**No Parental Leave**

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by [WritingItDunn](http://archiveofourown.org/users/WritingItDunn)

**Summary**

Tony technically knew he was a father but it was in the same sense that he was also a healer or a politician. He made it possible for it to happen, but he's never directly involved.

This is the story of Tony trying to fit the word father into his title of "Genius Billionaire playboy philanthropist" and how Tony can be a better person when he has to be. Of course
becoming Iron Man and teaming up with the Avengers helps.

NOTICE: AUTHOR IS SUPER SLOW WITH UPDATES
Mary Parker. That’s a name Tony hadn’t heard in a long time. Even then he knew her when she was Mary Fitzpatrick, bright-eyed girl with dreams of being a civil servant. At first, she was just meant to be a notch on his bed post but they ended up being good friends for a while, she let him get away with too much, humoured his poor behaviour too often, but he had made her laugh and to her that was important. It hadn’t been long into her time with the CIA that she had met Richard, and with her work and obvious love taking up all her time, Tony took a step back not that it bothered him he was always letting himself get distracted. It was years later that she asked something of him. Something that he happily gave up out of respect for their brief but interesting friendship.

That favour had just come back to potentially bite him in the ass.

“Tony. You’ve just been requested to attend a will reading.”

“My parents died years ago Pepper, I don’t know anyone else other than you and Rhodie who would actually leave me stuff when you die. Where is Rhodie anyway?”

“He’s at Edward’s Airbase.”

“Nothing new there then. Pepper, you deal with it. I’m busy”

And with that, Tony went back to his schematics, muttering to J.A.R.V.I.S as he works, with exasperation Pepper stalks out of the room to do her apparent job of being Tony Stark when he was too busy working on weapons or sleeping with someone to deal with the ‘boring things’.

There was a child. On his couch. This. This was new. It also looked upset. All he had wanted was to come up to get a sandwich to take a break from designing, there shouldn’t be a kid on his couch.

Tony hadn’t really ever had to deal with children before, at least not past the occasional press invited hospital visits he had attended when Stark industries had developed something that would help sick children. So Tony opted to do what he would do if it was anyone he didn’t know just sitting on his couch.

“Pepper?!”

She walked in calmly despite his surprised and confused tone, holding a glass of milk and a plate of his chocolate-chip cookies.

“Those are my cookies. Pepper, what is going on, was there a thing that I was meant to do but didn’t. I don’t remember meeting with a children’s group thing being on my schedule.”
Pepper ignores him in favour of handing the plate of cookies and milk to the young brown-haired little boy who politely took them, thanking her in a small voice, he took another moment to just look at Tony before eating just as quietly as he spoke. Pepper strokes his hair before coming over to Tony, dragging him a little away from the boy so she could talk to him.

“Pepper, why is he eating my cookies?”

“Because he asked for them. Remember that thing you said you were too busy for?”

Tony blinked at her owlishly.

“You’re really going to need to be more specific. There are a lot of things you talk about that I’m generally too busy for. Why is he staring at me like that? Why is there a 4-year-old on my couch?”

“Seven and a half. And I’m talking about the will reading, remember that, I told you about it four days ago.”

“Really not seeing what that has to do with the kid.”

“He’s Mary Parker’s son.”

It takes him a second then he just stares at the kid. And just keeps looking at him.

“Will reading?”

“Of Mary and Richard Parker. Yes.”

“Seven?”

“And a half, yes.”

Tony just turns and walks off, heading down to his workshop and garage, ignoring Pepper as she shouts for him to stop and follows him. Once down there he orders J.A.R.V.I.S to play anything hard rock as he moves from works space to works space, pacing at his cars, ducks both Dum-E and Butterfingers arms then sat down at his computer.

Pepper was right on his heels as he fled the living room, trying to get him to stop the whole time. She stood just inside the room and watched him pace and wander from place to place, she stopped her yelling and just watched him before telling J.A.R.V.I.S to turn off the music.

“Adopt him out.” He looked determined and only mildly panicked “Why did he even get to me? Richard had a brother.”

“Had, Tony. I didn’t ask about it, but something happened shortly before they passed. He has an Aunt May, but right now there’s no way she could look after him on her own right now.”

“Right now? So it’s only temporary then?” Tony knew he shouldn’t have looked so hopeful because Pepper shook her head slowly.

“You’re named on the birth certificate.”

“Mary was a drunk.” Pepper let out an exasperated sigh.

“Tony, I might not have been your assistant 7 years ago, but I am now and I know every legal
transaction you’ve made, including helping them conceive. He’s legally and biologically yours.”

“No” He turns back to his computer and starts typing. Pulling up files trying to find one that he can focus on and lose himself in. Causing Pepper to grab the back of his chair and pulling him away, the panicked look on his face returning.

He can’t be a father. Well okay yes, he can be the boy proves it but he’s talking about actually doing the parenting thing. Of course, he can’t be he’s a terrible role model, he shouldn’t even be looking up to himself let alone impressionable kids. Not to mention the fact that he is very much like his own dad, and no way is he going to end up like that to the kid.

Pepper seemed to be very aware what was going on in his head and lowers herself into a delicate little crouch in front of him.

“Peter has no one else. Just you… And me.”

Tony stares at her for a long moment, blinking slowly.

“You’ll help me? With the whole feeding, and diaper changes?”

“He’s seven, he’s been potty trained by now. But of course, I will help.” Pepper rolls her eyes good-naturedly at him, Tony just looks relieved, and then they hear a small knocking. Turning they see Peter on the other side of the glass wall, looking lonely, lost and confused. Standing up Pepper approached the door, her hand securely around Tony’s wrist as she dragged him behind her then opened the door to let Peter in.

He comes in looking very shy, Tony looks down at him deciding that this was part of Mary in him, ignoring the knowledge that when he was about that age he usually ended up being so quiet around Howard he only would realise he was there when he actually saw him and consequently chase him out of the room while he was working.

“Peter. I’d like you to meet Tony Stark.” Tony gives pete an awkward grin, looking at him now he can see some of the resemblance, unruly hair that despite obviously having a lot of effort put into brushing it down still had the of careless flick to it, deep brown eyes that betrayed an intelligence that was yet to come into its own, as well as seemingly very expressive while the rest of his face was still, not to mention some delicate and defined eyelashes.

“You’re my real dad, right?”

“Uh, yeah. Seems like it.”

“Do I have to go to all those big parties?”

“You know about the parties?”

“Mom used to watch some of the gala events.”

“Wait, you knew?” Peter nods slowly.

“You’re four years old, you shouldn’t be told these things.”

“Mom and Dad had black hair. I have medium brown hair, black is more dominant when both parents share the same hair colour. That and my grandparents didn’t have brown hair that matched mine which only reinforces the likelihood of me being born with black hair. You do, so did Mr. and Mrs. Stark. Also, I’m seven and a half.”
Tony. Just. Stares at the kid who was staring up at him, he still looked lost and lonely however with an opportunity to prove to Tony that he was smart and worth taking notice of had made him look more confident. It struck a chord in Tony.

“Fine Pepper, you win, we can keep him. Be he’s keeping his last name and he doesn’t get access to here until he can build something without any of this.” He gestures to the room in general. “Now let him pick one of the spare rooms, I have deadlines.” He gave Peter another appraising glance before turning back to his workstation. He could feel pepper giving him a disapproving look, and got the feeling the boy was looking a little sad. Sighing he turns to look over his shoulder.

“Welcome home, kid. When I’m done, I’ll take out to Pizza, okay?”

“Okay!” Peter gives him a smile and starts to turn to pepper before his smile fades and he looks back at Tony. “Um?” Tony raises an eyebrow at him, fidgets with his hands waiting for the boy to keep talking, but he doesn’t.

“If you’ve got a question, go ahead and ask no one discovers anything keeping quiet.”

“What do I call you?”

“Huh?” Tony’s face goes blank, what kind of stupid question is that he wonders.

“Are you Dad? Father? Pop?” Tony can feel his heart stop at the question, yeah he so was not ready for this.

“Uh, Tony. Tony works for now. Sound okay with you?” Peter is silent for a long moment, Pepper and Ton can see his mind working behind that little face of his, then he gives a nod.

“Tony will do.” He smiles up at Tony a little awkwardly before Pepper hurried the boy back up the stairs to let him pick out his room.

And while it had taken him four days to finish the blueprints, he actually did take Peter out for some Pizza, and a bought him a bike.

For the most part, Peter was technically a secret to the world. It’s not like he was hidden under a sheet when going out in public or anything, nor would Tony actually deny being his father. It was just a matter of neither of them would bring the other up without a reason, which both Pepper, Happy, and Tony all said was for his own safety. Happy and Pepper were the loudest in telling Peter they would die if they found out he got kidnapped or hurt to get at Tony and his money.

It got boring to hear after a while, but he had gotten the message clear enough, and the look on Tony’s face, when it had first been brought up, was enough to tell him that maybe he should be very careful. For the most part, though it seemed completely unimportant because when he wasn’t at home and being monitored by J.A.R.V.I.S he was at a private school that contained quite a few of the Californian who’s who of genetics, which was also a very secure safe place. Otherwise, he would be with Pepper or Happy, both of which always kept a very close eye on him. For a kid who spent so much time in New York just wandering the streets as he pleased with the other kids until his parents called him in for dinner it was kind of overwhelming, so he soon learnt to really appreciate
that he was left alone while in his new Malibu home. He almost always had it to himself when school was out because Tony and Pepper would be at Stark Industries, with Happy always nearby to drive them where they needed to be. At night Pepper was almost always there even if Tony wasn’t, which he generally wasn’t. When they were away on business there was always Happy with him to take him where ever he needed to go.

Of course, the downside to being safe and alone in your own, new home was that.

You were alone.

He had turned eight a few weeks ago, Tony and Pepper had taken him out to a little burger place that he admitted to liking. Pepper had insisted on keeping it small and quiet for Peter’s sake because he was still adjusting, Tony agreed only because he didn’t know how to throw a kids party and he was pretty sure you couldn’t drink and have hot girls there without getting in trouble.

After the meal, Tony had produced a package from his Aunt May, she had given him clothes, not all of them suited him, but he knew she was still sad about losing uncle Ben so he was still really happy that what she got would fit. Pepper had given him a build your own human kit while Tony had left some biology books in his room that morning. Happy gave him some boxing gloves with a note saying ‘for when you’re 10’.

That night, Pepper insisted that Tony stay in to spend the night with Peter, and made sure he couldn’t leave by making off with all the keys to his cars and having Happy drive her home.

They started the night watching a movie or two but soon ended up on the discovery channel, at first tony seemed disinterested and kind of at a loss, until an engineering documentary came on and Peter starts asking questions that Tony started answering without thinking and then started drawing diagrams on paper to explain how an engine worked better than the documentary.

Peter was enthralled by Tony’s knowledge and explanations, and Tony was a little surprised at how well he was keeping up with what he was talking about. Peter was even smiling which when it was usually one on one with Tony he usually felt too awkward to do. It was starting to feel like it did with Mom and Dad. Then his face fell and he went quiet. Tony hadn’t noticed, at first, having gotten caught up in the ins and outs of internal combustion, but soon he realised there wasn’t another shadow over the paper, and it was only him talking. Stopping he leaned up and looked at Peter.

Realising that he was being stared at Peter quickly excused himself thanked Tony for the night and said good night. Scooping up his things he tried really hard not to run to his room, leaving Tony behind to be confused.

It had been a few hours since Peter had gone to bed, Tony stayed in the living room, the TV was off and he sat at the piano playing a tune that had no real connection to any song he knew, simply just making a harmony as he looked at the drawings his writing mixing with Peters as concepts were explained and mimicked. Tony was quietly proud of how much Peter was able to take in. He was two years older than Tony was when he had built his own engine, but he had his dad’s whole garage to learn by himself. Just as he was about to text Pepper about it was when he heard it. A small little squeak of a noise, he glanced around the room and couldn’t think of the source, he waited but heard nothing. But soon he heard something and knew exactly what it was.

“Mommy! Daddy!”
Tony knew desperate cries when he heard them, he had made them himself when he was that age. He stared in the direction of Peters room for a long time before getting up and heading to Peter’s room, realising that the boys fear trumps his fear of the crying child, he didn’t knock, he didn’t see the point. He just slipped his head in slowly to assess what was going on.

“Pete?”

In the low light he saw Peter, bolt upright in bed tears streaming down his face, he looked startled at Tony and started to scrub at his eyes with his pyjama sleeves, trying so hard to act like he wasn’t crying.

“Wow, hey. What’s wrong kiddo?”

Tony was sure that’s how you started a conversation with a crying child, after all, TV imitates real life. He sat on the edge of Peter’s bed and waited for him to say something.

“N-Nothing.”

“Believe me, I know nothing. This isn’t what it looks like, come on Peter. What’s wrong?”

The boy stared up at the man, evaluating the situation and rubbed his eyes again.

“I had a nightmare.”

“Really?” Peter nods, starting to feel real stupid about being caught crying. “About what?” Peter stares up at him confused.

“You don’t think I’m being a baby?”

“Why? Everyone has nightmares, I know I do, one of them is called Pepper.” Peter gives him something of a smile, and Tony relaxes slightly, feeling a little more confident about this. “What was it about?”

Peter was silent for a long time, fidgeting with the bed sheets, Tony quietly wondered if Peter had been watching him really closely or if it was just something Stark’s did when they weren’t sure of how to go about something.

“Mom and Dad. And the car accident.”

Tony tried not to react to that because he was really starting to think he started a terrible curse with his own parents dying in a car accident, what with Peter losing his. Richard was his dad, more than Tony was/is at least.

“Yeah, those kind of dreams are the worst.” Peter looked up at him with wide innocent eyes.

“You’ve had them?” Tony nodded.

“That’s what happened to my parents too.”

“I’m sorry.”

“What are you sorry for?”

“You lost your parents.”

“So did you.”
“But you lost yours first.”

“Tru- Why is this suddenly a contest? This isn’t the thing you make contests out of” It got a little laugh from Peter, and just as Tony thought he was going to get out of this alright, Peter started crying again, loudly and lunged for Tony wrapping his small arms around him. Tony was in over his head, having no idea what to do and after a few awkward moments of being cried on he put his hand on Peter’s back and rubbed gently.

The next thing he knew was Pepper was standing over him and Peter as asleep on top of him. He had fallen asleep while trying to comfort Peter enough to sleep on his own. Pepper still refuses to delete the photo she took.
His Own Passcode

Chapter Summary

Peter feels like he should have known better than to get his hopes up with Tony.

When Peter was nine, he had a science project. They were studying natural disasters and had to make a display of a disaster of their choice.

He sat in the living room, books all around him open at different pages and had J.A.R.V.I.S display different footage of disasters, as well as having Volcano with Tommy Lee Jones playing on mute. As Tony hand come into the room tying his tie in place.

“Looking into a career in the office of Emergency Management? Because I probably know a guy who can get you a look on the inside.” He raises an eyebrow when he gets no response, whatever Peter was doing he was very engaged, so he comes over and looks over his shoulder.

“What’s got your attention, Stewart Little?”

Peter finally looks up and blinks at him as if surprised he was there.

“Huh? Oh, we have to make a natural disaster display. And I was thinking that I could do a volcano?”

“You’re not talking about papier-mâché and baking soda are you?”

“Well not the paper mache, no…” That was enough to get Tony curious.

“I’m listening.”

“Well, it’s all about magma and tectonics, right? I was thinking of putting the baking soda, vinegar and food dye all in capsules under some earth, potting mix or something and setting them up like a glo-stick that will break when there’s a shaken force.”

“And the resulting chemical reaction would break the surface, with liquid seeping into the dirt to form the volcano then the rest pops out.”

Tony finishes Peter’s thought to Peter’s excitement, taking Tony’s interest as his thinking up a good plan.

“How are you going to keep it from erupting at the sides of the display?”

“I was going to put some paper between the soil and the reaction with a hole cut into it” Tony gives a slight head shake.

“The paper could get too wet in tear, try balsa wood, it’s stronger than paper but still easy to cut, it also gives you a firmer line between the too so the soil doesn’t cause the reaction during transportation. What are you going to do to cause the reaction?”

Peter takes notes while Tony thinks out loud. Then he pauses.
“Uh… I was just going to shake the box myself.”

Tony smirks and raps his knuckles softly against his arm in a ‘come here’ gesture, and then starts heading to his garage. Peter blinks, knowing that since coming here he has never been allowed to go to the workshop. Realising that meant that he was actually just told to come to the workshop with Tony he snatches his notebook and rushes after him. As he catches up, Tony has already opened the door and breezed in. Peter lingers in the doorway watching with a quiet and appreciative awe, stepping in he slowly takes in everything around him, at the far end of the workshop he could see where it became the garage, with all of Tony’s expensive, but well looked after cars all lined up, computer screens were everywhere on delicate looking arms that could be manipulated into any position Tony needed, and then there were his robots.

Peter had never seen them in person, but he had seen a picture of Dum-E on a magazine cover with Tony when he had first built him, but he knew all of their names, Dum-E was the first, he was a free roaming bot, very clumsy and over eager, he reminded Peter of a puppy. And Butterfingers, Just looking at him Peter could tell was a heavier robot, he had casters with stabilisers, Peter guessed he was meant for heavy lifting and bracing but couldn’t move on his own. Which would explain why he was idly sitting by one of the cars as his arm swung in Peter’s direction to see the newcomer. Dum-E was next to Tony’s desk, apparently tidying it unnecessarily because Tony was shooing him away.

“Why are you here? No one told you to do this. Remember last tie? Of course, you do, now go get me a quarter-inch steel plate 2x2 feet. Why are you still here?” Watching Tony talk to his creation had Peter realise that the man’s face was very expressive, that is, Peter did know that his face was expressive, but for the most part, when he wasn’t making jokes, Tony did tend to look bored more often than not. For a long time, Peter thought it was because of him.

He approached the desk as Dum-E trundled off sounding dejected, then gave his father a curious look. He was going to ask him why he was here when Tony tosses a small pneumatic actuator. He blinks at it for a second, he knows what it is, but he’s not sure why he has it.

“I don’t….”

“What causes volcanoes?”

“A build-up of pressure caused by magma that has escaped during a tectonic plate shift.”

“What else do tectonics cause?” Then it dawns on Peter and he grins.

“Earthquakes. You want me to use an ‘earthquake’ as a real-time catalyst to cause the volcano.”

“I don’t want anything.” Tony shook his head with an amused grin. “This is your project, you can do whatever you want for a catalyst. I’m just… Expanding your options. Why settle for an A when you can get an A+?”

“I think my plan was an A+ because you saw it.”

“Never avoid a chance to go big”

“If I didn’t like the idea so much, I would call it overboard and egotistical.” Tony watches Peter for a second then runs a hand through his hair.

“You sound like your Mom.”

“Really?” Peter smiled but then looked incredibly lonely. Tony suddenly wishes he hadn’t said
anything, but luckily Dum-E displays a rare moment of good timing. Trundles over with the quarter-inch of steel. Which causes Tony to sigh dramatically.

“I said 2x2 feet. Did I even program measurements into you? Did you delete them? This is 3x7. Why do I even have this length? Why do I even keep you around?” He snatches the large sheet of metal from the bot and inspects it. “At least, it’s actually steel, now you go back and make sure you didn’t scuff my floor.” Dum-E warbles sadly, and it makes Peter laugh and he reaches out and pats Dum-e’s grip.

“I think you did a good job.”

“Don’t encourage him.” Tony grumbles but doesn’t have enough harshness in his words to mean it. But Dum-E chirps happily at Peter before wheeling off to check to see if he actually damaged the floor.

“So, what do you think? Rig up a tectonic plate for your volcano?” Tony asks as he wiggles the misshapen steel. After a moment, Peter nods. Tony lets him sit down and plan out how everything works while he cuts the steel down to a more reasonable size. The project took a week all up, with very little actual help from Tony in making it. At first Peter had started to think that he was giving him access to all his things to make sure Peter didn’t embarrass Tony, because every time he finished a part or tested something Tony would watch with a critical eye, make comments about rewiring or reinforcement or trying a different method and then work on his own things. It wasn’t until Peter had finished his final test that he realised why Tony hadn’t helped.

Tony had even said it himself, ‘it’s your project’. Tony was giving Peter access to the workshop so he could test safely and work on ideas himself, so when he finished he could say HE had made this and no one else.

Tony comes up behind him while he resets his volcano, putting in new vials and fresh dirt while trying to keep as much mess off his not book as possible because he was to hand that in with it, it’s not working. He flicks through the notebook and grins.

“You know, I think this is going to turn some heads.” Peter looks up at him and smiles.

“Don’t think it’s too much?”

“Of course, it is, but why waste talent on something you obviously could have done when you were four?” The boy gives him a bashful smile. “J.A.R.V.I.S.” He gestures for Peter to follow him as he walks to his desk. “Bring up the box.”

“At once, sir.”

“The box?” Peter’s starting to look a little confused until he looks at the screen in front of him, there’s a panel of numbers, arranged like a keypad underneath five empty boxes.

“You know, like a lock box. I have a lot of projects down here that people would love to get their hands on, so this workshop, it’s like a lock box of ideas, and not unlike a lock box, you need to get in with a code.” The boy nodded, every time he wanted to come in he had to wait for Tony to let J.A.R.V.I.S unlock the door, or wait for him to open it himself, not that that happened as often. “You’ve proved yourself kid, so put in a code, and remember it, because J.A.R.V.I.S is getting tired of unlocking the door for you.”

“On the contrary, I actually enjoy opening the door for young Master Parker.”

“Don’t remember asking you. Thanks.” Peter didn’t hear Tony and J.A.R.V.I.S, he was still staring
“Tony, are you sure?” He looks at Tony and he shrugs before running a hand over his goatee thoughtfully.

“You earned it. Besides, you might want to work on projects here at times I’m not here, I’m kind of not here all that much anyway.”

Peter smiled up at Tony and then entered his five digits. “Thanks”

“It’s nothing. Now, get this upstairs and go to bed. You have a project due tomorrow morning, and I have to go to Nevada before you get up.” Mentally, Peter sagged, he had really gotten used to working around Tony over the week, he had almost forgotten that he wasn’t always around. He sighs slightly then goes over to the project and picks it up.

“How long are you gone this time?”

“Three days.”

“Right. See you when you get back, I guess.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Quietly Peter just left the workshop and went to bed, as he lay there he wondered what exactly he was expecting from Tony and his letting him into the workshop. Probably just letting him have the best resources, he did keep saying that he deserved to work with the best. What if he said that to everyone who worked for him at Stark industries? At least, he knows a little in advance that he’s going to be on his own for three days, that’s new.

Whatever time it was that Tony left, it must have either been really early, or he had driven without Happy because he was sitting at the table reading a newspaper and drinking coffee.

“Hey, mini boss.”

“You can just call me Peter, Happy.”

“Sure I could, but that doesn’t sound nearly as good.” Peter just rolled his eyes, He and happy had this conversation a lot, and Peter was sure that he was wearing the man down, at least, that’s what he’d like to believe.

“Did Pepper leave with Tony?”

“Nah, Pepper’s at Stark Industries, she’s keeping track of the bosses every day.”

“So she’ll come here to see me then?” Happy looks at him for a moment then puts down his coffee.

“You know, the boss won’t mind if you bring some of your little friends over. It’s not like they can get into anything they shouldn’t with J.A.R.V.I.S on duty.” Peter can’t help but blink at Happy.
“Uh, yeah sure. I know that. But they’re all actors’ kids, so this place isn’t cool enough for them.” He lies, through his teeth. Because for the most part, the other kids were the kids of actors, or other big league names in business or industry. Peter just didn’t know how to connect with them and really, they all kind of intimidated him with how overly groomed and confident they were. Compared to them Peter was just some weedy little nerd from Queens, none of them were remotely interested in hanging out with him especially when they didn’t actually know who his father was, and as far as he was concerned, he liked it that way.

“Well, my nose won’t be out of joint if I find out there’s more than one of you in the back seat okay?”

“Thanks, Happy.” Peter gave him a small grin while grabbing some cereal to eat before he went to school.

Once he had gotten to school, he started to feel like showing off was a really bad idea. One boy just had a fish tank with sand, water and match boxes for skyscrapers, His ‘tsunami’ was just him lifting one side of the tank up, his match city fell down even before the water got to it. Everyone else, however, had done something normal, like papier mache, and dioramas. Needless to say that when the class saw Peter come in with a large box of dirt being transported very gingerly, they all kind of looked at him. Peter, at any rate, managed to not be nervous under their stares until he put the box down on his desk and sit down. No one approached him even though he could feel their curiosity about what he made, he guessed it was because he looked so nerdy, so asking him would obviously mean he was going to just nerd out and say weird words and explain everything for hours down to the little detail. So he just sighs and waits for class to start.

In order to keep things fair to the students, the teacher was going down the roll call. He said fairness, but everyone knew it was so people couldn’t all fight to go last. P for Parker meant that Peter was far enough down the roll that he might as well be at the end, and it suited him just fine because people were still eyeing his project and he would give anything if he could just show it and run right now.

“Parker, Peter.”

All eyes are on him again. Great.

Peter shuffles to the front and puts his box on the desk.

“I’ve picked a Volcano for my natural disaster. I’d like to thank Tommy Lee Jones for my inspiration.”

A couple of kids laughed, good, great, that made things a little easier. He did some quick set up, arming his chemicals and turning on the pneumatics. Everything was set to a timer so all he had to do was talk.

“Like some of you have said before. Volcanoes occur when there is a pressure build up due to tectonic plate movements under the surface. But did you know, that Volcanoes can also two disasters in one? Because in order for a volcano to form, it needs an earthquake.”

There’s a beat of pause and then the box starts to shudder, yes, he’s still timed it perfectly. His class stand and lean over their desks to see the box shimmy and shake.

“The violent movement in the places gives magma than normally lives under the crust a chance to come up to the surface, which then makes the ground start to billow.”
While he talks the soil in the box starts to bulge closer towards him.

“From there it will keep building until it reaches critical mass and blows.”

He looks at the box, then the teacher.

“Okay, so every test I did it erupted at different times so…”

He just sort of stood back, everyone else, including the teacher leant forward. A minute almost passed, everyone stared, then started to look at him. Of course, it’s going to fail, 10 tests successful and it’s the one everyone needs to see that fa-

Peter doesn’t get a chance to finish that thought because finally there’s enough pressure for the top of the volcano to almost pop off sending the creamy reaction to pour down the sides and all over the environment in the box. Everyone else had gotten a polite clap, Peter had gotten cheers.

Some of the students asked if he had a parent in movie special effects, he just shook his head and said his dad was an engineer and let him use what was laying around. Which wasn’t a lie.

One of the kids accused him of cheating, saying his dad built it for him. Panicking, Peter had squeaked that he didn’t which only encouraged the boy to say it was obvious. He was silenced by the teacher, who said considering the school he wouldn’t be surprised if someone’s nanny had actually done their projects. One or two hands curled defensively around some dioramas. But other than that one boy, everyone else thought it was a really exciting display.

Peter spent the rest of the day almost on top of the world, even having a few jokes with Happy, when he got home he went straight to the Workshop, putting in his code before opening the door.

“Everyone thought it was the coolest! The teacher wants me to present it at the f…”

Right, Tony was in Nevada.

“Fare…”

Only Butterfingers and Dum-E were in the workshop, like always. They shuttered their claws open at him. Peter wasn’t sure if that was them clapping for his success, or saying hello.

“That is excellent news, Young Master. Shall I inform, Sir of how it all went?” J.A.R.V.I.S, at least, sounded like he was praising him. All the excitement went out of the boy, his shoulders sagging.

“No, don’t worry about it. I can tell him when he gets back.” He turns and leaves the workshop, heading up the stairs. It might be late afternoon, but Peter just wants to go to bed and sleep. Nothing like a big success to show you how lonely you are.
To Steal a Prince

Chapter Summary

It takes having a child himself for Tony to understand the logic behind why people kidnap for ransom.

Chapter Notes

Now, I'm vague with the kidnappings themselves for two reasons:

One: They have potential to be triggering.
Two (And more importantly): As I have only TV and Movies to go on for how kidnappings work, and that there are so many factors on what could happen. I'm not even going to attempt it.

So this is why it focuses less on who's taken, and more who they were taken from.

Also, I know I'm jumping kind of quick through Peter's pre-adolescence, that's because I want to focus more about Tony and Peter with the Avengers now in the picture.

No matter how some people make it look, stealing is hard. It gets even harder when what you’re stealing is a child. Especially when that prince is a son of Stark. When Tony was young he had been kidnapped three times. The first time was completely botched, the kidnappers were over eager and completely new to the whole grab a child, hide them and demand a ransom. The police had found them within five hours, when they got to Tony he wasn't scared, traumatised, or hurt. He was just confused, he was almost five and was in a park with his nanny she had looked away for a few moments, she was taking out snacks for Tony on a bench, she looked up, he was gone.

You see, the downside of being in the public eye, and a socialite’s son is that you get used to strangers coming up to you and talking to you, when you also make things everyone wants to know about, you get used to them wanting to show you things to, you just don’t question it. So Tony had gone with the man and woman without question.

After that, Tony was kept more secure, but it’s the bold weasel that goes for the protected nests. When Tony was asked to identify the people who grabbed him when he was seven, that’s what he identified them as. They were narrow faced with beady eyes, they demanded their random and after a very tense few days it was paid, they left Tony tied to a chair as they fled with the money, this one had been pretty scary for him, but he was still left confused. He never understood the point in holding him for ransom or taking him seeing as they spent most of the time threatening to kill him if he kept talking. Tony has babbled when uncertain his whole life.

The last time he was taken he was ten, and it had been terrifying they had masks, and guns, and didn’t even try to be nice or gentle. They were demanding a ransom, but what they were doing was instilling fear. Tony had been in the car with a driver, his mother and a bodyguard. They drove a truck into the side of the Rolls Royce killing the driver and guard grabbing only Tony while Maria
screamed for him, Tony was unconscious, he still can’t remember what happened before or after the crash, but he remembers waking up in a dark room with only a small bulb for light and a blanket for comfort, every few hours they would leave him water and toast. The papers reported that they threatened to kill Tony unless Howard handed them over weapon plans and money.

Tony was being dragged out of his cell when an organised task force infiltrated the building and got him out, for the most part, he blocked that memory out but he always remembers eagles when asked about that kidnapping.

It took nearly thirty years but Tony finally understood why someone kidnapa a person’s child for ransom.

The money part was obvious, but if you need money you can rob a bank, or scam an old lady. No, you steal a kid and demand money, because you get a thrill from the desperation in a person’s voice to hear their child’s voice, the willingness to keep quiet from the police to ensure the child’s safety, the eagerness to hand over as much wealth it takes for that small little life that doesn’t mean too much to just any person, because that small little life is part of you.

Peter was eleven, his class was on a field trip to the Hayden Planetarium. The job was very well planned, they clearly had followed Peter the entire trip, watching where he sat for the display watching his every move, they send a young girl to talk to him when he came out of the display, saying she couldn’t find her parents, Peter being a trusting and level headed young man had said he’d walk with her to the information desk because they could help. When they got there that’s when everything happened at once, the power was cut the whole building went dark, in the ensuing chaos, Peter was grabbed and dragged out of the building when he came into the light and blinked he saw three men in suits and sunglasses pulling him along.

“What’s happening?!” Peter starts to struggle, looking worried.

“It’s okay Mr. Parker, your father found out someone was trying to grab you, so he sent us to keep an eye on you, the second the lights went out we knew it was time to act. We’re taking you to Stark Industries now.”

Peter stopped struggling and went with them without a fuss. Because when you are surrounded by the familiar, you don’t question it, and ever since he came to live with Tony, it was rare for Peter to be outside without someone in a suit and sunglasses keeping an eye out, even if it was just Happy.

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Tony can’t remember what happened to an hour of his day. He can remember the morning, Peter was excited about his trip to the planetarium, and started asking about how many components inside the space stations and shuttles were from Stark Industries, Tony remembers the conversation;

“Let me look it up at work, I can give you an exact number when I get home. How does that sound?”

“Cool! Can I have blue prints too?”

“Only if you don’t show up your teachers today. And I’ll know if you do.” Peter beams at him
“Tony, why would you think I would ever do that?” giving him a poorly made innocent look.

“You’re track record and your bloodline, Starks cause trouble for everyone.”

“Even Starks?”

“Especially Starks.”

After that he had gone to work, he hadn’t moved from his blueprint table since he’d come in. Pepper came in with Obadiah and a man at 2:34, Tony can remember the time very well. Pepper was pale, and clutching a manila folder, it contained the list of Stark components for everything man-made and orbital, with blueprints on a CD inside, Obie was stoic and looking distracted. Tony could see she was holding it tighter than she needed to, in fact, she was probably crushing what was inside which told him right away something was wrong, Pepper was always careful with things in folders.

“Mr. Stark, I’m afraid, we have some bad news.” The man began, but Tony wasn’t looking at him, he was looking at Pepper, she looked like she was about to faint and he went straight to her and he and Obie lead her to his desk to sit. “Mr. Stark, I’m afraid it is my duty to inform you that there was an incident at the planetarium today, and your son is missing, we believe he was targeted.” The officer was diligently fighting on to supply them both with information but Tony stopped listening. They had Peter. Which they? Was it even a they? What If it was only one person, a sick person?

Tony’s stomach lurched, and realised that he was suddenly hoping this was a kidnapping for ransom and not a kidnapping for…

He shook his head to get rid of any thought like that.

“Tell me everything you know, I need to know everything.”

The officer repeated himself a little, and he seemed to be understanding about it.

“First, I want to introduce myself. I’m Robert Jones, I’m with the FBI’s Kidnapping and missing persons unit. Normally we aren’t involved this early, however due to the rather extravagant way your son was taken, the school and planetarium felt it necessary to get in contact with us straight away.”

“That’s not telling me what you know.” Tony looked unimpressed, Obie tried to placate Tony, telling him the man is only trying to do his job, but Tony ignored him and focused on Jones, causing Obie to sigh. Jones seemed surprised by this, he was used to denial, panic, grief, and desperation, he wasn’t however prepared for determination. After a moment’s pause he went over the details they knew, Peter was last seen with a young girl, by the information desk before the power went out, the surrounding grounds caught distant footage of a young boy surrounded by three suited men leading him into a black sedan and then nothing. Tony was beginning to demand the footage when he heard a sharp inhale.

“Tony.” Everyone in the room turned to Pepper, she was shaking with her eyes locked onto the screen. He came over to see what had shocked her. She was in his email program, there was a new email with the subject ‘RE: Young Stark’ he could hear Obie mumble under his breath, he clicked the mail and read the contents allowed.

“Stark, we have your boy. We went to a lot of trouble to get him, and we would really like to be compensated for their trouble of looking after the boy. But if we don’t see any compensation then things are going to turn soul. He looks a bit scared, he might not enjoy himself if that were to happen. You have three hours to put 5 bags of 2 million dollars each in the locations in the txt file or the next thing you’ll know is that getting your son back means you need to get a needle and thread and start
hoping the bits that turn up are good enough to sew back together.”

Tony opened both of the attachments that were with the email, one was the locations for the bag drops the other was a photo of Peter, looking dirty, confused and scared, Tony went silent and started pacing, Pepper was crying into the side of Obie’s suit who in turn looked lost and angry as he absently pets her shoulder. Jones, on the other hand, re-read the email and started making calls and was already in full motion, everything about him smooth, rehearsed and calm. In the ensuing madness, Tony left the room and at first nobody knew where.

Obie did what he did best, he took over, authorising the removal of the money from Tony’s account and put into bags, all with tracking beacons as agents began to silent head out into position, Pepper and Obie put the bags into the locations. Pepper was beside herself with fear for Peter and fury for Tony, the deadline was fast approaching and Tony had just left his son’s fate, Peter’s fate, in their hands. She knew he was irresponsible at times but this was just beyond a joke.

As the deadline hit nothing happened. No one moved on the locations for the FBI to pounce. An hour went by, still nothing, a second went by Panic was starting to settle in, what had happened? There was no Peter, and no kidnappers, Jones just announced they were shutting the drop down when a man came out from the bushes at the Bernice Bennett Park location, he had a small boy with him looking scared. He looked at the spot and found the bag and seemed pleased, Agents started popping up everywhere, and he pulled a gun on Peter and everyone froze. He started to shout that if anyone moves he’d shoot the kid, but was drowned out by a Pave Hawk helicopter hovering menacingly overhead. Then a voice broadcast down to everyone below.

“If you don’t drop my kid, you’re going to have your day ruined by a disgruntled USAF sniper who was meant to be taking his leave today but was forced onto a helicopter just as he kissed his wife hello.” Tony paused “He’s really hoping you don’t put him down.”

Unfortunately for the sniper, the man dropped Peter and tried to run, unfortunately for the kidnapper, the sniper decided to wing him anyway. The helicopter sank out of the sky touching the grass gently as Tony steps out, followed a moment later by Rhodie, before the Helicopter takes off again, and back to the airbase.

The second Peter saw him, he ran.

“Dad!”

Tony was already crouching for him as heard Peter shout, after 3 and a half years of being called ‘Tony’ the sudden ‘daddy’ caught him off balance, and so did Peter, he didn’t slow down when he got to Tony and barrelled straight into him knocking him onto his back. All he could do was shush him softly while hugging him tight murmuring that he was safe.

“I was just trying to help a girl.” He gasped between halting breaths when he started to calm down, Tony couldn’t help but smile.

“Always causing trouble” Tony just kept holding him tight.

Pepper spent the rest of the day crying, she cried when she got to the scene, cried when Peter hugged her, Cried to Tony sorry for doubting him, and just cried because she was happy that Peter was safe and back. In the following months Peter got tense whenever the light changed suddenly, and because he was kept in a sewer while he was being held, whenever he got the slightest chill he would put on more clothes, and showed a great distaste for being anywhere damp. Over time he grew out of most of it, especially now that he was old enough to start working on a real project with Tony in the workshop, things more interesting than Tony had let him play with before.
By his twelfth birthday, with Tony’s help, Peter had built his first car.
Said in the Heat of the Moment

Chapter Summary

Peter yells at Tony before he leaves for Afghanistan, and ends up blaming himself for what happens.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is longer than the last three, and the next few will be about the same length.

As it turns out, when you're writing alongside movie-events, means chapters get longer.

Which means it's going to take a little longer between chapters until after the events of Iron Man 3, unless I get a taste for writing longer chapters.

Please enjoy!

The last year and a half had been painful for everyone involved. Peter had not only hit puberty, but he hit it hard, and while he was still a weedy dorky-looking fifteen-year-old his hormones dealt with the situation gracefully. In this case, gracefully means with a hair-trigger temper.

On the whole, Peter was taking puberty really well. At least, he never got into trouble at school.

Yet.

He had been up late working on a project, and he had heard Tony coming in late. Blinking and rolling his shoulders he came out into the hall, both wanting to see how the award presentation had gone and to see if Tony would check the numbers he had for a chemistry project. It was a giggle that made him stop in his tracks, and it was what he saw that made him just turn around and go back to his room.

Tony was tangled up almost literally with some blonde woman, she had been chewing on his bottom lip as he was working his tie undone. Peter had no idea who she was, not that this was a surprise Peter never knew who Tony was with until he heard about it at school the following week. Or in some cases, the following day, because his dad sometimes had a habit of never keeping it to just one woman a week. Peter still remembers the Maxim cover model twins, and he really wished he didn’t, because there were things a boy should never have to see, at least not without google, and defiantly not including your old man.

The next morning he was up at 6am, eating his breakfast. Hoping that Tony would already be in the workshop by now so he wouldn’t have to deal with his dad’s ‘got laid’ face. Sadly he didn’t have such luck while Tony had clearly been in the workshop before coming into the kitchen, he must have been out of snacks down there because he came striding in his work tank top and sweatpants heading to the fridge.
“Morning pumpkin eater.”

“Hey” Peter went to a lot of effort to sound like he didn’t care, and it must have worked because Tony paused mid-hover in the fridge before straightening up to look at him.

“Something wrong?”

“You care?”

“Well, the asking usually implies something to that effect.” Tony gives a vague shrug and wipes his hands on his pants when he realises there’s grease on them.

“You really don’t.”

“Peter.”

“No, you don’t. Stop even pretending you do. Can you remember what you said before you left for Vegas yesterday?” Tony just stares at him, Peter knew he had forgotten. “You said you’d be home in time to check over my calculus and my chemistry work to make sure I had the calculations right.”

“You’re the top of the class, I don’t need to check your answers.” Peter just groans and hunches over his corn flakes.

“You know what. It doesn’t matter. Just go back to whatever.”

“Clearly it does, you want me to check it over, fine get them out.” Peter shakes his head at his bowl.

“What’s the point? It’s not some cute blonde, so you’re not going to actually pay attention to it.”

Tony looks over his shoulder in the direction of his room, knowing that that’s where he left Ms. Brown… Or was it Everheart? Before looking back at Peter.

“Don’t really think I paid any attention to what she was saying.” Peter looks up at him and looks appalled.

“Oh my god. I really cannot believe you said that.”

“What? I offered she said yes, what’s more even to it?”

“That’s some great morals to instil in a kid, thanks, dad.”

“You’re going to get tonal with me?”

“No, I’m going to school. I’m really not in the mood to deal with you being… You.” He pushes his bowl away from him and stands up, grabbing his backpack off the counter and shouldering it.

“Sorry to say, but I’m always me, so you’re always going to have to deal with this.”

“Wait. Are you really telling your fifteen-year-old son that he has to always has to deal with the fact his dad spends more time in other women’s beds than in his own? That you come home from parties at ridiculous hours, and when you are home and sober you’re down in the workshop or just being Dismissive of Pepper. Is that what you’re saying?” He almost glares at Tony, daring him to disagree with anything he just said. Tony just stares at him, as if confused as to where all this is coming from.

“It’s moments like this, that I wish Aunt May was able to take me in from the start.” He starts heading for the kitchen door.
“I’m not done talking to you.”

“Good for you. Because I’m done.” He leaves the kitchen heading for the door.

“Damn it, Peter, if you –“ Peter stops and looks at him, clearly fuming and unimpressed.

“You know what dad. Good luck with your flight, and I hope Jericho does exactly what it’s meant to.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“I hope it kills people.” Before Tony had a chance to react Peter starts running towards the front door and all Tony can hear is a resounding slam as Peter storms off towards the driveway just was Happy pulls up with the car. The car doesn’t even stop as Peter just gets in while it moves, demanding the Happy doesn’t stop and to just take him to school.

Tony stares at the empty room for a moment then heads down to the workshop again, not coming out until Pepper forces him out several hours later so he can get on his now very late flight with Rhodie.

It was almost two days later when Pepper and Peter found out that the armoured convey that Tony was a part of had been attacked. Another day to find out that Tony wasn’t part of the survivors or the deceased. Peter just couldn’t bring himself to speak, this was his fault. He said he wanted Jericho to kill people, and what if it had and so people got back at him for it.

Tony, his dad, could be dead.

But he and Pepper got the news at the same time, and Pepper had fallen apart, a mixture of shock and tears. All Peter could thing was that he can’t tell Pepper what he said, but he couldn’t ignore her either, Peter hugged her and tried to be strong for her. As Pepper stayed at the Malibu mansion treating it like a base of operations, Peter took the opportunity to be extra good, to work off the horrible things he had said before leaving for school that day. Making her tea, attempting to cook for her, but in the end, he just ended up ordering take-out from her favourite place.

Rhodie checked in a lot, letting them know how the search was going because he was sure that someone had Tony, he was known across the world for his weapons technology, and it made him a commodity. After a month, Peter stopped listening to Rhodie’s check in’s. It stopped sounding like Tony was a person, just an item. It wasn’t Rhodie’s fault he probably didn’t know he was doing it, or he was doing it to keep rational, but it was a whole lot of not finding Peter’s dad.

When not at school, or helping Pepper, Peter kept finding himself in the workshop, he looked at the hot rod by the door. It was sitting there with the engine beside it, all the tools in a tool box that were left open they were put in awkwardly which made him suspect it was Dum-E that had put them away. It had escaped Peters notice, but whenever he came down the stairs and into the shop, Dum-E and Butterfingers would turn expectantly to him, as if this time it would be their creator coming in.

If he knew, he would have probably felt awful for getting their hopes up every time. As it was he would come in, sit behind Tony’s main computer table, pull his feet up on the chair hugging his legs to his chest and hiding his face in between.

“J.A.R.V.I.S?” he mumbled one day from behind his knees.

“Young Master?”
“Countdown.”

“Mr. Stark has been out of communication for 34 days, 15 hours and 32 minutes.” Peter drew in a long breath and let it out just as slowly. “Minutes.”

“49,963 minutes, Young Master.” J.A.R.V.I.S pauses for a second. “Young Master, is there anything I can do?” Peter was silent, curling in on himself a little knowing that a computer just asked him a question and sounded worried. His father created that computer, an emotive and free thinking program that had more personality and drive than a third of the kids at his school. And Peter blames himself for what happened to J.A.R.V.I.S’ programmer and creator.

“Uh, no. Not that I know of. I’m fine, I just…. Need a moment to myself.”

“As you wish.”

The room was silent again, not even the robots were making a sound, like sulking dogs in corners feeling like they have upset their master and that’s why he hasn’t returned. Peter stayed in the silence for a long time, while he knows he could ‘have a moment’ in his room, his room was just that, his and what he needed right now wasn’t what was his, he just wanted to feel like Tony was still there, that he was just quietly working somewhere in the workshop.

After another minute he heard tinkering, Tony was muttering to himself before accusing dummy of not being of useful. He stared into the dim light coming in past his legs as he listened before slowly looking up. It was a video, he was working on some sort of propulsion system the video must have been recorded for later review. Blinking Peter sat quietly while he watched the screen, as Tony turned to the camera, obviously butterfingers, because Dum-E was in the background. Looking professional even in a worn tee shirt and jeans he let the parameters of the test be known and then went to set up a controlled test burn. It was successful, and Tony’s only indication he was pleased was his shoulders pushing back and a slight grin on his face.

It was when the video turned off, Peter realised he was holding his breath. He let it out slowly and smiled.

“Thanks, J.A.R.V.I.S.”

“I live to serve, Young Master. Shall I play it again? Or bring up a new one?”

“No. I mean thanks. But it’s fine.” He fidgets with his shoelace for a second before standing up and heading to the door, pausing as he opens it. “But keeping them close for easy access, wouldn’t hurt?”

“Of course, Young Master.”

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“I’ve got him, Pepper, I’ve got him and I’m bringing him home.”

Peter was quiet on the way to the airbase. The last three months had been terrible for him, at least, when his parents died there was closure, there was a funeral he was there, there was grief. Half way through the third month, he was losing hope that Rhodie would make good on his promise to find Tony, that there would be no closure, and possibly worst of all, he would have had to live with the
fact that his last words to Tony came from a place of frustration and hurt.

Glancing at Pepper, he held her hand, he could see he tears in her eyes. Ever since Rhodie called with the good news, she had been beyond happy, Tony was important to her after all, plucking her out of accounting after an incident with pepper spray and one of Tony’s bodyguards and giving her an amazing break in being his personal assistant, which gave her access to worlds she would have never dared to dream of until now. So every now and then she would cry, she would never make a sound but the tears still would drop without any shame or fear of mocking. Giving Peter’s hand a squeeze she looked back at him with a wet smile.

“You don’t seem happy, Peter.” He sunk into the plush leather a little.

“Not really sure if he’ll want to see me.” Pepper’s eyebrows raised at him with confusion, the look combine with her watering eyes almost made him wish he hadn’t said anything.

“Peter. You’re his son. Of course, he will.” Her face settled into a fond, but still very damp smile.

“But after what I sa-“

“If Tony refused to see anyone who yelled at him, he would be a very lonely man. Even I’ve shouted at him before. And now, I’ll be able to shout at him again.” She seemed almost to take strength from that statement, which should have been weirder than it was. “Tony isn’t like that and I have no doubt he’s missed you”

Peter didn’t reply, he just sat quietly for the rest of the journey and didn’t look at all like he was going to move when the car came to a stop on Edwards Air Bases runway as the C-17 taxis into position before dropping the cargo door to reveal a battered and Bruised Tony Stark, who looked no less proud and confident as ever. The teen watched him come down and talk to Pepper, then saw him glance around before looking at the car while he knew his dad couldn’t actually see him from there, he still sunk into the soft leather seats trying to hide in them.

Tony made his way over to the car and knocked on the window next to Peter before opening the door.

“Keeping my spot warm?”

Peter just looked up at him, there was a fond smile on his face but all Peter could see were the cuts, though the playful tone wasn’t lost on him, he blinked at him slowly before sliding to the middle, and Tony slipped in after him, closing the door.

“So, still angry at me huh?” Peter went still, and looked at Tony wide-eyed, did he really just say that? “Guess I can’t really blame you.” Peter couldn’t find his words and just shook his head instead before managing to blurt out.

“But this was all my fault!” And then it was Tony’s turn to look surprised.

“Not. The direction I thought this was going to go in. Peter, how is this your fault?”

“I wanted Jericho to kill people, and then you got taken, I thoug-“

“Okay, I’m going to stop you, Peter.” Tony went to the trouble of holding up a finger to punctuate his silencing of his son.
“This isn’t your fault, this is power hungry crazy people who technically took advantage of my irresponsibility.” His hand twitched as if he was going to touch Peter, but he stopped and just fidgeted with his fingers again out of habit. “Okay, I might not have liked what you said three months ago, that and nearly dying kind of put perspective in my life.”

“You almost died?” Peter paled

“Not really, but I could have. But we fixed it.” Peter’s eyes goggle at him.

“H-How?” Tony loosens his tie and unbuttons his shirt, revealing the arc reactor. The teenager looks almost awed at the soft glow and the super quiet hum, taking in how torn, red, and painful the scarring around the item keeping him alive. “This is…” He looks up at his father. “It… I thought it didn’t work.”

“The original plans weren’t effective, but death and wanting to avoid it are great motivators.” Peter didn’t say anything, just stared. He was unable to really understand what Tony was saying, well, intellectually he understood all of it, Tony had found a way around the problems Howard had been having with the Arc reactor and had adapted it to suit whatever reason it was to be installed in his chest, and that that reason was to keep him alive. But emotionally all he could hear was that his dad needed a new heart and nearly died getting it. In the back of his mind he heard a knock on the window and was faintly aware that Tony was doing up his shirt as Pepper slipped into the car beside Peter, after a moment she realised that her hand was on his shoulder and he looked at her though his mind was still reeling from seeing the reactor and how aggravated the skin around it was, if it was hurting Tony in any way, he wasn’t showing it.

“Tony, you have to go to the hospital. The doctor has to look at you.” Tony gave a small dismissive head shake to her demanding request.

“I don’t have to do anything. I’ve been in captivity for three months. There are two things I want to do. One, I want an American cheeseburger, and the other –“ Pepper glances at Peter before giving Tony a frown and cutting him off.

“That’s enough of that.”

“It’s not what you think. I want you to call for a press conference.” Both son and Personal Assistant blink, giving him a confused look, Tony was never one to really enjoy press conferences, so his wanting to hold own himself was surprising.

“Call for a press conference? What on earth for?” Pepper queried, canting her head to the side looking equal parts confused and suspicious.

“Hogan, drive. Cheeseburger first.” Pepper and Peter exchange a look as the Happy starts the car moving before Pepper starts making all the appropriate calls.

Happy was told by Tony to take Peter home then come back to get him and Pepper after the conference, at first, Peter was startled, the young scared boy inside him rearing his head.

He had only just got his dad back, and now he was being pushed away by him??

He had the small reassurance that things could get too noisy and pushy with what he was going to
say and he didn’t want the camera’s turning to Peter.

Coming home to the news feed of Tony’s conference explained to Peter why Tony had made a good choice.

“That is why, effective immediately, I am shutting down the weapons manufacturing division of Stark Industries.”

Peter couldn’t believe his ears or his eyes as the whole room erupted into questions and camera flashes, reporters almost climbing over each other to get more out of Mr. Stark about his declaration. Absently he couldn’t help how surprised but quietly furious Obadiah was about the announcement, it was a look he often adopted when Tony came out of left field with something, though usually, in the end, he didn’t seem to mind because it would always benefit Stark Industries, but this time? It’s hard for there to be a benefit when you close down your primary contract base.

At least, that’s what Peter thought.

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Despite Pepper and Obadiah having to go into damage control over Tony closing down the weapons department, and Rhodie being somewhat annoyed with Tony’s actions, life had for the most part gone back to normal, and it was something that made Peter feel so at ease. Though he had noticed that Tony didn’t really leave the house anymore, part of it Peter had taken as Tony lying low like Obadiah had told him too, however, he didn’t even go to the office. Instead spending all of his time in the workshop.

At first, Peter spent a lot of time sticking close to the workshop, sitting on the staircase watching him work on something that Peter was currently too shy to ask about, or just listening for noises coming from the stairwell to make sure here was still there.

One night, Peter was doing homework in the living room when Tony came up the stairs two at a time, something he did when he was a man on a mission, curiously, Peter looked up at him.

“You’re still up?” Tony looked at Peter with equal curiosity, who looked at his laptop when the question was asked.

“Well, it’s only 10?”

“Huh.”

“It’s also Friday night.”

“That, I knew. Don’t stay up too late.” Peter’s shoulders sank as Tony started to head to his room, he was hoping not to hear those words again.

“You’re going out?” He sounded defeated, causing Tony to stop.

“Firefighter’s Fund Gala. Apparently they forgot my invitation. So I’m going to crash my own party.” Peter looks at him for a long moment then just turns back to his laptop, sinking into the couch. The reaction is enough to make Tony come closer out of curiosity. “Something wrong with that?”
“Nothing, I guess. It’s also not my business if you want to start picking up girl’s aga-“

“Who said anything about picking up girls?” The teen turns around to look back up at Tony, looking at him as if he asked him a stupid question.

“That’s the only reason you willingly go to those things because you always make Pepper make all the important work connections.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him, wondering why he’s surprised that his own flesh and blood is actually perceptive about his old habits.

“Actually, it wasn’t on my mind.” Peter gives him a disbelieving look. “It’s true, there was a small story on the news about it, and they said they didn’t think they’d see me there. So…” He searched for the words he wanted, but Peter filled it in for him.

“So you thought you’d go and prove them wrong?” He shook his head with a slight smirk, really the man was more of a teenager than he was sometimes. Tony grinned back.

“If I didn’t shake things up occasionally, what would all those YouTubers have to do with their time?

“Go back to posting kittens, and autotuned news reports?”

“I’m going to get dressed.” Tony turned, rolling his eyes and trying not to look too amused at Peter’s reply as he head towards his room again.

“You’ll be back?” Tony looks over his shoulder at him. “Tonight?” Peter had gone back to looking at his laptop, but even from this angle, Tony could see that Peter was trying not to look hopeful.

“Sometime tonight. I promise I’ll be alone.” Peter seems to relax at his words and Tony finally makes it to his room to change.

When Tony did come home, Peter was asleep, he had never heard the destruction that Tony created in his workshop, furious at Obadiah’s betrayal, and feeling helpless to do anything about Golmera. He also hadn’t heard Tony leave in his newly sprayed suit while Peter had known he was working on something, he’d watched him after all, Peter was under the impression that Tony had felt the need to make rocket boots with stabilisers. He thought it weird and couldn’t think of any real practical application for them, but he knew that Tony had a habit of doing things that only made sense after he had made his big reveal.

At first, Peter was disappointed when J.A.R.V.I.S said that Tony wasn’t home, but he was reassured that Tony had come home, alone. Then when out to deal with a problem that he had found out about. So Peter with a shrug had just gone to school, at least feeling glad that his dad was, at least, true to his words this time. All in all Peter’s day had been relatively normal, and on the whole boring, that was until Happy came to pick him up from school at the end of the day.

“Good day at school, mini boss?” Peter shrugged as he got into the car.

“Nothing blew up, girls laughed at me and I only got stuffed in one locker.”

“Looks like things are on the up then.” Happy turned to him as he sits in the driver’s seat. “You want me to. You know, have words with this guy?”

“Uh. No, great offer. But yeah. I don’t think I need my driver punching a guy in the face. Besides, don’t they say ‘Violence isn’t the answer’?” Peter smirks a look that Happy returns.
“Oh, yeah. Of course, you’re right, that’s why there’s world peace right now.” They chuckle, then Happy clears his throat. “Let’s get you home then.” Peter buckles up and gets comfortable for traffic roll home. During the drive, Peter distracted himself by playing a game on his phone, when suddenly he hears a phone ring. He stares at his phone for a moment knowing it wasn’t his ringtone, but still expecting it to be his phone until he heard Happy talking into his Bluetooth.

“Hogan. Do you need picking u- I. Of course?” He glances back at Peter who just gives him a curious look-back, leaning in to see if he can hear. “Heading back, Is there som- Right. Can do. I’ll take him there right now.” He hung up and took out the Bluetooth from his ear.

“Happy?”

“Ms. Potts wants you to stay with me tonight.”

“Uh. Why?” Happy doesn’t reply, just focusing on the road. “Okay, you’re kind of freaking me out. I think there’s a law about freaking out teenagers unprovoked.” Peter starts to fidget in his seat, giving a hopeful smile, like there’s some sensible reason like there’s going to be some sort of party being thrown and they want him out the way. Even though Tony’s been basically hiding at home and has only left the house maybe three times that Peter can remember. Or, Tony’s gotten overly wrapped up in a project and has done some of his own remodelling making home a bit of a safety hazard.

“She didn’t say. Just that you should stay with me and not to go near the house of Stark industries.”

Peter can’t help but feel panic seep in.

“Where’s dad?”

“He’s at home and he’s fine, Ms. Potts just wants you to stay with me.”

“Yeah, because when my dad’s fine there’s no reason to keep me away from him.” Happy grips the wheel tighter and sighs.

“Sorry kid, but I know as much as you do. But I’m your bodyguard as well as Mr. Starks, so I’ve I’m told to keep you safe at my place. It’s what’s happening.”

Heavily Peter throws himself into the back of the car seat, pushing himself against the plush leather as he drags his fingers through his hair. Glancing at the doors, he could get back to the mansion without Happy. Unfortunately, his logical mind takes over reminding him that these people are not just his family, but have only ever done their best to keep him happy and safe.

So Peter stayed in the car, fidgeting with his phone quietly wondering if he should text Tony, but losing his nerve, what if something was happening and texting him could be the worst thing Peter could do right now. Glaring at his phone he turns it off and stuffs it in his bag. Hoping ‘out of sight, out of mind’ really was as true as people claimed.

It wasn’t.

Happy did try to make Peter feel comfortable in his home, but while Peter’s home was opulent and fancy, Happy’s was the definition of a bachelor pad, or a gym. The walls were bare except for a few posters of boxing matches, and two framed photos of cars, a Lotus and a Mercedes. Peter thought it was weird, to have those particular cars. But he guessed that the style of the car and the overall art of the photo was actually kind of cool. He had clothes lying over the back of the couch, which he was
in the process of scooping up, on the counter there were a few Chinese containers that hadn’t been thrown out yet, Peter wondered if that was today’s lunch. There was a punching bag hung from the roof in one corner along with several sets of weights.

“I’ll change the sheets and you can stay in my room. I can couch it for a few days.”

“Uh, no, I can sleep on the couch. It’s fine.” Happy smirked.

“You can sleep on yours maybe, but my couch doesn’t cost as much as yours.” Peter looked at the couch, it was very worn and battered in places.

“Doesn’t dad, you know. Pay you really well?”

“He pays the best I’ve seen. But that’s all in a bank, I like living like this.” Then he grins. “Less likely to get robbed.”

Peter grins back at him because he, at least, knew that was right, at school he never put on airs, everyone, for the most part, everyone thought he was there on a scholarship, or at least was from a family rich enough to send him there but not rich enough for useful networking. Because of this even though he was bullied, he was never bullied out of money.

Despite the nagging worry in the back of his mind, he actually had a good amount of fun with Happy, they watched WWF with pizza and chips, Peter couldn’t avoid laughing at how into it Happy got, even though he knew it was fake, Peter even felt himself getting super into it after a while, the pantomime drama of it all, the over the top psyche outs to the other wrestler, the costumes. Oh boy, the costumes. They were just so brightly coloured and silly, Peter found it endearing, weirdly.

Soon enough Peter had started to doze off and Happy pushed him off to bed.

He didn’t get to sleep long, it was 1 am when Happy knocked on the door.

“Peter?” Peter sat up slowly looking up at him groggily, as he heard Happy's voice.

“Uhh?” Then he heard two people came into the room, which was odd, he blinked the sleep out and turned on the light, staring at the suited man next to Happy, who had a pleasant yet insistent look on his face. “If this is about that Library book, I didn’t mean to set it on fire and I did put a fifty in the cover so they could buy a new one.” If Peter wasn’t so tired, he would have known that the state library wasn’t going to send a man in a suit to scold him, and they especially wouldn’t have sent him to Happy’s apartment.

“This isn’t about a book. It’s about Mr. Stark.” The man in the suit said calmly, Peter practically leapt out of the bed.

“What about my dad?!”

“He’s in the hospital, something happened tonight and I have been sent to get you as well as debrief you on what’s happened.”

Peter starts hopping impatiently from one foot to the other, he knew this person wasn’t bad, Happy had let him in after all.

“Well then let’s go, what happened.”

The man gestured for him to leave the room and Peter walks out, with Happy close behind him.
“He got into… A situation. Involving Obadiah Stane.”

Peter doesn’t even look for shoes as he gets ready to leave, he just turns to look at the man looking horrified.

“Is Obie okay?” The man shakes his head slowly, the teen’s shoulders droop. “What happened to them?”

“Stane created a machine build from the designs of the suit Mr. Stark used to escape from Afghanistan. And tried to kill him with it.”

It took Peter a moment to realise that Happy was now holding him up.

“Take me to him. I need to go to the hospital.”

Without another word the man who soon identified himself as Agent Coulson lead him down to a car along with Happy and they were taken to the hospital Tony was. Coulson told him that he was fine just currently sedated so he wouldn’t try to leave while they made sure that the Reactor wasn’t going to shut down, although it was flickering occasionally but was otherwise steady and still keeping him alive, he also told him about Tony’s suit and the fight between machines.

Both Pepper and Peter stayed by the bed during the night, with Happy coming in with food and coffee.

Tony woke at his usual 6am sitting up with a groan, which only got louder when a split second later there was a young scruffy-haired teen in his lap clinging to him for dear life.

“You do know, this stopped being cute after you turned 5 right?” Tony smirked over Peter to Pepper who just sighed, more at the fact he was awake than his need to make a comment even though he once again almost died.

“You know your nearly dying got old the first time you tried it?” Peter mumbled into his dad’s shoulder. That was when he felt a hand on his back. Tony was never really one for physical affection, but there were always moments, moments when even Tony knew that reassurance was needed by touch. He rubbed the boys back gently.

“Yeah, I know.”
Chapter Summary

Tony's been acting weirder than normal, and Peter doesn't even get to find out why, until Tony's scraping the bottom of the barrel for what will keep him alive.

Chapter Notes

I did some creative internetting to try and find out roughly where Stark Industries is in California, and it's mentioned below.

This is easily the longest chapter I've written so far at just short of 10,000 words. Kind of proud of myself on that.

I don't know if any of my future chapters will be as long as this, I kind of hope not because I wasn't really sure how to end the chapter because of it.

Peter had come into the workshop to use Tony’s holographic wire frame to test his plans for a school robotics assignment, it was simply meant to be a fan powered car but Peter wanted to see how fast he could make it by using lighter materials. But for the moment, he was stopped and staring at the scene in front of him.

