mr. blue sky, please tell us why (you had to hide away for so long)

by willinplaid

Summary

He had spent his entire life thinking of his father as sort of an abstract concept, a guy who was out there but that he would probably never meet. And here he was, sort of an abstract concept after all. An abstract concept and a complete dick.

Peter goes to Ego's planet on his own, a terrible idea. The rest of the Guardians don't take kindly to Peter getting hurt.

Notes

I just needed a bit more of Ego being a great dad, and I love angst. Everything's pretty much the same as Vol. 2, except Mantis isn't on Ego's planet, Peter went with his dad on his own, and Gamora and Nebula have their battle/make-up on Berherdt, because I wanted Nebula in the story. This is off-the-cuff, very self-indulgent, and as such, I only gave it a cursory proofread.
“Peter, I don’t like this.” Gamora touched Quill’s arm, speaking under her breath so Ego couldn’t hear her. Peter’s newfound father was standing at the entrance to his spaceship, smiling magnanimously. Gamora didn’t trust him one bit.

Peter wasn’t really listening to her. He was distracted by the sight of Ego. “Gamora, look, even if he turns out to be kind of an ass, he’s my dad. I have to know what he’s like.”

Gamora was fully aware she had trust issues, but that didn’t mean she was wrong. She didn’t trust enough and she tended to think Peter trusted too much. Normally, that made them a good pair, but she didn’t like this situation one bit.

“Peter, I don’t want anyone to take advantage of your trust in them.” She could tell she wasn’t getting through to him.

“You think I’m being an idiot.” He said.

“No, I don’t think you’re an idiot, I just think you’ve wanted to know your father for years, and someone could take advantage of that.”

“I appreciate your concern, really, but I’ll be fine. I’ll only be gone a few days.” Peter said, smiling brilliantly at her, clasping her hand, and then going to join his father.

Watching him take off with the others, Gamora hoped he was right, but she couldn’t help the nerves coiling in her stomach.

If there was a moment Peter regretted coming to his father’s planet alone, it was when he was strung up in the air by burning coils of light. It wasn’t so much the pain, but the horrifying sensation of being drained of every ounce of strength in him. He could feel his limbs getting heavy. When Ego first strung him up, he had been fighting back, but he didn’t have the strength anymore.

Ego was standing below him, still talking about his plan but Peter had tuned him out. He was expending every ounce of effort on keeping his eyes open. After what felt like forever, Peter was completely drained. He hung limp from his bonds, the spike through his chest making it hard to breathe.

Ego peered up at him and wrinkled his nose. “Shit. That drained you quicker than I thought.”

With a snap of his fingers, the coils of light disappeared and Peter collapsed to the ground. He groaned, not even having the energy to roll over. Ego did the honors for him, pushing him onto his back with his foot. Peter’s vision swum in front of his eyes. His heart was pounding from the effort of being drained and he panted. Peter tried to get onto his elbows to scoot away from his father, but he didn’t have the energy.

“Must be the human side of you.” Ego said with an audible note of contempt. Peter couldn’t believe he had been foolish enough to be taken in with him, if even for a little while. Ego stared down at him for a moment before coming to a decision. He clapped his hands and instantly brightened. “Well! Guess this is going to take longer than I thought. That’s all right. Gives us a
chance to get in some good old father son bonding. I have a lot of time to catch up on.”

Ego gave him a brilliant smile, and Peter mustered up all his available energy to wrinkle his face in disgust. He tried to tell Ego exactly what he thought of him, but he just couldn’t seem to catch his breath.

“Honestly, Peter, this entire situation could have been so much easier. I wanted to do this as equals, but if you’re going to force me, I’ll have to put my foot down. I guess that’s also part of being a dad.”

He snapped his fingers, and a shimmering object began to take shape across the room. Weakly, Peter turned his head to look. Originally a blue-white shimmering, the object darkened to dark grey as a sturdy cage took form, steel bars interlocking out of thin air. It was medium-sized, not big enough for Peter to stand up all the way or stretch full-out.

Peter’s eyes widened and he redoubled his efforts to get away from Ego. He managed to roll over and started to crawl away, his frantic panting the only sound in the hall. Ego laughed behind him and strode over, grabbing the collar of Peter’s shirt and dragging him on hands and knees toward the cage.

Peter grunted and tried to fight back, but Ego was too strong. He shoved Peter headfirst into the cage and slammed the door shut behind him. The heavy sound of a lock landed.

Peter pushed himself into a sitting position and looked balefully up at his father. He had recovered enough by this time to extend Ego his middle finger. It felt a lot better than he was sure it looked.

