, running up the hall, almost bouncing off the walls as he whipped around a corner, disappearing from sight. “Clint-”

“I've got it, I've got it,” Clint said, giving them a wave. “Promise.” He ambled after DJ. “I know it goes without saying, but call if anything changes, I'll update his printed schedule. As long as he's got it in writing, he's fine with it.”

Tony watched him go, stared after him, even after he disappeared from sight. Steve slipped an arm around his waist. “He's going to be fine.”

“I know.” The words slipped from his mouth, his lips barely moving. “I would've thought we'd get at least a little separation anxiety. I think I'm worth it. You might not be. But I am.”

Steve laughed, and gave him a kiss. “He's seen us leave often enough.” He pulled away, and Tony missed the heat of his body almost immediately.

“Wow.” Tony rolled his head in Steve's direction. “That supposed to help me right now? Because that? That is the opposite of helping, that is the anti-help, that's just-”

“He doesn't worry, because he knows we're coming back,” Steve said, picking up a bag. “You have always come back. You have always come back, and you've done what you can to understand and work with his need for schedules and information, and-” He looked up. “You always come back.” He smiled. “Right?”

Tony nodded. “Right.” He took the suitcase Steve handed him. “They're going to eat burritos.”

“Probably.”

“They're going to eat trash. Like, frozen burritos and cereal with the word 'frosting' in the name drowned in chocolate milk and deep fried cheese logs heated in the microwave and chips with
improbable flavors chosen by public internet polling. Literal trash food.”

“Yeah, sounds about right.”

Tony sighed. “I'm leaving my kid with Clint.”

“Yes. You are.” Steve paused. “I mean, you are, or I'm going down to the lobby and seeing how lucky I can get.”

“I'm tempted to call this bluff, because you are the worst at picking people up,” Tony said, making Steve laugh. “Seriously. You are pathetic, Rogers.”

“I got you, didn't I?”

“I'm easy! Ask anyone!” Tony took the suitcase armor from him, shifting his bags as Steve collected the rest of them. “I'm easy, and it still took you months!”

“Easy, my Great-Aunt Fanny,” Steve groused. “There was absolutely nothing easy about getting you, Tony, it took me months just to get your attention.”

“Because you're bad at this,” Tony said. He gave Steve a look full of pity. “You're amazingly bad at this.”

“Right. It's my fault.” But Steve was smiling at him, his eyes warm. “Still. It's our anniversary, and that means I got you eventually. So. Wanna go celebrate?”

Tony took a breath. “Yes. Yes, I do.” He looked up. “Jarvis, call me every fifteen minutes to update me on DJ's status—”

“Jarvis, do not do that,” Steve said, his eyes rolling up towards the ceiling. “Override code Rogers four-beta-six-seven-seven-sigma.”

“Thank you,” Jarvis said, and he sounded relieved.

“Do not undermine me with my people,” Tony said.

“Get on the elevator, Stark,” Steve said, in his field voice, his 'now means now, soldier' voice.

Tony got on the elevator.

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“Sure you don't want an egg?” Clint asked DJ gave him a look, and Clint shrugged. “Okay, okay, keep the stinkeye to yourself, bratbot.” He leaned back into the fridge, his eyes narrowed at the contents. “I think I've got some leftover rice and beans in here, and an avocado, we can toss that into a burrito with a little cheese, that be okay?”

DJ leaned against his side, peeking around him. He pointed at the salsa, and Clint reached for the bottle. “It's hot,” he said, checking the label, then holding it out for DJ to read. “You don't usually like spicy things. Want me to see if there's some mild stuff on the shelf?”

His phone rang, and he reached for it. “One sec, buddy.” He picked up the call, tucking the phone between his cheek and his shoulder. “Are you coming up or not?”

“I was waiting for them to leave,” she said. “Like you told me to, Barton.”
“They left, you can come up now. Where are you? Hiding behind a potted plant in the lobby?” Clint asked, catching DJ with a gentle hand and steering him away from the stove. “Breakfast's on hold for fifteen minutes,” he said. “Okay? We've got a guest.”

Instantly distracted, DJ headed for the door. Chuckling under his breath, Clint shoved the refrigerator door shut with a bump of his hip and followed behind him.

“I ducked behind the guard desk. The guard's looking at me like I talked bad about his mother.”

“People got personal space requirements,” Clint said.

“They're New Yorkers, time to get over that,” she said. “I do not have time for some dude's stinkeye. He's going to have me arrested. He's staring at me right now, like he's going to call the cops. I know that look. I've seen that look before. Warning you now, if he calls the cops, I'm off babysitting duty.”

Clint rolled his eyes. “Not going to call the cops—” He paused. “Wait. Which guard?”

“Name tag said Craig.”

“Oh, yeah, he's gonna call the cops, he called the cops on me once and I live here.” Ahead of him, DJ raced to the end of the hallway, bounced there impatiently for a moment, then dashed back to Clint's side. Clint leaned over and extended an arm, allowing DJ to grab hold and drag himself up.

“Jarvis, can you get the elevator for her? And cancel any 911 calls Craig may have made?”

“Of course,” Jarvis said.

To DJ, Clint said, “Ready?” When DJ nodded, grinning, Clint straightened up, lifting DJ off of the ground. DJ let out a shriek of laughter, his legs kicking wildly in mid air.

“You killing that kid?”

“Hey, he's having a great time.” Clint spun around, and DJ held onto his arm with a deathgrip. “Perfectly healthy.”

“Cause if he's dead, I'm going to go back down and tell Craig we have a little 'problem.'”

“Really? All we've been through together, and you're going to sell me out at the first sign of trouble? We're fine, this is fine, we're doing just—”

“That vase is worth a rather large sum of money,” Jarvis said, and Clint swung DJ up to keep the boy's foot from clipping a side table.

“Thanks, Jarvis,” Clint lowered DJ back to his feet. He eyed the table, and the very stupid looking vase on it. “That's a stupid place to put something that's worth, you know, money.”

“Yes, I've often warned sir against putting items of value in the entryway, but he has ideas of his own as to what is and is not appropriate for a household with rather rambunctious inhabitants,” Jarvis said, his voice dry.

“I'm going to pretend that he's talking about you,” Clint told DJ. DJ leaned against his leg, his feet sliding along the floor. Clint caught him by the back of his shirt and heaved him back upright.

“C'mon, ragamuffin, we've got a guest. Be presentable.”

DJ blew a raspberry.

“Yeah, that's my opinion of it, too, but we're going to pretend to have manners,” Clint said. DJ made
a face. “Hey, if I can do it, kid, you can do it.”

The elevator pinged, and Clint looked over just in time to see the doors open. “Took you long enough,” he said, grinning.

“Really? Really? I take a day off from work, and come over here and this is the thanks I get?” Darcy asked, grinning back. “Dick.”

“Right back at you.” He watched, amused, as she dragged herself, and a backpack that probably weighed as much as she did, off of the elevator. He looked down at DJ. “Take the lady’s bags.”

DJ looked at the bag, and then back at Clint, dismay on his face. But ever game, he took a step forward, his hands out.

“He is joking, DJ,” Jarvis said.

“I'm joking, DJ,” Clint agreed. He reached out a hand. “What the heck did you pack, Lewis?”

“Everything!” she said, grinning at him. She let Clint help her off with the backpack and watched, her nose in the air, as he stumbled back a step under the weight. “Wuss,” she said. While Clint sputtered, she turned to DJ. “Hey,” she said, grinning down at him, her thumbs tucked in the pockets of her jeans. “Remember me?”

He considered her, his head tipped to the side. “Darcy,” he said after a moment. “Jane's friend.”

“That's right! Jane's best buddy. You're a smart one, you know that?” she said. She crouched down. “How's it going, sparks?”

He held up a hand, expectant, and Darcy gave him a high five.

“Know what we're going to do this weekend?” Darcy asked him, leaning in, her voice dropping to just above a whisper. Blinking, DJ shook his head. “We're going to be explorers,” Darcy said. DJ stared at her. Then looked at Clint.

“Hey, don't look at me, Deej,” Clint said, managing to get Darcy's pack onto his shoulder. “I'm as lost as you are.”

Darcy wrapped her arms around her knees. “How much of this tower have you actually seen?” she asked, her head tipped to the side. “I'm betting not much, right? You've been here, and in the Avengers' apartments, and some of the workshops and science spaces, right?” DJ nodded, his eyes big. “So, what we're going to do is put on our explorer hats and spend the weekend finding cool stuff right here in your home.”

She held out a hand. “What do you say? Want to come exploring?”

DJ considered her hand, and her, then her hand again. Then, his movements cautious, he reached out and tapped his hand against hers in a tentative high five.

“All right,” Darcy said, straightening up. “Let's do this!”

“After breakfast,” Clint said. They both looked at him, with almost identical expressions of disdain. “Hey, I'm hungry and I'm awake, and I resent both of these things, so I'm going to eat.” He shrugged. “If you two want to set off on an empty stomach, that's up to you, but I'm having an Eggo or something.”
“I hate to say it,” Darcy said to DJ. “But he's kind of got a point.”

“Burritos,” DJ told her.

“Cool,” she said. “Lead the way, sparks.” Pleased, DJ took off down the hall, leaving them to trail after him.

“Okay,” Clint said to Darcy. “How much of this is just you wanting to peek in and around all the corners of the damn tower?”

Her nose wrinkled up as she thought about that. “Thirty, maybe forty percent,” she said, shameless as ever. “Definitely less than half. Mostly, he seems like a kid who likes to go poking, and Jarvis’ll keep us out of any place really dangerous, right, Jarvis?”

“I shall do my best,” he agreed.

“See?” Darcy said to Clint. “I got plans. We're gonna have a great time.” Clint studied her. The suspicion must've shown on his face, because her shoulders rose and fell in a shrug. “What?” she asked, her mouth set in a pout. “Trust me, Barton, I've got plans.”

“That's what I'm worried about,” he said. Up ahead, DJ peeked around the corner, checking to make sure that they were still following. “We're coming, Deej,” Clint said. Reassured, DJ disappeared up the hallway again. “He might not stay as a kid all weekend, you know that, right?”

“He's a kid,” Darcy said. “If he's not having fun, I'm not going to make him keep playing.” She linked an arm in Clint's and grinned up at him. “But he's gonna have so much fun.”

“Uh-huh,” Clint said. “I don't trust you, Lewis.”

“That is because you are a black hearted servant of the man,” she said, unbothered. “The MAN.”

“How is it that you're working for SHIELD but that you still consider it the man?”

“I'm bringing it down from the inside,” she said, pulling Clint to a stop as they reached the massive sunken living room where Tony did his entertaining. “One sec.” Raising her voice, she called, “Hey, Deej, come back here, okay?”

DJ reappeared, bouncing back to their side.

“Now, our first order of business as explorers is to make a base camp,” Darcy said, her hands on her hips. She tipped her head towards the living room. “This looks like a good place, what do you think?” She headed in, letting Clint and DJ follow. She looked around, nodding. “This is good,” she said. “Plenty of room to pitch our tents, protection from the elements, a good source of water and a nice firepit.” She studied the huge fireplace that dominated the center of the room. “We can put up our tents and cook all our meals right here.”

“We're not cooking on the fire,” Clint said, but it was too late. DJ was already nodding, his eyes huge and his face full of excitement. “I'm going to kill you, Darcy.”

“The kid's never had a hot dog on a stick, and that hurts me on a very real level,” she said. “You can put down my bag anywhere.”

“I'm going to throw it off the roof,” Clint said.

Darcy ignored him. “I hear that you're preeeeeeeeeetty good at making a blanket fort,” she said to DJ.
“I mean, I bet I'm better, but here's what we're going to do. We're going to eat breakfast, and then we're going to come back down here and we're going to make the most awesome blanket forts ever. Then we're going to get out the maps and plan our route.” She grinned. “I've got our first day's worth of food, and we're going to cook it over the fire and then starting tomorrow, we're going to live off of the land.”

“The land' being our apartments?” Clint asked, but the expression of pure glee on DJ's face was hard to resist.

“Scavenging,” she said.

“This is gonna go well,” Clint said. He watched, amused, as she opened her bag, and from it, she came up with a stack of pith helmets. “What the ever loving-”

“Explorer hats!” Darcy said. She plopped one on Clint's head. “Deej, do you want to wear an explorer hat?” she asked, putting her own on with a lot more care. DJ nodded, and she leaned over, setting it gently on his head. “When you're going to be a dingbat who goes around poking your nose in places people already live and calling it discovery, you gotta wear an explorer hat, and…”

She went back to her bag. “Clint, close your eyes.”

Clint gave her a horrified look. “Oh, HELL, no.”

“Seriously, it's a surprise, close your eyes,” she said, glaring over her shoulder at him.

“I know it's a surprise, that's the exact reason why I'm not-” Too late, he realized that he was standing too close to a couch, or at least close enough for DJ to scramble up onto the back of it and slap his hands over Clint's eyes. “You're supposed to be on my side, Deej,” Clint complained, but he stayed still.

There were some soft whispers, and then a giggle from DJ, and then something fuzzy and sticky was pressed against his upper lip.

“Okay, sparks, good job,” Darcy said, and DJ dropped his hands.

Clint blinked at them. They were both wearing huge fake handlebar moustaches. Darcy was grinning under hers, and DJ was trying to lick his. Clint sighed. “Well, this is better than most of the SHIELD missions that I've had that required fake facial hair,” he said. “Slightly less chance of dying.”

“Only slightly?” Darcy asked, wiggling her moustache.

“I don't want to know what else you've got in that bag.”

* *

“Welcome to our home away from home for the next three days and two nights,” Tony said, sweeping an expansive hand out ahead of them as they stepped off of the elevator. He dropped his suitcase, letting it rock back on its wheels. Steve reached out to steady it, rolling his up next to it. Behind them, the elevator slid shut, and Tony turned the full force of his grin on Steve. “What do you think?”

“Well,” Steve said, on a thin exhale. His eyes traveled up, over the broad expanse of beautifully worked marble floors and silk covered walls. Around the massive entryway, gilt and gold gleamed in understated elegance against the black and white stone. A huge vase of perfect, velvety red roses stood on the small table in the center of the floor, a brilliant splash of color directly beneath a
gleaming crystal chandelier. Steve tipped his head to the side, studying the long sweep of what was, in essence, an overblown hallway, with a few doors on each side, and the sweep of a staircase at the far end. “Well,” he repeated.

Tony grinned. “Two floors,” he said. “Bedroom and master bath upstairs, full sauna and a bathtub you could swim in. A glassed in solarium with a little breakfast nook overlooking the city, the view’s spectacular and so are the live orchids.” He tucked his hands in his pockets. “Down here, there’s a dining room and full kitchen, which we will not be using, instead, we’ll have full meals delivered from some of the best restaurants in New York. There’s a sitting room with a fireplace ready to be lit and a billiard table, in case you want a game. There's also a couple of surprises.” He grinned at Steve, his face lighting up with it. “Well?"

“Well,” Steve said, rubbing a hand over his face. “Tony, this is ridiculous.”

“We could've gone to France,” Tony pointed out.

Grinning, Steve shook his head. “This is absolutely ridiculous, you know that, right?” He put his hands on his hips, his head falling forward. “You know you are a ridiculous human being. You have to know this.”

Tony made a face, his eyes huge with exaggerated hurt. “Steve, I'm hurt. I want you to know that. I am absolutely devastated by your lack of trust. I took your working class sensibilities into effect, don't worry, I told them that we would not be requiring the live in butler service.”

“That was nice of you,” Steve said, struggling against a laugh.

“I thought so.” Tony grinned at him, and Steve had to lean in for a kiss. Tony laughed against his mouth, against his cheek as Steve nipped at his jawline. “So.”

“So,” Steve repeated, nuzzling Tony's neck, his arms wound around Tony's waist, pulling him in close.

Tony kissed him, then leaned back. “Do you like it?”

“I thought we were getting a HOTEL ROOM, not a-” Steve's eyes tipped up, staring at the chandelier. “Not a...” He shook his head. “Whatever this is.”

“A hotel room. With benefits,” Tony said, looping his arms around Steve's neck. “I followed your instructions exactly, Rogers.”

“How do you figure-"

“I asked you what your requirements were for this weekend,” Tony said, talking over him, drowning him out. “And you said, and I quote, 'as long as it has a bed, I don't care.'”

“Did I say that?” Steve said, resting his forehead against Tony's.

“You said those exact words, in that exact order,” Tony confirmed, his teeth flashing in a wicked grin. Steve nipped at his lower lip, making him laugh.

“That was pretty dumb of me,” Steve said.

“Not your finest moment,” Tony agreed. “Worked out to my benefit, though, so I'm going to let that incredible lapse of judgment and good taste slide.” He pulled away, his hands sliding along the length of Steve's arms, catching on Steve's wrists.
“Awful nice of you,” Steve said, as he let Tony pull him forward.

“Isn’t it?” Tony paused at the vase, drawing one perfect red rose from the vase and holding it out to Steve. He was grinning, his dark eyes dancing, his face lit with warmth and humor and so bright that it almost hurt to look at him. “Happy anniversary,” Tony said. “We could’ve gone to France.”

“We could’ve,” Steve agreed. He took a step forward, and scooped Tony up. “But this is much less of a commute.”

“Shorter distance to the bed is, in fact, a good thing, what are you doing, what is this, you’re not going to carry me, this is, wow, this is just-” Steve leaned in for a kiss and Tony stopped talking.

“Happy anniversary,” Steve said, heading for the stairs.

“France is overrated,” Tony said, looping his arms around Steve’s neck. “Remind me of that, next time.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We're not cooking over the firepit.”

“Well, maybe you're not,” Darcy said, with a wide, bright smile. “But I am! If you're nice, you might be invited. If you continue being a jerk about stuff, then you can sit outside base camp and eat a cold cheese sandwich.” She dumped another armload of blankets and sheets onto the pile. “It'll be cold and sad and pathetic.” She stuck her lower lip out in a pout. “Just like you.”

“So, I'm used to it,” Clint said, taking a loop of rope away from DJ. “Eat your breakfast,” he said. DJ considered him, then reached for the rope again. Clint held it above his head. “Food.” DJ pointed at the rope, his mouth set in stubborn lines, and the costume mustache made his pout even more ridiculous. Clint groaned. “Not food, Deej. This?” He held it up. “This is not food. I know Tony's got a powerpoint about this, we gotta find the power point?”

Unimpressed, DJ made another grab for the rope.

Clint crouched down, slinging the rope around the back of his neck, snagging the other side of the loop with his other hand. “Fifteen minutes,” he said, falling back into the established patterns that Steve had set. “Eat all of your freaky burrito, and drink your juice, and in fifteen minutes, we can start building the tent city of doom.” He tipped his head forward, meeting DJ's eyes. “Want Jarvis to give you a clock?”

DJ nodded, and Clint looked up. “Jarvis, can we give him a digital?”

“Of course.” The holographic display flickered into place next to the firepit. “Schedule?”

“Fifteen minutes to eat the rest of his breakfast, then blanket fort building until noon, and we'll check and see if we want to start lunch,” Clint said. He paused, feeling like there should be more to it than that. He looked at DJ. “That far enough out for you to plan?” DJ nodded, grinning, his fingers stretching for the rope again.

Clint dodged. “Breakfast,” he said, and DJ plopped down at the coffee table. Clint moved a pile of pillows away from his plate and topped off his juice before he tugged the mustache off of DJ's upper lip. DJ made a grab for it, and Clint held it out of reach. “Salsa'd ruin it, right?” DJ nodded, reluctance curling his mouth down. "After breakfast. We don't want to ruin it."

“I brought extras,” Darcy said. “Mostly for you.”

“Glad you're prepared. Even if it's just to make my life more difficult.” He collected their plates from where he'd left them on the bar. “Here, Darce, eat your breakfast. Be a good example.”

“Those words have never been spoken to me before,” she said, grinning at him. “Ever.”

“There's a first time for everything,” Clint said. “Have a seat, finish your nightmare in a tortilla.” He took a seat on the broad stone lip that surrounded the firepit, considering it with one narrowed eye as he held hers out to her. Darcy plopped down next to him, tossing her legs out in front of her. Her feet were clad in heavy black combat boots, scuffed and worn and threaded with bright pink and yellow laces. Clint pointed his fork at them. “Are those your trouble making boots?” he asked, suspicious.
He did not have good memories of the trouble making boots.

“What?” she looked over the top of her glasses at him, her eyebrows arching. “Shows what you know, these are my—” Her eyes darted towards DJ, now carefully dissecting his burrito with the tines of his fork. “My butt-kicking boots. The trouble making ones have swear words written on the soles.”

Clint grinned. “Classy.”

“My middle name,” she agreed. She shoveled a bite of her burrito into her mouth. Her nose wrinkled as she chewed. “Eggs and guac?”

“Don't start on me, I have seen you eat in dive bars, this is nothing compared to what we had at that place outside of Clovis, and you know it.”

Darcy shrugged. “I'm not going to lie, if it involves deep fried jalapenos, I'm going to order it.”

Clint patted a hand on the stone of the firepit. “Jarvis, can we control the heat on this enough to cook on it?”

“Oh course. One does wonder what you plan on cooking, however,” Jarvis said.

“You know what? That's a very good question. Let's ask the chef.” Clint gave her a look, and she fluttered her eyelashes at him as she licked her fork clean. “Darcy? Feel like sharing?”

“Only because I'm being a good example,” she said. She reached across, stealing a bite from his plate. “I brought hot dogs and beans, and the stuff for foil packets of potatoes and onions.” She waved her fork through the air. “Corn in the husk for roasting and the refined ingredients necessary to make our delectable dessert.” She paused, eyes narrowing. “S'mores tacos.”

Clint paused, his fork halfway to his mouth. “For what now?” he asked.

“S’mores tacos,” she said, unconcerned.

“This sounds unpleasant,” Clint pointed out.

Darcy shrugged. “You sound like a wuss.”

He grinned. “I've seen you ‘cook.’” He made finger quotes around the word, and she kicked him in the ankle. Clint moved his leg away from her. “You brought all this?”

“It was on ice in my pack, I put most of it in your fridge while you were arguing with the kid about how much cheese was an appropriate amount.” She tucked another bite into her mouth, her eyes wide as she chewed. “You lost that one, by the way.”

“Trust me, I'm aware.” Clint finished his breakfast in short order, shoveling the last bites into his mouth. “I think I've got some steak in the freezer,” he mused, licking his thumb. “Maybe we can make some kabobs, y' know, marinate it on skewers with peppers and squash and onions.”

Darcy grinned at him, and Clint ignored her. “You know, not many women could pull off that mustache,” he said.


“Ready!” DJ said, around a mouthful of burrito. He gave Clint a hopeful look, his fingers wiggling
in the air. “Rope, please!”

“This is going to be a disaster, you know that, right?” Clint asked, even as he handed over the coil of rope.

“Yeah, you should've expected that,” Darcy said, scrambling to her feet. “Let's get busy!”

Clint collected her plate. “This,” he mused out loud, “might not have been my best idea...”

“Best idea!” DJ said. “Mustache?”

“Mustache,” Clint agreed, handing it over.

* *

“Just so we're clear,” Tony mumbled into his pillow.

“How are you still conscious enough to talk?” Steve asked, sprawled out on his back next to him. His breathing was still a little fast, a little unsteady, pulse throbbing in his ears. He stretched, just a little, arching his back and feeling his muscles pull in the best possible way. His skin, damp with sweat, stuck to the fine linen of the sheets, and he caught himself grinning at nothing in particular.

He didn't really have the energy to turn his head in Tony's direction. But out of the corner of his eye, he could see the sleek, strong lines of Tony's back and shoulders amidst the tumbled linens, one muscular arm buried in the pillows, and his dark hair rising above it.

Well, maybe he had the energy after all.

“Rogers, if you expect anything short of death to shut me up for an extended period of time, you're just delusional,” Tony said, not bothering to raise his head from the depths of his pillow. It barely muffled his voice, and Steve's smile went soft and warm, heat curling in his gut. He had it bad. “And even then, probably going to keep babbling for at least thirty minutes after my heart stops, you gotta know that.”

“Uh-huh,” Steve said, rolling towards Tony. He smoothed a hand along the line of Tony's spine, letting it settle in the small of Tony's back.

Tony batted at him with one limp hand. “Stop trying to distract me.”

Steve grinned. “Stop being so easily distracted,” he said, and Tony turned his head, just enough to glare at Steve from over a tumbled mass of pillow. Steve ruffled his hair, making the glare deepen.

“You are the worst,” he said. Steve made a sound of agreement, and Tony pushed his hand away. Steve tangled their fingers together. “Is this what we're doing now?” Tony asked, amused.

“Guess so.” Steve watched, fascinated as always, as Tony's hand flexed in his. Tony's fingers were long and graceful, a shade or two darker than Steve's, and perpetually covered in nicks, cuts and burns. Working hands, calloused and strong and capable of such amazing delicacy. Tony's thumb swept along the back of Steve's hand, and Steve shuddered.

“Just so we're clear,” Tony said, letting Steve trace the bones of his hands with a slight smile, “that whole, picking me up and carrying me around thing? Not hot.”

“Okay,” Steve said, the edge of one fingernail sliding gently over the lines of Tony's palm. Tony's fingers flexed against his, a twitch that was echoed by the way his breath hitched.
“Okay? That's all you have to say, okay?”

“Pretty much,” Steve agreed, his attention still focused on Tony's hand. “Not like I'm going to grab you and throw you over my shoulder if you don't actually like it, Tony.”

Tony shifted, moving up on the bed, his free arm bunching up the pillows under his head. But he didn't pull his hand away from Steve's grip. “You are the most literal person I know, you know that?” he asked, but he was grinning. “Captain Literal.”

“I prefer to err on the side of literal,” Steve pointed out. He wove their fingers together, and Tony didn't fight him, just squeezed Steve's fingers. “Especially when you tell me you don't like something. Keeps me out of trouble and in your bed, after all.”

“You liked it,” Tony said, a smug smile curling his lips.

Steve grinned. “I like anything that gets you in bed, as quickly as possible,” he pointed out, making Tony laugh. “And I've got a couple of other ways to do that, so... If you don't like it-” He gave Tony a sunny, innocent smile. “I'll keep my hands to myself.”

“You're going to make me say it, aren't you?” Tony said, managing to sound both amused and petulant.

“Yep,” Steve said, kissing his wrist. “Or next time, you can walk.”

“Steve?”

“Tony?”

“It's hot when you carry me,” Tony said.

“Well, I've always thought so.” Steve twisted around, pressing his lips to the center of Tony's palm. He let his breath curl there, in the hollow of Tony's hand, until Tony's fingers twitched against his cheek.

“Kinky,” Tony said, grinning.

“Sure.” And he did, there was still the strangest sense of cognitive dissonance when he realized that he could do things like that effortlessly. He'd resigned himself, years ago, to barely being able to move his own weight, let alone someone else's. Not that it mattered, all that much, but back when he'd thought about maybe getting married, he'd known that carrying anyone, even the smallest girl, over the threshold, wasn't going to happen. Being able to scoop up someone Tony's size was still, on some level, a novelty. He shifted, heat rolling through him. “But I meant, it's hot when you carry me.”

“When do I-” Steve rolled his head in Tony's direction, giving him a pitying look, and Tony's eyebrows shot up. “In the SUIT?”

“In the suit,” Steve agreed. Tony's thumb stroked along the underside of his jaw, the rough skin rubbing against the stubble there, and Steve laughed. “Every time.”

“Steve, that is not appropriate,” Tony said, full of mock horror. “That is fighting time, that is not a time when it is appropriate to start thinking about how incredibly hot I am, I understand, it's difficult to pry your brain away from that, but really, not at all appropriate, I don't know how you manage-” He was laughing as Steve rolled over, pinning him down and kissing him. When Steve finally pulled back, Tony grinned up at him. “Inappropriate.”
Steve dropped a kiss on the tip of Tony's nose. “Yeah, well, apparently, my dick didn't get that memo,” he said, his voice dry.