Pepper and Tony had both stopped to look at his entrance. Pepper looked more annoyed than normal, Tony had a framed art piece of Iron Man in his hands. Peter blinked at them stupidly for a moment.

“Uhhh. I. I’m in the wrong room. I’m going to.” He gestures to the door “Hm. Go. Now.” Then he turns to go back out the door. Pepper sighs at Tony who then points at Peter as he lets the frame drop in his other hand.

“He can prove it.” He states in a rather fact of the matter voice. Peter’s eyebrows slowly raise.

“I know I can prove a door works, see.” He starts to open the door, more than eager to get out of a situation he seems to have gotten himself stuck in.

“How can he prove it, Tony?”

“Peter, the expo.” Peter’s shoulders drop, he was half way through the door, if only he had run, or had just made prototypes instead of trying to save time with computer models.

“Yeah, the expo.” Peter nods as he comes back in to acknowledge that this seems to be what they're talking about. They continue to just look at him, then his tilts his head slightly. “What about it?” Tony shakes his head with a tutting sigh as he walks past him.

“Ms. Potts seems to think it’s a waste of time and money. What do you think?” He pushes some things off a counter and starts to climb up, Pepper looks like she’s about to fight Tony on what’s
about to happen before Peter speaks up.

“Um, well. Technically it is.” Pepper turns to Peter with a smile, Tony just shakes his head.

“Thank you, Peter.”

“But only financially.” Pepper splutters as Tony finishes hanging the Iron Man art and jumps down from the table with his own grin.

“See, go on.” He gestures for Peter to continue.

“There’s easily a hundred people in California alone who was working on projects that with the right funding could go on to revolutionise. Uh, anything really, medicine, engineering, homes, and stuff.” He fidgets a little under Pepper’s scrutiny as he speaks. “Without the expo, some of these people might never get seen for funding. It’s like an international science fair. I think that’s pretty neat.”

“But a whole year?” She goes from looking at Peter, to Tony who’s come over to Peter, and is rubbing his shoulders as a reward for taking his side. “A whole year, Tony.”

“It’s giving people a chance to get their moment in the spotlight, money and breakthroughs take time. Besides, it’s been so long since the last Stark Expo, I’m making up for the years we’ve missed.”

Pepper groans in frustration and Tony leant in to whisper in his ear.

“I have something I need to talk to Pepper about, want to give us a minute.” Peter, looks at Pepper who’s on the verge of pulling out her hair.

“Is this a proposal thing? Because I don’t think she’s going to go for it right now.”

“Propo- Uh, Peter, get out.” Peter puts his hands up in defeat, keeping his reply quiet.

“Do I have to call her mom?” Rolling his eye and keeping his hands on Peter’s shoulder, Tony directs him out of the room.

“Go do your homework, prank call Rhodie, get a job or something.” Peter ducks out from Tony’s hands and turns to give him a dramatic look, then waves his hand dismissively to his father as he heads back up the stairs. At the top, he wonders for a moment if Tony is going to do something like propose to Pepper, because, despite their casual flirting, it didn’t really make sense. Then again, Peter’s noticed that the only time Tony makes sense is after all his craziness is said and done and everyone’s had a moment to take stock of what’s happened.

The week following Tony making Pepper his CEO had been a whirlwind and full of people shuffling to and from the house, for the most part, Peter had managed to keep out of the way which was fine by him.

Then there was Monaco.

Peter didn’t really want to go, he didn’t really have an interest in racing, and he knew that it was doubling as a network vacation. However, Tony had been – strangely – very insistent and had even
gone to the trouble of telling Peter’s school that he would be absent for a few days, so Peter was stuck and had no option other than to go.

Peter wore one of his nicer suits for the Grand Prix itself, Pepper had helped him pick it out and slipped out of the Rolls Royce with Pepper, following alongside her so anyone taking photo’s would just dismiss him as an assistant. As they head into the dining area, Peter can hear Tony telling Pepper to go with a plan of his wasn’t anything new but usually, he was talking about weird things was about to do, so Peter wasn’t entirely sure what kind of weirdness he could actually come up with while in a completely different country. Then he realised what, or more who Tony was talking about.

Almost 16 and Peter was already an inch taller than Tony, giving him about half a foot on the woman approaching, a glance to the side showed that Tony and Pepper knew exactly who she was and seemed to be talking in hushed tones until she stopped in front of them, but all Peter could really notice was that this woman while short had really nice eyes, and really red hair – easily darker than Pepper’s – that could only be described by Peter as messy ringlets, if ringlets could be messy that is. She was also looking at him as if confused as to whom he was and why he was there. Then he felt a pat on the back that stayed there in order to make him move forward.

“Mr. Stark.” The woman approaching them opened with.

“Hey,” Tony replied with his usual casual air.

“How was your flight?”

“Excellent, this is my son.”

Shyly she tucked some of those ringlets behind her ear and offered a hand to him.

“It’s Natalie Rushman.” Peter took it after an awkward moment of realising he was still staring while leaning forward because while Tony was still trying to push him forward Peter hadn’t actually moved. A moment of stumbling forward and stuttered apologies Peter took her hand and shook it politely.

“Peter Park- er, Stark.” Natalie gave him a curious look about his last name but looked like she wasn’t going to press that matter. Even though Peter was officially a Stark after living with Tony for a month, He had gotten so used to introducing himself as ‘Peter Parker’ when at school or part of school activities like camps, and excursions. Peter spend a lot of time at Stark events fumbling over which name to introduce himself with.

After the moment had passed, Natalie had seemingly gotten herself back on track. Tony was already picking himself and Pepper up drinks from a passing tray.

“We have one photographer from The Standard if you don’t mind.” With great ease, Natalie scooped the drinks out of both of their hands and back onto the tray.

Seeing the camera, Peter successfully ducked out of the way slipping in beside Natalie, while he had no problem with normal photos being taken, he felt really uncomfortable about being in press photos. Growing up in the spotlight himself, Tony sympathised with him and never said anything when Peter disappeared to one side at moments like this, and occasionally would defend him against Pepper if she ever brought it up in moments she felt like Peter should actually be in the photo too.

Peter couldn’t help but glance at Natalie again as the photographer does his job, she gives him a glance back another polite smile before Tony comes back into their orbit looking at Natalie.

“You look fantastic.” He gives a small gesture for them all to start walking, Peter slips in easily
behind both of them, listening to the conversation quietly. Natalie thanks him while being spoken over.

“But that would be unprofessional, what’s on the docket?”

“We… Have a 9:30 dinner.”

“Perfect, I’ll be there at 11, is this us?” Tony gestures at a table as Natalie confirms his changes, then looks a little thrown when he starts to claim a table near a corner with big windows on either side. It was nice and tidy enough, just as expected for a grand lunch room for an international race event.

“Uh, it can be.”

“Great, make it happen.” Natalie immediately starts talking to someone to arrange for the table to become theirs. It doesn’t take long to realise that Peter lingered too long and lost sight of Tony long enough for him to wander off, for a small moment almost panics before he catches sight of Tony and Pepper talking to Justin Hammer. Peter knows enough to know that Justin irritates Tony, and Peter can only think of weasels when confronted with him. So Peter stays where he is watching from a distance when he hears a small throat being cleared. Looking down he sees Natalie patiently waiting for his attention.

“I’m in the way, huh?” He couldn’t help the reaction, he always seemed to be in the way at events hosted by Stark Industries, just some awkward teenager who is all limbs, not only that but Natalie was very pretty, distractingly so, which meant that for her he would obviously be in the way. At least, that was usually how it went in school, Peter was often told by the pretty girls that he was in the way and to move.

“Actually, I was going to say the table is ours now, so you can sit here if you want.”

She gestured to one of the chairs and Peter stared at it stupidly for a moment.

“Right, sitting. That’s. Well, lunch is usually easier when sitting, huh?” He gives her a dorky grin, which he was hoping had come off as casual and cool as Tony’s grins, it had failed, but what Peter hadn’t known it was a charming look in its own way.

“Sort of does, yeah.” She gives him another polite smile as he sits down, after a quick glance around, she sits down across from him. “I’ll sit with you while Mr. Stark and Miss Potts are busy.”

“Oh, hey, you’re dad’s new personal assistant, right? I’m sure you have better things to do than babysit me.” He gave her a depreciating look, one that actually was a strong reflection of the ones Tony would hand out when he was talking about his own work or himself, instead of something that had come out of Stark Industries.

“Its fine, I’m sure that Mr. Stark will let me know if he needs me, and right now” She glances at her watch. “He doesn’t have anything that needs his attention right now.”

“Well, if you have a spare moment, then yeah, sure we can totally hang out.” He gives her a playfully cocky grin, she gives him an amused look. She almost looks like she wants to ask him something, no doubt about what it’s like being the son of Tony Stark, but she never gets to ask him, and he never gets a chance to ask her about it as Pepper sits down next to him and lifts up a menu.

“What happened to talking to Hammer?”

“Any longer and I would have needed a long, hot shower, or a chemical bath.” She sighed Peter had always liked the fact that Pepper found him as greasy as he did, she had enough laughed without shame when he had told her about Hammer being a weasel to Peter. After a casual look over the
menu, she realises Natalie is still there, they share eye contact for a moment then Natalie excuses herself from the table.

“Wow,” Peter said after a long quiet moment, Pepper looked at him curiously. “You don’t like her, huh.” It was more of an observational statement than a question.

“It’s not Miss Rushman.”

“It’s that dad picked her?”

“After I told him no.” she makes a frustrated noise. “He’s just-“

“Hey, whoa. He’s Dad remember? I know what he’s ‘just’. Really I get it.” His tone was light and casual while he didn’t always like it when people with frustrated with his dad, he was more than understanding as to why they were, so his statement was meant to be situation defusement, they were in a nice place, on a nice day. Pepper shouldn’t have to feel stressed out on a day like this, she seemed to realise this and gave him a smile, patting his hand on the table.

“How did you become such a sweet boy?”

“I’ve heard it’s all in the genes.” It gets a small laugh out of Pepper, so Peter marks that as a success.

After a moment of looking over his menu and deciding what he wants he glances up to see Tony sitting down at a table nearby still with Justin and a woman, who looked like a journalist, if the voice recorder in her hand was anything to go by it wasn’t long before Natalie was by his side and talking to him then he was off and following her. The teen shrugged, no doubt Tony had some interview or something about to happen, he might not be CEO of Stark Industries anymore, but he still owned it and was still famous, part of that was being harassed by paparazzi and journalists hoping to get more readers by featuring him.

It was about half an hour later that made it obvious something was wrong, of course that something was Tony being on the Television in a racing suit.

“Is that...?” He raises his hand to start to point at the screen, but Pepper had already seen it.

“Natalie” As if, by magic, Natalie was almost instantly by Pepper’s side, looking a little flustered as to the situation.

“Yes, Miss Potts.”

“Did you know about this?”

“Uh. This is the first that I’ve heard of it.”

“This cannot happen.”

“Absolutely I understand completely, how can I help you?”

“Where’s Happy?”

“He’s waiting outside.”

“Okay. Get him, I need Happy” With an ‘okay’ Natalie was already off. Peter barely heard the conversation however, he was transfixed with the screen, was his dad seriously just going to drive in a televised Grand Prix? Well, obviously he was already in the cockpit doing all the pre-race checks, which made Peter wonder when he had time to even learn how to do that past just reading about it.
His body was a mix of surprise, panic and something that was probably a mix of excitement and pride, after all, no one else could say their parents just decided to race in a formula one car while in Monaco?

That feeling didn’t last long. During the race one of the many cameras focused on a man just walking out onto the race track, a man whose suit seemed to be melting off him.

Then Peter was out of his chair as the man cracked a whip at an approaching car slicing it in two.

He barely hears Pepper telling him to stay with Natalie as she leaves, but he knows what he sees, and what he hears himself scream.

“No! Dad!” He looks around in shock for someone anyone who can help his dad, but all he sees is Natalie, her hands up a little at him in hopes of calming him down as if he was a startled horse rearing.

“It’s okay.”

“Okay!? Did you even- Where’s Pepper? Or Happy?”

“They just left to get Mr. Stark.”

“No! That’s bad they’re going to get-“ He runs his hands through his hair, his fingers gripping in, hoping that will do something to help his dad, but it doesn’t, why hasn’t help come. Then he feels hands on his shoulders pulling him down into a chair, he fights it at first but realises that Natalie’s only trying to help him and reluctantly sits down her voice low.

“They’re taking the briefcase to him.”

“Briefcase?” The panic is still swirling in his head “Who cares about a brief—… Case. They’re bringing him the briefcase?” Natalie nods and some of the panic bleeds out of him and he sags into the chair a little, Natalie’s directly in his face and he can’t see the television or what’s going on, weirdly despite the gasps and worried noises all around them, Peter’s feeling a lot calmer. “If they have the briefcase… I don’t see why you’re so nervous, Miss Rushman.”

Natalie blinks at him, looking like she just missed a part of the conversation, then sighs lowering her head a little, patting his shoulder.

Peter missed the rest of what had happened as Natalie made sure to keep him from seeing anything and get him all worked up again. When they finally both looked up at the screens again, Tony was suited up and pulling something off of the man’s chest and crushing it. Peter knew that it was a very familiar shape and in a very familiar location. But he had no way of being sure it was an arc reactor.

When Peter and Tony got back to the hotel the first thing Peter did when the door was close was cling to Tony.

“Glad to see you’re relieved, Cottontail. But, ow,” Peter scrambles away and looks understandably upset.

“Who was that? What was that? Why were you even in that race?” Tony dusted himself off a little then started heading to his room to put on clean clothes, Peter following.

“I was on vacation, it’s something to you know, try. At least once in your life. As for the first two? No idea, but I plan to find out.”
Tony starts changing as Peter fidgets just inside the room.

“Plan to find out? How?”

“I’m going to go to where he’s being kept, and ask him.”

“Dad! Are you out of your mind?”

“Seems to be the going theory” He hears Peter groan in frustration as he pulls on a black shirt, then starts looking for some pants. “He’s being held in a jail Peter, what could he do to me?”

“Well, he’s a big guy, and you’re well…”

“I’m?” He raises an eyebrow at him.

“Well, you aren’t a pyscho for one thing.” Tony scoffs and pulls on his jeans and starts putting on shoes.

“I survived him easily while he was strapped into a vest wired up to ionised plasma whips. I think I can survive a man in an orange jumpsuit.” He comes over and rests a hand on Peter’s shoulder. “Trust me.” Then he leaves the room. Leaving Peter alone in the room and he sighs deeply before slowly leaving the room and heading to his own room knowing that with this happening Pepper is going to start getting them ready to leave to do damage control on what’s happened.

Peter had chosen to spend the whole flight in one of the sleeping compartments of the plane, he wasn’t feeling particularly in the mood to spent the whole flight with Tony or Pepper he wanted to avoid any possible arguments that could be going on, knowing that Tony tried to avoid stopping arguments he wasn’t winning, and after all this time with Tony, Pepper had a tendency to argue with him whenever he was an ass. So arguments happened a lot.

All he could do right now was keep running through the day in his head, and slowly thinking back to before it. Tony had been acting stranger than normal for a few months now, doing strange things that even for him ranked as weird and erratic. Donating entire art collections to boy scouts, jumping in a race, he had even auctioned off his ‘Iron Man’ damaged cars and gave all the money to a children’s hospital. The expo being one of the bigger surprises that even for Tony was a bit out there to do. He had even spent more time in his lab, which wouldn’t have been so strange but whenever Peter entered, Tony seemed more quietly contemplative than he did busy with upgrading the suit, J.A.R.V.I.S, or working on something for the company.

He had also spent a lot of time just watching Peter, something he never particularly did when they were both working in the shop, asking him why only got the reply of “Just thinking”, before he would then shuffle off to do something or abuse Dum-E.

The next few days at home were tense, Tony spent most of his time in the shop, Pepper was doing a lot of damage control with Natalie, though she would switch between the house and the company, Pepper was usually at the house so she could keep enough of an eye on Tony to make sure he didn’t do anything else that required her to put his fires out for him. Peter, however, was just avoiding everyone, finishing homework and keeping himself busy, he was still feeling a little lost as to what happened in Monaco, and angry that everyone was deflecting his questions while he expected it from his father, he didn’t expect it from Pepper. While it wasn’t exactly on purpose as her own frustrations and being almost over her head with interviews and lawyers.

On the day of Tony’s birthday, Peter finally brought himself out of his room and found Tony sitting
at his desk in the workshop, reading what was on his screens. In his hand, Peter had a cupcake with pink frosting and sprinkles, on it was a simple birthday candle that was lit. It had become something of a tradition for Peter, because when he was 7 he had been found by Tony worrying in his room one night about what to get him for his birthday, because even at that age and watching Tony that if he wanted something he never had to wait until his birthday or Christmas so there wasn’t really anything Peter could get Tony that would mean anything. At first, Tony had seemed confused by it all, after all, he never really got presents when he was a child himself, and once he enrolled in MIT birthdays were less about presents and more about parties and had been ever since. So the fact Peter was worrying about it was strange. It had taken a bit of thinking, but in the end, Tony had simply asked for a cupcake. So then an ever year from then Peter had gotten him just that. Sometimes he made it himself sometimes he bought them, however, he had tried very hard each year to make sure they were different every year.

Peter sat on the desk next to his cupcake, waiting for his father to finish where he was up to in his reading while he did he couldn’t help but notice that the man in front of him was looking so very tired and drained. Peter can’t remember him ever looking like that.

“Dad?”

Tony turns and looks at him for a moment then to the cupcake.

“You did strawberry at 10.”

“It’s raspberry and cinnamon. I just used the same food colouring.”

“Makes sense.” He picks up the cupcake and contemplates the little flame on the candle, Peter watches him too, not too sure what’s going on. “What would your wish be?”

“Isn’t that meant to be a secret?”

“Only if you want it to come true. Or, if you actually believe in it.”

“Well I do believe and I want it to come true.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him.

“You really believe this, huh?”

“Sure it’s silly, but yeah, I do.”

“Well, okay. Well, considering this isn’t your candle, tell me what you _would_ wish if it was yours.” It’s Peter’s turn to be quiet while he thinks about it.

“Hmm, well, to pass my exams, maybe for you to stop being so weird.”

“I’m weird?”

“Of course, you are, but I mean weirder than normal.”

“It’s nothing.”

“Looks like a complicated nothing. Dad, you loo-“ Tony blows out the candle then pats Peter’s knee.

“I look like there’s a party tonight, and I have to get ready for it. So do you.” Peter groans.

“Dad” he whines. Tony just gives him a vaguely amused look, Peter was sure if he didn’t look so tired, that the expression would have been very amused.
“You don’t have to come, but I, at least, want you there for the cake.” He punctuates this by taking out the candle then biting into the cupcake and looking actually pleased with how it tastes.

“Fine.” He slips off the table and stuffs his hands into pockets. “But only for the cake.” He grins as he turns to leave. “Happy birthday dad.” Tony gives another smile as he watches Peter leave.

“Thanks, pumpkin-eater.”

The party had gone on for hours while Peter stayed in his room, he could hear the music, laughter, and loud talking all the way in his room, and he had long since put on a pair of headphones and was listening to his own music while playing a video game, knowing that when it was time for the cake, someone would come in to get him.

He hadn’t heard his door open, and he certainly didn’t expect a sudden and firm hand on his shoulder, Peter jerked up to look at who was in the room, and he certainly had never expected to see Natalie giving him a face that suggested she didn’t want an ounce of nonsense from him. The look made him pull off his headphones quickly.

“Uh, has something happened to the cake?”

“Peter, we need to get you out of here. Come with me.” She let go of him and took a step back, watching him expectantly for him to stand up.

“Get me out of here? Uh, wh-“ he heard a crash and the distance, and stood out of reflex as his head snapped towards his opened door.

“That’s why, Tony and Lt. Col. Rhodes are both in Iron Man armor and fighting, it’s not safe for you to be here.” She reaches for his arm and he backs up, a move that clearly doesn’t impress her.

“What do you mean, they’re both in the armor and fighting?”

“We don’t have time for this, the more you waste time, the more likely it is that you’re going to see it first hand and get hurt. I have my orders.”

And with that she reaches for him again, grabbing his arm just above his elbow firmly, Peter blinks at her hand for a second before being dragged after her, he was surprised at how fast and strong she was. He couldn’t help but babble at her about this not making any sense and tried to ask who gave her the orders but she was tight-lipped and only concerned with dragging Peter behind her. Soon he gets his legs working and keeps up with her easily enough as she pushes him in the car, the journey there was more than a little worrying as there was still loud crashes and the sounds of things shattering all around them, with fractured glass all over the floor. Peter can’t help but buckle up for no other reason than to feel that extra touch of safety.

“Is this really one of those ‘Dad’s doing something dangerous’ moments? Not some really elaborate kidnapping?” For a moment, Natalie doesn’t reply she just gets the car in gear and starts to drive away.

“If you want to get technical it’s both.”
“Both?!” Peter really wished he didn’t sound as startled as he was, and she glances at him.

“Well, I did just forcibly remove you from your home without any consent from your father. Under the law that is kidnapping.” Peter can’t help but pale while trying to subtly check if he actually had his phone on him. The move clearly didn’t go unnoticed.

“It’s still on your desk. I work with Coulson.”

“As in agent Coulson.”

“Yes.”

“From S.H.I.E.L.D?”

“He doesn’t work for any other government agencies, so yes.” Peter takes it in quietly for a moment while Natalie continues to drive.

“What is it with you people and stealing kids from bedrooms at night?” He wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw her lip quirk in the darkness around them.

“I promise we only do it to you.”

“That isn’t as reassuring as you think it is.”

“Who said I was trying to be reassuring?”

“I don’t know if I like this whole kidnapper side to you, Natalie.”

“Natasha”

“No, I’m Peter.” He suddenly felt like he got lost in this whole conversation.

“And I’m actually Natasha.” There’s another long pause from Peter.

“This is going to be a long night, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid so.”

They were both quiet for the rest of the drive, Peter right now was thinking back about what Natasha was saying about his dad and Rhodie fighting, and hoping it wasn’t as bad as it was sounding, even though the sound of two Iron Man armoured suits clashing with each other does sound super bad. Natasha was quiet because, well, Peter just assumed she wasn’t really a talkative person or all that comfortable around teenagers she just, in theory, stole.

As they pulled up in front of the local S.H.I.E.L.D building, Peter saw a familiar face standing outside waiting for them. Neither of them wasted any time getting out of the time, and Coulson gave Peter a cautionary once over.

“He’s unharmed?” Peter was more than aware that it wasn’t him the older agent was addressing.

“Not a scratch. Actually managed to keep calm and quiet in the car too.”

“Oh, hey. I’m going to go with that being kind of rude.” Peter butts in with an indignant look.

“Sounds like he’s fine,” Coulson says with a pleasant look on his face, Peter took a moment to wonder if the guy only had two expressions; politely pleasant, and put out. “Well Mr. Stark, let’s get
you inside.”

“Uh, Peter is fine.”

“I’m sure it is, Mr. Stark.” Coulson gives him another nod before walking to the door and holding it open for him. Peter hesitated for a moment then started to walk in with Natasha behind him. They were soon heading down corridor after corridor full of people in suits, which at a normal time of day Peter wouldn’t think about it. But it was well past 11 so why was it so busy?

“Is it always this busy here?”

“For this time of night, it’s been busier.”

“Wow. So do you sleep or are you all like, robots?” He glances at Coulson, using the talking as an excuse not to think about everything that’s going on.

“That depends on who you listen to.” Natasha cuts in from behind Peter, he can see Coulson utter a soundless sigh.

“I assure you I, as well as everyone else working at S.H.I.E.L.D, is actually human.” Natasha seemed to mumble something that Coulson seemed to pointedly ignore.

It wasn’t much longer before they got to the room Coulson was clearly leading them towards. Opening the door revealed the room in question to be a bedroom with an ensuite. Peter steps into the room cautiously then looks around.

“Uh, how long are you planning on kidnapping me for?”

“Providing tomorrow’s meeting goes well, you should only be staying here the night, and you will be returning with me before noon. However that does all depend on your father.”

Peter couldn’t help but snort before flopping back onto the bed.

“Then it looks like I’ll be here for a while then.” Then he sits up. “What kind of meeting.”

Coulson and Natasha exchange a look, Peter’s pretty sure he sees her almost start to shake her head before Coulson turns back to look at the teen on the bed.

“Director Fury needs your father’s help with a project that will be beneficial to everyone involved.”

“Is S.H.I.E.L.D’s whole deal about stalking, kidnapping and being vague?”

“We also have a strong background in gymnastics.” Peter gives both of them very long looks.

“I don’t know if you’re serious or not.”

“I get that a lot. If there’s anything you need, just use the phone on the desk and we can make the necessary arrangements though there are a change of clothes in the wardrobe including something to sleep in.”

“That’s kind of overprepared. Have you been expecting me to stay here?”

“We like to be in the business of prepared. But we got this room ready for you after installing Natasha into Stark Industries, to be on the safe side.”

While Peter is easily keeping up with the conversation and what’s going on, he does get the feeling
he’s only being told certain parts of the story which makes the whole situation fell all the more overwhelming. He runs his hands through his hair slowly and sighs.

“I get to go home tomorrow, right?”

“I certainly hope so. For now, though. Agent Romanov and I are going to let you get some sleep.” As Coulson gestures to Natasha exit the room, without a word she starts to leave with Coulson behind her.

“So, what will you be doing?” Natasha steps out of the way so Coulson can pass her before looking back at Peter, knowing the question was meant for her.

“I’ll be coming into work as usual at 9am.”

“So you’re still going to be there.”

“For as long as the director needs me to be, yes.” Her tone is quiet and professional.

“Cool, well. Kind of. Thanks, for telling me I mean.” Natasha watches him in a moment of quiet thought before giving him a little nod then closed the door behind her.

Peter’s starting to notice that he’s spending a lot of his time alone in rooms, for a moment he’s not entirely sure about how he feels about this. While he gets the feeling he shouldn’t be spending so much of his times sitting alone in government buildings or a bodyguard’s house. But then again, when your dad’s apparently a superhero a lot of what should and shouldn’t be normal becomes fairly blurred, and really, the lines were already undefined enough.

Peter slept easily enough in the room once he got used to the light outside his room, and how unnaturally cold and quiet the room felt. While he was used to his own home being very quiet and seemingly unlived in, it was still a completely different feeling to this. Peter’s house only felt like that when Tony wasn’t in the house, it was a literal sense of quiet, however, here was full of people, but they seemed to avoid being in this area because he and possibly others were sleeping which only helps to make him feel more isolated from everything that’s going on.

When he wakes up, Peter looks around the room to finally take it in past a cursory glance to see what was there, everything was straight, clean, regulation. Things that were all relatively far from what Peter knew, he was never one for living messy, but living untidy was definitely an inherited lifestyle. He had two desks at home; one for homework, one for little projects and both of them were covered in books, papers, post-its, and various bits of electrics and computer parts. So waking up to such a tidy room had felt wrong, what was more wrong was he didn’t have his phone so he had no idea what time it was.

He slid out of the bed and started to poke about in the dresser, a couple of pairs of trousers and white shirts, some with the S.H.I.E.L.D with some accompanying bits of underwear were all that were in the drawers. After a moment of internal debate about wearing underwear of unknown origin, Peter decided to take some of the clothes and wandered into the ensuite, which seemed suitably stocked. As he put the clothes down on the counter he noticed a razor with some shaving cream then looked at himself in the mirror. Somehow, its presence seemed like an insult, but at the same time how were they to know that Peter wasn’t one of those 15-year-olds that needed to shave.

Peter was sitting on the edge of the bed tying his shoelaces when there was a knock on the door, he opened the door to find Coulson on the other side of the door looking like he didn’t expect such a prompt answer.
“Something wrong, Coulson?” His head tilted slightly.

“Just didn’t think you would be awake and dressed at this hour.”

“Well, I don’t really know what ti-“

“7 am” Coulson cut in with a practiced efficiency.

“Really? Hm, well dad and I are both early risers, so…” He nodded as he left the conversation open as if it explained everything, and it seemed enough for the agent in front of him.

“Understood. It’s time to go home.” Peter didn’t hesitate, he just grabbed his clothes from last night and followed Coulson out. Somehow on the walk from the room to the car, Peter’s clothes had ended up in a bag for convenience, Peter hadn’t even realised I happened until he was sitting in the back of the car with the bag on his lap.

When they got to the house, Peter was surprised at how much destruction had actually happened. Then he was so very glad for all the re-enforcing that had gone into the construction work. When they came into the living room, Tony was there, jeans, black shirt and a dressing gown he was sitting on a deck chair next to another man, Natasha was also there standing back from them and looking watchful, in an overly distracting catsuit that made Peter think it was a whole lot safer to pretend he hadn’t noticed her there. The other man stood up just as Peter, Coulson and two men carrying a crate came over, something about the guy made him feel uneasy, but he wasn’t sure if it was because he was a guy sitting just outside a ruined building having a casual chat with his dad while all in black, or if it was because he was very tall, bald and with an intimidating eye patch.

“Wai-wai-wai-wait, what is this?” He heard his father say to the other man as Peter kept quiet and close to Coulson.

“Yeah, you’re good right” The man seemed very disinterested in Tony wanting him to stay.

“What? No, I’m not good.” Tony looks at the box like it’s going to insult him before turning back to the man.

“You’ve got this, right? Right?”

“Got what? I don’t even know what I’m supposed to get.” He’s starting to look a little lost as the man starts to pull on his long black intimidating jacket. Peter was noticing a trend here.

“Natasha is going to remain a floater at Stark with her cover intact, and you remember Agent Coulson, right? He was with your son last night after Natasha kept him safe from last night if you were wondering where he was.” With his business obviously done, he starts to leave.

“Yeah…” Tony finally settled on looking like he was told to just suck on twenty lemons before looking at Peter, taking in the change of clothes and the S.H.E.I.L.D logo on his shirt. “What is this, are you defecting now?” Peter didn’t get a chance to answer before the other man came back into the conversation.
“Oh, and Tony.” He pauses as he turns to look at him better. “Remember. I’ve got my eye on you.” Giving Tony a look challenging him to make a comment about it, Tony just looks unimpressed at him, then turns to look at everyone in the room.

“We’ve disabled communications. No contact with the outside world, good luck.” Was all Natasha said before she also left heading towards the door, and no doubt to Stark Industries. She gave Peter a quick glance as if to say ‘I told you I’d still be around’ before all there was to her was her retreating figure heading towards the door. Coulson stood there quietly, just watching Tony. After raising his arms a little in annoyance Tony turns to Coulson to ready his demands on the situation, needing to instil at least some power into his grounding.

“Please,” He started with as if this was all beneath him. “First thing I need is a little body work. I’ll put in a little time at the lab if we could send one of your goon squad down to the Coffee Bean or cross the road for a Starbucks run that would be-“

“I’m not here for that.” Coulson interrupted with an unruffled calm. “I’ve been authorised by Director Fury to use any means necessary to keep you on premises. If you attempt to leave?”

“Right?” Tony comes in with, wanting to interrupt this time.

“Or play any games. I will taze you and watch Super Nanny while you drool into the carpet. Kay?”

“Okay, I think I’ve got it.”

“Enjoy tonight’s entertainment.” Coulson gives the box a meaningful look before turning to leave the room. Tony sighs quietly then looks at the box himself, taking it in. It looked to Peter like a military storage box, grey with red locking clips. ‘Property of H.STARK’ stencilled on the top.

That’s when Peter realised that whatever was in there, it was his grandfathers. Peter was well versed in the rise and fall of Howard Stark. It was a little hard not to be when a lot of Stark technology was in day to day things, the man was even in history books for his advancements in the theatre of warfare including his work assisting on the Manhattan Project, as well as Project Rebirth, which created its first and only successful super soldier back in World War II, while Howard wasn’t the lead scientist on the project, he had developed an effective method of stimulating and keeping the serum from overly developing the subject's body in dangerous ways.

Project Rebirth was for sure one of the most talked about things when Peter grew up, at least, what was produced was. Tony had told Peter the stories that he had heard from his ever proud father about both Captain America and his helping save the world, and Steven Rogers, some skinny kid from Brooklyn who had ultimate made the project the short-lived success it was. That was until he crashed into the ocean and died to protect the world from the Red Skull.

Peter got the feeling Tony actually really enjoyed those stories growing up. After all, Tony did have one of the prototype shields for the Captain in the workshop. He never had it hung up anywhere, it was usually sitting on a desk either being used as a paperweight or being weighed down with paper itself. But it was always somewhere accessible in the room.

Then Peter realised Tony was shuffling closer to the box but still doesn’t touch it.

“Pick it up. Let’s get it down to the shop.” Tony finally says then walks around the box as if it’s dangerous.

“Pick it up? What happened to your last slave?” he grumbles as he comes over and picks it up. It doesn’t seem very heavy and he can feel things moving about inside. Whatever was in there, the box
clearly wasn’t packed full.

“She got assigned to Pepper, now come on. We have work to do.” Rolling his eyes, he follows Tony and they head to the shop. When they get there Peter puts it down on the couch, standing back to let Tony open it and rifle through things. Peter kept his distance, getting the feeling that this really wasn’t something for him to butt into.

As Tony shuffled around the room setting up the projector and screen and laying out various items from the box he was quietly assessing everything. Peter knew the look well but found the quiet part very weird. He was used to his dad’s incessant need to talk, even if it was just mumbling out loud while working. Then before Tony set the projector to run he said something Peter handed expected.

“I’m not doing so well, kid.” Not expecting him to say anything, Peter just looks up at him with a raised eyebrow, Tony taps at his chest before sitting down in front of him. “Turns out, Palladium is really bad for long term use in your body. Now before you say anything because I know that look by now, I’ve been trying everything, nothing so far has worked. But Fury seems to think the answers in here.” Peter shakes his head, not wanting to hear it, it was bad enough that Tony nearly died a hand full of times just last year, that now he’s known that the reactor, the thing that had the sole job of keeping him alive, was doing the opposite.

“Why didn’t you talk to him sooner about it?!” Tony just gives him a look. “Because… You didn’t know about it.” Then Tony gives him a concertation, Peter sags into the seat with Tony patting his knee.

“Dad wasn’t much of a parent. But I trust his work. If fury said dad was working on something that could help, well. It can’t hurt to try it.”

Peter, lacking the ability to overreact to the information given to him not only plainly, but given also a chance for it to all be a moment in history that Tony will no doubt make light of in the next year. So he just chose to sit back in a chair and watched everything, soon getting caught up in the reels featuring Howard.

“Wow, so. Did Grandad steal this from Disney, or did Disney steal this from him?”

“It’s a small world.” Tony drawls sarcastically then shrugs. “I was just how they did it in the 60’s. Believe me, the cheese is meant to be part of the charm.”

Peter nods then goes back to looking at the screen, blinking when he sees a small boy pop up behind the display and taking something off looking so very curious about it in his striped turtleneck and well-brushed brown hair.

“Da-“

“Tony? Tony, what are you doing back there? What is that? Put it back. Put it back where you got it from now!” Peter glances at Tony who’s also watching the footage now with a grim look on his face. “Maria!? Go on, go, go, go” Turning back to the screen Peter can see some man from the set coming over to pick Tony up and carry him off, with Howard just looking annoyed that his son was not only there but had the audacity to touch his things. Peter had known that there was no real love won or lost between the two previous generations of Starks, but it didn’t make it any less jarring to see for himself. Tony himself wasn’t an overly affectionate man, one of the things Peter remembers about Tony most when he was younger was how he was always hesitant to touch him and looking very unsure of what to do in some of the more father-son moments of their lives.
It was like Mentos and Diet coke, it was one thing to hear about how violent the reaction is, but in person, it really showed how volatile and messy it all was.

They both watched the reels still going, watching Howard getting progressively drunker. Peter fidgeted as Tony went back to looking through the notebooks. Tony was obviously used to how constantly drunk Howard was, and Peter was kind of uncomfortable about the parallels he was noticing between the two. But then the both looked at the screen when they heard Howard address Tony.

“Tony, you're too young to understand this right now, so I thought I would put it on film for you. I built this for you. And some day you'll realise that it represents a whole lot more than people's inventions. It represents my life's work. This is the key to the future. I'm limited by the technology of my time, but one day you'll figure this out. And when you do, you will change the world. What is, and always will be, my greatest creation... is you.”

Peter couldn’t believe it when he heard the last line. It was so simple and matter of fact that Peter could comprehend the words came out of a man who had just shouted at him in an earlier part of the reel. But looking at Tony, Peter could see something in his mind working, then he just gets up and starts to leave.

“Tidy up this place, when I get back we’ll have work to do.” Before he gets to the door he stops then looks at him. “Also, change, that eagle is giving me an itch.”

“What, wait? But what about the taser?” Peter stands up but then stops, realising that Tony was in the mood to work on something, his grandad had either left Tony feeling intrigued or challenged, probably both and he was going to involve Peter in it in some way. So why was he standing about trying to object to that? He wastes no time starting to pick things up and put them either back in the box or just out of the way for the moment, then makes a space with some of the workshops wheeled benches to create a lot of space. After that, he heads upstairs to change into something more him. Tony was gone for a while, and when he finally came back Peter was spinning on a chair in the middle of the workshop/garage floor with his long limbs streaming behind him. He stopped when the Audi came rolling in with Tony in the driver’s seat, and his Grandad’s expo model in segments in the passenger seat.

“Dad, did you seriously drive from Palmdale with that?” Peter gestures to the model as Tony slips out of the car and starts coming around to the other side to start pulling out the pieces.

“Looks like.”

“How didn’t you lose trees or food carts?”

“Peter” Tony Grunts as he manhandles a length towards him to suggest that talking about it now wasn’t important. “I need something wide with wheels to put these on.”

“Other than your ca-, alright, this is me getting something with wheels” Peter backpedalled fast as Tony give his smart reply a withering look. But he wastes no time bringing over one of the benches for Tony to set down on. It only took ten minutes to put the pieces together, and twenty more to pick up the tiny bits of scenery that had fallen into the car in transit and put them back where it looked like they belonged.

It had taken Tony and J.A.R.V.IS maybe twenty minutes to work out the atomic structure of the element Howard had been working on. The rest of the day and most of the next one were thoroughly taken up with construction of a prismatic accelerator, while Tony didn’t let Peter near any of the
construction tools or the more awkward or potentially damaging parts of building it, Peter had more of his fair share of bolting, soldering, and wiring. Dealing with the small important things, while his father dealt with the big and sweaty things.

When Coulson came into the room, Peter was half in the workshop fridge contemplating what to drink.

“Heard you broke the perimeter.”

“Ah yeah, that was like, 3 years ago. Where have you been?” Tony barely seems to give him much notice as he keeps working on the accelerator. Peter closes the fridge with a water in his hands to pay attention.

“I was doing some stuff.”

“Yeah, well. Me too, and it worked.” He glances up to see Coulson staring into one of their opened crates. “Hey, I’m playing for the home team, Coulson. You and all your fabulous furry freak brothers. Now are you going to let me work, or break my balls?” Tony gives him a glance before going to look into a bag for something he wants as Peter comes over to Coulson as he pulls someone out of the crate.

It was the Captain America shield prototype. Peter had put it in there earlier to keep it out of the way.

“What’s this doing here?” Coulson asks looking almost in awe of it, as he directs his question to Tony, which surprised Peter, as far as he knew no one really knows about Captain America anymore, at least not past history books and a memorial, no more remembered than other important American war figures.

“That’s it. Bring that to me” He gestures as he comes closer to Coulson, the accelerator still dividing them.

“You know what this is?” The agent starts to hand the prototype over in near reverence.

“That’s exactly what I need to make this work.” Peter already knew where this conversation was going, he could see it was his dad looked over the shield. “Lift the coil.”

Coulson slips his hands under the coil and lifted it up. “Go, go, put your knees into it.” Then Tony slips the shield underneath it onto a pile of books that sat on a Lincoln power generator. “Drop it.” Then Tony slips the spirit level on top of the coil then nods with satisfaction. “There, perfectly level. “ With a dismissive sniff, he looks up at the agent in front of him. “I’m busy, what do you want?”

“Nothing. Goodbye. I’ve been reassigned, Director Fury wants me in New Mexico.” Tony frowns a little at the development.

“Fantastic, land of enchantment.”

“So I’m told.”

“Secret stuff?”

“Something like that.” Tony looks down for a moment, before offering up a forced smile. “Good luck.” Coulson offers with a handshake that Tony takes.

“Thanks.”
“We need you.” At the Coulson holds the handshake still, giving Tony a more bland face than normal.

“Yeah, more than you know.” They let go as Coulson gets ready to leave.

“Not that much.” Then Peter finally pipes up.

“Uh, Coulson, Er, Agent Coulson?” He stops and turns to look at Peter.

“About the clothes I was wearing this morning, how to I-”

“Keep it, they were set out with you in mind.”

“Suddenly I think I want to have a conversation with you about how you know my kids underwear size.” Tony comes in with, an eyebrow raised, Coulson once again stone-faced him.

“No you don’t.” with that he just leaves the room and they watch him go up the stairs.

Then spend the rest of the afternoon finishing the building and set up of the accelerator, it’s nearly four when Tony finally opens it up, Peter sitting back in the hot rod from a distance, safety in case something goes wrong.

But it doesn’t, J.A.R.V.I.S confirms that the new element has been created and is stable.

In the downtime of J.A.R.V.I.S’ calculations, Peter took the chance to go upstairs and order something for them to eat. While Peter wasn’t a bad cook, he wasn’t feeling in a cooking mood, nor did he feel like waiting for Tony to engineer his way through the kitchen. The food was always good, but Tony spent more time testing and evaluating what it is that it becomes a waste. After making the order, he takes a moment to have a shower, despite not doing the heavy work, everything they had done had still ended up with him in one hell of a mess. In half an hour he hears the doorbell ring, grabs up their food and after paying he heads back to the workshop, just in time to see Tony taking off in the suit. With a touch of over dramatic Peter groans and drops his shoulders.

“Oh man. Really?” He puts the bags down on the counter then pulls out his phone and calls.

“You know, one day I’m going to be a superhero, and just dash off at a moment’s notice and leave you behind all confused. But see this, I’m at least going to the trouble of giving you the heads up.”

“Wouldn’t work, I still have three suits.” Peter could hear the smirk in Tony’s voice.

“So, where are you going? What’s happening?”

“Remember the guy who tried to kill me?” Peter fought the urge to say ‘which one?’

“Uh, Vanko? He blew up, right?” He had heard him talking to Pepper about it.

“Yeah. Not as dead as we thought, I think he’s going to attack the expo.”

“Why can’t you just have normal people that hate you?”

“I have those too.”

“You shouldn’t sound so eager about that.”

“I think I’m going through a tunnel. In bed before midnight Peter.”
“You are not. When has that ever been a rule? Go easy on collateral damage, okay. Also, I’m eating your eggrolls.” Then Peter hangs up.

Four days later, Tony had come home from his award ceremony, he tossed his medal to Peter telling him to look after it while being more than a little amused at retelling the story of how unimpressed Senator Stern was that he had to be the one offering the award to Tony and Rhodie, he did mention however that he could have done without being stuck with the medals pin, by him. But he still felt he won that little battle against him.

His crowing didn’t last too long, because soon he was already elbows deep in plans to expand on the new arc reactor designs, and started talks with a contractor to start work on Stark Tower in New York.
Peter was alone in Malibu, until an Agent shows up with Aunt May. Apparently there was something big going down in New York, unsurprisingly his dad was involved.

This is a smaller chapter than the last, because it turns out I didn't have as much to add as I thought I did.

But now we have almost all the characters in play now and from here on out there won't be as many direct movie chapters. Partly because there's really only one more movie and it would be very hard to write Peter in it without him spending the whole time thinking Tony is dead until suddenly he's not.

This will be where things start moving into the direction I'm after however!

Hope you all enjoy!

Peter had gotten used to being home on his own. It was hard not to learn to adapt when your dad is a genius mind behind a multi-billion dollar company with locations all over the country and the world. But since he had become Iron Man, Tony Stark had become something of a homebody, well, he was at least at home more often. However for the last month and a half, he had stopped coming home all together as he was overseeing the last major moments in building Stark Tower in New York.

So it meant that for now, it was just Happy and Peter. Especially seeing as Tony and Pepper were being so into each other that Peter was wondering if they turned into some weird human form of Hallmark cards. Peter was happy for them, but there’s only so much a boy can take when his dad is being gooey over a person that Peter thinks of as an aunt or a sister. It was a level of creepy he didn’t want to think about.

It was only a few days ago where he was on the phone to both of them, updating Peter on progress and that if everything went according to plan, Tony was going to have him take the jet up to see it for himself on the weekend. There was even talk of trying out the food carts and trucks in the area, which really just made Peter realise that he was Tony’s beard for trying out food that doesn’t suit his billionaire image. At least, he wasn’t a Halloween candy beard, something about that just felt creepy.

When the doorbell rang, Peter didn’t react. Happy was in the living room watching something so he would probably answer it, it’s not like it would have been for Peter anyway so he continued to stare at the pantry willing something to jump out at him to eat.

“Young Sir, there appears to be a S.H.I.E.L.D agent at the door.” Peter blinked at J.A.R.V.I.S’ announcement then just grabs a jar of peanut butter.
“And they’re not trying to break in, or anything? Is Happy getting the door?” He twists off the lid and sticks his finger into the jar, taking out again to give the blob of brown goo there a contemplative look.

“He isn’t alone, Young Sir. It also seems like Mr. Hogan appears to be rather caught up with college basketball in the living room.”

“Oh yeah? Who’s with him, Natasha?” He sticks his finger in his mouth then sticks the peanut butter in his mouth then starts heading to the door, knowing there would be no chance of getting Happy’s attention right now.

“May Parker.”

“And May!? Open dador” Peter tried to say around the edible glue in his mouth as he nearly runs for the door, he gets there just in time to see the agent opening the door for his aunt. The second she sees him she drops her bag giving him the biggest smile she can muster opening her arms to it.

“There’s my boy!” Peter tries his best to get rid of the rest of what’s in his mouth as he all but tackles the small woman. “Oh, my, my. Do you plan to stop growing?” He leans back to give her a bashful smile.

“I thought I had?” He would look down at himself but he wasn’t done hugging the woman he hadn’t seen since Christmas.

“Oh, at least, two more inches, lord knows what Tony feeds you.”

“Normal things?” She gives him a look as she takes a step then takes the now offending jar out of his hand.

“This is normal?”

“Everything else wanted me to cook it.” He gave a little shrug then reached for the jar bashfully, May, however, pulled it more out of his reach.

“You can’t cook?”

“Well, I’m better than dad, I just didn’t want to. Besides, Happy was going to pick up Chinese tonight.”

“Happy?” It was then Peter realises that he really doesn’t talk that much to May about what goes on in California. His visits mostly had him talking about how school was, his dreams and thoughts. She was his confidant and advisor, for everything day to day it was Pepper he spoke to, generally because she was there.

“Oh, uh, Harold. Harold Hogan. He’s our driver and bodyguard.”

“And you call him Happy?”

“Dad started it, he used to be a boxer and he looks serious a lot so it kind of stuck.” May just shakes her head, her hands coming up as if she doesn’t know what to do with the situation.

“Of course, Tony calls him Happy. Well, where is this boxer that you’ve never told me about. If I’m going to make the man dinner, I have to, at least, meet him.” Peter starts to look apologetic then frowns a little.
“But Chinese…” He gets a sharp look from May which gets him backpedalling. “But, it has been so long since I’ve had your cooking, of course. And I have always loved your cooking. Yes, uh. Happy, right away.” Peter gestures out of the hallway and towards the living area, now that everyone was paying attention, the background noise from the game could be heard easily. They soon follow the sound leaving the agent who brought May standing by the door, an eyebrow arched at the fact he was completely forgotten about.

With how large and open as the living room was, the sound of squeaking of shoes, the thud of the basketball on the court and the cheering, all to a level loud enough to make it feel like the game was playing in the house itself. Happy sat on the leather couch with a beer in one hand and a large bowl of popcorn next to him, anyone would be hard pressed to say that Happy was anything other than totally immersed in the game.

“Happy, hey.” Peter had stopped beside him. After a moment of not being heard, he scratches his head and tries again. Then he stands in front of him and waves at him. Happy looks at him for a second then leans around him to keep watching.

“C’mon, mini boss. We’re in the final minutes here and we’re 10 behind.” He leans around to try the other side of him. Peter just looks over his shoulder then back at Happy.

“You know there are more than two people in the house, right?” Happy stops and looks up at him.

“Boss and Pepper are back.”

“No, they’ve never been here before.” Happy’s expression drops and he stands up quickly, reaching for Peter to pull him behind him, as he turns around he sees May standing there with her head tilted curiously, the agent is hovering back from everyone watchful.

“May Parker?” He glances back at Peter before looking back at the older woman, she gives him a small smile and nods.

“How did you-?” Peter starts to ask, as he comes out from behind Happy.

“Photos.” Was all the bodyguard offered, Peter guessed it made sense really. After a moment May comes over and offers her hand, she and Happy shake comfortably. Then there’s a polite cough in the background, everyone looks at the agent. He was about the same height as Peter though a great deal more filled out and straight backed. Even with the sunglasses on he looked the very opposite of thrilled about being here.

“Oh, yeah right.” Peter looks from the agent to May again. “Why are you visiting? Not that I don’t want you here, but, well unannounced.” The agent stepped in before May could get the chance, she gave him a frown as he quickly spoke over her.

“There is a situation developing in New York. Under the circumstances, it was safer to relocate your aunt.”

Peter started at him for a moment, clearly not all of S.H.I.E.L.D were as naturally reassuring yet unassuming like Coulson was.

“Dad’s in New Y-“

“He is doing his part.” Peter gave an exaggerated nod.

“Yeah, my dad’s helping out in some big thing going down in New York, that’s big enough to have my aunt May brought to the other side of the country?”
“Yes.” With the agent straight-faced, Peter looked surprised.

“What’s going on?”

“That’s classified.”

“You can’t classify Tony Stark. Especially if this is something that he’s helping with, because I’ve grown up with him, really. Even his attempts at being subtle aren’t.”

The agent sighs, as May pets Peter’s arm.

“Honey, Agent Ward can’t just go telling everyone what’s happening. Even I don’t know why I was brought here. He just showed up at my door and asked me to pack some things. I only found out I was being brought here by the time I got to the front door.”

“My orders were to bring May Parker to this address. Orders which I have successfully carried out.”

Peter takes it all in for a moment, his previous anxious thoughts about what was going on quieting for a moment.

“It’s normally Coulson who comes here to deal with these things.”

“He is currently with Mr. Stark.” Peter gives Ward another long thoughtful look.

“Why do I get the feeling that this is even above your need to know level.” Ward twitches slightly.

“Oh wow. It really is. Isn’t it?!” Peter almost wants to laugh at how crazy this is starting to sound in his head, then he feels his leg being swatted by aunt May.

“Peter, mind your manners. I’m sorry, Agent Ward. He is just a boy, and with his father and all”

“No, it’s… It’s fine. There won’t be any agents left on site here. But we will be monitoring the house to be on the safe side.”

“That would be wonderful of you. Thank you, Agent.” May smiles at him, stroking Peter’s arm to distract him from asking any more questions as Ward nods then turns to leave. When Peter realises he’s gone he digs in his pocket for his phone. “Peter, what are you-“

“I’m calling dad.”

“Peter Benjamin Parker Stark, you take that hand out of your pocket.” Both Peter and Happy jump as May takes command of the situation with all of Peter’s name. She sighs a little and holds his cheek. “Obviously, something really important is going on, you know what your father’s like, he might be so busy with what he’s doing he won’t answer the call, and you’ll think the worst. Or he’s in that suit of his, do you really want to distract him?” Peter sags, giving her a little smile.

“No, I guess not. Thanks, Aunt May.”

“Well, you’re very welcome.” She turns and regards the room. “Now, Mr. Hogan. This room isn’t going to look like this the whole time I’m here is it?” Happy looks around and then starts snatching at some of the mess he’s made.

“Uh, no ma’am.”

“Good. Now I’m going to check on how the kitchen looks, I may need you boys to go down to the store.” May doesn’t wait for either of them to speak and just heads off in search of the kitchen. Happy keeps tidying up but looks over at Peter.
“I thought we were going to get Chinese?” Peter shrugs at him.

“Aunt May decided she’s cooking.” He starts to head to the kitchen to see if she needs help. “Let’s hope it isn’t meatloaf.”

When the news came on the next day, that there were aliens in New York and that there were reports of Tony Stark in the Iron Man armour along with several other unnamed people and a monster fighting them back, May, Peter and Happy were unable to leave the living room in case they missed anything. While Peter had come to terms with the fact his dad was getting into these situations, it was more that aliens were destroying New York. It was life changing, so life changing that for the first time since Tony came out as Iron Man, Peter was not only proud but relieved at the fact Iron Man existed.

As the footage kept rolling, Peter started to get better views of people who were fighting with his dad. The green guy was hard to miss, and something about him seemed really familiar, he was pretty sure he’s heard his dad talking about it to Pepper only a few months ago, but he could have been wrong. When he realised that Natasha was out there he couldn’t help but cheer for her, Happy did too, then went on to brag about who she got changed into one of those suits in the back of the car he was driving. May sighed exasperatedly at him while exclaiming that men will never change.

Then Peter saw the shield.

Not just any shield, those are never going to be interesting to him, but this shield and who it was attached to, was. All Peter needed to see was the slightly domed metal, the pattern unmistakeable; red silver, red, with a silver star on a blue background. That was Captain America, or at least someone wearing the outfit. Because news like that, Tony would have told him? Right? After all, some of the first nights Peter had spent in the house were Tony telling him second-hand stories about Captain America and World War II. He even had some of the original figures and comics, which whenever he asked where they came from had only gotten vague replies or complete topic changes.

So seeing a hero he grew up with, even if it wasn’t the same guy, was still super exciting.

It was two days after the battle before Peter could get to New York with May in tow, of course, it wasn’t a commercial flight, the teenager managed to get strings pulled for one of the company helicopters to fly them there. As they sat in the back of a taxi, May comments on the fact that even with half the city evacuated so damage could be assessed traffic were still unbelievable.

When they got to the S.H.E.I.L.D building just up from Times Square, it didn’t take long for Peter to get the right badge to let him enter. May declined her own pass, the foyer alone was just too intimidating for her, so she told Peter she would go and see if her house was still there. Peter insisted that when she was done to go to Stark Tower, it took some convincing, but she finally agreed.

Peter sat in one of the inner lobby chairs for the better part of two hours. Apparently his dad was in a meeting with Fury, so Peter as taken out a book and started reading it to pass the time, he got the feeling it was going to be a long time until either would surface for air. He was about 3 chapters down when he heard someone address him.

“Excuse me, son. But are you sure you should be here right now?”
“Son?” Peter looked up from the book at the man. While he was certainly older than Peter, he was also easily younger than his dad. Also very blonde with blue eyes. He couldn’t help but give him an incredulous look. “Uh, I could ask you the same thing. What’s a Hilfiger model doing in a government building? Without a pass.” Peter gestures at the lack of pass on the other man’s person, the man actually looked a little lost.

“Hilfiger? I’m assuming that’s fashion. I’m sorry to say, that I’m not a model, nor am I a visitor here.” The man glances around to see if there was anyone around was meant to be keeping an eye on Peter. Something about the man’s face in profile had Peter narrowing his eyes staring hard when the man realised he couldn’t help but look a little awkward about it.

“You’re…Wait you can’t be.”

“Excuse me?” This man was looking lost as well as awkward.

“You crashed. You should be dead. Are you really?”

“Captain America? Uh, well.”

“No, Steve Rogers. Well, yes, obviously if you’re Steve Rogers you’re going to also be Captain Ame- What?” The man looked surprised at the fact Peter knew this, and momentarily Peter wondered if he should have actually shut up for a change.

“You know Steve Rogers?”

“Uh, yeah?”

“Forgive me I’m a little lost here, but. How?”

“My dad. I grew up on Captain America stories. He gave me comic books and everything.” Something about the statement made the man’s face drop significantly.

“Was… I not meant to let you know about the comic books?” He shook his head.

“Your dad told you about me?”

“I just said that.”

“Son, what’s your name?”

“Peter?”

“Peter, I’m afraid I have some bad news.” Rogers took a deep breath as if he was going to start apologising for something, for a moment Peter was confused and a touch concerned.

“Hey, you. You shouldn’t be in this city. It’s dangerous right now.” Tony’s voice pierced through the awkward silence that had come up, Peter and Rogers both looked over at Tony. The older man was pointing at Peter, his other hand in his pocket. Beside him, Natasha was walking in step with him. She looked a touch surprised to see him there. Rogers, however, looked even more out to sea.

“You know the boy?” He asks, stepping more away from ‘the boy’ in question.

“He should.” Natasha gets in before Tony and smiles at Peter. “You’re looking good.”

“Thanks. I mean, it’s always great to get a compliment like that but really, I should be giving it to you. You and that archer guy. Just. Okay, wow.” Natasha’s smile grows.
“I’m sure he’ll be really happy to know he has a fan.”

“He was amazing out there.” Peter exclaims.

“Okay, so what am I then? I was out there too.” Tony gives the pair an annoyed look, currently not taking in the fact that the symbol of American freedoms looked like he was dumped in another country without so much as a phrase book.

“You need to stop almost killing yourself. I saw the footage of you going through the wo-“

“I’m going to take that as a ‘Thank you’ if you don’t mind.” He finally looks at Rogers. “Rogers, breathe. I know you’re the unofficial champion of holding your breath. But right now, you look like you’re going to fall over. I’m not going to catch you.”

“I’m not going to fall over. I’m just a little…” He searches for a word but doesn’t seem to find it. Tony seems to figure out enough, though.

“Steve Rogers. I would like to introduce you to Peter Stark.” Peter smiles and offers his hand with a quiet ‘hi’

“Stark?” Steve takes the hand and shakes it politely, before looking at Tony.

“Oh, yeah. He’s my son.”

“When you see them in action it’s more obvious,” Natasha adds to help the captain absorb the information.

“He isn’t mentioned in any of the reports.”

“Actually, if you look in the right places he is. But as untrustworthy as Fury is. The man sticks to his word. I don’t want Peter in my spotlight.”

“Apparently I have to get my own.” It was obviously taking a long time for Steve to register the fact that the man he had very recently insulted in various ways actually had a son. So much so that Natasha felt the need to step in.

“I think it’s time for the good Captain and I to file some reports. Stark, I better see that boy again before you all go back to California.”

“You know where the tower is. It’s not my problem if you don’t show up.” Tony retorts as the woman then went to guide the confused icon away as he tries to say polite, if confused goodbyes. Tony hears Steve quietly admit he thought Peter was Coulson’s son, Tony turns back to Peter missing the tall blonde look back over his shoulder at the pair. “Where’s May?”

“Uh, either still at her place. Or on the way to the tower.”

“I was told by… I was told that she was sent there to keep her safe. The place was clean?” Peter raised an eyebrow at the pause.

“Yeah, well everywhere I was. College basketball finals were on so Happy was camped in the living room.”

“She would have loved that.”

“I actually got to see Happy use a vacuum.” Tony laughs.
“Let’s get back to the tower.” He turns Peter to face the door and they start walking out together.

It was on the way back that Tony told Peter about what had roughly gone down over the last few days, and what had happened to Coulson. Which came as a bitter shock to Peter, as he had really liked the guy, he was funny without trying when he wanted to be and seemed so professional and respected. It had caused Peter to be quieter on the trip to the tower.

After getting to the tower, they were immediately met by Pepper who checked Peter out, then snipped at Tony for letting him come to the city, they argued over it for a moment but it all seemed to pass. It wasn’t anything out of the ordinary really, at least not for Tony and Pepper. Then Peter was introduced to Bruce Banner, it took a moment to remember the name but soon Peter was flooding the man with questions about gamma radiation, and other questions about his papers. Bruce and Tony shared a look at one point during the questioning.

“He knows exactly who you are.” It seems to make Bruce seem a little wary, Peter looks between them, a touch put out that his question was interrupted. Once looking between Bruce and Tony, he shrugs.

“You’re Dr. Bruce Banner, and you’re an amazing scientist and superhero. Now, back to the question.”

While Tony and Pepper stayed in New York, to make arrangements for repairs to the tower and the city, Peter spent most of that time with Bruce. Bruce even admitted to growing fond of him easily, his knowledge and eagerness to learn with the older man had certainly helped him feel more at ease in the tower, especially as Bruce’s new apartment in the tower was the first thing being worked on as Tony had offered him an open-ended lease and complete access to the research and development floors.

Before leaving to go back to Malibu, what was left of the Avengers had dinner. Admittedly, Tony had only informed Natasha about it as per her demand, so he wasn’t expecting Steve and Clint to have shown up with her. Bruce and Pepper ignored Tony complaining about how they weren’t invited while still leading them all in and bringing them to the table to sit at places that Pepper and Bruce brought out during Tony’s complaining. Natasha brought Clint over to Peter.

“Peter, I’d like you to meet, Clint Barton, or Hawkeye. This was the archer.” Clint gave the boy an appraising look as they shook hands.

“Oh wow. I mean nice to meet you. I saw some of the things you did out there. Talk about putting yourself on the line.” Clint raises an eyebrow then looks at Natasha.

“You sure he’s Starks. I mean he’s …”

“Politer?” Pepper offered.

“Modest?” Came from Bruce.

“Less abrasive” Natasha added objectively, earning a derisive snort from Tony.

“Tall. I mean he’s closer to the Captain, than Stark in height.” Almost everyone in the room laughed, the only ones trying to not be obvious about it were Steve and Natasha, but they both looked very much amused.

It set the tone for the rest of the night, everyone was clearly content with having an easy dinner among others with no agenda other than to enjoy the meal and conversation. Peter felt that it would have been even Peter with Aunt May joining them, but she had declined, saying there were just too
many people for her these days, and she’d finally got the house back to looking like it used to, even though the front yard could use some new plants.

The conversations went long into the night, Peter even managed to ask Steve about one of the stories Tony had told him, wanting to know how much of it was true. He wasn’t entirely sure if he was being honest about how true it actually was, but it definitely felt pretty honest.
Chapter Summary

Tony learns that sometimes compromise makes for a happy son.
He also learn Bruce prefers subways bread.

Chapter Notes

The chapter happens after Thor: The Dark world, and before Captain America: Winter Soldier.

This was part of the reason I took so long to write it, I wanted to make sure where Winter Soldier was going before I ended up having to rewrite things.

PLEASE NOTE: The next chapter is directly after the events of Winter Soldier, and hopefully enough time will have passed for everyone to have seen it so I don't go and massively spoil things for you. Seeing as the movie is kind of an in universe game changer.

Also! I want to give a shout out to my Beta: MayanAngel, she is beautiful I love her and it's about time I found someone to have my stories make more sense.

Enjoy the chapter!

The moment Tony announced his address to the world's press, Pepper sent Peter straight to New York to be with May to keep him safe. While he was there he saw the paper saying Tony was missing assumed dead. He was on his bed when May walked into the room placing a small box on her lap as she sat on the edge of her bed, Peter idly looked at the box sitting up a little out of quiet curiosity and to be polite.

“I’ve had these for a long time. Couldn’t really bring myself to get rid of them.”

She said it simply and quietly, which only had Peter more curious. He sat up properly and shifted closer to his aunt. She opened the box and pulled out an album putting it on his lap.

“Photos. Richard took a lot of photos of your mother, and Ben took his fair share of them, and me.” She smiles softly as her nephew opens the album eagerly to look at the family he had for a very short period of time. Everyone looked so happy in the photos, there was a moment of loss deep in his chest as he remembered the memories. Near the end of the album, there were more and more photos that included Peter, it was strange seeing himself so small and at times covered in mud.