Ego laughed patronizingly. “See you in the morning, Peter.”

The only thought in Peter’s head was escape, but as each second went by, he found it impossible to keep his eyes open. He was completely drained, and the brief burst of adrenaline passed. He found himself drifting off into the black within a minute.

When he awoke later, he was still lying on his back in the cage. He opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. He was half-hoping he had eaten some horrible alien thing that had given him hallucinations, but no. He was still right where his father had left him.

Groaning, Peter rolled over and sat up. Every muscle ached like he had just run a marathon. His arms, his legs, even his head felt heavy. He bent his knees and leant against a corner of the cage. He closed his eyes for a second, just trying to catch his breath. God, his father. He didn’t know if he was going to be able to get used to that. He had spent his entire life thinking of his father as sort of an abstract concept, a guy who was out there but that he would probably never meet. And here he was, sort of an abstract concept after all. An abstract concept and a complete dick.

The hall was totally quiet, and after resting up a bit, Peter got on his hands and knees and wrapped his fingers around the door to the cage. He gave it an experimental shake. It didn’t budge at all. He snaked an arm out and ran his fingers over the lock. He had never been much of a lockpick, and even if he had, this one was far too solid. Given that this cage was made by magic, it might not even be real. It might just be for show, just like Ego’s human form.

“Shit,” Peter cursed. He never should have agreed to come here alone. He realized Gamora, Rocket, and Drax didn’t actually know where this planet was. They would have no way of finding out where he was. He could just hear Gamora telling him I told you so. At this point, he would gladly take hours of Gamora berating him for being an idiot if it meant he could get out of here.
Peter pulled his knees up to his chin and wrapped his arms around his legs. He was in big trouble here. He ran through his options as fast as he could. Getting out of the cage seemed to be impossible. Fighting Ego head-on wouldn’t end well. The only thing he could think to do was make a run for it, but where was he going to go? His father was the planet. He wondered if his father had left his communicator where he left it. If he could just get to it...

His thoughts were interrupted by the door at the end of the hall opening and echoing footsteps pounding down the floor. Ego appeared, not a hair out of place, smiling like the world belonged to him, which, Peter supposed, it did. God, but he was starting to hate that smile.

“Good morning, sleepyhead. How are you feeling?” Ego said, peering down at Peter.

“Just like I’ve been run over by a truck. Except that actually wouldn’t be as bad as what’s going on.” Peter glared. He refused to give Ego anything.

Ego kept looking at him with that maddening smile on his face. He didn’t seem fazed by Peter’s resistance. “You know, Peter, I did some thinking last night. You haven’t had a strong male presence in your life. I know sometimes all someone needs is a father. A father should love his children, but he also needs to put his foot down sometimes.”

“Look, one time I was stranded on a planet for a week with this disgusting lizard thing that wanted to eat me, and that was a better father figure than you.” Peter said.

Ego snapped his fingers and the door of the cage sprung open. He stepped back and beckoned Peter to follow. Peter got to his feet, only then realizing how weak he still was. All the blood rushed to his head and he stumbled, grabbing onto the closest thing for support, which just happened to be his father.

Ego grabbed his arm and steadied him. Peter blinked and breathed deep until his head cleared. Then he realized what he was doing and shook his father off. Despite still feeling exhausted and more than a little scared, Peter intended to give Ego a piece of his mind.

“This isn’t going to work, you know.” Peter said, crossing his arms and trying to appear more nonchalant than he felt.

Ego was still smiling patronizingly at him. “Isn’t it?”

Peter shook his head. “Well, my friends know I went with you. They’ll start to wonder where I am. They probably already have. And they’ll come find me. You want Nova Corp up your ass? Mission accomplished.”

Ego shook his head. “Oh, Peter. Did you really think I was that stupid I’d overlook a detail like that?”

Peter shrugged. It was meant to be witty or sarcastic, but it just ended up looking confused.

Ego finally turned around, pacing down the length of the hall. His voice echoed throughout the chamber. “One of the advantages to being a sentient planet is that I don’t need to stay in one spot. For my own safety, I’ve made it difficult to locate me. Your friends won’t be coming any time soon. You don’t have to worry about anyone interrupting us.”

An icy flush of fear went through Peter. He had wanted to get out of here, but he had been secretly banking on someone coming to find him. If that wasn’t going to happen… He decided to take his chances in the open. He waited until Ego was sufficiently far away, and then backed up and ran for the door to the hall. His jacket was still out there somewhere, and in it was his radio. If he could
just get word to Gamora, Drax, or Rocket…

Peter knew he wasn’t going to make it when he heard Ego turn around and sigh deeply. “Peter, I’m honestly trying to be patient here, but you are testing me. Come here.”