“Which is odd, Coulson's usually very careful about addressing things to the correct parties—” Tony started, and Steve shut him up with a kiss.

“Does this mean I get to carry you around?” Steve whispered against his mouth, and felt Tony's grin.

“Suppose turn about's fair play,” he admitted. “Once in a while.” Tony's hand slid up Steve's back, then back down, cupping his ass with one rough hand. “Just leave me my dignity.”

Steve pulled a face. “Not sure I can make any promises on that,” he said, and Tony grabbed a pillow, smacking him in the side of the face. Laughing, Steve rolled away, and Tony followed, still swinging the pillow. It took him a few minutes to stop laughing long enough to disarm Tony and pin him back down to the bed, his arm across Tony's chest and their legs tangled together.

“Dignity is overrated,” Tony panted, his hand buried in Steve's hair. “Really, really overrated.”

Steve nuzzled his throat. “I've always thought so,” he admitted.

“We should get up,” Tony said. Steve made a low sound of agreement, but didn't bother moving. Tony tugged lightly at his hair. “I'm serious. I ordered breakfast. It's waiting for us up in the—” He gestured at the door. “Fruit and pastries and coffee, all the fancy little melon balls, overly complicated French pastries, and carved butter roses that you could want.”

“Great,” Steve agreed, his eyes falling shut. He yawned against Tony's neck. “That's nice.” He curled a little closer, loving the flex of Tony's body against his, the warmth of Tony's breath against his skin.

Tony waited for a few seconds. “Any interest in getting up and eating any of it?” he asked at last, laughter curling through the words.

“Nope,” Steve said. He punctuated the single word with a kiss against Tony's throat.

“Gotcha.” Tony's fingers slid over Steve's head, sweeping his hair away from his face. “Any interest in letting me get up and bring us breakfast in bed?”

“Nope,” Steve repeated.

Tony was silent for a moment. “I have to pee?” he tried, laughter bubbling through the words.

“Think you're lying,” Steve said, grinning against Tony's shoulder.

“You're really going to take that chance?”

“I'm really comfortable here,” Steve admitted. “And you're the one who keeps bringing up his dignity.”

“You know, if I'd known you were a cuddler, I would've thought twice about this relationship,” Tony said. “I mean, I still would've slept with you, but I could've been prepared an excuse to sneak out before you got all clingy.” He shifted, and Steve shifted with him, because Tony was right. Dignity was over rated. “So, nothing I can do to get you to move?” Tony asked, and there was an arch, smug note to his voice that Steve didn't quite trust.

Steve opened one eye and studied him. Tony gave him an innocent smile. “Nothing,” Steve agreed
at last.

Tony's lips brushed against his temple. “I could bribe you. I've got something you want.”

“You can try,” Steve said. “But I'm pretty sure the only thing that I want...” His hand smoothed down Tony's chest, settling on the tense muscles of Tony's stomach. “I've already managed to get my hands on.”

Tony's face was flushed, his breath coming in soft, fast pants. But his voice was steady. “Really?” he whispered.

“Really,” Steve said, stretching up for a kiss. Tony kissed him back, a long, sustained tease, all teeth and tongue and Tony knowing just how to play him. Steve didn't even care, he just reveled in the touch. It was Tony who pulled away, leaving Steve breathless and needy. Tony smiled at him. “Because there's a really nice mini theater here. Projection screen, big couch to sit on, popcorn machine. I grabbed some movies, but I also called in some favors,” he whispered, his mouth obscenely red and so tempting that it took Steve a couple of seconds to focus on what he was saying. He leaned in, his mouth brushing against Steve's ear. “From a guy I know over at Major League Baseball. I got you the complete recordings of the 1955 World Series.”

Steve froze, his head snapping back. He stared down at Tony, who grinned up at him, all bright, wicked eyes and flushed cheeks. “You know,” Tony said, innocence personified. “That's the one that the Brooklyn Dodgers won.”

Steve realized his mouth was hanging open. “No,” he said, his voice faint.

“All seven games,” Tony said. His eyebrows arched. “You're turned on right now, aren't you?”

“You have no idea,” Steve said, almost dizzy with it.

“So, did I do goo-” Tony started, and Steve kissed him, hard and rough and hot. Tony's hands tangled in his hair, his body arching into Steve's.

“I love you,” he said, when they finally broke apart, both flushed faced and breathing hard. “Oh my God, do I love you.”

Tony stared up at the ceiling, his chest rising and falling with each breath. “I'm so going to get laid tonight,” he said, gleeful about it.

“Yes, yes, you are,” Steve said. “But baseball first.” He rolled off of the bed, nearly bouncing as his feet hit the ground. “C'mon.”

Groaning, Tony flopped back against the pillows, his arms tossed out at his sides. “You go ahead. I'll be there. In a few innings.”

Laughing, Steve leaned over him, bracing his hands on the bed. “Won't be half as good if you're not there,” he said, letting his voice go low and cajoling. “C'mon, Stark, you can sit in my lap and I'll feed you pastries and explain the game.”

“I know how baseball is played,” Tony said, arching an eyebrow at him. “I just don't care.” But he sat up, running a hand through his hair.

“I'll get the luggage from the front hall,” Steve said, joy bubbling through him. “And after we
shower, I'll go get you the biggest, sweetest, most calorie laden coffee drink the shop in the lobby sells. Then we can make popcorn—"

“We have actual breakfast food,” Tony pointed out. “Did you miss that part of the discussion, the discussion of the fancy breakfast foods that I actually did go through the trouble of procuring, so—"

“You need to have popcorn with the ballgame,” Steve said. “Or peanuts.” He grinned, so wide it almost hurt. “Just be glad I don't have access to sausages, or I'd be frying up peppers already.” He started towards the bathroom, only to realize Tony hadn't moved, and he doubled back. “You coming?”

Tony smiled up at him, something warm and sweet in his expression, and Steve held out a hand. “What's that face for?” Steve asked.

Tony took it, letting Steve pull him to his feet. “You're cute when you're excited,” he said, and Steve kissed him. “I'll call the front desk and have them bring the coffee up,” he said, leaning into Steve's body.

Steve looped his arms around Tony's waist. “Deal,” he said, and stole another kiss. “Shower?” he asked, his voice coaxing.

Tony smiled at him, his dark eyes dancing. “Shower,” he agreed, and let Steve tug him towards the bathroom.

* *

“It's good that we're playing explorers, because I no longer recognize the living room.”

“This is no game, Barton,” Darcy said, tying off a rope on the leg of a chair. She plucked at it, checking to make sure that it was tight enough. It flexed, but neither the chair nor the sheet that it was now securing moved. Satisfied, Darcy sat back. “This is a life and death struggle against the environment, and you need to take it seriously.”

There was a long pause. “Darce, are you wearing a fake mustache right now?”

Darcy checked. “Two, actually,” she said. When there was no response, she shrugged and tossed a sheet over another rope, stretching it out. “I thought, what will I do if my mustache fails?” she explained. “I need an emergency back-up mustache.”

“And you're wearing both of them at the same time?”

“Can't take the risk that I'll need my back-up and won't be able to get to it,” she said. “That's just common sense.” She threw a blanket over the back of a chair, draping it down to the ground. It promptly got back up again. “Oops, sorry, DJ.”

The blanket swayed, and then DJ's head popped out from under the fabric. “Okay!” he said, grinning up at her. His handlebar mustache was pasted on upside down on his chin, a bizarre little beard.

“Where the hell are you two?” Clint asked.

“In the central complex,” Darcy said, her hands on her hips. She glanced around, pleased with their work. The sunken living room was now almost completely draped in fabric, an amazing collection of tents, lean-tos, and mini shelters. “You're really good at this,” she said to DJ, who nodded, a proud smile creasing his little face.
“We do this a lot,” Clint said, appearing from under a tent flap. “Thor's gonna be upset he missed it.”

“We can do it again next week when he's around,” Darcy told DJ, who nodded.

“No, we can't, your dad's going to see this and get a machete,” Clint said. He took a seat on the edge of the hearth. “This might be overkill, Lewis.”

Darcy looked around. “Maybe,” she admitted. “Good for us.” She held out a hand, and got a high five from DJ. “So this is the cooking slash eating area,” she said. “With space to pull up a blanket if we want to sleep next to the fire. Otherwise, we have tents.”

“Man, do we ever have tents,” Clint said. “I call the one by the couch.”

“You just don't want to sleep on the floor,” Darcy said, disapproving. He nodded at him. “We're roughing it.”

“Darce, I'm sleeping on a couch under a sheet tent in a living room when my bed is like one floor away,” he said. “That counts as roughing it.”

“I plan on telling Coulson we slept together,” Darcy said. “It's fun to see that vein next to his eye twitch.”

“You wanna play with fire, and end up mysteriously having your paperwork go missing for the next ten years, you go right ahead. Question,” Clint said.

“Answer!” Darcy said, tossing a pile of blankets out by the hearth. She eyed the windows, wondering if they'd be able to get away with having dinner outside. Probably not. The winds got fierce this high up.

“Why is Butterfingers here?” Butterfingers' camera popped up over the edge of a tent. Clint pointed at him. “Yes, you. Why are you here?”

“Because we need a packbot,” Darcy said. “Butterfingers will carry our supplies, and accompany us throughout our adventures.”

Clint looked at her, at Butterfingers, and back at her. “Why is You here?” he asked, and the other bot popped up from behind the bar.

“He's in the bot stable,” Darcy explained. “He's the relief packbot.”

Clint nodded, then shook his head. “What?”

“Packbots,” Darcy said patiently. “I made them little bot style saddlebags. They go over Butterfingers' arm and when we come back up for lunch, he can stay here at base camp and You can take over the packbot duties. Then at night, they can charge so we'll be ready to go again tomorrow.” She spread her arms. “Unless you'd like to carry all of our necessary equipment?”

“No,” Clint said, drawing the word out. “No, I do not...”

“Great! Then go get his saddlebags,” Darcy said, and Clint went, still looking pretty confused. She wasn't worried, since that was Clint's default look. “Hey, DJ, they know they don't have to come if they don't want to, right?” she asked.

DJ nodded. “Want to,” he said. “I explained.” His face flushed, he held a hand up for Butterfingers to give him a high five. “They want to.”
“They are actually quite pleased to be included,” Jarvis said.

“Excellent! All right.” Darcy clapped her hands together. “Do we have everything?”

“I doubt it,” Clint said, saddlebags hanging from one shoulder. He glanced around. “I mean, we have a lot of stuff. Piles of stuff. But I doubt we’ve got what we actually need.”

“You know what you are?” Darcy asked.

“Devastatingly handsome?” Clint guessed, his face guileless.

Darcy stared at him, her lips pursed up tight against the impulse to smile. “You're lucky you're cute, Barton,” she said.

“Devastatingly handsome?” Clint repeated.

“I'll give you cute,” Darcy told him, because it was true. “And you're lucky that I find you cute. Very lucky. That's all that's keeping you alive right now.”

DJ tugged on her shirt. “Cute?” he asked, his eyes big and dark in his adorable little face.

“You are far, far cuter than Barton,” Darcy said, ruffling his hair. He grinned up at her, satisfied. “Also smarter.”

“And richer, and with better taste in clothing,” Clint said. “Also~”

“Better than you in just about every way,” Darcy agreed. “Moving on.” She plopped her pith helmet on her head and adjusted it to a jaunty angle. “Do we have a map?” she asked.

DJ held up a tablet. “Blueprint!” he said.

“Also we can just ask Jarvis,” Clint said.

“That would be lazy, and defeat the purpose,” Darcy told him. “I'm sure Jarvis could tell us where everything is, but what's more fun? Having Jarvis read the Tower's inventory to us, or going out to explore the hidden spots for ourselves?”

“I vote for whatever does not get us trapped in some storage closet somewhere,” Clint said.

“When did you become an adult?” Darcy asked.

“Less growing up, more sobering up,” Clint said. “In retrospect, I spent a lot of time swimming though tequila fumes during our time in New Mexico.”

“It was a good time,” Darcy said, nostalgic. And since DJ was blinking up at them, she dropped his pith helmet onto his head. DJ giggled at her from under the rim, perfectly pleased to wander in circles without being able to see where he was going. Clint snagged him by the back of his shirt, keeping him from walking into the hearth or a wall or Butterfingers. “DJ has he map. You have the provisions.”

“A mix of 'things that are good for us' and 'things that we'll actually eat,' and a couple of bottles of water, despite the fact that we can just come back up at any-”

“How many times to I have to use the phrase 'defeats the purpose' before it sinks in?” Darcy asked him. She tilted her head forward, fluttering her eyelashes at him. “So, you have the provisions?”
“I got the snacks,” Clint agreed. “What've you got?”

“A plan!” Darcy held out his pith helmet. “Suit up. And let's roll out.”

“This is going to end badly,” Clint told Butterfingers. “Let's go, PackBot.”

* 

“Aw, what kind of a call is that?” Steve groused.

“I'm guessing it was a bad one,” Tony mused, without looking up from his tablet. He tucked his head under Steve's chin, hoping that might distract him. “I mean, judging by your tone of voice. And your rapidly thickening accent.”

Steve dropped a kiss onto his head, but he didn't look away from the screen. “It was a lousy call, I mean, a blind man coulda done better than that.”

“There's the Brooklyn boy everyone loves,” Tony said. He flicked his fingers across the surface of his tablet, making alterations to the design with each tap. “You're adorable, you know that?”

Steve nipped lightly on Tony's ear. “And you're going to end up on your condescending ass one of these days,” he said, laughter curling through his voice.

Tony paused; considering his current position on the couch, seated comfortably between Steve's legs, his back braced against Steve's chest, with Steve's arm looped around his waist, the threat had teeth. He leaned his head back, against Steve's shoulder, and gave him a bright smile. “It's not my fault that you're cute when you're mad,” he said, because, yes, he was in fact a condescending ass.

“That's it—” Steve started, his arms going around Tony and pushing him forward.

“No, no!” Laughing, Tony made a grab for the back of the couch with his free hand. “I take it back! You are an intelligent, reasonable man who should be taken seriously at all time!” He braced his feet on the cushions, trying to pull away, but Steve's grip was iron. He twisted, grinding his ass shamelessly against Steve's hips.

“You are horrible, you know that?” Steve said, even as he pressed a kiss to the skin just below Tony's ear. “You are the actual worst.” But he was laughing, his body shaking with the force of it.

“You're angry about a decision made by an umpire who could very well be dead,” Tony pointed out. He tipped his head to the side, letting Steve nuzzle at his neck. “This game was played in the fifties, Steve. You're watching a sixty year old baseball game and arguing with the calls.”

“Which is my right as a baseball fan,” Steve said, so solemn about it that Tony burst into laughter. “My God-given right, Stark.”

“As a baseball fan?”

“As a baseball fan,” Steve agreed, his fingers tickling their way up Tony's ribcage. Snorting, Tony swatted at his hands, which did nothing to dissuade him. “You don't get to talk, Tony, I've heard you grumbling at just about every movie we've ever seen.”

“Not every movie,” Tony said, giving him a mock scowl. “Just the sci-fi ones.”

Steve kissed him on the temple, his lips lingering. “No, that's just when your grumbling is the most audible.” He was still watching the huge television screen with half of his attention.
“You think I'm cute when I whine about technical inaccuracies, though,” Tony said. He considered the remains of their breakfast. The mostly empty plates were still within easy reach, piled onto the sleek glass and metal coffee table. He reached for the bread basket, digging under the linen napkin for a croissant. He ripped it in half and offered a piece to Steve.

“Keep telling yourself that,” Steve told him, taking it. “Thanks. We have any-” On screen, the batter took a swing, connecting with the ball with a ringing snap, and Steve muttered something that sounded like a curse as the ball went soaring.

Tony considered the screen. “We can go,” he offered, settling back against Steve's chest with his coffee, a chocolate covered strawberry clamped between his teeth.

“What, to a baseball game?” Steve's hand was still on the bare skin of Tony's stomach, tucked easily beneath the hem of Tony's t-shirt. The touch was familiar and warm and comforting, and Tony relaxed into it. “That's a horrible idea.”

“Why? You like baseball. I... Tolerate baseball,” Tony said. He gulped down the last dregs of his coffee and fumbled with the mug. Steve took it from him and put it aside, freeing Tony's hands again.

Steve's fingers cupped Tony's jaw, tipping his chin up. “You're sweet,” he said, “but I think I'll ask Rhodey next time he's in town.”

Tony's mouth fell open. “You're going out with my best friend behind my back?”

Steve kissed him, sweet and light. “Nope. Out in the open.”

“What makes you think he even LIKES baseball?”

“He likes baseball,” Steve said, attention back on the screen. “Okay, he DOES, but why do you THINK-”

“He's been friends with you for more than a decade,” Steve said, with a straight face. “Only a baseball fan has that kind of staying power in the face of a losing proposition.” Tony gaped at him, and Steve struggled against a smile. “Cubs or Red Sox? I mean, the Red Sox have finally won, but still, long dry spell there and-”

“Being friends with me is like being a Yankees fan,” Tony said, struggling to keep a straight face. “Nothing but champagne and home runs.” He waved a hand through the air. “Home runs, every day, nothing but-” Steve was laughing against him, his whole body shaking with the force of it. “I'm going to elbow you now,” he warned, grinning down at his tablet.

“And I would deserve it,” Steve agreed.

“Yes, you would.” But Tony made a note on his calendar. “Ditching me. For my best friend. I'm putting this in the Smithsonian exhibit, that you are a best friend stealing bastard.”

“Well, you're welcome to join us.” Tony opened his mouth and Steve kept talking. “No boxes, Tony. No air conditioned, glass enclosed concrete bunkers with a spread cooked by some executive chef that's loosely based on ballpark food. No 'artisan organic frankfurter sushi' or 'five cheese sliced truffle deep fried mac n' cheese bites.' I'm talking bleacher seats and sausage sandwiches with extra peppers that are a little burnt on the edges and bad beer in plastic cups.”

Tony considered that. “I'll call Rhodey for you. Set it up. Bring flowers. And chocolates. He's hard
to impress.” Steve laughed, and Tony grinned. “It's not my fault. Baseball is insanely boring.”

“Now, you're just picking a fight,” Steve said.

“Boring,” Tony said, going back to his schematic.

“It's a game of skill and strategy and patience,” Steve said. “It's a game with history, Tony.”

“You're watching a man scratch his balls and spit,” Tony said.

“And later he'll hit a ball out of the park,” Steve said, unconcerned.

“Let me know when they remove all the boring bits where guys are standing around watching the grass grow,” Tony said.

“Life isn't a highlight reel,” Steve said. He shifted his position, and Tony moved with him, raising a knee to rest his tablet against it. Steve's hand smoothed up under his shirt, his lips light against Tony's throat, just beneath his ear. Tony's breath hitched, and he shifted, arching his back just to feel the flex of Steve's hand against his stomach.

“Are you trying to seduce me?” Tony asked, amused.

“Trying and succeeding,” Steve said, unbearably smug about it.

“You're choosing seducing me over baseball?” Tony asked, even as he twisted around in Steve's arms, straddling Steve's hips. His tablet hit the ground with a thump, and Tony couldn't have cared less. “Over the Dodgers? The Dodgers winning the World Series?” He kissed Steve's flushed lips, letting his mouth linger there. “I'm flattered.”

“Well, to be honest, the game's got a pause button,” Steve said, his breathing hitching between the words.

Laughing, Tony sat up. “Still. As a dyed in the wool Dodgers fan, aren't you ashamed of yourself? What would Little Steve Rogers say if he knew?”

Steve arched an eyebrow, his hands resting lightly at Tony's waist. “Little Stevie Rogers wouldn't have believed you could stop the game.” His thumb swept along the line of Tony's hipbone, smoothing the hollow there just beneath Tony's sweatpants. “However, it was sixteen-year-old Steve Rogers who was the most rabid Dodgers fan.”

“Really?” Tony leaned over, bracing his hands on Steve's chest. “What would he think of this situation?”

Steve thought about that, and grinned. “Kinda enjoying the thought of telling my sixteen-year-old self that I have a lover, and he's a gorgeous, brilliant, hot-”

“I like this conversation,” Tony said, grinning down at him.

“Sexy, heroic, sweet-”

Tony straightened up. “Wait, sweet?” he asked in mock indignation. “You ARE cheating on me with Rhodey!”


“Good save.”
“And he wants me, but I'm going to watch baseball instead.” Steve paused. “I don't think sixteen-year-old me would take that well.”

“Might have something to say about your choices?” Tony asked, scraping a fingertip across Steve's nipple, just to make him arch off of the couch.

“He'd go for my throat,” Steve admitted. He slipped a hand around the back of Tony's neck, tugging him down. “I was pretty sure I was going to die alone and unloved. Probably before the age of twenty,” he whispered. “You- Are more than I'd ever thought I could have.”

Tony's eyes closed, his chest seizing. “You deserve better than me, you know that, right?” he whispered, and Steve kissed him, hard enough to steal the breath from his lungs.

“I think you're exactly what I deserve, and I don't give a damn either way,” Steve said. “I might not deserve you. But I'm going to keep you, as long as I can manage it.”

Tony grinned against his mouth. “Pause the ballgame, Rogers, unless you want to fantasize about a fancy older man who bought your ticket, got you in, then seduced you under the bleachers.”

“I'd think that if you were trying to seduce me, you'd shell out for more than a bleacher seat,” Steve mused, even as Tony sat up, just far enough to pull his shirt off. Steve watched him, his eyes hot. “But I suppose if you were determined enough...”

“I think I can manage it.”

“Pretty sure you can.”

*

Chapter End Notes

I have no idea if recordings of world series games are available from the fifties. I've seen clips, so I assume something must still be out there.

Let's assume this is a world where A. there are superheroes and B. such films exist but MLB doesn't circulate them. Because they are dicks.
"Not this one," DJ said, tugging on Darcy's shirt.

"But I like this elevator," Darcy said. She pointed at it. "It's right here. And it's unoccupied. That makes it my favorite."

"You brought the bot so we didn't ever have to take the stairs, didn't you?" Clint asked her, amused. DJ bounced past him, and Clint caught him around the waist and lifted him off of his feet, swinging him around before putting him back down. Giggling, DJ leaned against his legs, a warm, solid pressure against Clint's side. He ruffled DJ's hair with an easy hand, just to make him laugh again.

"Mostly so I didn't have to carry anything, but also to avoid stairs," Darcy agreed, unrepentant.

"Multitasking your laziness, that's impressive," Clint said.

"Do I hear you volunteering to tote around all our supplies?" she asked, giving him her sweetest smile. He wasn't fooled. He'd encountered it often enough, and it was a vicious lie. He'd learned that the hard way.

"You hear me volunteering to leave all of this behind," Clint said, smirking back. "I've done missions into third world dictatorships that required less luggage."

"You can eat bugs in a jungle somewhere, that is because you have made very bad life choices," Darcy said. "I'm not going to."

"Worst food I've had on a mission was that time you tried to make a souffle," Clint told her. "Didn't know those could explode."

"Shouldn't poke your head into other people's ovens," she said, unrepentant.

"I thought it might be a bomb. For good reason."

"Well, that-"

"No fighting," DJ said, and they both stopped. He looked up at them, disapproval clear on his little face.

"This isn't fighting," Darcy said, grinning at him. "It's squabbling. You don't have any siblings who can bicker with you, but I do, and I can clearly say-"

Bored, DJ hopped across the hallway and back. "Wrong elevator," he said, jumping up to grab hold of Butterfinger's support strut. The bot lifted him off of his feet, letting him swing back and forth.

"What makes it the wrong one, monkey boy?" Darcy asked.

"Doesn't go all the way."

"Wrong elevator," he said, jumping up to grab hold of Butterfinger's support strut. The bot lifted him off of his feet, letting him swing back and forth.

"What do you mean, 'all the way?'" Darcy asked.

"All the way down," DJ said, grinning. His head tipped back towards the freight elevator. "This one. Doesn't." He let go, and Clint caught him before he could hit the ground.
He studied the elevator. “This one goes to the sub basement,” he said at last. “Below the garage. How much further down can we go?”

DJ blinked up at him, his nose wrinkling as he thought about it. Then he held up three fingers.

“Three,” Clint said, his voice flat.

“Three what?” Darcy asked, peering around his shoulder.

“Three levels we don't know about,” Clint said, setting DJ down on his feet. “Jarvis?”

“Yes?”

“Are there three levels below the subbasement?”

There was a long moment of silence. DJ bounced up the hallway. “Override, Stark four-six-twenty-two, seven, alpha, nineteen,” he said, the words rhythmic and sing song. Practiced.

“Yes,” Jarvis said.

“There are secret levels that-” Oddly insulted, Clint glared up at the ceiling. “What's down there?”

“That information is beyond your clearance level,” Jarvis said, his tone apologetic.

“Not mine,” DJ said.

“You should be respecting clearance levels,” Jarvis said.

“Nope!”

“Sir is going to be displeased with you.”

DJ threw his hands in the air, knocking his pith helmet over his face. “Don't care!” he said, his voice muffled by his headgear. Clint reached out and put it back where it belonged. “Thank you!”

“This hat may not be for you,” Clint told him, and DJ clamped both hands on the brim.

“Oh, this is awesome,” Darcy said, her voice full of a rather unholy glee. “This is so awesome. DJ, what elevator?”

“Workshop,” he said, hopping back, his helmet wobbling on his head with each bounce. He steadied it with one careful hand, and balanced on his toes. “I can show you.”

“Wait, wait,” Clint said. “Is this going to get us killed?”

DJ considered that. He took his helmet off and studied it, his eyes narrowed. “No,” he said at last, and put it back on.

“Wow, that wasn't comforting at all,” Clint said. “Jarvis, second opinion?”

Jarvis made a sound like a sigh. “There is little to no danger,” he said, clearly resigned. “As there are no ongoing experiments or tests being performed at this time.”

“Awesome,” Darcy sang out, her hands in the air. “Let's go run one!”

“No,” Clint said.
“Okay!” DJ said, and Darcy took his hand.

“No,” Clint said again, not that anyone was listening to him. DJ held up his other hand, wiggling it in Clint's direction. “Okay, if I take that, it does not mean I agree to this plan,” Clint told him. DJ grinned up at him, and wiggled his fingers again. Giving in with something like grace, Clint took it. “Yeah, yeah.”

“Let's go!” Darcy said, slapping her moustache onto her upper lip.

“How did I become the voice of reason?” Clint asked, not really expecting an answer. “How did I become the responsible adult? This is- This is not a role I'm good at. Or used to filling. So how the hell did it happen?”

“I suspect it has to do with your life choices up until this point,” Jarvis said.

“Karma,” Darcy told him.

“I hate you both,” Clint said, resigned. DJ blinked up at him. “Not you. You're a delight.”

“It's true, you are,” Darcy said.

Clint gave up. “Okay. Let's go.”

*

The elevator looked like every other elevator in the Tower, and Darcy peered inside, curious. “So, this is it?” she asked DJ, who nodded, holding the door open for Butterfingers. The bot rolled in behind them, inching forward into the space. Darcy gave him a pat on his claw for good measure.

Clint was studying the buttons. “Looks the same as the others,” he said, and DJ slipped in front of him, one hand digging in his pocket. From the depths, he came up with a black plastic card, punched on one end so it could be hooked onto his plain white lanyard. He reached up and pressed the card against a blank area at the bottom of the elevator panel.

“Bottom,” he said, and the door slid shut.

“What's that?” Darcy asked him.

DJ held it out. “Mul-ti-pass!” he said, grinning.

“I did not show you 'The Fifth Element,' I thought we agreed on that,” Clint said. “Seriously. Steve will kill me.”

“Won't,” DJ said. He bounced back and forth, hopping around Butterfingers with a giggle. The bot spun in place, tracking his movements. “Loves you.”

“Yeah, well, he loves you more,” Clint said, grinning. “He loves you uncorrupted, and that's hard to do, because all the best stuff falls under the category of 'holy crap, I forgot that this was not appropriate for children.'”

“You're gonna get choked to death by an American icon. Which is sad. Because you are adorable,” Darcy told Clint, who flipped her off. She grinned. “Classy, Barton.” She leaned against the wall. “So what does the multipass do?” she asked DJ.