Before the accident, Peter had spent a lot of time with Aunt May and Uncle Ben when his parents work took them overseas, which was, at least, a third of the year. So a lot of the photos of Peter were of him and Aunt May, Uncle Ben obviously was the one behind the camera, though there were some
shots with him and Ben too, they didn’t have the best focus, and in one, the top of Ben’s head was missing but that didn’t stop them feeling any less special.

Once he closed the album, May top one more thing out of the box before putting it on the floor. It was an old analogue camera, Peter wanted to be gentle with his, but he was just far too eager to get his hands on it. He turned it about in his hands, taking in all the details, little nicks, and scuffs in the casing from where it had been bumped or dropped, little plates pointing out it was a Yashica GSN, with a small symbol of an atom. The underside of the camera had Peter paused, running his hand over the inscribed name on it.

“You want me to have Uncle Ben’s camera? Really?”

“Well, I’ve never really been good at taking photos anyway. Richard bought it for him, so I thought that if anyone was going to have it should be you. I know I should have given it to you years ago, but there’s just so many memo-“ May doesn’t get a chance to finish what she was saying too distracted by Peter’s babbled thanks and big loving hug.

In the month he stays with Aunt May, he learnt that now, the mansion in Malibu is only a memory, Tony’s heart no longer needs protecting from shrapnel, and they’ve moved into the refurbished Stark Tower.

Through it all, Peter can’t help but be moody about it all.

Peter was sprawled out on the leather couch, staring out at the New York skyline through the viewfinder of his camera, but not really looking at anything. Even though he didn’t have roots in Malibu it was still jarring to know that short of a few days’ worth of clothes, phone and music player everything that Peter had owned, earned, even his projects were all gone. Either as rubble or making themselves useful by being part of an unplanned beachside fish play world.

Tony and Pepper had sourced new books, equipment, even a new skateboard. Unfortunately, he had been unenthused about all of the ‘new thing’ smells that came with them. Pepper had understood and apologised about it turning out this way. Tony probably understood in the back of his mind, after all, he had gone to all the trouble of fishing Dum-E and Butterfingers out of the pacific because in the end they were some of the first things he had built that he had also designed. They, along with J.A.R.V.I.S were the only things that people could point to that proved Tony was actually sentimental. At the same time, he couldn’t understand Peter being put out about losing the recognition for his hard work.

After all, Tony had been winning awards his whole life. So the excitement and pride that came with them had long since faded. The achievement itself was still there, in a school hallway and he had several people involved with science fairs keeping an eye out for his work. Things like brass trophies and pretty ribbons just weren’t anything compared to the right people seeing your talent.

So when Tony came into the room, a bag of dried banana pieces in his hand that was keeping his attention for the moment, seeing Peter like that only caused him to get curious.
“What’s happening sauerkraut?” When he doesn’t get a reply he comes closer so he’s in Peter’s eye line. “Oscar. Care to share.” Peter sighs roughly then sits up, giving Tony a flat look.

“Nothing. Just sitting here.”

“Really? Not contemplating the universe, or thinking up something to shoot?” Tony starts to gesture at the camera as Peter shrugs and stands up to leave the room.

“Guess I’m just working through my own blank slate protocol.” Without giving Tony another chance to speak he disappears into his room. Leaving Tony just to stare.

“J.A.R.V.I.S.”

“Sir?”

“Little help?”

“I’m afraid I lack sufficient data when it comes to the teenaged mind, sir. Most of my processing power is redirected into anticipating what goes on in your own head.”

Tony rolls his, then makes a dismissive gesture in the direction Peter had gone in.


“The workshop will be in diagnostic for another 32 hours, Sir. I am still in the middle of compiling and re-ordering all the available data you managed to recover from your private servers in Malibu.”

“Real chalk it is.” Tony rolls up the bag of dried fruit and slips it into his back pocket as he heads off to his new workshop, disappearing for about a day as he starts work on drafting new armour.

Six months later Peter’s mood hadn’t improved. It was starting to seem like anything Tony did would set him off, Pepper would try to tell him it was just something he was going through. All this managed to do was cause arguments between them, partly because the idea of Peter being angry at him for something that he can’t change, partly because he knew Peter was actually trying to avoid Tony, but mostly because he didn’t like the idea that when it came to problems, that Peter was a little too much like his father, keeping it all inside and not sharing.

Tony realised that it had taken him years and a slow almost death to teach him that wasn’t the best coping mechanism. It was not at all something he wanted Peter to develop.

“Kid’s just acting out. Everyone does it at that age.” Rhodie was leaning against a work bench as Tony was hunched over the Iron Patriot’s frame, connecting cables that linked it into the server. The genius had gotten tired of how many times this particular suit had been corrupted, and negotiated with the army for some interesting defence technology contracts just so he could regain the rights to the processors in the suit. While there was always a chance it could be taken again, at least, this way Tony would have enough back doors into the systems that if he had to break back into it, he could.

“I wasn’t like that at his age.” Tony wiped at his eyes glumly, before turning to one of his consoles, to make sure the suit was syncing properly.
“No, no you’re right. You weren’t anything like Peter was.” Rhodie gave Tony’s back a contemplative look. “You were worse. If we were doing a comparison, what Peter’s doing? Downright angelic compared to the hell caused at college.”

“That’s different, I was going through things.”

“Yeah, the sophomore dorms, a new room each night. Usually drunk too.”

“Okay, now this is about me?”

“Always, but this time, it’s more about your parenting. Sure, when you were his age, your parents just died and you were the only 17 years old in M.I.T. That boy up there? He already lost his parents, and now he’s lost his home and all the memories in it. It’s going to cause some issues. I just hope he’s got a better support group than you did, so he only ends up with a few issues, unlike you who has more issues than Readers Digest.”

Tony pauses and looks at him.

“Of all the books you could have compared me too.”

“They have a lot of interesting articles, Tony. But also, a lot of crap.” The pilot gives the engineer a pointed look. “Give the kid some space. If you ask me, which you don’t but I’m telling you anyway, let him go to a different school.”

“I went to that school.”

“You got kicked out of that school because you hated it. You’re spending all this time keeping him out of the spotlight you’ve trapped him. Let him pick a school, let him actually skateboard without Happy waiting for him outside the park. He needs to be a kid.”

“I think I like you better in the suit, you talk less.”

“Uh, huh. Just make that thing unhackable.”

“What did I tell you about that word?”

It took several hours, and a lot of arguing with everything that was able to be argued with, even a few things that can’t argue back but in the end the new components, software were all installed. He even began working on a new OS to install into it something that would be more use to Rhodie than what was there, but not something as advanced as J.A.R.V.I.S for the moment, it was compiling in a folder designated H.O.M.E.R.

The whole next day, Tony continued to tweak and fiddle with sub-routines in the OS while idly thinking about what Rhodie had said. Maybe he had a point, after all, he usually did but it always seemed to get in Tony’s way so he would tend to ignore it however it really might be something to listen to and work with this time.

“Uh, Earth to Tony?” Bruce leans around in front of him tentatively waving in his face with an amused look on his face, Tony blinked at him as his eyes focused on him instead of wherever they
had been focusing, and his eyes felt dry making him wonder how long he’d been staring like that.

“Something up, Doctor?” He pushed himself away from the holo-screen and turned to a cup of coffee, a small sip told him that not only was it cold, but it was the kind of cold that implied he had come in with that cup that morning and hadn’t touched it since, causing Tony to give it an unimpressed look.

“Looks like there is.” He eyes what’s on the holo-screen before looking back at Tony. “I didn’t think you needed to concentrate so hard on an upload screen.”

Frowning, Tony looked at the screen, Bruce was right he had been staring so deeply into a screen that was telling him how much of H.O.M.E.R had been uploaded into the Iron Patriot. He shook his head.

“Not important.”

“Tony…” Bruce sighed at him.

“You said it yourself, you don’t have the patience for my problems.” This caused Bruce to shake his head and give a sighed chuckled, which had Tony give him a flat look.

“I said I didn’t have the patience to be your psychiatrist or the degree. But I live here rent free, the least I can do is be a friend with a sympathetic ear.”

Sighing, Tony contemplates him before starting to shake his head.

“It’s about Peter, isn’t it?” Tony pauses in his head shaking. “He’s in my lab a lot, and he’s about as shy when it comes to talking than you are.” This gets Tony to scoff before sitting down in a chair.

“Rhodie thinks he should go to a school he wants to go to. But I don’t know, it was a good school. Sure I was kicked out but I did that on purpose. But even now it’s still one of the best schools in the area, and now that I’ve made something of myself and am Iron Man, they were more than happy to take Pete as a transfer.” He looks a little defeated then rubs a hand over his face. “Which is the right thing.”

Bruce watches him quietly for a moment, then puts his hands in his trouser pockets slowly, as if every move he makes is taking its own time in thinking about Tony’s concerns.

“I think.” He starts, carefully choosing his words. “That Peter is a bright kid and will do well anywhere he feels engaged.” Tony looks at him hopefully, Bruce offers a sympathetic smile. “He doesn’t have friends at this school, I know he just started but everyone has, at least, one friend after they start, even me, probably even you.” He raises a hand to stop him from an attempt to boast about friends. “I’m not talking about people who would go to your parties, I’m talking about people you will hang out with you when no one’s watching.” Tony frowns, but then gestures for him to keep going.

“If you ask me, I think Peter would really like public school.” Tony looks at Bruce as if he grew rabbit ears.

“Public school?” He starts to say it’s a terrible idea and why, but Bruce soldiers on over him.

“They might not offer the best education, but Peter doesn’t need that, he’s already naturally curious about things that interest him and what doesn’t interest him isn’t going to be something he’s going to want to be a part of in a career. Just like everyone else. Peter’s grown up in what? Schools that cater to the rich and famous? With kids who plan to live off that fame or be famous themselves? That’s not
Tony sinks more into his chair and rubs at his chin thoughtfully. Taking in what Bruce had said and reflected on it.

“You know. When he was eleven. He was grabbed.” For a change Tony was still, he wasn’t fidgeting or pacing, he just sat still recounting the experience quietly. Bruce’s focus got tighter on Tony’s face, his lips pinched at the thought. “His life for 10 million. They never got their money, but.” He inhales deeply, then runs his hand through his hair as he exhales. “They could take him again in a public school, or worse.”

The only thing that could be heard in the workshop was the whir of Dum-E’s joints as he swept as quietly as he could in one corner. The remaining silence was long and tangible as Tony’s concerns were out in the open, and Bruce quietly absorbed them.

“Or, it could be the safest place for him.” Tony gives him a doubtful look. “Hear me out. No one who has children in public who has even a 10th of that kind of money and compared to you, Peter really isn’t all that assuming, he looks like a normal kid. Well normal for a geeky kid. The worst he’d have to suffer is school bullies, and I am fairly confident that they’re something he can handle.”

“I’ll… talk to him. You know about it. See what he thinks.” Bruce smiles and nods amicably.

“Sounds like an awfully smart plan.”

“What brought you down here anyway?”

“It’s Thursday. You’re the one that wanted us to have a regular lunch on Thursdays.”

Tony looks at his wrist only to find he doesn’t have a watch on.

“It’s 12?”

“2. I wanted to finish a simulated test first.”

“Makes sense. I’m thinking Quiznos.”

“You can go to Quiznos, I’ll have Subway.”

“What’s wrong with Quiznos?” Tony asks as he stands and starts to head for the elevator.

“Nothing, I just like Subway’s bread more.”

It was that afternoon after school when Tony got a moment to ask Peter. The boy had been home for an hour and was in the living area doing some checks on his skateboard, getting ready to go out with it from the looks of it.

Peter glances up as he hears Tony’s shoes tap against the floor. He hunches more over the board.

“Don’t worry, I’ve already called for someone to pick me up and take me there.”
Tony frowned at his short snappish tone, then shook his head then comes over to sit on the arm of the couch.

“Not what I was going to talk about actually.” Peter sighs sharply and leans away from the board, dropping the Allen key in his hand loudly onto the table then turns to Tony. “I wanted to talk to you about schools and you going to them and if you like them or not.” Peter raises an eyebrow at him.

“Is this going to be one of those trick questions?”

“Not that I’m aware of. What do you think of your school?” Peter barely thinks about the question and just shrugs.

“It’s a school? I don’t know it’s like the one back in California.”

“Did you like it?”

“I didn’t hate it?”

“Peter, this isn’t a time to be me, right now.”

“Oh so you’re allowed to never answer direct questions, but I always have to?”

“Yes.” With a frustrated noise, Peter stands up, grabbing the board on the way up.

“Right now, school isn’t the worst thing in the world that I have to deal with.” Without looking at Tony, Peter just heads to the elevator.

“I’m trying here.” Tony starts, as he also stands looking just as frustrated.

“I have no trouble believing how trying you are.” Peter mumbles before raising his voice. “Don’t worry I’ll be sure to bring a babysitter with me to the park.” Just as the doors close he swears he sees Tony wince. He tells himself he doesn’t care.

The trip down to the lobby isn’t a long one, after all, it’s the Avengers private elevator so there are very few levels for it to stop at. So when the doors open, Peter walks straight out, not expecting anyone to be standing at the door, let alone wind up getting a face full of chest.

It doesn’t take him long to figure out who the chest belongs to, after all, there’s only two Avengers with a chest like this and one of those chests are still in London.

“This… is awkward right now, isn’t it?” Peter asks the chest.

“Little bit. Yeah.” Steve replies calmly but doesn’t really sound upset about the fact that there’s a teenage boy whose nose is almost pushing into his sternum. Peter steps back bashfully.

“Sorry.”

“It wasn’t the most awkward thing I’ve ever had to live through.” He smiles easily at Peter, who can’t help but awkwardly return it. “Something up?”

“Huh?” Peter tries to feign innocence. “What do you mean?”

“You were awfully focused coming out of that elevator, son.” Steve clearly looked like he wasn’t buying it.

“Peter.” He couldn’t help but correct him with a bob of the head, before glancing at the elevator
doors. “It’s nothing. Just dad being… Well, himself so fun times there” The sarcasm dripped from his voice.

“Well, at least, he’s consistent with it.” Steve shook his head a little. “Want to talk about it?”

Peter almost starts to say no, then changes his mind, shrugging noncommittally. “Can I use this while we talk?” He wiggles the board at him.

“I won’t have a problem keeping up,” Steve grins in return, Peter can’t help but find it reassuring on so many levels, not only that Steve is happy to listen to a kid he barely knows because he’s looking put out, but this is one of his childhood heroes wanting to listen to him complain about the man who raised him on the stories of this hero.

For a while, they don’t say a word as Peter pushes himself along on the skateboard while Steve keeps up at an easy pace.

“It’s not like I don’t like New York, this place is great. Times Square, the subway, street carts. It’s not that we moved here.”

“It’s that he doesn’t seem to think about who he’s going to effect when he makes his mind up?” Peter looks at Steve as he pretty much hits the nail right on the head, Steve gives a little shrug. “I think it’s safe to say every channel in America had Stark announcing his address to the world. He’s certainly a force to be reckoned with when he’s like that.” He pauses for a second “Not that I need to tell you that what with you being his…” Steve gestures weakly into the air.

“Natasha actually looked surprised when she met me. If that helps?’

“Natasha? Really?” He chuckles. “Now I don’t feel so bad.” There’s another long quiet pause that borders on awkward.

“It’s weird, you know. I spent so much time actually wanting him to be a dad when he’s off at meetings or saving the world from aliens and out of work actors. Then he tries to be one and I can’t get away from him fast enough.”

He then goes on to tell him about when he’s working on projects with Tony, or just sitting around watching movies, that before Extremis and the Mandarin that it was so much easier to get along with his dad, at least, when he was around at any rate.

“Can’t say I ever felt like that about my old man. But I think I know how you feel.”

Peter looks at the older man curiously, but Steve doesn’t elaborate until they make it to an open space, it looked like a site for a building long demolished but never built on, a decent sized concrete square long since set up with poles and cinderblocks by teens looking for somewhere to practice near home. There were quite a few kids there so for the moment Peter and Steve just sat down.

“How much do you remember about your grandpa?”

“Howard?” Peter noticed Steve shift slightly as he calls his grandfather by his name, but he doesn’t correct himself. After all, he never knew the man. “Just that he was a genius like dad, drunk mostly, argumentative always and he didn’t have time for dad growing up. That’s not just dad talking, I’ve seen a reel… It was kind of surreal to see.” He added the part about the reel after seeing Steve giving a doubtful look. But for a moment, he contemplates the teenager’s words.

“I only knew him while he was just a genius.” Steve sighs a little, as if sad he wasn’t there to help Howard through whatever it was that lead him to what he became. “So it was a little jarring to meet
your dad. I was told he was just as talented, if not more than your grandpa, also as single-minded. He looks just like him and spoke a lot like him so it was hard not to expect him to be Howard, which I’m pretty sure was part of the reason behind our fighting after we met.” Peter watched as Steve’s face looked contemplative. It was always weird to Peter when he was younger, hearing Obie compare Tony to Howard, but hearing Steve, it’s more objective as if he’s reflecting on the situation and how it makes him think of Tony more than pointing out how much difference there was.

“But I learnt that your Dad, isn’t Howard, so I should stop expecting him to be. Maybe it’s the same with you? I mean I can’t say for sure, but it sounds like when you’re not expecting him to be a ‘dad’ you get along better?”

“You’re getting all of that just out of me complaining about dad?” It made sense to Peter logically, but it was still something to wrap his head around emotionally.

“That and Bruce and I exchange letters. Both you and Tony are mentioned a lot in them.”

“Oh. Wow. That’s. Got to be the most embarrassing thing I’ve ever heard. That not only are the Hulk and Captain America pen pals, but they talk about me and my dad.” Steve laughs.

“It could be worse, Natasha and Pepper keep in contact too.” At that, Peter lifts his skateboard to hide his face while shaking it pathetically.

“No. This. This is the most embarrassing thing. Just leave me here to die.” Steve continues to look amused by the situation.

“You shouldn’t be surprised, you’re a good kid. I’m surprised you don’t have friends waiting for you, you’ve been here for a few months now.” Peter puts the board on his lap then plays with the wheel.

“You have to fit in enough to make friends with other people. I mean sure, I know a lot of guys in class who think Black Widow is hot. But, I can’t really join in saying something like ‘Yeah well, Black Widow kidnapped me to keep me safe from my dangerous superhero dad.’ Because then it’s making friends with the guy who knows the Avengers and not making friends with Peter.”

As Peter explains, Steve rests his elbow on his knee, then gets his cheek comfortable on his knuckles, giving something of a knowing look.

“Uh, what’s with the face?”

“Just remembering a gangly kid I used to know who had trouble making friends.”

“Well, you grew up in the 40’s that would be most kids. Well, the gangly part, wait, I’m gangly?”

Peter looks down at himself stretching out a leg to look at it critically.

“You’re almost as tall as me and you’re all limbs, kid. I’d count that as gangly. It’s not a bad thing.” Peter continues to frown at his legs because he doesn’t really think he’s gangly, just generous with his limbs. “Peter?”

“Yeah, Cap? Er… Steve?”

“I know I haven’t known your dad long, but give him a break. If being a parent is anything like waking up 70 years in the future. Then there’s a lot to adjust to, I guess it’s even harder when your name is on buildings and you have to keep the world safe.” He pats Peter’s shoulder then stands up. “That and I’m pretty sure he can’t actually think like normal people.”
“You really are a boy scout.” He grins at him playfully.

“Suddenly, you’re too much like your old man. Look after yourself, Peter. Make sure you’re home before it’s dark.

“I will, mom.” Steve just waves over his shoulder.

“Thank you, Tony.” He glances back at Peter with a smirk that makes Peter laugh.

Despite the mocking, Peter does come back to the tower before its dark. Tony’s at the dining room table alone, picking at a slice of pizza.

“Uh, isn’t it a little too lonely in here?” Peter props his skateboard against the wall then comes over to the table, pulling a slice out of the box.

“Bruce is working on something that he can’t leave right now.” Tony peels off a piece of pepperoni and stares at it for a moment before eating it.

“And Pep-“ He catches Tony shift at the start of the word. “… Oh. Is this a sleeping different room’s fight..?”

“Left for Washington early fight.” Peter sags into a chair as Tony pushes his pizza away.

“Dad what’s…” He tries to search for a word but not even conjunctions are forming on his lips. Tony shakes his head.

“It’ll work out. It’s fine, just a little, you know. Bump in the road.” There’s a long quiet moment between then that makes the apartment feel bigger, emptier and higher up than it actually is, stretching into uncomfortable. Soon it’s too much silence for Peter to take.

“About before…” Tony shakes his head.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s a bump.” Tony looks at him as he gives a shrug.

“Why were you asking?”

“It’s been pointed out to me that you might not… Like private school”

“It’s not that I don’t like it, it’s just.”

“Not the right fit?” Peter nods. “Look. My dad put me there, I thought it was a punishment, now from his side of things I get he was trying to do what was good for me. Unfortunately for me, Dad didn’t have Rhodie or Bruce to give him a different perspective. How does public school sound to you?”

“You mean other than thinking of High School Musical, or 90210?”

“I don’t think any of the public schools require you to sing or have mediocre acting skills. Outside drama club of course.” Peter takes another slice of pizza and slowly eats it as he thinks.
“Have you got one in mind?”

“I’m not sure how public schools work, but I think there’s a few in the area, you can pick one.”

“Really?”

“Got to start making your own mistakes sometime, Screech.”

“Really, all the school-based TV shows you pick Saved by the Bell?”

“Well, you’re no Daria.”

“I do have a green jacket and glasses at least.”

“When’s the last time you wore either of those?”

“That’s not the point.”

“The point is, eat your pizza. I’ll tell Bruce he’s taking you school shopping tomorrow.”

“You can’t come?”

“Can’t. I’ve finished Patriot’s upgrades so Rhodie and I need to test the functionality.”

“You know, I can wait until you get back. It’s not a big deal.”

“I want to get you somewhere you want to be yesterday. Besides you can look through them all, then when I get back we’ll look at the one you’ve picked together with your transcripts. Then we’ll go to Original Nicks.”

“Authentic Nicks.”

“Not original? I thought we went to original”

“You didn’t like Original Nicks, and Authentic Original Nicks was closed, Authentic Nick’s also does that chocolate pizza.”

“New York pizza is a very delicious maze of confusion.” Peter nods in agreement wisely.

Waking up, Peter found Bruce sitting at the table with a cup of tea, looking at it with great concern was he clutches it with both hands. He looks at Peter when he enters the room all scruffy and still in his pyjamas.

“Your dad thinks I need to get out more.” He gestures to a post it on the table in front of him, Peter peels it off the table and reads it.

Bruce,

You and Peter should go look at public schools this week, you need to get out more and have fun, go hit on a chemistry teacher while you’re at it. Don’t have too much fun.
“Chemistry teacher?”

“I’ll let you know when I figure that one out. So Looks like Tony’s giving you some freedom, aren’t we a lucky rich boy?” He gives Peter a soft but amused grin, which makes Peter roll his eyes and buries himself into the fridge for some juice.

“Lucky rich boy with his scientifically published babysitter.” He chuckles.

“Reluctant scientifically published babysitter. I’m really not sure this is going to be a good idea. I remember high school, it was stressful enough without having to worry about the other guy lurking around corners.” Bruce folds the note and fidgets with it, tapping the edge of the table in an impatient tattoo. “Could be dangerous.” Peter removes himself from the fridge eating something left over, at least, he hopes it’s a left over.

“Maybe that’s the plan?”

“Last I checked, Tony gave up on trying to bring him out after seeing him in the green flesh. The lack of casual bruising points that out these days.” He shakes his head as he’s obviously thinking of Tony’s overly attentive curiosity over the first few weeks of meeting him. They experimentation to get Bruce angry might have dwindled significantly since the day before the Battle of New York, but as Tony is known to, he had a habit of seeing if he could push the boundaries.

“He wouldn’t be there to see it anyway. I mean for a start you’re the only one he could ask because you well, you never leave the tower and Dad’s working on Rhodie’s armour then off with Rhodie to test it.”

Bruce thinks on that for a moment.

“Surely Pepp-“

“She and Happy left for Washington last night.” Peter knew he said it too quickly, but he couldn’t help but feel a little edgy on his dad’s behalf about Pepper. Bruce looked at Peter for a long moment.

“Still…” He makes a vague gesture but they both knew what it stood for, which had Peter nodding. Bruce stretched then stood up slowly rolling his shoulder, Peter swears he tries to make himself look older than he is on purpose.

“Well, better get this over with then. Excited or not it’s going to be a long day for both of us.” Peter starts to grin. “We’re not taking the subway.”

“Hey, now I’m okay with that. We can walk, after all, you could use the sun, and you’re looking a lot paler now you’re not on the run from crazy generals and secret governmental bodies.” Bruce just shakes his head.

“You need to start spending less time with Tony, it’s turning you into, well, a smartass” Peter looks shocked.

“Wait really? Damn, I was really hoping to be a wiseass.”

“I’m seeing all boy’s schools in your future.”
“Oh well, look at that, it’s no longer smartass o’clock. Imagining the timing in that.”

“Yeah, truly amazing.” Bruce came back with dryly as he started to tidy up the kitchen while Pete disappeared to quickly get ready for school hunting.

At the end of the day, as predicted, Peter and Bruce were both exhausted, the last school for the day had Bruce aching for a taxi even with how slow the traffic would be back to the tower.

After seeing seven schools the list narrowed down quickly, top of the out list was a school Bruce had flat out refused to go into because it looked way to small and far too easy to break. The apprehension alone made Peter cross it off. In the end, they settled on Midtown High, it was fairly close to the tower, at least, close enough for Peter to easily walk to without having to wait for school buses or general public transport, it was also one where both Peter and Bruce had felt easily comfortable in. Part of the reason Peter liked it was because it looked and felt like a movie version of a school, clean generally friendly with obviously looking cliques and guys with lettermen jackets, really lettermen jackets, he didn’t even realise they were a thing. Even the janitor was weirdly friendly, it had a weird charm to it, how could Peter not be interested in that?

“You know, if I was actually under contract, I would demand a bonus for today.” Bruce sagged bonelessly in the back seat of the taxi looking more tired than usual.

“Wait. I thought you were working for dad?”

“He demanded I be a Consultant to Stark Industries. Better rates and whatever I develop within the building doesn’t count as being automatically company property unless I offer it up.”

“Okay, that’s one sweet deal.”

“It’s his way of not letting me feel trapped I guess.”

“Well yeah, if dad likes you he’ll always try to spoil you. At least, he always spoilt me, Pepper and Happy. Rhodie too, but he usually keeps rejecting it to annoy dad.”

“It feels like it should be strange that Tony Stark is the weirdest part of my life.”

“I think there’s a support group for that. Chapters all across the city really. Probably the world. ‘We met Tony Stark and our lives will never be the same’. At least, that’s what I guess it’s called, I’ve never been, I’m too used to the weirdness or something.” Bruce huffs a laugh then settles himself into less of a despairing slouch and into a more comfortable position in the taxi. It doesn’t take too long for them to end up back at the tower.

“So, how are you feeling about going to Midtown?”

“You know what? I think it’s going to be a pretty great idea.” Peter smiles as they walk into the building’s lobby heading to the private elevator.
To say things are getting rocky within Stark Tower could potentially be an understatement. Then along came a spider...

I want to apologise with how long this chapter took to get uploaded. It was a mixture of my own writers block, moving house, and my beta having one hell of a hectic university life for a bit there.

But everything is starting to get traction again, though there may be a little while for the next chapter it shouldn't nearly be as long a break, because this next chapter is taking so long because there's a lot going on in it and needs much tweaking.

ENJOY!

“You want to know what I think? I think it’s going to be a terrible idea.”

“You.” Pepper’s voice is scolding as she checks her watch. “I’m really sure it won’t be.” Tony knew why she was impatient, she had a board of directors meeting and wasn’t in the mood to salve Tony’s ego over the situation. “You even made space specifically for her after the building was destroyed.”

“Half destroyed, and only really a few floors were kind of breached, that’s not the point. That was before I knew she was a double crossing double agent.” He paced the floor with a tumbler with two fingers of scotch in it, he eyes how close he is to the window for a moment and moves away from it all the while ignoring Pepper’s pointed glances at the tumbler. “How do we really know she isn’t a Hydra sleeper agent?”

“She was fighting with Steve, I think that’s an obvious indication of her alliances. And you knew she was a double agent, she defected from Russia to the United States years ago.”

“Not the point, she’s really good at her job. She worked for us too, do you remember that the whole stabbing me in the neck incident is still fresh in my mind. You didn’t like her either.”

“It was you I wasn’t liking in that situation” Pepper replied shortly.

“Are you really going to make this about me?” There was a tenseness to his voice that even Tony didn’t like after he heard it. Pepper simply stood up with a sigh and brushed the wrinkles from her skirt.

“It’s always about you, isn’t it?” She shook her head for a moment, dismissing anything she could have possibly meant by that. “She needs somewhere she knows is safe. And what place could be
safer for her right now than a tower that is run by an artificial intelligence designed by a man who never trusted the company she used to be paid by. Not to mention our lawyers are the best in the world, we could keep anyone wanting her tied up in paperwork for years. She’s been cold to you, never actually cruel.” Tony downs the contents of the drink. Then looks down into it for a moment. Pepper gave him a moment before adding, “You worked together easily enough with the inv.” She hesitates. “The invasion. And that was after she helped you fight symptoms for something that was killing you. That you told no one about I might add.”

“Well, I guess, it’s getting dusty without anyone using it anyway,” Tony pauses for a moment. “How was she looking? Last time I saw her was at the tribunal, and that was only what J.A.R.V.I.S dug up for me outside of what was broadcast.”

“Find out for yourself, she’s waiting in the lobby. I have to go to one of those meetings you rarely showed up to. Join me in the elevator?” She picked up her briefcase and Tony nodded. The ride down had an air of tension in it, Tony wasn’t entirely sure why. He opens his mouth to ask, but Pepper cuts in.

“Mk 43.” Tony just stares at her. “That’s what you were working on when I came in today, wasn’t it?” She doesn’t look at him, and Tony is quiet for a moment.

“44, 43 is already fabricated and in the process of a paint job actually. Though it’s less Mk 44 and more playing with ideas for Mk 44” Pepper makes a frustrated noise as she looks at him.

“You promised no more. Tony, you promised me.”

“Actually, what I promised. Was a break, I’ve taken that break, Pepper, you’ve seen it out there. Even after New York, Aliens from Middle-Earth invading Greenwich, Hydra still alive and strong inside of S.H.E.I.L.D, Slattery going missing during a jailbreak a few months back” Pepper raises a doubtful eyebrow at him.

“Trevor Slattery… Really, Tony, You’re going to try and use him of all people to justify two new suits?”

“One suit, and I am when the ten rings are behind it.”

“What? How?”

“Hell if I know. I just know I got an annoyingly long letter from Hammer about it claiming how not fair it was. Had to shower after it while I had J.A.R.V.I.S verify it. All I know is, I have even less of a reason to trust the idea of a one on one interview with reporters.” Pepper’s hand raises as she shakes her head, refusing to let Tony drag her off point with this nonsense.

“Tony, you can’t do this, it’s nearly killed you how many times now? Every time you go out there I feel like it’s going to kill me seeing you out there in danger”

“That’s what the suit is for, to eliminate the danger”

“That would be fine if it actually did that! The suit itself tried to kill you” Their voices rise without them realising.

“That wasn’t the suit, it was the reactor.”

“That doesn’t make it any less scary, Tony”

“Well since I removed it from my chest, Pepper! I think it counts as something that won’t kill me”
“Oh well, that’s great to know that’s one less thing on the growing list of things that could kill you!”

The argument continues in volume and viciousness as the elevator stops, and the doors open silently opening up their shouting to the public of the lobby. Which quickly goes silent after the fact.

They’re both aware of all the eyes on them, however, they both refuse to glare at anything to each other. Pepper steps back from Tony, running a hand through her hair to make sure it’s all in place before she quietly leaves the elevator, ignoring what eyes are on her as she leaves. Tony, however, doesn’t move an inch, scowling at the elevator as if it was to blame for everything, just as the doors start to close a hand appears to get the doors open once again and Natasha slips in. She’s wearing a pair of jeans, a simple tee shirt, and a baggy jacket.

“This way you don’t have to worry about coming out and having everyone stare at you.” She said lightly as she backs into a corner of the small box to give him as much room as possible, knowing he wasn’t currently in the best of moods and because she asking a big favour from him right now.

“Yeah, never really been on the top ten things I’ve ever worried about the list.” He presses a button as the door closes and the elevator starts moving. “How about I show you your floor?” Natasha looks physically relieved to hear him say that, causing any residual anger to drain out of him. He had built up such an image in his head of her never showing her cards, that the action made him re-think things. He knew that she was professional to a fault which made her come off as emotionless and standoffish at times, but he had seen her smile, laugh and be playful, but still to see her look that relieved at his accepting her really made him pause.

“That bad, huh?” She raises an eyebrow at him.

“You didn’t read the files?” Tony shrugs and sticks his hands in his pockets.

“J.A.R.V.I.S is mining it for anything interesting, but I don’t really plan to read anything he doesn’t bring up. I only broke in because I was feeling personally lied to.”

“Not even my files?”

“I’m the last person to be judging people based on their past.” He pauses. “Though, okay I was maybe a little hesitant to agree to this because well, that was one hell of a snake vine in your super-secret establishment.”

“Actually, I was kind of thinking that you wouldn’t let me in because of that.”

“Yeah well, if Peter found out he probably wouldn’t forgive me. Stop making him like you, it’s hard to be mistrusting and judge-y.” She gives him a small smile.

“I don’t promise anything. I think I like Peter in my corner.”

“Of course, you do, everyone does.”

The doors open and Tony steps out into the level. It’s open and completely unadorned. He walks in and looks around shrugging at it.

“Okay so basically it’s an empty room right now. Technically you’re going to be in my guest room until this place is habitable. So let’s remember how much I’m sticking my neck right now, remember cut it off and nothing grows back. Which means that kid you’re so fond of gets one hell of an inheritance and legacy to match up to.”

As Tony explains this, Natasha wanders the empty room, she makes it almost to the window when
he finishes. She stops and he can see her mind ticking.

“There’s something I have to tell you.” The man raises his eyebrow at her and glanced at the elevator his mind figuring out details in case this was all just a trap.

“Uh huh?” He gives her a cautious look.

“About all that. You really didn’t read any of the files?” He tilts his head at her.

“Uh, already covered that.”

“Steve and I found something out, something that you probably should know.” He looks at her sceptically. “About Howard and Maria Stark.”

“What, you’re going to tell me they were Hydra agents? Bit rich, really. Mom was only at her most devious when shopping and dad... Well... Hard to take over the world when you’re too drunk to remember it exists. Besides, why would Hydra found S.H.I.E.L.D?”

“No. Not at all.” She shakes her head and comes closer “He hired Armin Zola, he hired a lot of German scientists after the war, thinking that bringing them to America would give them a new chance to prove themselves.”

“Yeah, real campaigner for the little people he was.” Tony almost rolls his eyes. “Well, actually he was. So he essentially brought Hydra into S.H.I.E.L.D. Yup, greatest mind of an era alright. That’s all you wanted to tell me? Because really, that’s hardly news, everyone was hiring scientists after the war to give them a new start, and all of us a leg up.”

“Armin Zola arranged for-“

“You know what. I don’t want to hear it.” He shakes his head, backing up. “I don’t need to hear it. I don’t need another reason to want to wipe these guys out. So you know what, I didn’t hear you start that sentence.”

“I just thought...” Natasha started, stopping again at Tony shaking his head in frustration.

“No, no way. Look you finish that, it becomes personal. Last time I made it personal, I endangered the life of my kid, Happy and caused serious genetic changes to my girlfriend. I am not going to let that happen again. Understand me?”

Tony understood that he had the ability to captivate those around him when he wanted to. It’s usually how he got his way when it counted and was always great when trying to wind up an audience’s excitement. Natasha had experienced it before and at his commanding tone almost felt the need to snap to attention, almost, but it was still quite a bewitching experience. He seemed to take a moment to calm down before continuing.

“Tell me what you need in here, I’ll arrange it. Furniture wise, just go online, let J.A.R.V.I.S know and it’ll all get delivered. And if you’re thinking about rent, don’t. You can pay me back in babysitting and be an Avenger.” He smirks for a moment “Also you can walk Bruce.” Natasha pulls a face at him for that.

“You know, fighting with the guy made it a little hard to be still scared of him.”

“Then making sure he get some vitamin D isn’t going to be a big deal. Come on. I’ll show you the guest room.” He eyeballs her. “You’re not carrying?” she shakes her head patting herself down.
“All clean. Part of finding myself again means I shouldn’t have all the old things on me.”

“Says the woman who’s come to a superhero tower where she did some superhero things”

“At least, it was all honest.”

Tony can’t help but smile at that as the step back into the elevator to go to Tony’s level.

“Everyone really just uses my floor as the communal area.” She raises an eyebrow at him. “Okay, so everyone means Bruce is here a lot, also Peter, but then this is his house so not that surprising. But I mean he’s just you know, not in his room that much anymore so along with Pepper it makes the place seem a lot more, you know. Crowded, then it was in Malibu.” He heads back to the bar picking up his used tumbler then turns to eye his liquor. He can see her eye him for a moment in the mirror behind the bottles and decanters then starts to wander the open living room. He can see her bend down to pick something up, he looks over his shoulder to see Natasha airing out then folding a rogue hoodie that wasn’t in Peter’s room like it should be.

“Teenagers.” Tony shrugs and after a moment just pours himself a soda water. “Want anything?” Natasha smiled then shook her head.

“I’m fine for now.” She looks at the hoodie before putting it over the back of the couch. “So, how’s he taking to public school?” Tony gives her a suspicious look. “Pepper, we write. Well wrote, one of the last letters I got before… Everything, she told me you enrolled him in Midtown high?”

He drinks before answering her but doesn’t look tense about it.

“It was a good move, nothing’s my fault anymore, looks like he has friends now too. Or at least, has friends he wants to talk about now at any rate. So he’s good.” Natasha raises her eyebrows in playful surprise.

“Friends? Isn’t he a little young for those, I mean he’s 17? Aren’t you worried?”

“I know this is some cheap and tacky dig at me. It’s beneath you, so I’m going to ignore it.” Tony came around from the bar and held out a tall glass of soda for her, she considered it with a small smile for a moment before taking it then sitting down on the couch with Tony and they both sat quietly to drink and just be in each other’s company.

Tony liked it, Pepper was usually the only woman he was ever able to just sit with, without trying to hit on or antagonise. Well, he would do that to her, but until recently she would never rise to the bait. These days, well everything changes really. He really didn’t want to admit that he and Pepper weren’t working, at least not how they would be working if he actually gave up being Iron Man. It’s not like he hadn’t given it some thought after Killian’s revenge campaign, but the more he thought about giving the suit up the more he realised he couldn’t.

After Afghanistan, he needed to be Iron Man to repay his debts to the world, to make up for the senseless deaths that could be chalked up to Obadiah’s under the table deals as well as his ignorance, and as penance for being so blind to it his whole adult life. But now, now he wanted to get back into the suit to protect what the world now was, and everything he now had, Peter, Pepper, and not that he’d say it aloud, but the Avengers too. As much as Tony did enjoy the thrill and freedom the suit gave him, he felt more like he and Iron Man were more intrinsically connected together than he ever was. Especially now that both of them now really belonged to something more than just his own selfish wants.

He must have been quiet too long because he felt a gentle hand on his forearm. Natasha had slipped
closer without him realising, her face giving the beginnings of a concerned look.

“Something wrong?”

“Nothing I can’t handle.” He sighs at her dubious look. “Believe me, it’s not like last time.”

“Last time didn’t have screaming matches in elevators.”

“Well, to be fair, last time didn’t have elevators.” He gave her a deliberately pitiful look, she gave him a look that said she wanted to know what he was thinking, it made a part of him feel edgy, the part that made him untrusting of secret governmental bodies who had dangled carrots in his face then had taken them away. The rest of him remembered he fought beside her and came to him in a moment of need instead of others.

“Guess I’m just thinking about how you can’t trust The Beatles.” She raises an eyebrow at him momentarily, though a quick glance at the elevator means she understands.

“She does love you, you know.”

“And that love would be easier to show if I gave up the suit.” He shakes his head and stands up. “I… Need to get back to the workshop. J.A.R.V.I.S bring up some catalogues for our new tenant to get herself, you know comfortable.” He doesn’t look at her as he leaves though she watches him contemplatively for a moment before looking at what the AI supplies her on the coffee tables surface.

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It was late in the afternoon when Peter came into Bruce’s lab, rubbing at his neck looking forward to telling him about what he saw during his OsCorp. field trip. Well, maybe leaving out that he snuck off at some point because some of the private labs caught his attention and ended up with a pinching feeling in the back of his neck. As he came in he could hear him talking quietly, Peter assumed he was recording his findings until he heard his dad and Pepper being mentioned. Then he heard a female voice reply, grinning he walks by a whiteboard that is hiding him and the entrance and sees Natasha sitting on a stool on the other side of one of Bruce’s workbenches both of them with tea. She looks up at him leading Bruce to turn and look at him.

“So.” Peter starts clapping his hands together then fidgets with them. “Do you qualify for unemployment when your last employer was secretly evil?” Bruce rubs his forehead with a sigh, as Natasha raises an eyebrow at him slowly.

“No, but I’ve found myself a pretty good bridge to sleep under.”

“Oh yeah? I hear Ward’s Island’s pretty quiet” Natasha nods at him.

“It probably is, but right now my tent’s pitched at Stark Bridge.”

“Stark Bridge? We don’t ha- Really?” Both Bruce and Natasha laugh at Peter’s obvious excitement.

“Is this a temporary thing or are you a full-time Avenger now?” Peter asks

“No one told me moving in here means you’re a full-time Avenger.” Bruce came in with, an amused look on his face.
“You get off on account of being my biology tutor.”

“There’s a lot of fine print I don’t remember reading.” Bruce shakes his head good-naturedly and drinks more tea.

“I’m not sure yet, right now we’re playing it by ear. But at least, a few months for sure.”

“Well, that’s good. I mean, dad would love the company because he misses you.” He nods while still absently rubbing at his neck. Natasha gives him a mock surprise look.

“Really, your dad misses me? I wouldn’t be so sure about that.”

“Oh, did I say dad? I meant me.” Natasha gives a small laugh.

“Something wrong with your neck there, Peter?” Bruce has his eyes focused on Peter’s busy hand as he polishes his glasses. Peter blinks then looked at his hand then gives another rub at his neck.

“Uh, it’s nothing just kind of itchy” He still comes over when Bruce gestures for him and turns around and stoops for him to see, Natasha leans in to see too.

“Looks like a bite, climbing trees again?” The grin in Bruce’s voice is obvious.

“Nah, school field trip to Oscorp. I took the subway home, could be fleas?”

“Fleas don’t bite like that, looks like a spider. How do you feel?”

“Fine?” Peter shrugs because he really did feel like nothing was wrong right now. Bruce gets off his stool and goes looking for a first aid kid mumbling how it’s good that America doesn’t have many potently venomous spiders.

“I’m surprised your dad let you go on a field trip to enemy territory.” Natasha gives him an airy look.

“Dad has to care for competition to be enemies, Hammer and Osborne are really just second rate Stark-wanna-be’s.”

“Don’t tell him that, it’ll inflate his ego.” The red-head comments as Bruce started to clean the bite then puts on an Iron Man band-aid with a smirk, knowing Peter won’t see it.

“He’s who I was paraphrasing.”

The next morning, Peter felt terrible, clammy, drippy, stuffy, clogged up and oozing. Bruce tried to assure him that you couldn’t actually feel all those things at once, but clearly he was wrong because Peter felt exactly that. It was only Bruce and Natasha in the tower, as Pepper and Tony left for Europe the night before for an energy conference that Tony had been excited about for days looking forward to showing off his latest developments with Arc Reactor Technology as he’d worked out most of the kinks by now. As it was now Bruce was in the kitchen making Peter some breakfast that would help him get through his grossness, as Bruce was sure that it was probably a side effect from the spider bite. Natasha had already come in and left him with a honey tea to help his clogged up feelings. Peter was pretty sure he didn’t appreciate two people more than he did these two right this
very second.

By the end of the day he swore his skin was literally crawling and that all of his muscles were cramping and stretching all over the place, Bruce was concerned about this but apparently was feeling cruel enough to make him drink a mug of pickle juice, claiming that it would help the cramps. Peter couldn’t help but accuse him of picking on him while he was sick, refusing to admit that he did feel a little bit better.

The next day he was fine, but running late for school so he had to run for it.

At first, he didn’t notice anything was wrong. Until he accidentally pulled the combination knob off his locker, he blinks at it with a look of great confusion.

“Uh?”

Looking between the knob and his locker, Peter curls his finger into the new hole and opens the door a little harder than he means to, making him bounce back in surprise.

“Wow, been working out there?” a voice just behind him, He turns still looking like a deer in the headlights.

“What?”

“Wow, this is one of those days, isn’t it?” She smirks at him, her blonde hair held back in a headband. She was in Peter’s class, she was easy to remember for Peter, besides being really pretty and sweet, but also because she had two first names as her name. Gwen Stacey. He looks down at his hand and then his locker, the door looking more warped than it should be.

“Oh, this? Nah, I mean what, these lockers? Old, you know all dented and covered in stickers. Really it’s a safety nightmare.” He gives her an awkward grin.

“Yeah. Those stickers are pretty hazardous, that’s for sure. I have class next to the maintenance room” She holds her hand out to him “How about I tell them about your locker so you’re not even later to class?” Peter stares at her for a second before giving a more confident grin.

“Sounds like a good deal, here.” He tries to drop the combination knob into her hand but nothing happens. “Uh…” Gwen raises an eyebrow.

“This is where you let go, Pete.” He shakes his hand a little before looking at it.

“No, yeah I know that. But it seems stuck?” They both look at his hand then she reaches over and tries to pull it from his hand but gets nowhere with it.

“Glue?”

“It doesn’t feel sticky? Believe me, glue is normally sticky.” She tugs a little harder while he tries to let go, right now Peter’s starting to feel really kind of stupid about this, but after some more tugging they suddenly come apart the knob dropping to the floor between them as Peter stumbles back into the lockers, he can feel his fist hit one of the other lockers and denting it more than he should have. Gwen bends down to pick it up, turning it around in her hands.

“you’re right it’s not glue. Weird.”

“Uh heh. Yeah, Weird. Uh, I think. I’m still not feeling well, so.” He points toward the school’s front doors. “Um, home.” And with that, he turned and ran as fast as he could back to the tower. By the
“Sir, you have a highly elevated heart rate and a large amount of adrenaline in your system.” Peter can’t help but jump, his mind was so far from where he was he didn’t expect to be spoken to.

“J.A.R.V.I.S. has anyone programmed the concept of privacy into you?”

“Considering it appears to be a primary function I would say I’m deeply familiar with it.” Peter nods mumbling ‘of course’ the computer’s sarcasm not lost on him. “But when you take into account that I am also programmed to monitor all residents life signs with priority on Mr. Stark and yourself, there are a few privacy rewrites in my system.”

“I’m fine J.A.R.V.I.S.” He replies feeling lectured.

“Your vitals suggest-”

“Hey, you know what would be a totally fun game? The ‘let’s not monitor Peter’s vitals’ game. Its fine, I’m fine I’m just a little… I ran home I’m still feeling sick.” Peter felt like it was a lame comeback to the computer who would obviously know otherwise, however J.A.R.V.I.S didn’t make any other comments even after Peter came out onto the floor. Luckily no one else seemed to be on the floor, Bruce must have been in the lab, Natasha… Well, she really could be anywhere.

For the rest of the night, Peter was deeply involved with not only trying to see what spiders could alter genetics but also testing out his new strangely adhesive fingers, which seemed to also apply to his feet Peter learnt as he found himself moving across his ceiling after several hours of testing.

By the end of the week, Peter had soon managed to get the rhythm of his strange new abilities. He even read up more on Captain America to see if there were any similarities. There weren’t, but the connection made him grin stupidly for a little while. One night as Peter came back home from practising his new acrobatic abilities on a closed down construction site, he walked out of the elevator to see Pepper and his dad standing at a distance in the middle of the room.

He could tell Pepper wasn’t impressed about something. Seeing Peter she came over told him goodnight and kissed his cheek before going to bed. Leaving Peter alone with Tony.

“Dad?”

“It might have been overheard that I couldn’t wait to get back into the suit again.”

“She’s one of the best things to-“

“Peter.” Tony shakes his head, the look on his face told him he had already gotten enough tonight.

“Okay, well. Night dad.”

“Yeah.” He pats Peter's shoulder before disappearing to the elevator, no doubt heading to his workshop.

Peter made a frustrated noise as he pulls his hands down his face then turned around and waited for the elevator to come back up again.

“J.A.R.V.I.S?”

“Sir?”

“If anyone asks, I went to bed.”
“Sir…”

“Hey, when I come back later it won’t be a lie okay?”

There came no reply, but Peter left anyway he needed to not go to bed thinking about the fact his dad and Pepper are fighting more and more. While he walked the streets he heard a muffled cry down an alley as he goes past. Stopping he backtracks a little and peers into the gloom, he pulls his hoody up and skulks down. He knows he really shouldn’t look for trouble, but that short time in the room had made him so tense. As he gets closer it becomes obvious that whatever is going on that it’s involving a woman and she isn’t approving of being pressed up against a wall.

“Hey.” Peter barks, causing the woman’s cry to get louder, the man turns slightly to leer at him.

“Keep moving kid or someone’s gonna get hurt.”

“Yeah, you probably will. But hey, at least then you’ll leave the nice lady alone.” The man curses and pulls the woman back just enough to slam her into the wall causing her to collapse a little to the ground whimpering.

“Hate to tell you kid, but people who think they’re heroes end up dead meat.” He growls as he stalks towards Peter. Peter just puts his hands in his pockets and shrugs.

“Oh yeah? Well, it seems like it’s working out for Captain America. I’m American, sure it’s only half of his name, but it could work for me too.” The guy doesn’t answer him, just swings for Peter suddenly. Moments before he moves the whole of Peter’s body tingles, and it tingles the most on the left side of his face. He can’t bring himself to ignore the feeling and steps back seconds before the large knobby fist flies past his face, close enough to feel the wind rushing past. The hood still covering his eyes in the dim light so it only looks like one of them is surprised by the movement. The guy doesn’t seem deterred and keeps swinging at Peter who readily takes advantage of the tingling skin and ducking every move he makes.

“Wow, is this making me dead meat? Because if it is, I really hope your day job isn’t being a butcher, because that would make things really awkward.” The guy just swears more and pulls out a knife. “Oh wow, you really are a butcher aren’t you? I think you need some retraining because this has to be embarrassing.” The guy charges at Peter who takes the opportunity to leap over him, pushing off him to give him more distance then turning around to kick him hard in the behind. Giving him extra momentum to slam his head into the wall that was behind Peter. The more than a little offensive man crumpled to the floor after the sick thud against the wall.

After making sure the guy was unconscious Peter comes over to the woman, squatting down a little away from her.

“I don’t really know how this will sound, but. Are you okay?” The woman looks up at him, tears on her face. “I mean.” He rubs at the back of his hoodie. “He didn’t….” She shook her head.

“N-No he… At first, he wanted money but I didn’t and he just.” She started to sob.

“Woah, hey it’s okay, see he’s the one um… Unconscious, and here’s you all you know, sore but not violated so that’s… Good?” She sobs out a laugh and he offers her a hand. “Come on, let’s get you to a doctor or something, police maybe?”

Peter didn’t go into the station with her, but as he headed back to the tower feeling that if it got too late people might actually notice, especially if J.A.R.V.I.S tells someone. He felt like what he did was right, and not in the Good Samaritan sense but in the ‘this is something that he can do’ sense.
Sure it wasn’t exactly the same scale as Iron Man and Captain America, but the world already had them. What did the streets of New York have?

It took a few weeks and several sneaky trips to the home economics room but it was finally finished. Making a full body suit had been one of the more horrific moments of Peter’s life, not because he was making a skin-tight body suit when your father is Tony Stark you embarrassment threshold is fairly high, no what was horrific was finding out how evil it was to sew lycra. After getting frustrated enough to take a pair of scissors to the hideous man-sock he created he opted to go online to search for something premade, and thank god for New York because there was an actual store he found that sold them. It was a sex store, which Peter did find embarrassing, but at least, he knew he wouldn’t bump into anyone he knew there, so he praised the small favour it was.

Buying several suits so he didn’t have to come back again while trying to find the right look, Peter went back to staying after school to work on the outfits. When it came to applying the designs to the suit he created he found out that it felt really soothing, almost like photography was for him. While he takes a break to let his fingers stretch out Peter realises that they share a similar level of creativity and concentration, framing pictures, laying out a webbing pattern both needed a similar kind of focus and attention to get them both right. If this is the same kind of feeling his dad gets after disappearing into his workshop whenever he is feeling stressed or at a loss, then Peter feels like he can’t really get angry at the man for his escaping the situations that need him to de-stress.

Trying on his suit for the first time his first thought was about how thin the material was because he felt really cold, colder than he would like at least. To remedy this, Peter slipped on his back up suit over the top of his first suit. He already felt a lot warmer, which made sense now he had two layers with what air was moving in-between acting as an insulator. Moving around in the suit was easy, nothing caught and in the reflections in darkened windows showed how good the red, blue and webbing looked on him.

With the suit sorted out, all the Peter needed now was an extra easy way to get around, and a way to contain thugs for the Police to deal with them. Sitting at his desk he spun in his chair trying to figure it out, leaning back lifelessly with his arms hanging beside him. A steel cable would be good, but he would have to create a grappler for them and it would damage buildings and would wear down pretty fast, and could actually be dangerous to use to contain people. Rope wouldn’t last either. Groaning Peter raises his hands to rub at his face as he knocks some papers off his desk. Groaning he looks down at what’s on the floor, they were pamphlets from his field trip to Oscorp.

As he picks them up one of the pamphlets catches his eye, high tensile cable that connects to any surface, strong enough to pull a Boeing 737 but environmentally friendly because it’s braided cord farmed from spiders.

Well. He already had a theme going, why not try it out?

Two months later, the name Spider-Man was starting to show up on the internet and mentioned on the streets. The only down-side is that the Daily Bugle’s J.Jonah Jameson seemed to think everything that was wrong with the world could be traced back to Spider-man. Peter is sure Jameson needs a better hobby. In being Spider-Man, Peter couldn’t help but feel not only more confident but a whole lot less helplessly frustrated with the fighting in his house now that he turned that frustration into determination to help the everyday people. This afternoon, in particular, he and Natasha were on the couch competing with each other in a friendly game of Peggle 2 when raised voices could be heard.
from Tony and Pepper’s room.

“Looks like she found out about 44’s fabrication,” Peter said dispassionately, Natasha simply chewed her lip as she lined up her shot and let it go.

“Sure it’s not about the charity gala we all have to go to?” Peter shakes his head.

“That was last night when you were out. Soda?” Peter sets his move in play then gets up off the couch and heads for the kitchen. Natasha follows him quietly.

“You’re worryingly calm about all this.” She leant against the kitchen counter watching him. He shrugs easily.

“You know how if you live by a beach, or next to a train line you forget that the sounds they make even happen? This is that. And it’s not like they’re getting actually aggressive over it.” He slides a can over to the ex-spy as he opens his own, staring at it for a moment. “It’s pretty much been like this since before the whole Killian thing. I mean, it got quiet for a while but not for long.” He drinks slowly knowing that Natasha is watching him, reading more from his posture and micro-gestures than from what he’s actually saying. He wants to find that a little creepy and invasive, but somehow with Natasha it’s comforting, that she can see how much he’s resigned himself to it all. “Really I’m waiting for the day Pepper takes me aside and gives me the ‘we love you very much, and each other we just can’t live together anymore’ speech you see in those cheesy T.V dramas. Maybe she’ll even take me to Coney Island and break it to me over a corn dog and bumper car ride.” He doesn’t look at her, knowing that her face is going to be neutral or a little sad even. He really doesn’t want to feel pitied because of someone else’s relationship problems.

“Really, even though Pepper’s been around ever since I came to live with dad, she’s an aunt to me, not a mom. Like Aunt May really, except younger and with a better paying job. So it’s not like it’s a big deal to me… Right?” Then he does look at her she gives him a little comforting smile. A smile that he knew meant she wasn’t going to be apologetic to him.

“It’s your turn in Peggle unless you want to forfeit?” Peter gave her an affronted look then ran to the couch. “Surrender is for people who suck at Peggle!”
How to House Your Birds of Prey

Chapter Summary

Tony could say that the tower is starting to get really crowded. But he can’t there’s well over one hundred floors of Stark Tower and it’s not like anyone whose showing up is at all unwanted. Even if he is acting like the rest of the team slowly filtering in is a massive burden on him.

Big thanks to SmurfSmuggler for being my beta for this chapter!

Chapter Notes

Good lord! I keep promising I’ll be quicker with these chapters and then life happens to me. So this time I’m not going to make any promises of the like and see how that works out?!

“Mr. Stark, there is a very disgruntled gentleman down here who demands to talk to you. Normally I wouldn’t bother you, however, he does seem to be…” The person on the intercom hesitates. Tony waits for a few seconds but gets no reply.

“Seems to be what?”

“Armed.”

“I know I’m Iron Man, but this sounds like you should be calling the police.”

“It’s a bow and ar-“

“Send him to my office.”

When the door bursts open, Tony looks up but is still typing.

“You.” Clint points at him aggressively as he shoves the door open, arrow and quiver resting easily on his back over a military-like uniform that’s seen happier days, he looked like he hadn’t washed for a while and somehow Tony got the impression that was adding to his irritation. “You have a hell of a lot of explaining to do.” Tony kept his face impassive and stopped typing.

“Sorry Ricky, you’re confusing me with Fury, possibly Rogers, he likes explaining things, I think it keeps his boots shiny.” While his tone isn’t exactly sarcastic it is fairly dismissive. “What do I have to explain?”

“Yeah well, good luck finding either of them. I came here because you can give me, at least, some answers.”
‘You know what.’ Tony begins as he stands. ‘You probably deserve answers, but I’ll throw in a shower if you tell me where you’ve been.’ Clint offers Tony a frustrated huff before dusting at his jacket.

‘I was watching a situation in Afghanistan. Everything went to plan. Except no extraction team came for me and trying to get on an actual flight had me ducking security.’

‘So how did you get back here?’

‘Cargo hauler.’

‘Let me guess, in a crate?’

‘Stark, I don’t have time for this.’ The look in his eye was not only dangerous but proof that he was in fact in a crate on some cargo ship bound for who knows where. Considering how many months it had been since S.H.I.E.L.D’s fall, Tony wouldn’t be surprised if Clint had been hitchhiking across every land mass just to get here in between stowing away on boats.

‘One more question. Quick one I promise, then you can have a shower and all the important answers to questions.’ He takes the younger man’s silence as agreement. Tony presses a button on his desk phone. ‘Do me a favour, consider me out the rest of the day.’ He doesn’t turn the button off before looking back at Clint. ‘If I said Hail Hydra, what would you say?’

‘That you’re an ass and that’s not funny.’ His demeanour hadn’t changed slightly. ‘Look, I might have had a hell of a time getting back here, but I still heard what happened to S.H.I.E.L.D. I look good in the uniform I have, I like the eagle on it, the only good octopus is one that’s predicting soccer outcomes or on the grill at a teppanyaki restaurant. Now don’t you think if I was Hydra I wouldn’t have been stuck in the back of a rusted pickup being drooled on by a pig called Pecker across three state lines?’

‘Pecker?’ Tony is trying to give Clint the blandest look ever he really is but for him, that name is almost too much.

‘I didn’t name the bacon.’ With that, Tony laughs and walks out from behind his desk and into an elevator that was right next to the door Clint had come through, gesturing for Clint to follow as he does. The journey up to Tony’s floor had Tony trying to stop laughing the whole way. ‘If these doors don’t open soon, you’re going to be in a lot of pain.’

‘I’m a superhero with a teenage son. My life is already pain.’ Tony manages to get out after a long moment, just as the doors open. Clint steps out but stops momentarily glancing around the room. ‘Yeah, well he’s a clean teenager.’ Tony offers at the fact the room doesn’t look like it’s overly lived in, however, that was due to a well-paid and happy cleaning service.

‘When was Tasha here?’ Tony raises an eyebrow at him prompting him to add. ‘I can smell her perfume.’

‘You know there’s a certain level of creepy here I don’t want to address. Why can’t it be Pepper’s?’

‘Pepper likes subtle fruit fragrances. When off the job, Tasha goes with vanilla.’
One of the more interesting things about Bruce taking up breakfast was that was the best time to see him smile to himself. Food was just another science to him, and the man did love science, so if you wanted to see him calm and happy the kitchen was the most chemically sound place to do it.

“She’s here?”

“Yeah, she was teasing Peter about eating bunny shaped pancakes.”

“Bunny. Shaped.” Something about the look on Clint’s face suggested that out of all his recent traveling that was the weirdest thing he’s heard in a while.

“Bruce gets creative.”

“Dr. Banner is here too?”

“Are you even near the loop? I brought him back with me after Thor went home.” He pauses. “You do know he’s back too, right?”

“In Stark Tower?” Clint paled a little, just how much had he missed while on that mission.

“You put in apartments here?” The archer gives him a curious look, wondering just who would actually rent an apartment in a multi-storey target like Stark Tower.

“For the Avengers, yeah.” Clint stops.

“For us?”

“After the battle, I was thinking a base of operations would be nice. Just never got around to bringing it up.” He continues walking, just looking back and raising an eyebrow at him as if to say hurry up. Clint blinked away his surprise and caught up with Tony, who led him to the spare room, telling him it’s his until he sets up his apartment.

When Tony’s done explaining, Clint leans against the door frame of the spare room’s ensuite and just stares at Tony as if he’s trying to figure him out. Wondering if he was thinking about something to say, Tony gave him a minute to just stare, but it quickly got on his nerves.

“If you’re going to say something Barton. Now’s the perfect time.”

“I’m starting to think Tasha’s assessment was kind of off.”

“When you take in the fact I was dying when she was writing that, which was making me do the whole reckless thing more than normal, so doesn’t count as something I normally do. I’d say it was accurate.”

“Even though you now have three members of the Avengers Initiative living in your tower?” Tony gives a slight shake of his head. “Doesn’t sound like a narcissist who doesn’t play on teams.”

“Don’t read anything into it, Barton. I collect a lot of things that I’m not actually interested in doing anything with. Ask Pepper to show you my art storage sometime.” To make sure the conversation didn’t go any further, he left the room, leaving Clint to get clean and less surly about dirt and pigs. At first, he started heading to the elevator to take him back to his office. However, he quickly gets lost in his thoughts causing him to slow to a stop and look out towards the New York Skyline. Standing
there for a long moment before shaking his head and heading to his workshop instead. He still has plenty of time to ignore his office work. Tony was only working on reports about the towers reactor prototype, so it was easy enough to put off for another day.

He used to pride himself on how he wasn’t sentimental. At least, he used to pride himself on how everyone was sure that Tony Stark was an arrogant, shallow woman chaser who built weapons in between conquests. So now that he’s slowly collecting people who are seeing how sentimental and selfless he really makes him wonder if there is even a point of keeping up his little charade in the tower anymore. Or would they end up like Pepper and Rhodie and just accept that his whole point is to give everyone a sense of mental or emotional whiplash and not look any deeper into it?