Peter panted as he saw light behind him. He half-turned his head to see those tendrils coming after him again. Gasping in fear, he spun around, stumbling on his feet. When one of the tendrils came for him, he dove to one side. He actually managed to avoid two of them before a third snaked its way around his waist, stopping him in his tracks. It jerked him like a ragdoll so he fell to the floor. Peter screamed as he felt himself being dragged back towards his father. His fingers scrabbled against the smooth marble, helpless to stop himself.

He slid to a halt at Ego’s feet. He wasn’t smiling anymore, and in fact looked a little pissed off. “If you’re not going to be civil, I guess we’ll just get down to business.”

“No,” Peter croaked as burning tendrils of light wrapped themselves around his wrists, ankles, torso, and waist. He was yanked to his knees, arms pulled behind his back. The tendril around his torso pulled tight so that it became hard to breathe. Quill jerked and struggled, angry yelps escaping him. After a time, he was forced to admit he couldn’t move, and he aimed a look up at his father. He was trying to look defiant and angry, but he was sure he just looked scared.

“Peter, do you know what the first thing I teach to all my children is?” Ego asked.

Peter gasped a little from the pressure around his chest. Ego squeezed until he answered. “No, what?”

“Obedience. It makes things easier if we’re all on the same page. Most of my children, disappointments though they were, learned that pretty quickly. Once I showed them the Expansion, all of my children acquiesced. You’re the only one who insists on fighting back.”

Peter squirmed in his restraints. He was finding it a little hard to breathe. “Yeah, sorry to disappoint. Guess I’m just not into being used as a battery.”

Ego shrugged. “No matter. We have plenty of time. After a few years of this, I’m sure you’ll be ready to reconsider.”

Peter blanched. Years? Before he could answer the spear of light went through his chest again and all he could think about was blinding light and the burning pain running through him.

Gamora sighed from her seat in the cockpit. She was fiddling with her communicator, trying to get an answer from Quill. He had been gone for four days now, and the continued radio silence was starting to bother her. Not worry her, of course. She would never admit that she was worried about that curly-haired, overexcitable buffoon. She would just prefer it if she knew where he was.

Rocket wandered into the cockpit of the Milano with an armful of machinery that he had probably stripped off their ship to make some sort of explosive. Groot was perched on his shoulder, holding up a cog in triumph.

“You still messing with that radio, Gamora? I told you, Star-Munch will call us back when he’s good and ready. That Ego guy said they could be gone a week.” Rocket said.
Gamora turned to look at him. “Yeah, but he should have called by now. Just to check in.”

“So he’s probably discovered how great his dad is, and he’s gonna stay there forever.” Rocket said.

Gamora clenched her jaw. “That’s not funny. I didn’t trust him. Why did he need Peter to go with him alone?”

“Because he’s a drama queen like his son. Who knows?” Rocket was maddeningly unconcerned.

“The green woman is right. That man smiled much. I do not trust those who smile too much. Peter is one, and I only just trust him.” Drax said from the back of the room where he was sharpening his knives.


Rocket set the small tree down on the table and glared at him. “Not you too, Groot. Now you’re all ganging up on me. I’m the only reasonable one around here these days.”

Gamora sent another questioning beacon to Peter’s device and got no response. “Rocket, please. Just admit it’s a little weird that Peter hasn’t called us.”

Rocket climbed up onto the table to get a better vantage point and shrugged. “All right, it’s a little weird. I would have thought Peter couldn’t stop himself from bragging about his cool dad. But that doesn’t mean anything bad happened. He’s probably just too busy to give us a call.”

Gamora hummed and put the radio down in frustration. “Okay, if he hasn’t given us a call back in two days, we need to go looking for him.”

Nobody disagreed, so Gamora dropped it and just hoped Peter was all right.

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After the longest time of only seeing light and light and light, the first thing Peter noticed was the sound of screaming. It was a horrible sound, cracked and hurt and hoarse. He wanted to help whoever was making that sound, but he couldn’t move, he couldn’t feel his body. He felt strange, disconnected.

Panic gripped him then, and he struggled in this strange void. Eventually, the light around him began to ebb and the ceiling of Ego’s hall became visible again. He felt catapulted back into his body, and all of a sudden he could feel everything. His knees were aching from the hard marble floor underneath, his shoulders and wrists burned from the tight bonds holding them behind his back, his throat felt dry and cracked from the screaming he just realized was coming from him, and his head was splitting.