He blinked slowly as he considered that. “Opens.”
“Opens doors?”

He grinned. “That, too.” With that, he hopped up, hands in the air, and Butterfingers dipped down so DJ could catch hold of his claw. He swung there, legs kicking in the air, as the elevator came to a stop. “Bottom floor!” he said, grinning.

The elevator doors opened, and for an instant, there was nothing, nothing but but a flat wall of darkness, barely disturbed by the lights that spilled out over a gleaming white floor. And then the lights came on with a subdued, muffled, click. First right in front of them, and then further away. Two, three, four, five sets of lights, and they were still coming on, light spreading out in front of them like a wave.

Darcy realized, with a sinking feeling, just how massive the room was. Row upon row upon row of huge, industrial metal shelving marched formed big, broad aisles, a good six or eight feet apart and stretching up fifteen to twenty feet to scrape the ceiling. Boxes, bins, and neatly labeled cases of all shapes and sizes filled every available inch of the shelving.

And the lights were still going on, far in the distance.

Darcy took a deep breath. "Wow."

Clint gave her a look."That's the best you can do? Wow?"

"I'd swear, but we've got the kidlet."

"Think he's heard it all before," Clint said, grinning. "Have you met his father?"

"Yes, I've met him, which is why I don't want to be on the hook if DJ greets him at the door with the f-bomb," Darcy said. "Because he would, in fact, blame me."

"Nah. He'd blame me." Clint snagged DJ by the back of his shirt as the boy tried to dart past him. "Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. No running off into the warehouse from 'The Raiders of the Lost Ark.' I want your face to remain right where it is. On your-" He paused, struggling for words. "Face."

"Wow," Darcy said, smirking at him.

"Shut up," Clint said. DJ leaned forward, stretching his shirt and almost losing his helmet in the process. Clint released him, then caught him under the arms before he could pitch face first into the floor. "How about I give you a ride until we have our bearings, okay?"

DJ nodded, grinning up at Clint, and Clint boosted him up onto his shoulders. "I expect you to keep my hat in place," he said, and DJ pressed down on his head with both hands. "Try not to break my neck in the process, Tinker Toy."

"Jarvis, what are we looking at here?" Darcy asked, turning in a slow, deliberate circle. Her head was tipped back, her own pith helmet held in place with one hand. The air was cool and clean, scrubbed clean by some unseen circulation system.

"Long term storage," Jarvis explained.

"This is STORAGE?" Darcy asked, her mouth hanging open. "What does he have in here?"

There was a slight pause. "If you are asking for a complete inventory, that might take a great deal of time to compile."
"No, no, no," Clint said, his voice flat. "I do not want to know the crazy that we're living on top of here."

Darcy looked down, noticing the letter and number designation that had been stenciled on the floor in front of every one of the shelving bays. She looked around, to the left and right, and then up. All the way up.

She resisted the urge to yell and see if there was an echo.

"But you know what's in all of these?" Darcy asked instead. She paused next to a row, her fingers light on the edge of the box.

"Yes."

"Okay," Darcy went up on her tip-toes, tipping her pith helmet back with a flick of her finger. "What's this one? Box VS34927-21?"

"Early blueprints for a StarkIndustries production facility outside of Wichita, Kansas," Jarvis said. "And all subsequent revisions."

"Boring. Okay, how about JU34875-19?" she asked, crouching down to check out a big, flat case.

"Original StarkIndustries patent filings, circa 1963."

Darcy darted up the row, scanning the boxes as she passed. "This one? HS37048-33?"

"Correspondence of Howard Stark, designated personal, box nine of twenty-three," Jarvis said. "Tony's dad?" Darcy peered at the box. It was substantial. "Are these from scorned ladies?"

Jarvis sighed. "Considering his... Romantic history, it is highly likely that at least some of them would fall within that description."

"Oh, man, this I've got to see." Darcy wrestled the box off the shelf, and flipped it open. The smell of stale perfume hit her nose instantly, and her head snapped back. "Whoa, ladies, cool your atomizers."

"Can you not?" Clint asked her, and caught DJ's arm as the boy reached for a box. "What're you up to, no, do not- No. You will pull everything down on our heads."

"Yeah, that's what the helmets are for," Darcy said, taking a seat on the floor. Packets and stacks of letters were neatly arranged in the box, and she dug through the piles. "Why is there so much here, Jarvis?"

"There were extensive archives that were inherited from sir's father," Jarvis explained. "Due to... Unfortunate circumstances, he did not always trust electronic storage, and was less prone to hiring professionals for storing sensitive material. Due to his early work with both the US Government and SHIELD, he had quite a backlog of experimental and research data. After his passing, the archives at his various properties, most notably the ones at the Stark family mansion in Manhattan, were collected and efforts were made to catalog the contents.

"However, sir's disinterest in the project made it difficult to know how thorough the job was. Much of the information in the database now comes from previous cataloging efforts, or Mr. Stark's own notes." Jarvis paused. "The situation is not optimal, to be perfectly honest."

"Oooooo," Darcy said, wincing. "That's like moving. The first couple of rooms, everything is neatly
put in boxes with a full listing of the contents and where it should go, grouped by color and how likely you are to need it. But by the end of moving, you're just shoving things wherever they fit and writing 'stuff' on the outside of the box and that means you will go six months without finding your cheese grater and then you'll give up and buy a new cheese grater.”

“And that's why I owned three cheese graters,” Clint said. He started up the aisle.

“Where are you going?” Darcy asked, glancing up from a stack of purple and pink stationary, tied with what appeared to be a lace garter.

“I'm going to see how deep this rabbit hole goes,” Clint said.

“We're going to die,” Darcy said, shoving the box onto Butterfingers' frame before scrambling up. “I'm taking this.”

“Multipass!” DJ said, throwing his hands in the air.

“Right!” Darcy said, because why not.

* 

“Why is there still baseball?”

The words were mumbled against Steve's shoulder, muffled by his shirt. Steve smoothed a hand down the length of Tony's back, letting it rest on the dip of Tony's waist. “Oh, are we awake?” he asked. “Finally?”

Tony raised his head, just far enough to glare in Steve's general direction. He was trying for cranky, and it just looked adorable. Steve resisted the urge to flick the tip of his nose. Or kiss it. “Hi,” he said instead. He smoothed Tony's hair away from his forehead. “Did you have a good nap?”

“Why,” Tony repeated, his voice gravelly with sleep, and filled with confusion, “is there still baseball?”

Steve arched an eyebrow. “Well, you brought a lot of baseball,” he said, amused despite himself. He rubbed his hand up and down Tony's back. “I don't think you understand just how many games you brought, and how long those games are, Tony.”

Tony twisted around, his body sliding against Steve's as he considered the screen. Steve wrapped an arm around Tony's waist, tugging him back before he could fall off of the couch. Tony settled back against his chest, and Steve pressed a kiss to warm skin of his neck. “We stopped watching baseball,” he said, shoving a hand through his hair. “I remember that.”

“Yes, we did,” Steve agreed. “We stopped watching baseball because you decided to seduce me.”

“Good for me,” Tony said. He settled back with a yawn. “I have good ideas.”

“I have to agree. But then you fell asleep on top of me, so I decided to go back to watching baseball,” Steve said.

Tony looked back his shoulder at Steve. “I didn't,” he said.

“You did,” Steve said, his lips twitching. Tony winced, his face twisting up with it, and Steve couldn't hold back a laugh.
“Well, there goes my reputation. How far did I get with the seduction?” Tony asked. He fumbled at the blanket that Steve had thrown over them. “I'm still wearing clothes.”

“We weren't in any rush,” Steve said. He still wasn't. This was nice. Rare, but nice. Usually, there were things to do, or places they had to be, or other people crashing in and out of their lives. A lazy, warm afternoon, with nothing to do but watch the Dodgers crush the Yankees and listen to the soft, familiar sound of Tony's breathing was a rare pleasure.

Tony considered that. “That doesn't sound like me at all,” he said at last.

Steve kissed his neck again, giving the skin there a playful nip. “Pretty sure it was you,” he said, making Tony laugh. His arms tightened. “Sure felt like you.”

“You mean when I fell asleep on you?”

“It was kind of adorable,” Steve said. Tony looked over his shoulder at him, his expression full of displeasure. Steve grinned. “You're adorable.”

“I will punch you.”

Steve chuckled. “Worth it.” He nuzzled Tony's neck, enjoying the smell of the sleep warmed skin, and the way that Tony shivered against him at the contact.

“How long was I out?” he asked, his voice rough.

“Couple of hours,” Steve said.

“I've wasted this whole day, haven't I?” Tony grumbled. He pushed himself up, groaning a bit as he stretched. Steve just stayed where he was, already missing the heat of Tony's body. He glanced down at Steve, his nose wrinkling. “Sorry.”

Steve's eyes rolled. “Tony, I've been saying for weeks that you need more sleep. Now, we have nothing to do and nowhere to be. It's the best thing you can do, to get some rest.”

“It's not much of an anniversary,” Tony said, shoving a hand through his hair.

Steve glanced at the tv. “I don't know,” he said, his voice quiet. “Seems that's where we started out, you know?” His lips tipped up in a smile. “A couch, a tv, and-” He sucked in a slow breath. “That's when I realized I was in trouble.”

Tony looked down at him, his eyebrows arched. “I have no idea what you're talking about,” he said, smiling.

Steve's eyes closed. “That night, that first night that Dummy came and got me,” he said. Warmth curled through him, and he cleared his throat. “You were-” He stopped, suddenly realizing there were some things that Tony probably didn't want to be reminded of.

“I was having a nightmare,” Tony said, and Steve's eyes opened.

Tony was smiling at him, just a little, his eyes warm. Steve leaned forward, his hand cupping Tony's cheek. The kiss was sweet, and warm, and he could feel Tony smiling against his lips. When the kiss ended, Steve rested his forehead against Tony's. “And you fell asleep on my shoulder,” Steve said.

“It was the first time, I mean, I wasn't really sure where I stood with you, up until that night.” His smile started low in his stomach, a warmth that curled through him. “You're hard for me to read. You're very good at-” He stopped, trying to find a diplomatic way to say it.
“Faking it?” Tony asked, leaning back just far enough for Steve to see his wry smile.

“Protecting yourself,” Steve countered. He caught Tony's hand, running his thumb over the rough skin of Tony's palm. “Putting on a mask.” His eyes flicked up, catching Tony's. “I couldn't tell, really, if you...” He sucked in a breath. “Trusted me.”

Tony's eyebrows arched, tugging his lips up. The warmth of that smile leaked into his voice. “Of course I trusted you, why would you-”

“You were hiding a lot of things, Tony, and it was hard to tell what was a lie and what wasn't,” Steve said, his voice quiet. “Or maybe, I knew you trusted me in the field, you knew I had your back when it mattered, when your life was on the line, but that wasn't enough. It wasn't enough until you fell asleep on my shoulder.”

His eyes closed, and he remembered that, that moment when Tony's weight settled heavily against his side. He remembered the way that Tony had stolen his breath, how Tony's breathing had gone soft and steady and deep, even as Steve's had died in his throat. And when he'd started breathing again, his breath had synced with Tony's, their chests rising and falling in tandem.

He smiled. “That was the first time I knew you trusted me,” he said. “When you fell asleep on my shoulder.”

Tony was studying him, his face unreadable. “I always trusted you,” he said, his voice quiet. “Always. Even when we were fighting, tooth and nail, I trusted you.” One shoulder rose in a slight shrug. “Sorry it took me that long to prove it to you.”

“That's not what this is about.” Steve pushed himself up, and Tony moved to the side, out of his way. Steve reached out, his hand cupping Tony's cheek, coaxing his head up. “It's not about you having to prove anything. It's about me figuring out where I fit in, in-” He stopped, and his face felt hot, but humiliation had been a constant companion in his life, he was used to the sickening twist of nausea low in the pit of his stomach. “In your life.”

He took a deep breath. “You were so exhausted, so close to-”

“‘To breaking.’” Tony finished for him, when Steve's voice trailed away. “I was on the edge, back then. Barely holding it together. Didn't know how to cope, what to do, how to handle it.” He stopped, a faint smile curling his lips. “I hated that you saw me like that, that you knew, but then, it was freeing. You knew.”

“You knew, and you stayed.” He grinned at Steve, the strange, strained look on his face bleeding away, something more familiar lighting his eyes. “I wanted you, even then, you knew that, didn't you?”

The laughter caught him off guard, but it was freeing, warming, and Steve didn't try to stifle it. “You did not. You were barely awake.”

“Oh, I was awake, awake and you know damn well what a shot of adrenaline can do to you,” Tony said. “I woke up scared, and ready to fight and then there was you, being all noble and kind and-” He shook his head, laughter still bubbling through his words. “I wanted to crawl into your lap and kiss you so hard.”

“You wanted to punch me,” Steve pointed out.

“Sure, for about five seconds, and then, you were just you, and all that frustration and fear and adrenaline had no where to go.” His grin was wicked now, sharp and hot. “I was so exhausted, so
messed up, but let me tell you, if you'd given me anything even approaching an opening, I would've
gone down on you at that moment.”

The rush of heat could still catch him off guard. He was used to the low level need that had been his
constant companion since he'd allowed himself to admit that he wanted Tony. Or, if he was being
honest, probably from before that, from when he'd met Tony, when Tony had somehow gotten
under his skin and in his head, from when he realized that Tony could rile him up and calm him
down with a handful of words, usually the same words. The heat had been there from that first
dream, where the nameless, faceless men who'd kissed him and held him and whispered sweet, hot
words in Steve's ear had acquired Tony's hands and Tony's lips and Tony's voice, coaxing and
ordering and twisting him in knots.

He was used to the simmer of arousal that was always there, and he liked to blame the serum,
because he'd never been like this before. Or maybe he had. Maybe it had just been easier to fight a
different losing battle back then, since he WAS going to lose, either way. But Tony could give him a
look, or a wink, or a smile, or a word, and that small spark of heat would blindside him, roar through
him like a wildfire.

“Probably a good thing that I didn't know that,” he managed. He licked his lips, and Tony's eyes
dropped to his mouth.

“You wouldn't have done anything about it, anyway,” Tony said, grinning.

“It would've been really dumb to have done anything about it,” Steve agreed. He gave Tony a wry
smile. “But I'm not known for my solid life choices, Tony.”

“Thank god for that,” Tony said. “Because if either of us made good life choices, we probably
would not be here.”

“When you put it that way,” Steve said, and Tony laughed. He was so alive, so relaxed and so
perfect, that for a second, Steve ached with it.

He sucked in a breath that hurt, and exhaled on a
prayer. “I love you.”

Tony pushed him gently back down onto the couch, and Steve went down willingly. “I love you,
too, even if you did ditch me for a guy named Pee Wee.”

“First of all,” Steve said, pulling Tony down with him. “First of all, Mr. Stark, you fell asleep on me,
and second of all, you had better not be insulting Pee Wee Reese here, because, because that would
be a cause of a row.”

“He was a lousy pitcher,” Tony said with a straight face, and Steve just gaped at him. Tony's eyes
were dancing and his lips were twitching with the effort that he was expending to keep a straight
face.

“Well, that's probably true, because he played shortstop,” Steve said, and Tony was straddling his
hips now, his knees firm on the couch cushions as he stripped his shirt over his head. “And despite
that, I think you should know-”

Tony reached for Steve's pants, and Steve was having a hard time concentrating on the game all of a
sudden. “I- I am mad,” he managed. “At you.”

“At me, or at the Yankees?” Tony asked, laughing.

“The Yankees aren't here, and they probably haven't insulted Pee Wee Reese recently,” Steve said,
as Tony's hands slid over his stomach, nails just barely scraping the skin. “Probably.”
“Probably,” Tony agreed. He leaned over, his mouth hot on Steve's. “Tell you what, let's blow the rest of the afternoon messing around on the couch, napping, and watching baseball. Then, tonight, I have plans.”

“Yeah?” Steve asked, playing with a strand of his hair just because he could. “Wanna let me in on them?”

“I'll give you a hint,” Tony said. “It involves you, a tuxedo, a four course meal cooked by the hotel chef and dropped off in the dumbwaiter, and a surprise.”

Steve's eyes shut. “I like all of those things,” he admitted. “Still not forgiving you.”

“That's okay, I'm used to working for it.”

“Thank god for that.”

* * *

“Okay, those... Aren't boxes.”

Without even looking down, Clint snagged DJ by the back of his collar. It was easier now that DJ had found, with Jarvis' help, a box of vintage formal wear, swapping his pith helmet for a top hat and a 1950's era tuxedo jacket with tails that dragged behind him as he bounced along.

Darcy, wearing a faux fur shrug and a tiny pillbox hat, crashed into Clint's back. “Jeez,” she managed, steadying herself with one gloved hand on Clint's back. “Give a girl some warning, would you plooooottttt-”

Her voice trailed away, and Clint nodded. “Yeah,” he said. “That's about the size of it.”

Ahead of them, beyond the ends of the shelves, a huge, open space yawned, and even from here, Clint could see huge, hulking shapes, shrouded in canvas covers. “Okay, so-” Clint scooped DJ up, sitting him in the crook of his elbow. “What are these?” he asked, taking a cautious step forward.

“Prototypes, for the most part,” Jarvis said. A pause. “Mostly failed prototypes.”

“Right.” Clint stepped out into the open floor, looking warily at the shadows cast by the huge pieces.

“What... Kind of prototypes?”

“There are no weapons, if that is what you are inquiring about,” Jarvis said.

“Thank heavens for small favors,” Clint said. He lifted the edge of one canvas covering. The blocky dark metal underneath was unfamiliar to him, and he let it fall. He considered asking what it was, but decided he was better off not knowing. “Hey, you hungry, Deej? We're well past lunch time and-”

“Hey, there's a sweet looking red car over here,” Darcy called, and Clint spun around.

“Can you stop wandering off?” he yelled. “Darcy, where are you?”

From across the room, he heard. “Over here!”

“Not helpful.” He headed in that direction, anyway. DJ wrapped his arms around Clint's neck, seemingly happy to just be carried for the time being. Clint glanced over his shoulder, checking to make sure that Butterfingers was still with them. The bot rolled along in their wake, his wheelbase stacked high with the treasures that Darcy and DJ had unearthed from the aisles. They were probably going to be in trouble for that, but there was no question that DJ had been having a lot of fun.
“Car?” he asked, even as he moved between various pieces. “Darcy, do not try to start it, okay, with our luck it'll have gas and you'll crash into something.”

“Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck yooooooooooooou,” she sang out.

“You're baaaaaaaaaby-siiiiiiiiiiitting,” Clint sang back. “Waaaaaatcch your-” His eye caught on a label, and he promptly forgot what he'd been saying. “No way.”

He set DJ down, brushing the back of his arm against the canvas, sure he'd misread the label. “Jarvis? Does Tony own carnival rides?”

“Yes.”

Clint started laughing. “DJ, help me here,” he said, and the boy nodded. “Find the places where the ropes are secured, and unhook them, okay?”

“Okay!” DJ said.

It didn't take long for them to remove the bindings, and in a matter of minutes, Clint was throwing back the canvas. “Well, I'll be,” he said, a grin splitting his face. “Okay, you're going to have to explain this one to me, Jarvis, this is-” He yanked a rope free, stepping back as he tossed the canvas out of his way. “Why the hell does Stark have a Scrambler?”

“He grew sick of hiring professionals to bring carnival rides in for Stark Industries picnics and family gatherings,” Jarvis said. “And in a fit of pique, he acquired his own. Only to realize that owning a carnival ride did not assist him, as-”

“He didn't have anyone to RUN them,” Clint filled in. Laughter bubbled through him. “Wow, Tony, that's, really. Really.”

“Oh, my God,” Darcy said, her voice full of awe. Clint looked back, just in time to see Darcy come running in their direction. “Oh, I loved these things! Look at this! Deej, do you know what this is?” DJ shook his head, and Darcy scooped him up, setting him in one of the ride's seats. “It's a ride,” she explained. “See, it's attached at the center, and when they turn it on, the central arms spin, and the little groupings at the end of the arms spin, and you slide around on the bench until you're squished up against one side, laughing or screaming or both.”

DJ blinked at her, his face squishing up.

“It's more fun than she makes it sound,” Clint said. He crouched down, checking the control panel. “This thing is actually functional, isn't it? We could disassemble it, and bring it upstairs and-” He was laughing too hard now to stand, and he collapsed back on his ass. “There are carnival rides in this building, oh, my god.”

“Wait, can you run this?” Darcy asked, her eyes huge.

“A MONKEY could run this,” Clint said, waving a hand through the air. “I'm not kidding, they're made so that you can train an eighteen year old to run them in like, half an hour. They're pretty idiot proof, Darce.” He leaned forward, bracing his hands on the floor. “Is this the only one?”

“The only Scrambler, yes. There is also a ferris wheel, a swinging ship, and bumper cars,” Jarvis said, and Clint flopped onto his back, pressing both hands to his face.

“Are you having a nervous breakdown?” Darcy asked.
“Maybe,” Clint admitted. He pushed himself back up. “DJ, we are going to have the best birthday parties ever, you know that, right?”

DJ, still perched on the seat of the ride, considered him through the bars of the railing. “Yes,” he said at last.

“I want a ferris wheel,” Darcy said.

“I'll teach you how to put one together.” Clint pushed himself up, and hopped into the ride, sitting down next to DJ. “For now, let's eat.”

* *

“Tony?”

“Up here,” Tony called. “Just checking to make sure everything was ready.”

Jarvis had arranged the whole thing, routing communications through the front desk, the kitchen, and the housekeeping staff. They'd all been busy, slipping in and out of the suite while he and Steve had been getting cleaned up and dressed. By the time Tony had made it up to the patio, they were long gone, leaving the wrought iron table set with paper thin china and crystal on a starched linen tablecloth. A tureen of soup was steaming in the middle of the table, ready to be served, and delicately arranged salads were waiting on their plates.

A bottle of champagne was chilling in a silver service next to the table, and Tony reached for it. It was icy cold, the glass slick beneath his hands, and he gave the label an approving nod. "Now, this was a good choice. Excellent vintage."

"Wow."

Tony glanced up. Steve was standing at the top of the spiral staircase, one hand braced easily on the wrought iron railing. Tony gave him a look, from the top of his head, down to the tips of his polished shoes, and back up. "Speaking of an excellent vintage," he said, making Steve laugh. "Wow, yourself."

"I will never get used to this," Steve admitted. He paused, his head turning as he took in the excellent view of the New York skyline, lit by last rays of the setting sun. A lock of his hair fell over his forehead, and he reached up to smooth it back into place.

“What, eating a delicious, gourmet meal on a glassed in patio space on the top of one New York's finest hotels with your loving boyfriend?” Tony asked.

“No, well, yes, actually,” Steve said, and Tony couldn't hold back a grin. “That, yes, but I meant, I'll never get used to wearing formal clothes. Because wearing formal clothes is something that happens to normal people.”

“Are you implying the rest of it isn't?” Tony asked, sweeping up two champagne flutes with an expansive gesture and setting them on the table in easy reach. "I don't know what you're talking about, this all seems perfectly normal to me."

“That's what worries me,” Steve said. He crossed the patio, and Tony just enjoyed the view. There was a certain fluid grace to Steve's movements, all tightly controlled strength, that he couldn't help but appreciate. The tux just made it hotter. Grinning, Tony gestured him closer with the crook of a finger. Steve raised an eyebrow, but he came anyway, and when Tony wound a hand around the back of his neck, he went willingly into the kiss. “Hi,” he whispered against Tony's lips.
“Hi, yourself.” Tony let himself savor the contact, the heat of Steve's body and the way his breath hitched as Tony's lips brushed his. “When it comes to a tuxedo, no one ever gets used to it, Steve,” Tony said, slipping out of Steve's arms to turn his attention back to the champagne. He popped the cork with a practiced hand, and reached for the flutes. “You just get better at hiding your discomfort.”

“You look comfortable,” Steve pointed out.

“I've been at this game longer than you, and I'm much, much better at lying then you are,” Tony pointed out. "There's only one good reason to wear a tux, Steve."

"To impress you?"

"You're adorable," Tony told him. "Also, I would say that I'm not that easily impressed, but let's face it, I am. And even if I wasn't, you in formal clothing?" He tilted his head to the side, his smile taking on a distinctly dirty edge. "Is highly impressive."

"Now, you're mocking me," Steve said, giving him a look. Despite the dry words, there was a faint flush to his cheeks, a wash of pink over the bridge of his nose and along the curves of his ears. There was a certain boyish shyness to the way he looked up, his eyebrows arched, a slight smile hovering around his lips.

"Nope, just hitting on you. There's a difference.” Tony filled a champagne glass, watching as the bubbles swirled through the golden liquid. “You wear a tux because you need to remind yourself that the person you're with is worth the annoyance. You never get too comfortable in a tux, and that reminds you that you're on your best behavior.”

He paused. “It only occasionally works on me, I've worn too many tuxes for the wrong reasons and for stupid reasons, but having you around helps.” He held the glass out to Steve. “Can I tempt you?"

“Don't you always?” Steve asked, a smile creasing his face. He took the flute from Tony, his fingers careful. “You joining me?” he asked. “Or are you going to let me drink alone?"

“What, is champagne your secret weakness?” Tony asked, reaching for the other glass. “It's the bubbles, isn't it?"

“If I say yes, are you going to try to take advantage of me?” Steve asked, arching an eyebrow in his direction. He took a sip, his lips lingering on the rim.

“Of course not, I'm a gentlemen,” Tony said, filling the glass with a twist of his wrist. He set the bottle back into the stand. “I mean, unless that's how you were hoping this night would go.”

“Not really,” Steve said. He leaned against the railing, a stunning sight against the backdrop of the city. He grinned at Tony, his eyes dancing. “I was hoping to get you tipsy and take advantage of you.”

Tony considered that. “Really?” he asked, setting his glass down on the table.

Steve's eyes rolled upwards. “No, of course.”

“Too late.” Tony reached for the bottle and raised it to his lips. With his other hand, he held up his index finger. “Just give me a second here, need to get in character.”

“Tony!” Laughing, Steve made a grab for the bottle, and Tony turned to the side, ducking away from his hands. Steve snagged him around the waist with one arm and dragged him backwards, half
tossing his glass at the table. Tony put up a mock struggle the entire way, until he was snug against Steve's chest, Steve's arms wrapped tight around him. “Wow,” Steve said, as Tony let his head fall back against his shoulder. “Give me that.”

“No,” Tony said, trying to keep the bottle out of his reach and failing miserably. “I'm here to see that you have a wonderful fucking weekend here, Steve, and if that means I have to drink this entire bottle of champagne and then have a lot of sex with you, well, then, that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make.” Steve was laughing so hard that he was shaking, now, and Tony was laughing too, but he was hiding it better. Well, he liked to think that he was hiding it better, but Steve's face was buried in the crook of his neck and his arms were tight around Tony's waist. Tony grinned at the sky. “Look, I'm trying to make your dreams come true, here, and this is the thanks I get?” he managed, laughter rolling through the words.

“You are out of your mind,” Steve said, snagging the bottle from Tony.

“I'll just get it back,” Tony said, twisting in Steve's grip until they were face to face again. “You know I will, Rogers. I'm wily and clever.”

“Those are two things I love about you,” Steve agreed. He held the bottle above his head, keeping it just out of Tony's reach. “And, no, you're won't.”

Tony arched an eyebrow at him, his fingers sliding down Steve's chest and catching on the first button of his tux jacket. “How do you plan to stop me, Rogers?”

Steve's eyes narrowed. Tony knew what was coming, but he didn't move fast enough to stop Steve from bringing the bottle straight to his mouth. He managed one long swallow, and then he started coughing. Choking, almost gagging, his head jerked back, champagne splashing on his hand and arm.

Tony steadied him. “Bubbles up your nose?” he asked, grinning.

“How do people DO that?” Steve said, still coughing. “That's…” He coughed again, and Tony took the bottle away from him, and this time, Steve didn't fight him for it.