When he got to the workshop, he knew he wasn’t the only one there. Natasha was sitting on one of his mobile counters but after a quick glance at her, he turns to Dum-E and points at him.

While Dum-E sorted through the desk he was scolded over, Tony tidied up another desk still not acknowledging Natasha, who seemed to be fine with the silence for the moment. Running his hand over his face, Tony sighed softly to himself. Normally, Tony is guarded enough to try to avoid showing his weaker side, however Natasha had seen him at one of his lowest points so there wasn’t too much of a need to hide it from her. Besides, she would have figured out anyway. Ever since she was first assigned to him she always seems to watch him closely, as if trying to see if he’s as shallow as he once acted, or trying to anticipate his outwardly erratic nature. Either way, her watching him made it easier to notice when he was hiding something, even if she wasn’t sure what it was.

“I could have told you he wouldn’t be part of Hydra.” The ex-agent says quietly, having let him stew in his own thoughts long enough. Not turning around Tony just gives a look to the tool in his hand instead.

“What makes you so certain?”

“I know him.”

“I knew Obie.” Tony glanced over his shoulder at her, the name made her pause and think to herself momentarily.

“Clint’s nothing like Stane. He has hair and is smarter for a start.” There’s a huff of amusement from Tony as he turns to actually look at her as she easily kicks her legs back and forth while on the tabletop. “And he ends up with better stories because of it.” She gives herself a pause. “Thank you, for turning the intercom on. It’s good to know he’s safe.”

“You can go talk to him, what with him allowed to live here after all. It’s not like there’s a S.H.I.E.L.D bunk for him anymore.”

“I want him to have a relaxing shower before we find ourselves on that bridge right now. He could use the rest.” Tony raises an eyebrow at her.

“This can’t be a you-being-worried thing?”

“This is me letting him have a rest before we end up sounding like you and Pepper.” She frowns at Tony as he stares at her with a blank face. “What is happening between you and Pepper?” Tony stares at her for another moment before staring past her. His expression doesn’t change however the shift in his eyes spoke volumes of the change in his mind.

“It’s,” He licks his lips as he grasps for the words to use. After all, what were they now? “We’re just
dialoguing. All couples do that, it’s part of learning about each other.” Natasha gives him a sympathetic but disbelieving look. “Actually, you. I’m not discussing this with you. You. Are a stray.” He adds with a note of finality, to say the conversation was over. Natasha slipped off the table, her face as unreadable as the day Tony met her, approaching him she rests a hand on his shoulder, giving him a long knowing look. He knew from what little he learnt about her that the look meant she understood better than him what being alone is, and how hard it was to trust people with your feelings when things like that can be exploited. Neither of them say a word, as Natasha gave his shoulder a light squeeze before leaving the room, leaving Tony to his unspoken request for solitude.

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Tony didn’t surface from his workshop until nearly 3 in the morning. While heading to his room he noticed the kitchen light was on. It wasn’t exactly uncommon for people to be up all hours so the kitchen light was usually left on, along with the living room light. Looking at the doorway, however, had reminded Tony that he was thirsty.

He walked in to find Clint at the table curled around a mug of coffee. They both eyed each other for a moment before Tony disappeared into the fridge for wheatgrass juice, a habit retained from when he was trying to get an edge on his Palladium poisoning that stuck only because he actually enjoyed the taste. Leaning against the fridge Tony took a drink.

“Haven’t slept, or just woken up?” He asks before mentally judging if he was hungry or not.

“Why not pick both?”

“If you think I’m putting you on my shoulder and cheering for that, you need to re-evaluate how that would look if anyone walked in,” Clint smirks and drains his mug. “Also, you’re too old to be the Old El Paso girl.”

“Having trouble sleeping long. Not sure if it’s the bed or the past.” He looks into the empty mug with great contemplation. Tony comes around to sit at the table, bringing the pot of coffee with him as he does, putting it near enough to Clint, who takes it and refills it without a word.

“From my experience, it’s never the bed's fault.” Clint looks up at Tony with a raised eyebrow, Tony simple gives a shrug and drinks more juice. “I don’t really think anyone but Bruce got a good deal when the chitauri showed up.” While Tony had no idea what Clint’s been through since New York, he can’t imagine it was anything amazing by a long shot. With J.A.R.V.I.S keeping tabs on everyone who was on speaking terms with an Avenger, Tony knew that for at least a few days Selvig was admitted to a facility for being naked and offering crazy naked shouting at Stone Henge. So really what kind of crazy naked happenings that went on with Clint was certainly kept on the quieter side of things.

But then, S.H.I.E.L.D probably had its own branch of highly qualified psychologists to handle their agents if they went a little nutty.

Selvig coupled with Tony’s own little foray into the lifestyle of the post-traumatised, knew that what was keeping Clint up would be all mental, not sleep comfort. In part because Tony knew he had amazing mattresses.

“Yeah, I hear having to rebuild a tower is really stressful,” the archer drawls sarcastically though the
slight inflection at the end almost felt to Tony like it was almost a question though that question was probably ‘what horrible thing did you suffer?’

“The tower was easy, that’s what workmen are for. There’s just something about going through a big black hole in the sky with a nuclear weapon on your back, seems to mess with you.” Tony watches Clint carefully as he speaks, the look on the other’s face shows that he’s making connections to things he had heard or read about no doubt.

“How’d you get back to sleep then?”

“A combination of Pepper, Bruce, and open heart surgery.”

“Yeah. If that last one doesn’t get people sleeping there’s a problem, also pain I’d say.” He pauses. “Does that mean?” Tony raps at his chest in response to the question, the only answer was a dull thud of someone tapping on skin through fabric.

“Not running on batteries anymore.”

There’re a few moments where they both sit in a silently agreed upon quiet, both contemplating what the other had gone through. In that moment Tony had gotten back up to refill his own drink and pull out some cherries, putting them on the table. It was obvious that Clint seemed unconcerned about fruit as Tony was, as he casually picks up a double stem.

“How long did you go between sleeping?” He asks before popping a cherry in his mouth.

“78 hours and 42 minutes, before sir started to drift off at his desk before waking up again 4 hours later.” Tony pulls a face at the AI interrupts the conversation, probably because he was aware that Tony would have avoided answering the total truth. Clint just boggles.

“What were you doing? Sitting up playing pong all night or something?”

“Pong. Really?” Clint shrugs. “Building mostly, making new suits, upgrading them, testing them.”

“Do I even want to know how many?”

“Well, kind of had them all. Explode, or they were exploded without my permission. But I’ve fabricated mk43 and 44. Just keeping myself busy.”

“Stark. You are an uncomfortable kind of unsettling.”

“I aim to please.”

Just as they’re about to fall into another companionable silence, Peter ambles in with one of his bigger hoodies on with the hood up. He seemed completely oblivious to the fact there were already people in there. Tony and Clint both watched as he buried himself into the fridge, picking at food until he decided to take the milk and drink from the gallon jug instead of a glass. With a gasp of air he wipes his mouth before putting the milk back. He turns to leave the room then stops as he realises he’s being watched.

“Uh.” Came his intelligent response. Before pointing to the fridge. “I was hungry.”

“We can see that. Why is your hood up? Indoors, several hundred floors up,” Tony asks with a very raised eyebrow over his glass of juice.

“It’s almost 4am,” Clint added, getting the feeling that that hadn’t factored into Tony’s thought
“Oh, uh. I was out,” Peter comes back with a serious nod. “I was out with my board, and I was taking pictures. Lost track of time, I guess.”

“Where’s your camera?” Clint countered with, as the camera in question wasn’t present, causing Peter to pause again.

“In… The hall, I put it down in the hall. You know,” he gestures to the kitchen doorway, “hall.” Clint clearly wasn’t buying it but Tony didn’t actually care.

“I’m still waiting for the whole hood being up part of the night.”

“Teens these days like to keep up our angst act even at weird hours of the night,” Peter came back with a mostly visible grin, the hood shadowing the rest of his face.

“Off,” Tony orders, with a sigh Peter pulls it back to reveal one hell of a nasty grazing along his cheekbone and forehead. Clint gave a low whistle and Tony just shook his head.

“What? Oh, this? That well, skateboards are dangerous, and uh, like many kids my age, helmets are a sign of being. Safe. So I wasn’t wearing one. Half-pipes. They’re pretty serious business when your face is involved.” Tony just waves a hand at him to go away.

“Put cream on that, and see Bruce in the morning or he’ll come in and nag me for not looking after you. Also, bed, go be in it.”

“Ah, yeah. No, totally the bed thing is happening. Night.” He looks at Clint. “Are you going to be here for breakfast?”

“Worry about that in the morning, kid.” Clint still looked like he knew Peter was lying.

“Right.” Peter pointed to the door again and then slowly disappeared out of it. Neither of them said a thing for a good five minutes before Clint broke the silence.

“Planning on busting him for lying?” He took a long slow sip of coffee watching Tony closely. Tony really could care less about the judgemental feelings of people without kids, however, Clint’s wording seemed to be more about the lying than the age of the liar.

“And let him know he’s a terrible liar?” Tony pops a cherry in his mouth completely unconcerned, it was Clint’s turn to raise an eyebrow. “Kids have secrets. If he doesn’t want to tell me right now why he looks like he went face first along Broadway at about 2 in the morning then forcing him is only going to get him defensive.”

“Think he was at a party?”

“Please, the kid might be as smart, funny, and potentially as attractive as me. But not enjoying the spotlight was something he got from his mom. Whatever he was doing it wasn’t skating or partying. But he’s a smart kid, I trust him not to be into drugs or gangs.” He stands up and walks over to put his drink in the sink. “Mostly because that mouth of his discourages shady people being around him. I’m going to try sleeping again, enjoy.” Clint gives him a nod as Tony leaves the room.

He walks past Peter’s door on the way to his own and looks at it for a long moment. There was no light under the door so Tony assumed he just creamed up and went to bed, he popped his head in and saw Peter sprawled over his bed, cuddling around, of all things, one of his backpacks. Shaking
his head Tony closed the door and headed to his room to see if he could reach the same level of sleep Peter had.

It had been about two weeks since Hawkeye had nested. Surprisingly he really didn’t order that much for his suite. Just a bed, dresser, and nightstands. Unlike Natasha who also had two arm chairs a large bookcase and what could only be described as a needlessly large beanbag.

It was about lunch time, and Tony and Bruce were about to go out to eat, just as Clint and Natasha appear and inform them that they will be accompanying them for lunch today. So as it was also a nice day so they decided to eat out on the terrace that lead to Tony’s landing pad, where there was a glass top table and cast iron and wicker chairs set out. As a group making lunch instead of ordering anything.

To Tony it felt weird at first, sitting around a small table in the sun drinking coffee, and juice, eating precisely-cut finger sandwiches, and apparently pigs in blanket, with three people who are living with him, just idly chatting about nothing in particular. And it really was nothing in particular too. Clint was trying to get Bruce to tell him what was the weirdest name he had ever heard someone be named, offering up his own names, including outing one probably ex-S.H.I.E.L.D agent who had the unfortunate name of Chuckie Westcock. Bruce, however, managed to dodge answering the question by asking Clint where the weirdest place he had to shoot a bow from.

Clint proudly claimed that in a Wendy’s without being noticed and hanging upside-down from one of the points of the Sydney Opera House in Australia were tied for first.

Natasha and Tony mostly had a running conversation about Peter and school, and not that she’s been following him of course, but it seems that he’s sweet on a girl in his class called Gwen. Who needs to hire bodyguards when you have an assassin who has a soft spot for dorky teens?

“Forgive me for interrupting lunch, however, there seems to be a situation developing in midtown,” a speaker offers up from the table itself. Tony starts moving things aside on the table’s top as a news report starts to play when there’s enough space. Four men in ridiculous outfits, were apparently making merry with disaster, breaking shop windows and stealing whatever could be grabbed. One of them in green swinging a crowbar shouted a declaration that they were the wrecking crew and not nobody could stop them.

“I don’t know about you guys. But that sounds like a challenge.” Clint smirked as he rocked back in the chair.

“Small time thugs,” Natasha offers up in a bored tone. “Isn’t that usually what Spider-Man deals with?”

Picking up a sandwich, Bruce shakes his head. “I don’t think he has the same freedom you all do. He isn’t really out saving the day during work hours.” Clint and Natasha exchanged a look before turning it on Bruce. “Tony and I keep track of other heroes’ activities.”

“Actually, J.A.R.V.I.S does, Bruce is the only one who reads the data,” Tony corrects as he takes a drink of juice.
“That explains why you weren’t surprised by the reports of the Daredevil showing up a few months back.” Natasha gave a slight smile. Tony just shrugs dismissively and stands.

“Ever since Spider-Man kept making the Bugle’s headlines I thought it might be a good idea. But then, Daredevil seems to have somewhere to be during the day too. So, shall we go see what’s going on?”

Bruce shakes his head and starts tidying the dishes. “There’s enough mess out there without the Other Guy adding to it. I think it’s a smart idea to keep me reserve unless it’s something bigger than a few blocks, destruction-wise.” Everyone nods, because really, that made the most amount of sense. Natasha simply gets up and leaves to get ready, Tony assumes. Clint keeps rocking in his chair.

“Coming?”

“Do I get to fly the jet?”

“Well I’m not going to be flying it, take it up with Natasha.” Clint doesn’t move an inch for a few seconds, then in a blink of an eye, he’s already vaulting over the table and off after Natasha.

“It’s good to have the kids home. With all their shouting and arguing over who gets to fly the multimillion dollar jet,” Bruce says to Tony.

“At least, it keeps them off the streets. Stay on the comm, you might see something we or J.A.R.V.I.S miss.” Tony stands and looks towards the platform “J.A.R.V.I.S ready 43.” He starts to head towards the assembly area.

“I can do that. Should I let Pepper know?” Stopping he looks over his shoulder at Bruce, for a moment, looking conflicted and he knows Bruce knows it.

“Ah. Sure. Why not, it’s not like this is going to be anything for her to worry about.” He looks ahead again and starts walking along the terrace as the suit assembles around him, everything in place when he walks up to the giant S on the landing platform. Taking off without an additional word to Bruce as he takes off as the Quinjet takes off beneath him and the platform.

Tony ended up being right about the fight not being a worry, it was obvious that whatever resistance this Wrecking Crew thought they’d be up against clearly wasn’t going to be 3 of the heroes that saved New York. One thing that had annoyed Tony was one of them had the gall to ask why wasn’t Thor or Captain America with them. Which Tony easily replied with “We only wake them up for real problems.” But he was glad for his face plate because there was an obvious grimace there.

It took the better part of an hour to round them up, a job made a little easier with the sudden appearance of Spider-man into the concoction of chaos. By the time they were finished the police had already arranged for vans to have the Wrecking Crew contained in waiting with doors open. Tony couldn’t help but notice Spiderman perched on the underside of a light post watching him.

“You’re breaking the rule,” he states simply, Tony doesn’t raise his face plate but his eyebrow comes up just as Natasha comes to a stop by his side.

“There’s a rule?” she asks carefully.

“Yeah, you save the world. I save the streets. So you broke the rule.” Tony couldn’t help but feel the person under the mask was giving them a blank face for not knowing this apparent rule.
"I don’t remember there ever being a rule." Natasha looked at Tony who shook his metal head before they both looked up at the spider who was shrugging upside down. Which looked really weird, Tony could only imagine what it was like to experience.

"It was unwritten. What you haven’t heard of unwritten rules? I mean come on. You guys. You’re The Avengers. Guys like these guys are kiiinda below your pay grade don’tcha think?"

"Pay grade? You’re getting paid for this?" Tony questions with a tilt of the metal head with its blank expression giving away nothing.

"You know, that’s really creepy when you do that? But, well. No. I’m not getting paid.” He gives an over dramatic sigh. “Which would be really helpful, because this outfit?” He picks at it “Making it doesn’t come cheap. My family’s going to start noticing when I keep coming home with bolts of blue and red spandex without joining a dance troupe or something.” Tony’s faceplate does come up just to give him an incredulous look.

"You talk an awful lot.”

"Yeah, people tell me that a lot.”

"Not surprised. Thanks for the help, kid.”

"Kid? I’m nearly 18.”

"Yeah, because that really makes you sound like an adult,” Clint chimes in as he leans against Natasha.

"This is starting to feel like gang up on your local friendly neighbourhood spidey day. So how about you guys smile for the cameras. Actually. Do you two even smile?" He points at Clint and Natasha, who just give him unimpressed looks. “Yikes, that’s a no. Well, then I better go and be infamous, while you three go be, you know, actually famous.” With a little salute, he shoots out a web and away into the afternoon skyline.

"Why do I get the feeling everyone who gets called a superhero needs therapy?” Clint asks no-one with an eyebrow raised in the direction of the fleeing teen. Causing Tony and Natasha to stare at him. “Yeah, because I’ve claimed to not need it.” He scoffs “I’m just a contentious objector to mental health.”

"Idiot,” is all Natasha says as Tony just opts to take off.

Two days later, Sunday, he gets the phone call he kind of expected to get sooner. They were all having a lazy day; Clint and Peter were playing a video game that Tony didn’t care enough about to figure out its title when he walked past to the kitchen where he found Natasha making something involving either bacon or prosciutto, whatever it was it smelt pretty great and seemed to be a late dinner for either her or everyone, Tony wasn’t sure who had eaten. Bruce was sitting at the table doing a crossword and neglecting his coffee. Tony steals the abandoned mug and has it to his lips ready to drink when J.A.R.V.I.S makes an announcement.
“Sir. There is an incoming call from Captain Rogers.”

The silence that follows could almost be described as solid, he heard the game pause, and could feel everyone staring at him.

“You know, the only one I can’t have legally evicted from here is Peter.” He waves a dismissive hand at everyone who could see him. “Don’t leave him hanging J, put him through to the elevator then track me to the workshop.” He orders as he heads to the elevator, hitting the buttons and watching Peter and Clint watch him as the doors close.

“Stark?”

“Yeah. I’m here, sorry I was.” He looks at his coffee. “Committing petty theft.” He can hear the pause on the line and the amused tone when he speaks up again.

“Stealing Peter’s candy again?”

“You know, for someone who’s supposed to be above petty judging, you’re really not going to let me forget stealing from a 16-year-old’s pumpkin.”

“He earned those.”

“He knocked on people’s doors with a sheet over his head as chaperone to a bunch of kids for extra school credits.” He rolls his eyes while knowing Steve won’t have seen it. “What’s up Cap?” There was another pause, which felt less like he was thinking about what to say and more like he was whispering away from the phone or making a gesture to someone.

“I saw the News Friday, but we were on the road so I couldn’t really check in before that.”

“How is flying high with your parakeet?” Tony walks out into the workshop and just gets comfortable in a chair spinning in it as he can hear Steve’s amused but exasperated huff.

“Sam says hi too, Tony.”

“No, he didn’t.”

“No. He didn’t. Is there any reason you felt the need not to let me know that Natasha and Clint are in New York?” Tony can hear something in the others voice, also the quiet goading in the background.

“Well, being over 21 they can legally be wherever they want.” He stares at his reflection in a monitor and shakes his head, knowing that’s not what he should have said. “Well since you went off on your very specific scavenger you haven’t called and I didn’t want to interrupt. Also, I’m not their babysitter so I shouldn’t have to tell you when they’re in my neck of the woods.”

They both go silent. Tony feeling bad for being snippy at a guy just trying to find his childhood friend, which shouldn’t make him feel annoyed that it’s the reason Steve hasn’t called. He was also sure that Steve had his own reasons for being silent. But Tony opts to break the silence.

“They’re living here. Like, Bruce. Speaking of, he’s getting out more. Charities and things, trying to create causes to send aid to Indian kids and… Stuff like that.” He could still feel the silence on the other end, even with Steve offering a distracted reply of;

“Well, it’s good that he’s getting out more. Good.”

“I wasn’t keeping any of this from you on purpose.”
“I didn’t say that.”

“I can hear you think it. Look. There has always been space for you. There’s been space for everyone since what happened with Loki and we all went our separate ways, you know that. I showed you your suite.”

“You never expressly said that.”

“I thought asking you what you thought of it heavily implied that.”

“It’s fine Tony.

“There’s also space for Tweety.”

“When you had those built in there was only 6 suites.” Tony raised an eyebrow to no one in particular, clearly Steve knew exactly what Tony was implying just wanting him to say it directly.

“Well from the looks of it I’m going to have to remodel a whole floor for Thor because I doubt he’ll be coming back without Dr. Foster and that whole little entourage thing she has going on. The room’s completely empty so it’s not like it is even obvious the last one would go to Thor, they were designed the same on purpose so everyone could take their pick.”

There’s another silence heading into awkward territory pretty quick, and Tony wasn’t enjoying it.

“How is your current lead on Fred Johnson panning out?”

“You know I’ve seen that movie, right?”

“Means I don’t have to explain it, how is it going?” Tony presses on.

“It’s. Well, it’s gone dry.”

“Well then, come order your furniture and get reacquainted with beds without lumps in them until it rehydrates.”

Tony can hear a hand go over the phones mic with muffled talking in the background, he takes the time to spin in his chair to silently shoo Dum-E away who had taken the moment to try and give Tony what he thought was a massage but in reality was just rolling back and forth jabbing his grips into Tony’s shoulder blade.

“How long’s the offer open?”

“Well, you have until I find other superheroes I like to fill them.”

“So. Opened indefinitely?”

“All this sarcasm. I think you’ve fallen in with a very bad crowd.”

“I learn from the best.”

“I’m sure Peter and Natasha would like to see you, it’s been months.” Tony, who was big on doing nothing but talking was also a cunning businessman who prided himself on negotiation and how to read pauses during the deal. This pause was telling him he won.

“Tony. That is a dirty move.” The grin in his voice is obvious.
“I don’t like to lose. Tell Woody to bring his wings. I want to improve them.”

“Can’t you leave anything alone?”

“Sounds boring, not interested. Eta?”

“Sam’s saying something about a plane, so probably tomorrow night?”

“Text me your location, I’ll have the jet at the closest airport within hours.”

Tony gestures to J.A.R.V.I.S to cut the call before Steve can argue with him. Drinking Bruce’s coffee he turns in the seat to see Peter by the door looking excited. “See this. This is why I make sure your birthday and Christmas presents stay at Happy’s. How long have you been there?”

“From when you called Sam Wilson Tweety.” Tony just shook his head. “People on the internet have been calling him ‘The Falcon’. It’s pretty cool.”

“At least, on the internet you know it’s not focus tested.”

“Dad, really. It’s not that bad a name, you just want to pick on Rhodie.”

“It’s a terrible name, and I have better things to use on Rhodie if I want to pick on him. And don’t make this about my sidekick, we were talking about Steve’s sidekick.” Peter rolls his eyes, as the conversation is cut short by J.A.R.V.I.S.

“Sirs, it appears the good Captain is in Odessa.”

“The Ukraine? That’s going to be a little hard to get there in a few hours,” Tony interrupted as he turned to the computer screen to look up a flight plan.

“If I had been actually allowed to finish; The Captain is in Odessa, Texas. Which makes the closest airport Midland International.”

Tony and Peter exchange looks, Tony’s eyebrow-raising daring the boy to make some comment, Peter however simply shrugged. After all, Steve was looking for the Winter Soldier, and Natasha had said her Russian contacts had given her information leading to the area. So it wasn’t all that a surprise for Tony to make the connection. “Break it down, J,” Tony orders.

“Flight time five hours and 30 minutes, pre-flight checks one hour, refuelling thirty minutes. Total estimated wait time. 12 and a half hours, sir.”

“That’ll get him in here about 8 tomorrow morning,” Peter fills in, his mind working as fast as his father’s when it came to maths.

“Which means you won’t see Steve until you get back from school,” Tony comes back with dryly, causing the boy to snort and roll his eyes.

“Yeah, I’m going to be on time the day national icon moves into the building. You know, I think you’re getting on in years, getting silly notions into your head like that.”

“Don’t you have homework to do?” Tony stares at him before looking past him to the door, his oh so subtle way of telling the boy to go away.

“Yeah, right homework. I should really get on that, wouldn’t want Cap to frown at me for not doing it.” Peter grins as he starts to head to the door.
“You’re mine, not his. You’re supposed to want to make me proud you know.”

“I already do.” Is all that can be heard as Peter vanishes into the elevator to his room, his father just stares after him continuing to stare long after the doors had closed and taken its contents to its destination. Tony didn’t have long to himself, however, as he muttered to J.A.R.V.I.S about making sure the jet had the best of American diner food was part of the jets catering, a new voice entered the room.

“If I didn’t know the kid was yours, I’d be worried about the D.E.A showing up to shake this place down,” Clint says as he comes in with his quiver full of arrows, Tony just shakes his head.

“What do you expect, he grew up idolising the guy.”

“Wait, you were telling him bedtime stories about Captain America?” Clint looked honestly surprised about that.

“He was a small boy who lost his parents, giving him a hero think about at night isn’t exactly a strange thing to do. It’s not like I knew he was going to be moving into my home.” After all, Tony had grown up the same way before Howard chose to wrap himself up wholly into his work and the best liquor money could buy. After the moment of thought to himself, Tony glances at the quiver.

“Are you here to bug me for a range, because I’m not going to keep repeating it’s being worked out.” Tony wasn’t exactly thrilled about the idea when Clint first brought it up but understood the guy needed to practice and without S.H.E.I.L.D around it was hard for him to just head somewhere like Tri-State Archery. Especially not when after the Battle of New York’s footage was aired, Archery memberships near tripled, it’s hard to practise your trick shot when people keep trying to bother the ex-circus attraction for a selfie or an autograph. So Tony said he’d figure out a way to safely recreate a range in the tower for him. So far Tony hadn’t really looked into it all that hard.

Clint shook his head.

“Nah. Not that it wouldn’t be great if you could hurry that along. I’m just here to bum some tools.”

“Tools.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him, not too sure where he’s going with this.

“Yeah. Okay, I have what I need to keep normal arrows in their peak condition, but I moved into this tower with only what I had on me after coming back from Afghanistan. Shock and explosive heads don’t just make and attach themselves on their own.” Finally, Tony was able to catch up, he wasn’t really eager to give up his tools to anyone, even if it was temporarily, but only because he knew from M.I.T that just because someone borrowed your screwdriver didn’t mean you were always going to get it back.

“If you want new arrows I could easily-” Clint raised his hand to silence Tony’s thought, Tony simply huffs at the silent interruption.

“No offence, but I’ve got this. Would you let anyone else repair your suit?” Clint shakes his own head and doesn’t let Tony answer. “My bow is strung a certain way, I shoot in a certain way, just because you know the wind resistance and standard dimensions of an arrow doesn’t mean you can build me something that I can fire as accurately as I can. Believe me, I know my arrows like you know your armor. So putting them together is my thing. That and I don’t want my arrows coming back with a red and gold theming. It’s tacky.”

“This is how you ask to borrow a guy’s tools?”

“You were expecting something different from me?” With a vague feeling of defeat Tony sweeps his
arm around to gesture to the room.

“Nothing leaves this workshop that isn’t you or your arrows, got it?”

“Got it, got it.” Clint waves him off dismissively and starts rifling through various storage boxes.

“If you aren’t neat, you’ll be making more work for Dum-E” on hearing his name the robot reared its head and looked around the room before focusing in Clint, its grips expanded and closed at him a few time before rolling up to the desk Tony is at and waits at Tony patiently. “If you’re here that means you’ve finished sweeping.” Tony says with an unimpressed tone, the once school project sags and turns back to where it had come from and goes back to its task.

“Is it bad that I’m feeling bad for a robot?” Clint asks as he picks up a wire stripper.

Tony doesn’t bother replying to him because he knew there wasn’t too much of a point, that and because the elevator doors opened again.

While Bruce did have his own lab below Tony’s workshop, he did on occasion start little projects in the workshop. Mostly they were projects that needed Tony’s input, or engineering experience, but every now and then he would just be in the workshop, contenting himself with little things or just amusing himself with a newspaper on one of the couches. Despite how much the man did not care for being around people due to what he considered his problem, it was good in Tony’s opinion, to see that he felt not only comfortable around the rest of the team, though he did tend to seek out Tony as they shared casual conversations about science, technology, and food. The latter being a topic spoken about most, as while neither of them generally ate big meals. They both had a great appreciation of international foods and street cart offerings.

Bruce gives him a grin and a nod to Clint who returns a nod to him as he heads for one of the chairs near Tony, putting down the paper and the mug before getting comfortable in the chair.

“If I’ve deciphered right, Steve and Sam will either be here in the morning or are now fascinated with mooring,” he offered casually before slowly drinking his coffee.

“You know, the latter one sounds really interesting. Maybe I’ll bring it up with them tomorrow.” Tony snorts as he opens up a program to pour over the data it was offering him.

“I’m guessing from the fact that you’re not being snippy that it all went over pretty well.”

“Well, other than him feeling like I was deliberately keeping him out of the loop, yeah. It did.”

“Out of the loop?”

“He found out on the news that Natasha and bird boy over there, moved in.” Bruce gave him a face that said ‘oh’ easily enough without having to actually say it. Then he furrowed his eyebrows and tilted his head at Tony.

“You didn’t tell him? You talk for hours about how Peter once brought home a baby bird to anyone who’ll listen, but you didn’t tell Steve that Stark Tower is slowly filling up with Avengers?”

“You know, if I want guilt, I’ll find an Irish catholic. Why are you getting on to me over this?”

“Because I know you talk to Steve regularly?”

“Wait, you’re always calling Cap?” Clint butts in looking a little surprised at that.
“Okay, that’s a face I don’t enjoy. Why is that face being used?” Tony replies with a flat look.

“Come on, you’re always making snippy little comments to the guy. That doesn’t exactly sound favourable.”

“I do that to everyone,” Tony counters, Clint’s observation.

“Yeah, but we’ve all seen you in the news or on TMZ enough to know to ignore you.”

“Speaking of ignoring.” Tony turns back to Bruce, causing Clint to roll his eyes and grab his work coming closer to Tony and Bruce to both listen to the conversation and have a larger work space. “I haven’t called since. Well, since Natasha moved in.” To his credit, Tony looked a touch guilty about this.

“Tony…” Bruce sighs with a shake of his head, causing Tony to become slightly defensive.

“Hey, he hasn’t called either. I figured with S.H.I.E.L.D disintegrating and him globetrotting to find Barnes that he might need some time to get the work done.” Bruce just gives him a contemplative look. “You know, you who only just got friends, can’t give me that look.”

“Shocked as you may be to hear this. I actually had friends before I ended up with. The Other Guy.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him and begins to open his mouth. “Not many, but none of them have ulterior motives for being my friend, like military liaison, personal assistant, and son. So even this lonely nerd has something up on you there.”

They both glance over at Clint who snorts at Bruce’s sass.

“Really?” Once again Tony’s flat look returns to Clint.

“Not my fault it’s funny that Mr. Rich & Famous just lost a friend off to the ultimate Jekyll and Hide story.”

“Are you really laughing at this?” There’s nothing harsh or angry about Tony’s tone if anything it’s conversational in its disbelief.

“Yeah, I grew up with carnies and, until a month ago, professional assassins and spies, and even I had more trustworthy buddies than you.”

Tony can’t help but sigh because even he had to admit that most of the people in his life that called him their friend were really anything but, merely celebrity chasers, c and b listers doing their rounds to keep relativity popular, and anyone aiming to get into bed with Stark Industries while those that actually meant something to him were genetically related or on his payroll, which even included Bruce. At least, Bruce became his friend before he started paying him. What Clint is to him, however, is still up for debate.

“Still doesn’t mean you can give me that look. Respecting his right to hunt for a guy whose brain spent too long in a juicer means not calling him every day like a lovesick teenager.”

“Lovesick teenager?”

“What? That’s what love sick teenagers do.”

“You need to stop watching daytime television.”

“And miss out on what passes for acting? I don’t think so.” Bruce just shakes his head and opens up
his paper and starts to read while contemplating what has been said. At least, so Tony assumes.

About half an hour passes before Bruce speaks up again, Clint has become absorbed in his arrows, somehow having co-opted Dum-E into helping hold things and raising an eyebrow when he asks Dum-E to do something simple like move but instead just stays in the way. Tony knows he should fix that about the robot, but it’s become part of who he is now and it seems wrong to fix it. Tony, has gotten lost in the numbers on his screen as he runs a new batch of theoretical tests on the large scale arc reactors. While the one in his tower has so far powered everything smoothly, that’s just one tower, working to power a whole city is a whole lot trickier and can be cost heavy, so that’s where Tony’s head is right now.

“I haven’t seen Pepper in a while,” Bruce says casually as he turns a page, Tony doesn’t hear him.

“My guess is she slept on the lounge in her office last night,” Clint offers without looking up, Bruce bends the top of the paper down to look over at him.

“Dare I ask?”

“Tony drinks better coffee than Tasha and is less distracting when he wanders about in his underwear. So I was reading in his kitchen all last night.”

“Who’s walking around in underwear?” While of course no one would be surprised that this is when Tony came into the conversation, he chimed in more because his name had been said than the actual content of the sentence. “I don’t walk around in my underwear.”

“But if you did, you’d be less distracting to me than if Natasha did it.”

“I’ll have you know… No, you’re right I’ve seen the modelling shots.” Bruce raises an eyebrow at Tony but he is quite happy to ignore the look. “Why are we talking about Natasha and her lacy things?”

“We were talking about Pepper,” Bruce starts.

“And how she didn’t come home last night,” finished Clint, who was still focused on his arrows and not the other people in the room.

“There is weirdly too much oestrogen in this room right now. Why is this anyone’s business?”

“Tony. Before it got a little more crowded in this tower, I used to see a lot of Pepper even with her busy schedule. But since. I guess S.H.I.E.L.D fell I don’t see her around much anymore.”

“And Tasha says you’re arguing in public.” Tony pinches the bridge of his nose and makes an attempt to ignore them for a moment while he willed himself to focus back on his data. Ultimately he shakes his head then runs a hand over his face.

“That was once, and technically it was in an elevator. But she has been sleeping on the couch, I mean it’s a good couch, practically a bed in its own right.” He attempts to justify as J.A.R.V.I.S breaks in over him.

“Ms. Potts, unfortunately, isn’t the only one who hasn’t been sleeping in sir’s bedroom of late.”

“J.A.R.V.I.S, stop being a yenta. I’ve been busy.”

While Clint still doesn’t look up, clearly content to have a conversation while being preoccupied with setting a small explosive into an arrowhead, Bruce does give Tony a sympathetic look. He knows
that things have been getting rockier between them, it had been obvious just how bad it was getting when Bruce had called Pepper to fill her in on Tony heading out with Clint and Natasha to take on the wrecking crew, however, he had no idea that they were starting to avoid each other.

“Tony.”

“It’s fine. We’re just. Having, a moment. Couples have moments.”

“Yeah, then they break up.” Clint grunts, earning him a dirty look from Bruce.

“You aren’t helping.”

“I’m not trying to. Pepper and the kid are the only people who live in this tower that have any semblance of being normal. Relationships are hard enough for people, when you throw spies, superheroes and collateral damage into the mix, it goes from being hard to being damn near impossible. Especially when the person you’re dating is Pepper, Peter, or, I dunno Stan Lee”

“Who?” Bruce raises an eyebrow at the last name.

“I made the name up. But I know for a fact that when you live in one world, and you’re dating someone from another, things get way too complicated. Especially when a lot of what you do is classified. If you’re not willing to work hard to keep it. It ends.” He frowns and starts picking up his stuff and putting it to one side then starts putting the tools away. “I think I’ll come back later.” He mutters before heading for the elevator and disappearing. The two remaining men watch him go as Dum-E quietly picks up the tools he left.

“I don’t think we’re ever going to hear that story,” Tony thinks aloud.

“I get the feeling it’s more than one story.” Bruce turns back to Tony. “But he is right. And as someone who runs away to third world countries to avoid his problems. You should probably, I don’t know. Do something about this? Sleeping in different parts of the tower, arguing in elevators and Pepper leaving the state, sometimes the country earlier than she has to for meetings and deals after those fights? That’s a relationship that isn’t working.”

“She’s the best thing to happen to me,” Tony offers, sounding a touch pitiful to his own ears. “If it wasn’t for her I really wouldn’t be the man I am today.”

“But are you the best thing for her?” Tony gives him a sour look, at which Bruce lifts up his hands and looks at him properly. “Surprisingly, I didn’t mean that as an insult. Tony, you’ve always been in the spotlight, more bad than good, and she helped you through that in her own way. Then Afghanistan happened and you found a purpose. A purpose that she hasn’t exactly seemed to enjoy I might add.”

Tony shakes his head, his face saying he doesn’t want to hear it, however, he doesn’t get up or leave. Bruce has become what Obie had always pretended to be, an advisor with Tony’s best interests at heart. Someone prepared, to be honest with him even if he didn’t like it. It just happened to be a bonus that that same advisor-come-best-friend was someone who, when angry could snap Tony in half like a stick, because it meant Bruce had a higher tolerance for Tony’s nonsense, which in turn helped Tony level out more because rarely would Bruce snap at him and leave, but would stay and sort him out.

Even if he had fallen asleep on Tony every now and then. The guy was still human.

“I know this isn’t something that you’re going to be thrilled about. But you’re going to actually talk to her, Tony.” He folds his hand onto the bench top, looking to Tony As if trying to judge what the
As usual, Tony is awake just after dawn. With none of his currently running projects needing any of his attention, he’s taking the quiet morning as a chance to finally get through paperwork, it only took him a few hours and he was up and heading to his suite knowing there would be breakfast waiting for him, even though at quarter to 8 that breakfast would be long past freshly served.

As Tony stepped out of the elevator he saw Peter standing outside, who had quickly turned and was staring at a piece of art on the wall. There’s a long moment of staring from both of them. Tony didn’t need to ask why he was standing there, he was well aware of the time for a change and was mostly just staring at Peter because there was a flush of embarrassment on his face that was only getting darker the longer Tony was focused on him.

“Go to school.” Is all he says as he decides that food is more important than letting Peter feel more embarrassed.

“Yeah, I will. Promise. I’m just…” Peter pauses to try and think up a flimsy excuse as to why he hasn’t left yet.

“No, just don’t. Because you’re going to say something that even you will think is a lame attempt to stay. Go.”

“Fine.” Peter sags and drags his feet to the elevator pressing the button, Tony Turns to keep walking to the kitchen, see’s Peter’s bag by the wall and then kicks it towards him, Peter glares at the bag like it betrayed him as it slides across the polished floor towards him, which is all Tony sees as he disappears into the kitchen.

Bruce and Clint are busying themselves washing and drying dishes. They both know there’s a dishwasher right next to them, but Tony has long since given up pointing that out as they both seem to find it meditative. Natasha is curled over the table with a book and a cup of coffee, she doesn’t look up from her book but does instinctively pull her coffee closer to her to ward off Tony’s ever looming threat of caffeine theft. Tony notices the move and smirks slightly as he sits down and starts working on his bowl of fruit, yoghurt, and muesli that Bruce has clearly left out for him.

“How long as he been sitting out there?”

“He’s been hovering near the elevator the last hour.” She replies, not looking up until she finishes the sentence she was reading. “But he’s been awake as long as you have.” Tony shakes his head as he eats, having gotten far too used to Natasha seeming to know everything to be even remotely concerned that she knew when he woke up.

“I don’t remember him getting this excited about our fine Captain showing up before. When did this happen?” He’s really not too sure if he should be concerned or not about this, before answering Natasha curls both her hands around her mug and pulls it up to her mouth.
“My guess is somewhere between Clint and I becoming unemployed and your open heart surgery.” She answers before taking what appears to be a very indulgent sip of coffee.

“The fact his childhood hero is actually moving in and not visiting is only going to make him more excited,” Bruce adds, clearly listening to the conversation.

“Captain Steve Rogers and Staff Sargent Sam Wilson have entered the lobby, sir.” J.A.R.V.I.S politely chimes in, causing everyone in the room to look at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Thank you, J.A.R.V.I.S” Tony starts with a terse tone. “For heads up I never asked for.” As he speaks they hear loud running and through the doorway they can all see Peter leap over and land on the couch to look as casual as possible.

“Would you go to school!” Tony say loudly as J.A.R.V.I.S begins to talk over him, sounding hurt.

“I merely took into consideration the amount of trouble you had gone to not only to make sure the Captain and the Staff Sargent arrived here comfortably but also with a great amount of haste.”

Tony ignores the tone in the computers voice and stands up with a harassed sigh escaping him, he heads to the living room making sure to ignore his teammates looks at him, his A.I has been taking far too much pleasure in trying to embarrass him in front of the others in order to get him to open up more. As far as Tony was concerned all it succeeded in doing was making him ignore J.A.R.V.I.S more than he usually does.

Stopping at the arm of the couch, Tony looks down at Peter, who almost manages to look back up at him just as casually.

“This.” He gestures to Peter and the couch. “Is pathetic. You’re starting to act like Dum-E.”

“I’ve never seen Dum-E jump over a couch. And I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Those pictures of you in your Captain America jammies are going on the internet.” Peter sits up and looks appropriately affronted and embarrassed.

“Hey, come on I was 10. That’s no fair!”

“You want fair you should have gone to school this morning.”

“I’m going to go! I just am trying a thing.”

“The only thing you’re trying is my patience.”

“Wait, you have patience? That’s new.” Peter and Tony both look at the new voice to enter the conversation. Steve stands just outside the elevator with a grin as large as the duffle bag on his shoulder and Sam peeking over Steve’s other shoulder looking both curious and a little surprised.

“It’s cute you think you’re so funny,” Tony says flippantly as Peter scrambles off the couch, his whole face lit up in excitement. The look isn’t lost on Steve as he and Sam come closer, and he gives Tony a curious look for it. Tony glances at Peter then shrugs.

“That is what happens when you don’t visit. The puppy gets so excited it doesn’t know what to do.” He turns to Sam and offers a hand. “I guess I should say thanks? For looking after the Apple Pie? Oh, and welcome, to you know. The building.” Sam shakes his hand back eagerly.

“I’m not a puppy.” Peter sulks, but it doesn’t last long when Steve smiles at him.
“Hey, don’t worry about it. He’s made life more interesting.” Sam replies.

“He says that, but he hasn’t missed an episode of Glee the whole time we’ve been on the road.” Steve teases.

“Oh, ha ha. Why are you doing that? I don’t think I’ve really deserved that somehow.” Sam counters with as the rest of the team enter the room and greet him with a handshake, with the exception of Natasha who gives him a warm hug. Tony and Steve exchange a small nod before Steve turns back to Peter.

“Is today a school free day?”

“Uh.”

“Peter?”

“No.” Peter sighs despondently.

“Well, you better take off or you’ll miss your first class.”

“I know, I know. I’m going I was just… Trying to be fashionably late?”

“You can be fashionable when you graduate, scoot.” He punctuates his sentence by nodding his head towards the elevator. Peter sags a little more for a moment before scrambling around everyone, grabbing his bag and skateboard then disappearing off to school. Tony just scowls at his exit.

“When I told him to go he made excuses. He practically called you sir.”

“Maybe he’s just excited to have someone to look up to?” Steve replies with a straight face, Tony begins to give him a curious look, after all, Tony’s worked really damn hard to turn his life around to be someone Peter and others could actually look up to. Then looking up at Steve he sees that poorly masked look of amusement in his eyes.

Steve Rogers, Captain America, Man out of time. Just made a damn height joke.

“Suddenly I’m not remembering why I let you come here.” He frowns at Steve who pats him on the shoulder before turning to the rest of the team handshakes and hugs abound. Tony stands back and watches as Clint looks almost hesitant for him as he holds out his hand for Steve. Clearly not sure where he really stands with the guy. Not that it matters because Steve ignores the hand and pulls the man into a hug, asking how he is and generally wanting to know how he’s been doing since he last got here.

Tony thinks to himself that everything is starting to fall smoothly into place.
Dates All Around?

Chapter Summary

Somehow Peter manages to score a date and Tony ends up with a play date, but will either of them turn out well?

Chapter Notes

OH MY GAWD!

I've updated. I know I said I'd be infrequent but my life got very, let's go with irritating with both financial and family issues cropping up making life difficult as well as having to undergo a knee surgery which put me out of action.

I hope you all enjoy! And I hope everyone's looking forward to Civil War!!

Tony isn’t a leader. He knows this. At least not really, he knows how to take control, dish out orders and take the lead when a problem arises, though as far as Tony's concerned it's working with the situation, he's used to being the one who knows what is happening and how to deal with it. Leading a superhero team wasn't at all the same thing in his books, right now in the few little dust up that have occurred Tony was only the leader because he sounded the bossiest. So when Steve came in and assumed the position of leader, Tony felt more relieved than bitter.

Steve, was very much a leader in all the ways Tony wasn't. He already had a morning routine of getting up at dawn and going for a run. Tony knew it was a routine Steve had kept up with since escaping the ice, he also knew it was how he met Sam. Together with them trotting the globe to find James Barnes, it was hardly a surprise that even after moving into the tower with an entire level of gym equipment at their disposal that the pair continued to take early morning runs while most of New York was barely conscious or on the verge of losing consciousness depending on the age and status of the person, of course. Despite there being no official conversation – or a joking one for that matter – about Steve taking command of the Avengers officially, the others still slipped into place by his lead.

The first instance of this becoming obvious was simple. Natasha and Clint began going with Steve and Sam for their runs. Clint was less disciplined with the running however as he only seemed to run twice a week. Then slowly over the next two months the Gym had been rearranged and became a training room that seemed to suit what Steve had in mind for the team. Two mornings and one evening a week they train, going through drills. To Tony it makes sense, Sam and Steve are military, and with the way Clint and Natasha work in the field, they were trained just as hard as any soldier. That level of training becomes a habit, when you don’t have anywhere to train or hone your skills you feel at odds and useless.

It’s something Tony’s felt first hand and not just in an Afghani cave that smelt of rotten shoe leather and resentment, and it took the new training regimen to realise this is probably exactly how the two ex-S.H.I.E.L.D agents must have been feeling before Steve had moved in. Just more proof he’s not
suited to be their leader.

Tony’s never shown up to the training, even though he knows Steve would actually prefer him there, the guy isn’t as good at subtle as he thinks, he does, however, monitor the sessions through J.A.R.V.I.S, but something keeps him from it. He almost feels ashamed about it really. The reality is, Tony’s not avoiding the training because he wants to keep any credibility as someone who doesn’t work with teams. He’s avoiding them because he’s worried that working with the team now it’s a demi-god shy of a complete set that he’ll start falling into panic attacks again. He is fully aware of the fact that he hasn’t beaten them just that he worked around them for the time being.

He doesn’t want the team to see him fall apart like that. He doesn’t know how he could take the looks in their eyes.

As he watches the feed in the training room, he can see Sam and Clint attempting to take down Steve while Natasha and Bruce sit on a bench together, he can see them talking about something but so far isn’t interested enough in trying to figure out what, he doesn’t miss the playful knee bumps though.

“J.A.R.V.I.S. What’s the upgrade time on the suits?”

“Upgrading and routine tests will take a further two hours and 30 seconds, sir.”

“Good. Connect me to Thor. I can’t put this off much longer.”

“I would say not, sir.”

The monitor to his left shines to life, a white animated phone ringing on a black background with Tony’s image moving slightly out of time with his actual movements in the bottom corner as he waits for a connection. For a moment, Tony thinks the call is going to ring through until the camera on the other side comes to life with a wet blonde face comes into view.

“Stark,” Thor says while his hair drips. “I must say you’re almost a sight for sore eyes.”

“Why are you naked?” Is Tony’s only reply.

“I promise I’m in a towel. I just came out of the shower after a long run.” He smiled amiably, which had Tony rolling his eyes.

“Seems to be catching. How’s things?”

“Things are well. Though Darcy told me that you and the others recently fought a group called. The Wrecking Crew? She implied you ‘kicked ass’, congratulations on your victory.” There was always something to be said about Thor, unless his brother was brought up he was always near painfully congenial.

“Uh, Thanks.”

“You haven’t called in some time, Stark. Has something happened?”

“Something like that? I mean. Nothing’s happened, not like Dark Elves, terrorists, or aliens kind of happened. Just. Well, I was wondering how things are going over there in England. For you, I mean I’m not really all that interested in hearing the soccer scores or the weather.”

“I’m told both of those are fine, even though you aren’t interested.” He grins, holding a look that bugs Tony because it looks like Thor’s well aware that Tony’s going to try and bring him there. “Selvig has proven himself to the educational board at Royal Holloway and is teaching full time. He
is enjoying it greatly. Jane, well she is in great demand these days.” Thor beams at Tony for the ability to brag about his Jane. “Off to countries, I can’t even remember now to talk about her theories of the” He pauses to remember. “The Einstein-Rosen Bridge.”

“That. Is a pretty big deal.” Tony says sounding as impressed as he actually is. “Wait, If Fosters’ away. Why are you answering this phone? After all this time still in the UK I thought you found a way to surgically graft yourself to each other.”

“I’m afraid I would have been too much of a distraction, for both her and those she’s talking to. After all, you aren’t the only person who can make headlines by just showing up.”

“Feel proud, you’re in a group of people that includes the Kardashians.”

“I saw they have a new phone app coming out soon.”

“Please stop spending all your time with the interns watching Ellen.” Tony sighs, knowing that really Darcy and that boyfriend of hers would be the only way Thor would even know that, even if Darcy had brought it up to be ironic.

“Darcy has been with Jane this whole time,” Thor says casually as he stands up and steps back from the camera, so he can still be seen while he picks up a towel and starts drying his hair which causes his most of head to disappear out of frame, leaving only his battle-hardened abs and the top of the waist wrapped towel to be the only thing Tony could see. Tony had spent far too much time in boarding schools and exclusive parties to even register that he was seeing so much naked man on his screen. And if Thor wasn’t going to make a big deal about it then Tony wasn’t either.

“So you’ve been essentially living the bachelor’s life, for what? A month?”

“Three.”

“Do I even want to know what you’ve been doing? Actually don’t answer that, I don’t want to know. I have space for you. Well, I don’t, but I can make space for you.” Thor pauses in his hair drying while he leans back into the cameras view, an eyebrow disappearing up into the towel.

“I thought you had long built each of us a room in your tower.” Because of course Thor knew that. Tony was well aware that Thor wasn’t an idiot, just someone from a different world. Like Steve really, so naturally Thor was able to piece together what it was Tony was doing with his tower. And like Steve, Thor clearly had no intention of bringing it up without strict invitation.

“That’s the thing. I thought you were still in your honeymoon phase so I gave it to an ex- military paratrooper. But I have a spare room until I can have your boarding kennel arranged.”

“I think you enjoy referring to some of us as animals too much.”

“Calling it how I see it. So you in? I mean the spare room is more than comfortable, has an ensuite built in robe, windows. And with that hammer of yours, I can probably save on construction costs with you knocking out walls to keep you busy between fighting the good fight.” He smirks, and can’t help but notice the grin is being returned.

“Well, it has been hard to ignore that S.H.E.I.L.D has fallen to Hydra, no doubt causing a great deal of trouble that we should no doubt should have already started to deal with.”

“How noble.” Thor ignores him and goes on.

“I have been meaning to ask you something for some time, however, it’s been rather quiet so I could
be just worrying over nothing.” Tony tilts heads head curiously, his own image on the screen following him a quarter of a second later. The slight movement is enough for Thor to know the other is interested enough to continue. “Do you know if anything was taken from S.H.E.I.L.D’S containment?” Tony shrugs and leans back in his chair.

“Probably, I mean you can’t work your way in that deep to an international spy syndicate without coming out with something.”

“Like the sceptre?” Thor frowns, the statement causing Tony to frown too.

“J.A.R.V.I.S.?”

“With S.H.E.I.L.D being dissolved, it’s hard to obtain an accurate itemisation manifest at this time, sir. However the information already on file compared with that of what was released by former Agent Romanov does confirm that the sceptre Loki had in his possession was indeed kept by S.H.E.I.L.D and would no doubt be a prime target as Hydra is on record previously for using the Tesseract to create weapons.” Tony scrubs his face with his hand at the details. “As did S.H.E.I.L.D as you will both no doubt remember.”

“If the sceptre has even a slight chance to be in the wrong hands, then I will come as soon as possible.”

“I’ll arrange a plane. If you’re going to be staying here, you’re going to need the clothes I really hope you’ve bought since moving in there.” They both give each other a nod and they take that as an end to the call.

“Make the arrangements.”

“Sir.”

“And J?”

“Sir?”

“Find Fury. I’m going to need to talk to him.”

“Sir, Director Nicholas Fury is buried at-“

“I know where his headstone is. I want the man, no one that slippery dies of anything other than old age. And even then I wouldn’t count on it.”

Tony is covered in both grease and char. While this isn’t exactly new for him, he has at least opted into taking in a new location. After all, you can only work on new Iron Man suits, and stalk video surveillance for so long before wanting a change. He hadn’t worked in his garage since it and his workspace had been one in the same back in Malibu. So he had decided to take the change of scenery and run maintenance on the several cars that were the same make and models that Killian had destroyed.

“Well, this almost feels nostalgic.” A Steve-like voice came to Tony in muffled tones as he lay on his
back on an apple cart while checking the seals running under the chassis of his 1932 Ford Flathead Roadster, unlike his original, this car was just plain black, Tony really needed to make time to either have flames put on it or have some new and more interesting paint job instead. Tony clicks his tongue at Steve’s remark while not being entirely sure of where he was in the garage because he couldn’t see him.

“Well, if you’re going to own a classic you might as well keep it serviced in a classical way.”

“Makes sense to me.” Tony can hear footsteps after a moment, they sounded casual, as if taking in what’s around him. Not that Steve has never been in the garage before, but as he owns a Motorcycle he’s never had the need to come this far back to see Tony’s collection. There’s a low whistle then another pause. “J.A.R.V.I.S. How long has since he’s surfaced.”

“He?” Tony says indignantly, most of the indignance coming from the fact that Steve clearly knows better than to ask Tony himself, something that even Bruce and Pepper haven’t adapted to, always asking him and waiting for J.A.R.V.I.S to chime in with the facts.

“Surprising to say, Captain. That Mr. Stark has only been in the garage for 9 hours.”

“Guess everyone’s keeping better track of him.”

“It would seem that way.”

Tony scoffs loudly and mutters to himself about the fact he’s being spoken about like he’s not around, a habit people in the tower were becoming annoyingly proficient at for Tony’s tastes. He didn’t manage to gain much speed in his under-car grumbling before he feels a foot hooking around his own that then pulls him out from under the car.

“I was going to say you should buy me lunch. But I’m pretty sure the press would have a field day with that face.” Steve gives him an amused smile, Tony knew how he’d look so he just sits upright on the apple cart, pulling out a rag from his pocket and wiping his face. What he didn’t realise is that it was just moving the grease around and making himself grubbier. “Might want to try another approach, or I might have to give you a lecture on civil rights.”

“Don’t think I haven’t noticed you’re actively a wiseass when I’m the only one around.” Tony rolls his eyes as he stands up and goes to look for some de-greaser.

“Don’t be rude, J.A.R.V.I.S is also here.” Tony pointedly ignores him while cleaning his face and hands, even though he can’t see it, Steve shrugs. “It’s easier when people don’t treat me like I’m someone important.” While drying his face, Tony reflects on how much easier everything had been once he had Pepper in his life, never treating him as anything more than an irritating employer who lets her yell at him. Adding Peter then the Avengers into that has made him feel like a normal everyday person. Which is pretty damn strange within context of what they did as day jobs. So it’s not like Tony doesn’t completely get where he’s coming from.

“What important? You said it yourself, you’re just a kid from Brooklyn. Who ironically, can’t afford to live there now you actually have money.” Steve laughs and gives Tony an easy smile, which Tony offers up a crooked grin in return.

Tony had half expected for him and Steve to get on each other’s nerves pretty fast while living under the same roof. Having weekly conversations on the phone had been one thing, and trial and error had set up a list of things they had learnt to generally avoid; Politics was a given, even in the 40’s that was just a polite unspoken rule, Steve had learnt to only speak about Howard as a person unrelated to Tony, Tony had learnt not to bring up Peggy who had been a part of his life in a way she never
would be for Steve, which suited Tony fine because with how she was now she was a sore spot for both of them. However, Tony had avoided calling him after the fall of S.H.E.I.L.D both not wanting to interrupt Steve’s search for Bucky, but also because even he knew starting a conversation with ‘so, what’s it like knowing you were technically evil?’ won’t end in smirks and playful banter.

But so far, it had been easy. Conversations were smooth, though not very long surprisingly through no faults of their own. Tony may not be CEO but he was still kept busy with various Stark Industries research projects as well as his own projects with Bruce and general Avengers-themed upgrading and development, while Steve was keeping abreast of the threats that were worthy of their attention as well as a few that weren’t and eye on J.A.R.V.I.S’ data on events involving Spider-man as well as a few other people that were making themselves known to the Avengers, not that they were doing it on purpose so much as news like a group of people claiming they were forced to try and kill themselves just because some well-spoken man asked them to does tend to get around.

“You’ve got me there.” Steve replies simply. “So, feeling clean enough to go out?” He asks as Tony glances at a reflective surface that tells him that he is, in fact, respectable enough to be seen by cameras.

“What’s with the sudden interest in dating me, Rogers?” Tony looks at him with a raised eyebrow. “I mean, who wouldn’t want to be my other woman, but didn’t think you were that kind of girl.” Steve doesn’t even roll his eyes or even sound exasperated, clearly more focused of denying Tony the chance to get a rise out of him.

“Guess you could say I’m coming to the mountain.” He gives a slight shrug then looks at the roadster which he hasn’t moved an inch from since Tony went to clean his face. “Can’t say I really know enough about cars or technology to find some common ground. I can use them, but I don’t know what they need to run. But I’d like to think we’d both agree on food.”

Steve had a point, Tony had some pretty ‘narrow’ interests despite how broad the world of engineering is, it’s not really something any person can just talk about with the level of understanding Tony had of things. And it was true that as many times Tony has been to $200 plate gala’s and raised with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, he really had no hang-ups when it came to eating at any place that would serve food. He still, however, had something of a suspicious look on his face about the whole situation, which this time did have Steve give at least a slight sigh as he shifts his weight then runs a hand through his hair.

“It’s been over a month since you ordered Sam and me to get into your jet.” He starts simply. “The whole team dynamic and friendship building aren’t going to work unless we actually do things together.” Tony glances around for something to fidget with but comes up with nothing but the oily rag, so he puts his hands in his pockets. “Besides, if you aren’t going to listen to directions outside of the fight the least you and I could do is actually be friends.” He pauses. “You. Have heard of that word, right?” He smirks again.

“Ever think this might be why you barely see me around?” Tony comes back with sarcastically, Steve answers the question with a slight raise of the shoulders looking like the thought never crossed his mind.

“I just thought you were playing hard to get.” Tony stares past him, clearly not the most impressed that he was being kept up with when it came to playful teasing.

“If you suggest anything other than Shake Shack, I’m getting back under the roadster.” He comes back with as if it’s a threat, but really is just trying to get back on top of controlling the conversation.

“Shake Shack?” Steve parrots looking like he’s trying to figure out if Tony’s just making up word
combinations to mess with him.

“And you say you’ve been here for over a month.” He shakes his head and gestures to one of his many Audi suggesting silently Steve should get in.

“Well between Bruce’s cooking and the delivery boys I don’t really have to eat out much.”

“There’s one at Gran- Never mind, probably better for your shyness people don’t find out you eat in a Station food court.”

“Shyness?” Steve repeated mildly as he got into the car.

“I’ve seen the reels, you don’t look comfortable holding babies.” Tony explains as he gets into the car himself and wastes no time driving out of the garage planning to head to the Upper East Side location, it was the one Tony would most likely go to because it was further from the tower and being the Upper East Side, people were used to minding their own business more.

“That was 70 years ago.”

“Are you trying to suggest you’ve been practising holding babies in between spy missions?” Steve just rolls his eyes at him with a smirk. The trip while long due to midafternoon traffic went with casual conversation, after finding parking they managed to order with ease, Steve being particularly pleased that the menu was light enough not to needlessly overwhelm him with food options and they found themselves a seat in the garden plaza this Shack offered, keeping themselves to a corner to attract less attention.

“How’s acclimation going?” Tony asks when they’re down to picking at the last of their chips while lazily drinking their shakes.

“Hm? Oh, I guess you could say good. It’s hard when Sam, Peter, and Clint keep giving me reasons to add to what I have to catch up on.” He takes the lid off his shake to stir the contents thoughtfully.

“It has gone a lot easier with access J.A.R.V.I.S. It’s easier than just searching on the internet and hoping I don’t come up with something… Completely unrelated especially when it’s an image search.” Tony couldn’t help but smirk.

“Let me guess, porn?”

“I know how to use Safe Search, Tony. No, I mean more cats in Starfleet uniforms.” This gets a chuckle from Tony as he reaches for one of Steve’s fires, now his are all gone.

“If they’re in uniforms, it’s related. Also, sounds cute.”

“Didn’t think you were a fan of dressing up animals.”

“Who wouldn’t love it in theory? Raising a kid was close enough.”

“You used to dress up Peter?” Steve can’t help but look really curious about this, not that Tony could blame him whether he wanted it or not Peter was at least enough in Steve’s life for him to be at least a little attached to the kid.

“Uh, no. Pepper was, I… Wasn’t the best dad when I got him. But it was really only for Halloween anyway.”

“I’m sure you were fine.” The blonde offered only to get a dismissive wave and another stolen chip for his trouble.
“I avoided him, kid knows it just as well as I did.” During their phone calls Peter had been occasionally spoken about but never anything about his past, only things worth remarking on in the present. Awards hilarious goof-ups and the like. It wasn’t really a topic Tony loved to talk about because until Peter was kidnapped he was certainly heading down the same path his father took, luckily he had Pepper and Rhodie to help him see this. “What did I know about 7-year-olds? I was building car engines and being in magazines at that age.” He shrugs defensively at his own words. Steve sat quietly waiting for Tony to say more, looking both curious and respectful of the topic. “Stop that.”

“How is everything with you lately?” Steve asks after a while, looking at the table instead of Tony, who doesn’t answer just looks at him with the slightest eyebrow quirk. “Is this some kind of team building challenge?” He asks dismissively, Steve looks at him curious about the question.

“I think I’ll save him the embarrassment.”

“Not that this hasn’t been a great ruse, Rogers. But everything’s fine.” Tony stands up abruptly, roughly yanking his wallet out of his back pocket, pulling a tip out for the table. Really the fact Steve’s asking him how everything is wouldn’t have been that bad if it wasn’t for the others always acting like he is about to reenact some of the more recently dark parts of his life, or blow a fuse about his relationship with Pepper. It’s not like any of that was on purpose in the first place and he feels adamant that everything is fine in his relationship. As he starts to leave the table in his mostly quiet frustration, Steve doesn’t do more than just watch him, making him a little more frustrated. “What?”
He spits tersely.

“Guessing your projects aren’t going well then?” Tony can see the tense lines of Steve’s jar, obviously fighting the urge to call Tony out on his petty explosion at the man for asking a simple question, his unwillingness to let Tony start anything surprises the physically older man enough to cause him to pause in his movements.

“Any project that isn’t designed for the mass-market or the military generally don’t go that well.” He replies with cautiously. It’s not as though he expects Steve to suddenly snipe him after setting him on a new subject of discussion, but it’s more that Steve is seemingly trying to deny Tony the steam he usually uses to steamroll people into getting his own way.

Which is irritating in its own right but curious enough not to make a deal about.

“Didn’t think upgrading the team would be that hard.” Steve’s face is still tight and controlled as he keeps watching the short man, but he keeps his tone light.