Minute by minute, the light ebbed a little more until the spear through his chest slowly retracted. It felt like an icy spear being pulled out of his heart, and he gasped and panted as it left. Once the spear was gone, he began shuddering as if he had just come in from the cold.

Ego walked around him, kneeling down in front of his son. Peter shivered and panted. Something felt wrong with his eye, he wondered if it was going bloodshot. Ego reached out and grabbed Peter’s chin, forcing his head up to look at him. Peter groaned and tried to pull his head out of his father’s hand, but he tightened his grip enough to bruise the jaw. Peter hissed in pain.

Ego tipped his head from one side to the other. Peter felt like a horse being examined. “Hmm,
you’re holding up well enough.” Ego said.

Peter grit his teeth despite their chattering and sucked in a deep breath. “F-fuck you.”

Without even a flash of anger, Ego pulled back and gave Peter a vicious backhand smack. Peter’s head flew to the side and his face exploded in pain. He cried out and squeezed his eyes shut, horrified to find tears had sprung to his eyes.

He pulled in a breath that was more like a sob and refused to look at his father.

“I don’t want to hear any more backtalk out of you. You’ll keep a civil tongue in your mouth or I’ll take it.” After that terrible pronouncement, Ego gave it a moment’s thought. “You know, I actually don’t know if it would grow back or not. It would be an interesting experiment, to see if there’s more human or celestial in you.”

The academic way he said that gave Peter a burst of fear. He looked at his father warily and clamped his mouth shut until he shook his head and stood up. He didn’t let Peter go, just paced back and forth across the hall, deep in thought. Peter watched him in silence from his place on the ground. He experimentally tried to move his feet, but his ankles were cinched together. He couldn’t help gulping in huge breaths. He was out of breath like he had just run a marathon.

His father was looking out the window. “This universe will be beautiful one day. Everything will be me. And you, I suppose.” He frowned and turned back around. “At least you look like me, we’re halfway there. But there’s a little too much of your mother in you. We’ll have to work on that.”

A burst of anger went through Peter, and he forgot about Ego’s threat to cut out his tongue. His voice was hoarse but still defiant. “Everything I get from my mom is what’s good about me! The only thing I get from you is being an asshole. I’ll never be like you.”

Ego came to stand in front of him again. Peter had to crane his head to see him. His voice was thoughtful. “You know I could make you forget her. That might make this easier on both of us.”

Peter stilled. He stared up at Ego with wide eyes. This scared him more than anything his father had said so far. “What? You can’t.” He pleaded.

Ego reached a hand out and grabbed a handful of Peter’s hair, forcing his head back. Peter twisted his wrists in their bonds and couldn’t help an undignified whimper emerge from his mouth.

“It wouldn’t be hard at all. Just reach in and pluck her out. I could do your friends too. If you weren’t thinking so much about them, it might make you a little more compliant. A little easier to handle.”

Peter wouldn’t admit this later, but he completely lost his composure. He unsuccessfully tried to pull his head away and began to beg. “N-no, no, don’t, please don’t.”

Ego watched him struggle for a few more seconds before leaning in. Peter’s eyes widened and he renewed his fight, sobs ripping through him. His mother, his friends, they were all he had in this world. If Ego took them away from him, he would just be an empty shell, with no reason to resist him.

"Are you sure? It would be easier for you.”

Peter shook his head silently. His heart slammed against his rib cage.

Ego hovered a hand above Peter’s forehead, and he shut his eyes tight. He kept him in suspense for
a few more seconds before pulling his hand away. “No, not today. But don’t forget that I could.”

Ego stood up, snapped his fingers, and Peter was released from his restraints. Peter tried to catch himself from falling, but his limbs were rubbery and would not support his weight. He collapsed onto the floor and sucked in a breath. He was still shaking, and he couldn’t control it. He couldn’t stop thinking about having memories of his mother plucked out of his head. He didn’t know who he would be without his mother, but it certainly wouldn’t be Peter Quill. Not even Star-Lord.

Ego dragged Peter back over to the cage and slammed the door shut. Peter pushed himself back and wiped the tears off his face. A flush of embarrassment came up his neck, but he honestly had bigger issues at the moment.

Before Ego left him again, Peter wrapped his hands around the bars of his cage and called after him. His voice was still hoarse, and he descended into a fit of coughing before he could continue. “Hey, uh, can I have some water?”

Ego turned around, looking confused for the first time. “Water?” He said as if he’d never heard of the concept.

Peter nodded, massaging his throat for emphasis. Ego frowned as if annoyed by his son’s petty human needs. “I suppose.” He said coldly.