Tony took a quick swallow. “Practice,” he said, tossing it back into the stand. “Want me to finish it?”

Steve's face was still red, his voice rough. “Not at all,” he said, drawing Tony back into his arms.

“But the plan,” Tony said, giving him wide eyes even as he went easily into Steve's embrace.

“How 'bout you just take advantage of me, instead?” Steve asked.

“That is what this relationship is based on,” Tony agreed. His phone buzzed in his pocket, and he reached for it. “Is it that time already, Jay?” he asked, swiping his thumb across the glass.

“Yes, sir.”

“Great.” Tony caught Steve's hand and headed for the table. “Put the bratbot through, will you?”

Steve sank into one of the chairs, pulling Tony down into his lap so they could both see the phone. Tony leaned against his shoulder, holding the phone up as Jarvis put the call through. A moment later, the video feed kicked in, and Tony blinked.

“Do I need to teach you how to shave already?” he asked. “I was expecting to put that off a few years, what the hell is on your upper lip there, buddy?”
DJ wiggled his nose. The impressive fake mustache he was wearing wiggled along with it. “Itches,” he said.

“I bet it does,” Steve said, his voice full of laughter. “And you're going to get food in it.”

DJ considered that. “Probably,” he admitted.

“Great, that's great,” Tony said, pressing a hand to his eyes. “Is this what Barton has you doing? What- I just- I don't know what to do with this, I'm tagging you in, Steve, this one is all you, you can handle it.”

Steve kissed his temple. “I like your mustache,” he told DJ. “Very classy. The Stark men have always looked good with facial hair.”

“We grow our own, it's a point of pride, we don't buy it for a dollar ninety-five at a bad costume shop,” Tony pointed out.

“He's a little young to be growing his own, so this seems like a good compromise while he waits,” Steve said, and when Tony opened his mouth to object, Steve covered it with a hand. “Do you like your mustache, Deej?”

DJ's teeth flashed in a grin beneath the clump of fake hair. “Yes.”

“Then we like it, too.” Steve leaned his chin on Tony's shoulder. “Right?”

Tony nipped at his palm, and, laughing, Steve pulled his hand away. “I'll get you some mustache wax as a souvenir,” he said, and DJ fluffed his mustache with both hands. “That's... That's not gonna help, that is the opposite of helping, now you look like a walrus. A hungover walrus.”

“Did you have a good day?” Steve asked DJ. He nodded. “Were you good for Clint?” Another nod. “When is bedtime?”

“Eight pm,” DJ said. He looked over his shoulder, clearly distracted. “I'm going now.”

Tony grinned. “Oh, you are?” But as much as it stung, that DJ didn't need them, that DJ wasn't missing them, it was also a relief. To see him happy and healthy and comfortable, even though neither of them was there to put him to bed. “Fine. Ungrateful brat.”

“Yes,” DJ said, grinning. “Love you.”

“Love you, too,” Steve said, his arms tightening around Tony's waist. “We miss you. When will we be home?”

“Sunday,” DJ said without hesitation. He blinked at Tony. “Right?”

“Right,” Tony agreed. He took a deep breath. “Good night, bratbot.”

DJ gave them a cheerful grin and a wave. “Night!” he said, and the feed clicked off.

Tony put the phone down. “Well, he's fine,” he said.

“Of course he is.” Steve kissed his neck. “We left him safe at home, with a person he likes and trusts, who lets him get away with murder, and now he has a mustache. When you're his age, that's pretty much heaven.”

Tony groaned. “I was too afraid to ask what dinner was.”
“We could check to see what's still stuck in his mustache,” Steve started, and Tony elbowed him. Laughing, Steve hugged him tight. “He's fine, Tony.”

“I know, I know.” For a second, Tony closed his eyes, ignoring the ache beneath his breastbone. Steve's hand smoothed up and down along his stomach, and Tony covered it with his own. “We're going to eat the fanciest fucking meal you have ever had in your life,” he said, staring out at the city. And then, we're going dancing.”

Steve stilled behind him. “All... Right?” he said at last.

“That sounded uncertain,” Tony said, slipping out of his arms, crossing to his own seat. “Are you doubting me, Rogers?”

“Just curious,” Steve said, reaching for his champagne flute. Somehow, despite their childish behavior, nothing had ended up spilled or broken. Tony took that as a good sign.

He picked up his own glass. “For now, you're just going to have to trust me,” he said, holding it up. Steve tapped his glass against Tony's. “Always, Stark. Happy anniversary.”

Tony grinned. “Happy anniversary, Steve.”

*
Chapter 4

He was never going to get used to fancy dining.

Steve stared down at the small white ramekin, positioned on the edge of an oval plate. A complicated swirl of caramel and fruit puree had been painted across the gleaming white porcelain with a practiced hand. Strawberries dusted in gold powder and carved into thin spirals followed the arc of the sauce, and a small stem of raspberries, including the gold embossed leaves, was wrapped around the base of the small cup of custard.

Steve wondered if he was supposed to eat that, too.

“Don't like crème brulee?”

Steve glanced up to find Tony watching him, a slight smile on his face. Tony gestured at the tiny white pot with his spoon. “You're looking at it like it talked bad about your sainted Irish mother;” he said, eyes bright in the subdued candle light. “Want something different? I bet they've got something else downstairs in the kitchen, I can-”

Steve smiled back. “The food is fine,” he said, setting his spoon down with more care than was probably necessary. “Just trying not to break the silverware.”

Tony's eyes flicked down towards the spoon, and then back up, his face splitting in a grin. “I know it looks delicate, but unless you try to stab an invading Hydra goon with it, it'll probably survive you, Rogers.” His head tipped forward, his voice falling as if he was imparting a secret. “Metal. It's pretty durable.”

“You think?” Steve leveled a mock glare in his direction, and Tony smirked at him even as he tucked a spoonful of the sugary custard into his mouth. Steve reached for his coffee cup, which looked a bit more sturdy. “It's like eating with a spoon designed for a baby.”

Tony nodded, licking a smudge of custard from the corner of his mouth. “Okay,” he said, reaching for Steve's crème brulee. He tapped the bowl of the spoon against the crisp, golden crust, cracking it with one blow. “Here.” He scooped out a spoonful of custard and held it out to Steve, who gave it a suspicious look. Tony grinned. “Don't you trust me?”

The thin, delicate spoon seemed to fit into Tony's hand the way it never would fit into his. There was an elegance to Tony's hands, to the long length of his fingers and the strong lines of the bones. They were patrician hands, for all that they were working hands as well. Steve opened his mouth, and Tony slipped the spoon between his lips.

It was cool and creamy, the vanilla flavor so subtle that it took him a moment to pick up on it. The crisp layer of caramelized sugar melted into the heavy, rich custard, and he closed his eyes, savoring the taste. When he opened the again, he found Tony watching him, his eyes big and dark. “Good?” Tony asked.

Steve licked his lips. “Good,” he agreed. Tony held out another spoonful, and Steve reached for the spoon. “You don't have to feed me.”

Tony held it out of reach. “What, this isn't how you saw your anniversary going?” he asked with a grin. “With your lover and or spouse feeding you crème brulee in the penthouse of New York's finest hotel?”
“Not really,” Steve said. He folded his arms on the edge of the table, leaning forward to accept another spoonful. Tony stole the next bite for himself, and Steve ran an idle finger across the fine linen of the tablecloth. Over Tony's shoulder, he could see the glittering skyline of the city stretching out across the horizon. He smiled, just a little. “If I'd thought of it, it was probably a little closer to a dish of ice cream out on Coney Island, after a boxed lunch or maybe a hot dog at Nathan's.”

Tony scraped the bottom of the ramekin. “Well, now you tell me,” he said.

Steve burst out laughing. “Small dreams, Stark.” He opened his mouth for the last bite of the custard, and then caught Tony's wrist, tugging him halfway across the table for a kiss. Tony's mouth tasted like sweet cream and burnt sugar, vanilla and coffee, and champagne beneath it all. Steve smiled against his lips, savoring the warmth of the kiss.

They pulled away, just a bit, just far enough so that Steve could feel the warm wash of Tony's breath against his lips. “But this is nice, too,” he whispered, and Tony started to laugh.

“Well, I'm glad I could provide a decent replacement,” Tony said, pulling away to lean back in his chair. His tux was pleasantly rumpled now, his dark hair tumbled over his forehead, his face relaxed. Steve reached out to push his hair away from his face, and Tony let him with a fond smile.

“It's no ham sandwich wrapped in wax paper and packed in a shoebox,” Steve mused, smoothing the pad of his thumb over Tony's cheekbone, cupping his jaw in one palm. “But it was decent enough.”

“Next time I'll cancel the lobster tails and prime rib and just get Nathan's to deliver,” Tony said. He turned his head, pressing a kiss against the hollow of Steve's palm before pulling away. He reached for the champagne bottle, and poured the last drops into Steve's glass. “Drink up. We're going dancing.”

Steve picked up the flute, but made no effort to drink it. “Since when do you dance?” he asked, smiling as Tony tossed his napkin on the table and pushed himself upright.

“I'll have you know that I'm an excellent dancer.” Tony paused, giving Steve a look down the length of his nose. One hand was braced on the edge of the table, the other, he propped on his hip. “Which you actually know. Because you've seen me dance.”

“I've seen you have strange, semi-rhythmic seizures in time with really loud rock music,” Steve said, then hid his smile behind his champagne glass as Tony gaped at him.

“I'd be insulted,” Tony said. “I would be. But you have horrible taste.”

“In dancing?” Steve asked.

“In pretty much everything, it's not your fault, you're-” Tony waved a hand through the air. “You're old. This happens to old people. They see the future coming and they get upset about it. Yelling about the young people and their clothes and their hair cuts and their music and-”

When he wanted to, he could still move fast enough to catch Tony off guard. He didn't do it often, because it was a trick that lost its effectiveness the more he used it, but when he did, he used to to very good effect. Which is how he got out of his seat and got an arm around Tony's waist before he had time to come up with his next word, let alone have a chance to say it.

Tony blinked, pupils dilating as Steve pulled him close with one hand and downed the last of the champagne with the other. “Or maybe,” Steve said, setting the glass on the table, “I just prefer dancing with you, rather than watching you dance.”
Tony recovered quickly. “That’s a lie,” he said, and Steve choked on a laugh. “I’m pure sexual energy when I’m dancing, you see me and you’re in my thrall, it’s a thing, I have to be careful with it, it’s caused so much pain with so many people and I’m not really interested in ruling the world, but I’d have you know I could do it, I just need a live video feed seen by the world’s population and a song with a good beat and-”

Steve leaned in, and pressed a gentle kiss against Tony’s lips. It didn't stop Tony if he was on a roll, but sometimes, it slowed him down. Enough for Steve to catch up.

Tony's arms slipped around Steve's neck. “Hi there,” he said, and Steve pulled him close.

“Hi,” he said, resting his forehead against Tony’s. “Can I have this dance?”

“Think that’s my line, soldier.” Tony tipped his head back. “Jarvis, can you hit up the hotel system and give us something appropriate?”

“Pretty sure there's a remote control for that,” Steve said, amused despite himself.

“I prefer to have Jay hack the system and meddle,” Tony said. “Keeps him young and agile.”

“God forbid I should age with grace,” Jarvis said, his voice coming from Tony's coat pocket.

“I'll turn this phone off,” Tony said, staring down at his chest.

“No, you won't,” Steve said.

“Okay, no, I won't, but it's an effective threat,” Tony pointed out as the audio system switched over to something soft and easy, big band music with a lot of horns and a slow, swinging rhythm. “See?”

“Thank you, Jarvis,” Steve said, even as he reached for Tony. “I can work with this.”

“It’s slow and boring, but-” Tony grinned as Steve stole a kiss from his lying lips, and leaned into Steve’s body. “But I think I can work with it.”

Steve let Tony tug him away from the table, onto the wide, open expanse of the patio. “I appreciate that,” he said, as they started to sway in time to the music. It wasn't really a dance, not really, but it was nice, to curl close to Tony in the light of flickering candles and the nearly full moon. Steve caught sight of their polished dress shoes, sliding soundlessly over the patio stones every time he looked down.

Tony caught his chin, tipping it back up. “My eyes are up here,” he said with a broad smile.

“I like your shoes,” Steve said with a straight face. “Where’d you get them?”

“I’d tell you, but I don’t want another ‘you paid how much for that?’ lecture,” Tony said. “You're not going to step on my feet.”

“Probably will,” Steve admitted. But he wasn’t really worried. He was lighter on his feet now than he’d been when he was younger. Younger and smaller. And Tony had a mercurial sort of grace that helped him relax.

“See, I would've thought you’d be more comfortable with this,” Tony said. “We've danced before.”

“In the workshop. Barefoot.” Steve arched an eyebrow. “Clothes change things.”

“We can do this naked, if you'd prefer. Because, let's be honest, I'd prefer,” Tony said.
“No,” Steve said, holding him close.

“But—”

“No,” Steve repeated, laughter rolling through the word.

“Fine,” Tony said. The music swelled, and for a moment, they were both silent, both moving in something more like an actual dance. “Weren’t there dance halls when you were young and reckless?”

“Sure. All over, but... There were these grand ballrooms,” Steve said, swaying along with Tony, “down on Coney. Ma used to talk about dancing with my father, down at the Dreamland ballroom. She...” He paused, his eyes closing. “She used to talk about that, about the size of the room, and the lights, and grand scope of it.” Tony’s arms tightened on his neck, and Steve smiled. “She talked about it like it was a Fairyland from the old world, a place that appears, glittering and magical, for one night, and then disappears again.”

Tony shrugged, even as they moved in a tight turn. “Good nights are like that,” he said. “Even if she went back, it probably never felt the same. Without—” He stopped, and Steve kissed him.

“Without my father,” he agreed. He buried his face in the side of Tony's neck, breathing in the familiar scent of Tony's skin. He felt Tony's hand slip into his hair, ruffling the strands. Steve smoothed a hand up Tony's back, even as he raised his head. “I never went dancing. Seemed too awkward, and I was—” He stopped, his body stilling along with the words. “Peggy was supposed to teach me. She just never got the chance.” He sucked in a breath. “Without my father.”

Tony smiled, just a little. “She was a good dancer,” he said. “Saw her at some of my parents' parties, on the rare times when she could be in Dad's presence without trying to break one of his limbs.”

The laugh caught Steve off guard, but it was warm and real. Tony grinned up at him. “I liked Agent Carter,” he said, even as they swept in a smooth circle, Tony's feet leading the way. “Most people couldn't keep up with Dad, and the ones that could often weren't willing to go head-to-head with him.”

“Peggy never had that problem,” Steve said.

“Peggy NEVER had that problem,” Tony agreed. “Half the time, Jarvis would go to get the door and she'd already be yelling before he even got it open.” He grinned. “She was always perfectly amiable with mom, and me, for that matter. Jarvis caught it sometimes. Dad?” He shook his head. “Dad learned to run.”

Steve was laughing, soft and low, his arms tight around Tony. “You know what? I am so glad to hear that.”

Tony smiled up at him. “Sorry you missed your dance, Steve.”

He nodded. “I am, too,” he said, because he tried to be honest. And because he still loved Peggy, in a way that made his chest ache and his eyes burn sometimes. An echo of something he'd had, that he'd almost had, that never quite faded. But that's all it was now, a faint echo.

Tony stopped, and Steve stopped, too, stumbling over both of their feet. His eyes opened, and he found Tony smiling at him. “This isn't how we should be dancing,” Tony said, slipping out of Steve's arms. He caught Steve's hand, and even as he turned away, he pulled Steve along with him.

Steve followed, curious now. “How, exactly, do you think we should be dancing?” he asked,
tangling their fingers together.

“The way that only we can.” Tony dragged him down the stairs and across the suite, to the closet in their bedroom, to the pile of luggage there. Steve realized what he was going for, even before Tony turned around.

Holding the suitcase armor up between them.

“That's not dancing,” he said, trying not to smile, trying not to laugh.

“When we do it right, it is,” Tony said. He grinned, his dark eyes brilliant. “Come flying with me, Steve. Come dance.”

“You're suggesting you put on the armor and the two of us to flying over the city, with me still in a tux?” Steve asked, rubbing a hand over his chin to hide his smile.

“I'll put my bow tie on the armor, then we'll both be in formal wear,” Tony pointed out. He took a step closer, holding a hand out towards Steve. His eyes were brilliant, his face bright with laughter. “Come dance with me. Come fly.”

Steve took a breath, and held it. He should say no. This was ridiculous. A waste of power, a waste of time. It was dangerous, far too dangerous for them to risk for no reason other than the fact that he wanted to.

But he did want to. And he'd always been reckless.

Steve took Tony's hand. “Yes.”

*

"What happened to the marshmallows?"

Darcy didn't even look up from the letters that were scattered around her folded legs. "Same thing that happened to the hot dogs," she said, with a grin. "And the potatoes. And the roast carrots. And pretty much everything."

Clint gave DJ a look. DJ, already dressed in a pair of Wall-E pajamas, tried to look innocent. Considering that there was marshmallow all over his face, it wasn't particularly successful. "Someone," Clint said, emphasizing the word, "lit them on fire?"

"And then ate them," Darcy pointed out. "I mean, I feel we have to be fair here." She flopped over on her stomach, pushing half a dozen sheets of well-perfumed stationary out of her way. "He did eat them, char and all."

"Still good," DJ explained, licking chocolate from the back of one wrist. With a sigh, Clint pulled his hand away, and DJ made an unhappy noise, his tongue still sticking out.

"What're you, a cat?" Clint asked him, reaching for the roll of paper towels that Darcy had left conveniently within reach, but safely away from the fire. "Did you even get any chocolate in your mouth, kid, or did it all end up on your pajamas?"

"Some. Not enough," DJ said. He sounded morose, and Darcy buried her face in her folded arms to muffle her giggles.

"Yeah, great, laugh it up," Clint said, scrubbing at DJ's face. "What're you reading?"
Darcy fanned the letters out in front of her. “DJ's grandpa's racy letters from sexy ladies!” She picked up one fragile piece of stationary. “I think Angela Lansbury was just playing with his affections, to be honest. I mean-” She fanned her face with one hand. “The woman had a way with words, and this is brutal.”

Clint stared at her. “Angela Lansbury? The lady from Murder She Wrote?”

“She had a life before that, you know, and apparently, it involved teasing the hell out of Howard Stark but being smart enough not to sleep with him.” Darcy grinned, tucking her cold toes under the blankets. “She's my new hero. I love her. I hope she made him cry.”

“I feel I should object to this,” Clint said, but it was an offhand comment. Most of his attention was focused on scrubbing at DJ's face with a paper towel. DJ leaned back, his face scrunching up with distaste, and the paper towel went with him, stuck firmly to his cheek. Clint sighed. "Kid. I think that marshmallow has merged with your skin. We're going to need sandpaper to get that off. Or, I don't know, a jackhammer.”

"Or," Darcy said, amused, "a hot washcloth. You could try that first, Mr. Gigantic Overreaction.”

“That's never going to work,” Clint said, but he held out his hands. “C'mon, botboy, let's hose you down and see if you're still intact under that layer of carmelized sugar and preservatives.”

“Nope,” DJ said, but he let Clint pull him to his feet. Keeping his grip on one of Clint's hands, he hopped towards the door. Clint went along with him, weaving his way through the forest of blanket and sheet tents that filled the room.

“Brush his teeth while you're at it,” Darcy called.

“To heck with that, they're baby teeth,” Clint said, hefting DJ up over his shoulders. He spun in a circle as DJ clutched his hair with one grubby hand and screamed with laughter. “They're like, you know, rental teeth, there's no point in trying to take care of them, he's just going to replace them in a couple of years.”

“No,” Darcy said.

“Hey, you can-”

“Call Steve and run your 'let his teeth rot and fall out of his face' plan by him?” Darcy said, rolling her head in Clint's direction. Clint stilled, DJ flopped over his back. Darcy arched her eyebrows.

“Maybe we should do that?”

“Maybe we shouldn't,” Clint said. “Besides, you don't have Steve's phone number, you're bluffing, that's a bluff, I know you-”

“Jarvis, can you call Steve for me?” Darcy said, her voice sugar coated.

“Of course,” Jarvis said, and she loved how smug Jarvis could sound when he wanted to. “One moment, Ms.-”

“Okay, okay, fine, I'll let him eat some toothpaste, too,” Clint said, his head falling back. “God forbid I be efficient.”

“Don't worry, that's never going to happen,” Darcy said.

“Don't worry, that's never going to happen,” Clint repeated, in a mocking sing-song. He was still
muttering as he left the room.

Grinning, Darcy picked up DJ's pith helmet and silk top hat, setting them with the rest of DJ's things on a nearby table. “We need anything else, Jarvis?” she asked, as she gathered up the letters she'd been reading. She stacked them with careful hands, and retied the bundle with the crumbling bit of satin ribbon.

“You and Butterfingers have returned to their charging stations, and DJ has access to his favorite blanket and Furbro. That should be adequate.”

“As babysitters, adequate is pretty much all Clint and I can shoot for,” Darcy agreed. She gathered up the mess from their dinner, pitching paper plates and empty wrappers into the very fancy looking trash can Clint had dragged over. When things were more or less clean, she took a seat in front of the fire, picking up a half-empty bottle of soda. She was pretty sure it was hers. Of course, she was pretty sure she didn't care.

Darcy pulled a blanket around her shoulders and tucked it in around her feet. She side-eyed the couch, wondering if she could claim it before the boys got back.

Her thoughts must've shown on her face, because when Clint came back in, DJ clinging to his back like a monkey, he immediately said, “Couch is mine.”

Darcy took a sip of her soda, giving Clint an innocent look over the top of it. “Sure, old man,” she said with a grin. “I understand. Life's hard when you get to a certain age, back gets stiff, you run the risk of breaking a hip if you fall down...”

“What are you doing?” Clint asked. He set DJ down, and the boy promptly disappeared into one of blanket tents. “Are you... Are you trying to manipulate me?”

“Maybe,” Darcy said, unrepentant.

Yeah, that's not going to work,” Clint said, tossing himself down on the couch. “I am an old man and I fear for my hips. I'll take the couch. You can take the ground. Since this whole mess was your idea.” He stuck one leg out, poking at the side of a blanket tent. “Hey, you causing trouble in there?”

“Yes,” DJ said, sounding happy about that.

“Well, don't. It's bedtime.” Clint checked his watch and groaned. “It's past bedtime.”

“You're really going to sleep this early?” Darcy asked, draining the last of her soda. She should probably brush her teeth. She wasn't going to, but she probably should.

“Yes,” Clint said, utterly deadpan. “I am old, and I'm going to bed now.”

“Fair enough.” Darcy put the glass bottle on the edge of the hearth, because she liked the way the light played off of it. She tucked her legs up, folding her arms around her knees. “Know what the best feeling in the entire world is?” she asked.

“Blow-” The word was halfway out of Clint's mouth before his head twitched in the direction of DJ's tent, and she watched, amused, as he scrambled to force the word into another direction. “-Ing bubbles in the park,” he finished, and Darcy burst out laughing. Clint flipped her off with a wry grin. “Shut up. I saved it.”

“Yeah, that was just, that was seamless,” Darcy said. Luckily, DJ didn't seem to be paying attention. He was too busy dragging armloads of blankets out of his tent and piling them up in front of the fire.
“That's a mighty fine nest. You going to sleep here, or in your tent?”

DJ looked at her, his face scrunched up as he thought about that. “Here,” he said at last, adding a pillow to the pile. He fluffed it with careful hands before crawling into the blanket pile.

“Sounds like a good plan.” Darcy helped him get the blankets arranged, gently tucking one up over his shoulders. DJ mumbled something that was probably a thank you, and Darcy moved Furbro so he'd be in reach.

“So what's the best feeling?” Clint asked, his legs stretched out in front of him.

Darcy made sure that DJ was settled before she moved back to sit on the floor next to the couch. “The best feeling in the world,” she said, dragging a blanket over her legs, “only happens on the coldest days of winter.

“You know what I'm talking about, right?” she asked, folding her legs under her. “Those really cold days that sink into your bones, until you're numb, until you're worse than numb. After the sun goes down, just as night is starting, you take dinner out of the oven, and you turn the oven off, but you leave the oven door cracked so that you can heat the kitchen a little.

She took a deep breath, her eyes closing. “And if you lean forward, and hold your shirt out away from your body, you can trap the hot air as it rises. You feel that hot air on your stomach, so hot that it hurts and you don't even care, because at least you're warm again. And as the heat comes up, warming your shirt, you can smell your detergent, or the fabric softener, or something, it smells like clean clothes, like clean clothes right off the laundry line in the summer sun.”

Darcy smiled, staring into the fire. “And that is the best feeling in the entire world.”

For a long moment, Clint was quiet. “Heat got turned off at your house a lot when you were a kid, huh?” he asked at last.

“It happens.” Darcy shrugged, unconcerned. “Sometimes you just can't afford a new oil delivery until payday, you know how it is.”

“Yep,” Clint said. “Better than the electricity getting shut off, honestly, that sucked. And everyone on the street knows it's happening.”

“Ain't that the truth.” Darcy arranged her own pile of blankets, savoring the heat of the fire. “Hey, Jarvis? Any chance we can keep the fire going? Just a little?”

“Of course.” The fire died back, becoming just a soft glow on the hearth. “Is this acceptable?”

Darcy gave a thumb's up. “Perfect, thank you.” She settled down, finding a comfortable spot in the blanket nest, and wrapping her arms around her pillow. Across the floor, she saw DJ roll over, the blankets shifting, and she started to laugh.

“What's so funny?” Clint asked, his voice quiet.

“I was just thinking,” she said. “This might be the most uncomfortable night this kid ever knows.” She dragged her blankets up around her shoulders. “Here, sleeping on the floor, in front of the fire, this might very well be the coldest, hardest night he ever has to endure.” She smiled. “And it's voluntary.”

Clint was silent for a long moment, and DJ rolled over again. Clint sighed, an audible exhale, and pushed himself to his feet. Darcy watched, amused, as he scooped DJ up and crossed back to the
couch. Clint lowered DJ, blankets and all, onto the couch, before he went back for Furbro and a pillow. DJ, probably already half asleep, fumbled out with one hand, and Clint handed Furbro over.

Then he sank down to the floor, lying down next to the hearth with his arms folded behind his head.

Darcy tossed him a pillow. “Thought you called the couch,” she said.

“Yeah, well.” Clint shoved the pillow under his head. “There's a rule about him sleeping on the floor. It makes Tony crazy.” He shifted to his side, bunching the pillow under his head. “And you know me. I'm all about rules.”

"Riiiiiiiiight.” She paused. “Hey, Clint?” Darcy asked, hugging her pillow.

"Go to sleep," Clint said.

She grinned. “Didja ever do that for me?” she asked, her voice slurring a little with exhaustion.

Another beat. “No.”

Darcy snuggled down, her arms wrapped tight around her pillow. “Cause one time, I woke up in bed. And I don't remember how I got there.”

“Only once?”

She laughed. “Shut up,” she said. It was dark now, with only the low light of the fire casting heavy shadows over their blanket forts. Still, she knew where he was, and considered throwing something in his direction. But all she had was pillows, and she needed those. “In New Mexico.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Remember that time? When you were still my handler and I got super drunk?”

She heard him laugh, just a little, a muffled little chuckle. “Yeah, gonna have to narrow that down a little there, Lewis, that covers a lot of ground.”

"Pay more attention." She grinned. "I was drunk and angry and we were at that dive bar just outside of town, you know the one, the one-"

"With the mechanical bull that you challenged to a fistfight?" Clint said.

"I knew you had my back," Darcy said. "But I woke up that night in bed." She paused, and for a long moment, she just listened to the fire crackle and the slow, even sound of Clint's breathing. "Did you put me there?"

"Nope," Clint drawled. "I left you on the kitchen counter with your head tilted towards the sink so that when you threw up, it'd be easy to clean up and even easier to hose you down."

"Screw you," Darcy said, grinning.

"The little hose for washing dishes was right there, it would've been fine," Clint said.