“Upgrading the team doesn’t bring in profits. Pepper’s placating the board saying what I do for the team could end up being implemented later, “ He raises a dismissive hand at the topic. “Microchips, communications speeds, clarity, whatever. Not interesting. But because it’s not offering the immediate benefit and without lucrative S.H.I.E.L.D contracts coming in it means I actually have to order my own products, from my own tower, just so I can use them without having to be accused of using Government paid for creations as my play toys. The number of hoops my legal team has to jump through just so we can be well-dressed vigilantes are both tight fitting and probably on fire.”

He drops his wallet on the table, clearly disinterested in putting it back into his trouser pocket then drops back into the seat. Steve’s face visibly relaxes when he sees is sure he managed to de-escalate Tony’s temper.

“We aren’t Vigilantes, Tony.” Steve comes back with. Tony just shakes his head.

“Two Ex-Military, Two un-contracted spies, an ‘unpredictable’ monster, a god and a rich guy in a tin can fighting people, aliens and irradiated haggis without any government sanctions?” Tony drums his fingers on the table. “Sounds like a vigilante group to me.”

“You know it’s not like tha- God? Thor’s coming back?”

“Uh, hm. Yeah, he’s should be stateside tomorrow providing he doesn’t get too caught up with seeing Jane on the way here.”

“Planing on sharing with the group at all?” Tony just smirks at him.

“Surprise.” He replied in a sing-song tone. “Come on, it’s not like the guy has ever shown up announced on this planet… Ever. I’m just helping him keep the streak.”

“Guess I didn’t really expect to bother him unless we needed him.”Steve eyes Tony. “What’s got him jumping the pond?” Tony slows some of his fidgeting before looking at Steve directly.

“J.A.R.V.I.S couldn’t locate the sceptre.”
It was getting to the end of the school day, and Peter was bored. Math had come easily to Peter unsurprisingly and even with his enrolment in advanced placement he remained bored. Instead of making a fuss about it, Peter instead decided to work on his Spanish homework instead, which came to him a little harder, mostly because he was never sure if he was telling people that the cat was yellow or if the pencil is on the fence. Learning Spanish felt a little over the top to Peter, if only because he spoke passable French and German which Tony and Pepper had encouraged him to do in case he wanted to work in Stark Industries when he was older.

The bell rang soon enough, however he was still too wrapped up in his homework to actually notice it was time to go. At least until a hand rapped on the empty space of table just above his notebook.

“I’m still waiting you know,” Gwen says as Peter looks up, he blanks for a moment trying to figure out what she’s talking about, clearly understanding the obvious reaction she fills him in. “Dr. Banner.” Sighing Peter starts to pack up his things and stuff them into his bag.

As much as Peter tries hard to keep himself uninteresting, Gwen was still his friend and she is one of the very few who knew who is dad was, which meant by extension she knew he knew all the Avengers.

“You need new hobbies, Gwen.” He announces as he shoulders his bag and starts to leave the classroom without her, she follows him with a whine.

“I just want to pick his brain.”

“That could make him angry.” He smirks.

“Wow. That’s not funny, I thought you thought you were funny.” She gives him a teasing look. “Just one afternoon.”

“You already intern at Oscorp. Do you really want to be found fraternising with the enemy?”

"He's not on the permanent roster, I checked which means he's either just living in the tower or is freelancing to Stark Industries. So no, not fraternising."

"You know, sometimes you scare me with your research skills."

"Well, I am an intern for a multimillion dollar company at 17 for a reason," Gwen replied with a comfortable self-assurance that Peter only felt while wearing thin spandex.

"Oh wait, this isn't you trying to make Dr. Connors jealous?"

"Because I couldn’t possibly want to impress him by networking with other amazing scientists.” She rolls his eyes. “If I can get an inside track on this it means I have a better chance to secure scholarships, Peter.” Peter sighs as they reach the school doors and walk out into the mid-afternoon sun.

“Okay, fine. I’ll bring it up. But you don’t get to pout at me if he says no.” Gwen beams at him, giving him a quick hug.

“You’re the best.” She declares before she shuttles down the stairs.

“What I am is a sap for a pretty face.” He mutters to himself as he follows after her. “So, guessing you’re heading to Oscorp now then?” Gwen gives him a quick grin before walking just that little bit faster, challenging Peter to keep up. It’s not a challenge, as long as her legs are, his are longer.
“Well, it is a work day, Peter. I can’t really work on weekends now, can I?”

“Can I come?”

“Now who’s trying to fraternise?” Gwen gives Peter a playfully challenging look, to which he raises both his eyebrows and his palms.

“Who said anything about going in?” He pauses. "Again. Maybe. Just go with me on this one. But, maybe. I just want to enjoy your company on the way to a large biogenetics company.”

“Mhmm. Come on captain smooth. You can walk with me then.” They walk together in a companionable silence for half a block before she adds. “Are all Starks that smooth or do you take special classes?” Peter nods his head with an awkward look on his face.

“That obvious, huh?”

“A little. But it was a cute attempt.”

“Well, this is. Really embarrassing.”

“Not that embarrassing. You standing up against Flash while only being a third of his size? Way more embarrassing than this. Noble, but embarrassing.”

“Nah that just hurt. I mean, it got you talking to me? I know you were just waiting for your chance, so I thought that would be a great moment.” Gwen stops in her tracks and just stared at Peter, whose voice and gestures were just dramatic she could barely do anything other than laughing loudly, getting her one or two strange looks from passers-by on the busy Midtown streets.

The rest of the walk to Oscorp went easily after that, as they casually made fun of each other or talked about school. Stopping in front of the stairs that lead to building’s entrance.

“So, I was thinking.” Peter starts as he awkwardly rubs the back of his neck. “What would your thoughts be on maybe, going out for some, burgers?” Gwen smiles at him then makes a show of contemplating his offer.

“How about dinner at my place?”

“Your place? That would mean, parents?”

“And my three younger brothers.” She smiles sweetly at him as she plays with the pendant on her necklace.

“Brothers.” Peter looks a little surprised and confused.

“Scared?” Gwen clearly can’t help but tease him.

“Scared? Pfft! Me? Nah. I was just… Thinking about how big the table would be.” Rolling her eyes she puts her hand out to him, which he looks at stupidly.

“Phone.”

“Uh?” Without really making a connection, Peter simply obeys her and takes out his phone, she takes it off him, pulling up his calendar app, typing into it before handing it back.

“The alarm goes off at four, but dinner’s at eight on Thursday. Don’t be late.” Peter blinks and then grins.
When getting back to the tower, Peter falls onto the couch with a groan. Deep in thought about what had just transpired.

“Sounds like girl trouble.” Peter jumps at the voice he didn’t expect to hear, he shifts around on the couch until he can see Clint, leaning on the door frame from the kitchen with a bowl of cereal in his hands.

“That has an actual sound?”

“Oh, sure. It tends to sound confused.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” He sits up as Clint comes over to sit on the arm on the couch as he spoons some cereal into his mouth.

“The Stacy girl?” Peter looks almost appalled at how he knows this. The resulting look just has Clint shrug again as he has another spoonful of sugar and cardboard. “Nat can’t keep a secret.”

“She’s a spy!”

“Ex-Spy, technically. She only keeps them if it’s profitable. So what’s wrong?”

“We have a date.” Peter just groans and flops back down on the couch.


“Dinner with her parents.”

“Parents?”

“And brothers.”

“Wow.”

“This is our first date too.” Clint pauses for a moment then slaps at Peter’s thigh.

“Really is terminal. She must really like you, Pete. Or, she’s going to really interesting lengths to make you run away.”

“Her father is Captain George Stacy.” Natasha offers, seemingly appearing from nowhere surprising only Peter who realises he really should be used to this by now, as she takes the cereal off the archer and starts to eat it herself. Clint takes the news in then shakes his head sadly.

“Nice knowing you, kid.”

“Thanks, great. Really helpful there.” Peter buries his face into his hands with another groan.

“I wouldn’t worry about it. Remember, you live with people who have saved the world at least once as a team, and who knows how many times on their own. How bad can a police captain be?” Natasha offers, that has Peter pulling a face at her.
“You’re eating Clint’s cereal and it’s like 5 in the afternoon. Sorry, but I don’t think knowing superheroes is really going help me with a police officer who has to deal with criminals all day.”

“Who also doesn’t like superheroes,” Clint adds, clearly not at all bothered that the teenager was clearly pointing out how weird he and Natasha were.

“He what?” Peter asks.

“He issued an arrest warrant on Spider-Man.” Clint clarifies, which makes Natasha sigh and Peter’s eyes go wide then quickly runs a hand through his hair to hide his reaction, which the two intelligence agents seem to miss mostly because they clearly don’t expect him to react to the news in any strange way.

“I thought only judges could do that,” Natasha says before eating a spoonful of the cereal, Clint shrugs before taking the bowl back to finish it off.

“My money’s on his speech writer missing a beat and he was too passionate to pick up on it. Either way, he thinks the bug is bad news because he serves hot vigilante justice.”

“We serve hot vigilante justice,” Natasha scoffs.

“Cops can’t do what we do,” Clint says with a mouthful of cereal. “Not without slipping a disc while trying anyway. Besides, I think because we’re around he’s doing what he can to jump on any small timers swinging onto the scene.”

“But Spider-man’s trying to help the police. He’s doing what they can’t… For… You know, whatever reasons. Like legally and stuff.” Peter says defensively, trying not to be annoyed that he’s being labelled a pest more and more every day. The pair of them raise an eyebrow at him.

“Don’t let your dad hear that,” Natasha says before walking off into the kitchen, the now empty cereal bowl in hand.

“He’s sensitive when it comes to who you fanboy,” Clint smirks at Peter as the teen pulls a face at him.

“Who’s Peter fanboying?” Steve asks coming into the room with Sam.

“Petey here is Spider-Man’s biggest fan.” He says, turning to Steve. Catching the pillow Peter threw at him without looking at it.

“Huh. I thought you were my biggest fan.” Steve pretends to look downcast about this, Sam gives him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder, causing Peter to splutter.

“I’m nobodies fanboy!” He exclaims looking mortally embarrassed.

“Wow, that’s going to hurt all you guys, huh?” Sam starts. “I mean I came into this tower without fans, but you guys. People actually think you guys are important. But your mascot doesn’t even like you. Ouch, man.”

“Wait I’m your mascot?”

“Well, J.A.R.V.I.S is hard to personify,” Natasha calls out from the kitchen.

“Oh, okay wow. No, I can’t do this anymore. You guys are going to drive me into seeing a psychologist!” Peter scrambles off the couch and bumps into Tony and Thor who had been walking
into the room from the elevator after having just given the alien a tour of the tower.

“Someone other than me is sending you to a psychologist?” Tony raises an eyebrow looking around Peter to look at the crowd in his living room.

“Dad. Look, I know you’re a better person with everyone around, saving the world and stuff. But can you tell them to stop to make me crazy?” Peter pleads with him, he’s not entirely serious, but at the same time he’s so mortified at everyone he can’t help but feel a little serious.

“Are you kidding me? I use you to keep them off me,” Tony's reply causes a frustrated groan from his own as he stomps off to his room “You know, as a teenager, he manufactures his own angst. You don’t have to add to it.” Tony says as he and Thor walk through to the kitchen and starts making himself a coffee while Clint and Sam mutter conspiratorially to each other as they both stick their heads into the large double door fridge probably raiding it for beer or small goods. Thor and Steve simple lean on the kitchen island counter watching everyone move around them.

“Couldn’t help it. Kid’s got a date with the Stacy girl.” Tony looks over his shoulder at the information Clint offered, as Sam stands exchange a look exchange a look with Steve then Thor.

"Date? I didn't know Starks date." Sam says with a grin.

"Then what am I doing with Pepper?" Tony asks with a snippy tone.

"Treading water" Natasha cuts in but doesn't let the conversation continue in that direction for more than a split second. "I think it's sweet."

"I'm leaning towards tragic. Kid's mouthy so he's definitely a Stark, how long do you think it's really going to last when her dad is one of the badged masses? Just because the forms list his family name as Parker doesn't mean he sounds just like Tony, sometimes it's a little creepy sometimes. " Clint counters as he makes his up his mind and pulls out a beer from the fridge, moving to lean by Natasha as Sam fishes out a can of soda.

"He does not sound like me." Tony cuts in defensively, still looking a little annoyed about the treading water comment from a moment ago.

"He talks just like you, Tony." Steve cuts in with a gentle tone that for now seems to dissuade Tony from getting any pricklier. "Stacey? As in Captain Stacy?"

"Very same," Natasha confirms as she slides a fruit bowl towards Tony and sits up on the counter top swinging her legs a little. "So really it's good his name is Parker. Our genius here hasn't made any attempt to be friends with that particular Captain."

"I haven't tried to be friends with this Captain." Tony twitches his head at Steve as he moves next to Tony to get a closer look at what's in the bowl. "He just can't leave well enough alone." Steve just rolls his eyes at him and reaches in front of him to pull out a mandarin, Tony is certain it's to deliberately get into his space to bug him with his choice of fruit. Honestly, Tony's surprised no one has caught video of Steve being the cheeky bastard he is when he thinks people aren’t paying attention out in the field.

“Peter’s a polite kid, I'm sure he won't try to start anything with Captain Stacy. Not if he really likes, uh.”

"Gwen." Natasha supplies, Steve points at her to confirm that's what he was looking for and that it's the end of his sentence.
“I’ve seen that boy talk back to Natasha. Not something someone does who’s looking for a long lease on life.” Sam offers up, being the one who’s had the least contact with Peter, Tony assumes he feels like he has something of an outsider’s perspective on the deal. Natasha offers up a soft smile.

“To be fair, I let him get away with a lot.”

“Too much. Someone needs to put the fear of death in him. It should be you.” Tony says as he picks an apple and bites into it.

“I thought parents were meant to teach respect,” Steve asks with an eyebrow raised at Tony.

“Wouldn’t know, I have no point of reference.” Steve looks a little sad about his glib remark, Sam shifting a little uncomfortably. Clint and Natasha don’t react, in part because they’re used to Tony enough by now to ignore those remarks. “Not important, besides with my life being public knowledge I’d be a hypocrite with anything I could tell him off for. Like you said, he’s a good kid. It’ll be fine. And if not he apparently has an entire coop of mother hens to come home to sob too.” That’s all Tony says before leaving the room to head back to his workshop with fresh coffee and the biscuit tin to waste time until J.A.R.V.I.S finishes his search for Fury. He can hear Thor wonder how much trouble Peter could really get into by having dinner with an officer of the law which Tony’s sure the others are giving each other looks of varying levels of dubious amusement as he leaves, which causes him to smile to himself as he steps into the elevator.

Bruce is leaning over a computer as Tony enters, reading what the screen has to offer while idly stroking DUM-E's head as the bot is nestled into his thigh.

"Maybe we should get Rogers in here. This is an image for above the mantle." Bruce grins at the screen as he goes from stroking DUM-E's head to giving it a fond pat.

"It saves me time. I'm working while I meditate." Tony shakes his own head and puts his mug of coffee and the tin down on his computer desk. To Tony, Bruce will always be the easiest person for him to be around, he's quiet, unassuming, rational, with a very even keel for someone who has an angry green monster inside him. All things that Tony feels he lacks, so having Bruce around helps Tony feel balanced. Though he does lack the challenge Tony enjoys, if only because Bruce has schooled himself so much in the art of avoiding confrontation it's made him easy to get him onto Tony's line of thinking just by talking fast enough with a reassuringly confident tone. Something he almost instinctually takes advantage of while ignoring the later admonishing from his A.I, he's fully aware how terrible it is, but sometimes he's so obvious about it Tony can't help but wonder if Bruce lets Tony talk him into things so he has fewer outside factors to think about.

Also, Tony offers some interesting challenges. At least, he thinks so.

"How's it look?" He asks referring to the thing Bruce was reading on the computer when Tony entered.

"The coding is sound." He's interrupted by Tony muttering 'naturally', Bruce nods in a way that acknowledges the fact Tony spoke but not what he actually said causing Tony to believe that Bruce would make an excellent teacher. "But I'm not sure about these metals. Are you sure they'll hold up?"

"This alloy is in all my suits since Killian got me in trouble. Besides, they don't have to hold up any better than that, all the joints detach, have you even read that far?" Tony leans over the other man to look at the screen, being used to having Tony constantly in his personal space, Bruce simply leans back and to the side so he can see what Tony's doing. Tony scrolls a little bit then minimises a file before pulling up a hologramed schematic to light up behind them. "J.A.R.V.I.S, run the test for arm
replacement." The large blue framed suit lit up behind them they both turn in time to see the frame lifts an arm as digital mechanisms release the arm causing it to pop off as something flies in from a hovering craft in the background, which then builds a new arm into place.

"Okay, so it looks like the engineering is sound." Bruce agrees dubiously.

"Of course, it is. It all came into play because of this." Tony taps Bruce's temple, who waves the hand away like a rude fly. "The only thing we can't do is stress test it. Unless you're up for a trip to say, the Mojave?"

"No thanks. But along that theme. I think Natasha and I might have a way to make his appearances a little easier, well disappearances. Though how we're going to bring it out of theory could be interesting."

"Please tell me this is something kinky."

"We were thinking more a conditioned response."

"Very kinky. And here I thought you had to keep that heart rate down."

"If we can encourage a set of words and movements that he associates with a calm environment, it should make things easier for me to come back to the foreground." Bruce too used to Tony to let anything he said really get to him, however, he still had a shy almost smile that Tony couldn't help but take note of but he had enough sense to let it go for now.

"So, what we're talking like training a dog here, or are we pulling a Koko here?"

"I'm going to go with a big green gorilla dog if you want accuracy."

"I do like accuracy. So, this does mean a trip to the Mojave then?"

"I was thinking somewhere a little more controlled. Cooler too."

"I'm sure we can work something out," Tony replies with a grin as they continue to talk more about Hulk management tactics.

Everyone's prediction that the dinner would be fine was predictably wrong. If only because Peter was quite defensive of Spider-Man while Captain Stacey was quite in favour of due process over spandex clad vigilantism. Although to be fair, Captain Stacey did admit that it would be hard of Peter to understand, knowing that Peter has been raised by Tony Stark which really hadn't been that hard for him to find out. Which all and all could have been all the night lead to if it wasn't for the Lizard making his first appearance and making his night a very sore one.

"Young sir, the injuries you have sustained should be seen by a medical professional," J.A.R.V.I.S informs him the second he manages to get into his room without anyone noticing. He drops his bag heavily by the door and drops to the floor to crawl half under his bed to pull out a first aid kit.

"I'm fine."
"Mr. Stark has better traits for you to emulate. Perhaps I could list some of them in case one sounds more interesting than Wilful Self Destruction." At this, Peter pauses in putting antibiotic cream to just give the room an incredulous look.

"I really don't know where to start with that sentence."

"Might I suggest you ask me to call for both Mr. Stark and Dr. Banner."

"Suggest away, I'm not doing it."

"Young sir, it is one thing to go around harassing common criminals with your currently unstudied condition. However, I'm afraid that taking on a mutant reptile is something else completely. Something that could lead to your demise if not careful."

Peter doesn't say anything for a while opting to just quietly reflect on what J.A.R.V.I.S has said, the occasional hissing wince the only sound to be heard while he works on protecting his wounds from infections and the open air.

He lets himself imagine what it would be like if he told the others, scolding for sure. He isn't entirely sure how his dad would handle the news if he was honest. As predictable as the media seemed to think Tony was the man was actually strangely accepting of some things but not others, for instance, he might make references to Lord of the Rings, however after reading it once he didn't care for the ideologies behind the writing. There was a realistic probably he would try to outfit Peter with his own tech. Which would be pretty awesome, but he isn't like the Avengers, this isn't about some special club to save the world, it all started because he had built up frustrations at the fact that the two people who have been there for him at a really important time of his life aren't getting along as expected now they're dating. It simply didn’t take all that long at all before Peter just started to enjoy the feeling of helping people and stopping the bad guys. Being Spider-Man has become something of a therapy for Peter, both freeing and empowering him to be more than others assumed he was. Being able to actual save lives was a lot more powerful than standing around with his dad and Pepper at charity galas.

He took a moment to look down at himself once he felt he was sufficiently cleaned up. The downside to being Spider-Man secretly was he was coming back with more and more cuts and bruises. It was only a matter of time before he got himself into a situation that antiseptic cream and plastic band aids couldn't fix. But right now he wasn't confident enough to believe that the people in his house wouldn't either try to talk him out of or force him into doing something else. So for now, avoiding the consequences were the way to go.

"J.A.R.V.I.S"

"Am I to assume you have made a decision, young master?"

"Uh, yeah. No." He pauses. "Not yet. I need you to keep not telling them for now. Guess you could say I still don't know where I'm standing with this yet?" He can't help but sound a little unsure because it sort of sounds stupid even to him. There's a long silence from the computer, making Peter a little concerned that J.A.R.V.I.S is overriding his request and currently informing both their creators about this.

"For now. Your secret will be safe with me. However if your vital signs get any worse after one of your 'missions' I will not hesitate in informing Mr. Stark." The teenager expels the breath he didn't realize he'd been holding in.

"Thanks, Jay." The computer doesn't respond, with the relief that he's not going to be snitched on
Peter can feel what little energy remained after his fight with the lizard he just crawls into bed to ignore the world until morning.
The Itemization of straws.

Chapter Summary

Everyone has their limits.
Even when you are a strong person who can handle everything that has come your way.
Sometimes it takes a lizard-man to help you realise that it takes, even more, strength to hurt people just so you can stay sane and safe.

Chapter Notes

Don't worry! I haven't quit writing!
I've moved back home so hopefully, I'll be posting more again.
Updated this chapter because there were some stupid spelling errors, bits missing and a part I didn't actually mean to put in.

Peter was reflecting on the night before, he had kissed Gwen but he got interrupted by sirens blaring and knew too well that something was wrong in a bad way, so the job would have to come first. It wouldn't be safe for him to think otherwise while something dangerous was on the loose. His reflections too place as he sat on Iron Man's take off pad that stood high above the helicopter landing pad on the balcony after all the higher pad had no railings and made it easy for him to sit at the edge without anything obstructing his view or kept his legs from dangling while staring idly watching the skyline as he thinks to himself, of what his possible future held.

After a long moment of thinking about both Gwen and the Lizard, his thoughts turned to J.A.R.V.I.S’ request that he tell his dad and the rest of the Avengers about what he’s seen and been through. He still wasn’t prepared to give up his secret to them, he didn’t want to think about the blood draining from Pepper’s already pale face at the thought of him not only taking after Tony by putting on a suit and fighting less than reputable people on an almost daily basis, that was bad enough, but also imitating Tony in that he’s hiding what he’s doing from everyone.

The scolding from the team would probably be hard to deal with too, that he’s too young, too much of a target, whatever. He could handle it, he’s been handling it for almost a year now and unlike his dad, he’s started this whole gig clean and sober. But then last night was the first time he had saved not just several people, but a young boy. He couldn’t have been much older than seven and so scared, a feeling he was kind of familiar of himself back then. He had helped that boy, Jack, to feel brave enough to come to him while Peter was just not able to reach him without things going so very wrong. But what got him the most was when he returned Jack to his dad. Tony wasn’t really an affectionate father, there were pats and awkward touches but never really hugs, in fact, the only time he could remember Tony ever holding him like Jack and his father were, was when Tony and Peter had their own terrifying moment when Peter had been rescued from his kidnappers.

It was so strange to see how it looks from the outside. It was really heartwarming, at least that’s would Peter would say if he had to describe it. He goes to scratch his head at his internal dilemma when suddenly there was an appearance of a thick blanket dumped on his head to break him out of
his own mind.

“Bit cold to be out here staring out at the scenery don’t you think?” Clint asks as Peter pulls the blanket off his head and wraps it around him, as he looks up Clint offers him a mug of coffee while drinking from his own mug.

“Guess I lost track of time?” He answers cautiously.

“Nice try, kid. It was dark when you got here.”

“You were watching me?” Peter’s look takes on a look of suspicion, maybe J.A.R.V.I.S did actually tell someone. Clint turns at the waist and looks at where he came from then tilts his mug at the 2 storey bank of windows, Peter looks along with him with a pinched look of someone who thinks they’re busted. If Clint notices he doesn’t say anything.

“Don’t know how long you’ve been living here. Two years or something, but you have to have noticed your home is just steel and windows.” Peter’s head just drops fighting the urge to exhale in relief then he cuddles more into his blanket. So J.A.R.V.I.S didn’t say anything then.

“Oh.” Is all he can come out with, as much as he’s inwardly relieved he hasn’t been found out, there's a nagging feeling that Clint saw Peter climb up onto the platform from the outside, Peter opts to dismiss the thought, Clint wouldn’t be the type to hold something back like that, right? Then he looks up at the casually snarky guy. He’s only wearing a basic tee, an open flannel button down and a pair of jeans. If Peter ever had to describe what a typical father was meant to look like, he’d probably say like a less highly-trained Clint. “Aren’t you cold?” Clint blinks at the question and looks down at himself as if he’s only realised now how rugged up he isn’t. He rubs at the inner corner of his eye next to his nose.

“I’ve been up higher places in colder climates than this. Usually in the rain or snow.” He answers casually “I also don’t plan to be out here for very long. Can’t speak for you, though.” Clint watches Peter for his answer.

“Oh, yeah. I don’t be out here much longer. I’m just. You know, it’s a full house sometimes it can get noisy. I was just. After some quiet.” Clint watches him for a long moment before draining the last of his coffee.

“Didn’t know Starks could be quiet. That’s all it is?” Peter tilts his head at him.

“Should it, be something else?”

“You tell me, you’re the one who’s half a step away from being up close and personal with Park Avenue.” Both Peter and Clint lean just enough forward to look down at the street below both of them clearly not at all worried about the height.

“Oh yeah. Uh. No. I’m good. Promise.” To make a point the teen carefully scoots himself back further from the edge while tucking his legs underneath him. Sure there’s obvious web-slinging reasons why he’s not scared of the drop, but it doesn’t mean he should give any reason for Clint to possibly be more suspicious of his movements.

“You know, if someone’s bothering you I’m sure Nat would be happy to, you know, sort them out for you.” Peter shakes his head at the offer, eyes wide.

“Whoa. No, really not that kind of problem. Not anymore anyway. It’s just, you know, Spanish. I have tests coming up and well, really isn’t three languages enough?” Clint snorts then shakes his head.
“Don’t say that where Nat can hear you. She’s pretty big on languages.” Clint takes another look out at the skyline before looking back down at Peter. “Not too much longer right?” Peter nods and watches him go back inside. With the common lounge so well lit Peter can easily see Natasha sit up after a moment or two passes from Clint going back inside. Clint’s body offers nothing in the way of what they’re talking about, Natasha simply stretches at the conversation as confidently as any cat sitting in front of a doorway you want to pass through, he can’t tell if she looks at him because the couch she was laying on was already making it so she was facing towards him. After almost 10 more minutes of possible conversation, the pair leave the room heading towards the elevator.

If Peter hadn’t been so tired, sore and introspective he would have been really curious about what they were talking about. So instead he just finishes the coffee, and after a careful stretch of his own, he felt comfortable enough with going in without anyone else coming to be concerned about him.

“So what are we looking at exactly?” Steve asks sitting at the conference table, looking at several sections of footage being displayed on one of Tony’s holographic displays of a large something stomping along the Manhattan Bridge from several different camera phones and bridge surveillance footage.

“Some kind of. Dinosaur? “ Bruce tried to answer but he sounded way to unsure of himself.

“Can you not make it clearer?” Thor asks, standing with his arms crossed with a curious head tilt to Tony who just shakes his head.

“You’ve been watching too many movies, Blue Crush. This is basic phone camera quality here. The best I can do is brighten it and maybe up the hue. J.A.R.V.I.S.” Seconds after Tony says J.A.R.V.I.S’ name the images are all brighter and have a little more colour. But really all it does is let them know for certain that whatever they’re looking at is green. “So. What’s a Goomba doing on this side of the dimension bridge?” He says to himself getting an appalled look from Clint. Steve and Thor exchange a confused look, Bruce and Natasha were the only two who didn’t have a reaction to Tony’s terrible movie reference, the pair of them knew it was just easier not to give him the satisfaction.

“All we know for sure is the earliest dated footage plus traffic flow puts the creature on the Manhattan side of the bridge. I’m going to make the same assumption with Spider-man, most of the blogs and Bugle articles seem to point as Lower Manhattan and Midtown as his ‘home range’ so to speak. A police scanner is my bet for how he knows when something’s going down.” There were a few nods of agreement.

“That really only explains Spider-man.” Bruce begins as he scratches at his nose before gesturing at the screen. “We still don’t know what this is or where it came from.”

“What if it is something new from Hydra?” Thor thinks aloud, concentrating on the screen as he leans back in his chair.

“Hydra’s been blending in too long to come up with something so eye catching so suddenly. Unless something’s come up in the released S.H.E.I.L.D files?” Steve directs his gaze to Tony who has been pacing alongside the table while trying to get as much quality out of the footage as he can get
with no real success. He shakes his head.

“Still going through it all. Not only is it over 70 years of data, some of the encryptions have needed me to establish new routines just to break them down enough for J.A.R.V.I.S to dust off his rosetta stone programing. And some of that is just chalked up to Fury barely trusting his own reflection when it came to some subjects. Our friendly fascist regime really didn’t want anyone snooping. I’m almost impressed at how much they tried. Everything's got code names for code names So trying to figure out which encryptions need the most attention is slow going. Not something I love to admit.”

Steve gave a sigh and leant back in his chair. Tony could tell from the expression that Steve didn’t like how little they knew about the situation, it prompted Tony to shrug. “Really it could be worse.”

Everyone gives Tony an incredulous look.

“Tony. We don’t know what it is, where it is or who unleashed it.” Steve shook his head.

“10 years ago and we’d only have grainy bridge cameras to go off of. We can at least see what it’s doing here and try to figure out a basic idea of what it's doing.”

“It’s hunting.” Clint says simply, Thor and Steve look back at the footage narrowing their eyes as Tony increases the size of the footage. “See, it’s looking in the windows for something.” He gestures to the bulbous head dipping down to glance into the vehicle before aggressively pushing it to one side.

“Maybe that’s just how he moves.” Mused Bruce quietly barely loud enough to be heard over everyone’s concentration.

“Oh someone. Stop it there.” Steve announces as the image stops it’s a bad angle but it clearly shows the creature attacking a car. “Looks like it found what it was looking for.” The footage starts moving again showing him lifting up the car and throwing it off. This time, Tony stops the footage.

“Jay. Looks like that’s half a plate.”

“Crossreferencing now, sir.” J.A.R.V.I.S replies diligently the footage moving again to show Spider-Man launch at the creature and promptly shoot that webbing of his at the vehicle leaving it to swing ominously against the side of the bridge like a few of other cars the slight superhero had managed to save. Shortly after there’s no more footage of the creature, just of Spider-Man saving a child, again from a very awkward angle giving them little to work with on finding out who he is either.

"Looks like for now, all we can do is wait." Steve says running a hand through his hair the eagerness to get out and do something written all over him. Tony can't help but wonder if the guy is itching for a fight to get some of his frustration about Barnes continuing to be a mystery to him. Not that he could blame him, Tony glances at everyone in the meeting room who are all in various stages of preparing to keep themselves busy for the time being when he gets that nagging feeling of what would he do if anything happened to these people who had managed to slip into his life with a weird yet startling easy efficiency. Shaking his head he decided to leave the room before sentimentality got the better of him. Stepping into the elevator he realised he wasn't alone, Natasha was in there with him.

"Am I going to have to buy a collar with a bell for your birthday?" His tone bored as he reaches to hit the button for the workshop floor, but he gets denied by Natasha slapping his hand and pushing the button for the ground floor. "Okay if I had to be somewhere I would know, I have J.A.R.V.I.S to ignore for that very purpose."
"Believe me, I'm taking you somewhere you want to be." She says seriously.

"You know, this vague show is really not what I call a fun time." He replies not liking how stoic she's looking while being vague.

"Only when you're on the wrong side of it. There's ice cream in it for you." She finally gives him a smirk.

"I'm not Peter."

"Coffee and bear claws?"

"That I can work with." There's a quiet moment in the elevator before Tony glances at Natasha, she's leaning against the far wall looking at something on her phone, her face giving away nothing. It's starting to make him uncomfortable if only because she isn't telling him where they're going. He fidgets with a frown, looking at her once again. "Really, nothing? You're really going to stonewall me on this? I feel like I'm going to a parent-teacher meeting only to hear 'we're not angry just disappointed' here. Come on, Natasha It's been what? 5 years since I was trying to do very interesting things to my body with Palladium. I'm being a good boy, I don't even put things in my body that shouldn't be there anymore." Natasha looks up from her phone to give him a long look. "Nothing that's going to kill me with prolonged use, at least." She sighs at him before letting her face relax.

"You need to see something outside of that workshop or Stark Industries speeches."

"My speeches are always enjoyed." She ignores him.

"We're going to lunch in Central Park. You could use the Vitamin D."

"Not really big on picnic blankets, the plaid really clashes with silk shirts."

"I was thinking Tavern on the Green."

"Accepti- Wait, you're bribing me to leave the tower for lunch with coffee and pastries even though it doesn't even sound that bad?" Natasha only answers him with a teasing smile. "You were working me up on purpose?"

"Do you still feel tense about the creature?"

"Uh, yeah. Distracted and a little confused now admittedly. And a little curious as to why people keep dragging me out to lunch."

"I see that mind working. We know you, Tony. If we leave you on your own too long you'll only create more robots."

"The Iron Legion's whole point is to keep people out of harm's way, and I haven't even run a prototype build." There's a pause. "I'm starting to not like how much you and Bruce are talking."

"I give him a fresh perspective, and I'm less likely to cause fire hazards"

"Not a statement I trust. What else have you two been talking about?" Tony asks as the Elevator gets to the ground floor and the pair of them step out into the Avengers parking garage.

"Hulk calming techniques, recipes, the uncomfortable number of hats you seem to have for DUM-E"

"There are two. Technically they're also caps." It was true, everyone knew at this point about DUM-
E's Dunce cap which Tony would make him wear when even for the robot he was being particularly useless to what was going on, the other had been a Hulk themed flat cap. It's only existence was to get withering looks out of Bruce when he was too focused on his own projects.

"A robot arm doesn't need any headgear." She states as she easily slips into the driver's seat of one of Tony's exclusive not-yet-on-the-market Audis, as Tony got in the passenger seat, not at all bothering to ask her where she got the proximity unlock card. After all, he doesn't feel the need to lock the storage box they're kept in in the workshop. He huffs at her trying to insert logic into his relationship with the almost 30-year-old robot.

"Tell that to The Animatrix" he mutters, however clearly knowing Tony would want to have the last comment, Natasha deliberately revved the engine to drown him out before pulling out of the garage.

The drive was pretty quick for New York traffic, both Tony and Natasha chalking it up to leaving the tower at that sweet spot that happens every so often in big city traffic where everyone has just finished their drive or just getting into their car or taxi for the next trip. A moment all big city people dream of but don’t always achieve more than once a year if they’re lucky. The time had passed easily enough, Tony’s suspicion was returned to the loosely locked cage in the back of his mind and the pair of them were making idle conversation about New York, Peter, and the rest of the team. All in all, an average trip that most average people take, something that Tony never really had in his life so he took a moment to enjoy it as a small part of his mind couldn’t help but notice his most everyday conversations were usually with a woman not only trained from near birth to be an emotionless murderer who could out do most Olympic gymnasts. Somehow one of the more dangerous members of his team always managed to bring him some strange kind of comfort.

Once they pull into a parking spot and enter The Tavern on the Green, Natasha takes the lead and tells the hostess who approaches them that there was a booking for Stark. Tony feels like he should be annoyed Natasha's preemptively booking things under his name, but really his name is the best way to secure a booking in most major cities. The woman leads them to a table and excuses herself as they sit down saying she’ll return with water. It was at this point Tony noticed two things;

The Tavern was empty, and they were seated at a table for six. Tony, who sat at the head of the table without thinking looks down the length of the table then to Natasha who sat to his left who was already looking at the menu.

“You didn’t mention this was going to be a team thing.” He said to her giving her an almost suspicious look.

“That would be because the team wasn’t looking for ghosts.” Answered a voice that very much didn’t belong to the sneaky woman he was looking at. He frowns at her.

“You just can’t stop, can you? It’s like you’re addicted to playing all sides.” His accusation had her looking up at him looking very much offended.

“I was ask-“ Tony ignores her reply and stands to look Nicholas Fury in the singular eye. He’d already been tricked into this meeting and he was hardly about to allow himself to be knocked off guard any further.

“Nick,” he rose in the inflection of the former S.H.E.I.L.D directors name. “You know, death is doing you really well.”

“You were making some very obvious attempts to look for me, Stark. I asked Romanov to bring you here before you blew what remaining cover I can afford.”
“I know you well enough that going quietly down alleyways was the best way to get you ignoring me.” Tony snipped back with, he wasn’t at all annoyed that Fury made an attempt to seek him out, hell he wanted to talk to him after all, he was just left a little tender after thinking all those previous thoughts about how calm he felt to be around Natasha. A glance back at her showed that she knew exactly why he was being snippy and her face was also telling him that later there was going to be a conversation about him snapping at her like that. Because of the look, Tony shifted his weight as if resetting his whole tactic before sitting back down at the head of the table and gestured for Nick to sit down. The bald man opted to sit down across from Tony at the bottom of the table, clearly aware of any games that could be going on in Tony’s mind. In fact, he too looked at the menu on the table waiting for Tony to speak.

“So, who else knows about your death?” Tony asks conversationally as he flips through his own menu. After all, he was brought her for lunch and it was going to be on fury’s tab if he could get away with it.

“Just Steve, Sam, Maria Hill and myself. Maria brought us to Fury after the strike team arrested us.” Natasha wasted no time in supplying, either because she has gotten used to offering relevant information or to make up for keeping it from him, Tony wasn’t sure, and really he got the information so it didn’t matter too much. It also made it a little harder to be annoyed at Natasha because she wasn’t the only one who kept it from him.

“Think of it as my last order. I’m an old man, an old man who a lot of people wanted dead. Thought it’d be easier to let the world keep on believing that.” Fury said simply. “Thought I would have a little more time to myself before someone found me, however.”

“Yeah, well me? I wouldn’t have been any worse of thinking you were still dead. Had something of a shared thought with Thor, that Hydra probably took off with more than just guns and a death toll. Just trying to confirm from the horse's mouth instead of wasting my time decrypting every file I come across until I find the right one. You know, you really put my own paranoia to shame, you know that right?” Tony gives a slight pause. “I have a computer system running my home, who can autonomously shut down systems, floors, and other people’s cell phone systems. Then there’s you, who encrypts your own soup plantation order.” Fury simply watched Tony with a well-practiced look of disinterest. The waitress comes up filling three of the glasses at the table, Fury gives a polite nod to the woman, Tony gives her a quick grin before she disappears again.

“You’d think right.” The one-eyed man leant back in his chair, tapping his middle finger on the table. From the corner of his eye, Tony noticed that Natasha seemed to take interest in his tapping, looking at the fingers curiously, like she was trying to understand what the finger was doing. Tony, however, was more interested in what was going to be said next. “Thing’s have been taken, things that more than just the Avengers went to a lot of trouble obtaining.” Tony’s eyes narrowed at Fury.

“So they did shanghai the sceptre.” Fury nods to confirm Tony’s statement.

“But the director is doing his best to retrieve it. You and the others just have to worry about the overgrown gecko.”

“Director? Now I know you’re not talking in the third person here. So not only have you started up your super secret boy's club again but you’ve talked some poor, what? Puppet? for you to pull the strings on when death gets boring?”

“I’m hardly a puppet.” Came a clear unruffled voice from behind Tony’s right shoulder. He visibly paled and his head snapped to Natasha, there was an intention to demand if she knew about this too, but by her wide eyes and her mouth being slightly open in surprise as she looked at who Tony refused to told him that she was just as in the dark as he was about this. His head snapping back to
Fury as he stands up sharply from the chair.

“Son of a bitch, you can’t help yourself, can you? And people tell me- Hell! You have probably even told me that life isn’t a game. Clearly, because you wanted all the pieces to yourself.”

“Stark, you didn’t have the clearance to know. Very few people did.” Came a woman’s voice. Tony rests his hands on the edge of the table lowering his head and shaking it for a minute. Then he laughs. It’s not a pretty laugh, nor does it sound like he’s finding anything really funny, but then his face goes serious as he looks at Maria Hill.

“You know Hill, I can’t even accuse you of being a traitor, because not even my ego is big enough to think that just because I hired you and gave you one of the better employee health plans out there, the safety of my lawyers and their red tape that you would ever be loyal to anyone other than captain shifty and the super snoop brigade. So if you don’t mind. Heel.” He straightens up again and faces Fury, completely ignoring the once thought dead Phil Coulson who is just out of his line of sight.

“Okay. How are we getting the sceptre back? I didn’t like the idea of Philoctetes poking me with the damn thing in my own tower and Hydra is a long way crazier than him, and they don’t come with a brother who can give us the inside track.”

With Tony’s attention on him, Fury takes a moment to look at everyone assembled. It grates on Tony that he’s not getting the attention he feels he deserves at this moment, he can see the other man’s eye focused on the man to his right, Tony refuses to act like anyone is behind him. Because If Coulson’s going to be dead for over 3 years, he might as well stay dead to him. Fury spread his hands when he finally returned his gaze to Tony looking apathetic.

“Why don’t you make a plan with the new Director of S.H.E.I.L.D?” Tony’s jaw set at the response. After a moment of staring at the man at the other end of the table, Tony straightened his cuffs and looked at Natasha.

“I’m done here.” The woman looked at the others for less time than it took to blink, she stood up quietly and with Tony left the room in utter silence neither Avenger giving anyone so much as a passing look. Once in the car, Tony sagged heavily and rubbed at his eyes.

“Tony if I had any i-“ Tony raised his hand to call for quiet as Natasha tried to prove her innocence then let his hand dropped weakly ruining any attempt Tony may have had for dismissive.

“I believe it. We need to grab something on the way home now.” Natasha doesn’t say anything she just reverses the car and drives while Tony stares at the roof of his car contemplating all the emotions running through his mind. Anger was certainly there, but so was pain. Sure he wasn’t really an easy guy to get along with by most stretches of the imagination, his mercurial temperament just didn’t accommodate other people very well. He did at least think that Coulson and he had at least enough of an understanding to know that Tony actually thought really well of the guy. He kept his son safe from danger and never had a problem calmly instructing Tony to get his head out of his ass. So the thought that he had apparently never actually died and no one told Tony, hurt.

A lot more than he wanted to admit.

“So. How are we going to approach this?” Natasha asks carefully, clearly no longer wanting to allow the viscous silence to remain in the car any longer, especially as the traffic was back to its regularly scheduled stand still. Tony holds his silence for a moment before rubbing his face and sighing.

“Guess we’re going to start with reassigning Hill. Where we can see her, she can be the liaison between us and S.H.E.I.L.D as well as overall operation management with J.A.R.V.I.S, that way we can keep an eye on her and keep her up to date on what she needs to know.” He answers with his
Tony had long ago taught Peter that he should always use every available resource he had in order to get the job done and Peter, never one to ignore a good advice had managed to get Steve to read over his history paper to make sure it sounded right. After all, what better way to get the facts right about the great depression than someone who live through it? Not only that, but it seemed like Steve needed to think about something else. Which Peter understood, both he and the Avengers were looking for the Lizard and both he and they were currently turning up with nothing so a break would help.

Peter was sitting a respectable foot and a half from Steve on the couch as the man read what Peter had supplied on the tablet. Bruce was in an armchair typing at something on a laptop while Clint was teaching Thor how to play Go, with Sam watching them with a bemused look. After Clint explained the rules, Thor said it sounded something he had back home but some of the rules were different.

Right now the atmosphere was easy going and quite stress-free, and weirdly comforting to Peter. After most of his life being mostly on his own while Tony was off playing up to his lifestyle and Pepper often out either cleaning up his father’s messes or just, in general, trying to keep Stark Industries afloat, having so many people ostensibly living with him he could almost imagine this what a real family would be like with extended relatives… With the added bonus of all of them living extremely dangerous and therefore interesting lives.

“You know.” Steve started, catching Peter’s attention away from the Go match. “I don’t know why you have me looking over this, it looks good to me.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, I know schools work differently, now.” He gives a self-deprecating grin. “But it’s really well written, thought out, and looks accurate to me. Not that I’m really an expert on the topic.”

“Wouldn’t be too concerned about that, Cap. School has changed a lot since I was there too.” Clint says as he taps a white stone to his lip contemplating his next move, Sam nodding in agreement with him.

“We’ve been here, 3 months now? 4? And I don’t think I had the amount of Homework Peter’s had in that same time. How you haven’t gone crazy, kid. Astounds me.” Sam says looking over at Peter with a playfully sad look which Peter just shrugs at.

“Most of it isn’t hard, just unending.” He says dismissively.

“Not to mention he has Stark level’s of intelligence, it’s the other kids you should feel bad for.” Natasha says clearly from behind Steve, Peter and Sam all look at her clearly not expecting her to have just appeared out of nowhere, even if Sam should know better by now as Steve just shifts in his seat to make looking at her easier. Clint and Thor don’t look up from their game. She gives Peter a smile. “And giving a challenge to a Stark is the best way to exercise them.”

“High school isn’t exactly a challenge.” Peter replies half-heartedly. After all, he wasn’t put in
Midtown high because of the quality of education, he was there to be around normal kids. While he didn’t exactly have a great deal of friends he at least had some, which was more than he got in private school. Peter blinks after a second, feeling that the whole feel of the room has changed, which causes him to cautiously look at Natasha, who looks as easy going as the rest of them did mere moments ago.

“Tash?” Clint says after placing a piece down, causing Thor to frown at it. “Something you want to share with the class?” Natasha crosses her arms, her hands rubbing at her elbows, seeking unneeded warmth as she takes on a more serious look.

“Tony and I almost went to lunch today.” It wasn’t the words that got everyone’s attention, but the tone. “We wanted to talk to Fury about the aftermath of S.H.E.I.L.D falling.” Bruce, Thor, and Peter looked a mixture of dubious and surprised at the information, Clint simply barks a laugh.

“Trust Fury to actually dodge death.”

“The sceptre among quite a few other things were stolen from the vaults by Hydra.” Thor tenses, as Steve tilts his head.

“That’s not possible.” Bruce said quietly, pulling his glasses off to clean them “I saw the body myself.”

“He was standing right in front of me.” Natasha says clearly.

“Son ova’bitch.” Clint spits out through clenched teeth, plainly not doubting her words.

“Surely this is some mistake? I saw Loki pierce right through him, I saw him fall. It was hardly something a human could come back from so easily.” Thor tries to reason to Natasha, who simply shrugs. She knows what she saw, that much was obvious to Peter he looked down to think about how that could be even possible himself when he noticed that Steve wasn’t as tense as everyone else.

“Steve?” The other’s look at him when they hear Peter’s questioning tones. He sits on the couch frowning but not looking as shocked at the others. He looks up and meets Peter’s questioning look, then Natasha’s.

“I didn’t know. But something felt off while I was working with S.H.E.I.L.D. I had level Eight clearance, I knew Fury had dedicated resources to a new team, but at the time, I just thought it was another retrieval team.”

“Why did it stick out?” Clint asked.

“The team leader was never listed. I never really got too much time to look at it due to my own missions, and then we found out about Hydra.” He rubs the back of his neck and leans forward to rest his elbows on his knees. “If they were keeping him a secret from us, it makes sense they’d avoid using his names in any records Clint, Nat, and I could easily see.” He pauses. “Where’s Tony?”

“Where he always is when he needs to work something out.” Natasha replies.

“He’s probably running through all the data to find any mentions of Coulson.” Offers Peter, who
looks towards the elevator as if hopeful Tony would come out to announce his findings at the moment. He didn’t.

“What I don’t get is.” Started Clint. “The hell were we kept in the dark?” He stands up, the game of Go a memory now. “We’re not just everyday low-level agents here. We’re the Avengers, everyone here worked with him at some point. What kind of ops was he running that meant we had to be kept in the dark?” Peter was hardly surprised that Natasha and Clint seemed the most out of shape over the news. They would have worked with him a lot no doubt so it would have really stung them to know they were kept in the dark.

“He would have been brought back to life. Of this, I am certain. Maybe the methods employed to revive him would have been ones we may have objected to.” Thor rationalizes. “Or perhaps we were fooled into believing him dead from the start.” Which Bruce shook his head at.

“No, Loki wouldn’t have been a part of it, besides. Like you said, you saw the sceptre go right through him. That’s not exactly a heart attack which can easily be faked.”

“No, Loki wouldn’t have been a part of it, besides. Like you said, you saw the sceptre go right through him. That’s not exactly a heart attack which can easily be faked.”

“Excuse me, but there is an incoming call from Maria Hill.” J.A.R.V.I.S interrupted. Natasha turned on her heel and headed to the elevator.

“I’ll take it in my room.”

“Of course, Ms. Romanov.”

“If she doesn’t have answers…” Clint mutters shaking his head, leaving the rest of the sentence up to everyone else’s imagination.

“I think until we do have answers. Our thoughts should be directed elsewhere. We still have that creature and the Sceptre to locate.” Thor says either to be a diplomatic way to encourage people not to dwell on this news and come to the wrong conclusion or because he isn’t too sure what else to say, Peter isn’t sure.

“Both things we have no solid leads on.” Sam scratches the back of his head as he speaks. “I’m calling it. Today is really not a great day for Avenging.”

“You can say that again.” Clint agrees. “I’m going upstate.” He declares as he heads to the elevator himself now. Specifically, he was talking about the stark owned warehouse where Stark Industries stored technologies both non-functioning or just too old to be of use but could still be used in someway in the future, even if it’s just for parts. It also had become a training centre away from home that was slowly coming together for moments when training regimes needed more space than the tower could offer, it had also become a useful archery range and explosives training area.

Sam and Thor get up, clearly intent on going up with Clint leaving Steve, Bruce and Peter in the room.

“So. That got awkward pretty quick, huh?” Peter says after a quiet moment passes between the three of them.

“How are you taking this, Peter?” Bruce asks as he closes his laptop, obviously no longer able to focus on what he was working on before. Peter blinks at the question then thinks about it. How does he feel about it? After all Agent Coulson had at least been someone who had made sure Peter was safe, and he did grieve what he thought was his passing, but knowing he was actually alive?

“I…” He starts and pauses. “Confused I guess? I mean, why hide it from us? Especially this long. I’m more worried about dad, really?”
“Your dad?” Steve raises an eyebrow, Peter nods. Steve glances at Bruce who looks understanding but offers nothing as an explanation. “I know Tony was upset about Agent Coulson, uh, passing. But I don’t see why he’d take this hard enough for you to be worried about him.” Peter chews his lip for a moment, unsure if he should admit something about Tony to Steve. It had to be fine, right? At least as Captain America there was little that Tony and Peter didn’t know about him, so maybe sharing something Tony hates to admit wouldn’t be all that bad. He gave a glance to Bruce who was watching him, clearly curious how Peter would take it, then Peter shrugs.

“Dad doesn’t like it when people leave.” He says simply, then feels suddenly uncomfortable about saying it, not helped by the conflicted look on Steve’s face. He almost wishes he could take it back. “Don’t say anything to him about it? He’s kind of textbook and I’m sure we’d all prefer if he didn’t pull a Punxsutawney Phil if someone brought it up.”

“I promise; we’ll be seeing spring on time.” Steve pats Peter’s shoulder in thanks and then stands up. “Doesn’t mean I can’t try and talk him out of his hole early.”

Steve entered the glass engulfed workshop Tony had ensconced himself in, Tony knew he had come in, he couldn’t even pretend to be too involved with something he was doing as he was just staring at a monitor that was decrypting files, not only that but J.A.R.V.I.S had announced his entry. Tony glances over the monitor at the original if not genetically accurate gleam in his own father’s eye but doesn’t say anything right away. Tony knew exactly why Steve was here, it was starting to be a running theme that whenever Tony seemed stressed, annoyed, or was avoiding something that it was either Steve or Bruce seeking him out to level him. In all honesty, Bruce would have been less likely to start a fight with him if only because Bruce had quickly learnt how to circumnavigate Tony’s moods in order to keep his own in check.

“Did you know?” Is all Tony said quickly and unlike with Natasha without an ounce of accusation, knowing that right now he doesn’t need Steve defensive. and is greeted with a subdued head shake, which causes Tony to huff.

“I was kept too busy with the S.T.R.I.K.E missions Fury kept me on besides, unlike you, I need a reason to go snooping.”

“Not trusting spies is a reason.” Tony mutters, knowing Steve would hear it, habits die hard and as usual, he doesn’t let the muttered comment stay in the air long before talking over it. “How many more things are we going to find hidden from us by Fury’s order?” He stood up and stalked the room a little, Steve standing almost at parade rest as he watches Tony move the passive reaction gets Tony’s attention and he stops and looks at him. “Let me guess, lecture time??”

“I honestly don’t know. I think out of all of us you’re probably going to know the most.” He gestures to the monitors in the room. “At least once J.A.R.V.I.S finishes decoding a significant amount of the data.” He pauses when something comes to mind looking at Tony then glancing away. It causes Tony pause and tilting his head he takes a half step closer out of curiosity. What was it that came into the man’s head that would make him break eye contact with him?

“Steve?” The man shakes his head again.

“The only thing I know for sure you don’t know that was in S.H.E.I.L.D’s, er, Hydra’s files. Is something I already know you don’t want to know.”

“I want to know everything; I can’t improve on what I don’t know about.”
“You’ve already told Natasha you didn’t want to know.”

“No, I di- Uh, wait. My parents?” Steve nods slowly and it makes Tony anxious. Pulling back from that half step he took before rolling his shoulders and losing the anxious look as he picks up a screwdriver from the table and begins to fidget with it. “Not a road I’m willing to drive down right now. They’re dead, no amount of truth is going to change that. Unless they’re just as dead as some Agents seem to be.” The last sentence runs so close to the last one and so fast Tony’s sure that Steve can’t miss how it sounds but the man shakes his head with a sad confidence.

“No Tony, they aren’t secretly alive.” Tony’s both surprised and embarrassed that he lets out a sigh of relief. The really would be the last thing he would be able to handle, even on his best days.

His skin bristles at the fact both Natasha and Steve know something about his parents deaths that he doesn’t, and every time he feels himself almost dying to know what it is all he can think of was the non-stop bars and strange beds he had found himself in as a coping mechanism when they had died all those years ago, he didn’t want to go back down that road, especially when he was doing so much better when it came to drinking and Peter’s seen his rock bottom enough for Tony to never want to go in that direction again.

“So I’m guessing he’s still and idiot then?” Steve says mildly snapping Tony out of his thoughts, causing him to blink a few times before bringing Steve into focus, running the question back in his head realizing Steve was bringing back the conversation on the helicarrier after Tony had stormed off to the place Coulson had died after being told. He snorts at the question a smile almost breaching his face.

“I think this goes beyond the definition of idiot.” Tony almost smiles at the growing levity before it becomes a tense frown. “J.A.R.V.I.S, you listening?”

“Always, sir.” Steve gives Tony a suspicious look which he ignores.

“I want this priority, I want a skim program designed to look for anything that mentions Agent Phillip Coulson and get it legible and in front of my eyes.”

“Is this to be more or less of a priority than finding the sceptre and the other stolen items from S.H.E.I.L.D’s containment, or running the partial license against similar car models you asked me to do only three hours ago?” The droll tone is obvious to both the men in the room, Tony opts to ignore the tone.

“You’re a smart A.I, I’m sure you can make them equal priority.”

“Luckily despite keeping the tower and Up State Facilities monitored, controlling creature comforts, and every single one of your other whims, I’m sure I still have a few processors left to add this to the list.” J.A.R.V.I.S added no more and went silent, as Tony tossed the screwdriver he was fidgeting with, not paying attention to the fact Steve closes the distance between them and puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“I’m sure he had a good reason to keep it from us.” Tony looks at the hand on his shoulder then up at Steve, his jaw setting stubbornly, he starts to move to knock the hand away, however Steve clearly senses the move and drops his hand, but doesn’t back away from him.

“He never wanted to be saddled with us anyway. Well. You were the exception, as always really.”

“Excuse me?” Steve asks, clearly confused. Tony shakes his head and walks to a bundle of papers, wedged in between piles of paper is the same shield prototype Howard had made that Coulson had
been surprised to find in Tony’s possession. He’d had it long before he’d become a hero, and he has a feeling he’ll have it long after. He drums at the aluminium rim for a moment his body hiding what he’s doing from Steve how makes no move to see what Tony’s restlessly tapping.

“I used to hate you, you know?” He then looks up to Steve who schools his reaction, Tony is pretty sure that Steve is imagining their first meeting. “In high school... And Middle school too, really.” That had Steve look confused, which Tony found pretty amusing. He waited to see if Steve had anything to say about it, he didn’t so Tony continued. “You’re kind of hard to live up to. All I’d ever hear about really, even at school” He says matter-of-factly, it had been part of why Steve’s distaste for him in those early days had that extra sting to them, Howard spent a lot of time and money trying to find Steve, and when he wasn’t doing that he was reminding Tony how he would never be what Steve was. Looking at the man in person, Steve seemed to make the connection easily enough and tilted his head almost looking guarded.

“And now?”

“Well I don’t live up to you. Not enough serum for that.” He comes back jokingly, shaking his head when he sees Steve rolling his eyes at him. “I found out you’re human. Made things easier. Also, there’s the whole matter of the Iron Man armour and how it just looks so much prettier than you.”

“I dunno about that, a lotta people seem to like the red, white, and blue.” Steve says with a boyish grin. Tony raises an eyebrow at him.

“Are you trying to be Brooklyn at me?”

“I’m just talkin’, Tony.” He smirks.

“Ignoring this. Besides, everyone’s seen red, white, and blue. Red and gold? Now those are power colours.”

“Well they are colours, I’ll give you that.” Steve replies, clearly trying to get a rise out of him.

“Good to see those late 1930’s art classes are paying off.” He makes an attempt to goad, which doesn’t seem to work as Steve only seems to smile more.

“They did actually, and really I’ve improved since then. Natasha says my drawing’s are very soothing.”

“Wait, she actually sees you draw?”

“You’ve seen me draw, Tony.”

“You don’t let me see what you draw, if Natasha says they’re soothing, then she’s seen what you’ve drawn.” Steve pauses and thinks for a moment.

“You got me, she’s seen what I draw. Maybe I think she’d appreciate it more.”

“Why wouldn’t I appreciate it?”

“Pepper’s told me about your art storage” Tony blinks at him.

“I like to keep good art safe.”

“Mhmm.” Steve sounds very convinced of that, Tony opens his mouth to counter it with what he actually knows about art, because after all you can’t draw blue prints without at least some artistic
background when J.A.R.V.I.S interrupts.

“Forgive the interruption, however I believe I’ve come up with the car the creature attacked.”

Tony turns to a screen as the information comes up, Steve turning to the same screen when he realises which on is going to offer the information.

“The car in question belongs to Angel Elite, a chauffeur service. Records say this car was under a regular booking by Rajit Ratha, who was heading to 800 Poly Place, Brooklyn before the attack.”

“Rajit Ratha?” Tony says to himself tapping his goatee thoughtfully, wondering why the Barney reject would be interested in him. “What’s at 800 Poly Pl-“

“It’s a veteran’s hospital” Steve answers looking confused, it only lead Tony to be more curious, not about how Steve knows Veteran Hospital locations, for some reason that felt like an obvious thing he’d known to Tony. “Tony?”

“Rajit Ratha is the head of Oscorp’s bio science departments. He knows how to manage scientific data like a pro. Kind of an ass if you ask me.”

“You’d know.” Tony raises an eyebrow but doesn’t supply a witty comeback. “Why would a Bio-Science head need to go to a veteran’s hospital that late at night.”

“Can’t be anything good. Something to put our new B Team on.” Steve looks at him curiously. “If S.H.E.I.L.D is going to insist on still being a thing and work with us, it can do the boring work. And you can be their handler.”

It quickly becomes a busy week for Peter, trying to chase down The Lizard and only successfully managing to catch a severe case of bleeding and a monstrous hybrid lizard creature attacking his school, not only that but he manages to just too close to being caught and his identity found out by Gwen’s father as Peter’s trying his hardest to get to The Lizard at Ozcorp to stop him from releasing the one thing Dr Conners’ seemed to have been creating to help mankind, which was now set to harm them due to the mental instability the concoction had created.

Things got a touch more complicated when The Avengers came onto the scene, at least they seemed to be aware that Spider-man had at least some level of control on the situation and were mostly running interference with the police on the ground, though, Iron Man, Hawkeye, and Black Widow were on the roof, discovering the dying Captain Stacey trying to make him comfortable as Peter releases the antidote cloud to save those in the city who had become infected as well as Dr. Conners. Iron Man approaching both of them as Conners saves Peter from falling.

Peter, relieved to know he kept his mask undamaged returns to Captain Stacey only to find he died in Clint’s arms.

“No.” Peter says sounding pained, this death was his fault. He clenches his fists as he drops to the ground next to the body, Clint watching him calmly.

“It happens kid. You saved everyone else, and that’s what’s important.” Peter’s head snaps up at the
archer, his face under the emotionless mask screwed up in pain.

“He didn’t deserve this.”

“Who does? Look, he knew coming up here wasn’t safe. He came up here because he was a good cop for a reason. Not all heroes wear spandex or have small reactors powering their chest.” Clint says Peter’s quiet for a long moment looking at the body in front of him, feeling Natasha give him a consoling pat though it’s without the warm familiarity he’s used to. “He did have a message for you.” This has Peter looking up at the older man, his hidden eyes wide.

“What did he say?” he croaks, to distressed about Captain Stacey’s death to worry about how stupid his voice sounds.

“He said ‘Keep her safe, and stay away.’ Well he made me promise it. Figure you know who he wants you to keep safe more than I would.” Peter’s body goes from rigid to very pliant as his whole body sinks at this news. He’s right of course. Captain Stacey didn’t even know Peter’s was Spider-Man until the last half hour of his life, but Gwen did, if anyone saw Spider-Man with her they would target her in an instant. Very slowly Peter nods already very aware of what a target she was.

“I promise.” He says quietly as he rests a hand on the dead mans shoulder.

“Want us to help you get home?” he heard Natasha offer, though she sounded like she was miles away. He shook his head and stood, looking at the two former S.H.I.E.L.D agents and over his shoulder to his dad, all three unaware of who he really is under this suit, then ran and launches himself off the building. Using what web fluid he had left to get away from them. He needed to get out of this torn suit, he needed to look at his leg. Which he did from a quiet rooftop, he needed support but he had none without blowing his cover.

Except for one.

A door in Queens opened to reveal Aunt May looking flustered at the constant and insistent banging on her door.

“I’m here, I’m here. It’s 11 at night what is i- Peter? Oh Peter, what’s wrong?” He shakes his head, aware that he looks like a broken mess, even after changing into the clothes he had been wearing earlier that night, just shakes his head as an answer and curls around her smaller, pyjama and dressing gown clad form. “Oh, honey. Come inside.” She says as she awkwardly walks backwards with a 17-year-old bean stalk wrapped around her closing the door managing to only datable herself from him once she gets into the kitchen and makes them both hot chocolate.

“Has something happened to Mr. Stark? I heard there was some horrible business with a monster.” She asks, only getting another headshake in reply as his fingers curl around the mug in front of him.

“No. Dad’s fine. Everyone’s fine. I was just in the area when it…” He stops and just drinks as Aunt May watches him from across the table. Waiting patiently to collect himself. “A policeman died, Uh, Gwen’s… Gwen’s dad.” Aunt May gasps softly.