Ego disappeared down a hall. Peter leaned back in exhaustion. He wanted to stretch his legs out, but the cage was just a touch too small for that. It was almost enough, but he had to bend his knees a little. It was tall enough for him to sit up straight, but if he got onto his knees, he would have to bend over a little. He rested the bottom of his boots against the bars of the cage and ran shaky hands over his face. He just hoped Gamora’s naturally suspicious nature would cause her to come looking for him. He had promised he would call them when he got to Ego’s planet. They had to know something was wrong by now.

Ego came back holding a cup of water and passed it to Peter through the bars. Only after he spilled a third of it did Peter realize how much his hands were shaking. He took a sip and coughed up a good bit of it on account of his sore throat. After the messy start, he managed to drain the whole thing. He didn’t feel all that much better, but his throat hurt less.

It was only then he noticed Ego was still standing there watching him. Peter wiped his mouth with a shaking hand and blinked. “What?” He rasped.

“That’s still your human side that needs the water. I hope I can get rid of that.” That was all he had to say before leaving Peter again. Peter eased himself down to a half sitting position. Like last time, he couldn’t help himself drifting off. Before he fell asleep, he thought of Gamora and hoped she was somewhere out there.

Gamora woke in her bunk with a pit in her stomach. It had been the same every morning since Peter left, and after seven days of it she decided to do something about it. She got up, got dressed and wandered across the hall to Quill’s room. In the week he had been gone, Rocket had managed to put the ship back together. It was really a marvelous job, but their things were still all over the place from the crash. Peter’s room, especially, looked empty. It didn’t look the same without his retro gadgets from Earth cluttering up the space. Looking down at his empty bed, Gamora decided she was going to start looking for Peter today, regardless of whether Rocket thought there was cause for concern.
She checked the radio once more, but just as she had feared, there was nothing there. She turned around to find Rocket and Drax already up. Drax was strapping his rapiers to his back and Rocket typing coordinates into their display screen.

“What are you doing?” Gamora said, taken aback.

“What I said I was going to do. Let’s go find Quill.” Rocket said, not looking at her.

She narrowed her eyes. “I thought you said you weren’t worried.”

He sneered and looked at her. “I thought you said you weren’t worried.”

Groot grew his hand into a long vine and swatted Rocket’s nose. Rocket snarled at him, but softly. “I am Groot!” He announced indignantly.

“Small Groot is correct.” Drax said. “You are both lying. I am not sure why. I am worried about friend Peter and I know you are too.”

Rocket put his hands on his hips. “It’s just not as much fun stealing parts off of Quill’s ship when he’s not here to complain about it.”

Gamora didn’t say anything else, but her friends’ concern was touching. “Where do you think we should start? I’m not sure where Ego’s planet is. I tried looking it up in the galactic directory, but its location is a blank.”

Rocket nodded. “I called an old pal of mine. There are a few of those planets that don’t stay in one spot. What the hell is up with that? Call me old-fashioned, but a hunk of rock that damn big should stay in one spot. Makes it easier for the rest of us.”

Gamora frowned. “I don’t like the sound of that. I tried to see if there was a tracker on his communicator, but nothing.”

Rocket finished typing in coordinates and spun the screen around. “I figure I know where to start.”

Gamora and Drax peered at the screen. “Ravagers?” Drax asked.

“Yondu…” Gamora said, realizing what he was up to. “Yes, if anyone will know where to find Peter’s father, it would be Yondu.”

“Then let’s get going.” Rocket grinned, sliding into the pilot chair and pulling off from the ground. They all held their breath for a moment, hoping Rocket’s modifications would hold. They did, and he began to pull out of the planet’s atmosphere.

Gamora stood with one arm over Peter’s chair when she remembered they would need to do something with Nebula. She groaned and descended the steps to the lower level. After Nebula had tried to kill her, they had made up in their way, but Nebula had made it clear she would be leaving the rest of them the second they landed on a habitable planet.

Gamora found her sister packing a bag, shoving supplies into a bag and cinching it tight. “Nebula…” She got her attention, and her sister looked up at her, forgetting for a moment that she didn’t have to glare.

Gamora shared their plans with Nebula, and she nodded. “Well, I can’t say I understand why you’d want that hyperactive golden retriever back, but I wish you well. You’ve gone soft, sister.”
Gamora felt an automatic urge to start a fight, to prove to Nebula and anyone else she wasn’t soft. Never would be. However, she had just managed to get on Nebula’s good side, and she didn’t want to jeopardize their newfound alliance. She could still hear Nebula’s words: *You always had to win*. She was just getting used to having a sister again, and so this time she let Nebula win.

For that reason, she settled for frowning. “Peter is part of my team, and he is my friend. When your friends are in trouble, you help them.”