Darcy ignored him, because that was always a better idea than listening to him. "You put me to bed, didn't you?"

He sighed. "Maybe. You tried to sleep on my truck. Not in my truck. ON my truck." In the dim light of the room, she saw his hands snap up, beseeching an uncaring god, or maybe just Jarvis. "I still
don't know how you got up there."

"How'd you get me down?" Darcy asked, only vaguely curious.

"Coaxed you down with a two day old donut that I found in the backseat. You don't respond to threats, orders, or begging." He rolled over. "But you do respond to stale pastry."

"I'm smart that way." She closed her eyes. "Clint?"

"Sleeeeeeeping."

"What happened to my pants? I never located my pants."

"You said you were saving them for later, so you took them off and threw them out the window of the truck halfway down Route 25."

"Pants rule," DJ mumbled, and Darcy grinned.

“He's right,” Clint said. “There's a pants rule here. You gotta wear pants. At all times.”

“Right,” Darcy said. “I'll keep that in mind.” She considered that. "But that does sound like something I'd do. You know. In a place without pants based rules.”

"Yeah, sounds like something you'd do." Clint was laughing now, she could hear it under the words, a slow, sustained rumble. "You are a dangerous drunk, Darcy."

"That's why I only get drunk when I'm with people I trust," Darcy pointed out. From the other side of the floor, there was silence. She grinned. "Good night, DJ. Good night, Barton."

"Go to sleep, Lewis,” was all Clint said, but she could hear the smile in the words. Satisfied, she rolled over, and let her eyes close.

*

Tony woke up slowly, giving in to the siren scent of coffee with some reluctance.

He pried one eye open, staring at the expanse of pale sheets lit by warm sunlight. Tony let his eyes close again, even as he swept a hand across the blankets. They were empty, and cool to the touch, and Tony let his breath out in a grumble. “That man,” he mumbled into his pillows, “has got to learn to sleep in.”

He considered rolling over and going back to sleep. The bed was warm and comfortable, and it was still painfully early. But his stomach was grumbling, and the smell of coffee was hard to resist. And bed wasn’t really that interesting if Steve wasn’t in it.

Tony stretched, letting out a heavy groan, and pushed himself upright. wandering across the room to collect a pair of shorts and his phone. A cup of coffee from the kitchen completed the bare necessities for morning functioning, and Tony wandered through the suite, looking for Steve. A mechanical whir was audible from the small gym that was part of their rooms, and Tony headed in that direction.

Steve was running on a treadmill, clad in a pair of workout shorts and one of his usual too-tight t-shirts. Tony leaned against the doorframe, taking a moment to just enjoy the view. “Morning,” he said, and Steve glanced back over his shoulder, his hair flopping over his forehead. There was a faint flush to his cheeks, and he was breathing in quick bursts. Tony never tired of watching him move, all sustained strength and grace in a very masculine package.
Steve grinned at Tony, his face lighting up. “Hey,” he said, never even slowing down. “Sorry, did I wake you?”

Tony waved him off. “I needed to be waking up anyway.” He pushed away from the door and wandered across the compact gym space. Morning light was spilling in from the massive windows, and he boosted himself up onto the narrow ledge at the bottom. “Figured I should figure out what you were up to.”

Steve waved a hand at the gym. “Just taking a run,” he said. “Care to join me?”

Tony eyed the treadmill. The belt was a blur beneath Steve’s feet. “Think I’ll pass,” he said. He took a sip from his coffee, yawning into the cup. He dropped his phone next to him on the windowsill. “I don’t...” He gestured at nothing in particular. “Run.”

“I love how much disdain you manage to pack into that word,” Steve said, laughter running through the words.

“I work at it,” Tony said. He stretched, arching his back as he found a comfortable spot against the window. His body was one sustained ache this morning, in the best possible way, and he grinned into his coffee.

“We could spar later,” Steve suggested, and Tony made a noise that was a half-giggle and half-snort. “Is that what we’re calling it now?” he asked, grinning. Steve rolled his eyes, and Tony reached for his phone.

“All I’ve done so far this weekend is eat, sleep, and have sex.”

“We watched baseball,” Steve said.

Tony pointed his coffee cup in his general direction without even looking up from his phone. “You watched baseball,” he said. “I played with some designs and napped.”

Steve was laughing now, soft and low, a sustained sort of rumble of sound. “All right,” he agreed, “we went dancing.” The rhythm of his feet accelerated. “And flying.”

“That was sex,” Tony said. “That was one hundred percent sex, it just took me a while to get your pants off, but it does not change the fact that I was having sex every single minute of that, and it was fantastic.” He paused, cup halfway to his lips. “Was it good for you?”

Steve stared at him, one eyebrow cocked. “No,” he said, but his ears were pink, and there was a sweet sort of smile curling the corners of his lips. “Not at all.”

“Right,” Tony drawled, bending over his phone. His other hand rubbed at his shoulder, his thumb stroking over the rather obvious hickey on dip of his collarbone. “I'm surprised you let me get us back inside the building before you started stripping.”

“I think I was just overheating,” Steve said with a straight face. “Too close to the repulsors.”

“Uh-huh,” Tony said. He stretched one leg out in front of him, tipping his head towards the sunlight. “Overheating does explain everything.”

“I think it does, really. Can I borrow that?” Steve asked, bringing Tony's head up.

“My phone? Sure.” Tony tossed it in Steve's direction, and Steve snagged it with a flick of his wrist. Tony settled back against the windowframe, going back to his coffee. “Need to check the sports scores?”
“Something like that.” Without even slowing down, Steve brought the phone up, pointing it in Tony's direction. Tony paused, coffee cup hovering at his lips, as the phone's camera clicked.

“Jesus, I can't go anywhere in this city without the paparazzi finding me,” Tony said with a wry smile.

“Maybe you shouldn't hang out in your underwear in front of windows,” Steve said, and Tony choked on a laugh and a mouthful of coffee.

“Really?” He leaned forward over his upraised knee, setting the cup next to his feet. “You're blaming me for this situation?” Steve took another picture, and Tony arched an eyebrow. “Should I be posing? You looking for a particular angle, Rogers?”

“No, this is fine,” Steve said, and took another one. “I just want some drawing reference.”

“Oh, right, this is for reference, gotcha, purely for art's sake,” Tony agreed. Shaking his head, he went back to his coffee, trying to ignore the sound of his phone's camera going off behind him. He absolutely was not blushing, because that would be ridiculous. Another faint whir and click, and Tony shot a glare in Steve's direction.

Steve, unrepentant, just grinned and took another picture.

“Those are going to be great,” Tony pointed out. “Nothing like a picture taken with a cell phone at a dead run, that's, that's really going to be useful.”

“I don't know, I seem to remember a press conference where you loudly proclaimed that this thing had a propitiatory image stabilization feature that could compensate for any amount of movement,” Steve said. He held up the phone. “Yep, this is the latest model of the StarkPhone, so I'm assuming that it'll work just fine.”

“Tell me you don't watch my press conferences,” Tony said.

Steve gave him a pitying look. “Every single one.”

Tony stared at him over the rim of his coffee cup. “I lie during those,” he said after a long moment.

“I know.”

“A lot,” Tony said.

“Trust me, I'm aware,” Steve said, grinning. “Don't worry, I still love you.”

“I'm relieved.” He kind of was.

“Even though you could do with a little less lying.”

“Look, my lies serve a very important purpose, there's-”

“Less lies, that's all I'm asking,” Steve said. Tony opened his mouth to argue, and Steve took another picture.

“That's it.” Tony pushed himself to his feet, and shoved his shorts down, kicking them off. Then, naked and smirking, he dropped himself back down on the windowsill. “There,” Tony said, leaning back. “Now what are you going to do?”

Steve's head tipped to the side, a flush rolling over his cheeks. And he took another picture.
“If I find that on the internet-” Tony said, but he was laughing and Steve was laughing and Tony was pretty sure that Steve was still taking pictures, even as he shut the treadmill down. Laughing too hard to keep going, he braced his arms on the treadmill controls and let his head fall forward.

Tony threw his shorts at Steve's head. Steve ducked, laughing so hard that he had to grip the treadmill to stay upright. “When are you gonna learn?” he asked, his eyes wet with tears. “Don't dare me.”

“You are remarkably predictable,” Tony said, and he let his head fall back against the window. Everything was sunlight and Steve's laughter, and Tony let his eyes shut, tried to memorize the way he felt in this exact moment, tried to hold onto it for as long as possible.

There was another click, and Tony opened his eyes, not surprised to find that Steve was now within arm's length. “Hi,” he said, eyebrows arching.

Steve lowered the phone. “Hi,” he said. He reached out, his fingers sliding into Tony's hair to cup the side of his head. Tony tipped his chin up to meet Steve halfway. The kiss tasted like coffee and sugar, like the salt of Steve's skin. “We done playing photographer?” Tony asked, his lips still lingering against Steve's.

“Probably not,” Steve admitted. He pulled back, just a little, just enough for his lips to meet Tony's. “Sorry. You were just-” His thumb stroked over Tony's cheekbone. “Gorgeous.”

“That's my default state,” Tony said with a straight face, and Steve choked on a laugh. “No, you should be used to that by now. You should be absolutely used to my stunning beauty, because-” Steve kissed him, and Tony grinned against his lips.

“Never going to be used to it,” Steve admitted. He settled down next to Tony, reaching for Tony's coffee cup. Tony, caught in a haze of hormones and warmth, decided to allow it. Steve eyed him over the rim of the cup. “So, what's on the docket for today?”

Tony opened his mouth, then closed it. “Let's go to Coney Island.”

Steve's eyebrows shot up. “What?”

Tony grinned. “C'mon, Rogers, let's go. Let's go down to Coney Island. It's not summer, not yet, but it's warm enough, and Nathan's will be open. We can have a hot dog and you can run on the beach, and I can watch you run on the beach.”

“You could walk with me on the beach,” Steve pointed out. He waved the coffee cup through the air and Tony took it away from him.

“I could, but that sounds like work,” Tony said. “I'll ride on your back. You can run, I can ride, it'll be extra training for you, I know you need that.”

“It's so good for you to always be looking out for me,” Steve said.

“For you and the team,” Tony said, grinning at him. He downed the last of the coffee and set it aside. “What do you say? Want to go hit the beach?”

Steve looked out the window, his chin tipping up towards the sun. “Are you doing this because eof what I said last night?” he asked at last.

“Yep,” Tony said.
“You don't actually want to go to Coney Island, do you?”

Tony shrugged. “I could go for a hot dog,” he said. “And the boardwalk won't be crowded.”

Steve huffed out a sigh. “Tony, I don't-”

“Look, it's not a difficult question,” Tony said, pushing himself to his feet. “We can hang here, play some billiards, watch a movie, take a nap, have some good sex, or we can go to a tourist trap from hell that isn't really fully open, eat a hot dog as soon as Nathan's opens, because breakfast hot dog, why the hell not?”

Steve considered that. “Can I get an orangeade?” he asked at last, his head turning in Tony's direction.

“I think I can afford that,” Tony said. “Bet we can find some ice cream somewhere. Maybe pick up a pizza on the way home.” He grinned. “New York kind of day.”

Steve's smile was slow, but it bloomed across his face with real warmth. “Tell me if you get bored,” he said.

“I'm already bored,” Tony said. “It's a constant state with me. I'm used to it.”

“Ah, right, the infamous Stark ennui,” Steve said, rolling to his feet. He paused. “Breakfast hot dog? Really?”

Tony picked up his phone from the windowsill. “Jay, when does Nathan's open today?”

“Nine AM, sir,” Jarvis said.

“Well, then, we won't be alone,” Tony said. “Let's go.”

Steve fell into step with him. “Pants first.”

“Spoilsport.”

*

“Okay, who wants another pancake?” Darcy asked, her voice far too enthusiastic for Clint's liking.

“I'm good,” Clint said, and when DJ raised his hand, Clint gave him a look. “You're good, too.”

DJ considered that. “Not good,” he said at last. “Pancake, please.”

“You've had like six pancakes,” Clint told him.

“Seven,” DJ said, holding up seven fingers. He held his hands out towards Clint with a proud smile. “Seven.”

“I stand corrected,” Clint said. “But seven is enough.”

“No,” DJ said.

Clint tried not to smile because smiling would probably not help his position as an authority figure. “Yes,” he said, even as Darcy carried the plate with the last of the pancakes over to the table. She dropped into the chair next to him, and dumped two pancakes onto his plate. Clint looked at them with something like pain. “Why, Darce? Why?”
"Because you're taking one for the team to keep the munchkin from eating himself into a coma," Darcy said with a grin. She cut the last pancake in half, dropping one half onto her own plate and the other half onto DJ's. "You're good like that."

Resigned, Clint reaching for the syrup before DJ could get to it. "Next time, less batter."

"There is no next time," Darcy said, slathering butter on her pancake. "I cooked for you twice now, I'm not keeping this streak alive."

Clint gave her a look over a forkful of pancake. "You stuck hot dogs on skewers last night," he pointed out. "That's not, it's not really gourmet cooking."

"And this morning, you get pancakes!" Darcy gave him a smirk and shoved a quarter of a pancake into her mouth. "Two in a row," she said, her mouth full. "Your turn next."

"Not happening," Clint said.

DJ's head bounced between them, his eyes huge. "Me next," he said, chopping his pancake into small pieces. He stabbed one chunk with his fork and dipped it into the syrup.

"You're going to cook tonight?" Clint asked, amused.

"Yes," DJ said with such confidence that Clint found himself nodding.

"Okay, dinner is smoothies, this seems fair." Clint turned his attention to his pancakes. "What're the plans until dinner?" he asked.

"Today, we're going to find empty spaces," Darcy said. "It will require sneakiness and cleverness. Luckily, we excel in both of those." She picked up her glass of milk and held it out to DJ. "Right?"

DJ picked up his cup with both hands and tapped it against hers. "Right!"

"Okay, that's fine," Clint said. "But lobby first. I need coffee."

DJ peered up at him. "Me, too."

Clint burst out laughing. "Oh, god, no, absolutely not, you are not getting coffee."

"There's a coffee machine here," Darcy pointed out.

"Yeah, but I want an iced mocha and I don't want to hear any comments from you about that," Clint said, heading her off.

"Aw, are you going to get your coffee with extra whipped cream?" she asked.

"Yes. Yes, I am, and unless you want to pay for it, you can keep it to yourself," he said. He finished the pancakes, and dropped his fork to his plate with a happy groan. "Okay, Deej. Darcy made breakfast, so we get to do the dishes."

DJ considered that, then wiggled out of his chair. "Fair," he said at last. He reached for his plate, and Darcy's, carrying one in each hand. "Dishes now. Then coffee."

"Then CLINT gets coffee," Clint corrected. "No one else gets coffee."

"What, I can't have coffee?" Darcy asked, drinking her milk.
“Whatever, you can get coffee, why-”

“Well, if you get coffee and I get coffee, then he should get coffee, it's not really fair that he's the only one who doesn't get coffee,” Darcy pointed out. Clint turned around to stare at her, and Darcy grinned at him, her eyelashes fluttering. “You should be fair.”

“Fair,” DJ agreed.

“No,” Clint said, shaking his head as he filled the sink.

Darcy held up her hands. “Avenger Deprives Small Child of Fair Share of Treats,” she said. “It'll make a good headline, don't you think?”

“What is wrong with you?” Clint asked her.

“What? I'm on the side of truth and justice and fairness,” Darcy said. She stood, gathering silverware and cups. “Unlike you.”

“He's not getting coffee,” Clint said. DJ leaned against his side, a high pitched whine working its way out of him. Clint grinned. “Good try, buddy, but no.”

Darcy leaned over. “Stick with me, kid. See where it gets you.”

*
Darcy peered into the office, still wary of crossing the threshold. “You sure about this, Jarvis?” she asked.

“Quite,” Jarvis said. He sounded somehow amused. “Their lease expired on Thursday, and the cleaning team will be in on Monday to clean the offices for new tenants.”

“Excellent.” Darcy pushed the door open. The suite of offices were halfway up the tower, with an open, glassed off reception area in front of a compact arrangement of small rooms surrounding a large open area. A few desks had been left behind, and leftover newspaper and boxes were scattered across the floor. A half a dozen trash cans were by the walls and various doors, overflowing with what hadn't been packed up and taken with the former tenants.

“Okay, Deej, new game.” DJ, a step behind her, hopped forward, his face a mask of intense focus. Darcy had to fight the urge to scoop him up and kiss him. Instead, she held out a hand and let him latch onto it. “The French have a tradition of letting people go through the fields, after the harvest, and take what ever's left behind. It's called gleaning.”

“Also called picking through the trash,” Clint said. He held the door open so You could scoot through. The bot immediately rolled over to take up a place behind the reception desk. Darcy fished her phone out of her pocket and took a picture.

“Also called picking through the trash,” Darcy agreed, because shame was wasted effort, really. She put her phone away. “You're the worst, Clint.”

“And Darcy learned about the French from Facebooks posts,” Clint said.

“Oh, have you ever been to France?” Darcy asked him. Clint opened his mouth and Darcy cut him off. “Without SHIELD orders or Coulson shoving you out of a plane?”

“Listen, I don't do ANYTHING without SHIELD orders, Coulson shoving me out of a plane, or maybe Steve yelling at me,” Clint said. “I don't even like going six blocks out of my way to get a burger at Five Guys.”

“How are you a super hero?” Darcy asked him.

“It's a fucking mystery,” Clint agreed. “I think it's because I want someone else to pay for my arrows, and people only do that if you claim to be doing it for the greater good.” He swept a deep bow.

“Suivez-moi, madame, je sais où je vais.”

Darcy paused, squinting suspiciously at him. “Was that French?” she asked.

“J’ai besoin d’un gâteau, un poulet grillé, et les directions vers le pub ou restaurant décents à proximité qui ont un large menu de cocktails,” Clint said with a wicked grin.
“I don't think that means what you think it means,” Darcy said.

“Nope, it means exactly what I think it means, you just don't speak French, let's go sort through the trash left behind by a failed dot com that tried to hit the big time too early. Who wants to play a game?” He looked down at DJ, who was still leaning against Darcy's leg. “The person who finds the most discarded pens, wins.”

“Double points for ones that still work,” Darcy said as DJ's face lit up. “Ready?” He nodded. “Go!” DJ was off like a shot, through the door behind the reception desk and into the main room, his feet pounding across trash-strewn floor. Laughing, Darcy headed off after him. “You coming, Clint?”

“Race you,” he said, and Darcy took off after DJ, shoving the glass door open and ducking into the open door of the first office she reached. Behind her, she could hear Clint laughing, but she didn’t really care. There was stuff to dig through.

“Fifteen minutes!” she yelled, kicking sheets of week old newspaper out of her way. “Bring the best thing you find!” There was a file cabinet in the corner and she yanked at the drawers. Inside, she found a set of broken keys, two pen caps, and a porcelain cup with the words “Number One Secretary!” on it. Darcy grabbed it. “Someone failed at Administrative Assistant's Day,” she said with a grin, and tossed it into an empty box.

Fifteen minutes later, she skidded across the floor to where DJ and Clint were sitting on the floor. DJ’s shirt was in his lap, filled with a massive pile of pens, pencils and markers. He grinned up at her as Darcy dropped her box and flopped down next to him. “What kind of shit did you find?” Clint asked.

There was a plastic trash can between his splayed legs with a feather duster sticking out from one edge. Darcy tipped her box over. “Three unopened packets of Cup Noodle,” she said. “And a box of plastic spoons.”

Clint reached for one. “What flavor?”

“Mushroom.”

Clint made a face. “That explains why they're still here.” He reached into his trash can. “Pair of athletic socks.”

“Clean or dirty?” Darcy asked.

“Clean.” Clint paused, then held up a white sock to his nose, Darcy gagged, and Clint shrugged. “Probably clean.” He tossed them down on top of the Cup Noodles. DJ looked at Darcy, his eyes wide.

“Christmas lights,” Darcy said, holding up the wad of icicle lights.

“Huh, nice,” Clint said.

DJ reached for them. “Work?” he asked.

“Probably,” Darcy told him. He did not seem impressed by this, and Darcy shrugged. “Look, I didn't have time to test them, I don't think-”

“Kid's right, automatic downgrade,” Clint said. He held up a small paperback book. “Romance
“His Majesty, MD.,” Darcy read. “Oh, god, give it to me.”

Clint held it out of reach over his head. “Hey, hey, finder's keepers, what've you got to trade?”


Clint grinned. “No way.” Darcy handed it over.

“There once was a boy from Castille,” he read aloud. Without even looking up, he held out the romance novel. “Okay, you win.”

Darcy snatched it and threw her hands in the air. “Yes!” DJ applauded, and she grinned at him. “What'd you get, botboy?”

He held up his shirt. A black ballpoint pen tipped out of the fabric. “Pens,” he said proudly.

“Lots of pens,” Darcy agreed. “Did you count them?”


“Highlighters,” Darcy said, folding her legs under her. Clint was giggling over the legal pad. “What color?”

DJ dug through his pile. “Yellow.” He held it up. “And pink.”

“Can I have one?” Darcy asked. DJ considered that, then handed over the yellow one. Darcy tucked it behind her ear. “Thank you, Deej.” He beamed up at her, his bare toes digging into the carpet. “Did you find anything else?”

“Stapler,” DJ said, pointing to the pile next to him. There were at least six staplers of varying sizes and colors.

“Do they work?” Darcy asked.

DJ shook his head. “They will,” he said, with a grin.

“Cool,” Darcy said, pushing her box towards him. “Wanna pack 'em up and we can have You carry them for us?”

“Yes.” He got to his knees and loaded his staplers into her box, placing each one with careful consideration.

“I'm keeping this,” Clint said, holding up the legal pad.

“I figured,” Darcy said, pointing at the box. Clint tossed it in, and DJ dumped all of the pens on top. “How's Tony going to feel about gaining a couple of dozen pens?”

“I doubt he'll notice,” Clint said. “Okay, way I see it, we've got some choices. Empty Office Hide and Seek.”

Darcy looked at DJ. “Small person has a lot of advantage to that one.” DJ smirked up at her, and she ruffled his hair. “What happens if he hides too well and we never find him and his dads kill us?”
“Good point, he's too clever to trust.” Clint reached into his pocket. “We've got Discarded Business Card Go Fish.” He fanned out a fistful of cards.

“Got any HR specialists?” Darcy asked, and he handed over a card. Laughing, she tossed it down in front of them. “Creative. But I don't think so.”

“Okay, fine, what's your idea?” Clint asked.

“Maybe I don't have an idea, maybe I just want you to have better ideas,” Darcy said.

“Yeah, well, maybe we should let DJ choose,” Clint said.

“Good idea.” Darcy looked at DJ, who had lost interest in the two of them and was now arranging the pens he'd found in neat rows on the floor by maker and color and whether or not that they had a cap. “Deej? You want to play Go Fish, or Hide and Seek ooooooooooooooooor-” She drew the word out until he looked up, his eyes focusing on her, and Darcy grinned. “Broken Office Chair Races!”

“What,” Clint said, at the same time as DJ said, “RACES!” very, very loudly.

Darcy threw her hands up. “I think we have a winner!” she crowed and DJ scrambled up, his feet kicking at the carpet. Pens went in all directions, and Clint stared at Darcy, his expression unreadable. Darcy grinned at him. “I call the one that's still got all its wheels.”

“This is the worst idea,” Clint said, but he was already rolling to his feet. “Let's go.”

* 

Coney Island was pretty much like he'd remembered it. Or maybe it was just like he'd imagined it. Tony wasn't sure anymore. But Steve was grinning out at the ocean, his eyes bright, and he'd put up with a lot for that.

A surprising amount, actually.

The armor finished folding up, and Tony grabbed the handle. “Okay, point me towards the hot dogs.”

“So, what, you're going to carry a giant metal suitcase around all day?” Steve asked. But he took Tony's hand, leading him up the boardwalk. In the distance, Tony could see the sign for Nathan's, and he grinned. In his pocket, his phone gave a discreet beep, and he tapped it with one finger.

“What, are you offering to carry it for me?” Tony asked, slipping a sleek pair of sunglasses on his nose. The sun wasn't really bright enough to make them necessary, but he had an image to maintain. “Thank you, Steve, but I have a plan.”

“Oh, you have a plan, what's the-”

“Hey, boss. Hey, Cap!”

Tony held the case out to the side. “Plan,” he said, with a smirk as Happy came jogging up the boardwalk with his usual enthusiasm, a paper bag in one hand, and a watchful look on his face.

“This is your plan?” Steve asked. “Make Happy babysit your armor?”

“It's a good plan,” Tony said. He handed the case over to Happy, who handcuffed it to his wrist with a great deal of ceremony. Tony watched, his hands tucked in his pockets and a fond grin on his face.
“All set there, sport?”

Happy patted the case with his free hand. “I got this. You go have a good day.”

“It's a lousy plan, what're you going to do while we're out here?” Steve asked Happy.

“Car's parked just off the main drag,” Happy said. “Got the newspaper and sports radio. I'll grab a couple of dogs later, be an easy day.”

“I have good ideas,” Tony said.

“I've heard that,” Steve said, his lips curling up. “Mostly from you.”

“And I keep waiting for you to back me up, and yet-”

Happy cleared his throat, and Tony glanced at him. Happy thrust the paper bag at him. “Happy anniversary, boss,” he said with a grin.

Tony considered the bag. “I can see the grease seeping through this,” he said.

“That's how you know it's good,” Happy said. He wiggled the bag back and forth. “You going to take this?”

“No,” Tony said, putting his hands in his pockets. Steve reached past him and took the bag. “That's not for you,” Tony pointed out.

“It's my anniversary, too, and you're an ungrateful ass,” Steve said. He opened the bag, peering inside. “Donuts?”

“From the best shop in the city,” Happy said. He seemed proud of this. Tony gave him a look over the top of his sunglasses. “Your favorite.”

“Thank you,” Steve said, reaching into the bag to pull out a large mass of white powder. Tony was pretty sure there as a pastry under there somewhere, but he wasn't sure where. “Tony?”

“You're getting powdered sugar everywhere,” Tony said.

Steve held the donut out to him. “Say thank you, Tony.”

Tony took the donut. “I got you a car for Christmas,” he said to Happy, who grinned at him. “Like, a nice car. And you get me a pastry?”

“It's fresh,” Happy said.


Steve took a large bite of donut. “You do look extra sweet,” he acknowledged with a wide grin. “Sorry, Happy, he's like this, you know how he is.”

“Been around him for longer than you,” Happy agreed. “Emotional stuff isn't his strong point, we both know that, but I get the gist of it, I know where he's coming from.”

“I'm right here,” Tony said.
“And Happy brought us donuts. And he's holding your armor so we can go get a hot dog, and an ice cream cone.” Steve licked sugar from his fingers, and that was a hell of a visual. “Say thank you, Tony.”

“Card,” Tony said. “Much easier.”

Happy grinned at him. “You're welcome.” He patted Tony on the shoulder. “Give me a shout when you're ready to go.”

“Right, right,” Tony said. He paused, and Steve took another bite of his donut, his eyebrows arched. Tony cleared his throat. “Thank you.”

“Right,” Happy said. “You really thankful? Bring me a couple of Nathan's.”

“Bring me a card next time, it's only polite,” Tony said, and Steve made a play for his donut. Tony held it out of reach. “Hey! You finished yours, back off.”

“Thanks, Happy,” Steve said, catching Tony's wrist and taking a big bite of his donut.”

“Card,” Tony said, and ate his donut before Steve could get to it.

*

"Okay, so the access tunnels were a bad idea," Darcy said.

"Oh, you THINK?" Clint drawled, his head tipping in her direction.

"Don't give me that, you spend half your life thumping around in the air vents," Darcy said, rolling her eyes. "The access tunnels were better than that."

"Well, they were bigger, I wouldn't say 'better,' but they were definitely bigger." He braced an arm against the wall of the elevator, propping himself up. You shifted out of the way, scooting towards the wall. Clint patted his support strut. "Sorry, buddy."