“Oh dear. She’s your friend from school isn’t she?” Peter nods.

“It was Spider-Man’s fault.”

“Spider-man? He’s never done any harm to anyone who wasn’t already causing harm. I’ve seen it on the news, and I don’t believe the bugle for a second. Why do you think it’s his fault, dear?” Peter scowls at the table.
“If it wasn’t for him, Gwen’s dad wouldn’t have chased him up to the top of the tower.” Aunt May watches him with soft eyes and reaches over the table to take one of Peter’s hands.

“Why would he be going after Spider-Man? Wasn’t that creature up there too?”

“But if it wasn’t for Spider-Ma-“

“If the news reports are anything to go by, Spider-Man was sorting out this monster creature long before your dad got there. If it wasn’t for him things could have turned out so much worse. Certainly more than just one officer dying.” Peter looks up at her with his eyes watering. “I’m sure your friend isn’t going to blame him, and you shouldn’t either. Do you want to stay here tonight?” Peter nods looking like the world’s most depressing dashboard dog. “Then let Mr Stark know. The spare room is always made up for you, but I’ll get you some towels.” She gets up after giving Peter’s hand a squeeze and leaves the room, she’s gone for no more than a second before she comes back and wraps her arms around Peter giving him a big loving hug. He hugs her back and they remain like this for a few moments before she kisses the top of his head and goes to the linen closet for towels. Peter waits until 2am to text Tony, saying he was out too late and that he was crashing at his Aunts. The only reply he gets is to avoid coming home via Oscorp and to bring bagels.

Peter has a restless sleep when the vacant look of Captain Stacey looks him in the eye in his dreams. However, when his aunt asked how he slept, he smiled and said the bed was super comfortable and he slept like a baby. In the end Peter ended up staying at his Aunts for the whole weekend ignoring Gwen’s texts and calls, choosing to help is aunt around the house cleaning places she couldn’t reach, fixing things so she didn’t have to waste money being overcharged by a repairman. He felt guilty for doing it, but he wanted to keep to his promise to not involve Gwen in his life. He has already lived the life of having to worry about if the superhero you know is coming back in one piece. Her father’s dying request to keep her safe only impressed upon him more how much he should stay out of her life.

Unsurprisingly, Gwen wasn’t at school Monday and he had heard on the news a public funeral would be held on the Wednesday. Which helped strengthen his resolve. She was a normal girl and deserved a normal life.

When he came home after school, the promised box of bagels in his arms he could hear raised voices, sighing he knew exactly whose voices they were, so he just walked to the kitchen to deposit the box finding Steve staring hard into his coffee as he stood with his arms folded onto the counter, Peter coming into his line of sight had him look up, he gave a begrudging smile as Peter put the box down.

“When did Pepper get home?”

“Two hours ago.” Steve says tensely after glancing at his watch. “Everyone else cleared out when she showed up.” His sentence is punctuated with a loud bang and Tony’s voice echoing ‘come on!’ loudly into the living room. Both Peter and Steve look towards the open archway that connected kitchen and the living room, no one appeared to them, and neither made a move to see what was going on. They didn’t have to the conversation was clear enough.

“I won’t ‘come on’ any more Tony. I can’t do this anymore.” Pepper said sharply, her mind clearly made up.
“Can’t do what? Pepper, this was barely even an outing, Natasha didn’t even have a hair fall out of place.”

“But it’s not going to stop. Tony. Is it? Can you look me in the eye and tell me there won’t be another lizard man? Another alien coming to take of the world? Another Killian?” She lets out an explosive sigh, and there’s a long silence, Peter and Steve know he can’t make that promise, not even as a joke.

“This. This whole superhero thing? It’s not me. Tony I was happy to live my life with you as a billionaire genius who would disappear for days into the workshop, I could live with the scandals. I can’t live my life terrified that I’m going to see you fall from the sky again, finally not being able to walk it off. Not as your girlfriend.” They can hear Tony stutter something and the sound of heels moving, Peter guesses she’s closing a gap between them. “I don’t want to marry you either. I love you Tony Stark. I always will. But I can’t keep being romantically linked to you anymore. It’s the last straw.”

There’s another long pause that Steve and Peter don’t move more than exchanging a glance, Peter paling at the realisation of it all.

Pepper was leaving his dad.

“You’ll have my resign-“

“Don’t. You run Stark Industries better than Obie or I ever have. Besides.” Another pause. “No other company could afford your shoe budget.” Tony offers the joke weakly, and Pepper gives a watery laugh. Everything goes quiet again and then the elevator can be heard opening then closing again. The silence returns and drags on until Tony appears in the kitchen doorway, he halts when he sees his boy and his friend looking a touch shell shock. His emotions tighten and his eyes lock in on the bagel box and he heads right to it, pulling one out and starts to make himself a sandwich with it. No one says anything for a long moment.

“Tony…” Steve starts and falters, obviously clueless as to how to proceed.

“It was nobody’s fault.” Tony says quickly. “It makes sense.” Peter knows the distant tone, and bites his bottom lip.

“Is there anything you need?” Steve offers, clearly not at all enjoying how quietly his friend is acting after such a sad moment. Tony just shakes his head and leaves the room, Peter waits until he hears the elevator doors opening, then he leaves the kitchen running and gets into the elevator just as the doors close behind him.

Tony and Peter stare at each other for a long moment, and then Peter just closes the gap and hugs his father. For the first time in over a decade. Tony gives him a one handed hug in return.
That Which Cannot Be Mended Can Be Re-purposed.

Chapter Summary

Peter and Tony both have to deal with the holes created in their lives. Being superheroes and having friends could make things easier, or make some things harder. Hopefully things can be resolved before the Avengers start looking for Loki's Sceptre.

Chapter Notes

HAPPY NEW YEAR... Well HAPPY LAST DAY OF 2016!!
Living in Australia there's a lot of the world that still isn't as close to the New Year just yet. I hope everyone has had a better year than they thought they would and that 2016 was for the most part fun.

I hope everyone's looking forward to seeing what fun craziness 2017 brings!!! Thank you all so much for reading along with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Young Master. Miss Stacey is at reception asking for you.” J.A.R.V.I.S announces to the kitchen, where everyone but Tony and Steve are sitting quietly eating lunch. The pair of them had elected to attend Captain Stacey’s funeral as a show of solidarity of those who try to keep the world safe. Peter couldn’t make himself go, even with Tony trying to coerce him into showing up to be there for Gwen, but he promised to keep her out of his life. Even if he hadn’t at all tried to let her know this.

It was the announcement and everyone looking at him that made Peter realise that it was raining, pouring down really, with the water just streaming down the windows and reminding him of the water feature that used to be installed in the Malibu mansion before it came down with a bad case of explosion. Wiping his mouth on a napkin Peter stood from the table and headed to the elevator, ignoring the fact everyone was watching him leave, no doubt curious about what the discussion would be if Peter looked like he was being marched to his own grave.

Coming out into Stark Tower’s lobby, Peter sees Gwen standing at the reception desk, the women working the desk had long gone back to their own work after alerting J.A.R.V.I.S to her presence. Her hair and hat were damp, and she’s clinging to an obviously wet umbrella, a small pool of water trailing around her, naturally she looks super distressed which only makes Peter more anxious about the conversation that obviously is going to be coming next.

But he quietly moves towards her catching her eye before he gets too close, he just wants to run and hide but he knows she doesn’t deserve that, and that’s not how he’s been raised, technically he was only raised to run away from his own problems, not run away from saying what he feels needs to be said. She closes the distance between them and end up standing out of the way of the walking traffic that’s flowing into the business sections of the tower.
“Where have you been?” she asks softly, Peter tries to reply but can only choke out ‘I’ before finding words too hard, as Gwen watches him for anything. “My father died.” Peter can’t bring himself to speak ashamed now that he didn’t go with Tony and Steve, all he can do is look at the ground.
“There was a funeral. They shot off rifles and made speeches.”

Gwen continues, somehow having more strength to keep it together than Peter was able to manage and she was the one who just lost her parent. Not that Peter hadn’t lost parents in his life too, but even in this moment Peter couldn’t say he’d be able to speak even half as steady as Gwen is mostly managing right now. “Two of my teachers showed up. The class showed up. Your father and Captain America were there.” Tears were pooling in her eyes now, Peter tries and fails several times to speak but can at best only look lost and shameful. “Everyone was there but you.” She starts to wipe away a tear, but Peter manages to at least tenderly to that much for her, his own tears start to form as he looks around the lobby feeling like everyone’s watching but no one gives them so much as a first look let alone a second. He focuses on her again, trying to make the words he’d been rehearsing come out but nothing comes short of a weak clearing of the throat then he shakes his head.

“I can’t do this.” It’s quiet and it’s pained, but he’s at least able to say something. “I can’t- I can’t do this.” He says clearer than before. He can see the heartbreak and confusion in Gwen’s eyes and after a sniffle only manages to say “I’m sorry.” Then mutters more, but even he can’t hear it over the emotions going through his mind.

“What are you saying?” She asks, her voice gaining more clarity.

“I can- I can’t see you anymore.” He answers with the strength he had always wanted to start with. “I can’t.” He says with an attempt at finality, it’s harder than he wants it to be, it was hard enough to think of in the confines of his own mind so saying it now when he knows he’s hurting Gwen is just awful. It can’t continue, what lingering want to keep her protected while by his side faded hard and fast when he heard Pepper leave the tower and her relationship with Tony for the last time. He couldn’t let what happened to Pepper, happen to Gwen.

Gwen desperately looks like she wants to say more, and he wants to say more to her but he can’t. She grips tighter to her umbrella and starts to walk away, before stopping a few feet away and looking back at him a quiet realisation on her face.

“He made you promise, didn’t he?” She asks fighting back her tears again. “To stay away from me? So I’d be safe?” Peter doesn’t move, trying not to let any indication of what her father had him promise, even if Peter himself hadn’t been there to hear that promise directly. A tear falls down her cheek and he can’t keep so quiet anymore.

“It’s because I can’t protect you.” He rasps, clearing his throat as she can’t help but look at him with a strange expression, as if you could look so very heartbroken and affronted at the same time. “No not like…” He looks around again looking helpless but knew nothing or no one would step up for him right now. “You don’t need, protecting but…” He runs his hands through his hair and comes closer. “People can’t see you with me. Or… Or with Spider-Man.”

“I…” Gwen starts scrubbing at a tear as her face just looks confused.

“People will use you to get to me, to the Avengers.” Even though it’s a very likely thing to happen it still sounds like a lame excuse from Peter.

“What.” Now it’s Gwen’s turn to clear her throat as her voice breaks. “What makes you-“

“Pepper left yesterday. Left Dad. That’s what I can’t protect you from. Being the left on the ground,
to be grabbed by some crazy person with an axe to grind. To hurt you… To get to me. Or even the
Avengers because it’s public record I’m Tony Starks son. Pepper, one of the strongest women I
know, couldn’t stand being left behind to worry if Dad would come back alive, she’s even been
taken by some crazy from dad’s past who wanted to hurt him. You’ve already gone through enough.
You even said yourself it killed you every time he went out because there could be one time he
didn’t and that just...” He chokes to a stop as her eyes widen, he takes a step back just in case she
gets the urge to slap him.

“I won’t let what happened to Pepper, happen to you.” They both go silent for a long moment, the
background sounds of office workers coming and going. A minute passes before Gwen pulls herself
up to her full height, no longer holding tightly to her umbrella but letting it drop to her side and gives
him a nod.

“I. I won’t be at school, for a while.” She says giving her lips a thoughtful lick. “I will, See you
around after that, right?” Peter doesn’t hesitate nodding.

“No, of course you will. We’re still friends… Right?” Gwen shrugs after a moment.

“I mean I’d like to think so. But the day of my father’s funeral, my boyfriend just broke up with me.
So I’m having the queen of bad weeks, so it’s hard to say.” She tries for light but her voice still
shakes at trying to get it all out.

“I’m so-“ Gwen puts up a hand to cut Peter off and shakes her head for him to stop.

“Sorry, I know. So am I.” There’s another heavy pause between them then she nods to herself.
“Goodbye, Peter.”

“Y-Yeah. Goodbye, Gwen.” She turns for one last time and leaves, Peter stays in place unable to
stop himself from watching her go. This was better. Safer for her. Peter couldn’t even think of how
he would feel if he ended up being the reason she died.

“That doesn’t get any easier.” Steve says with a heaved sigh in the back of the town car he and Tony
are in as they’re driven back to the tower after the funeral, traffic is at a standstill due to the lunch
hour and paid no heed to the rain that was making every effort to wash away everything the day
brought. Tony huffs at the comment as he reads through an article on his phone that needed proofing
by him before being announced for the company. It could have waited, of course, however Tony’s
been to enough funerals that he chooses to disassociate, act like it’s any other business day so he
doesn’t have to think about any form of loss.

“They’re meant to get easier?” He replies derisively, he can see Steve flinch from the corner of his
eyes then puts the phone down. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“You did.” Steve says contemplatively, looking out the window where every shape is obscured by
the rain. “You’re right, I guess. Maybe I’m just letting it get to me.” He looks at Tony with a wan
smile. “I’ve ended up missing a lot of funerals I should have been at.” Almost instinctively Tony
wants to remind Steve that he still has Peggy’s funeral to look forward to, but he’s so appalled at that
thought that he easily manages to just keep quiet instead. “Maybe, it’s better I missed them.” Steve
continues. “I left them all behind first, I don’t think I get to be sad that I missed their passing.”

Tony blinks at how maudlin Steve’s being, which to a degree makes sense, Steve has lived a
strangely complicated life. However, being trapped with his own mind like this is never a good place to be at a time like this and Tony has no real intention of letting Steve dwell on it. He knows from experience only stupid comes from that line of thinking and there’s a part of that thinking that he himself has been avoiding so the ability to change plans and not go home is a welcome idea.

“Change of plan.” He announces to the driver, it’s not Happy, it hasn’t been since Pepper became CEO, it’s a weird sting given the recent developments in his life. Either way he leans more forward to be heard as he sees the driver’s eyes flick up to the rear-view mirror at him. “The museum of Modern Art.” The driver nods with a polite ‘sir’ and changes into a lane to get ready to turn at an upcoming intersection.

“Tony?” Tony shakes his head at Steve.

“If you’re going to be all mopey and reflective, we might as well put you in a setting that suits that feeling instead of the back of a Bentley Mulsanne.” Tony really didn’t think what he was doing was a big deal, but looking at Steve offered the Billionaire a look he couldn’t read. “I know there’s nothing on my face that shouldn’t be there, what?”

“You really are a nice person, Tony.” An eyebrow raises over his tinted glasses at the blonde next to him.

“I’m a philanthropist. It’s in the definition.” He says dismissively, goes back to his phone as Steve lets out a knowing ‘mhmmm’ at his side, before taking on a curious tone as he asks.

"How are you doing?" Tony doesn't even pause in his scrolling, but after a slow breath he just shakes his head, which he knows is all he has to offer Steve to tell him 'not now'.

Peter comes back up the elevator and slumps heavily and face first onto the couch.

“Sounds like things did not go well.” Thor comments from an armchair as he and Clint watch a television show that Peter isn’t interested in figuring out right now. He shakes his head, his nose dragging across the upholstery.

“Am I the only one who’s noticed that when Gwen Stacey is involved Peter ends up trying to break the couch?” Clint asks the room but gets no immediate answer, but Peter does shift on the couch so he’s being held up by his elbows to look at the two older men.

“We just broke up, so that won’t be a problem anymore.” Thor and Clint exchange a look, Clint with a raised eyebrow.

“I am sorry to hear this.” Thor starts. “Was it because you didn’t attend the funeral?” Peter pauses at Thor’s question and stares at him.

“Why would it be my fault?”

“She needed support at a very trying time. I’m sure you have your reasons but you should have gone.” He’s right of course, and while he doesn’t know all the reasons behind it the truth of the statement still has Peter dropping back face first into the couch.
“She wasn’t the one who did the breaking up.” There’s another pause.

“I thought you were better than that, Peter.” Thor’s words sting Peter and he sits up looking hurt.

“What?”

“This is a time when she needs support, not a time to find salt for her wounds. You could have waited for a better moment, I feel.”

“Better moment?” Peter can feel himself getting angry. “Her dad died being in a place he shouldn’t have been because.” He stops sharply before he refers to himself, her takes a huffed breath before continuing. “Because that’s your job. Protecting everyone from crazy monsters. She’s hurting because you guys didn’t do your jobs right.” His face is red from his anger and the whole situation, while he knows it’s miss placed it doesn’t mean he can stop himself.

“Now, Peter…” Thor tries to mollify the situation, Clint simply sitting there watching him.

“No. No ‘now, Peter’. You are all why I can’t stay with her, she’ll end up being hurt too many times. Like Pepper, taken and had weird things done to her all because of you!” He gets up off the couch and begins to storm away, he can hear Thor standing behind him, only to hear Clint say.

“Leave him.”

In the weeks that followed Peter was becoming quick to snap at everyone but Tony, which he was for the most part unaware of due to Peter using up what free time he had to spend with Tony. Even taking up the same methods Steve and Bruce would use of just being in the same room as him doing their own thing not only to let Tony know they’re there, but also help them feel less lonely themselves. It was one of the few time’s Tony noticed what people did around him, mostly because he noticed both would come in without a word but by the time they were ready to leave they would be talkative and interactive.

Tony admittedly hadn’t thought much about Peter’s attention past wanting to be distracted from his break up with Gwen. Banner week for the Stark men it seemed, but they dealt with it like any would. By servicing Tony’s Roadster. Wanting to give Peter a chance to get good and dirty, Tony leant against Dum-E who was holding a pneumatic drill in his grips waiting to help when called. Where they stood now in the service, Peter looked just about finished with checking over the engine itself as well as carefully cleaning and oiling parts to keep everything running smooth.

“I think.” Peter starts. “I’ve done it all?” He wipes at some dust on his cheek and effectively manages to grease his face up, Tony smirks noticing something Peter hasn’t returned a single one of the spark plugs back into their places into the engine block, but mistakes are all about learning so Tony keeps silent.

“Well then, fire it up and let’s see how everything sounds.” With a grin Peter wipes his hands on his shirt and jumps into the drivers seat, getting everything in gear before turning the engine on.

Nothing happened. Ton’s smirk fades into a mild look so he doesn’t give anything away when Peter leans out the car to look at him for help before leaning back into the car.
“I…” Peter says before trying again with the same results as before. “Did everything right I’m sure.” He looks at the wheel in befuddlement. Tony pushes off Dum-E grabbing one of the sparkplugs off of the tool box and then leans against the door looking through the window at Peter.

“Sure you did everything.”

“Yeah, I changed the oil, cleaned everything out, checked the spark plugs.” Tony shows the spark plug in question with a waggle of his fingers, Peter looks at it and frowns. “And forgot to put them back in.” He sags in the seat with a groan. “I should put those in, huh?”

“Only if I want my car to work, yeah.” Tony opens the door to let Peter out, he sags out of the leather seat to do just that, he watches Peter put them back in as Steve comes in.

“I’m going to need your signature.” Is all Steve says by way of an introduction as he holds out a clipboard with a pen under his thumb, his tone conversational but fringed with business. As if in response to Steve’s appearance, Peter hunches obviously over the engine as he slips the Spark Plugs back into place, Tony just glances at the document on the clipboard and raises an amused eyebrow at Steve.

“Money’s gotten that tight, huh?” Steve just rolls his eyes at him.

“If S.H.E.I.L.D is going to be working with us again, we need to move Hill out of records and into a liaison position. So I made some arrangements.”

“Gee, Pep. Efficient as ever.” Tony’s words drip with sarcasm, giving Steve a look as he pulls the pen from under Steve’s thumb.

“I didn’t mean it like-“ Tony puts up a hand to silence Steve as he signs.

“It’s a smart move. Anything else?”

“Dinner will be ready in 30.” Steve answers mutedly, clearly feeling like he stepped over a line and just as Tony is about to tell him it’s fine, Peter cuts in.

“Great. Cool. We’ll be there then.” An edge to his voice that wasn’t present at all before now. Steve had clearly picked up on it too as he just gives a short nod, turns on his heel and leaves.

“How’s the engine looking?”

“All together now.” Peter replies as he watches the door as if challenging anyone to come in next.

“What’s this?”

“What? ‘What’s this’ what?” Peter looks back, checking to see if he’s missed anything else.

“I know I’m abrupt and rude to people. You aren’t.” Peter shrugs at the comment.

“He was making things uncomfortable.” Tony raises his eyebrow at that. “I’m just saying, he was interrupting and making you sign over things. I mean really? Agent Hill?” Tony shakes his head.

“Yeah, how dare he talk Avengers business with Iron Man, that’s just beyond rude. Really can’t think what Captain America was thinking there.” Tony replies with a dry sarcasm that would make the whole of the United Kingdom proud, while causing Peter to look a little guilty. “Go clean up for dinner, I know how much the cleaners like engine grease in the kitchen.”
After two weeks of seeing Peter’s increasingly childish attitude towards everyone else, Tony decided to bring it up to them.

“It’s more than girl problems.” He declares, then frowns to himself and looks to the others in the room late afternoon. “Right?” they all exchange looks as Tony focuses on Bruce who simply spreads his hands before taking off his glasses and cleaning them.

“You’re looking at the wrong person, he hasn’t confided in me in over a year. The other day I got a door slammed in my face when I tried to find out what’s wrong.”

“Slammed?” Natasha, who’s sitting next to Bruce, raises a dubious eyebrow.

“Well. Hurriedly shut, Peter might be angry about something but he’s still a polite enough kid.”

“It’s moments like this where I don’t know if I should say he certainly is your kid because you’re the only one who actually tries to test Banner’s patience. Or not yours because he certainly didn’t get his politeness from you.” Clint chuckles.

“Who was asking you again?” Tony turns to Clint giving him a flat look. “You don’t get to speak again until you can actually contribute.”

“It is very out of character of him either way.” Thor offers to avoid the pair from getting too sarcastically antagonistic towards each other. “I’ve even heard him shout at the captain.”

“You think hearing it was bad, you should have been there. It was pretty awkward.” Sam adds, smirking clearly finding at least some humour in the situation.

“He actually shouted at you?” Tony looked at Steve with genuine surprise, who in turn couldn’t help but look a little bashful.

“More just snapped loudly, if anything. He came into the kitchen and was only drinking coffee.” Steve started.

“Steve made the suggestion that maybe some breakfast would help the coffee go down, and Peter just gives him this look and goes ‘Since when do I need to listen to you?’ The look on Steve’s face. You could almost hear Sarah McLachlan in the background with the SPCA begging me to adopt him.” Sam laughs as Steve faintly blushes with embarrassment but still rolls his eyes at him, Tony suspects he would swat at Sam if he was closer.

“He caught me off guard, is all.”

“Peter’s never been like this before. When he gets back from school I’ll talk to him.” Captain America and Steve Rogers has long been a favourite conversation point when he was still settling into his life as a Stark, so to hear from everyone that not only was he becoming more snappy and unfriendly but he’d been doing it to a person that had been seen as a hero was jarring for Tony.

“Good luck with that.” Clint says as he stands from the chair with a stretch.

“Okay, god of fatherhood. Why would I need luck with that?” Tony’s words rustle with irritation, Clint just shrugs at him.
“Gwen Stacey is in his classes, he’s most agitated before dinner. Then he hides in his room when
he’s finished, or goes and cuddles up to you for the rest of the night.”

“You notice way too much.”

“The codename isn’t Hawkeye because it’s cute, Stark.” He looks at his watch. “And I’m calling it.
Happy hour’s just started, if you’re going to talk to him then I’m going to be at The Mean Fiddler
until close. It was awkward enough hearing you and Pepper fight, not going to be here when it’s the
kid.”

Natasha hisses Clint’s name but he ignores it and the sour look from Tony as he walks out of the
room grabbing his jacket off the hook and presses the button for the elevator.

“I think I shall join you.” Thor announces, and with a nod to himself, then to everyone else as Sam
stands to go with them.

“I’ve heard they do a mean pot of meatballs.” Sam says by way of excusing himself. Once the three
of them leave, Tony rolls his shoulders then looks at Steve, Bruce, and Natasha.

“Bailing tonight, too?”

“Not until 7.” Natasha says simply before she gets up off the couch and heads to the kitchen. “We
have a reservation.” Bruce fidgets a little as Steve and Tony exchange a look and a smirk.

“Well, now I think I’m going to make myself scarce.” Bruce mumbles before escaping to the lift.

“I want to be more surprised about that.” Steve says watching the now empty foyer.

“About time she made the move.” Tony comments.

“I made the booking, he came up with the idea.” Natasha answers as she comes back through to the
living room with some grapes and an iced tea. “Have fun tonight, boys.” And then it was just Steve
and Tony in the living room.

“Good job, Bruce.” Steve says with a nod, clearly proud of him, even if Tony knows for a fact
Steve’s never had the courage to ask a girl out.

“He’s surprisingly easy to talk into things if you tease him long enough.” Steve gives Tony an
appalled look. “I don’t tease him like that. Believe me, my legs don’t go up far enough for him to
even entertain me teasing him like that.”

“That his type?”

“I’ve seen Betty Ross. If it isn’t legs, it’s certainly sweet looking innocent faces with intelligent
eyes.” Tony sinks into a chair then groans. “How am I going to deal with this? We don’t heart to
heart, that’s Bruce’s job.” There’s a pause. “Or Pepper’s.” Steve utters a slight ‘oh’ as if catching up
to where Tony’s train of thought was going.

“Can’t help you with this one. I was usually the one getting talked to. Well, me or Buck.” Tony just
huffs and rests his head back on the chair and looks up at the ceiling pondering just how far in over
his head he was going to be on this. This would be the first time he would have to be an actual parent
to Peter without any backup or cleaning up from Pepper, and he had a strong feeling that just a few
weeks after their breaking up that she wouldn’t at all appreciate him distracting her from running
Stark Industries just to ask for her to help him with Peter. “Tell you what, I can at least cook dinner
tonight. If it’s just three of us I’m sure I can pull something together.”
Tony just grins in agreement, if nothing else Steve has been there since Pepper left. Well they all have but it was always him or Peter in his eye line ever since she left.

Peter had dawdled getting home, opting to spend a few hours at an empty lot that had been made into a temporary skate park by the local kids letting it absorb him so he wasn’t thinking about how Gwen sat just out of his eye line in class. At first he thought it was on purpose, then remember that’s usually just where she sits. Gwen still wasn’t really ready to talk to him just yet, and with him giving Bruce more space as it always seemed like Natasha was in his laboratories when she had free time, Peter had ultimately pushed away all his emotional resources.

Without anyone to talk to and making it is personally mission to keep his dad company as much as possible, he had been unable to give himself any time to de-stress leading to him becoming the brat he was becoming to the Avengers. While he knew he should apologise it felt hard after all why were they all worrying about him and how he’s handling things when Tony just had Pepper leave him after being by Tony’s side long before Peter was even in the picture, even if they hadn't been dating that whole time, they had been majorly apart of each others worlds. Could Peter really hold it against them? It’s not like he’s been able to find a way to see how his dad feels, it was hard. How do you talk about your dad’s crumbled relationship to your dad? Should he be angry at Pepper? She did start dating him after he became Iron Man after all, so it wasn’t like she didn’t know what she would be in for. Should he be angry at the Avengers who seemed to be acting like nothing at all had happened to Tony at all?

The thoughts consumed him all the way back home until he sat on a large concrete planter outside Stark Tower, kicking his heels against it looking up at the very muted starscape above, really it was no more than a slightly bright smear amongst the cities own bright lights and reflective towers. A movement at the corner of his eye caught his attention, looking over he saw Bruce and Natasha coming out of the building dressed like they had somewhere to be, Bruce looked like a college professor while Natasha was wearing a modest black dress with a white top half, she had her hand nestled into the crook of his arm. Peter watched them in surprise until they slip into the taxi together. He couldn’t even be sure they weren’t just going somewhere for Avengers business, looking at his phone’s calendar turned up nothing which means, they’re on a date?

“Too weird.”

He shook his head and slipped off the planter, maybe if Bruce and Natasha going out it meant everyone was out and he’d be able to have the rest of the night to himself.

Coming out of the elevator he found he was wrong, he could hear talking in the kitchen. He wants to groan and just hide in his room until he realises there’s only two voices, Tony and Steve’s. That’s not so bad he walks into the kitchen and sees his dad at the breakfast bar, scrolling through a tablet while Steve cooks, they’re smiling and chatting comfortably. He’s not sure why but it feels wrong even though he’s seen the two of them talking and acting so domestically long before Pepper left.

“You’re home late.” Tony says when he notices Peter, checking his watch as he does so the only answer Peter offers is a shrug and heads quietly to the fridge.

“I made sloppy joes.” Steve frowns at the pan as he looks at them “Uh, they aren’t that sloppy, but I
was thinking of putting sour cream on them, maybe, what do you think?” There was nothing wrong with the question, it’s a perfectly good question really but it still set Peter more on edge, how dare Steve, who was his hero growing up, dare ask him if he wanted sour cream on his not all that sloppy joes to help make them taste less dry? Peter just shrugs again.

“Whatever.” He can see them exchange a look and it makes him ball his fists tensely and puts him off looking for something to drink in the fridge.

“Would you like sour cream or not, Peter” Tony asks with a flat tone, Peter knows means that he’s moving into parenting territory.

“Does it matter?” He asks clearly pushing his luck with his tone.

“Peter.” His dad says waringly, and with a set jaw Peter looks at him for a moment then looks away and shakes his head. He’s not going to fight with his dad, not now. He rubs the heel of his palm into his eye and sighs.

“Sorry, just been a long day. Sloppy joes?” Steve gives him a tentative look before nodding with that slight smile he has whenever he feels uncomfortable.

“Well, it’s just us tonight and we can’t keep relying on Bruce to leave us food.” Steve moves from behind the kitchen counters to the table where Peter can see three places have been set, he watches as his dad moved to the table. "I mean, I'm nothing special in the kitchen but I can say I've gotten better in the last 70 years." Tony snorts at the comment, and Peter can't seem to find what was funny about it right now, he could feel his tension rising, despite his attempts to hold it back. This didn't seem to escape anyone in the room, he could tell his dad and Steve were exchanging another look between each other because of him which only seemed to frustrate him more.

"Maybe. I'm not as hungry as I thought." He announces before turning to leave the kitchen.

"No, you're staying right there." He hears his dad say, he bunches his fists again and stops in the doorway. "Even I'm thinking you're spending too much time in your room as it is." Tony says, and peter can hear him crossing his arms, and could even imagine his head being tilted speculatively to the side. "Care to share with the class?"

Peter simply shakes his head, the room goes silent for a moment. Are they sharing a look again? Are they being worried about him? He wasn't the one who needed the worry, he was fine, great even, if you don't count the whole having to break up with Gwen while still seeing her at school almost every day which was more than a little bit of a suck parade, but he'd only known her two years, and there was college close on the horizon. Compartmentalising is a great way to deal with this loss Peter had decided.

"Nope, that's not flying. You've never been one to avoid talking. Ever, now what's going on?"

"It's nothing! Alright? I'm just not hungry." He replies with his voice tight.

"You're 17 You haven't been 'not hungry' since you were 13."

"If there's a problem we can help." Steve adds. For some reason this is the last straw to Peter and he wheels around on the two men, looking harassed and angry.

"Just stop!" He throws his hands up level to his shoulders, both men looking confused at the outburst. "I just can't anymore, okay?" He snaps at the pair of them who only momentarily look surprised before both faces go neutral. Peter can't help but feel like he's facing off against two parents right now instead of one but he continues anyway. "Why are you both acting like this!?" He
demands.

"Like what?" Tony asks flatly, clearly not wanting to play any games right now.

"Like this!" He gestures emphatically between them, to Tony who is sitting at the head of the table, the tablet still in his hands, Steve standing next to him with a tea towel over his shoulder, a frying pan in one hand a flipper in the other. They look at each other and clearly don't make a connection.

"Stop doing this to him." Peter demands of Steve who is having a hard time keeping up with what is being said, they both seem to be, which only serves to irritate Peter more for not knowing what he's thinking right now. "Stop acting like nothing has changed! Why are you acting like everything normal?!"

"Everything is normal." Tony snaps back with a scowl.

"What. So you just don't care that Pepper left? Is that why you are just going about everything like normal!?!" Peter angrily pouts, looks away and then starts frustratedly pacing. "I grew up with her, I always knew she was important to you and you are even sad You don’t even talk about her when I’m around. Good to know she was never that important!" Peter locks eyes with Tony who stares right back to the point of staring him down.

"Maybe it's because I'm 45 and too old and have too many other things to do." Tony replies quietly, which makes Peter pause. Watching as Tony rubs his eyes with a sigh. "It's been a month Peter. Pepper has moved on, I have to as well." He stands up. "This isn't some romantic comedy or teen drama, Pumpkin Eater. She doesn't want to be a part of this life, and I'm not about to be some ass hat throwing a tantrum or sulking for hours in the bottom of a whisky bottle thinking about how useless I am without her." He glances at Steve before looking back at Peter and continuing. "We grew apart, it happens that way sometimes. I needed Pepper to keep my life straight while I was living my high life. I don't know if you've noticed, but since the Avengers and making Pepper CEO, I haven't really needed her to make sure I make appointments anymore."

He approaches Peter and stops in front of him.

"Don't think I don't still love her, or that I'm not sad she's gone."

"But-" Peter tries to interrupt but Tony talks over him.

"But she can't keep cleaning up all my messes, and I had no right to expect she'd always just be there, Peter." he pauses. "I want her happy and safe more than I want her with me. Even you have to admit it wasn't fun for anyone these last few months. Now sit, eat." Peter nods, as Tony walks past him.

"Just remembered I've got something to do." Peter looks at his feet, suddenly feeling bad. His own anger at everyone treating his dad like they always do ended up exploding on his dad and causing him to bring his sadness over Pepper leaving. Before letting the other to object he turns and leaves the room as fast as he can without running, grabbing his skateboard on the way into the elevator.

"J.A.R.V.I.S don’t let dad hold the elevator."

“Unfortunately that goes against my primary function. However you will be relieved to know that Mr. Stark has simply asked me to make sure you are safe and to let him know when you come home.” Peter nods to nothing and leans against the elevator wall. Sure his dad didn’t seem angry about that explosion he just had, but he had looked unimpressed. With a sigh he rocks his head back resulting in a dull thud as a back of his skull raps against the elevator wall. He lets his mind go blank
when the doors open up to the ground floor and once he’s out of the building he gets on the board and just pushes himself along, with no real destination in mind.

It’s two hours later when he’s gotten all the energy out of him so he stops to sit and rest at the top of TKTS booth’s stair-like roof in Times Square, his feet still on his board as they rock back and forth slowly as he stares at the crowd of people wandering back and forth as well as walking up the stairs themselves for somewhere to sit. His eyes occasionally wandering at the promotional boards, most of them relatively new on behalf of Stark Industries, being only 15 minutes away from Stark Tower, naturally Time Square suffered damage like the rest of Midtown. He lets himself get absorbed into the bright colours and flashing lights that the sudden feeling of cold glass on his face startles him enough to make him yelp and kick his Skateboard away in surprise. Luckily it didn’t hit anyone as Peter’s head snaps up to see Clint looking very amused at the reaction and leaves the bottle of Coke he surprised the boy within range.

Peter stared at it contemplatively, before taking the bottle. He wanted to be upset that his Spidey-senses didn’t alert him to this, but he knew he couldn’t be. He’d been Spider-Man long enough at this point that his body naturally ignored anything that wasn’t a threat, it had to if he was meant to survive high school, where any number of things could be flying past your face for any number of reasons.

“Here I thought I’d have a hard time finding you.” Clint says as he sits down and opens his own bottle and takes a long draw from his own bottle. Peter fidgets with the bottle in his hands instead of opening it, looking at Clint curiously. “Got home from eating to find Steve trying to pry Tony out of the workshop.”

“Er. Why?” Clint watches him from the corner of his eye before he drinks from the bottle again.

“Because we’ve managed to keep him out of there while in a bad mood for over a month now, and we don’t need him locking himself away like your used to.

“But he always comes out after… A week or two.” Clint just looks at him, and Peter drops his head to look at the bottle in his hands. Yeah he knew how stupid that sounded when he started saying it, but it had been so common to Peter growing up he stopped questioning it. “Wait.” He looks up at Clint. “You’ve been trying to keep him out of there? But he’s-“

“Remember how I said bad mood?” Clint interrupts and Peter tries to remember the last time Tony had been in his workshop for a marathon, nothing comes to mind right away. The best he could think of was when they found out Coulson was alive, but even that wasn’t even 24 hours let alone a week. “I say we, but I mostly mean Steve, Nat, and Banner. Apparently I annoy him.” He says playfully.

“So, you have been acting like nothing’s changed… On purpose?”

“He’s got people who won’t yell at him when he’s holding back now.”

“Pepper didn-… Dad didn’t make it easy when I was younger.” He deflates when he realises that Pepper and even Rhodie had a habit of losing their tempers or their patience when Tony, after all the man made being difficult into being an art.

“He hasn’t really changed there.” Clint says with a snort. “But he’s not the only stubborn ass in his line of sight anymore. So that’s why you’ve been giving us the raw deal? Because we haven’t been treading lightly around him?” Peter just curls into himself.

“I was wrong.” He says quietly after a moment. “I shouldn’t have done that.”
“Could be worse. I mean you’ve been killing yourself over trying to keep that promise, makes sense
that you’re honouring it and all, but you really need to take at least one step back.” Peter almost
sputters at Clint’s words but manages to at least just looked shocked and confused.

“What are you talking about? Promise?”

“We’re not playing this game.” Is all Clint says before putting the cap back on the empty bottle
before tossing the bottle into a bin at the bottom of the stairs without even touching the sides. After
all, Hawkeye doesn’t miss. Peter sighs and finally opens his own bottle and drinks from it slowly.

“How long have you known?” He asks.

“I’ve known something was off since you came home with asphalt up your face that night. But I
managed to make the math work when the dinosaur attacked Midtown high.”

“Lizard.” Peter corrects. “It. It was a lizard’s genome. Dr. Conners was trying to use lizard genetics
to help people with missing limbs.”

“He needed more testing time, then.” Clint says dismissively. “When are you planning on coming
clean?”

“Please don’t say anything.” Peter begs, before putting two and two together and realising that Clint
has known for well over a month and said nothing. “Oh. I mean. I don’t know. At first it was partly
because I knew Pepper would freak out if she knew. Now… I dunno, guess I don’t want dad to be
weird about it and tell me what I can and can’t do? Maybe? Or I just like that only I knew?”

“Well. The longer you put it off the more your dad will ‘freak out’ about it.”

“What makes you say that?”

“If I had a teenager and found out he’s been a masked superhero for, what? Two years? I’d be pretty
hurt he’d kept it from me.”

“Well you don’t really have a teenager to worry about. Sorry.” Peter wants to be annoyed that Clint
is lecturing him, but really thinking about it, he’s the most neutral of the Avengers while still being
around enough to actually know both Peter and Tony. Something that Thor and Sam aren’t on the
level on just yet.

“You’re right there, I don’t have a teenager to worry about.” Clint replied glibly. “Stark’s does. And
unlike normal teenagers his isn’t hiding the fact he sneaks out to drink or do drugs, his is sneaking
about beating up the bad guys. I’ll say you had us fooled for a while.” Peter looks up at him.

“Really?”

“Well yeah. Not like you really got too close to us, the wisecracks helped. You’re really not as big a
wiseass out of the spandex.”

“That’s anonymity for you I guess.” Peter supplied a little meekly, Clint was right he was far bolder
when it was hard to tell who he was. “Wait, us? Everyone knows?” he looks a little panicked at the
question, was it only his dad who didn’t know? His Dad and Aunt May, after all she didn’t seem to
think anything of him showing up tired and bruised after dealing with Dr. Conners.

“If I know, Nat probably does, or at least has a solid idea. Guessing the latter more than the former,
we really don’t keep much from each other.”
“You’re keeping this from her.” Clint just grins at Peter making him really unsure about how truthful the archer is being. “So…” Peter starts, eager to get off this kind of creepy topic now. “We should probably go home, huh?” Clint nods and picks up Peter’s board on the way down the stairs with him.

He gets home to seeing Tony on one of the armchairs in the living room, he’s on his phone tapping away intently no doubt on something for the Avengers or Stark Industries. His face is set in concentration, Peter almost doesn’t want to interrupt this, but he knows at this point there’s really no point in skirting the issue so he shyly starts to approach his dad.

“How much do you plan to keep from me?” Tony asks without looking up from his phone and Peter pales as his mouth feels like the entire Gobi Desert has set up shop on his tongue causing him to simply croak out a surprised noise instead of a proper word, suddenly stunned to realise that maybe his dad did know after all.

“I mean, fine you’re a teenager. Whatever. Everyone has something to hide, I’m the last person to get on anyones ass about it.” Tony says looking up from his phone. “But this really is a thing, that you’re starting to be annoyingly good at.”

“It’s not what you think.” Peter starts trying to hold back panic while being very aware that he doesn’t know where to go from there.

“I think, you’re starting to be an expert in keeping everything to yourself.” He pauses to fidget with his phone and slips it in his pocket, Peter lowers his head staring at his own hands as they fidget with the drawstrings of his hoodie. “We’ve already established it’s my thing. So you’re going to have to look for a new thing here.”

The room is quiet as Tony let’s his by now well-established attempts at humour settle into the room. Peter’s is completely uneager to come clean about everything to his dad, still far too protective of this little thing that is his, that became his without his dad’s genetics or assistance.

“I’m not asking to know how much storage space your porn is taking up or what bits of animal were probably in the lunch meat at school. But I want you to talk it out with people when you’re worried about what’s happening in this house, J.A.R.V.I.S. is all the over-protective nanny I need, I don’t need you snapping at people’s heels either. Got me?” Peter looks up and realising that he wasn’t as busted as he thought about being Spider-man simply nods at first.

“I. Didn’t know what else to do.” He shrugs, because he really didn’t. Without even noticing it, he had been so focused on making sure his dad wasn’t hurting over his break up as a way to keep his focus from his own break up that he had clearly gotten too involved with the whole matter. Mentally he makes a note to pay more attention to what he’s doing as he’s already been found out by at least two people in his home that he’s Spider-Man because he was being too obvious about things.

“My money’s on talk to someone, Cap loves cheering people up. Maybe him, and while you’re at it maybe admit you were a baby and shouldn’t have yelled at him for trying to cook you food.”

Peter replies with a sheepish and very self-conscious smile.

“He’s mad, huh?”

“That it happened? Probably. At you? No, he’s annoyingly fond of you, probably all that sucking up you used to do.” Normally, Peter wouldn’t at all be all that embarrassed at teasing comments about
his mild hero worship of Steve however, the embarrassment he feels is more because of his behaviour.

“Where is he?” Tony shakes his head and stands.

“Tomorrow, he went to bed. Somewhere you should be I might add.” Tony says as he starts making shooing gestures at him to go to his room, a movement which Peter holds his hands up in surrender saying good night before he trots off to bed. While he might not feel like everything should be, he at least feels like tomorrow he can start making it up to the others as an apology.

The next morning Peter only just makes it out into the hallway as he see’s Maria Hill stride into the living room from the elevator, clearly on a mission. He knew she’d been assigned to liaising with the Avengers now S.H.E.I.L.D was officially back in business but he didn’t think she’d be giving morning briefings or anything.

He can hear her voice as he walks into the kitchen, and it looks like it’s a full house, all the Avengers are up and listening. Maria’s words don’t so much as halt as she glances at Peter from the corner of her eye, no doubt making sure he’s not planning to make any trouble, Peter just looks away from her and busies himself with putting some scrambled eggs on a plate that had clearly been part of this morning’s breakfast layout.

“It’s nothing solid. However there has been continued activity from these locations even though every one of these buildings have been designated as unoccupied or structurally unsound for at least the last 5 years.” She passes out some manilla folders, Peter watches from the counter. He knows that S.H.E.I.L.D is usually much more high tech than that the best guess Peter can make is that the previously thought dead Coulson is at least in some way eager to get the Avengers back on side, which considering their power and abilities it would really make the best strategic sense to get them all the information they need and worry about bells and whistles later. That and Maria might have only had a few days to prepare all this, so requisitioning tablets might be hard. He then realises after a moment he’s being supplied with a penetrating look from her, clearly silently asking him why he’s still in here.

“He’s higher ranking than you right now.” Is all Tony says as he scans his own paperwork for relevant information. Before anyone else can speak, Steve takes all the attention as he looks up at Maria.

“Are these all the locations? It seems a little light considering how long Hydra’s had to take root. Even before they were discovered within S.H.E.I.L.D”

“We have a few more staked out. We don’t have the manpower we used to not to mention we’re also working on our own things as well as this.” Maria’s back remains straight and her voice is solid and sure, loyal as ever to her agency. Tony just makes an obvious sniff as he reads on at her statement which has Steve specifically clear his throat at him.

“At least the means we won’t have to spread ourselves thin to start with. That’s a good way for Hydra to get more slippery.” He flicks through the pages again. “There’s only three in the country, so we better start there.” Looking up Tony looks around at everyone, who are all in various stages of reading or waiting for Steve to make his call. “How long is it going to take everyone to prepare?” Everyone except Tony and Bruce admit to being good and ready to go within the hour, without even acknowledging Tony’s non-answer, Steve looks at Bruce.

“Are we ready for a field test?”
Bruce leans back in his chair, taking off his glasses and exhales slowly as he rubs a hand over his face. Peter watches curiously, wondering what it is they could be possibly field testing.

“The building in Nevada is remote enough. I want Tony close in case he needs to snatch and run, because if he doesn’t want to listen everything is going to go wrong very fast.” Tony nods as he’s mentioned which gets a raised and amused eyebrow from Natasha.

“Just remember, I don’t like being dropped.”

“You’re the one who agreed to being a part of Mr. Toad’s wild ride when we started all this.” Tony answers, as Sam pulls a slight face which makes Clint smirk.

“If you’re feeling left out, sweetheart. You can pick me up if you want.” Sam scoffs but doesn’t look upset.

“Wouldn’t want you to go and break a hip there, old man.”

“Then let’s get suited up.” Steve declares above everyone else before they get too off point. “Wheel’s up in two hours.” He closes his file and stands as Thor, Clint, and Sam leave. No one else in the room moves. Steve focuses on Maria. “Thank you for the information. We’ll keep in contact before and after each location.” Effectively dismissed Maria doesn’t waste time and just turns and leaves. “We don’t want to pressure you, Doctor.”

“It’s alright. If I didn’t think it was time to get control I would have moved out long ago.” Bruce gives Steve a wan smile. “Guess I better get a bag packed.” Natasha pats his knee before he puts his glasses on and heads for the elevator.

“Not going to pack?” Tony asks as he tosses the file onto the table and goes back to the breakfast he had on the table before Maria came in.

“I’m always packed, and it doesn’t take two hours to put the suit on.” She replies casually before reaching over and stealing some of Tony’s bacon.

“Guess we have that in common then.” Is all Tony says. Peter watches the three of them sit comfortably before noticing Steve’s gaze on him.

“Uh. So about the last week… Or. erm, more.” He starts. Natasha tilts her head at him curiously before stealing more of Tony’s bacon and Steve just shakes his head.

“It’s fine. I understand, it’s not just hard for the parties involved after all.”

“I have a name.” Tony mutters indignantly but Steve doesn’t pay him any attention.

“I’m more worried about how the next week or more is going to be for you, if I’m honest.” Peter blinks with a confused expression.

“Huh? Why me? I’m not going with you.” He pauses then looks nervous. “Wait. I’m not, right?” Tony and Natasha exchange a look. “Why!? the two of them share an amused noise and Peter scrunches up his face. “Wow, real funny, scaring a kid like that.”

“What I mean.” Steve starts again poorly trying not to look amused at how harassed the boy in the kitchen was looking right now “Is while we look for the sceptre you’re going to be here alone. I know you’re old enough, but still. Our not being here could leave you vulnerable.

“Oh.” Peter says before nodding. “No, I’ll be fine. I mean J.A.R.V.I.S will keep an eye on me.” He
grins. "Right."

“Short of keeping him locked within the tower, I can assure you, Captain. Master Stark will be very safe.”

“And anyway, if something doesn’t feel right I can just go to Aunt May’s. I’m sure anyone trying to take me will get more than just an earful from her.”

Steve didn’t look too convinced.

“Really, it’s fine. I used to spend weeks on my own when I was a lot younger regularly.” The reply had Steve level a look at Tony.

“Hey. I was young, and I needed the money. Leave him alone, he’ll be fine. He even knows 911 off by heart.”

“It’s not that hard to remember two numbers.”

“And one of them is repeated” Tony adds as Steve sighs at both of them.

“Even I’m starting to think it’s getting a little too Gilmore Girls in here. Let’s go Steve, we’ll leave the Lorelai’s to their coffee.”

“There’s coffee?” Peter said looking around with theatrical surprise. As Natasha and Steve leave it’s obvious to Peter that Steve is trying not to laugh. Then he looks at his dad who takes a long drink from his coffee mug. “What’s the turn around on this looking like?”

“Not even a week for what’s in the country. 2 days tops. The other spots? 3 weeks if we take it easy which will probably be the case, they mostly seem to be in South America and Europe. But who knows what else Hill will offer us when she gets it.” They go quiet for a long moment. “Are you sure you’re going to be okay with everyone gone for a month or more?”

Tony glances at his watch to make sure he won’t be late for school, then leans on the counter and nods.

“Yeah. I mean if nothing else Rhodie could probably get here within an hour or so if something nasty shows up and you’re not in the country. Or I could just work a suit myself, I mean if Rhodie can fly the-“

“Do deal, you want to get in a suit, you have to be legally old enough to drink.”

“If this is a responsibility thing, I’m going to point out you’ve spent a lot of time drunk in those things.”

“Being a parent means setting arbitrary limits. This is my arbitrary limit. Deal?”

“Deal. I guess? I should get to school. Good luck and be safe.” Peter says as he puts his plate in the sink then heads for the elevator. He feels like he should feel a lot more concerned about the fact his dad is going off to possible Hydra bases to look for a mind-controlling sceptre however, as he thought about it on the way down to the ground floor, knowing that the Avengers get along really well and from what he has seen in the training room, are really working fluidly as a team. Even if his dad still hasn’t ever shown up. He knew that his dad would be coming back safe and sound, after all he’s saved the world at least once.
All in all the total time that had been spent looking for the sceptre was closer to 4 months. It was starting to get on Tony’s nerves. He didn’t like it when things took too long, even more so when there was nothing he could do to make the outcome faster.

Approach the location, plan, everyone goes to their marks. Move when Cap says, clear out the buildings, detain people who are smart enough to know when to quit. Search the building, turn up empty handed in terms of the sceptre, confer with S.H.I.E.L.D about what was there and what the next logical target would be.

Tony was getting impatient and he knew it was getting obvious. Especially as there were only three more locations to check out that S.H.I.E.L.D. was certain about. Some castle in Sokovia, abandoned military outpost in Croatia, and supposed wine bunker in France. At least the building permits were saying wine bunker however the location was too far away from any wineries that would be able to afford to store wines there.

He had to admit, it could be worse. It could have been 4 non-stop months of hunting for the sceptre, but they always came home after every location up to now was a bust so there was at least downtime and the comfort of familiar scenery. Which in a certain way was also a problem. They had visited well over 25 locations and each time they didn’t come back with what they were after wasn’t amazing for everyone’s moral, and as sour and agitated as Tony was with the failure. Thor was easily the most tense and wound up of them all so it was starting to be common for someone to make a comment to someone else and it being taken the wrong way, which at least Tony could see for the most part another member of the team would step up and defuse the situation.

Thor was pacing along the length of the Quinjet while Natasha and Bruce sat on the floor in front of the installed seating, backs resting against each other as they were being the support for the other, Bruce in headphones and a blanket as he continued his cool down procedure of trying to meditate while listening to soothing music. Though it was obvious to look at him that Thor’s heavy footfalls were not helping him keep that peace.

“Thor, could you sit down?” Natasha asks quietly. He stops, spinning the handle of Mjolnir causing the hammer’s head to look almost spherical in its spinning. He looks like he wants to loom over her and boom his displeasure with everything.

“Thor.” Steve comes in with a warning military tone, Thor’s head snaps to him with a set jaw and after a tense moment of staring, Thor does sit, far away from everyone else. Tony watches from the corner of his eye as Steve slumps down onto a free bit of console next to him as the Billionaire flies the jet.

“And here you thought you’d never get to be a father. Want me to put up a white picket fence when we get back?” His voice was tense, Thor’s irritation was feeding into his own which lead him to harassing Clint away from the controls because he knew that without something to focus on he would be looking for an argument. Steve gave him a tired smile.

“A picket fence isn’t really going to go with the Tower. Or Manhattan in general these days.” His voice as tired as his smile.

“I’m sure I could make it work.”
“Incoming communication from Agent Hill.” J.A.R.V.I.S announces to the cockpit, Steve puts his hand to his earpiece, intercepting the call. It’s short and Tony can’t hear much of it with Steve moving a little behind him so he isn’t a distracting to Tony’s flying.

“How’s the jet for fuel?” Steve asks leaning into Tony’s space, so he glances at the gauge.

“Easily enough to get home.”

“How about including a stop in Croatia?”

“We’re going to have to turn around, but we can make it. I know you said Croatia was next,” Tony starts but is cut off.

“Apparently they’ve doubled the guard while we were out, it’s looking hot and full of potential.”

“I’ve always been a sucker for potential.” Tony starts to flick switches and starts to turn the plan, those closest to the cockpit, Sam and Natasha were already watching Steve for what was going up. Clint looks up from his phone with a raised eyebrow when he feels the jet start to move, Bruce was unable to hear anything for his music and Thor was still choosing to glower out a window.

“Everyone listen up. I know we were heading home, but we’ve heard a whisper that Croatia has a party going on and it’s the kind of party we might want to crash. Everyone get ready.” Bruce looks up wearily at Steve, silently pleading. “You’ll stay on board, it’s underground so the Hulk is only going to get in his own way. You really should rest up.” He gives Bruce a smile and the smaller man looks so very happy to hear this answer. Once everyone starts taking stock of what they have and fixing up any available tech they’ll need, even Thor perks up clearly excited to work out his frustrations on Hydra even leaving his spot and starting to help Steve make plans in the half an hour flight time it would take to get to the abandoned base.

Once they land and take up their positions, the scans don’t thrill Tony. There’s plenty feet on the ground, sure but technology wise nothing more than standard weapons and computer technology.

“Unless there’s a bunker deep in the bedrock. I’m not pinning my hopes on this.” He announces over the comms.

“What are the scans showing.”

“Well I can tell you what they aren’t showing. No protection outside standard weaponry, they’re so with the times I’m not even sure anything has so much as one of my own processors in it.”

“Sounds like wishing on a star’s a better idea here, Cap” Natasha’s unimpressed tone almost sings itself into the ear pieces.

“We’ll deal with the stars later. Even if they don’t have the sceptre, Hydra is still Hydra.”

“I hope they don’t mind us showing up without an invite.” The grin in Sams voice is obvious, and before anyone else can comment two men standing by the main entrance drop into a cloud of mist billowing out from a gas grenade arrow that’s spinning on the ground as the gas continues to pour out. One of Hawkeyes least lethal projectiles in that it could only kill someone if aimed for the skull within a 30-foot radius, it didn’t even have a pointed tip.

“Time to move, people.” Cap announces as he and Thor head for the now unprotected door as Flacon and Iron Man stream overhead taking out any resistance on the towers before Tony centers in on one of the main halls within the underground compound, watching as Steve and Thor’s signatures come streaming in Natasha in their wake darting out.
“Maybe I should show up to training sometime.” He says aloud to himself.

“I’m sure everyone would be pleased you are finally thinking of taking this seriously, sir.” J.A.R.V.I.S comments dryly while Tony ignores him, instead putting out his arm and taking aim.

“Knock knock” He fires a small battery of explosive rockets with break a good sized hole through the concrete that could easily fit both him and Falcon, if it wasn’t for the fact Falcon gets in first taking a guy out with a speed decelerating punch to the face.

“Who’s there!” He declares as is wings fold in and he joins the fray proper.

“The intern is stepping on my lines.” Tony accounts as he enters the room, seeing in person how large the area is, with Clint up on a runway taking out people up there, so he fires a few rockets to lighten his growing load.

“That’s not a bad thing.” Clint grunts.

“We could use a change from your voice constantly on the line.” Adds Natasha.

“Everyone’s a comedian” Tony mutters, before joining the fray with more zest. “Right Jay, now we’re in, find me something interesting.” The HUD alerts him to the scan in progress and breaks off from the others to get a more complete layout of the area, clearing the path as he does. “Well it’s not bedrock, but they have been doing their own work back here. He comes to a hovering stop when he takes in the area. “Well isn’t this, boring.”

“What’s boring?” Steve asks with a breath, Tony figures he’s either hitting someone or throwing the shield.

“The machine of course.” He says the specs of the industrially titanic auger boring machine loudly chugs along as the people manning it are looking up at him and shouting for someone to deal with him. He assumes, after all he’s too far away and drilling into concrete and rock isn’t exactly like hiding silently under your blanket from monsters. It was the angrily pointing at him that really gave it away. “They’re drilling into the back wall. Looks like this place wasn’t big enough for them.” A warning appears on his screen attracting his attention to a rocket heading his direction with great exuberance. It was easy enough for him to dodge, however not being used to fighting in an underground cavern, he didn’t remember there was a concrete ceiling above him until it was actively introducing him to the ground. Instinctually he raised his hands to his face before hitting the ground and everything going black.

“Respond!” Tony blinks awake and tries to shake his head but it won’t move, panic floods him and he attempts to struggle in the suit until a pain so intense he sees white coming from his arm stops him.


“Scans indicate you have a radial fractures at both ends of your right radial bone in your arm.” An image shows up of Tony’s right arm circles showing the two places in Tony’s arm that are damaged.

“How?”

“It turns out trying to break your fall while in a mechanical suit under several tonnes of concrete is counterintuitive to your safety.”

“Iron Man! Respond!”
“They know you’re alive, and are working to free you. However for the past half hour I have been unable to assure Captain Rogers of your relative safety.” If Tony wasn’t so loopy from an obvious concussion he would be very touched that Steve was obviously so worried about his safety, but instead came out with.

“5 more minutes.”

“How about we give you 15? It’s going to take a while to get to you without equipment. How are you feeling?”

“With my fingertips.” He hears a derisive snort and a low spoken comment but the ringing in his ears can’t pick it out past knowing it was Clint’s voice and that it was coming in from someone’s mic near him instead of his own. “There was digging equipment all over.”

“Yeah, it’s under the rubble with you.” Steve supplies. “How are you feeling?”

“Like I should sue Croatian government for using weak rebar. Adrenaline’s wearing off enough for me to feel my arm, I’d appreciate it if you could dig… Deeper.”

“Tony? Speak to me.” Steve demands urgently hearing the distracted tone in Tony’s voice.

“S’getting fuzzy cap.”

“Keep it together Stark, we need you to get us home, Understand?”

Tony doesn’t respond.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all once again for reading!!

How are you enjoying it so far? I feel like I might be going too fast with things, what do you think?
Bed Rest and Development

Chapter Summary

With Iron Man out of the game, it’s up to the rest of the Avengers and War Machine to find the sceptre. If only that was the only thing they came back with.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony wouldn’t say he woke up, so much as oozed into consciousness, in the same way, melted wax in a lava lamp floats away from the heat globe at the bottom towards the cooler oil at the top. There were noises around him, and shapes moving around him in such a weird slowness he was actually starting to think he was in a lava lamp until words started to get clearer, like his name and the word dad. He looked at the other blobs slowly and smiled at them and despite himself muttered a declaration of love to a few of them.

Slowly things started to get a lot less blobby and he realised he had one hand clinging to Steve’s face as he squeezed his cheeks together causing Steve to look like a confused and embarrassed duck. Suddenly his brain started working. Right, he was under several tonnes of concrete, the others were getting him out if this is what he remembers now that means…

Without letting go of Steve’s face he looks at his right arm, he see’s Peter’s arms on the bed rail, it’s nice to see but unimportant, his arm is in a full cast and secured to his body. Ah, so morphine was the reason everyone was in his lava lamp. He looks up at Peter and smiles at him, assuming he was one of the blobs he loved then turns back to Steve, while ignoring that he remembers loving any of the other blobs in the room who are slowly becoming Avengers.

An attempt to speak makes him sound like an agitated goose running into a door. It’s enough for Tony to actually look enough embarrassed to let go of Steve’s face and weakly wave a hand in an attempt to ask for water. What he gets is Steve feeding him ice chips. There were worse ways to be hydrated.

“How long?” He gets out eventually, having ignored anyone who tried to ask him questions or in general talk to him up until now.

“In two days you would have been in and out of consciousness for two weeks. Looks like you’re planning to stay awake this time.” Pipes up Blob Bruce. After a minute of trying to sit up and having Steve and Peter help him, he’s able to take stock of who is here. Steve and Peter were obvious being right next to him but other than them it was just Bruce at the foot of the bed and Sam struggling very hard with not trying to laugh at Tony’s muddled actions. Then he looks at the cast again with a frown, it was wrapped in a pink camo cast wrap. It looked stupid.

“Where would I be hiding where this would be useful?” Boy did his voice sound gravely, Sam then bursts out laughing obviously not being able to handle the situation anymore and he takes the moment to give up being in the room anymore, he managed to get out between gasps of breath that he’s glad Tony’s awake and will tell the others. Tony just gives him a blank stare until the door shuts.
“This is going to be more than a week, isn’t it?”

“You’ve managed to break both ends of radius in your right arm.” Says Bruce calmly, his unregistered doctor days in India playing off right now. “You’re sort of lucky, because of your age and the way it was damaged they were very close to putting pins in.” Tony sags into the pillows.

“And it should heal well.” Peter adds “It also looks like it’ll be pretty hard for you to try and work despite it, which is good too”

“Thanks. Pete.” Tony rubs his face with his free hand and ignores the guilty look Steve offers him for being complicit in effectively putting him in a third of a straight jacket. “So how long are we looking at?”

“Including recovery? A year.” Tony looks so horrified that Bruce hurriedly adds. “We’re talking to people, I know someone in South Korea that could be helpful. We’ve spoken but she has to get back to me because she’s in the middle of a project. So really, it’s a tentative year.”

“Great. This is exactly what we need right now.” He flexes his cast fingers and winces from not only their stiffness but the feeling of the tendons pushing against his repaired breaks. “I have H.O.M.E.R in Rhodie’s suit, he’s no J.A.R.V.I.S but he gets the job done. We should be able to get him on loan from the Airforce.” Steve shakes his head.

“We’ll worry about it later. The team needed a break... Uh. Time off for a week or so anyway. We might even know about this someone’s ability to work with your arm before then.” The hospitalised man gives the blonde a withering look at being told not to worry about their work. “I’ll talk to the doctor, see about getting you some actual food.

“It better be a Pizza.” Tony grumbles as Steve also excuses himself. Peter helps Tony rearrange himself a little on the bed and it’s far more uncomfortable than it looks. Tony’s done a hell of a lot over the years to hurt himself, but this is the first time he’s broken a bone in more than one place and in general he hasn’t broken a bone since he was 7. He looks at Peter who seems to be very eager to be helping his dad, no doubt because the last few times he got himself into sorry states Peter wasn’t able to even see him until discharge or Tony had been hiding it from everyone including Peter. “You know. I’m expecting you to be a useful Dum-e, right?”