A smile played on Nebula’s dark lips. “Friend. The rest of these idiots may be your friends, but I don’t know what Quill is.”

Gamora gave her a look that could kill and went back up to the cockpit. Their unspoken thing sure was being brought up a lot recently. She’d worry about it, but she was busy being worried about Quill. She promised herself when she found Quill and he was alright, she might even bring it up herself.
Chapter 2

I'm sorry, but I couldn't resist making a Kurt Russell joke. Next chapter should be posted in the next couple days. Thank you everyone that's posted a comment!! You're all lovely.

Peter woke up disoriented and slightly panicked. He thought he was still being drained; lights careened across his vision, and only after getting his breathing under control did he realize they were afterimages, like staring too long into the light.

He had a crick in his neck from the awkward sleeping position. He groaned and felt like he was creaking as he rolled over onto his side and pillowed his head on one arm. This must be what Groot felt like growing himself from scratch, everything aching and creaking all the time. Or like what getting old would feel like, if he ever made it that far.

Every muscle in his body hurt. Muscles he wasn’t even aware he had hurt. Muscles he probably didn’t have hurt. He was dying to stretch himself out, but there wasn’t enough room. He stared dully at the confines of his cage. He’d been in his fair share of scrapes before this, both with the other Guardians and without them, but he didn’t know if he’d ever been in such big trouble before.

He ran his fingers over his chest where he had been stabbed and grimaced. It was still sore. Although he knew better, it still felt like there was an open wound. With two fingers, he pulled down the neck of his shirt and took a peek. There was an angry red mark above his heart, like the beginnings of a nasty bruise, about three inches across. He realized he would be dead now if it weren’t for his celestial gene. His thoughts turned to a throwaway comment Ego had made. His other children. How many had come before Peter? How many had he strung up and drained? What happened to them when Ego was done with them? He shivered.

The cage door sprang open with a clang, and Peter jumped. Ego beckoned again, and Peter couldn’t help but flinch back from him. A lump rose in his throat when he thought about being strung up again. He honestly didn’t think he could take it again so soon.

“Let’s go, son.” Ego said.

“You gotta give me a minute.” Peter said, pressing himself back into the bars of the cage.

“I’ve given you several hours.”

“Well, human beings take more than a few hours to get over being stabbed by light tentacles. Call it a funny quirk of ours.” Peter tried to summon up his normal irreverent tone of voice, but he was so exhausted it was hard to put on a show.

Ego scowled. “You’re not human.”

Peter wrapped his fingers around the bars behind him as if that would help at all. “I’m half human.”

“I’m not going to argue with you. Get out.”
Peter tightened his grip and shook his head. “Uh uh.”

Ego bent down and reached in to wrap a hand around Peter’s arm. “Stop it. You’re being childish.”

Peter felt a hysterical laugh bubble out of him. “Maybe I am. You wanted to be a father, didn’t you?”

Ego pulled hard, and Peter was forced to let go or his fingers might have broken. His father pulled him along, and Peter felt his breath start to come faster, like he was on the verge of a panic attack.

Instead of pushing him to the ground again, Ego kept walking, his bruising grip on Peter’s upper arm not letting up. Peter stumbled a little under his quick pace.

“Wh-where are we going?” He stammered.

Ego didn’t look at him. “We’re going to have breakfast.”

“What?”

“Breakfast. Bacon and eggs. Surely you’ve heard of the concept.”

Peter lost his footing as Ego dragged him up an opulent flight of stairs. “Y-yeah, I know all about breakfast. I consider myself an expert. I just didn’t know megalomaniacs liked hash browns.”

They emerged into a huge, wide-open room with a massive oak dining table taking up half the room. There were a series of silver platters with steaming food on them. Peter’s stomach growled. He hadn’t even realized he was so hungry until he smelled the food.

Ego let him go and Peter fell into an oak-backed chair. He watched as Ego picked up the biggest platter and drop it on the table next to him. Ego pulled the cover off with a flourish, and Peter braced himself for something horrible. A severed head or a bowl of eyeballs or something. He didn’t know why all his associations came from Halloween, like his father was something out of a John Carpenter movie, just pretending to be human. Okay, maybe he did know.

What Peter wasn’t expecting to see was a steaming hot plate of eggs in toast. Eggs in a basket, his mom used to call them. His mouth immediately started to water, he was so hungry, but he tried to restrain himself.

Ego had sat down next to him, putting his feet up in a way that Peter was uncomfortable to realize he did, one ankle crossed over the other. His hair was brushed back and he looked completely at ease. “Eat up.”