"Yeah, that was, it was a lot," Darcy agreed. She looked down at DJ, who was hopping back and forth in front of Clint, his eyes glued on his feet. Each hop released a cloud of dust from his hair and clothes. It wasn't really getting him cleaner, but it couldn't hurt. "You okay, sparks?"

"Walking lots," DJ said. He stopped, half crouched and ready for another jump, and looked up at her. He blinked, slowly and deliberately. "Lots of walking."

"Lots of walking is right," Darcy said, trying to hold back a smile. "You coulda warned us."

DJ thought about that, his face scrunching up. "No," he said at last, and went back to hopping in a tight circle.

"He's a brat," Clint said, reaching out to ruffle DJ's hair as he bounced past. DJ leaned into the contact, a wide smile creasing his cheeks. "Aren't you?"

"Yes," DJ said, clearly pleased by that.

"Good, be proud of that," Darcy told him. "Own it." She leaned back against the elevator wall. "Is it lunchtime yet?" She pulled her phone out to check the time. “Okay, way past lunchtime, actually.”

"Look, we're bad at childcare, any time we've got food is lunchtime," Clint said. He tossed a hand in the air. "Jay, hit the brakes. Let's see where we end up."
"Elevator roulette is the best game," Darcy said as the elevator came to a smooth stop. There was a faint, pleasant ding, and the doors opened. She poked her head out. "Where are we, Jarvis?"

Clint stepped past her, DJ's hand held securely in his. "Not the access tunnels. Other than that, I do not care."

"This floor is guest suites," Jarvis said.

"Guest suites?" she echoed.

"Yeah, it's where Tony shoves the VIPs who show up," Clint said.

"Hey, I show up all the time," Darcy pointed out, "and I never get to stay in a guest suite."

"That's because you're not a guest, you're just someone who refuses to leave," Clint said as they walked up the hallway, You wobbling along behind them. Darcy nudged one of his boxes back into place before it could topple off. "And you're Thor's problem."

"Keep it up," Darcy said as DJ darted ahead of them, dragging Clint with him. "And I'll make myself your problem next time I'm over."

"Sure, you want to share an apartment with Phil for the night, you stop on by, I'm sure that'll work out," Clint said, as Darcy made a face, and DJ dragged him to a stop in front of the biggest, most impressive set of doors on the hallway. Clint paused, looking down at DJ. "What's this?"

"Best," DJ said, with a lot of enthusiasm.

"Best?" Clint asked, grinning at him. "Best, what?"

"That is what would be termed the Presidential Suite," Jarvis explained. "It is objectively the best, it is certainly the largest and best appointed. It is reserved for certain heads of industry and governments."

"Anyone Tony wants to impress, intimidate, or butter up," Clint said.

"In as many words, yes," Jarvis said.

"Question," Darcy said, staring at the very sleek doors. "Is there food in there?"

"Yes," Jarvis said. "The suite is kept in a state of readiness in case there is an unexpected guest. There are a number of frozen and shelf stable gourmet food options, as well as all basic necessities."

"Okay, but we're talking about rich people here, right?" Darcy asked. "What counts as a 'basic necessity'?"

"A selection of clothing, including bathrobes, slippers, and swimsuits -" Darcy interrupted.

"Is there a pool in there?" Darcy interrupted.

"No. However, there is a large jacuzzi and a self contained steam or dry heat sauna in the bathroom," Jarvis said. "A fully-equipped audio visual home theater system, a selection of wines and non-alcoholic drinks, snacks, and a well appointed bedroom."

Darcy nodded. "So. Who wants lunch? And a nap?"

"What, here?" Clint asked.
DJ held up his passcard. “Best,” he said. Darcy took that as agreement. They both looked at Clint.

“What do you think you're doing?” Clint asked her. “What's the plan?”

"The plan is, we hit up a fancy guest suite, rummage around for food, hit the sauna for five minutes, crank up the sound system, watch bad Saturday cartoons on a tv bigger than my apartment. jump on the bed, then crash on the couch for a nap,” Darcy said.

He paused, his eyes narrowing. "Yeah, now that I say that aloud, that sounds like a really awesome plan. Let's go."

Laughing, she fell into step behind him. "Jarvis, are we going to get in trouble for this?"

"Do you care? Really?" Clint asked her. "Because I do not care. Not at all."

"I will simply mark the suite as having been used this weekend, the cleaning crew will refresh everything," Jarvis said. He sounded amused.

“You heard the man,” Clint told DJ. “Crack the lock, Bilbo.”

Grinning, DJ swiped his passcard against the lock, and Clint pulled the door open.

The lights came on automatically, and Darcy didn't know if it was a motion sensor or just Jarvis being dramatic, and she didn't really care. The suite stretched out in front of them, and she stopped breathing.

The floor of the entryway was polished marble, stretching out towards an expansive sunken living room. Two of the walls were massive sheets of glass, looking out over a stunning view of the city, and another was dominated by a huge flat screen television. Huge, sleek leather sectional sofas were clustered around a set of low glass tables. A few doors lead off to what Darcy assumed was the bedroom, and just to the left of the entryway, she could see a small, fully appointed kitchen.

"Oh. My. God," Darcy said, gripping the doorframe like a lifeline. "I am never leaving this room. I live here now. This is now mine."

“I think people would notice,” Clint said, as DJ went sliding across the gleaming marble floor, his sock-covered feet scrambling for purchase. It took him a second to get his balance back, and then he was off, sock skating towards the kitchen.

“Doubt it,” Darcy said, leaning over to untie her boots. “Tony doesn't befriend heads of governments and corporations, he deliberately annoys them until they go away. Usually swearing.”

Clint paused. “You're not wrong,” he said at last. “Deej! Don't touch the stove!” He headed off after DJ. “Or the blender! Or any of the appliances!”

“Just don't touch anything, Deej,” Darcy said, heading for the nearest couch. There was a huge bowl of artfully arranged snacks on the table, bags of artisan chips and crackers, small, individually wrapped packets of gourmet chocolates. She grabbed a bag of chocolate covered nuts and threw herself down on the couch.

“Feet off the furniture, please,” Jarvis said, and Darcy kicked her shoes off, laughing.

“Jarvis is judging me,” she yelled, ripping the chocolate open. “But I have chocolate and this couch is like, the best thing ever, so I don't care.”
“Jay judges us all,” Clint called back.

“I am not judging anyone,” Jarvis said.

“Meeeeeew!” DJ said, popping up next to the couch. He eyed the chocolate in Darcy's hand, and she broke off a piece for him. He took it with a wide smile.

“Do you mean you want chocolate, or that Jarvis judges you?” she asked.

He considered that as he chewed the chocolate. “Both,” he said at last.

“Pardon me, I do not judge you,” Jarvis said.

DJ looked up. “Judgey,” he said, and Darcy clamped a hand over her mouth to keep from giggling out loud.

“Rude,” she said from between her fingers.

“He's good at that.” Clint said, making her look up. He had a stack of aluminum trays in his hand, and he was trying to get his boots off without leaning over. It wasn't going well. “Looks like we got some reheat and serve meals here from some of the best restaurants in the city, you feeling Italian or Mexican?”

“Ooooooh, what've we got for Mexican?” Darcy asked, finishing the chocolate and holding her hands out to DJ. He scrambled up onto the couch to curl up next to her.

Clint juggled the containers. “Looks like enchiladas,” he said. Darcy made a happy noise, and he grinned. “Deej, want some enchiladas?”

DJ nodded. “Please.”

“Okay, let's throw these in the oven, then,” Clint said. “Don't destroy anything, Goldilocks.”

“He's right.” Darcy sat up. “We have to test all the chairs and found out which one is just right.”

“That... Wasn't what I meant at all,” Clint said. Shaking his head, he retreated back to the kitchen. Darcy was pretty sure he was swearing under his breath, but whatever language he was speaking, it wasn't one she knew. She was pretty familiar with his 'swearing tone' though, through long, painful experience.

“Don't pay any attention to him,” Darcy said. “Look at him, he's only got one shoe.” DJ held up his legs, wiggling his bare toes. “No, it's better to have no shoes than only one shoe. No shoes is just logical. Look.” She held her feet out next to his, and for a second, they sparred, ankles bumping and toes poking.


And DJ went.

Laughing, Darcy took off after him.

* 

“Okay, I have sand everywhere.”

“Whose fault is that?” Steve asked, amused. Balancing the pizza boxes in one hand, he stopped long
enough to kick off his shoes, sending sand in all directions on the polished floor.

“Pretty sure it's yours,” Tony said, holding up the suitcase armor. He gave it a critical look, his eyes narrowed. “This thing has been through like six major battles, and this is what ends up doing a number on the paint job. You. And your sand.”

“Me?” Steve ducked around him, easily keeping the pizza out of reach when Tony made a half-hearted grab for the boxes. “You tackled me, Tony.”

“Why are you bringing this up?” Tony asked. He set the armor down behind the suite's bar, and yanked open the door to the sleek drinks cooler just under the marble and zinc top. “Again?”

“That's how we both ended up with sand everywhere. You. Tackled me.”

“You weren't actually supposed to fall over,” Tony pointed out without straightening up. He held a beer up over his head, and Steve took it. A moment later, Tony emerged with one of his own, popping the cap with a practiced movement. “You never fall over. You're usually more-” He stopped, waving a hand in Steve's general direction. Steve paused, eyebrows arcing, as he waited to see how this would end. Tony huffed out a breath. “You're usually more stable than that.”

“I'm usually not standing on sand,” Steve pointed out. “Or eating a hot dog.”

“And here I thought you were prepared for an attack at any time,” Tony said. He took a long swallow of his beer, and Steve hid his grin behind his own bottle. “How is it that I was able to knock you on your ass so easily?”

“I'll admit it. I wasn't expecting you to be a double agent. You're lucky I didn't toss you into the ocean, Tony.” Tony wandered out from behind the bar, making a play for the pizza, and Steve moved the boxes out of reach. Tony tried to sidestep around him, and Steve wrapped his arm around Tony's waist. “Shower first,” he said, pressing a quick kiss against Tony's mouth. He tasted like salt and beer and Steve deepened the kiss, because he could, because there was no rush to anything tonight. When he pulled back, Tony was breathing hard, and Steve felt a mostly irrational spike of pride. He leaned his forehead against Tony's. “Then pizza.”

“It'll get cold,” Tony pointed out, his hand slipping around Steve's back.

“We'll put it in the oven, it's not the end of the world, and you smell like the docks. We're lucky Happy let us in the car to give us a ride back.” Steve took a step back, blocking the pizza and taking a drink from his beer. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tony pause, and then lift his arm for a discreet sniff.

“I think I can pull it off,” Tony said. He took a seat at the bar, setting his bottle down and reaching for the pizza.

“You really can't,” Steve said. Tony turned sad, hurt eyes in his direction, and Steve bit back a smile. “Come on, Stark, bathtime.”

“Right, know what, you can do that, I'm going to sit here and eat a slice of New York's finest while it's still hot,” Tony said, tossing the pizza box open with a theatrical gesture. “And there's nothing you can do to convince me otherwise.”

Steve crossed his arms over his chest. “Oh, is that right?” he asked.

Tony pulled a piece of pizza out of the box. “That is absolutely right,” he said, with a smug smile.
Steve waited until he'd taken a massive bite, and then stripped his shirt over his head. “Well, okay,” he said, tossing the shirt over one shoulder. He looked over at Tony, who seemed to have stopped chewing mid-bite. Steve smiled at him. “If there's nothing I can do to convince you, then-” His hands went to the waistband of his jeans. Tony's eyes followed the movement, and Steve unbuttoned them with a flick of his thumb.

He grinned. “Guess that's that, then.” He turned and started towards the bathroom, shucking his pants and shorts together in one smooth movement, pushing them down and stepping out of them. Naked, he continued on towards the bathroom.

There was a single beat of silence, and then the scramble of feet as Tony came up behind him. “Know what?” he asked, stripping his shirt over his head and tossing it down in his wake. “A bath sounds good.”

“How you can call yourself a New Yorker and not respect pizza. It's, that's a basic building block of our psyche, Steve. The certainty that New York is fundamentally better than anywhere else, pride in our sports teams, being a dick to everyone else in the world about bagels, and respecting pizza.” He ticked the points off on his fingers. “That's it. That's all you need to be a proper New Yorker, and yet you're failing all over the place here, it's shameful.”

“You do understand that pizza wasn't widely available when I was growing up in New York?” Steve asked Tony.

“There were Italians in New York in the twenties and thirties,” Tony said. “They existed. Pretty sure of it.”

“Yeah, and this might surprise you, but they didn't really get along with the Irish,” Steve said.

“Unlike the reasonable and even tempered Italians, the Irish are an ornery and stubborn people,” Tony said, and Steve set a hand in the middle of his back, giving him a playful shove in the direction of the bathroom. Tony skipped out of reach, and grinned back over his shoulder at Steve. “Not helping your case, Rogers.”

“Uh-huh,” Steve said, enjoying the visual of Tony's back, his shoulders and his legs, and the fine curve of his ass. Tony cleared his throat, and Steve looked up.

Tony smirked at Steve over his shoulder. “Like the view?”

“You know I do.” Laughing, Steve turned on the lights in the bathroom. The sheer size of the room always stopped him in his tracks for a second, his brain convinced that he’d walked through the wrong door. The gleaming expanse of tile floor stretched out in front of him, lit by recessed fixtures along the wall. There was a glass enclosed shower stall with an obscene number of shower heads, a small steam bath sauna room, and, at the far end of the bathroom, a bathtub like a small swimming pool or a large jacuzzi.

“How hot do you want it?” Tony asked, turning on the water.

“I like it hot,” Steve said, heading for the double sink and the small toiletry bag he'd left there. “Head's up.”
Tony looked up just as Steve gave the baseball sized bath bomb a toss in his direction. He caught it, turning the chalky ball over in one hand. “What's this?”

“Bath bomb,” Steve said, with a grin. “It smells good.”

Tony gave it a cautious sniff, and then tossed it into the rapidly filling tub with a flick of his wrist. “Since when do you do bath products?” he asked, smiling. He turned the water off and stepped back, gesturing towards the bath. “After you, Cap.”

“Seemed like something nice. You know, for a special occasion,” Steve said, stepping into the tub. The water was hot enough to sting, and he let out a sigh of pleasure as he lowered himself down. When he was settled, he held out his hands, pulling Tony in to sit with his back against Steve's chest.

Tony's breath hissed out from between his teeth, even as his head fell back against Steve's shoulder. “Okay,” he said, his face flushing and his eyes closed, “this was a pretty good idea.”

“I have those, sometimes,” Steve said. He tipped his head, pressing a kiss to the angle of Tony's jaw, to his temple. Tony reached back, laughing, to tangle a hand in Steve's hair.

“Know what would make this better?” he asked, his voice husky and warm, and Steve's breathing caught in his throat. Tony turned in his arms, his eyes bright, his lips curled in a wicked grin. “If we had pizza.”

Steve studied him for a second, then placed a deliberate hand on his head and dunked him under the water. Tony came up laughing, his hair dripping and his cheeks pink. “Taking that as an agreement with my wonderful idea,” Tony said, laughter running through the words. He leaned forward and kissed Steve's mouth before he pushed himself up and out of the water. It sloshed over the rim, splashing across the bathroom floor. Tony didn't seem to notice. “Wait here. Stay hot for me.”

“This is a horrible idea,” Steve said, but he leaned back against the edge of the tub, his arms stretched out on the rim, his head thrown back. The water had a faintly fizzy feel to it now, and he stretched, releasing a wave of tiny bubbles. Pleased, he churned the water with one foot, trying to get the bath bomb going. “You know that, right?”

“I know nothing of the sort,” Tony said, walking naked towards the bathroom door. “It's my idea, therefore, by virtue of BEING my idea, it is, by definition, an excellent idea.”

“Do you get paid by the word, Stark? Because, really-” Steve said, and Tony threw a washcloth at his head. Steve caught it with a grin. “Thanks.”

“Stay right there, I'll be back, and then you'll thank me. You will thank me when there's pizza in your mouth.” And with that, Tony was gone. Steve smiled after him, amused despite himself.

The water was pale now, an almost milky white beneath the heavy steam. Steve raised one leg, watching his toes emerge from the water, the skin bright pink from the heat. He let his head fall back against the rim of the tub again and closed his eyes. The air had a faintly herbal smell now, something like lemongrass or eucalyptus, rising with the steam.

Steve inhaled, slow and easy, and slid under the surface of the water, letting the warmth sweep over him. For a long, quiet moment, he just lay there, submerged in the water, his hands sweeping through it in idle, easy patterns. When he surfaced, his face felt flushed, and his hair dripped in his eyes, but he felt more relaxed than he had in a long time.

Letting out a long, grateful sigh, he settled down, letting his hair float in the water, with only his face above the surface. Every time he moved, the water swept around him, the eddies visible in the pale
water. He stretched out one leg, seeing if he could kick up the bath bomb, but there was either gone, or too small now for him to find it without putting out more effort than he wanted to.

Steve closed his eyes and let the heat sink into his skin. In the distance, he heard the rattle of plates, or maybe glass bottles, and he grinned. Tony, it would seem, was going to make a meal of this, no matter how bad of an idea that was.

“All right, pizza and beer in the bathtub, and actually, now that I think about it, you're right, this is a terrible idea, but we're going to do it anyway, because that's just how I roll,” Tony said, stepping through the bathroom door with a tray piled with plates and bottles propped on his hip and a pizza box in his other hand. “I figure if we end up dumping something in the water, we can always call out for something else, I'm lazy and I've got about six Chinese places in this city on speed dial, so that's covered, but—”

He looked up, and stopped talking.

Steve smiled at him. Tony didn't smile back. Steve sat up, trying his best not to send the rest of the bathwater splashing over the edge of the tub. “Tony?”

Tony just stared at him, his mouth hanging open, his eyes wide.

His hair was dripping in his face, and Steve reached up, pushing it away from his forehead. “Tony, are you all right?”

Tony nodded, a slow, deliberate bob of his chin. “That bath bomb,” he said, his voice quiet. He turned, and set the tray down on the counter next to the sink. “Who gave it to you?”

Steve blinked. “How did you know someone—” He went to push his hair back again, and this time, he caught sight of his arm. His mouth dropped open. “Oh,” he managed.

“Right. Oh.” Tony crossed his arms over his chest. “So, who—”

They said it together. “Clint.”

*

The buzzing of his phone was incessant.

Clint fumbled out with one hand, slapping at the offending device. “C'mon,” he mumbled, his eyes still squeezed shut. “Stop now.”

“It is not your alarm, Clint,” Jarvis' voice said. “It is an incoming call. From Sir. I do not believe that he will be put off, so it's best if you simply give into the inevitable and answer it.”

“Just mute my phone,” Clint said, rolling over to bury his face in the softest, fluffiest pillow he'd ever touched in his life. There was no response. “Jarvis, can you—”

“Answer your phone, Agent Barton,” Jarvis said in a non-nonsense voice, and Clint answered his phone.

“Look, this better be good, I was napping, and—”

“I am going to kill you, Barton.”

Clint tipped the phone away from his head, squinting down at the screen. Tony's face stared up at him, his eyes narrowed into angry slits, his mouth a thin line. “Hi,” Clint said, his brain trying to
catch up to his mouth. “You want to talk to DJ?”

On the other side of the bed, DJ's head emerged from a pile of covers. He peered at Clint, sleepy and curious. At the foot of the bed, Darcy was sprawled out on her stomach, a pillow over her head.

“I WILL KILL YOU.”

Clint's head snapped back, his eyebrows shooting up. He covered the screen with one hand. “I think this one's for me, botboy, I'll... Maybe go back to sleep now.”

“So loud,” Darcy whined from under her pillow. She rolled over, putting her back to him. Clint tossed a pillow at her and rolled to his feet.

“Naptime's over,” he told her, but he wandered out of the bedroom, keeping his hand over the screen until he had collapsed onto the couch in the main room. Then he plastered a smile on his face and held up the phone. “Tony! How's it going? How's your weekend going, are you-”

Tony leaned in, his eyes narrowed into thin, dark slits. “I will kill you,” he said, each word bitten off with vicious intent.

“Yeah, I got the death threats, can you-” Clint shoved a hand through his hair. “Can you please tell me what's happening here, why am I going to die? I think I deserve to know, why am I-”

Steve leaned into the shot, right behind Tony's shoulder, and Clint nearly swallowed his tongue. Steve raised a hand in a little wave. “Hi, Clint,” he said, one side of his mouth kicking up in a lopsided smile. “Guess what I did today?”

Clint sank his teeth into the inside of his cheek, desperately trying not to burst out laughing. Steve was covered in purple glitter. He was naked to the waist, a pair of boxer shorts clinging to the angles of his hip bones, and every inch of visible skin was gilded with a faint metallic sheen. When he moved, leaning over behind Tony, the light played off his shoulders and his chest, and he sparkled. And his hair was very, very purple and very, very glittery.

“Did you take a bath?” Clint asked, an unholy amount of glee seeping into his voice.

“I took a bath,” Steve agreed. “And I used your bath bomb.”

“Right, right, oh my God, I'd forgotten I gave you that,” Clint said. Tony stared at him, his eyes shooting daggers. Clint ignored him. “Looks good on you, Cap.”

Steve reached up, running a hand through his hair. “I would've gone with blue, myself,” he said, and he was smiling full on now, amusement lighting his features. “But this is pretty good, too.”

“It's really not,” Tony said.

“You do know it washes off, right?” Clint said. He got up and headed for the kitchen. There was a single shot coffee maker on the counter, with a spinning rack of matching coffee grounds next to it. Clint set his phone down and loaded the machine. “I didn't tattoo Captain America while he was sleeping, it washes off.”

“What washes off?” Darcy called from the other room, her voice sleepy, but curious.

“Do not tell her-” Tony started, and Clint ignored him.

“I gave Steve a purple glitter bath bomb,” he said. The machine hissed, and he waited impatiently for
“Goddammit, Barton,” Tony said.

“And he used it?” Darcy called.

“Well, in his defense, all the glitter was in the core, so from the outside, it just looked like a plain, you know, 'good for your skin' bath bomb,” Clint said. He leaned against the counter. “By the time the glitter gets released, the water's pretty foggy, hard to tell what's happening.” He blinked innocently at the phone. “Guess I forgot to tell you about that part, huh?”

“You did, in fact 'forget' to tell me that,” Steve said. But he looked amused, so Clint was pretty sure that Tony wasn't going to be allowed to kill him this week.

The machine beeped, and Clint collected his coffee cup. “Oops,” he said, trying to look ashamed.

“How glittery is he?” Darcy asked.

“He's pretty glittery,” Clint said. “There's a certain—” He waved his coffee cup. “Glow to him. His hair looks great, though.”

“Thanks, I guess,” Steve said, still grinning.

“Tell him to check his pubes,” Darcy yelled, and Clint choked on his coffee.

“What?” he mangled, scrubbing at his chin with his free hand. She leaned out of the bedroom one hand hanging onto the doorframe, and he shook his head. “Actually, don't, don't—”

“His pubic hair,” she said, strangely calm for a woman who was discussing Steve Rogers' pubic hair. “Trust me. I've done a lot more bath bombs than you, Barton.” She disappeared back into the bedroom. “THAT part of him was underwater a lot longer than his head.”

“Oh, GOD,” Tony said, and in the background of the shot, Steve pulled the waistband of his shorts out. For a moment, he just stared down, his face blank. And then he started to laugh.

Tony stared at Clint, his face set. Clint shrugged. “He thinks it's funny?” he said at last, because Steve was laughing so hard that he had to lean against the wall to keep himself upright.

“Of course HE thinks it's funny,” Tony said, full of venom.

“It's funny, Tony,” Clint said.

“Look at him,” Tony said. He pointed over his shoulder at Steve. “Look. You know what that is, Barton? That is 'small town quarterback attends his first rave,' that is what that is, I'm dating a SCENE KID, he looks like he's NINETEEN, I'm too old for this, I'm—” He seemed to run out of words, his jaw clenching. “I have to break up with him, and it's your fault.”

“Okay,” Clint said, because Tony seemed to be waiting for him to say something.

“Okay? Really, that's what you're going to say, it's your fault that we're breaking up, and your only response is 'okay?'” Tony asked.

Clint shrugged. “Your loss?” Tony glared at him, and Clint struggled not to roll his eyes. “Look, if he hadn't been in the bath alone, you would be covered in glitter, too, Stark, just even out the scene kid trappings and you'll be fine.”
“My ass has had glitter on it before,” Tony said. “I'm old. I did that, I've done that, and I don't date that anymore.”

“Apparently you do,” Clint said, as DJ came wandering out of the bedroom, his eyes scrunched shut and his mouth pursed. Clint spent half a second considering if his conscience would allow him to use the small, sleepy child as a human shield, and then Tony started making a sound that boded ill for Clint's continued well being.

Clint figured he could kill his conscience with booze.

“Hey, Deej, want to see something awesome?” he asked, holding out a hand.

“Don't you dare,” Tony said through his teeth. Clint put a finger to his lips, shushing him.

DJ blinked at him, waking up by stages. “Yes,” he said at last, grabbing Clint's hand and Clint sat them both down on the couch with DJ on his knee, and held out his phone.

'Kill you,' Tony mouthed at Clint, who made kissy noises at him.

“Hey, buddy,” Steve said, folding his arms on top of Tony's head. DJ stared at him, his eyes huge. He pointed at Steve's glittery purple hair. Steve grinned, his eyes tipping up. “What do you think?”

“Purple,” DJ said, emphatic.

“Very purple,” Steve agreed. He shook his head from side to side, sending a fine rain of purple glitter in all directions.

DJ reached up and tugged at one of his own locks. “Me, too.”

“No,” Tony said.

“Sure,” Steve said, grinning.

“Are you undermining me right now?” Tony asked, from under Steve's arms.

Steve made a face. “See, that's the thing,” he said, his eyes dancing. “We broke up. Or rather, you broke up with me. So I don't have to be a good parental influence anymore.” He pushed himself up. “I get to be the fun ex. I'm all about the candy, caffeine and glitter filled bath bombs now.” He patted Tony lightly on one cheek. “Looks like the kidlet and I are going to have fun.”

Tony stared into the phone. “Right,” he said. He took a deep breath. “You having a good day, Deej?”

DJ looked at Clint, pointing at the screen of his phone. “Hair,” he said.

“Want to put a bath bomb in Dad's jacuzzi?” Clint asked, with a grin. “We can have purple hair, too!”

“I will end you, Clint,” Tony said, but there was no more heat in the threat, just the sort of resigned acknowledgment that Clint could pretty much silly string his entire building and probably would.

“Right,” Clint said. DJ wriggled off of his knee, hopping his way across the room. “He'll talk to you tonight.”

Tony stared at him for a long, painful moment, and then hung up on him. Clint figured he'd gotten off easy. He stood up. “All right, guys, where are we going now?”
Darcy emerged from the bedroom, yawning. “Not the maintenance tunnels.”

“That could've gone unsaid.”

*

“I think I'm going to be able to get this off without resorting to a belt sander.” Steve squinted at himself in the bathroom mirror. Water was dripping off of his face, and he still looked a little glittery, but so did the sink. He straightened up, rubbing at his face with a towel. “But you're probably going to be hit with a hell of a cleaning bill, Tony.”

There was no response, and Steve heaved a faint sigh. “Tony, I'm pretty sure this is you over reacting.”

“I'm going to hell,” Tony said, and Steve bit the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing out loud.

“You're not going to hell,” Steve said, wrapping the inside of his neck and heading back towards the bedroom. He stopped in the door, leaning his shoulder against the door jamb. Tony was sprawled on his back on the bed, staring blankly up at the ceiling. Steve's head tipped forward, trying not to smile. “You're being ridiculous, Tony.”

“Probably,” Tony said. He sounded morose, and Steve covered his mouth with a hand. Tony frowned at the ceiling. “You're laughing at me.”