“Pretty interesting demand from a living hat rack.” Peter comes back with.

“We’ll all help, Tony.” Bruce says confidently. “Natasha has already made some adjustments to your room to make it easier for you to get in and out of things.” This gets Bruce his own withering look, unlike Steve, Bruce doesn’t look in the least concerned about it. “It’s only while you’re in the cast. Or would you like me to give you sponge baths? Or Thor?”

“Thor is an interesting option. Does it involve stories from the homeland?” Tony feels a little better imaging Thor going all out in a bath for Tony, and joining him in some kind of Scandinavian bathing custom. After all, he was, possibly still is their god and a people’s customs have to come from somewhere, so why not from an alien race of people?

“You could always ask him.” Bruce says shaking his head. “But at this point in time, both you and Peter are on notice.” Tony raises an eyebrow at Bruce’s principal-like tone and from the corner of his eye he can see Peter look stunned.

“Wait, both of us?! What did I-? I mean why-? Wait.” He blinks. “I apologised for that months ago!” He whines trying not to sound too sulky.
“Peter, you were snapping at us because your dad’s relationship ended. Can’t really say I’m going to enjoy you being overly protective while he’s physically incapable of being independent.”

“Rubbing it in there, Banner.” Tony cuts in with a displeased sniff, but he can tell Bruce is ignoring him to focus on Peter who after a moment nods his head.

“Got it. We’ll both be good. Promise.” Peter finally agrees.

“Don’t make promises you can’t make me keep.” Tony unconsciously goes to pat Peter’s shoulder but his movements only meet the immovable side of the cast and a sharp pain that makes him hiss loudly. Peter starts to crowd him but Bruce is already next to him putting a hand on him to keep him from getting too close, which with the pain slowly building Tony’s grateful for. Bruce gives the cast a quick check before looking at Tony’s face.

“Looks like you’re starting to feel again.” Bruce observes.

“Words I never thought I’d hear about me.” Comes Tony’s reply in mildly gritted teeth.

“I’ll let the nurses know, in the meantime I’ll take you home” Bruce looks at Peter, who looks like he wants to protest then realises it’s a good idea. “Get you fed, showered and in a real bed instead of a hospital chair.” He starts to guide the teen out before glancing over his shoulder. “I know you won’t want it, but you should sleep too.”

Then he’s alone. He looks at the arm again, and fidgets. To keep him moving too much there’s a brace bar going from his cast covered forearm to his waist and kept in place with straps that he’s now starting to feel dig into him. It feels weirdly claustrophobic and limiting, he knows he shouldn’t undo the strapping but it’s just so tight. However just as he gets the gown enough out of the way for him to start peeling at the velcro, one of the nurses comes in with a tray and an unimpressed look.

“Mr Stark. Please, you know you shouldn’t be doing that.” the matronly woman objects.

“If it wasn’t so tight I wouldn’t be doing anything.” He objects, she tuts him and puts down her tray, leaning across to see the strapping slipping in a cool finger between his skin and the strapping and only getting to the first knuckle, the cool finger makes him twitch which in turn causes him to wince from shifting his arm by accident.

“It’s fine, you’re just not used to it.” She says with a calm patience. Tony gets the idea she was born with infinite patience and is often designated to difficult patients like Tony. He idly wonders what it’s like to have that kind of patience until he realises she’s watching him expectantly.

“Yeah. I wasn’t listening.” He really can’t help but be honest right now.

“Dr Banner said your starting to feel pain, would you like some more pain killers?” He can’t help but feel a little dumb for not making that connection.

“Uh, yeah. I mean, shouldn’t that be up to you?”

“Well if you’re bothering your strapping and wincing when you move you probably should have some more. It will make you drift off no doubt, I’ll make sure to have food here when you wake. I hope you’re a fan of broth.” The nurse says as she readjusts Tony’s gown and pulls up his blankets.

Doesn’t sound like pizza, but I guess I can become a fan.”
The only reason Tony knew that it had gotten dark by the time he woke up again, was because the curtains were closed and on the whole, the corridors outside his room were quieter. He hears a page being turned and rather awkwardly looks to his right to find Steve on the other side of his cast reading a book, a very engrossing book going by the fact he hasn’t even realised Tony is shifting around yet.

“If this was some romance novel I’d think you were in love with me.” Tony purrs very deliberately. Looking up Steve blinks at him, no doubt trying to catch up with what Tony said while he had been reading then just raises an eyebrow at him.

“I don’t think I remember reading about Mr Darcy waiting by Elizabeth’s bedside after she was nearly crushed by debris while she was in a tin can. So good thing this isn’t a romance novel.”

“I don’t know what I want to talk about first. That you’ve read Pride and Prejudice, or that you went with the independent character who’s ahead of her time for me.”

“Ma had it. I read it a lot when I was too sick to go out.” Steve answers with a casual shrug. “And you dance with anyone, so you can’t be Mr Darcy.”

“It’s still cute you think I’m the lead character.” Steve shakes his head and closes his book, there’s a moment where Tony wants to wonder if Steve would remember what page he was on but when you know Captain America has an Eidetic Memory, you realise you’re wondering the wrong things.

“Shouldn’t you be back at the tower? Resting up and preparing for the next mission?”

“Tony.” Steve’s tone is a little exasperated. “We can have a break. I want to know what the doctor in Korea says before I make any plans. I’d prefer to have you fighting fit before going out again.”

“Sure Thor is going to love th-“ Tony starts but is promptly spoken over by Steve.

“We all agreed on it. Thor was one of the first, actually. Something about the importance of having a whole team.” Steve gives Tony a pointed look which only encourages him to roll his eyes. “Besides, we only have three places left, makes sense to rest up now so no one ends up making a mistake out of desperation.”

“You’re annoyingly logical at times.”

“You’re one to talk.” Steve smiles at Tony who just shakes his head then they easily move to a moment of silence, a far cry from the tense silences they used to have where they were both waiting for the other to do anything that would start up the next flair up of egos. The silence continues as they both quietly watch each other, with no expectations or desires, just simply watching each other as if the one they’re watching is just a deer in a distant field. Just as Tony starts to feel this could lead to over thinking things, his nurse comes in with a tray. Oblivious to the scenic staring she walked into she simply makes her way to the overbed table and places the tray on it then turns to Tony then glances at Steve who gives her a polite nod.

“Looks like you woke up earlier than I thought. Not badgering the Captain into getting you something I hope.”

“No more than usual ma’am.” Steve replies, Tony simply looks disinterested.

“He’d only want to feed me granola anyway.” He makes an attempt to sit up so the table can be placed but the casted arm makes everything just enough too awkward and he ends up looking a drunk crab, which has his nurse helping him before he can even realise how awkward everything really is, by the time she has a decent hold of him to carefully shift him up he can hear Steve stand up
clearly ready to help if necessary, sadly for him, it wasn’t and the over table was wheeled into place over his lap as he looked down at the chicken broth in front of him.

“I thought you were joking about the broth.” He picks up his spoon and scoops up the yellowy water and stares at it.

“You haven’t eaten in two weeks. Let’s take it slow and see where it takes you. If you can keep it down by lunch tomorrow we’ll see about solids.” Tony mutters that it sounds fair and then eats the spoonful. Sure, it was only water and chicken flavour but Tony couldn’t readily conjure anything that tasted better in this second and started to hungrily continue having the broth.

“Guess I’ll leave you to it. Someone will check on you tomorrow.” Steve announces with Tony nods in agreement, then clears his throat.

“Not Peter. He’s missed enough school.” He might not have been awake for it, but Tony knows that Peter would have been by his side the whole time and not one of the Avengers would have had the heart to stop him considering not one of the group had the best relationships with parents in various and complicated degrees.

“I’ll make sure he goes.” Steve promises then leaves. Tony stops eating and looks at the door that Steve had closed behind him.

“Good young man that one.” The nurse mutters loud enough for Tony to hear, he glances at her and her face gives away nothing as she checks all his signs on the monitor. Tony opts not to comment and goes back to his soup.

Steve and Tony sat across from each other at the doorway end of the dining room table playing backgammon with Rhodie watching, and helping Tony when it came to reaching the parts of the board Tony couldn’t due to his arm. Tony was sitting in an electric wheelchair that Rhodie, Sam, and Clint had all decided would be a funny welcome home gift, while the billionaire had initially disregarded the chair, it ended up being quite helpful when it came to the dining table, instead of awkwardly pulling the chair in or having someone push the chair in for him he just wheeled the chair into place. Which was equal parts annoying and embarrassing to him.

A habit which was annoyingly developing was Tony leaning back to cross his arms, a habit that normally suggested that he was contemplating how to go about something, now made impossible with the cast with ends up with him awkwardly using his forearm to stroke his chest. It had only been three days back home but he was already sure the others were deliberately ignoring it. Well. Most of them.

“Y’know, if your arm is itchy you know all you have to do is ask.” Rhodie smirks at him, rapping his nails on the fabric-wrapped cast, which only gets him a flat look from Tony.

“You have a really weird way of flirting. Is this why you never have any girlfriends to introduce me to?” Tony makes half a move then gestures for Rhodie to finish it.

“Real cute. I know better than to introduce women to you.” Tony looks knowingly at Steve, who’s watching the conversation with amusement
“He’s only saying that because he doesn’t want to admit to his woeful attempts to pick up girls.”

“I wouldn’t feel bad, James. I haven’t had a girlfriend either.” Steve offers a self-deprecating smile as he makes his move.

“Hold up. You?” Rhodie points to Steve and all his Steveness as Tony makes another move. This isn’t news to Tony he’s known most of his life from his dad’s stories and he more than aware of what Steve looked like before hand. All his illnesses aside back then, if he looked like this these days, he could probably easily net himself an arty girl or hipster, with that boy next door air to him.

“Girls are hard to talk to.” Steve shrugs, which causes Rhodie to point his thumb towards the door over his shoulder.

“You work with Natasha Romanov and Maria Hill”

“I wouldn’t say that to their faces.” Tony mutters and falls on deaf ears.

“I work with them it’s different, I’m not exactly inviting them out to dance.” Steve contemplates Tony’s move for a moment before making a move. “Besides, technically most of my life I was just some little wheezy punk. Not exactly winning any hearts looking like a paper boy.”

“No girl who decides just on looks is worth it in the end anyway.” Tony mutters again and makes a move that wins him the game. Steve and Rhodie watch him for a minute saying nothing as Bruce comes into the room and starts to make himself a mug of chai tea.

“So, there’s good and bad news.”

“Bad news is I need better rivals in Backgammon.” Tony replies at Steve looks down at the board and see’s how effortlessly he was defeated.

“You and Natasha get weirdly competitive in Backgammon, so Steve’s your only hope.” Bruce counters as everyone gives him attention. “Good News is; Dr Cho is not only happy to but able to work on your arm and get you back to fighting fit.”

“This feels there’s about to be uncomfortable bad news.” Steve says tentatively.

“More for Tony than us.” Bruce turns to look at the man in question. “That project I said she was in the middle of when Tony was in the hospital? She can’t stop right now, apparently, it’s very time sensitive. She won’t be able to bring the cradle state-side for at least three months.”

“Cradle.” Is all Tony says in way of reply.

“It will be able to heal your arm in a matter of hours. And it’s a better name than Dum-E.”

“He’ll know you said that.” Tony sighs to himself.

“It’s a lot better than a year.” Steve thinks aloud, resting his elbow on the table to support his chin. “I don’t think we can put off the last three points for that long, however.” He watches Tony for a reaction, Tony just gestures to Rhodie.

“Take him, he still needs to repay his debt for letting Hammer get his sticky fingers all over my suit.”

“My suit, it’s not like I had a choice. You stopped playing ball with the military, so we had to get someone on the job.”

“Henry Ford would have been a better option.”
“We don’t tend to let dead people work on our things, Tony,” Rhodie rolls his eyes. “I’m happy to pick up his slack if you need it. I went on compassion leave for this baby anyway. Probably more interesting than the usual terrorist raids I’m on.” Steve gives Tony a lingering unsure look, before turning to Rhodie.

“I’ll never turn down a helpful offer if you’re sure.”

“It’s help you or put up with his whining. Believe me, Going through MIT with him is all the whining I need.”

“Be still my heart.” Tony says dryly before rolling the dice again if for no other reason than as an excuse to fidget. “Three months?”

“Dr Cho will do her best to get here sooner, but yeah, three months.”

Tony leans back into the wheelchair and thinks things through. He has some schematics for various upgrades on the back burner he can bring forward, including a magnetised system for Steve’s shield instead of the leather straps that ultimately slows his movements, as well as a suit upgrade for Natasha. It also means three months of Peter not having to worry about what could kill his dad, which would be a nice change for him.

“Solid deal. I’ve got some projects I’ve been putting off lately.”

“Like?” Rhodie raises a suspicious eyebrow at him.

“Making Rogers the perfect woman.” Steve rolls his eyes and snorts at him before patting Rhodie’s upper arm with the back of his own hand.

“Seeing as the game’s over and Tony is… Tony. Want to get some practice in with me?”

“You good?” Rhodie asks looking at Tony who just waves him on, knowing the on the inside Rhodie is geeking out over the chance to train with Captain America. Just as Tony starts idly stacking the Backgammon pieces while thinking about how to go about magnetising Steve’s shield a coffee gets placed in front of him and he looks up at Bruce who takes the seat next to him, so their view of each other isn’t obstructed by the arm.

“Are you sure you’re going to be okay?” He asks as he sips his chai.

“I said I was going to be, didn’t I?”

“You say a lot of things, Tony.” Bruce replies reproachfully.

“These days, I’m not so much of a loose end if I have to sit things out. I mean I have upgrades in mind for the team” Tony starts then clicks his fingers at Bruce as he also remembers “Veronica. We’ve had to put her off because of all our globe-trotting. I can start implementing her and ordering things in, arrange permits to get her into orbit.”

Bruce takes a long drink from his mug, clearly ruminating on Tony’s words.

“I’ll make sure to check in with what you’re doing on Veronica whenever I can. Speaking of I think we’ll need her less than we first thought. The uh, ‘lullaby’ is showing a 90% chance of changing back, which… Is the highest return rate I’ve ever managed without him just getting tired out and changing of his own accord.”

“So does this make me Cogsworth?” Bruce just raises an eyebrow at him. “You have to admit the
“Gears make more sense than a candlestick.”

“You’re still Lumiere, Tony.”

“Warm light for all mankind.”

“And you made it creepy.” Bruce shakes his head and leaves the room, Tony assumes to go back to whatever project he was working on.

Peter sat with the statued First Responders that had replaced the angles the Chitauri army destroyed on top of Grand Central Station almost two years ago. He sat just under the fireman’s hose, legs just dangling over the side of raised pavement, watching the city while listening to his police scanner.

It was a good place to watch the city, like the name suggested it was pretty central to where ever he needed to go, and the breeze wasn’t as strong as could be sitting on the edges of buildings though being nestled by larger buildings even with his advanced abilities it was still colder than he’d like.

The view helped him ignore the cold, the sun was setting and giving everything a rosy orange hue and the light hit the surrounding skyscrapers at just the right angle it only improved the sparkle of New York.

“And this is why New York is the best city on Earth.” Peter announces to the marble kid next to him, who didn’t respond as he was busy being perpetually checked out by a paramedic as a soldier crouches behind them shouting orders to statues that will never heed him. He only got to marvel at the sight a little longer as the scanner finally caught his interest. A silent alarm had been tripped in an ATM vestibule the next block over. Robbers, bank robbers. How cheesy could you be? Peter thought as he turned off the scanner and pushed it under the fireman’s need to keep it safe from the elements before diving off of the station and towards the bank.

The bank had been easy enough to get into. After all the three robbers apparently just hurled a bin through a plate glass window which Peter understood, not everyone was meant for stealth, like Thor, or Hulk. He couldn’t really see them sneaking… Anywhere. Quietly he came in through their gaping entrance way and just hung out on the roof watching them they were even wearing ski masks. Peter let his head flop dramatically down towards the ground and let out a big sigh, the smaller of the three men looked around when he heard the sigh, but he didn’t look up so he saw no one and went back to working on busting an ATM open.

“What? Amateur night at a comedy club didn’t let you in?” That got everyone’s attention and they just stared at him in surprise. Really? That’s all they could do? Just stare with surprise and The Amazing Spider-man? He rubs his masked face. “You’re starstruck! Aww, that’s so cute. If you want I can come down and sign something before laying the hurt down?” Now that got a reaction as one of the big guys picked up a tyre iron and came at Peter menacingly, who couldn’t be less scared of the blunt weapon as he weaved around without even moving a hand or foot to avoid the swings, really they were so obvious his Spidey-senses were barely coming into play. “Uh, guys. A little help over here. I don’t think he’s actually hit me yet.” He webs the guy in the face as he swings wildly barely missing the other big guy who also came swinging at Peter but with a baseball bat, the small one pulling out a gun.
“Oh. Now you get serious? Lucky me!” Peter dodges a bullet dropping to the ground in front of the little guy and disarming him before vaulting over him as he senses the other big guy swing at him, which collects the little guy hard to the temple and he drops like a bag of peas to the ground. “Be careful, guy! You almost hit me.” Hanging off the wall he webs the guy's feet to the floor and his hands and bat get wrapped up and attached to the roof, then made sure to web the other two to a wall and floor respectively.

“Seriously. You guys are so bad at this, come from a small town and think you could pull this off?” He heard sirens not far away and decided to take his cue.

“Looks like the police are going to have to find out on this one. But hey, better luck next time. This is the city of opportunity after all!” He jogged out the broken window and pulled himself away just as the police were screeching to a halt out front. Peter was halfway up a building watching from a distance as the Police scurried into the vestibule to their mini Christmas of criminals inside. He had gotten so into the people watching he almost didn’t realise his phone was ringing. Like anyone who suddenly realises their phone is ringing, Peter stands up from his crouch and starts fumbling for his phone, oblivious to the fact he was standing on the side of a building and therefore was actually horizontal.

“Clint?” Peter asks as he answered the call, while it wasn’t a surprise that Clint had his number, Peter gave it to him. The surprise came from the fact they were on their way to Sokovia so why would he call.

“Just checking in, kid.”

“Wouldn’t you call dad for that?”

“Already have, he said you’ve been out all day. Steve was worried your old man would get lonely, he was going to call but hey, I have my finger on the pulse of the local youths.” He can hear Steve say something in the background but it’s just enough too far away and a little too noisy in where he was standing to make it out exactly.

“Yeah. Sure. If this is you flaunting your secret agent skills, it’s pretty lame.”

“Maybe. But I’m not trying. Just make sure you’re looking after yourself and Tony, alright?”

“Fine, mom. I’ll head home now.” Clint just hangs up instead of replying which amuses Peter, but true to his word he does swing back to Grand Central Station, changes into normal clothes and heads around the back of the station to Stark Tower. Then he stops and makes another call.

“Szechuan Gourmet, or Xi’an Famous Foods?” Peter asks when the line opens up.

“Excuse me?” Come’s his dad’s reply.

“I’m at the station, which one should I pick up from?”

“Neither of them are near the station.” Peter doesn’t reply leaving the line silent. “Szechuan. It’ll come back cold if you get it, just come up and order it.” He smiles at the man's words.

“Wow. Your only son offers to walk several blocks to get dinner and you’re complaining I’ll make it cold?”

“Cold dumplings might taste good but they taste better when still steaming.”
“Fine, make a valid point. See if I care. Be up soon.” They hang up and Peter calls to place the order as he enters a passcoded side entrance to the tower’s foyer and takes the elevator to the living room. He see’s his dad on the couch his head down, as he approaches he see’s that Tony’s working on a tablet on his lap.

“What’cha working on?”

“Running some numbers on different magnetic strengths.” Tony replies as his left hand still keeps drumming away on the screen

“What for?” He asks as he drops his bag on the floor and then sags onto the couch never to the older man.

“Steve’s shield. There’s wasted time in his movements because of the straps. If I can have it magnetised to him it’ll not only give him a more fluid movement but I can probably get to reattach itself if it’s not moving and close enough.”

“Wow, the things you can achieve with one hand tied behind your back.” Peter whistles and Tony just looks at him.

“My I even want to know how long you’ve been holding on to that one?”

“Probably not. Have you been at this all day?” Tony shakes his head.

“Just since the team left 3 hours ago. I’ve already figured out how to attach everything to the shield, not it’s a matter of finding the right magnet for the job.”

“I really want to sound bored and sarcastic about this, but. That actually does sound like fun.” So for the next half hour, Peter and Tony worked together going through different magnet strengths and styles until the food came, after paying with a good tip Peter started putting the food on the dining table, putting out chopstick for himself and his dad as Tony sat in his Wheelchair.

“Uh, Pete?” Tony gets his attention having him look around to his dad awkwardly holding the chopsticks in his left hand. “If you don’t want me to starve, I think I need to have a fork.” Tony frowned. Growing up Peter had learnt how to use chopsticks from Tony, and with his right and dominate hand out of commission Tony no longer had the dexterity necessary for wielding two sticks for eating.

“Aw, man. Sorry.” Peter hurriedly gets him a fork, trying not to feel bad as Tony sighs about his predicament.

“Don’t worry about it kid. Just have to wait it out 3 more months.” Tony says dismissively as he leans over his takeout box to start eating the rice inside. Peter pauses in his own bite and looks at his dad.

“Three months? But the doctors said a year.”

“They did. Bruce said he’s got someone in Korea who can heal it all up, but she’s busy now and can’t bring her ‘cradle’ over to do anything about it.”

“Cradle.” Peter says in the same tone Tony had used the day before.

“Yeah, better name than casket, I guess.”

“And it really will work?”
“Bruce seems pretty sure of it. Who am I to disagree. I’ve checked her out, she really knows her stuff. Shame she’s probably too loyal to come to the Stark side.”

“That. Was terrible.” Peter shook his head at Tony who just grinned at him before just slipping into a companionable silence with the odd conversations about nothing in particular. It had been so long since it had just been the Peter and Tony show. After Tony became Iron Man and started staying home and having fewer parties was when he and Peter really got to bond, since the Avengers came on the team and Peter started being Spider-Man, well they both got busy in other ways and rarely had one on one moments anymore. Peter didn’t realise how much he missed this.

“Something wrong?” Tony asks, making Peter realise he must have been pulling a face, he shook his head then smiled.

“Nah, I was just thinking about hoe long it’s been since it’s been just you, me, take out, and a big empty building,” Tony watches Peter while finishing his own mouthful of food.

“Miss it?”

“Kinda.” Peter shrugs. “Maybe not the empty building part. Guess I just got caught up in my own thing I forgot to just hang out with you for no reason.”

“Well, this is more fun than you thinking everyone else doesn’t care. I’ll say that for certain.” Peter offers up an apologetic look. “But you’re right. This is pretty nostalgic.” The both fall into a contemplative silence. Then it becomes almost oppressive to both of them how much silence there was. It wasn’t even 8pm and there was almost complete silence, the only noises to be heard was their own breathing and the faint up of the lights and the refrigerator. They exchanged a look.

“This is weird.” Tony starts.

“Way too weird.” Peter agreed. Even though Peter had been objectively on his own while Tony and the other Avengers were taking out Hydra strongholds he was very rarely at home for long, choosing to work at the library or spend the time skateboarding or developing something that was starting to look like actual photography skill. So to actually be in the tower when it was this quiet and not be asleep. Was just not right.

“Let’s go watch a movie.” Tony suggests as he and Peter get up quickly to fill the lounge room with noise which is where they stay until they fall asleep on the couch.

Peter woke up alone on the couch. He assumed that it was too uncomfortable for Tony to stay asleep long on the couch and would have gone to bed, so after stretching out on the couch and just, in general, having a long luxurious stretch Peter got up and went to have leftover Chinese for breakfast when he noticed that his Dad’s painkillers were still on the counter last night.

“J.A.R.V.I.S what time is it?”

“The time is 11:30am Friday.”

“What?!” Peter looks around stunned as J.A.R.V.I.S helpfully displays the time date and weather on one of the windows. “Aw man. Well no real point going to school now. When did dad last take his pills?”

“22:30 hours, young sir.”

“Better get him some relief then.” Peter ignores the white containers in the fridge and pulls out a bottle of water and grabs the pill bottles then makes his way into to his dad’s room, the only reply
knocking gets is a groan so Peter just comes into the room to see his dad curled up on his side laying on his good arm while cuddling one of his pillows his plastered arm up in the air. It had been finding out his dad did this that made him less babyish for having toys to sleep with when he was younger, unlike Tony however, Peter had grown out of needing something comforting to cuddle at night. He grabs at Tony’s foot through the sheets.

“Wakey wakey eggs and bakey.” Tony groans again, louder this time burying his face into the cuddled pillow.

“You better actually have eggs and bakey.” He threatened weakly.

“Better, I have Big Pharma coming to make you good and compliant for brainwashing.” Peter moves to stand next to Tony’s face, who peels said face out of the pillow and smiles up at Peter.

“Yay. Big Pharma” he says weakly as he uncurls his arm from the pillow and reaches up while rolling onto his back, Peter pulls his hands up.

“Uh uh, sit up. I know you’re going to complain about drowning your pillow if you do it laying down.”

“Arm hurts. Can’t move.” He pathetically reaches higher for the meds, before letting his hand drops. “I knew you only wanted my fortune.” He whines. With an eye roll, Peter puts everything down and helps his dad sit up before giving him what he needed to sail on the SS. Pain-Free. Tony smacked his lips in satisfaction. “Really shouldn’t have fallen asleep on that couch. Why did you let me do that?”

“Hey, I fell asleep before you.” Peter answered in his defence, as Tony stood up and then sat back down again. “You alright?”

“I’ve felt better. Bring me the tablet, I’ll work in here until the room stops spinning.”

“It’s spinning?” Peter sounded concerned but Tony waved him off.

“It’s just a side effect from something I’m taking it passes. Tablet, food, chop chop.” Peter makes an exasperated noise and does as he’s told and for the next two days Peter and Tony just hang out together, Tony working on his Avengers side projects and Peter working on his school work with breaks in between for food and movies.

So when the Avengers came back to the tower Sunday afternoon, they didn’t come back to a clean home. Peter was sprawled out on the couch reading a Spanish language book when he heard the lift open up to bring Clint and Natasha into the room, he sat up in time to see them both look at the mess on the coffee table and exchange a look. Peter turned to see what they looked at and froze.

“Uh. I’ll clean that.”

“We didn’t think anyone else would.” Natasha said as she raised an eyebrow at him while Clint headed into the kitchen.

“So, another bust?” Peter says at the same time as Clint exclaims.

“Was there a house party or something?!”

“Oh… Uh…” Was all Peter could say as Natasha looked into the Kitchen seeing all the take out containers just laying on the counter. She looks back at him and frowns.

“I was going to clean it all. I promise.” He said guiltily.
“You two used to live on your own how was the house always clean then?” Clint nagged at Peter as he came into the kitchen.

“We had cleaners come in.” Looking for all the world like a 6-year-old who just got caught drawing on the walls.

“Boy.” Is all Clint says as he points to the mess and without any resistance, Peter starts to hastily clean up. Natasha smirks at Clint who just shakes his head. “Why does anyone want to have kids?” He grumpily questions before leaving the kitchen muttering to himself.

“I wonder.” Comes Natasha’s reply with a playful hum, before looking at Peter and getting him a trash bag to put everything in. “We found the sceptre. So no, this time it’s not a bust.” She says finally able to answer his question.

“Really?!” Peter looks up excitedly and dumps what’s in his arms into the bag as she offers it and nods.

“Really. So now we have all the time in the world to teach you how to clean as you go.” She smirks at him as he groans.

As Tony hears Clint complaining he looks up at his closed door and comes out in time to hear Natasha telling Peter that got the sceptre, So Tony heads up to the Quinnjet hanger to meet up with everyone else to hear the good news. Bruce looks pale which Tony knew meant Hulk really had his game face on in Sokovia, he comes over to cheer him up when Tony can’t help but see Steve and Sam coming off the jet with two teenagers a boy and a girl.

“What’s that?” Tony asks. Bruce looks up only just realising he’s there, stares at him for a moment then turns to look at what Tony’s looking at.

“Looks like teenagers.” The dirty look Tony gives him has Bruce add. “Strucker had them.”

“Strucker? I missed out on Strucker?” Bruce gave him a rueful smile.

“We didn’t actually know it was where he was hiding until we got there and saw him.” Tony swore under his breath for missing out on that. “He’s with S.H.I.E.L.D now.”

“And we’re what? Adopting his kids?”

“They’re orphans.” Bruce looks back at them, they look tired, pale and scared holding each other’s hands as they listened to whatever it was Steve was telling them. “Twins, apparently Strucker talked them into to being his experiments, they were in a pretty bad shape when Steve found them. But they still tried to defend themselves. They’re enhanced.” Tony’s head snapped towards Bruce.

“They’re what!?” It was loud enough that Steve looked up and over the twins at Tony. “What’s the big idea bringing in potentially dangerous kids back here? Where Peter is?” Bruce just puts his hands up and looks very much like he’s about to say don’t shoot the messenger when Steve shows up, catching the tail end of the conversation.

“You’d rather I just leave them in an an icy castle all alone with powers they don’t really understand? That’s more dangerous than anything else.” Steve said logically.
“Yes.” Tony hissed.

“Bruce, could you show the Maximoff’s to the guest bedroom?” Steve asks followed on sharply by Tony saying.

“No. They’re not staying in the guest bedroom. That’s too close to Peter.” He almost growled protectively. Steve sighs.

“Tony. Can we speak in private please?” Instead of answering Steve, Tony just turns on his heel and storms off to the elevator, he can hear Steve ask Bruce if he and Sam can look after the twins for the moment and Steve quick steps into the elevator before the door closes.

“Are you trying to get Peter killed?” Tony snaps at him.

“Of course, not you’re overreacting.”

“How is this overreacting when even you said they don’t understand their power? What about that doesn’t make me concerned for my not-a-superhero son?” Tony points behind him as if that’s where Peter is, even though they are clearly alone in the elevator.

“I want to train them so they can understand their powers. The girl, Wanda? She could do some really amazing things with the right training, the boy too.”

“Good to see you’re excited about training up kid soldiers.” Tony says through a set jaw.

“Tony.” Steve sighs with exasperation. “They were in the hands of monsters. If I left them there, alone, they would become threats to public safety. I wouldn’t want that on our conscious. I thought about Peter when I made this decision. We were all agreed at the time to bring them.”

“I am not agreed. There is no way I would ever agree to them living here.”

“What do you want me to do Tony? What?” Steve says sounding on the verge of being annoyed and going to angry.

“I don’t know if you want to keep them, send them upstate.”

“Upstate.”

“Plenty of room for them to graze, kill whomever they like be nowhere near Peter.”

“They deserve a chance at a normal life, Tony.” The door to the elevator opens, Tony doesn’t say anything and just storms off to his room. “Tony!” Steve calls after him and follows, causing Peter and Natasha to come out from the kitchen to see what’s going on. Tony doesn’t manage to close the door fast enough and Steve comes in after him.

“How about they stay in my room then?” Steve says as a tense compromise. Tony just stares at him, a little surprised that Steve actually came into his room to keep this argument going. And he continues to just stare at him. “Honestly. I see me in them.” An answer Tony didn’t exactly expect to get. “Poor kids with no home no parents and the world didn’t give them a chance. Put yourself in their shoes, Tony. What would you do, if you had all this power and no one to show you how to use it?”

Tony just raises an eyebrow at him.

“I’d sneak into dad’s garage and figure out how to build an engine by myself.” Steve rubs at his face.
“They don’t have their dad’s garage.” Steve says softly.

“You really aren’t going to give this up, are you?” Tony asks sharply.

“Not really. But I’m willing to wear you down on it.” He gives Tony a cocky grin, it annoys Tony because he knows he’s going to give in to it. Tony wasn’t completely stupid, he knows he’s being a little too standoffish about this but he doesn’t want Peter to get hurt and when you have more than one teenager in one place showing off happens or fights and without any powers Peter would lose these fights and Tony didn’t like the sound of that.

However, he also knows it’s not like the Avengers wouldn’t be able to break up anything that was happening.

“Fine.” Steve gives Tony a warm smile, which causes Tony to look away. “But they stay in your suite and they’re under your protection until you think they’re stable enough to go to school too.” Tony tries to at least get back onto a level playing field by putting out these rules. “But they have a month to prove they’re learning, or they’re going to S.H.I.E.L.D or Xavier’s or something.”

“Thank you.” Steve said candidly and hell if it wasn’t obvious to Tony how much he meant that.

“You know. If you wanted to adopt this bad we could have talked to people you know.” Tony says after too many seconds of a pleased Steve being in his room, Tony just shrugs.

“I don’t usually end up doing things the easy way.” Steve cants his head in an almost distracting fashion.

“Believe me we know. Now. Shoo. Go out and buy some a sleeping bag with princesses and race cars so they have somewhere to sleep.” Tony makes shooing motions with his good hand and his cast free fingers, Steve smirks at the words and with a nod turns to leave the room.

“And put down paper!” Tony calls after him, as if the twins were new puppies.

Tony had made a strong effort to keep Peter away from the twins for the rest of the afternoon by trapping himself and his son in the workshop, by taking Peter into doing some soldering he needed to be done. It was hard to get Peter to focus at first but he soon got caught up in the work and they were being called up for dinner which by then Tony had also gotten so caught up in what they were doing he forgot about the twins.

That is until he was facing both them with Steve behind them. Well wasn’t this some awkward meeting the other’s kids moment from some poorly written rom-com about blending families. Tony just looked at Steve.

“Tony, Peter. This is Wanda and Pietro Maximoff. Wanda, Pietro. This is Tony Stark and Peter Stark, Tony’s son.” The twins looked between each other then looked at Peter.

“We did not know you had a son.” Wanda said looking uneasy about something, which Tony assumed had to do with her confidence in English.

“We don’t make a big deal about me.” Peter gives a shy dismissive shrug, Tony being reminded that as confident and smart as the boy was new people always had him go all shy. Maybe he didn’t have to be so worried after all.

“It keeps him safe if he isn’t in the spotlight.” Tony says. “Uh, Welcome to America. Hope you like
group meals.” Tony follows up with a nod then gestures to the kitchen, which with polite smiles all around the five of them went into the kitchen where everyone else was already starting to get into the food, the twins sitting next to Steve while Natasha had Peter sit next to her, she gave Tony a little look. Tony could only feel at ease the the most dangerous women he knew had a soft spot for his boy and was making a show of letting Tony know that she’s watching out for his boy too.

Not that any other them would let any harm come to Peter, but not counting himself she was the one who’s been around him the longest and that much exposure to Peter makes you more than a little dangerously protective of him.

Luckily, dinner went smooth. All three teenagers quiet at first but slowly coming out of their shells as the night went on, which it was hard not to with Clint, Steve and Thor sharing silly war stories and jokes to get the twins feeling comfortable, which obviously worked.

Maybe this wasn’t going to be as bad as Tony thought. When it got late it was only Tony, Steve and Thor left awake, they all sat out on the balcony chairs with drinks in their hands enjoying the night.

“So.” Tony lead with. “Do I have an automatic pass to do some scans on that sceptre, or am I going to have to beg?”

“I think the sceptre has been gone from Asgard long enough, Tony.” Thor says after a long draw from his bottle, Tony huffs.

“C’mon big guy. What’s one or two more days of them waiting for it? It’s got some juicy secrets in there I just know it.”

“Oh, it indeed does. None of which you are ready to learn about just yet I feel. Perhaps another time.” Tony takes his own long drink and sags in the chair.

“You know, you’re a real pooper of parties.”

“This is not something I’m often told. Perhaps you just don’t throw the right parties.” Thor smirks.

“That sounds an awful lot like a challenge.”

“If you want the gauntlet to be thrown.” Is Thor’s Dismissive reply as he smirks at Steve who’s on the other side of Tony.

“Oh, it will be.” An air of finality comes with Tony’s words. After all, it has been a long time since Tony threw a party and now they have the sceptre what better time is there than now to throw one. “You will revel!”

“Yes. Revels.” Thor tips his glass to Tony then drains it. “But until then, I shall sleep. I will take the sceptre home with me tomorrow. I don’t believe I shall be there for no more than a day, to ensure it’s safe keeping.” Thor stands, nods to both Steve and Tony, and gives Tony’s shoulder a squeeze before going inside.

Steve sat and drank in a companionable silence for a few minutes.

“Tony.” Steve starts.

“Hmm?” Tony says around his drink as he looks at Steve.

“I want you to know something.” He looked a little too serious for Tony’s liking.
“You’re pregnant? See it always happens right after you adopt. Congratulations” He drinks again hoping the levity breaks the seriousness of the moment, Steve makes an amused noise but doesn’t take the bait.

“You’ve been through a lot this last month and I know you have a habit of taking things in stride and keeping it to yourself and I just want to say. Thank you, for not doing that this time.” Tony looks at his arm and then offers an awkward shrug.

“Hard to act like nothing’s wrong when your arm is in a full cast with pink wrapping around it.” He says dismissively. Then Steve takes the glass out of his hand putting it down to take his hand, Tony looks at their hands together a little stupidly before looking up at Steve.

“I mean it. You’ve really opened up recently and it’s helped me feel like I belong.”

“Wait only now you feel like you belong?”

“It’s hard when you’ve been frozen in ice for decades and then thaw out just in time to save the world then find out your business is evil and have to save the world from them. It’s hard to find your footing. But this, here. You’ve made us feel like a family. I. We all need that.” He gives Tony’s hand a squeeze.

“It’s nothing. Just happy to do my bit for the community.” Steve just smiles at him rubbing a thumb over the back of his hand then stands himself, taking both his and Tony’s glasses as well as Thor’s abandoned glass.

“Don’t stay outside too long. The twins are all set up in my room so. I’ll be in the guest room if that’s okay?” Tony just nods his head as he catches up with what just transpired. Then Steve goes inside.

“J?”

“Sir?” a Small Speaker in the nearby table replies.

“That. I want to say that was kind of unexpected.”

“Would you, sir?”

“Yes.” Tony says very slowly after a minute.

“As convincing as ever, sir.” There is no follow-up comment from the A.I as Tony just stares at the skyline for a moment. Tony isn’t an oblivious man he knows an overture when he feels one, and it’s not like he has at all tried to not hit on the Captain. But as much as Steve humoured him and occasionally flirted back did he ever think that Steve would actually go for it. After all, the 1930’s and 40’s weren’t exactly the best time to admit to enjoying anything other than vanilla off-brand heterosexual sex. But still, Tony isn’t the only person in the world not not worry about what other people think about what you do in the private of … Well, very little Tony did was really ever private. That wasn’t the point. So just maybe.

After half an hour of solitary skyline contemplation, Tony finally went inside. He stopped outside the guest room on the way to his own and stared at the door before looking at his cast and shaking his head.

“Damn arm.” He mutters before going to his own bed, taking out more pillows than he needs and burying himself in them to sleep off his thoughts.
AH HA! Finally! The tag I've been waiting to put into this damn story has finally arrived. I don't know how many of you are actually at all surprised this was heading down a Stony path. (Am I not so funny?) But this was always where it was going.

I hope you all love it! And I'm sure everyone is thrilled I managed to get a chapter out so quick instead of having to wait like six months.

And I always want to give a big thanks to everyone who is loving this story and sticking with my terrible update times. You guys are the reason this fic keeps on keeping on you're all awesome!!!!
Cuckoo Eggs

Chapter Summary

Peter makes friends with the twins, which doesn't make Tony comfortable at all. Tony discusses relationship dynamics and what is and isn't his problem.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve and Tony enter the Avengers mission room the morning after bringing the twins home, Maria Hill is already sitting at the table, two manila folders in front of her. Steve gives a nod of his head as he sits down and Hill opens up both files. “Wanda and Pietro Maximoff. Twins, eighteen. Orphaned at ten when a shell collapsed their apartment building in Novi Grad. Sokovia's had a rough history. It's nowhere special but it's on the way to everywhere special.” She opens with as she pours through the files, while obviously being well acquainted with both as she didn't seem to be reading so much as picking up talking points as she scanned the pages. “Reports from what we could salvage from Strucker's computers mention the project they were a part of that of the 20 who volunteered.”

“Volunteered.” Tony cut in repeating the word before looking at Steve. “They volunteered.” This didn’t at all sound promising to Tony and his tone made that apparent to the other two in the room, Steve opens his mouth to say something but is cut off by Hill.

“They were under the impression they would be trained to better fight those who took over the country, what they didn't know was it was Hydra not only pulling the strings but training them. Before this, they were just a pair of kids who wanted to see change in their country.”

“You said there were twenty volunteers. We didn’t find anyone else in the castle like them.” Steve said with a questioning tone to Hill, who gave him a nod.

“The Maximoff’s were the only two to survive the treatments.” Despite himself, Tony couldn’t help but feel interested in their story now.

“So, then what are they packing? They can’t be all that helpless if they were the only two strong enough to survive.” He asks, after all. While Tony was painfully human, his trials of the Iron Man armour had been physically painful he was also very aware that of the four instances of creating super soldiers, each technique only managed to create one force of good and one force of destruction. Nothing Steve and Bruce had gone through due to these tests had been a walk in the park either.

“Her thing is neuro-electric interfacing, telekinesis, mental manipulation, while he's got increased metabolism and improved thermal homoeostasis.” Tony leant back in his chair to take in that information, absently he notices that the words seem to go over Steve’s head as he gives Hill a blank look. “He's fast and she's weird.”

“How long were they with Strucker?”

“They’ve been experimented on for the last four years.” Hill says with a sour look, clearly not approving of anyone being tested on for that long. Steve seemed to find it similarly distasteful. With
them being the same age as Peter he couldn’t help but think of him being swept up into a program where he was given no choice and forced to develop abilities that he would then be experimented on to develop those skills. As vivid as his mind was, it was choosing to draw a blank on what that would feel like. He stood up and straightens his shirt with his good arm.

“Tony?”

“J.A.R.I.V.S alter the grocery list to accommodate another person with a high metabolism.” He looks at Steve. “4 years means you’re going to have a lot of work to do. So I need to work with the empty half of your floor. Think they’d be okay with a two room suite?” Steve gives Tony a very big smile.

“Thank you, Tony.” Tony just waves him off.

“I’m just arranging for an apartment suite to be built. You’re the one dealing with their sponsorship forms.” Tony “Which Shouldn’t you have by now, Hill?”

“I do. But I was planning on holding off on them until everyone was sure they’re staying. Publicity wise it wouldn’t look good if they destroyed some of New York when it could easily be traced back to us. Right now? No one knows they exist let alone exist in the city.”

“Do it.” Tony says then leaves the room.

Peter had not exactly been concentrating at school today. Not only did the tower have two new people in it, but they were his age so it was kind of exciting. Sure they clearly had it rougher than him not only losing both parents and not having anyone to look after them after as well as being kidnapped to be experimented on in order for them to get their powers. But from a cold hard fact perspective, they were up and coming teen heroes like him. How couldn’t that be exciting?

And while at dinner the night before they were part of conversations, they were for the most part pretty quiet and kept to themselves, which hey, they were in a completely new situation that was to be expected right? But Peter was determined to try and make friends, even if his Dad seemed to be incredibly suspicious of them where Peter was concerned. But then, his dad thought he was just a normal everyday kid.

The eagerness Peter had to get back and talk to the Maximoff twins was so strong it was all he could do to not use his webbing to get home faster, so he skateboarded home as usual not even bothering to switch out books at his locker.

Getting home he found them on the Gym level with Sam, Steve, and Clint. Peter put down his things and sat on a bench against the wall to watch. While his focus was on Steve testing Wanda’s abilities to manipulate objects he felt a sudden and strong surge of air with Pietro suddenly sitting next to him, an ankle resting on the opposite knee and his hands behind his head.

“Enjoy classes today?” He asks, his accent thicker than his sisters as he gives Peter a cocky grin.

“Wow. I mean.” Peter looks around the room and realises he never even noticed where Pietro had been before he was suddenly next to Peter. “Can you teleport or?”

“Don’t worry old man I’ll beat your time trial.” He winks at Peter who tries not to look like he found that funny. He looks over at Clint who’s clearly muttering to himself and then points to a spot in front of him.

“Show off to me, not him.” With an overly dramatic eye roll, Pietro looks at Peter.

“Work, work, work.” He smirks before speeding off towards Clint, crossing the distance in milliseconds. Peter couldn’t help but be impressed. After twenty minutes, Steve called an end to their testing. While Pietro didn’t look too worse for wear Wanda did look a little tired, and they were talking quietly off to one side as Steve approaches Peter.

“Don’t see you here often.” Steve smiles pleasantly enough. Though there was a knowing look in his eyes.

“Well, I can’t spend all my time with my nose in a book.” Peter shrugs failing to come off as casual.

“Just remember, they’ve had a hard time if they want to be left alone…” Steve patted Peter on the shoulder before leaving. Peter stays sitting on the bench watching the twins, Wanda looks at him saying something he can’t hear from where he sits and then he see’s Pietro look over at him too.

He’s not sure if waiting around to talk to them was such a good idea now, as their looking at him so obviously makes him feel bad for just openly staring at them before. They start to have a heated discussion with each other that makes Peter stand up, maybe right now wasn’t a good time to make friends after all and he starts to leave.

“Wait!” Wanda calls out and he looks over his shoulder seeing them both approach him slowly.

“Uh, hey. So how’s your first day here? Hope Cap isn’t pushing you too hard or anything.” He babbles.

“You’re, really Stark’s son?” Wanda asks looking hesitant, neither of them looking like they’re going to answer his questions.

“Yeah, I mean it’s involved. My mom and her husband died when I was seven, it was awkward at first. But everything kinda is when you’re seven, I guess.” They share another glance before looking at him.

“So you’ve had to live with him for ten years?” Pietro asks Peter can’t help but feel like the Sokovian put a little too much emphasis on the word ‘him’ but doesn’t comment.

“Almost twelve now.” Peter confirms, saying it out loud feels weird twelve years doesn’t sound that long a time but living it felt like it was forever ago.

“What was it like? Living with a man like Tony Stark?” Wanda presses on, Peter can’t help but feel a little crestfallen that they’re so eager to ask about his dad. He shrugs.

“Well I mean, normal enough before the whole Iron Man thing I guess? He was busy with the company or parties so I didn’t see him much but then be became Iron Man and I saw him more?”

“We are making you uncomfortable.” Wanda observes.

“Famous parents.” Peter shrugs with a bashful smile. “Everyone wants to know about them and not you. Still hard to get used to really.”

“We didn’t mean to do that. In Sokovia we hear and know many things about Stark.” Wanda starts,
Pietro, shifting his weight sharply catching Peter’s eye wondering why he looked suddenly tense. “But his having a son was never one of them. We are, surprised. Especially when you seem so normal.”

“We thought all American rich kids would be arrogant, rude and loud.” Pietro adds forcing a smirk on his face. It makes Peter grin.

“Oh a lot of them are, I used to go to school with them in L.A. Dad raised me to be independent, kind of like a legacy thing, he built on Granddad’s fortune, and if I want to work at Stark Industries he expects me to do the same. Can’t really do that if I waste my trust fund on parties.”

“And make new weapons?” Wanda asks slowly.

“We stopped making weapons years ago. Dad’s put Stark Industries on the saving and improving lives path, you know free energy, more work on intellicrops, better medical equipment.” It felt weird defending both his dad, himself and the company to the Maximoff’s. “Why do you think we would make weapons again?” Pietro throws an arm around his sister and jostles her.

“There is a lot of in-fighting in Sokovia. We have many people making lives hard for everyone else. My sister is just a little. Preoccupied.” He looks at her pointedly.

“I’m. Still adjusting. Forgive me.”

“Woah, hey. No, it’s fine. I mean I get it it’s going to be weird coming from a different country to not just America but Stark Tower in a matter of days, I get it. Have you had Ben and Jerry’s yet? It’s an ice cream we have a few flavours in the fridge, wanna try?” Peter offers, there’s no way he could imagine what it would be like to live in a war-torn area, at least going from Queens to Malibu then to Midtown the only real difference for him was the change in how much everything cost and how tall the surrounding buildings were. He didn’t also have to get used to a completely different culture. With curious nods of agreement, Peter took them to the kitchen to try out the many strange flavours of ice cream they had.

Any tension that had been there the soon took a back seat to trying out various ice cream flavours and the three of them were soon smiles and pleasantness, Peter couldn’t help but feel comfortable like this, other than Gwen he really hadn’t gotten around to making friends in school even though he was on speaking terms with his class, and even a few of the regulars at the skate park they still weren’t people he’d be texting to get their thoughts on the newest shows or album releases. But right now, surrounded by several pints of different ice creams and talking about what they thought of it was really… Right.

As Clint comes in the three of them look up and then go back to their ice cream.

“Looks like you’re finally getting initiated.” He says eyeing the pints as he comes over, stealing Peter’s Spoon to try the Choc Jerry Garcia Peter had just scooped and sticks it in his mouth.

“Hey!” Peter whines to Clint as the other two look surprised at the boldness of ice cream theft. “That was my spoon you know.” Clint just shrugs before pulling the spoon out of his mouth.

“You know where the rest live.” Is all he says as he picks up Tubby Hubby and starts to dig in.

“You are gross. You know that right?” Peter says as he gets up to get a fresh spoon.

“I was circus folk, we aren’t known for our hygiene. Besides, got any plagues I should know about?” He asks.
“No.” Peter pouts at him as he slumps back into his chair to get more ice cream from himself, then looks at the twins. “It’s only a matter of time, you know. Soon he’ll be stealing your food too.” Wanda looks amused and Pietro simply tilts the chair back looking smug.

“First, I think he would have to catch me.” Clint raises an eye at him then sharply kicks the table causing it to shudder just enough for Pietro to lose his balance and hit the floor hard, but within a split second, he’s off the ground with a near identical pout to Peter, whereas Wanda has her hand to her mouth trying very hard not to laugh.

“Turns out you’re not so fast on your wooden feet, huh?” Clint smirks before heading to the fridge and starts digging around for sandwich fixings.

“That’s the only time you’ll catch me out, old man.” Pietro mutters, getting nothing more than an ‘mhmhm’ from the crisper. After a moment Clint starts working on a Sandwich and the teens go back to their ice cream, then Peter has a thought.

“Clint?”

“Yup?” He replies as he smears mustard on the bread.

“Are Pietro and Wanda allowed to leave the tower?” Clint looks up with three pairs of eyes on him.

“Uh.” He licks some mustard off his thumb. “Not sure. I’m guessing at the moment they’d need an escort. Not knowing the city or anything.” He shrugs then starts putting on ham. “I’m not the one to ask, you’d need to ask the man with a plan.” Peter nods, with Steve being the team's leader it did make sense after all. He turns to the twins with a smile.

“I’m sure Steve will be okay with it.”

Steve was very much unsure if he was okay with it or not. He had found Steve in the workshop, testing the magnetic strapping Tony had already prototyped for the shield, specifically Tony had his arm on a work bench fiddling with something while Steve was bent at an obviously awkward angle but every time he moved had Tony yanking his arm back into place.

“You won’t have to worry about them I promise, I’ll be with them.”

“I don’t know Peter. Remember, they have powers and you don’t.”

“I…” Peter pauses knowing better than to spill his secret but still had to offer pretence. “I can take apart a camera and put it back together again in two hours.”

“Why are you taking your camera apart?” Tony looks up from his fiddling.

“The winder was loose, I had to repair it.” This seems to be enough for Tony as he goes back to twisting Steve’s arm in non-human directions.

“Midtown alone is bigger than Novi Grad, Peter. It could be a bit much for them.” Steve answers through gritted teeth while giving Tony a sideways glance.

“Steve they barely have any clothes. You have more than them.” Peter debates.

“You go with them.” Tony says distractedly. “Right, try picking it up now.” He finishes as he backs away from the arm, Steve’s first reaction is to rub his arm protectively.
“Me?” He asks as he goes over to the shield and moves into a gesture Peter is sure his dad told him to use, as it looks similar to some of Tony’s armour summoning poses. The shield jumps up and drops. Then a screwdriver attaches itself for his forearm.

“It’s called testing for a reason. Give me the whole thing.” Tony says with a sigh, snatching the arm brace away when it’s offered. Peter blinks at this, as Tony tended to only take things Peter offered him only. Even Pepper had to force him to take things from her. “You’re the one with the adoption plans here.” Tony supplied as he went back to fiddling with the brace.

“Sponsorship.” Steve says with exasperation, giving Peter the impression they’ve had this discussion a lot in the last two days.

“Either way, they’re technically dependent on you. So if they need clothes and learn the city, you should take them around.” Steve looks like he can see the logic is sound but is suspicious of Tony.

“For someone who doesn’t trust them, you’re being awfully trusting of them out of the tower.”

“I’m betting on Peter into talking you into more clothes. You wear that shirt every week.” Everyone looks at the white shirt underneath an open plaid button down.

“I have more than one white shirt, Tony.” Tony just looks at Peter.

“Sort him out. Suit too.”

“I have formal wear.”

“Once suit and a dress uniform, isn’t enough formal wear.” He pauses. “Take Natasha too.”

“Tony.” Steve starts looking thoroughly harassed and cornered in this situation.

“You wanted me to be nice to them, I’m sending you, Natasha, and Peter out with them to shop with my card. Sounds like a nice day out to me.” Steve just pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Do you need me anymore?”

“Right now, you’re surplus.”

“How… Sweet.” Steve gives him a dry look, then shrugs. “Guess I’m finding out what Nat’s schedule for then next few days are.”

Peter couldn’t hide the excitement on his face that he was going to be able to hang out with kids his age, with chaperones, but really it’s not like Natasha and Steve were going to put a damper on anything.

It was the end of the week before they were able to go shopping, this would have bothered Peter, but realistically his being at school is what pushed it all back. Which in the meantime, Peter had been showing them his video games most of them they admitted to not knowing owning to the fact the last for years they were experiments. Their imprisonment, however, hadn’t at all meant they weren’t able to pick up the games quick enough and start having fun both with Peter and on their own in story campaigns. Which without school was mostly what was filling up their time in between training sessions with the Avengers.

Taking one of the many Audis the company would lavish on Tony to promote the company by just
driving it, while parking was going to be awful those accustomed to New York knew it would be
easier than lugging all the bags around considering they were buying two complete wardrobes and
adding to someone else’s look. Luckily most places had valet and everything was on his Dad’s dime.

Natasha had made the call not to bother with any of the trendiest places for the twins, not because
she felt they didn’t deserve it but more so they don’t get overwhelmed by staff all too eager to butter
you up so you buy their clothes. Instead, they went to regular stores, like forever twenty-one, Uni
Qlo, Deisel, and H&M. Which seemed to be a good idea because both Wanda and Pietro felt
comfortable enough to search for their own things and look around without any trepidation

Natasha had loaded Peter up with an armful of clothes for Wanda.

“Here, try these on.”

“Try them on?” Wanda asks eyeing Peter a little suspiciously.

“At the fitting rooms over there.” Natasha gestures to a sign with an arrow pointing the way they
needed to go. “You haven’t used a fitting room before?”

“Not for shopping, I would just buy what I knew fit.” Wanda replied simply.

“Well things can be too big or too small here, so it’s always good to try things on. Peter, lead the
way. I’m going to see if Pietro has confused Steve yet.” And with that, she wandered off leaving
Peter and Wanda standing there awkwardly.

“Uh, it’s this way.” He points with a finger under the clothes, Wanda smiles graciously and gestures
for him to take the lead. After dodging clothing racks and displays as well as excitable customers
Peter managed to get to the fitting rooms the woman manning the counter let them through and Peter
ducked inside an empty booth to hang the clothes inside before pushing the door open again to let
Wanda have privacy.

“I, uh. Will be right out here if you need me to find a different size, or, to call Natasha for help.” He
said scratching the back of his neck with a shy grin. Wand smiles at him then looked into the room
then goes instantly still staring into the room. Blinking Peter looks at her, then leans to one side to
look inside the room, it looks like how it did when he was in there, then he looked back at Wanda.

“Something wrong?” They words caused Wanda to give a small start, before turning to Peter,
rubbing her other arm as it lay limp beside her.

“No. It’s… Fine. I was maybe expecting bigger. That’s all.” She answers, Peter can hear her take a
depth breath before cautiously going inside then closed the door. Peter couldn’t help but feel like
something about the fitting room made her uncomfortable, or maybe it was him standing outside.

“I’ll… Just be over with the lady at the desk. Okay?” He says loudly for her to hear.

“No. Stay there.” She says tensely.

“Or. I could stay here, sure.” He nods, realising no one could see him do it then he just leans against
the wall and waits. He can’t help but still feel awkward standing around waiting for a girl he barely
knows as she tries on clothes, it almost feels like a scene from a movie where he manages to fall into
the fitting room while she’s naked and screams all played off as wacky hi-jinks. He never could find
those funny. “How’s it going in there?” He asks loudly after fifteen minutes, wondering if he should
just get Natasha to come and deal with this, she doesn’t answer. “Wanda?”
“It is going well.” She says as the door opens she’s back in the clothes the left the tower in. “How many can I have?” Everything was hung on the wall as Peter had hung it, it was almost like she never tried anything on at all, and he’d believe that if he didn’t hear the shifting about and fabric rustling.

“Well, all the ones you want?” Peter answers. “I mean. If you’re going to be living here you need a regular amount of clothes.”

“What is regular for Americans?” She asks tilting her head at him.

“Uh. Uh, depends on the American? I mean I have 4 pairs of jeans, 14 tee shirts and a suit. I know girls usually have more clothes.”

“So. Not that different from Sokovia, then.” She gives him a little smile before cautiously going back in and touching a black dress that was at the front of the hanging clothes. “But how many will Tony Stark pay for?”

“All of it.”

“But he doesn’t like us. Why would he pay for us when he didn’t even want us here?”

“Dad doesn’t like being unsure. It took him a while to even accept the Avengers, at least until a year after the Chitarui invasion.” Peter explains. “He’s not a bad guy, I mean he donates so much to charity every year. He’s just… Well. A weirdo.” Wanda like she doesn’t believe Peter.

“He built so many weapons too.” She says, suddenly moving out of the fitting rooms like it threatened her. “Maybe he donates to all that money to save his soul.”

“That’s. He doesn’t do that anymore, no one outside of the Avengers benefits from anything that could be counted as a stark weapon.” Wanda still looks unconvinced. “Wanda? My da-, Tony Stark. He’s arrogant, hard to follow and only does what he wants to do. But he never built anything for destruction. He thought he was keeping the world safe.”

“He thought wrong.” She scowls, Natasha returns before Peter can say anymore. He can tell Natasha see’s the tension but she smiles anyway.

“Didn’t like what was there?” She asks as she brushes some hair away from her own face, Wanda after a pause smiles at Natasha politely.

“I did. I was asking Peter how many outfits Mr Stark was willing to pay for.”

“Oh, he’ll pay for it. If you want it it’s paid for. Natasha took the clothes and got Wanda to tell her which ones she didn’t watch, as Peter just stood back and watched, digesting the conversation he had with Wanda moments ago. Maybe dad wasn’t being paranoid after all about them being dangerous if Wanda seems so obsessed about Stark Weapons. She smiled at Peter when they were ready to find Steve and Pietro, and he couldn’t help but smile back. Maybe he’s over thinking things.

Steve was in the Kitchen before Tony was, reading a newspaper. Tony wanted to be appalled but at the same time he knew Steve was a hobby artist and enjoyed using charcoal, so Tony made the decision he just liked having dirty fingers. As an engineer, he could respect a person who liked getting dirty. Surprisingly more in the non-sexual sense than anything else.
“Do you have any business ties with Pym Technologies?” Steve asks before drinking a coffee behind the paper as Tony eyeballs the cereal labels.

“Pym didn’t like Dad much.” Tony said with a shrug. “Darren Cross became the CEO a while back. He’s tried to get in bed with Stark Industries a few times, but nothing he had was interesting enough or too military for my agenda anymore.” He finishes as he takes the box of Fruit Loops out of the cupboard and starts making breakfast. “Why the sudden interest in PymTech?”

Steve lifts the paper for Tony to see the site where Pym Technologies should stand but there’s nothing but a tank, and a crowd of people. Underneath is a grainy photo of someone in a suit and a picture of Hank Pym and his daughter on the scene.

“Apparently something went very wrong last night. It’s also talking about an Antman and Yellowjacket?”

“Yellowjacket…” Tony repeats like it’s familiar for some reason. “J.A.R.V.I.S?”

“It is a type of wasp, sir.” Came the disembodied reply. Tony just kept a blank face and waited. “No doubt where the Yellowjacket Program got its name as the technology utilised a suit to grown and shrink at will. It was a weapons project that you were openly rude when Mr Cross invited you.”

“Sounds about right.” Steve said with a smirk and only got an eye roll from Tony in response. “They’re saying Antman saved the day. Think we should look for him?”

“We aren’t the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Superheroes, you know. Do you think I’m made out of apartment buildings?” Tony says sarcastically as he sits down to eat his cereal, stealing Steve’s paper to read the article.

“I think that there’s more than enough space in the tower yes. I just want to talk to him. What?” He asks as Tony gives him a look.

“You are Captain America, you know that right?”

“It’s been mentioned once or twice.” Steve replies with a dry smirk.

“So you shouldn’t be talking to anyone.”

“What? Why?”

“You could sell sand to a camel.”

“I could not.” Steve sighs exasperatedly as Clint and Sam enter Sam promptly snatching the Fruit Loops box that Tony left on the counter before Clint could grab it.

“What couldn’t you do?” Sam asks as he pours himself a bowl ignoring Clint's scowl as he reaches for Count Chocula instead.

“I’m telling Steve he can’t talk to Antman because as Captain America he could talk him into doing anything he wanted.” Tony explains, Clint and Sam exchange a look.

“A good guy who saved the day last night, he can make himself really small.” Sam blink’s at Steve’s explanation.

“Red suit? Silver helmet? Packs a hell of a punch?”
“Yeah?” Steve looks at him curiously. “How’d you know that?”

“Internet.” Sam says quickly. “Where’s he at? Clint and I’ll do it.”

“Why am I being volunteered?” Sam gives Clint a very obvious look to tell him to shut up. The room goes quiet for a moment.

“If you two really want too?” Steve says cautiously before sharing a look with Tony. Sam nods and nudges Clint into moving who protests while clutching to his chocolate cereal box.

“Great, we’ll get right on it. J.A.R.V.I.S. Can you tell us what we need to know?” And with J.A.R.V.I.S’ voice trailing them as they left Steve and Tony were left alone.

“What was…” Steve started to ask Tony shakes his head.

“He’s your sidekick. It’s your problem to figure out.” Steve just sighs at him and steals the newspaper back.

A week later not only did ex-thief Scott Lang seem to mingle well with the team, even if he had trouble getting sentences straight around Steve, he did, however, declined to live with them at the tower, if only because he wanted to be closer to his little girl, and no one could fault him on that. But he was willing to help out in any way he could. Tony also noticing that the twins were also integrating well enough into the team, Clint seemed to warm to them and they warmed up right back. They also seemed to give Tony a wide birth, neither seeking him out of speaking directly to him unless they need to, which while seemingly worried Steve didn’t bother Tony one bit because he wasn’t exactly jonesing to be friended on Facebook by them either. It’s not like he wanted to be suspicious of two teenagers from a poor war-torn country, however, something just didn’t feel right all the same.

They also spent a lot of free time with Peter, this did bother Tony more than anything else but he knew that telling him to avoid them would be the best way to get him to spend more time with them, and really they mostly stuck to being in the tower so it wasn’t like they weren’t always monitored when they were around Peter. It was late at night as he lay on his back with his eyes closed. For a moment he thought he heard his door opened it, but he couldn’t hear any movement so as he drifted off to sleep he assumed he was just imagining it.