Peter picked up a fork and poked at the yolk. It burst open, seasoned with salt and pepper. It was the perfectly-cooked egg. “What’s wrong with it?”

Ego pushed the plate closer to Peter. “Nothing’s wrong with it. Just eat the damn thing, or we can go back downstairs.”

Peter’s hand came up to rub against his heart. He spared his father another quiet look before taking a bite. It might have been the fact that he hadn’t eaten anything in days, that being tortured wreaked hell with his blood sugar, or that he hadn’t had proper Earth food since he was a kid, but the one bite of buttered toast was easily the most delicious thing he’d had to eat in a long time.

His body catching up with his mind, his stomach kicked into high gear and demanded more food. Peter soon found himself scarfing down the whole thing in three bites before reaching for another.
Ego watched him for a moment before he jumped in. “You know the only reason why I even know how to make this is because of your mother.”

Peter’s mouth went dry, and he swallowed his bite of toast around a grainy throat. He dug his fingernails into his palm to try and keep calm.

“She was a great cook, but of course you know that.” Ego said with a smile.

Peter had lost all his appetite in a second. His stomach roiled around the food he had eaten already. “She didn’t really get a chance to cook a lot once she got sick.” He muttered, closing his eyes. Once the cancer began to really take a toll on Meredith, she had to sleep a lot, which meant Peter learned how to work the stove and how to properly microwave things early on.

Ego seemed to be brushing right past the fact that he was the cause for all this. “Well, that’s a real shame. She barbecued some ribs for me not long after I met her. I’m telling you, you have not lived until you’ve eaten ribs made by a Missouri gal.”

Peter pushed himself to his feet. “I’m not gonna sit here and listen to this.” He scowled, fully prepared to march out of the room.

Ego’s voice was cold, losing all the conviviality he had been showing a second before. “You’ll sit down right now and have a pleasant conversation with me, or I’ll drag you back downstairs and we’ll get down to business.”

Peter clenched his jaw and glared, but he was already swaying a little bit, and his fear outweighed his anger. He swallowed his pride and sat back down. There was no way he was eating anything more after this, so he pushed the plate away from him.

Ego seemed to have got what he wanted temporarily in Peter’s acquiescence. He put a fatherly hand on his shoulder, tightening his grip when Peter tried to shove him off. “We got off on the wrong foot. Let’s try this again. Both of us have made some mistakes—”

Peter snorted. Ego squeezed a nerve in Peter’s shoulder so his entire arm went numb. He gasped in surprise and pain and jerked his arm out of Ego’s grip. He curled into himself, holding his injured arm against himself before looking up at his father with wide eyes.

Ego continued. “As I was saying. There are things that I can give you. Things you want.”

Peter shifted in his seat. “Like a ship to get off this planet and a promise to go fuck yourself?”

“Like what the first thing your mother said to you was. I was there, you know. She wanted me to stay, so I did. I know a lot of guys wouldn’t have done that.” Ego said.

Peter bit down on his retort. *You stayed around long enough to stick that tumor in her head*. There was still an irrational fury that descended over him when he thought about what Ego had done to his mom. He should have shot Ego a few more times. He tried to hold onto that anger, because it was better than feeling scared.

“Not that I know a lot about human birth, but all in all, it was pretty short. Meredith said you were making it easy on her, that you were a good kid who was going to take after her.” Ego said. Peter hated the way he talked about his mother, with such affection. He loved her and he killed her. These two facts were irreconcilable in Peter’s mind.

“And when the nurses came back into the room carrying you, Meredith’s face just lit up, she was so happy to see you. And you know what she said to you first time she held you?” Ego asked.
Peter had angled his body away from Ego and breathed through his teeth. His arm felt rubbery and weirdly not-there. “I don’t want to hear this.” He said in a soft voice.

Ego waved him off. “Yes, you do. She held you and looked at you, and her whole face was filled with love. You had the biggest eyes when you were just born. Looked a little freaky to me, but your mother loved it. She said to you, Peter, you came from the stars just like your daddy. You both came here to Earth to stay with me. I’d bet you that was the happiest day of her life.”

Peter was horrified to find tears were coming to his eyes. All he could see when he remembered his mother was her on her deathbed, reaching out to him in desperation and him not taking her hand. He wiped furiously at the tears with one hand, but Ego saw it. “Shut up. Just shut up.” Peter almost whispered. He didn’t look at his father.

“Even your mother knew that you didn’t belong on Earth. Everyone has a destiny, and your destiny was to come here.” Ego kept talking and talking, and Peter was seeing red. He grabbed the fork off the table and stabbed Ego in the thigh. He didn’t even flinch, just looked at Peter in disappointment before pulling it out and standing up.