“Nope,” Steve said from between his fingers, and Tony made a face. “All right, I'm laughing at you a little.” Pushing himself upright, Steve went back to rubbing at his hair with the towel. “Glitter's going to come off, Tony. It's not the most obnoxious thing that Clint has done.” He grinned. “It's not even the most obnoxious thing that he's done this month.”

“I am going to replace all of his arrows with pretzel rods,” Tony said. “See how he likes it.”

“He'd make it work. Somehow.” Steve ignored the flaky shower of glitter that was falling around him as he walked across the room. “I'm going to throw a slice of pizza in the oven, want one?” Tony made an inarticulate sound, and Steve stopped next to the bed, trying to keep the smile off of his face. “You going to spend the rest of the weekend trying not to look at me?” he asked.

Tony grabbed a pillow and dragged it over his face. “Yes,” he said from underneath.

Steve sat down on the edge of the bed. “I'm older than you, you know.”

“Oh, God,” Tony said, his hands pressing the pillow down. “Have I ever fallen for that line of reasoning? Ever?”

“Well, it's true, so I figured it was worth a try. Are you trying to suffocate yourself?” Steve asked. “Because I'm pretty sure that'll be hard to do.”

“I'm stubborn,” Tony said, and Steve caught one corner of the pillow, lifting it up despite Tony's struggles. Tony glared at him from under the white linen. “You're like nineteen.”

Steve arched his eyebrows. “And still more mature than you,” he said, with a smile. “How does that work?”

“I'm fucking immature,” Tony said, and Steve laughed. Tony pointed a finger at him. “This is why we broke up.” He yanked the pillow away from Steve, slapping it back over his face.
“Right,” Steve said, tossing the towel aside. He reached out and rubbed an easy hand over Tony's bare stomach. The muscles there tensed against his fingers, and Steve leaned over to press a kiss to Tony's navel, then moved up until he could press gentle lips against the arc reactor. “It's a shame,” he whispered. “Guess we'll have to go home early.”

“Right,” Tony agreed.

“And remove all my things from your place,” Steve said, grinning as he rested a hand on the hollow of Tony's stomach. He was breathing faster now, his chest flexing with the force of it.

“Okay, well, that's-”

Steve rubbed a thumb along the line of one of Tony's ribs. “Tell the team.”

Tony's back arched off of the bed, his breath hitching. “They can figure it out,” he managed.

“And sit DJ down and explain it to him,” Steve said, and Tony went still. Steve leaned over and placed a smacking kiss against Tony's shoulder, then snatched the pillow away. “Right?”

“Right,” Tony said from between clenched teeth.

Steve stood up, hitching his shorts up when they threatened to slide off of his hips. Tony's eyes darted in his direction, and Steve grinned. “So that's option one,” he said. “You can lie here, and have some sort of bizarre crisis-”

“I'm liking that option, that's, that's a very workable option for me,” Tony said, staring at the ceiling.

“Or,” Steve said, his voice rising over Tony's, “you can take advantage of your newly single status and go downstairs and see if you can't find a small town college quarterback who's looking for a sugar daddy to cover his bar bill and maybe coax him into a nice hotel room for the rest of the weekend.”

“Look, I'm perfectly comfortable right here, and-” Steve could almost see the moment when the words registered and Tony's brain abruptly changed direction. “Right. I could do that, too.” He sat up. “What're the chances of that happening?” he asked.

“I'd say your chances are pretty good,” Steve mused. He grabbed his jeans from the end of the bed and stepped into them, zipping them up but leaving them unbuttoned. He wasn't sure why, but it seemed to get Tony's attention. “I mean, provided you show up looking like you can afford to pay a fella's bar bill.”

“I clean up nice,” Tony said. “And I own a very nice suit.”

“You should put that on, and head back out to the bar,” Steve said. His face felt hot, but he grinned at Tony, knowing a victory when he saw one. “See if you can't get lucky.”

Tony got up. “Wait, how big is this bar bill? Am I being taken advantage of, here?”

“Large enough that the kid's probably going to fell very, very grateful for you helping him out,” Steve said, snagging a t-shirt from the top of the dresser as he headed out of the room.

“Can we do this at the real bar?” Tony called after him. “The one downstairs? With other people?”

Steve leaned back into the bedroom. “Don't push your luck, Stark. Just get your pants on and come seduce me before my glitter comes off.”
“That sounds like a euphemism for something,” Tony said.

“It could be, if you'd just get your ass in gear!” Steve called, and ran his hands through his hair as he headed downstairs to heat up some pizza. He was pretty sure he was going to need his strength.
Clint knew the moment his foot hit the gleaming black marble floor that the elevator had stopped in the wrong place. “Deej, hey,” he said, and DJ looked up at him. “Let's go, buddy, it's getting late. No more exploring.” Especially not in a place that looked this expensive. “Time for dinner.”

DJ nodded, and held up his passkey. “Promised. My dinner.” And then he was skipping merrily across the lobby.

Darcy peered around Clint's back. “Wait, is this—”

“The ultra expensive, ultra fancy, ultra exclusive three star Michelin restaurant on the highest public floor of the tower?” Clint filled in, already charging after DJ. “Pretty sure it is.”

He was absolutely sure it was. Phil had brought it up, once, and Clint had looked into it. But if the wait to get a reservation hadn't scared him off, the prices sure as hell would've. He'd never set foot in the place personally, but he'd seen the pictures on their very sleek, very minimalist website.

The elevator opened up directly into the entryway, and at the end of the hall, where black floors and gleaming walls of patterned glass gave way to one giant, very ornate wooden door. A young man in a black evening coat was guarding the entrance, white gloved hands folded in front of him, and Clint heaved a sigh of relief.

At least DJ would be turned back before getting into the restaurant proper. Except DJ reached the door and the man simply opened it for him, inclining his head in a polite nod as DJ went bouncing on through.

“Oh, for fuck's sake,” Clint muttered, and took off after him. Beyond the door, there was a well designed entryway, dominated by a large, imposing maitre d' stand. Beyond that, the entry way to the dining room loomed, with a smaller door to the left leading to a lounge where those without a reservation, or those waiting for their table, could take advantage of one of the best views in the city. Which meant, thankfully, that the entryway was empty, except for one small boy heading straight for the maitre d'.

Clint made a futile grab for his shirt, but DJ was on a mission, and not interested in stopping, or even slowing down. The maitre d', a tall, imposing older man with dark brown skin and stark white hair, was speaking quietly on the phone as DJ skidded to a stop in front of him.

DJ stretched up a hand, dropping his passkey onto the maitre d' stand. “Order, please,” he said.

There was a moment of stillness as the man looked down at him, down the full length of his impressive nose. Mentally cursing, Clint picked up the pace, trying not to run, trying not to make more of a show of himself then he already had, just by walking into the door in filthy cargo pants and a battered t-shirt from an amusement park somewhere in Ohio.

“Sorry,” he managed, reaching for DJ. “He just—” That was as far as he got before the maitre d’'s face melted into a warm smile. As Clint watched, stymied, the man hung up the phone, then crouched down, with no regard for the smooth, carefully tended fabric of his suit.

“Good evening,” he said, and there was a hint of an accent to the words, a delicate French lilt to the vowels. “I wasn't expecting you, this evening. I'm afraid we do not have an order waiting for you.”
He stroked his chin, his eyes narrowing. “I apologize, I will call Mr. Stark immediately and find out what he wants.”

“Sorry,” Clint said again, drawing the man's eye. “Tony's on vacation, so...”

DJ nodded. “Order.” He pointed up at Clint, and at Darcy, who was hovering awkwardly right behind him. “For us.” He grinned. “Please.”

The maitre d' smiled at him, his eyes crinkling at the corners. “Ah, are you dining with us this evening? What a wonderful surprise!” He leaned in. “Do you remember the rules?”

DJ nodded. “Jacket,” he said.

“Yes.” The maitre d' straightened up, his hands flicking the fabric of his suit back into place. “Gentlemen must wear jackets. Would you like your jacket?” DJ nodded, and the man looked at Clint with an easy smile. “I'm afraid that applies to you, as well, sir.”

“Right,” Clint said. He looked down at himself. “I don't have a jacket.”

“Yes, Agent Barton, I did notice.” The man was still smiling, just a little. “We are accustomed to guests who have had issues with their luggage, and we are prepared to assist with the problem. Would you like to borrow a jacket for the evening?”

Clint stared at him. “That... Would be fine,” he said at last.

Darcy raised a hand. “Can I have one, too?” she asked.

The maitre d' didn't even blink. “Of course, madam.” He picked up the phone. “I'll have a selection brought out for you.”

DJ tugged on Clint's shirt. He held up his hands. “Wash, please,” he said, his voice quiet, and Clint nodded.

“Good idea. You have good ideas.” He looked at the maitre d', who gestured towards a side corridor nearly hidden behind a massive metal and glass sculpture.

“I'll have the jackets brought to you at the washrooms, if you'd all like to take a moment to tidy up,” he said. It was remarkably non-judgmental, all things considered. “The ladies room has a powder room attached, perhaps it would be easier for him to wash there?”

“Want to come with me? You can see all the secret awesome things that girls keep in their fancy bathrooms!” Darcy said to DJ. DJ nodded, and reached for her hand. “Yay for exploring girl spaces, because you only have dads! Awesome, awesome dads, but still, dads!”

Clint watched them go, DJ hopping along, and Darcy changing her stride to match his, a little skip in her steps. As soon as they were out of sight, he turned back to the maitre d'. “Sorry about this,” he said, his voice quiet. “We can go, it's fine, I'm know you guys require a reservation about nine months out.”

“Mr. Stark has a reserved table,” the maitre d' said. He set a hand down on top of the heavy ledger in front of him. Clint could see the neat, precise writing that filled the pages, and wondered if they had a computer backup. “And we are accustomed to DJ's presence. He comes often, to pick up orders for Mr. Stark, and occasionally, for Captain Rogers.”

He turned his attention to the heavy velum pages, reaching for the pen waiting nearby. “Though we
do not offer delivery service, we would be pleased to send someone, should they request. However, DJ seems to enjoy being the delivery man.” One eyebrow arched. “It is possible that some of our staff have taken to slipping him small treats when he does.”

“Yeah, I know what that's like,” Clint said. “But-

“But he has never dined with us,” the maitre d’ said. “Mr. Stark and Captain Rogers brought DJ down at one point, and showed him the private table we keep reserved for StarkIndustries at all times. He will not be in the way, nor will he be the focus of any…” He tapped the tip of his capped pen against the page. “Undue speculation. We had expected his first meal with us would be with them, but we are pleased to have him.” He gave Clint a slight smile. “Provided he adheres to the dress code.”

“Right,” Clint said. “Jacket.”

“And a tie for you, Agent Barton,” the maitre d' said, a distinct twinkle in his eye. “The young man may avoid that particular stipulation, but you may not.”

“Right. Tie. Right.” Clint hooked a thumb over his shoulder. “I'll just... Go put that on.”

The maitre d' was smiling as he reached for the ringing phone. “Of course, Agent Barton.”

Clint hot footed it down towards the bathrooms. A woman was waiting there, with a garment bag in her hands. She smiled at him. “Hello, Agent Barton, I'm Holly, from the coat room. Mr. Bertrand asked that I bring you a jacket to wear for the evening.”

“Right,” Clint said, reaching for it. She took a step back.

“Perhaps,” she said, with a pleasant smile, “you'd like to wash your hands and face BEFORE you get dressed for dinner?”

Clint looked down at his dust covered arms. “Right. Filthy. One, one sec.” And he darted into the men's room.

By the time he came out, his skin and hair still damp, Darcy and DJ were waiting. Darcy was wearing a sleek black jacket over her flowing beige linen pants. It was nipped in at her waist and it made the most of her curves, an understated, elegant look She’d pulled her hair up to the crown of her head in some complex twist that Clint couldn't really understand, leaving curls trailing down to the nape of her neck. A silk scarf in a brilliant jewel-tone patter was looped around her neck, and she grinned at Clint. “What do you think?” she asked, gesturing at DJ.

Clint considered him. DJ's face and hands had been washed, his hair had been combed, and he was wearing a neat, albeit a little too big, blue jacket. DJ held his arms up. “Jacket!” he declared.

“It sure is.” Clint reached out, ruffling his hair. DJ grinned, his eyes squishing shut as he leaned into Clint's palm. “Looking good, botbrain.”

“And for you, Agent Barton,” Holly held out first a pale blue oxford dress shirt, then a dark blue tie with a subdued pattern to the weave, and finally a matching jacket.

Clint shrugged into the jacket, surprised when it settled around his shoulders perfectly. Holly smiled. “Mr. Bertrand,” she said, “has a very good eye for size.” She stepped back as Darcy adjusted Clint's lapels. “He will show you to your table, whenever you're ready.”

“Thank you.” Darcy touched the scarf. “I'll give this back right after dinner, I promise.”
“It's all right, glad I could help.” Holly crouched down. “Have a good dinner, DJ.”

“Thank you.” He held out a hand, and she tapped her palm against his before straightening up and heading down the far end of the corridor.

Back in the entryway, Mr. Bertrand gave them all a quick once over and an approving smile. “Thank you. This way, please.”

DJ held up his passkey. “Tip, please,” he said, with all seriousness.

“For Holly?” Mr. Bertrand took it with a smile. DJ nodded. “That is gracious of you, sir.” He tapped the card against something on his stand, then returned it. “Now, Jaime will be your server this evening, you remember him, do you not?” DJ considered that, then nodded. “Good. He remembers you as well, and you will be in excellent hands.” He raised a hand, and a young man in a black suit came out of the dining room. “Jaime will show you to your table. I hope you enjoy dining with us this evening.” He smiled at Clint and Darcy. “You are always welcome.”

"Good evening," the young man said. “If you will follow me.” He smiled down at DJ. “Do you remember where the special table is?” DJ nodded. “You have a good memory. Let's go.”

It was a short trip through the dimly lit, beautifully appointed dining room to a small, cozy room in the rear of the restaurant. Inside, there was a single table, already set with a gleaming array of stemware and topped with snowy white linens. Clint helped DJ with his chair, and Jaime pulled Darcy's out for her.

"DJ's account is set up for a pre fixe menu. First, there will be a bread service, a selection of soups, and a seasonal salad of endive, walnuts, cheeses, and roast beets. Then, the entree of your choosing, with appropriate drink pairings, and lastly, dessert," Jaime explained as Clint tried not to break anything on the table. DJ straightened up in his chair, and Jaime smiled at him. "That's the best part isn't it?"

DJ nodded. "Just dessert?"

"No," Clint said, because who knew what orders Steve had left? DJ subsided into his chair with a faint sigh as Jaime handed a heavy, leather bound menu first to Darcy, then to Clint. Clint opened it with a slight feeling of trepidation.

Jaime smiled down at DJ. "Would you like the full menu?" he asked, holding up menu identical to the one he'd given Clint and Darcy, and then a much smaller leather folder. "Or your special menu?"


"What've you got?" Darcy asked, peering around the edge of her menu.

"Menu," DJ said.

"May I explain it?" Jaime asked, and DJ nodded without looking up. Jaime smiled at Darcy. "Captain Rogers met with the chef to set up some options that DJ could choose from, if he ever came to dine with us. Captain Rogers was concerned that the full menu might be a bit overwhelming, since so much of it would be unfamiliar."

"Sounds like Cap. May I have a DJ menu?" Darcy asked with a winning smile.

"Do not order off the kiddie menu," Clint told her.
"Listen, I am young at heart and I think DJ has excellent taste, and this menu is terrifying," Darcy said. Her eyes flicked up towards Jaime. "No offense."

He seemed to be fighting a smile. "None taken, madam." He tucked his hands behind his back, leaning forward just a bit. "Might I suggest the Le Boeuf Bourguignon? It is beef stewed in red wine and stock, served with a seasonal selection of vegetables and roasted potatoes. Or we have a lovely roasted salmon, served with a lemon saffron sauce, and garnished with fresh herbs, or perhaps the duck?"

Darcy grinned at him, the full force of her charm evident. "The beef, please."

"A wonderful choice." He looked at Clint. "And for you, sir?"

Clint resisted the urge to close his eyes and stab a finger at the menu. "The..." He looked up. "The beef wellington with black truffle reduction?" He was pretty sure that he shouldn't have phrased it as a question, but he did it anyway.

"Excellent." Jaime looked at DJ. "Do you know what you would like, or do you need more time to think?"

DJ peered up at him over the top of his menu. He laid it down in front of him and put his finger down on one of the options. "This. Please."

Jaime leaned over, his head tipping to the side as he checked what DJ was pointing at. "That is chicken, roasted with garlic and herbs. It comes with potatoes, sliced thin and cooked in a creamy sauce, and roasted root vegetables, like carrots, parsnips, beets, and turnips." He looked at DJ, his eyebrows arched. "Is that all right?"

DJ nodded. "Shirley Temple?" he asked, the words hopeful.

"Of course, with two cherries, and an extra one on the side," Jaime said. He straightened up. "The meal includes appropriate wine pairings for each course. Would either of you care for a different drink this evening?"

Clint handed over his menu. "Can I get a Shirley Temple, too?" he asked DJ. "Or is that just for you?"

DJ grinned. "Just me."

"Rude." Darcy gave him a sad look. "Can I have one?"

"No," DJ said. Darcy gasped, pressing her hands to her chest, and DJ started to giggle. He clapped both hands over his mouth, his eyes dancing. Darcy held her pose for another minute, her eyes huge and sad, until he gave in. "Yes."

"Thank you, DJ," she said. To Jaime, she said. "Shirley Temples all around."

To his credit, he did not laugh at them. "Of course. Thank you, madam, sirs." He sketched a slight bow and slipped back out the door, shutting it soundlessly behind him.

There was a moment of silence. "You can make dinner any time," Darcy said at last, and DJ giggled, his nose scrunching up. "But next time, let me put on clean pants."

“No next time,” Clint said. He considered his water glass. It seemed... Fragile. He decided not to risk it. "There will not be a next time."
DJ grinned, but his eyelids were drooping. Clint reached over. “You okay?” he asked, pushing DJ's hair back.

DJ nodded. “After this,” he said, rocking in his chair. “Charge.”

“Charging station tonight?” Clint asked, and DJ nodded. “Want to go now?”

DJ shook his head. “Eat. Now.” He reached out, touching his water glass with one delicate finger. “But bot after.”

Clint nodded. “Okay. Tell us when you're done, okay?”

DJ nodded, and settled back to tug at the cuffs of his jacket. “Okay.”

“Did your dad bring you down here?” Darcy asked, bracing her chin on her hands. DJ nodded. “Preparing you for your life of being awesome and Starkish?”

DJ nodded. “Taught me.”

“What'd he teach you?” Darcy asked with a grin. “How to avoid reporters? How to choose a charity to donate to? How to wear a suitcoat and a tux?”

DJ nodded. “And red carpet.”

“What? How to do a red carpet walk?” Darcy pressed both hands to her mouth. “Oh my god, that must be ADORABLE. That must be the most adorable thing EVER.” She leaned in. “Will you show me?”

DJ considered that. “Yes.”

“Let me get my phone.”

* 

Tony woke up to the sound of someone trying desperately not to throw up.

Steve was sitting on the opposite side of the bed, his back to Tony, his body bent double. As Tony struggled awake, Steve sucked in a breath, and then another, his shoulders flexing with the force of it. One of his hands was visible on the bed next to him, his fingers locked in a death grip on the sheets.

Tony didn't move. “It's okay,” he said, his voice as calm as he could make it. “You're okay. You're safe.”

Steve's shoulders twitched, and there was a clatter as the trash can he'd been holding hit the ground. A moment later, his free hand came up, waving through the air. “Sorry. Didn't...” Tony heard him swallow. “Didn't mean to wake you, I'm fine. I'm...” His voice trailed away, and Tony pushed himself up to a sitting position.

“Do you know where you are?” he asked, because the questions centered them both. Made Steve think of something other than the too bright, too violent fragments of the nightmares that clung to his head after he woke up. “Do you know who I am?”

Steve made a sound that was almost a laugh. “Hotel. New York. 21st Century,” he said, his head falling forward. “And you're the charming, rich ass who picked me up in the bar last night.”
Tony grinned. “Well, you're not wrong,” he said, and he reached out, letting his fingers ghost against the skin of Steve's back. He braced himself for rejection; sometimes Steve couldn't bear any contact. And sometimes, he needed it desperately.

This time, Steve leaned back into Tony's touch, and Tony rubbed a hand up the tense line of his spine. “You want to talk about it?”

“No,” the word was out before Tony could even finish asking the question, and Tony fought against the sigh that pressed against his teeth. It wouldn't do any good.

“Can you look at me?” Tony asked. Steve didn't say anything, didn't move, and Tony moved closer, wiggling across the bed as gracefully as he could manage, until he could press a kiss against the back of Steve's shoulder. “I'm right here. I'm okay, Steve.”

For a long, painful moment, Steve didn't move, he just sat there, elbows braced on his knees, his head down, his back bowed with some invisible weight. “Why-” He stopped, his head turning away from Tony.

“Look at me,” Tony said, and Steve's head came around. His eyes were red, his face white, and Tony managed a smile. “See?” He smoothed Steve's hair away from his face, separating the damp locks with his fingers. Glitter clung to the strands, and Tony let it color his skin. “You afraid I'm going to disappear if you look at me?” he whispered.

Steve's eyes darted over Tony's face, his mouth tight. “Sometimes, you do,” he whispered back.

Tony nodded. “Not this time.” He kissed Steve's shoulder, his jaw, his lips. Steve didn't kiss him back, but he didn't pull away, either, he just leaned into the contact. When Tony pulled away, Steve let his head fall onto Tony's shoulder. Tony rubbed a hand up and down the length of his back. “Want me to leave you alone?” Steve shook his head, his breath still ragged against Tony's shoulder.

Tony took a deep breath. “Was it me?” he asked, his voice soft. “Or DJ?”

Steve was silent for a long moment, the muscles in his shoulders and back bunching under Tony's hand. “Both of you.”

Tony's eyes closed. “Okay,” he said, knowing better than to ask for more details. “Okay.” He wrapped his arms around Steve's back. “I'm right here. I'm fine.” Tony drew up one leg, pressing his knee against Steve's side, giving him as much contact as he could manage. “Do you want to go home?”

Steve shook his head. “I don't need to, it's fine.”

Tony gave him a quick shake. “Hey.” Steve's head came up, and Tony met his eyes without flinching. “I didn't ask if you needed to,” he said. “I asked if you wanted to. You don't have to wait until you need something, in order to get it, it's fine, we're ten minutes from home.” Steve's eyes slid away from his, and Tony gripped his shoulder. “He is right there. He is safe, he is fine, and he's ten minutes away.”

Steve nodded. “I know.” He pulled away from Tony, his head down, his body still tense. “I'm fine.” The words were hollow, almost inaudible.

Tony took a deep breath, and rolled over, reaching for the tablet on the bedside table. “Hey, Jarvis,” he said, flicking a finger against the screen. “Is the kidlet asleep?”

“Don't.” Steve reached for the tablet, and Tony rolled over onto his back, keeping it out of reach.
Steve’s eyebrows dipped low. “Tony, it's, it's fine, I don't...” The words trailed away to nothingness, his mouth working silently.

But his eyes were flat and glassy in the low light.

“It's no different than walking down the hallway and checking on him,” Tony said, trying for levity. He caught Steve's hand, pushing it down. “We're just using tech to do it now. Let Jarvis earn his monumental electric bill.”

Steve's fingers twitched under his, twitched against the skin of Tony's chest, and Tony stroked his thumb across the back of Steve's hand. He kept his breathing slow and regular, letting his chest expand with each inhale, letting Steve feel it. Feel the warmth of his skin, feel the regular beat of his heart, feel the way he breathed.

“It's okay,” he said, his voice quiet. “Steve. It's okay.”

Steve's eyes closed, some of the strain going out of his face. “What are you basing this on, Stark?”

Tony smiled. “Blind optimism.”

“Oh, now you decide to be an optimist.”

“You might be rubbing off on me. Here.” He sat up, leaning his back against the headboard of the bed, and waved Steve over. After a second, he came, crawling across the bed to sit between Tony’s spread knees, his back against Tony’s chest. Tony reached around him, pressing the tablet into his hands. “Jarvis? Can you check to see if he's sleeping?”

There was a beat of silence, then Jarvis’ voice came from the tablet. “Dummy is currently charging, and thus, in a sleep mode of sorts. However, it is a state that he can return to at any time without difficulty.”

Tony kissed the side of Steve’s neck and Steve caught his hand, weaving their fingers together. “Perfect. He up for a little facetime?”

A beat of silence. Then the tablet flickered to life, providing a video feed from the computer desk next to the bots’ charging stations. You and Butterfingers were still and quiet, but Dummy's head came up, staring into the camera, and Tony felt some of the tension go out of Steve's body. “Hi, buddy,” Tony said, resting his chin on Steve’s shoulder. “We missed you, thought we'd see how you were doing.”

Steve's fingers squeezed Tony's. “I had a bad dream,” he said, and Dummy's head swiveled slightly to look at him. “And I was scared.”

“Which happens to everyone, every so often,” Tony said, because yes, this was something that Steve was adamant about, that they not pretend that everything was all right when it wasn't. That they didn't lie about being afraid or worried or anxious, because DJ would follow that lead, would think he couldn’t come to them when he had a bad dream. When he was scared.

“I just wanted you to make sure you were all right,” Steve said, and there was a tight, pained note to his voice, a broken little hitch to the words.

“He wishes to know, if you'd like him to be human now,” Jarvis said. “If that will help you feel better, or less afraid.”

In the reflected glow of the tablet, Tony saw Steve's eyes close. For a second, he seemed to struggle
for words. “No,” he said at last, calm and precise. “You're still you. You're always you. And I'm just as happy to see you when you're one of our favorite bots as I am when you're our only kid.” His hand slipped free of Tony's, and he reached out, his fingers brushing against the screen of the tablet. “I love you, because no matter who you choose to be, you're always you.”

“I'd just like to say, I like you better as a bot,” Tony said. “You're much less trouble. And you have to do your work. You're a very troublesome kid, I think you should-” Steve's elbow dug into his side, and Tony's breath left him in a rush. “Love you.”

Dummy's claw traced a large, exaggerated heart shape in the air, and Steve grinned. “Are you having a good weekend?” he asked. He relaxed back against Tony's chest, and Tony took the weight with a smile, looping his arms around Steve's waist.

Dummy nodded, the force of it bouncing his entire frame up and down.

“Has Clint been drunk and or negligent?” Tony asked, stifling a laugh as Steve tried to elbow him again. “Listen, don't protect him, we know-”

“Are you having fun with Clint?” Steve asked over him, and Dummy nodded again, rolling back and forth in his charging station. “Are you following all the rules?”

“Are you wrecking my tower and my company and my general sense of well-being?” Tony asked, earning himself a stern shake of the head from Dummy. “I don't believe you. I have not gotten any assignments from you all weekend. You had all sorts of things you were supposed to be doing, and you've done none of them. Have you.”

Dummy was still for a moment, and then reached slowly for a tablet next to his charging station. “We can see you,” Tony said, staring at him. “You demented hunk of tin, we can see you doing that as you do it, right now, we can-”

Steve reached back and covered Tony's mouth with his hand. “Get some rest,” he said, ignoring Tony's grumbled protests. “You've had a long day, haven't you?” Dummy nodded, his arm drooping low, trying his best to look tired and pathetic. Tony snorted against Steve's palm.

“Faker,” he muttered.

“When will we be home?” Steve asked, his voice gentle. Affectionate.

“Tomorrow,” Jarvis said. “He is very enthusiastic about this. He says he has missed you.”

“We've missed him, too,” Steve said, as Tony pushed his hand away and added, “I miss his work assignments.”

“Tony,” Steve said, his head rolling back to look at Tony.

Tony glared at the tablet. “Work.” Dummy leaned in, so the gleaming flat lens of his camera filled the tablet's view. Tony held his stern face for another beat or two, then grinned. “Bratbot.” Dummy bounced back and forth, nudging the computer monitor on his end, making the video feed to wobbly for a second. “Stop breaking things.”