He hears a Chitauri cry out behind him as he stands in the darkness, the cry runs a chill through his bones he’s only in a black shirt and pyjama pants nothing else not even his cast and something inside him tells him he won’t be able to call for an armour. He spins on his heel and that’s when he feels like all the blood left him. There’s rubble everywhere, right above the largest hill of rubble is the wormhole, he could see New York on the other side. As bad as that was it was the mound he couldn’t draw his eyes from the team, Clint seemed to warm to them and they warmed up right back. They also seemed to give Tony a wide birth, neither seeking him out of speaking directly to him unless they need to, which while seemingly worried Steve didn’t bother Tony one bit because he wasn’t exactly jonesing to be friended on Facebook by them either. It’s not like he wanted to be suspicious of two teenagers from a poor war-torn country, however, something just didn’t feel right all the same.

Then Tony started running towards them all his feel slapping down on the black marble beneath him, reddening his feet with what he knows deep inside is the blood of innocent people he drops to his knees at the bottom of the rubble, pulling at the two bodies there. Peter was white and crumpled as Tony pulled him into his lap unable to speak. Clutching Peter to his chest he uses his free hand to
check Steve for a pulse, trying not to look at the shield laying in two decimated pieces next to him.

Suddenly Steve grabs Tony’s arm, Tony wants to pull back from the shock of the action but Steve is too strong.

“You said you’d be there for us.” As he spoke blood trailed from his mouth. “Tony.” He says weakly. Tony jerks away from Steve and drops Peter as he stands, looking horrified. Steve reaches for him.

“Tony?” Tony just shakes his head backing up, then feels something grab his arm again. “Tony.”

Tony wakes with a start trying to flail his arms to get whatever had him to let go, which only serves to wrench his arm in it’s cast, he looks around wildly and see’s Steve looking over him looking concerned. He relaxes onto the bed letting out a loud sigh.

“It’s okay, you’re at home in bed. It’s a Wednesday at 11 am.”

“Yeah, I know I know. I just. Wait, 11am?” Steve nods.

“You’ve never been this late a sleeper, so I was just making sure you were okay and I heard you…” He looks like he wants to finish the sentence but isn’t exactly sure how to phrase it. Tony just sighs and swings his legs over the side of the bed and gets up, swaying a little prompting Steve to take his shoulder to steady him.

“It’s nothing. Just a bad dream.” He walks past Steve and goes to his walk-in robe to pick out clothes for the day. Resigning himself to a polo shirt because none of his work shirts will accommodate all the casts engineering. He strokes one a cream coloured sleeve. “We’ll be together soon.” He says.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Steve says, leaning against the entrance of the walk-in robe.

“Fine. Everyone talks to their suits.”

“You know what I mean.”

“And it’s nothing. I’ve had worse, I’ve summoned an armour to protect me from Pepper. And.” Tony Gestures to the fact the room only contains them. “Obviously it wasn’t that bad.” Steve doesn’t look too convinced.

“You looked really scared, Tony.”

“Yeah. Nightmares do that.” He says dismissively, as he goes looking for a pair of trousers. He has work in the office today and wants to look at least semi-respectable, even if it has to be with a polo shirt. It’s a relief really even if it’s just paperwork and a few meetings it’s at least something to distract him from how unnerving the dream was “Can you bag me?”


“For a shower.” Tony explains as if that hint would actually make things clearer for Steve. It clearly didn’t. “I need you to tape a bag to my arm so I can have a shower without getting the cast wet.”

“Oh! Oh. You sure?” He asks looking a little hesitant. Tony just rolls his eyes and walks past him.

“C’mon Star Spangled Spaniel.” He says as he heads to his ensuite, with Steve following behind him. Tony hangs his clothing picks on a hook then pulls his shirt off and down the arm. “Right, take
the pole out so I can get this off, and hold my arm up here.” He instructs with gestures. Looking a little awkward Steve does as he’s told. Tony wants to feel a little bad for being a tease especially now he knows that Steve has some feelings for him, but at the same time, it’s hard to have a shower without getting this done. With the aluminium pole in one of Steve’s hand and the other hand holding up the cast Tony pulls the shirt off the rest of the way.

“Put that back in, then grab the bag over there.” Steve continues to do what he’s told then grabs the large garbage bag that’s been sitting on the counter, the tape that had been sitting on it drops to the ground and rolls to the other side of the room. They both watch it roll until it stops.

“You need that too, don’t you?” Steve asks.

“Yup.” With a nod to himself, Steve crosses the room to get it then comes back, Tony can’t miss the cheeky glance he takes at Tony. “Heel, soldier.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him and Steve just gives him a shy boy next door grin.

“Can’t blame a guy.” He tries.

“Sure you can. You, Rogers, have terrible timing. Now put this around my arm and tape it past the shoulder. I want it water tight up the top and tucked in at the bottom.

“How is it horrible?” He asks as he puts the bag in place and rips the tape with his teeth.

“You’re working on the reason for that terrible timing.” Steve looks at the cast for a minute then shrugs as he focuses on taping.

“It’s not that bad.”

“Because that wouldn’t be awkward at all. Besides someone has been encouraging me to take it easy and get plenty of bed rest.”

“I’m not exactly a sex on the first date kinda guy, Tony.” He answers once he finishes the taping.

“I can’t use chopsticks and people have to cut my meat into manageable pieces. That also cuts out dating right now.” Tony is about to say more but gets cut off by the medical tape that gets put over his lips in an x pattern. He gives Steve a look who leans in and gives the tape a kiss before pulling back to look at Tony.

“How about. We just keep being us and not worry about it until later? Go have your shower, Tony.” He pats Tony’s shoulder as he leaves the bathroom. Tony blinks then stares at himself in the mirror, the tape looking particularly stupid pulling on his face weirdly. He pulls it off and tosses it into the trash can beside the counter.

“Such a pain in the ass.” Tony says to himself as he goes to have his shower.

Within the hour Tony was strolling into Stark Industries R&D management floor heading to his office smiling to his secretary not giving her time to say anything to him as he opened the door to his office and found Hank Pym sitting at his desk.

“Ms Brown?”

“Yes Mr Stark?” The secretary asks from just behind Tony a clipboard in her arms.

“Has Pym Technologies bought my office?” He asks ignoring, Hank staring pointedly at him as he talks to the woman.
“No sir. He said it was important I tried to get him to make an appointment, but…” He raised a hand to quiet her she did so, looking concerned.

“It’s fine. Good afternoon Ms Brown.”

“Mr Stark.” She nods to him and goes back to her desk as Tony walks properly into his office and to the small bar inside.

“You can’t have them Stark.” Pym states clearly Tony just continues to make both himself and Pym a drink then brings it over placing one of the tumblers in front of the older man.

“Can’t have who?” Tony deliberately sounds oblivious, even though he’s a little sure why he had sais ‘them’ as opposed to ‘him’.

“You know who I’m talking about. I don’t want either of them mixed up in your little crusade.” He ignores the offered drink and turns the chair to watch Tony as he goes to look out the window.

“Good to know keeping the world safe isn’t important to you, Hank.” He uses his first name deliberately, if he’s going to try and make a power play by just waltzing into his office then Tony’s hardly going to back down with polite uses of last names. “Sorry to say, that I had nothing to do with it.”

“The hell you didn’t. You’re as bad as your father meddling in things you don’t understand.” The older man stands up looking irritated. Tony just drinks slowly then turns to face him.

“Look, you didn’t like Howard Stark. We have that sorta in common. It was Steve’s call, I don’t run the Avengers, I just fund them. Any problems should be sent in writing to Captain America. He loves fan mail, really he actually writes back and everything.”

“This isn’t a game, Stark. People's lives are at stake and you’re just flitting around in that cute little suit of yours acting like you and your posse can save the world.” Tony raises an eyebrow at him while mouthing the word ‘cute’ before shaking his head.

“I don’t remember you showing up to help put the Chitarui or Loki down. I also don’t remember seeing any donations for the rebuilding effort in your name either.”

“You couldn’t even run your own company four years ago. You can ruin your life, but you can’t ruin Scotts or Hopes.”

“At least when I found out I was being pushed aside in my own company I didn’t just accept it, Hank.” Tony finishes his glass and puts it down. “I don’t know any Hope, but Scott was asked and he said yes. You can’t get angry at me for free will.”

“You’re a real son-of-a-bitch. Stark, you know that.” Hank declares as he just leaves the room leaving Tony standing on his own.

“Yeah. I know.” He says to himself as he sits at his desk and drinks the untouched drink in front of him. “Hope.” Tony repeated to himself. “J.A.R.V.I.S connect me to Steve if he’s free.”

“Something wrong?” Steve’s voice comes through loud and clear a few seconds later.

“Who’s Hope?”

“Hope Pym?” Steve clarifies.
“Ah. Well, that explains it.” Tony answers vaguely.

“Tony, you know I’m not there and don’t know what’s going on, right?”

“Hank Pym just came in demanding that I can’t have Scott or Hope. Why do we have Hope? Other than the obvious intangible one, I know why we have that hope.”

“Scott said she sounded interested in joining. She has her own suit, called ‘Wasp’.”

“How every entomological. Must be more than a little interested if Pym’s going Daddy Dearest on me.”

“You think I should ta-“

“No. Leave him alone. I think the only reason he’s upset is because I’m a Stark. It’s a good reason really.”

“Sure it is, Tony. I’ll talk to Scott so he can reassure Mr Pym.”

“Diplomat.” Tony Snorts

“Capitalist.” Steve Retorts.

“It’s what makes America great. I should be back for dinner.”

“Bye, Tony.”

Chapter End Notes

This one’s a little shorter than normal I know. But really it says all it can before I expand on other things, Oh ho!

I hope everyone likes it, I'm going to be spending time in the next chapters fleshing out Wanda and Pietro a little more because they super didn't get a lot of screen time for that. People have also been concerned that the Stony element will take over the story. I can promise anyone thinking that, that it's not the case, it will feature a more than Tony and Pepper's relationship but only because they aren't going through any problems... Or actually dating yet. And any real relationship developments are going to be from Peter's point of view. I hope that makes people feel a little more at ease.
Plaster Casted

Chapter Summary

Peter talks about superheroes and learns something about his dad.

Chapter Notes

I am sorry this has taken so long!
My Back has gotten really bad and I’ve needed to get an epidural to deal with the pain!
But in happier news I also got a puppy who has been taking up my time, the little jerk.
I know it's a little short but I finally know where my story is going!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Did you ever want to be a superhero?” Pietro asks Peter suddenly on a Saturday afternoon. The only people in the Tower Peter, the Twins and Bruce who was in his lab everyone else was upstate going through training routines while Tony updated the computer systems. While the twins had been given their own homework assignments by Bruce to evaluate where they were at education wise, Peter was working on an English assignment and was caught off guard enough to just give Pietro a surprised look, which had him grinning smugly back in return.

“What? Why?” He asked with all the intelligence of a park bench.

“You live with superheroes, you saying it hasn’t been something you’ve thought of?” the white-haired boy asked barely attempting to look innocent.

“Thought of it, sure. Wanted to be one? I mean It’s hard enough being responsible for myself, I can’t even get my Spanish homework in on time. So, I don’t think I can help save the world.” He says with a shrug because technically it was true, he didn’t really want to be a superhero but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t try his hardest to do the right thing as one. And really as much as he wanted these two to be his friend, he wasn’t going to spill a secret that only him, a computer, Clint and probably Natasha already knew.

The twins share a look with each other which makes Peter feel like he’s missed a step.

“Did you?” He asks tentatively

“Who wouldn’t want to stop those who kill the innocent?” Wanda says flippantly but Peter can feel the razor edge underneath it.

“Good thing Cap brought you back, then. Because that’s pretty much the motto of the Avengers.”

“All of them?” Wanda pushes and she gets a sharp look from Pietro who mutters to her in what to Peter sounds like Russian, but really, he has no idea what the national language of Sokovia is so it could have been anything to his ears. It makes him uneasy.
“I mean, I don’t think any of the Avengers haven’t done things they aren’t proud of.” Peter begins very diplomatically. “But whatever they did was in the past. Pasts they’re all making up for now. What they were shouldn’t be as important as who they are now.” He finished with a nod when he feels like he’s gotten his feelings out on the matter, which has Pietro laugh.

“You sound very much like the Captain. You should be on American after school specials.”

“Real funny.” Peter rolls his eyes at Pietro who still seems to find what he said amusing, he wants to feel hurt by it but can’t because thinking back on it, Pietro’s right it really did sound like something Steve would say and something inside him makes him feel really proud of that.

“Pietro is right,” Wanda adds. Pietro looks surprised at his sister, who just looks at Peter like she knows more than she’s letting on. “You do sound a lot like the Captain. You’re a very kind and sweet person.”

“Oh, uh. That’s not what I expected to hear.” Peter can feel the heat on his cheeks and drops his head to look at his homework while rubbing the back of his neck.

“We like having you around, Peter,” Pietro says as if he was also pointing out that the sky was blue, the words a foregone conclusion. Wanda Nods in agreement, the attention causes Peter to blush even more. While Peter is used to having people who like him, having someone say it so directly is a little unexpected and embarrassing before he could say anything the elevator opened showing Bruce inside.

“How is everything going in here?” He asks before taking in how the scene looked. “Peter?”

“Nothing. I mean, yes?” Peter answers hurriedly.

“Any reason why you’re looking like the Iron Man armour?” Pietro laughs loudly getting a confused look from Bruce. “On second thought, I’m too old to know.”

“It’s not wha-“ Bruce holds a hand up as he approaches shaking his head. “Instead, how is the homework going?” Bruce asks looking at the twins, apparently not worried about how Peter’s doing.

“I finished an hour ago,” Pietro answers smugly, as his sister rolls her eyes and hands up her booklet, Bruce takes it while frowning at Pietro.

“That isn’t something you want to brag about when it comes to testing your knowledge.”

“About most things.” Wanda adds while Bruce starts flipping through their booklets, which has Peter smirking while Pietro tries to look above it all.

“No one has to be jealous that they can’t write as fast as me.” Pietro says with a big grin on his face as he leans back into his armchair with his hands behind his head.

“Sure. We are jealous of you, that is why people make fun of you.” Wanda shakes her head at him, Bruce tuts, either at the paper or the conversation Peter isn’t sure as Bruce leaves the room for the kitchen pulling a pen out of his back pocket as he does. The three teens look at each other as they realise that Bruce has gotten quickly distracted with the Twins assignments.

“We should eat.” Pietro declares after a silent minute or two.
“Pizza?” Peter offers.

“This is why we like you. You know how to make us happy.” Pietro grins as Peter gets up to head to the kitchen with the intention of asking Bruce if he wants anything. Once in the kitchen, Peter can see that Bruce is concentrating hard on the twins work, to the point where after calling to him twice Peter has to actually poke him which gets the older man blinking up at him in surprise.

“Oh, Peter.” He says at first as if Peter was the last thing he expected to see, Peter passes it off as just Bruce being caught up. “Is something wrong?”

“Nah, we were going to order pizza, and I wanted to know if you wanted in?” Which had Bruce smile fondly at him.

“Something with peppers would be nice.”

“Spicy pie, coming up!” Peter announces as he makes his order to J.A.R.V.I.S to get 4 large pizzas sent to the tower.

It was late when Tony got home from Upstate as Peter was sprawled out on the couch alone watching a random telenovela because he just couldn’t face his Spanish Homework just now but at the same time wasn’t nearly tired enough for sleep. While it was obvious that Peter was up, Tony just seemed to be muttering to himself and heading to the lab.

“Hey, dad.” Peter greeted but was met with only silence. He sat up and looked around and found nothing, he assumed Tony was preoccupied so he went back to watching the delicious over dramatics on screen. After a little while later Peter couldn’t ignore the feeling something was up with his dad, so he turned the Telenovela off and made his way to the lab.

Coming into the lab Peter had no trouble seeing his father in the middle of the room in the middle of an exploded view of the Upstate facility, his back looking tense.

“Dad?” No response. “Dad?!” Peter tried louder as he started to approach him but still getting no answer which made him sigh then walked into view and looked pointedly at his father who while facing him wasn’t at all looking at him so deep in thought he isn’t seeing the world, although Peter could see that his dad looked exhausted, Just like he did before Killian’s attacks.

“I know I’m a legal adult but you still have to pay attention to me sometime.” Peter raises a sarcastic eyebrow, it takes Tony a moment but he focuses on Peter, in the end, looking unsure at him for a moment then making the connection.

“Why should I when I know if I leave you alone you come looking for me?” Tony retorts easily Peter rolls his eyes.

“Did you even hear me when you came in?” Peter asks and Tony just gives him a blank look. “It was just a greeting. What were you thinking about? Or did you get in a fight with Steve?”

“Why would I fight with Steve?” Tony asks this time with Peter raising an eyebrow at him. “Lately, why would I fight with him lately, he feels bad about the arm and is letting me off with more than I thought he would really. But no, it’s nothing to do with him. It’s.” Tony sighs then rubs at his face. “Frustration.”

“Frustration?” Tony gestures to his arm.” At least it’s only a month and a half left?” Tony groans then drops onto a stool.

“I can’t do anything, it’s. It’s hard to be an engineer or a super hero when you have an arm almost
literally tied behind your back. And J.A.R.V.I.S, DUM-E, and Butterfingers can only do so much, they were only designed for minor assistance and heavy lifting, not rewiring suits or Vibranium shields.”

“What are you doing to Steve’s shield?” Peter asked curiously.

“Not the point here, kid.”

“I know. It’s just, you’re being pretty honest here and well I’m not used to that. Normally it takes weeks for you to admit something.”

“Like you said, I am one and a half months into a 3-month arm sentence and I’m only just mentioning this now.”

“Point.” Peter concedes. “I’m sure that Doctor will be ready soon.” He offers optimistically, Tony just waves his free arm dismissively. “Did something happen upstate?” Peter hopes that he hasn’t set someone on edge enough to cause an argument, after all, there are even times when even Rhodie can’t stand to be around Tony sometimes because his habit of needling just the right spot to set someone off when he gets it in his head to be defensive. And his being more contained than he’s ever been with only being able to use one arm, that would certainly be enough reason in his Dad’s mind. It didn’t escape Peter how very petty that is. Tony shakes his head then sighs.

“Nah. Everyone is working as a cohesive unit while I.” He looks past Peter momentarily before looking at his knees as he sits on the stool. “While I sat there watching the equipment and pointing out what needed adjustment while they trained.”

“Wait, you’re feeling left out? Really?”

“Sympathy isn’t your thing, huh?” Tony asks sourly.

“Well, Dad. You never turn up to training. I show up more than you do and I’m not even an Avenger.”

“I’m there in spirit. Besides, there’s a difference between ignoring requests and being forced on the bench.”

“That’s… Kind of unbelievable of you, Dad.”

“If you’re going to use that tone, you need a blue hat with an A on it.” Tony says dryly. “I was just doing my part towards that cohesion I was talking about earlier. In a reveal that would shock the nation, I’m more aware of myself than people think. The only time I would take training seriously would be when I’m testing the suit and I’m not going to test new additions to a suit around other people. Steve and I both know that, and he also knows I monitor the training feed.”

“You stalk the training room footage?”

“Stop that.”

“That’s creepy.” Tony rolls his eyes as Peter offers up an unreasonably creeped out look. However, he now understands his dad’s reasonings better now. It goes quiet between them for a moment then Tony sigh quietly, causing Peter to tilt his head at him.

“You know I’d do everything I can to keep you safe. Right?”

“Uh,” Peter starts with his eyebrows raised high. “You forced a recently off duty sniper into a
helicopter to threaten my kidnapper with. So yeah, I know that.”

“That will never happen again without a doubt.” Tony answers with an edge to it.

“Dad?” the concern in Peter’s voice is loud even to his own ears as Tony looks at him with a thoughtful look. “Is something going on I don’t know about? Should I pull out the emergency bag?” With Tony keeping the rebuilding S.H.E.I.L.D at a very deliberate arms length, Peter was certain that any risky thing that was about to happen wouldn’t come with Coulson coolly and calmly coming into the building and magicing him away like he had in the past.

“No. Really no, everything’s all quiet on the danger front.” He looks like he’s about to say more then stops.

“Then…”

“Just some bad dreams.”

“That’s all?” his concern still obvious.

“Yeah.” He scratches at his cheek as he closes his eyes tight. “About a months worth. Not the first time, I’ll get through it.”

“Anything I can do?”

“Just humour your old man. And get me a coffee.” Peter groans but does as he’s told, then he decides to lounge around the lab so he could be there if his dad needed him, though, for the most part, he seemed content to mutter to J.A.R.V.I.S getting him to do everything he couldn’t with only one hand when it came to entering information. While watching his dad work was normally an exciting and mentally stimulating time, it was getting late and before he realised, Peter had fallen asleep. While it was ultimately a dreamless sleep because he had fallen asleep to the quiet conversation the sound of people talking took over his sleep. Constant mutterings including running over the conversation Peter had with the Twins earlier that day, his own thoughts when he’s taking on crime as Spiderman, soon a new voice comes in at first sounding muffled and unfamiliar but then he soon realises the voice is Steve’s. Then he hears his dad’s voice.

“-Fell asleep about two hours ago.”

“Both he and you should be not just asleep but in your own beds.” Steve nags.

“He’s still a kid, he could sleep in a wheel barrow and wake up like he slept in the more overly engineered Posturepedic.” Peter wanted to argue this but while he feels like he has woken up his body is ignoring him and keeping him still and cosy.

“And you’re long past that.”

“Thank’s Mom, I wasn’t aware of that. I plan to sleep tomorrow.”

“Tony.”

“Judge me later, why did you call so late it qualifies as morning?” Peter heard a pause that felt to him like Steve almost felt bad for calling so late.

“Bruce got a call from his friend in Korea.”

“Dr Helen Cho. And?” Tony’s voice was urgent and curious.
“She’ll be here by the end of the month. Her experiment failed.”

“That’s. Not at all encouraging.” Peter could hear Steve give a huffed laugh.

“That was what I thought but Bruce assured me that it didn't have anything to do with reattaching broken bones.” There was silence between the two Avengers and it was almost stressful to Peter that he was awake enough to hear the conversation but not awake enough to sneak his way closer to watch.

“So why didn’t Bruce tell me this?” There’s another pause, longer than before then he could hear Tony snort. “You’re more excited about this news than I am, aren’t you?” Peter could feel the greasy smirk Tony was giving his childhood hero.

“Well, I’m sure I’m not the only one on the team who has had their fill of your frustrated huffs because of the cast.” The words seemed forced as if Steve knew someone was listening in, which didn’t seem to be lost on Tony.

“Clint’s just sad he never got a chance to draw on it.”

“I think that title goes to Natasha actually. Clint and Scott would be the happiest about this really.”

“Lang doesn’t get to be happy, he should be honoured I was using him for his lithe and dexterous body. Oh, the things I had those fingers do for me.” Peter could hear a muffled noise in the background of Steve’s call and Steve clearing his throat and another long pause before Tony continued no doubt after a visual cue from Steve if his low tone was anything to go by. “Now what are you going to do in the morning now you won’t have to tape garbage bags to my arm, then watch me shower?”

This has Peter’s brain pause, or more come to a screeching halt at the idea of that, not the garbage bag, that made sense you can’t get the cast wet, but watching his dad shower?

“Is this how you flirt with all the girls?” Steve replies so casually and Peter’s ability to comprehend stops. “I’m sure I could find something to fill my time in its place.” That sounded more suggestive than should ever be heard from the mouth of Captain America.

“I almost want to be surprised you’re so forward.”

“I lived through the second world war, Tony. I’m not the demure boy scout everyone assumes.”

“I meant more the being knocked unconscious in 1942 and waking up in 2012 and being so forward to a guy.”

“Oh look at that, not only is it not the 40’s but it’s also no longer illegal for homosexuals exist.” Came Steve’s smartass reply, it was getting more and more obvious that Peter really shouldn’t be listening to this conversation because of how many levels of gross it was, but like a car crash, he couldn’t force himself to stop listening.

“What gave me away, what with my history of sleeping around with many hot women?”

“Peter.”

“Wait. Being a single father?”

“When I first met him, he knew exactly who I was. Not who I looked like, but who I was exactly. With you and Howard clearly not having a great relationship in part because of me, for you to tell
Peter stories. Well, it made me pay attention."

“I. Don’t see how that proves anything.”

“You don’t take anyone else out to eat, everyone drags you out. And besides, you were putting on a show in the shower every time.”

“Check mate. So, how official are we going to be about this? I mean do I have to show up with flowers and ask Natasha for your hand?”

“Funny. My sides are splitting.” Steve replies with a flat tone. “Besides, Natasha informs we’ve been dating for a year when you look at it from their angle.”

“I don’t like how I’m the last one to know this.”

“Peter doesn’t seem to know. And well until today I wasn’t really aware of it either.” There was another long silence and Peter is begging his body to let him go back to sleep.

“SO! End of the month, huh?”

“Sounds like.”

“Want to go to In and Out after it all?”

“Is it always burgers with you. Isn’t that in Los Angeles?”

“I have a private plane and a flying metal suit.”

“If you’re a good boy. Maybe.”

“I’ll be good, Daddy.” Peter cringes at the words and the obvious smirk accompanying it as he hears Steve quickly say.

“No. Don’t you dare. It’s creepy when I actually worked with your real Daddy.” There’s another pause.

“Someone at the door?”

“We’ll be home tomorrow for dinner.”

The feed cuts and Peter can hear Tony shift in his desk chair, it’s then when his body moves into action as he jumps up from the couch.

“Are you kidding me!”

“So much for sleeping.” Tony sighs and swivels in the chair to face his son, not looking apologetic.

“This is creepy.” Peter exclaims flailing his arms a little looking lost at sea.

“It’s not that creepy.”

“Captain America was both our childhood heroes, how isn’t it creepy to find out that you were...Being gross in the shower at him.”

“I didn’t think it was gross.”

“Daaaad!!” Peter whines.
“Hey, we’re both kind of surprised by this too, it’s not like we doing this on purpose. It’s. Well. Look I don’t know okay.”

“I.” Peter pauses his mind still reeling from his discovery. “Uh.” Tony just watches him carefully until Peter drags his hands down his face letting out an exhausted noise. “I am too tired for this. I’m going to bed. Night.”

“Night, kid.” Tony adds carefully, for some reason actually nervous about how Peter feels to Steve and himself becoming something of a thing. Which is new.

Chapter End Notes

I actually have an end goal in sight now so I want to thank everyone for putting up with not knowing how long this story was going to be. I’m really excited and I hope it won’t be disappointing to most* of you!

*Because I know you can't please 100% of people 100% if the time

Everyone should check out my Tumblr, I mean sure there are better tumblrs out there, but mine has regular photos of my puppy!!
Dark Moon Rising

Chapter Summary

[Reuploaded]

A dark sense starts to fill Peter as he starts to lose his way with his family.

Chapter Notes

CAN I JUST APOLOGISE FOREVER?!

I know everyone has been eagerly waiting for chapters but I have the upload speed of a long dead sloth, I feel terrible and I hope you can all forgive me!

And just a reminder to everyone, this is a canon divergence fic so there isn't going to be any Ultron and Peter is written with Andrew Garfield in mind, not Tom Holland. Which makes me a touch sad because he is such an adorkable thing.

I hope everyone likes this chapter, I know it's starting to get dark, but hopefully, there will be light at the end of this tunnel.

Maybe?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been hard for Peter to get to sleep by the time he got back to his room. Not only was he replaying the conversation he had heard between his father and hero, but he was always racking his brain for how he hadn't seen this coming, after all, Steve had mentioned Natasha said the pair had basically been dating for months.

It had been there, maybe he hadn't noticed it because the last relationship Tony had been with Pepper, and they spent more time arguing than anything else; overwork, functions, Iron Man, his neglecting of his health. It hadn't been like that between Tony and Steve. They argued sure, a lot too. Though it had never felt antagonistic in a long time, back when the team was still finding their feet. And the more he thought about it, the more he realised they did tend to spend a lot of time in each other's company.

As he rubbed his eyes, he felt like he had red glitter in them, which was, well, different. He guessed it must have been from the workshop last night.

Getting out of bed he gave a sizeable long yawn as he padded out his room and toward the kitchen. Everyone was up and having breakfast, his dad and Steve were at the head of the table talking to and making jokes which had the twins talking and involved. Peter stared at the scene for a moment before going to the kitchen counter and poured himself cereal, then sat at the table and realised that no one so much as looked at him, blinking he looked at everyone. Clint and Natasha were sitting
together quietly discussing something Peter couldn’t hear, Bruce and Thor were idly watching the conversation happening with Steve, Tony and the twins. A laugh from the twins steals Peter's attention, they were laughing at something his dad said.

"Looks like you've been replaced." a voice whispered behind him, he looks behind him standing up to find him standing in a dark room with a light source behind him and something in his hand. It was the grade his teacher had given him for his volcano project when he was a kid. Looking up from the paper he looked around he was at the bottom of the stairs of their Malibu home, which had been destroyed for a few years now. Turning around he saw the old workshop devoid of only human life, just Dum-E can be seen moving in the back of the room sweeping something up.

"-ir of how it went?" Peter realises he hears J.A.R.V.I.S speak to him.

“Huh? I mean, can you say that again?” The silence was his only reply. He was then plunged into more darkness as he thought of turning to head up the stairs. He could hear people talking but couldn’t make out the words like it was in the next room, and he had just woken up though he already felt very awake from everything that was going on. He tried to move towards the voices, but it was hard to tell if he was actually moving or not, but he wanted to hear what the voices were saying.

“-Have passed.”

“No. Not Mary and Richard.” The voices suddenly rang clear. It was his Aunt May, and some man he had never heard before.

“Their will has listed you to raise Peter Benjamin Parker in.” Peter feels cold as he pushes and then bangs his fist against the darkness to get to his aunt.

“Aunt May!” he calls, but there’s no response, and the silence drags on.

“I can’t take him.” Is all he hears.

“-even am. The temperature is a mild 73.4 degrees traffic is flowing smoothly, and there is no sign of the subway running unusually late.” J.A.R.V.I.S announces as he gives his standard alarm for those living in the tower. Peter opens his eyes and looks up at the roof, slowly sitting up he runs his hand through his hair as his eyebrows knit together trying to remember his dream.

He couldn’t remember anything specific, but he does feel a very tangible sense of emptiness.

“J.A.R.V.I.S, where’s Dad?” He asks the room.

“Sir is presently meeting with heads of research and development on the 14th floor.” This information didn’t help the emptiness. “Shall I contact him?” the computer asks as if trying to keep his attention on him.

“Uh.” Peter begins to collect his thoughts, then shakes his head. “Nah, I’ve got school to get ready for.” He slides out of bed then starts grabbing clothes then gets ready to head to the shower. The hot water would for sure wash away any notions of emptiness. After all, the rest of the Avengers would be home by dinner, he distinctly remembered Steve saying that last night… In between flirting with his dad. Considering Tony used to date and sleep around with all kinds of people he wasn’t sure why this was so weird just because it was Steve Rogers, after all. Steve has been living in the tower for years now, less a legend and more a real dork. He would paint with his tongue sticking, give him until now unapologetically parental looks when he was putting off homework or spending too long moving his food around the plate instead of eating it. Steve, who found children’s cartoons charming
and was vocally unsure if he liked Game of Thrones or not because of how violent and sex filled it was.

Maybe that’s why it was so weird. Steve Rogers was the most normal person his dad had ever tried
to date, which for Tony Stark who then became Iron Man that really is the weirdest thing to think of.
Peter was right, the second the hot water tumbled down against his skin and soaking into his body
really did help him remove the cold loneliness from inside and spent too long in there to the point he
was running to the elevator his hair still wet pressing the button before spinning on the spot so he can
dash after his skateboard where it sat up against the wall. Then he stops suddenly and looks at the
large living room everything is silent, empty, lonely. He frowns for the briefest of moments as the
elevator chimes its arrival and he snatches up his board and escapes the silence by jumping into the
stainless steel car that would take him out into the world so he could be late for school.

For the most part school was dull and uninteresting, the only change in that standard high school
routine was when he was assigned to do an in-class team project with Gwen, they were both able to
talk to each other easily after all these months which seemed to be a relief to Gwen as much as it was
to Peter. That is until she got a particular look in her eye after Peter made a joke about nothing in
particular which caused her to excuse herself from the classroom and didn’t come back.
It left Peter feeling as hollow as he did that morning, and he didn't appreciate it. Determined to not let
the feeling get to him he left the school by the end of the day with a long stretch then got on his
skateboard to head to a skate park, planning to use the freedom of skateboarding push away the
heavy loneliness.

What he didn't expect was for a skate park, after school, in New York. To be empty.
with a determined look he took to the bowl and began doing tricks emptying his mind. After twenty
minutes of moving he was forgetting the bland loneliness of the day. Peter would go out an skate at
the park at least two to three times a week, but it felt like he hadn't done this in months it was the free
relaxing that Peter needed.

And yet.

Something in the back of his mind, like an itch you want to scratch but just can't get at, was
whispering into his mind that he shouldn't be so carefree. That if he isn't at the tower, they'll all forget
him. Coming down from a landing in the bowl Peter let the board roll to a stop, looking over his
shoulder at the skyline that was starting to glimmer in the orange hues that would soon be purples
and blues as the afternoon made way for the dusk and nightfall. He looked at Stark Tower, while not
dominating the skyline, like everything his father did, it caught your attention. Some of the local
teens started to roll into the skate park as Peter walked out of it, board under his arm. Slipping down
an alleyway before webbing his way back to the tower.

Steve said they would be home for dinner, the itch insisted that he get home, so they greet him. He
has to be home for what has become his very odd family.
Peter landed silently on the balcony of Stark Tower all those hundreds of floors up with the grace of
a boy who had done this a lot more often than he feels like he should be.

"So you have J.A.R.V.I.S lying for you, huh?" Peter's blood ran cold at the voice and wanted to
outdo a statue in his ability to be still. Natasha sat at the patio table with a mug of something hot
seemingly by herself, though Peter knew better than to assume there wasn't the chance of Clint also
being somewhere.

"Lying for me?" Peter asks after a moment, the residual shock of being caught waning as his
confidence that Natasha isn’t about to rat him out to his dad any time soon. That didn't mean her
words weren't confusing, however.
"Steve asked him where you were when we came back, he was told that you were studying and couldn't be disturbed right now." Peter blinks looking surprised.

"I... Never asked him to do that." He answers slowly as Natasha stands up and makes her way over to him, her face is carefully neutral which puts him slightly on edge. "Honest, I mean why would I ask that he's programmed, to be honest, and really all I did was go to the skate park after school, I noticed it was late and thought it would be easier to just." Peter rambles with a nervous honesty. Other than webbing home with technology he created for a superhero persona his dad didn't know about nothing he actually did today was wrong. However, Natasha continued to approach him silently, and he knew she was an interrogation specialist. His worry was all for nothing however as the second Natasha was close enough, the ex-S.H.I.E.L.D agent just wrapped her arms around him giving him a warm, comforting hug.

"Don't tell anyone." She begins quietly. "But I've missed your rambling." He looks up at her as she steps back a little rubbing his upper arms fondly.

"Really?" He can't help but think of all the things to miss about a person it would be over a nervous habit the woman nods at his confusion. "But you've only been gone the weekend," Peter adds with a dubious look on his face. Natasha nods then teasingly pats his cheek causing him to screw up his face at the deliberate movements.

"Maybe I'm getting old. all this country hoping for Hydra and what they stole from S.H.I.E.L.D's vaults is taking it out of me."

"Maybe because before you didn't have a kid to miss and come home to." Clint offers off handled, having come out onto the patio with a beer and a blanket that he drapes over Natasha's shoulders before giving Peter a smirking nod and setting himself down on one of the chairs, rocking back on it as he drinks. "Because that's the kind of thing that makes leaving hard, I'd say." Natasha doesn't reply just looks at him thoughtfully before snuggling into the blanket more.

"Miss me too huh?" Peter asks with the trade-mark Stark wiseass grin as he and Natasha join Clint at the patio table. Clint just looks at him up and down for a moment then takes a long drink from his beer bottle.

"So, who are you again." He turns to Natasha. "Do you know this kid?" he asks her seriously which she just drinks her own mug of something in return.

"Not a clue." She grins slowly.

"Ha ha. This is how people get complexes." The teen retorts resting his chin on his hands with a feigned pout.

"Fighting crime, huh?" Clint asks completely changing the subject as he nods towards the backpack and skateboard out on the balcony with them. Peter shakes his head.

"Just coming home late."

"Coming home late?" Clint repeats and gets a nod as a reply. "On the day we come home?" Peter just raises an eyebrow at him. "Cap was sad enough when we were told you were studying. But if he finds out, you just weren't home at all." Clint gasps dramatically. "That sad face is on you." He drinks the rest of his bottle in one movement.

"How did you get cleared for S.H.E.I.L.D basic training?" Peter blandly answers, especially as his tone to start with had been so tense Peter thought there was a chance he might actually get in trouble.
"All that talent I have."

"Probably slept his way in." Natasha teases.

"That helped."

"Oh man. You guys? Really?" Clint laughs at the face Peter pulls.

"Hey, you're old enough for this stuff now."

"When you just find out that your dad has been sorta dating America's national treasure. Any kind of sex talk is going to be weird."

"Your dad is dating Nic Cage? You going to call him Pop or just daddy-crazy?"

"You are not helping!" Peter squirms at the idea as Clint and Natasha laugh at him obviously choosing to help things feel less awkward for Peter. They were failing if that was their plan in Peter's mind.

"Clint's helpful?" Comes Steve's voice from the doorway, echoing a bit from a distance, Peter goes rigid. Steve was the last person he needed walking in on this kind of conversation.

"Well if it isn't papa-Steve." Clint raises the empty bottle to him. "And I can be when I feel like it."

"Well, go be helpful in the kitchen, the Chinese is here," Steve says with a raised eyebrow Pete buries his head in his arms on the table. There is no way that Steve doesn't know what they were just starting to talk about. He hears Clint and Natasha get up and walk away hearing Clint start to complain about the fact he had voted for Thai. Then Peter hears Steve approach. He doesn't lift up his head, because he's pretty sure the embarrassment would kill him. "Everything okay, sport?" It's not a tentative question, it doesn't sound like Steve sounds anything like he normally does. So Peter just makes a burbling sounds like a reply.

"Studying does that, huh?" after a moment Peter looks up slowly his eyes only just breaching the wall of his forearms to look at Steve in the dimming lights.

"You have no idea."

"Well, I'm sure there's a wonton or two with your name on it in the kitchen that might make the studying feel more worth it?" There, in his voice there Peter could hear him sounding a little unsure. As if what he was saying could upset Peter. Right? Or was he just imagining it? No, Steve's just being Steve. Slowly Peter rolls up from his seat into a standing position and grins at Steve who smiles back.

"And garlic chicken?"

"One for you, and Tony."

"Oh thank god." Peter exhales which gets a laugh from Steve. Yeah, he imagined the unsure sound in Steve's voice.

As he lays in bed that night full of good Chinese food and feeling like the world is right again now the rest of the Avengers are in the tower again Peter can't help but be amused at himself for feeling so lonely during the day. He marvelled at how easy it was for a place to feel so much homier when all the bedrooms where occupied. Not having to assume that you are going to wake up to an empty house, to wonder if anyone actually cares that you're there. Dozing off feeling comfortable, Peter
misses the red glitter moving over his eyes.

Peter wakes the next morning heavily, he can't remember dreaming, but he does feel like he hasn't slept a wink and it makes him feel slow and almost cranky. A big yawn and a stretch allow him to pretend that he had a full and restful sleep and for a second he thought it could be as unassuming a day as yesterday ended up being.

Until he saw the time, he was going to be late to school. It was 9 am.

Getting dressed and to school in as short, a time as possible without having to rely on his more spidery ways had him arriving by the end of second period. Just in time to bump into and bounce off of Flash Thompson's chest as he left the classroom Peter was trying so hard to make it to on time.

"Nice one, Parker. How about next time look before you leap, dumbass." He gives a very smug look as he moves on, Gwen and a couple of the other girls come out next, she looks at Peter and just sighs.

"Parker, If you plan to attend my classes, I would think showing up before it ends would be the best choice." His English Teacher informs him from his desk as he finishes packing up his books now his lessons were over, he gestures for Peter to come in, which Peter does and sinks into a chair in the front row. "Any reason why you're so late?"

"I slept in?" He asked with a slow, awkward shrug. "It wasn't on purpose I promise, and it won't happen again, sir." His teacher shakes his head at the excuses and promises.

"This is your last year, Parker. After this is college. And before you say anything I know you're smart enough to get into any school you want, not to mention your father and all his... Goodwill to both the city and the world certainly isn't going to hurt your chances." Peter sank deeper into the chair nervously picking at his cuticle because the last thing he wanted to think about was college admittance based solely on the fact his dad was Iron Man. "However, if you actually want to do something after high school you need to apply yourself. After all, as much as you promise this isn't the first time you've been late or the first time you've just disappeared from class. Keep that up, and I would suggest you would have a better time living off your inheritance than wasting the time of your future educators." Now that hurt, sure Peter generally had perfectly good heroing reasons to counter what the teacher had said, but unlike his dad, he was trying to maintain a secret identity. So there was nothing he could say. The teacher gets up and leaves the room leaving Peter alone. How much of a valid point did he really have? It's not like Peter was going to stop being Spider-Man in colle-

Peter stopped mid-thought, he had never actually thought of college. He could go to a college in New York, but why not an interstate school? But that would mean living on his own, in a dorm. And what about New York's safety? It's hard to be your friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man when you were in Massachusetts or California. After a moment he shuddered at the thought of being Spider-Man in either state. Maybe he should actually start thinking about what he's going to do. Peter stood up from the chair and walked out of the classroom, he got as far as his locker before his skin began to crawl in the way his Spidey senses only knew how. Looking around quickly he saw kids heading towards windows and doorways. Stuffing everything into his locker, he runs to find a window himself. Bingo, there's the problem: Task Master.

Now, Peter had never encountered Task Master before, but he did know about him from the Avengers files, he was able to imitate anyone's combat ability just by watching them. While he wasn't Loki dangerous, or as bad as Hydra or AIM could be, he was what Natasha called 'an annoyance' because you couldn't rely on normal tactics because he already knew them. He was certainly the kind of guy who needed to be caught in a spiders web. As Peter starts to turn he see's an explosion. He knew that explosion, it was one of Clint's arrows. This would give Peter all the time
he needed to find somewhere to change without having to worry about people getting caught in the way if the Avengers were on the scene.

He ducked into a recently abandoned classroom and started his near perfectly timed costume change stuffing his backpack into a cupboard and diving out the closest window Peter shot a web to get a good swing up onto the roof running to the front of the school to get a good look at what was going on. From what Peter could see was that the only two who were taking on Task Master was Natasha and Clint.

Which made sense, his Dad had an undeniable way of fighting, shoot dodge, smartass comment, repeat. While he did think out of the box when it came to fighting it was mostly when he had few resorts left. Hulk was also good to keep out of the fight because collateral damage aside the size of the unjolly green giant meant his moves were very telegraphed making it far too easy for the Task Master to get out of the way.

As for Cap and Falcon, they were probably on the sidelines waiting, as well as strategising and keeping an eye on the twins. Antman... Well, for all Peter knew he was climbing a leg undoing belts and being generally tiny and annoying which would help be distracting... If he was there, that is.

He saw all that he needed and tried to swing in at the right moment to surprise the Task Master only to collide with Natasha.

"Spider-Man?!" She exclaimed through her teeth as she untangled herself from him gave him a sharp look before getting back into the fight with TaskMaster.

"Not now, Kid." He hears Clint call out from the top of a bus stop canopy as he shoots a sedative arrow at the taskmaster who deflected the projectile causing Clint to swear.

"C'mon guys, I know you missed me, but you don't have to get all sappy about it." Peter quips sarcastically before slinging webs at Taskmaster's face which blinds him temporarily, Natasha took the chance to get in close and get him on the ground. "I mean, see. You're welcome." Though Peter's own brand of smart ass comment didn't get to stick as the Taskmaster twists out of Natasha's hold and throws what looks like a ball at Peter who dodges it only the have it make a loud pop behind him and get caught up in netting. "Well this feels Ironic" He comments as he starts to work his way out of the rope net just in time to get hit with one of Clint's arrows clearly deflected by the villain much to Peter's delayed surprise was explosive, and he was enveloped in fight and smoke.

He could hear his superhero name called out, as the smoke cleared he rubbed his masked face and looked around. The world was fuzzy, but he wasn't about to let that stop him, slinging a new web to try and get Task Masters attention for the ex-Agents to take advantage, but a throwing knife cut the web, and with a yelp, Peter slammed into a light pole without any purchase to stop himself.

"This. Isn't going well. Huh?" He asks aloud.

"Kid you need to get out of here," Clint shouts.

"Hey, I'm a superhero too ya'know," Peter answers as he climbs the light pole and starts using his web shooters to once again supply a distraction. Which wasn't working, and he soon finds Natasha just below him on the pole.

"We have Cap in our ears demanding you get out of here. You've done enough, we have this, Spider-Man" The woman emphasised his moniker and Peter frowned, feeling hurt. He knows that The Avengers have the advantage of experience and having dealt with Task Master before, but Peter
knew that he was more than capable of helping.

Well, typically, he really isn't giving his best showing today. Inappropriately inspired by the hurt of being politely told to stop getting in their way, Peter made an idiotic move. He leapt at Task Master web-slinging as he came at him.

Then he felt a cold, sharp pain in his thigh. Looking down he saw a knife in Task Master's hand as he plunged the steel into the teenager. Well, that wasn't great, it certainly wasn't what Peter needed right now. However, there was also no way he could easily dislodge himself from the knife or the man holding it so for the moment he just kept clinging to the villain with all he had.

Which managed to keep him off guard enough for the adults to get the edge and trap the Task Master who managed to twist the blade in Peter's leg which made the boy scream as he and the knife was released from Task Master both men hit the ground hard as Natasha made short work of hog-tying the Taskmaster. Clint was beside Peter before he could even feel his presence looking at the wound. Peter made a move to take the knife out, but Clint slapped his hand away.

"Don't be an idiot, that would just get the blood flowing. You'll probably bleed out that way. What the hell were you thinking to get into this with us?" Clint was shouting at him. Which took Peter by surprise, feeling like a scolded child by a disappointed parent.

"I was thinking I was being helpful." Peter snapped at the older man who raised an eyebrow over his sunglasses. "Which I did, by the way, I don't need your thanks or praise..." He shook his head as he felt a bit woozy. "A job well done is all your... Friendly Neighborhood..."

"Stop talking," Natasha ordered as both she and Clint put a finger to their ears, apparently listening to Steve issuing orders to them. Peter sighed, and started to get up only to fall.

"Idiot, what do you think you're doing? You aren't going anywhere like this." Clint ordered holding the boy down which only frustrated Peter.

Logically he knows he shouldn't be arguing with them and being stubborn, but they both knew who he was under the mask and he thought they were on his side, so getting ordered around like this and being treated like a child was really painful for Peter. He tried to get out of Clint's grip, but it was firm and unrelenting as Clint stared at him over his glasses making Peter feel small and useless.

"You sit here until the emergency services get here and sort your leg," Clint said. Peter deflates at his words.

"But my identity..."

"Don't worry about that, you can keep the mask on... If you haven't lost too much blood that is." Peter didn't get to have much more to say about that as he passed out just as Clint finished speaking.

"Countdown."

"Mr Stark has been out of communication for 34 days, 15 hours and 32 minutes." Peter drew in a long breath and let it out just as slowly. "Minutes."

"49,963 minutes, Young Master." J.A.R.V.I.S pauses for a second. "Young Master, is there anything I can do?" Peter was silent, the silence around him after the computer's words was deafening, he clamped his hands over his ears not wanting to hear the silence, however instead of the fifteen-year-old hearing the pulsing thrum of his blood flow her heard other things.
“Where have you been?” she asks softly, Peter tries to reply but can only choke out ‘I’ before finding words too hard, as Gwen watches him for anything. “My father died.” Peter can’t bring himself to speak ashamed now that he didn’t go with Tony and Steve, all he can do is look at the ground. “There was a funeral. They shot off rifles and made speeches.”

"What?" The small boy asked feeling confused. He wasn't there. A funeral? Wait who said that? The boy looks up taking his hands down from his ears, he's along in the workshop, everything is dimly lit and offers a deep, fearful cold in him.

 Alone, he felt painfully alone.

Steve moves from behind the kitchen counters to the table where Peter can see three places have been set from the workshop chair. Wait, What? He watches as his dad moved to the table. "I mean, I'm nothing special in the kitchen, but I can say I've gotten better in the last 70 years." Tony snorts at the comment, and Peter can't seem to find what was funny about it right now, he could feel his tension rising, despite his attempts to hold it back. This didn't seem to escape anyone in the room, he could tell his dad and Steve were exchanging another look between each other because of him which only seemed to frustrate him more.

"Maybe. I'm not as hungry as I thought." He announces before turning to leave the kitchen. Alone, they are apparently more comfortable around each other when he isn't there.

"No, you're staying right there." He hears his dad say, he bunches his fists again and stops in the doorway. "Even I'm thinking you're spending too much time in your room as it is," Tony says, and Peter can hear him crossing his arms, and could even imagine his head being tilted speculatively to the side. "Care to share with the class?"

Peter just shakes his head, the room goes silent for a moment. They want him to bask in their togetherness, don't they? Just to show Peter how lonely and useless he was. He broke up with Gwen while still seeing her at school almost every day which was another reminder that he was alone, unneeded. Gwen never looked sad around him after she came back to school again, she hung around with friends and laughed. What did Peter do? Ride his stupid skateboard, take stupid photos. All alone.

He wasn't wanted. The darkness enveloped him until he couldn't feel anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Tell me your thoughts about this crazy development!? 

Don't forget that I also have a facebook page now that I try and maintain that has updates about my fan fics and my original story that I'm writing!!!! https://www.facebook.com/DunnWritingToday/ So if you like what you read please follow me!
Setting stones

Chapter Summary

Peter is in Hospital, Tony has a strange feeling in his gut.

Chapter Notes

This is a short one. No real reason other than I wanted to get this one out for everyone to see everything starting to slide into place under someone's plan.

Tell me what you think of where the story is heading!?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Peter opened his eyes he saw nothing, blinking he sat up then flinched in pain as he clutches at his thigh. Then he remembers what happened, he grasps at his face to find that his face was still masked, Peter let out a deep sigh of relief.

"No one knows who you are." Comes a voice from a corner Peter thought he had looked in. Leaning into the corner of the room with her arms crossed, was Wanda who was wearing a black thigh length dress and a red jacket that was possibly some kind of leather her makeup and nail polish were as black as her dress and the look in her eye. He stares, glad his mask is on knowing that without it he would have a look of shock and confusion.

"Didn't know nurses dressed so casually," Peter says in a voice that mostly sounds confident, Wanda shrugs.

"Because I'm not. Funny how this works." She replies. "Why are you scared to tell him? Your father? Tony Stark." She catches him so off guard with her question that he missed the venomous way she spat his dad's name.

"Tony Stark? My Dad, wow I wish, do you know how much I spend trying to mend my out- ah man I'm going to have to make it all from scratch now. Great." He answers hopefully dodging her question.

"You are not fooling me, Peter. I've known your secret since I first met you." She approaches slowly then sits on the bed right beside him, Peter just watches her, unsure as she gently raises her hands to pull the mask of Peter's face, he grabs one of her wrists as she uncovers his mouth. "No one will come in. Let me see you." Peter lets go of her wrist slowly, and she peels the mask off, putting it in his lap, before really looking at his face. No doubt looking at the bruises, it felt like he even had a bloody eye. "Why won't you tell him?"

"He wouldn't understand."

"He is Iron Man." she counters giving him an expression of doubt.
"That doesn't mean he'd understand. I mean. He chose to be."

"Biting spiders don't force you down these paths." She tilted her head ever so slightly her deep brown eyes captivating though still seemingly dark. "You could have stayed as you were. So that isn't the reason."

"I." He blinks then looks down at the mask.

"You never had to do any of this on your own, living in a tower of meta-humans."

"I'm scared." He breaths out slowly. Wanda stays still observant and patient. "That he won't treat me like family anymore. That he'll leave... Again."

"Hasn't he already?" Peter looks up sharply at her, but her face remains placid. "Always with Rogers making jokes, or with Banner, in the workshop. Things he used to always do with you. Replaced." Wanda looks at him with sad eyes. "They will all leave, create distance between you. You are too young to understand their lives. To know the traumas that come with the fights they take up, that you have been kept from. Isolated. It is how it is with adults, but when you can crush buses like soda cans? They are more eager for distance." Reaching up she cups Peter's cheek with her pale hand. A comforting act, Peter leans into the gesture, feeling her warmth in an increasingly cold room.

"Have they really left?" She nods slowly to his question.

"But we will never leave you, Peter. Like us, you know what it's like to lose family. To be shuffled around and forgotten like a trinket. We share a bond." she whispers the last line before gently kissing him. The kiss itself was chaste. But all Peter could feel was the warmth that filled his whole body the moments her lips touched his. "It isn't a bond that can be broken by distance."

Peter hears the door open and pulls away to look. He's laying in bed, he can feel his mask rub against his neck as he turns to look at the door to see Clint slide in. Peter looks around for Wanda, but she isn't there. Did he dream that? It left him shaken, and he didn't look at Clint as the man sat in the chair beside the bed. Nothing is said for a long time they didn't look at each other. Peter was beginning to wonder if he imagined Clint coming in with how silent it was in the room.

"The hell were you thinking?" Clint says finally. Sounding disappointed.

"That I needed to help," Peter answers slowly, feeling annoyed at the tone he was given.

"Even after we told you to keep back? When you were caught in that explosion?"

"No one stops you from doing your job," Peter said pointedly, turning his head away from Clint.

"I follow orders, kid. Sometimes, yeah. I am stopped from doing my job." Peter doesn't say anything, he continues to stare at the opposite wall. After another long moment of silence, Clint sighs and stands up. "This is a S.H.E.I.L.D medical facility. So no one will ask who you are. But you're going to be on some heavy meds and won't be able to walk for a while. So maybe it's time to come out of the funnel web to your dad." With that final statement, Clint just leaves the room.

"See, even Barton has changed towards you." Whispers Wander, Peter looks around but can't see her.

"That's not it." Peter weakly defends Clint. But he had to admit, the conversation did seem rather cold and unlike their usual discussions.

"He wants you to tell your father. He wants Tony Stark to abandon you."
"That's not." Peter starts but ends up grasping for words he can't find.

"If it wasn't, wouldn't he make up an excuse for you? He's that kind of guy." Peter frowns at the words. He doesn't want them to be true, but they feel so right it's almost like a sharp knife cutting into his skin.

"They really don't care about me?" Peter asks quietly, scared of both feeling the need to ask the question and scared of the potential reply.

"Of course not, if they did wouldn't they bring the cradle to you? Or bring you to it?"

"Enough. I don't want to hear this." He shakes his head, willing himself not to believe what is being told to him. He's lived with everyone too long for it to be true.

"You don't want the truth?"

"Enough!" He shouts, he looks up in time to see the surprised look of a S.H.I.E.L.D nurse stepping through the door, giving him a curious look. Peter just gets comfortable and looks out the window rubbing his eyes over the mask. His eyes feel both tired and itchy for some reason.

The next morning, after a shower that are now twice as long thanks to Steve's 'help' with Tony's arm cast. Tony comes into the kitchen nosing about in the fridge as Steve shakes a cereal box at him and starts to pour them each a bowl. Tony takes in the morning crowd. Thor was scrolling through his new phone with a coffee in his other hand. Tony thought it was a good idea for them all to always have a way to contact each other on earth, though it was Natasha who thought it would be amusing to give him a twitter account and only half explain the point of it to him. It seemed to help Thor feel more at home. In fact, the phone had actually made him look more human, it felt weird. The only other person in the kitchen was Clint rocking back on his chair as he went through the motions of bow maintenance. Tony couldn't help but be amused at how much of Clint's carnie past had never left him and how it was so second nature that Clint probably didn't realise he was even balancing on only two chair legs.

As he watched his friend Bruce came in, and a thought struck him. He hadn't seen Peter around the house the last day and a half.

"J.A.R.V.I.S where is Peter?" Thor looks at Tony when he asks the question, curious about the answer as did Bruce.

"Young sir isn't in the building." is the only answer the artificial intelligence gives. Which made sense to Tony, it's not like he had a tracking chip in the boy despite how much he joked that he did.

"Any of you know where he is?" Tony asks, everyone but Clint shake their head or shrug their shoulders. "Clint?" He holds a hand up wagging a finger before finishing adjusting the tension on his bow.

"Nat said something about kidnapping him last night. She probably dragging him around to some high tea or art gallery." He answers with disinterest.

"Could have told his dad about it," Tony mutters to no one.

"He's legally an adult." Bruce overs though Tony finds it unhelpful.
"Doesn't hurt to keep me informed. Besides, I've been a legal adult for decades, everyone always wants to know where I am." Tony comments as he sits down with his Steve made cereal at the table.

"Responsible legal adult then." Bruce counters.

"You know, you are cruel as you are accurate," Tony replies archly, which causes Thor to chuckle.

"He always comes home, I wouldn't worry yourself too much. After all, he's had us in his life long enough, why wouldn't he want to be home as much as possible?" Thor delivers his words with a straight face, but Tony knows he's playing the innocently sarcastic card. Honestly, he's weirdly proud to hear Thor be so jokey with them, not that he isn't an amiable person, but Tony, as well as Steve, wondered if Thor feels as included as he did on Asgard.

"The alien has a point," Tony says before looking contemplatively at his bowl.

"Tony?" Steve watches him inquisitively. Tony almost wants to be annoyed at how quickly he can pick up on Tony's own thoughts.

"Something feels off." Tony shakes his head then starts to eat, ignoring the fact that now everyone's looking at him. Tony might be erratic, impulsive, hard-headed and callous when he's feeling hurt. However, they all came to trust when Tony's feelings were off. After all with the speed at which his brain moved he could already spot the twenty things wrong with the second picture before others had finished taking in the first picture. "It's probably nothing. I have a board meeting today, it's probably that," he says dismissively, before grabbing his cereal and heading to the kitchen table to eat with the others for some medium to light banter with a forecast of occasional sarcasm. It helps Tony ignore the annoying feeling that he can't describe though he does decide to finally put it down to the board meeting. Which made a lot of sense, after all, while Tony didn't always enjoy his board meetings, in part because someone still tried to blame some form of stock drop on him and the Avengers even though once the fight was one stock always rose again. Not only that but this would be the first board meeting he would be attending since he had broken his arm, it was undoubtedly something of an embarrassing feeling to try and act professional and not like you have your arm in a very stupid cast that everyone had drawn on, when you did, in fact, have a stupid cast on with that everyone had drawn on. Oh, the joys of being an Avenger and someone who more often than not was the one most likely to come the closest to death at any adversity they came across.

While thinking about this, Tony was only half aware of the conversation until he actually registered that TaskMaster was being spoken about causing him to get back into the conversation.

"Wait, you had to deal with Task Master?" The room looks at him pointedly. "What?"

"This was discussed last night, Tony." Bruce filled in.

"Where was I?"

"In the lab."

"And everyone ... Was in the lab too, huh?"

"You were working on your suit, it wasn't exactly like we expected you to pay attention." Clint comes in with, Tony frowns he's able to work and talk at the same time, so why not now? As he went to scratch his face, it dawned on him, the pain meds. Naturally, they would put him off his game, and there was no way he was getting away with ignoring taking them, not with Steve and J.A.R.V.I.S monitoring all his medications for the time being.

"Doesn't make it right. Guessing he's in a S.H.E.I.L.D tank as we chew?"
"Nah, he managed to turn things in his favour when Spider-Man showed up."

"Kid's got his fingers on the pulse, alright. Got in your way, huh?"

"He's eager, not his fault. Did seem a bit off, though." Clint added before putting is bow down. "This I didn't say last night, but the few times he's worked with us before he was on the ball. But yesterday? No dice, kid was flailing all over the place, getting caught in an explosion."

"That does not sound like our spider at all. Do we know who he really is?" Thor asked looking concerned, Bruce shakes his head and Steve pokes at his cereal with a frown. After all, they had nothing, Spider-Man was one of the few low-level superheroes who they just couldn't get a track on. While he did have a habit of working from Queens to the financial district, he never disappeared into the same area when finishing his deeds of daring do, which was made him so hard to track. Why couldn't he have just made life easier and be like Jessica Jones, or Luke Cage? Now they were easy to keep tabs on, they didn't exactly hide that well compared to other heroes, but they also didn't have alternate identities. Which. When you got down to it. Was precisely why they were so easy to track.

"Bupkis," Steve says. "Which isn't great because as helpful as Spider-Man is, he's really obviously untrained, I'd really like to train him."

"You really want another kid? Peter and the twins aren't enough for you?" Tony asks archly poking at him to try and make the room feel a little less gloomy. "Where are the twins?"

"Really Stark," Clint says with a Midwestern drawl "You can't keep track of anyone other than yourself can you?"

"He keeps track of himself?" Bruce comes back with sceptically.

"They're still in bed."

"Ah, to be young and recently freed from an evil regime that experimented on your without your permission." Clint remarks with a dreamy sigh before Thor kicks his chair out from under him, the resulting fall conjuring a laugh from Thor and grumbling from Clint. Steve warns them both to be more careful with their roughhousing, which Clint ignores by throwing the back of spare notched for his arrows hitting Thor soundly on the face.

"Okay. Take whatever this is to the training floor." Steve ordered as the pair got up and jostle each other playfully as they leave. Which left only Steve, Tony and Bruce in the kitchen. Tony decided to stretch out the quiet by chewing his cereal just loudly enough to be heard but not loud enough to be downright annoying. At least as far as he was concerned anyway.

"If he is off his game like Clint was suggesting, maybe we should put more effort into looking for him," Steve says as he gets the chair Clint left on the floor back up and in its place before going back to his own breakfast.

"Not sure that's a good idea, Cap. After all, he seems to be going to quite some lengths to not be found. Or at least has been able to dodge enough of the cities cameras to get away without us seeing who he is." Bruce offered to cause Steve to become thoughtful. "After all, people normally go to those kinds of lengths when they don't want to be found." Bruce shrugs. "Of course, this is just coming from my own personal experience. He could just enjoy hiding, that's what spiders are like after all, aren't they?" He added unhelpfully.

"Still, while I wasn't particularly happy with his hiding in the first place, especially when he was joining in on the dangerous things we were doing. I still think now it's wise to look for him."
"J.A.R.V.I.S is at your disposal, Cap," Tony announces before standing up.

"You don't care?" Steve raises a curious eyebrow at him.

"Oh, I care heaps. But I care about living more, and Pepper has promised all sorts of hell if I'm late for this board meeting, it's not exactly in the tower. Wouldn't want to fuel my ego, I guess." Tony adjusts his tie before picking up his cereal to put on the kitchen counter.

"Why would they think a man with his name on an entire tower right behind Grand Central Station would have an ego?" Steve purred sarcastically.

"You're right, it is weird." Bruce added with a half grin. "Tony diplomatically decided to ignore both of them as he left to go find Pepper so they could attend the board meeting.

Chapter End Notes

I've started streaming my writing at 7 pm AEST Wednesdays. Not sure where that comes out on across the world though I'm semi-tempted to aim for 10 am AEST Wednesday's instead which if the rooster teeth boys are anything to go by (I watch their streams like a nerd) should be Tuesday nights.

Tell me if you would be interested in watching at either of these times!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!