“We miss you, we'll be home tomorrow,” Steve said. His eyes slid back towards Tony. “Tony?”

“Oh, just me, huh?”

“Just Steve,” Tony repeated, as Dummy nudged the monitor again. “Look, smashing my things isn't going to change anything, I don't know what-” Steve was laughing, and trying to hide it, and Tony grinned at the tablet. “Fine. I love you. You are my favorite magical semi-biological child at the moment.”

Dummy's arm swept in a heart shape again, and Tony ignored the way his chest tightened. “Right, right, you're a living gif, now get your shiny metal ass back on your charging station.”

“Get some rest,” Steve said. “We love you.”

Tony held up a hand, his index finger and thumb an inch or so apart. “Not much though,” he said, his voice just over a whisper. “Only a tiny bit. Tiniest. The tiniest bit.” He reached out, tapping the face of the tablet. “Good night, babybot.”

He cut the video feed, and leaned back. “Thanks, Jay,” he said, and the tablet beeped. He glanced at Steve. “Better?”

“You shouldn't tease him like that,” Steve said, but he rolled over, just a little, taking the majority of his weight off of Tony's body but staying close. “You're incorrigible.”

“He is comforted by my sass,” Tony pointed out, taking the tablet from him and putting it back on the bedside table. He wiggled down, flopping into the soft mounds of their pillows. “His whole life has been guided by my sass, he'd be confused if I tried to change now.”

“Right.” Steve threw an arm over his waist, curling close. Tony stroked his hair away from his face with a careless hand, and Steve's lips curled up in a slight smile.

“I'm going to allow this,” Tony announced. “Just for tonight. I'm going to allow this undignified cuddling that you seem to be set on right now, but don't get used to it. This is only because you're having a bad night, that's it.”

“Oh, that's the only reason?” Steve, the bastard that he was, just curled closer, tangling his legs with Tony's, and burying his face in the hollow Tony's neck. “Really?”

“Yes. Absolutely. It's-” Steve shifted, all warm skin and tense muscle, and Tony's breath hissed out through clenched teeth. “I do not cuddle.”

“You're a cuddlebug,” Steve said, absolutely deadpan, and Tony choked on a laugh.

“Lies.”


Tony wiggled an arm free, and cupped the nape of Steve's neck, rubbing his thumb against the soft, short hair there. “I love you,” he said, his voice quiet.

“Just a little bit?” Steve asked, his breath warm against Tony's skin.

“Tiniest little bit,” Tony agreed. “Wake me up if you need me. Or if you want me.”

Steve nodded. He didn't say anything, but that was enough. Tony closed his eyes, and listened to the slow, measured sound of Steve's breathing, waiting for sleep.
“Morning, Dummy.” Clint opened the workshop door and headed in, with Darcy bouncing along right behind him. “Morning, You, morning, Butterfingers. How’re our favorite triplets this morning?”

All three of the bots straightened up in their stations, cameras swinging towards them. Clint grinned, and Darcy gave a little wave. “Hiya, guys,” she said, looking around as she crossed the workshop. There was stuff EVERYWHERE, and she was pretty sure most of it could kill her. “Wow. This is... A bit of a rats nest.”

“Hey, you try raising three bouncing baby bots and a team of super heroes and see how clean you keep the place,” Clint said.

“Yeah?” Darcy smirked at him. “What's your excuse?”

“I just don't care,” Clint said, and Darcy laughed.

“How has Phil not dumped your ass?” she asked, amused despite herself.

“Cause before me, he ate three quarters of his meals out of a box or out of a restaurant take out container and sometimes, I feed him,” Clint said. He reached out, petting one of the bots on top of his camera. “Hey, You! How's the wonky wheel today?” You rolled forward and back. “Yeah, Tony'll be home soon to yell at me and fix you, sorry, buddy.”

“Don’t tell me Coulson can't cook,” Darcy said. She squinted at Butterfingers' camera. “This lens is filthy, can you even see anything?” She looked up. “Hey, Jarvis, can I clean his eye with the lens cloth I use on my glasses? Is that okay, or does Tony have something special he uses?”

“Tony uses whatever greasy hunk of rag he's got within reach,” Clint said.

“That is not correct,” Jarvis said, disapproval coating the words. “And thank you, Ms. Lewis. I'm certain he would appreciate it.”

Darcy reached into her purse, rummaging around for her glasses case. “So, you're saying Coulson can't cook?” she asked Clint, who was pushing things around on a workbench.

“He CAN,” Clint said, unearthing a ball. “He just usually DOESN’T.” He held the ball up, getting Dummy and You's attention. “Who wants to play?” He gave it a light toss, and You stretched up, snagging the ball out of the air and tossed it back. Clint caught it one handed.

“Did you woo him with your cooking?” Darcy asked, grinning.

“No, I wooed him with bad jokes and constant demands for attention,” Clint said.

“It's rare you find a guy who's susceptible to that approach,” Darcy said, grinning.

“Yeah, he's a keeper,” Clint said cheerfully.

“I'll take your word for it.” She wiped Butterfingers' camera with careful fingers, not wanting to scratch the lens. She leaned back. “There. Better?” Butterfingers' head bobbed up and down in a nod, and she grinned, giving him a quick pat. “Go play with your brothers.”

He rolled off to where Dummy and You were playing a rather effective game of keep away with Clint. Darcy leaned back against the workbench, crossing her arms over her chest. “Are they outsmarting you, Clint?”
“Yes, in that they are smarter than me and, you know, have a hive mind,” Clint said, jumping for a throw. Butterfingers darted in, picking it out of the air inches from his fingertips. “I'm used to it.”

“Anything else you want to do today?” Darcy asked, and Dummy broke away from the group. He rolled over, picked up a tablet from the bench, and held it out to Darcy. She took it with a grin. “What's this?” Dummy leaned over, tapping the tablet and activating it. Darcy studied the recipe that came up. “You want to make a cake?” Dummy's head bobbed up and down. Darcy grinned as she scrolled through the instructions. “Ooooh, fancy cake!”

“By 'fancy cake' do you mean 'cake from a box'?” Clint asked hopefully. He jumped, his fingertips clipping the ball as it flew over his head. It hit the bench and knocked something to the ground. Darcy moved a few steps to the side as Butterfingers rolled off after it.

“No,” she said, twirling a strand of hair around her fingertip. “I mean 'fancy' as in 'made with cake flour and nothing with the Betty Crocker logo on it.'”

“Veto,” Clint said, his head falling forward. “C'mon, Dummy, can we do cookies? I'm good with cookies, I am bitching at cookies.” Dummy angled his camera in Clint's direction, then went back to Darcy and the tablet.

“I think that's a no,” Darcy said, patting Dummy on his support strut. “Bot wants cake. You can't swap out cookies for that. Besides, weren't you the one who was just bragging about his cooking? Pretty sure that was you. Sounded like you. Loud and obnoxious. Your trademarks.”

“Okay, look,” Clint said, bouncing the ball off of a very expensive looking monitor and over to You, who caught it. “I was talking about cooking. I'm good at cooking. I'm a boss at cooking. You're talking about baking. Baking is not…” He ducked as one of the bots retaliated with something like a line drive. Something broke, and he made a face. “Baking is fussy.”

“Oh my god,” Darcy said, rolling her eyes up at the ceiling.

“Shut up,” Clint said.

“Oh my GOD,” Darcy repeated. She grinned at Dummy. “We can make your cake, baby, that's fine. Are you making a cake because your dad and Steve are going to be back today?”

“Everyone's going to be back today,” Clint said. “Phil and Nat'll be done with their training, Jane and Thor'll be back from Asscrack-gard, and Bruce'll be done with his sciencey thing.”

“Sciencey thing?” Darcy asked.

“It's a thing. With science. Cut me a break here.” He grinned. “Is it family cake, Dummy?” Dummy's head bounced up and down in a quick nod. “That's adorable. We can buy one from a bakery.”

Dummy took the tablet from Darcy and rolled across the workshop to shove it at Clint. Clint took it with a sigh. “Or, you know, we could make a lemon curd cake with raspberry jam swirl,” he said, looking at the recipe. “Buddy, I don't know if anyone here has this stuff, I mean…”

“I took the liberty of placing an order with the usual delivery service,” Jarvis said. “They should have all necessary ingredients here within the hour.”

“And you're being outflanked by the resident AIs on all fronts,” Darcy said.

“Like I said, I'm used to it,” Clint said. “Isn't cake flour super bad for your delicate gears, Dummy?”
"He will wear an apron," Darcy said. "An apron and an adorable chef hat."

"Where are you going to get a chef hat?"

"Thor's got one," Darcy said, with a smirk.

Clint stared at her. "Of course he does," he said. The ball bounced off of the side of his face. "Thanks, You, that was great."

Darcy patted You on his strut. "Good shot, baby. Keep him on his toes." She straightened up. "I'll go get the hats and aprons, you can get everyone up to the kitchen."

"Wait, everyone?" Clint asked.

"Family cake means the whole family," Darcy pointed out. "Right, Dummy?" Dummy nodded. "See? Dummy agrees with me."

"Dummy likes watching things break," Clint said. "I mean, really."

"Whine, whine, whine," Darcy said, grabbing her bag from the workbench. "Jarvis, see if you can't put a rush on our ingredients?"

"For you, Ms. Lewis, of course," Jarvis said, and Darcy blew a kiss at the nearest camera.

"Meet you in the kitchen," Darcy said, and bounced out the door. By the time she stepped off the elevator, Darcy'd managed to locate the spare key that Thor had given her, in case she or Jane needed a safe place. It was supposed to be for emergencies, but Darcy was pretty sure this counted.

Jane had given Thor a chef's hat as a joke, but Thor, being Thor, loved it. Darcy found it sitting in its usual spot on top of the fridge, and had to climb onto one of the kitchen stools to get it. She managed it, cursing tall people under her breath the whole time. She scribbled a quick note on the Avengers notepad that was on his fridge, and leaned over to press a lipstick heavy kiss to it in lieu of a signature.

Clutching her prize, she bounced back out and headed to the shared kitchen.

"Okay, are we ready to-" An apron hit her in the head, and Darcy stopped. "Rude."

"Sorry, Miss Manners," Clint said, and Darcy pushed the fabric out of her face in time to see him tying his own apron around his waist. It said 'Shoulda Ordered Pizza' in a sweeping font. Dummy was draped in a bright red apron that said 'This Shit is Going to be Delicious.'

Darcy pointed at him. "The dads are going to kill you for that."

"Probably! It's day three of babysitting, and I think it's hysterical," Clint said, his hands on his hips. "Give me the stupid hat and put your apron on."

Darcy tossed him the chef's hat and held up her own apron. It was black, with the bib shaped like a cartoon bat's head. Giggling to herself, she tied it on, and then spread the skirt of the apron out like bat wings. "Please tell me that Natasha wears this."

"Sometimes, but mostly, it's Bruce's," Clint said. "All right, bot brigade." He adjusted the chef's hat on top of Dummy's camera, tying it in place with a piece of butcher's twine. "Do we all have our
assignments?"

You held up an egg. Butterfingers pushed a bag of flour a little closer to the center of the cutting board, and reached for the measuring cup. Dummy bounced up and down, his hat slipping sideways. Darcy put it back where it belonged and held out a lemon. "You get to zest!"

"How's he going to be able to do that without being able to hold onto the-" Darcy held the grater out to Clint, who took it with a sigh. "Right."

"Everyone needs help," Darcy sing-songed at him, her chin up at an obnoxious angle. Clint tossed a roll of paper towels at her, and she caught them. "I'll grease the cake pans!"

"Wouldn't that make more sense to give to You? Rather than egg duty?" Clint asked. He held the microplane grater out to Dummy. "Here, we're going to rub the lemon carefully back and forth until all the yellow is gone. Stop when you hit the pith, the white stuff. That stuff does not taste good."

Dummy glanced up at him, lemon still clasped firmly in his claw. "He is suspicious," Jarvis said. "In that no part of the lemon tastes 'good.'"

Clint stared back at him. "Then why are we making lemon cake?"

"Lemon cake tastes good," Jarvis explained. "Lemons do not."

"But lemon cakes taste like lemon," Clint said. He held out the grater. "Trust me. It'll... It's going to be fine."

Dummy looked at You and Butterfingers, and the three bots clustered together for an instant, waving cup and lemon and egg as they did a pretty good pantomime of an argument. Darcy watched, grinning, as Dummy returned back to the counter. "He has decided to trust you," Jarvis said.

"Thanks. I'm honored." Clint held out the grater. Dummy rotated the lemon a few times, his claw whirring, and then he slapped it down and went to town.

"Forget the pith," Darcy said. "Stop him before he hits pulp." She grabbed the mixing bowl, holding it steady as You cracked first one, and then a second egg with amazing precision. The shell came apart in two neat parts, and his claw flexed as he maneuvered the egg into the bowl. "And that is an awesome trick." The bot bobbed a little nod, or maybe a bow, and reached for a third egg.

"Okay," Clint said, putting the remains of the lemon aside, flicking juice from his fingers. "Butterfingers, you measuring the dry ingredients?

"I'll help," Darcy said. She took the bowl of eggs from You and held it out so Butterfingers could dump in the sugar. "Dummy, ready to mix?"

Dummy considered the bowl, his head dipping from side to side. Then he picked up the beater in his claw, and attacked. Darcy ducked, her arms coming up reflexively as well beaten eggs splattered across the counter and every other nearby surface. There was a beat of silence.

"I probably should've expected that," Clint said, wiping egg off the side of his face.

"Everything he does, he does with enthusiasm," Darcy agreed, her hands on her hips. "I'm looking forward to the frosting stage of this project."

"Shut up and crack some more eggs, Lewis."
Tony leaned over, lining up his shot in his head. “You do this deliberately.”

Steve circled around to the other side of the pool table, his cue held easily in one hand. “If I can't sink a shot,” he said with a smile, laughter bubbling through him. “I'm going to do my best to block you from sinking one, too.”

Tony shook his head, his cheeks creasing as he tried to hold back a smile. “Asshole.”

“I prefer to think of it as sound strategy,” Steve said. He wrapped both hands around the pool cue, leaning forward, making sure he was directly in Tony's line of sight. Then he began smoothing his thumb up and down along the smooth, polished wood. Tony's eyes flicked up, and then back down, but it was too late.

Holding back a grin with a force of will, Steve let his hand stroke up, and then slowly back down the circumference of the cue. It was an idle movement, and he kept his attention on Tony, who was struggling to focus on the billiard balls. He sucked in a breath, and drew back to take the shot.

Steve twisted his wrist, his fingers spreading as he stroked up to the top of the cue, his thumb flicking over the tip. Tony missed the cue ball completely, nearly face planting against the table.

“Scratch,” Steve said, and deliberately wiped the blue chalk that was smeared across his thumb off on his hip.

“I call foul,” Tony said. He straightened up. “Can you stop jacking off the equipment over there?” Steve gave him an innocent look. “I don't know what you're talking about,” he said, with a broad, easy smile.

Tony pointed his cue at Steve. “You,” he said, his head tipping forward. “You used to be so innocent. What the hell happened to you?”

Steve hip checked him out of the way. “Number one, no, I wasn't,” he said, leaning over to line up his shot. “And two, you.” He drew his cue back, and just as his arm snapped forward, Tony grabbed his ass.

Somehow, the ball dropped into the pocket anyway.

Steve straightened up. Tony gave him a smirk. “What?”

Steve considered him. “I might've deserved that,” he admitted at last. He sure as hell had liked it. “Didn't do you any good, anyway.”

“I didn't expect it to,” Tony admitted. “I expected to get to grab your ass. Anything beyond that would've been a bonus.” He set the cue back on the rack and boosted himself up onto the nearby bar stool. “Want to play another round?” His eyes lit up. “Strip billiards?”

Steve grinned back at him, warmth swirling through him. “Tony?” he asked, putting his cue back. “Steve?”

He took a deep breath, and turned to face Tony. "I want to go home."

Tony stared at him, his expression blank for a moment. "Thank fuck," he said. "I love you, but I'm going stir crazy here." He hopped down, already moving towards the door before his feet were fully
on the ground. "I want my workshop."

Steve choked on a laugh. “You do know how to make a fella feel wanted,” he said, falling into step beside Tony.

"Excuse you, I have given you my entire attention for days, most people are more than happy to get a respite at that point," Tony pointed out. "A little of me goes a long way, I have it on good authority that concentrated levels of me are possibly toxic, and we're better off keeping things in small, controlled doses for a healthy long term—"

Steve wrapped a hand around the back of his neck, tugging him in for a kiss. Tony's lips softened under his, gentle and warm. “Want to go home?” Steve whispered against his mouth.

“Yes,” Tony whispered back. He smiled. “Happy anniversary, Rogers.”

“Happy anniversary, Stark,” Steve said. “Want to get packed up and head home now, then?”

“No, I want to grab the armor, and your perfect ass, and make a break for it,” Tony said. “I want to pay someone else to pack our things, and pay someone else to pick it up and drive it and the car back to the tower, because right now, I don't want to deal with luggage, or traffic, or anything else.”

Steve considered objecting. “Let's go,” he said, instead.

“What?” Tony clutched his chest. “You're letting me solve my problems with money?”

“Yes,” Steve said. “Consider it my anniversary present to you. Can we leave now?”

“And here was hoping that you'd just tie a bow around some portion of yourself and let me unwrap you,” Tony said, with a wicked grin.

Steve threw his hands in the air. “Oh, NOW you tell me,” he said, and Tony burst into laughter.

Tony put a hand on Steve's shoulder and gave him a gentle shove towards the bedroom. “Get your shoes and anything you don't want housekeeping seeing.”

“An obscene amount,” Tony said, crossing behind him, the suitcase armor gleaming in one hand. “Which is why I don't feel bad about making them deal with the luggage as well. He disappeared into the bathroom, emerging a moment later. “Ready?”

“You don't even have your shoes on,” Steve said.

“Fuck it, fuck shoes,” Tony said, grinning, and Steve was laughing as he followed Tony up the curving staircase and out onto the balcony.

“I'm telling DJ you said that,” he said, watching with genuine pleasure as the armor unfolded, curling around Tony like a glove.

“Oh, feel free,” Tony said, his voice hot even through the Iron Man faceplate. “Enjoy fighting the good sock fight after that.” He held out his hand. “Captain?”

Steve grinned, holding his gaze as he hopped up and over the metal railing that surrounded the
balcony. He was laughing as he fell, arms outstretched, overnight bag held firmly in one hand. In an instant, he heard the roar of the repulsors, even over the rush of the wind, and then Tony's arms were wrapping firmly around his chest, pulling him gently out of freefall.

“One of these days,” he said in Steve's ear, the rumble of wind and flame there under the words, “you're going to do that, and I'm going to have a heart attack and die, and then where will you be?”

Steve shrugged, even as he wrapped an arm around Tony's shoulders. “In a lot of pain, I suppose,” he said. He tipped his head back, savoring the sun on his face, the way the wind whipped through his hair, and Tony's strong, sure grip on his waist.

The flight back took a matter of minutes, and only that long because Tony was indulging him, swinging them in wide, easy loops and spiraling through the narrow gaps between buildings. They came close enough that Steve could almost reach out and brush his fingers across the gleaming expanse of the glass windows. At one point, Tony shot straight up, pushing them up so far above the city that Steve saw his breath hang in icy puffs between them, and then let them drop back down towards the green expanse of central park. He pulled them up right over the lake, rolling over on his back so the water Steve could reach out and trail a hand through the water, letting the droplets fall through his fingers as they shot up and away.

By the time Tony set them down on the Tower's landing pad, his feet coming down with his usual delicacy, Steve was breathless and giddy. As soon as his feet were on solid ground, he raised his free hand and rapped his knuckles on the front of the helmet. “Open up,” he said, and when Tony popped the helmet's faceplate, Steve ducked under it for a kiss that bent Tony back over his arm.

When he raised his head, Tony was breathing hard, his eyes huge and dark. “Take it you approve of the trip,” he said, his hands smoothing over Steve's shoulders.

“Absolutely going to call you again when I need a pick up,” Steve said, grinning.

“Well, you damn well better.” Steve pulled Tony back upright, and he leaned against Steve's chest for a second, his breath coming hard and fast. “Jay, anyone know we're here yet?”

“No,” Jarvis said, his voice echoing out of the open helmet. “I assumed you meant this to be a surprise. They are down in the living room, watching a movie and having lunch.”

Tony grinned at Steve. “Want to surprise him?”

Steve grinned back. “Yes. Yes, I do.” Ignoring the way Tony was laughing, he headed for the living room. He heard them, even before he saw them, over the sounds of the movie, he heard Clint bickering with someone, heard DJ giggling. He leaned into the open door, his arm braced on the jamb. Darcy Lewis was their mystery guest, and she was hugging DJ as he kicked playfully at Clint.

They'd ordered Chinese food, and half a dozen containers were piled on the coffee table in front of them. As Steve watched, amused, DJ wriggled free of Darcy's arms and bounced across the couch, sitting himself down next to Clint and his container of sweet and sour pork.

Clint, accustomed to sharing, held the box out to him so that DJ could dig a piece out with his child-sized chopsticks. They each had a juice box balanced nearby, and Darcy had a sippy cup. In the background, Luke was making a run on the Death Star, and everything was so normal that it hurt.

Steve crept forward, his feet silent on the carpeted floor. He'd barely cleared the doorway when Clint's shoulders went tense, his head twitching to the side. He caught sight of Steve, and he relaxed, his mouth turning up. Steve pressed a finger to his lips and Clint's chin dipped in a tiny nod before turning his attention back to the movie.
Steve stepped up just behind the couch, his hands outstretched towards DJ, and from behind him, heard Tony say, “Is this Star Wars? You're watching Star Wars? Did you not read the instruction sheet at ALL?”

And then it was just pandemonium. Clint managed to catch DJ's container before it ended up on the floor, and Darcy snagged his juice box, and Steve caught DJ.

“Hi,” he said, swinging DJ up into the air above his head, making him shriek with laughter. “We're home!”

Tony leaned both hands on the back of the couch. “Barton. Seriously. Star Wars?”

“Is he not supposed to do Star Wars?” Clint asked. One shoulder rose and fell in something approaching a shrug. “Oops?”

Tony stared at him. “Where’s his instruction sheet?”

Clint stuck his chopsticks in his mouth. “Darce, where’d we put the kid's instructions?”

Darcy bit into an egg roll. “We used ‘em to start the fire on Friday.” Tony turned his basilisk stare on her. She grinned and held out the rest of the egg roll. “Want a bite?”

“It's a gas log, you don't need to 'start it,’” Tony pointed out. “And yes.” He took it from her. “Also, what are you doing here?”

“Barton called in a professional,” Darcy said. She reached for a plastic container of hot and sour soup. “I'll send you my bill.”

“Sure. I'll use it to start the fire,” Tony said. He straightened up, sticking his hands in his pockets. “Hey, munchkin. How're you doing?”

DJ grinned at him from the safe haven of Steve's arms. “Bring me?” he asked. He looked up at Steve, who stared back.

“Bring you?” he asked, and then the meaning sank in. “What did we bring you. Oh, Deej, I-”

Tony pulled his hands out of his pockets. “The mints from our pillows,” he said, holding out the foil wrapped packets, “And...” He held out his other hand. “A shower cap.” DJ's face lit up and he held his hands out, his fingers wiggling in the air. Grinning, Tony handed them over, and DJ wriggled out of Steve's arms, hopping down onto the couch.

Tony folded his arms on the back of the couch, an affectionate smile creasing his face. “One of these days, Rogers, you'll learn just how easily amused this kid really is.”

Steve watched, affection rolling through him like a wave, as DJ pulled the shower cap out of the little cardboard packet and put it on his head. “Looks good on you,” he said, and DJ grinned up at him, pleased. He patted the couch next to him. Smiling, Steve walked around, accepting a carton on mu shu from Clint as he settled down. DJ promptly scrambled into his lap and Steve wrapped an arm around his waist. “Tony?”

Tony was at the coffee table, sorting through the containers. “Did you get any cashew chicken?”

“It's over here,” Clint said. He held it out in Tony's direction. “How was the vacation?”

“It was a relief to get away from you,” Tony said, pulling the shower cap off of DJ's head and giving
him a kiss as he settled down next to them on the couch.

“Hug,” DJ said.

“Steve's got it,” Tony said, grabbing a pair of chopsticks from the table. “You don't need a hug from me. Mine are substandard.” DJ’s fingers wiggled in the air, demanding attention and affection.

“Here,” Tony said, holding out the container of chicken to Steve. “Swap you.”

“I'm not getting the best part part of this deal,” Steve said, but he took the carton and handed over DJ.

Tony scooped him up, hugging him tight. “Did you have a good weekend?” he asked, and DJ patted his cheeks.

“Miss you,” he said.

“Missed you, too,” Tony said, kissing him on the forehead. “Did you get into trouble?”

“Yes,” DJ said, and wriggled out of Tony's arms, hopping back across the couch to Steve.

“Did no one hug you while we were gone?” Steve asked, laughing as DJ settled down in his lap. DJ shook his head. “Really?” Steve pushed his hair away from his forehead and gave Tony his food back. “No hugs? None at all?”

“No,” DJ said with all due solemnity.

“Oh, come on, I was hugging you right before they came in!” Darcy said. She pointed her chopsticks at him. “You are a shameless liar.”

“None!” DJ said, giggling as he burrowed down against Steve's chest. Steve pressed a kiss to his hair.

“Well, then,” he said, “I guess you've been weaned off hugs and after two days of no hugs at all, now you don't need any more hugs.” DJ froze, his eyes narrowing. Steve gave a slow nod. “No more hugs for you.”

“No,” DJ said. “More hugs.”

“Steve's got a point,” Tony said, munching a bite of cashew. “You're clearly uninterested in hugs if you couldn't weasel at least one out of Clint, he's an easy touch.”

“He didn't even want any,” Clint agreed, shoveling lo mein into his mouth. “I asked. He was like, nope, too big for hugs.” DJ gaped at him, outrage making his eyes huge. Clint grinned, his cheeks bulging. “Right?”

“Not right,” DJ said. He looked up at Steve. “Not right!” He picked up one of Steve's arms and tried to wrap it around himself. “Hug now.”

“Oh, you DO want hugs?” Steve asked, trying not to laugh. But he wrapped both arms around DJ, grinning as DJ's arms curled around his neck. “Know what?” He leaned back. “I've known three Stark boys, and they have all been cuddlers.”

Clint choked on a mouthful of stir fried veggies, and Darcy let out a little shriek of laughter. Tony's head swiveled in Steve's direction, his eyes narrowed. Steve gave him a sweet smile over DJ's head. “Do not,” Tony said.
“Howard Stark was a CUDDLER?” Darcy asked. “I mean, I found some letters from his lady friends, none of them mentioned cuddling tendencies, but maybe he kept that on the down low.”

“Don't you-” Tony started to Steve, and then his head snapped around towards Darcy. “Wait, my dad's letters? What're you-”

“He got drunk in a pub with us once,” Steve said, resting his chin on top of DJ's head. “And fell asleep on me. He spent the next hour either trying to crawl under my uniform jacket or calling me Amanda, so I'm just saying.”

“Stop saying,” Tony said, pressing a hand to the side of his eye. “Oh, god, I did not need that mental picture.”

“I did,” Darcy said. She popped a dumpling in her mouth, chewing with a great deal of enthusiasm.

“You are banned,” Tony told her.

“No one's banned,” Steve said, taking a bite of rice from DJ's chopsticks. He grinned down at DJ. “Otherwise, who'll take care of you next year on our anniversary?”

“Next year he'll be old enough to stay by himself,” Tony said.

“No,” Steve told him.

“Yes!” DJ said, enthusiastically.

“We'll discuss it,” Tony said, settling back. “What's for dessert?”

Clint and Darcy exchanged a glance, and Clint buried his face behind the container of wontons. “Ice cream.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, that took a while. Thanks for sticking with me through the fluffiest fluff that I've ever created. Ever. God, this was a tooth rotting sort of sweet, and I feel no guilt at all. 8)

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