“Well, if you’re done eating.” He grabbed Peter roughly by the collar and dragged him back downstairs. Peter kicked and fought the whole way.

Gamora knew they were in trouble when the entire ship listed to the side and Groot went flying past her head. Thankful for her reflexes, she snagged him out of the air and stumbled out of the dining area to stumble up the stairs to the cockpit. Normally, an easy task, she kept slamming into the wall as the ship listed and rolled.

“What the hell is going on up there!” She screamed.

She heard Rocket cackle and then curse. She made it up the stairs to find Rocket with his fingers wrapped tight around the wheel as they flew down into this planet’s airspace.

“Rocket, stop screwing around, this is a busy airport. We could hit someone.” Gamora peered at the other ships in the air, which seemed to be swerving to get out of their way.

Rocket grunted and pulled up. “I’m… not… screwing around. Turns out this thing isn’t as rock-solid as I hoped it would be. Our secondary engine fell off back there.”

Gamora blinked. She could feel an aneurysm pulsing behind her eye. “Our engine fell off?”

“Secondary. Don’t worry about it. We’ll be on the ground in five minutes tops.” Rocket’s voice was strained, but she could tell he was having fun.

Drax laughed loud behind her. He was gripping the wall and smiling broadly. “This is the second crash landing in a fortnight. We should make this a tradition!”

A particularly worrisome jolt went through the ship, and Gamora stumbled and fell into her seat.

“I am Groot!” Groot yelled from the protective shell of her hands.

“Yeah, I know, buddy. Just hang on, I’m pulling down now.” Rocket grunted.

The airstrip beneath them was quickly cleared of people as they went careening toward it. Gamora
gripped her seat tightly with one hand and held her breath.

After a nerve-wracking two minutes, the Milano skidded to a halt on the airstrip, billowing fumes and smoke behind it. All four of them sat in silence for a second, catching their breath.

Drax let out a loud whoop and leapt to his feet. “That was exhilarating! We need to locate another ship we can crash-land.”

Even Gamora was smiling a little. They all made their way down to the loading bay where Nebula was standing with her bag. She was playing it cool, but Gamora noticed her legs looked a little shaky. “I don’t understand how you people are still alive. I will be glad to be rid of you.” Nebula noted in a dry voice.

Rocket hit the button to open the doors only to see an extremely angry-looking port authority official come marching towards them. He was a tall, corpulent, purple alien with three heads, all of which looked extremely pissed off.

“Oh boy.” Rocket said under his breath. The four of them looked at each other, trying to decide who would be the best one to deal with him. Two trigger-happy assassins, one trigger-happy raccoon, one blunt warrior, and one nonverbal tree. They realized with a jolt their balance was off. This was why they needed Peter and his not-always-successful, but ever-enthusiastic efforts at charming people.

As the pilot, Rocket agreed to jump on the grenade. After a quarter hour of yelling, threats, offers of a bribe, refusal of a bribe, offers of a bigger bribe, and no less than three weapons being drawn, they agreed to a fine they were never going to pay, and packed up their stuff for the trip.

Drax led the way through the busy market, having been here before. Rocket carried Groot on his shoulder and tried to keep him from grabbing every shiny bauble they passed on their way. Gamora lagged behind with Nebula, who hadn’t yet run off.

“I thought you’d be gone by now.” Gamora said, enjoying the lockstep she was in with Nebula. They hadn’t been this in sync in years.

Nebula hefted her bag on her shoulder and grunted. “I’m getting the lay of the land first. I’ve never been on this planet before. Besides, I have nothing better to do.”

If Gamora had been someone else, she might have smiled. As it was, she glowered a little less.

They knew they were in the right spot when they heard the sound of gunfire and at least one burly alien ran past them with one arm on fire. They turned the corner to hear a sharp whistle and an arrow went whizzing through the arrow to stop an inch from Nebula’s eye. She didn’t flinch, and after a second, the arrow went back the way it came.

Yondu was standing in front of a messy semi-permanent camp for his ship. There were half a dozen crew members lying dead around him. He kicked one over with a contemptuous sneer. His first mate Kraglin emerged out of the ship holding a blaster in one hand, having evidently dispatched someone else inside.

Yondu stepped a little closer to them, eyeing them with a sneer of suspicion.

“What’s up, ya big blue bastard!” Rocket greeted him.

Yondu picked a hunk of meat out of his teeth and spat it on the ground. “The hell you’s doin’ here?”
“We need to talk to you.” Gamora said. They all stepped closer and Rocket jumped on the back of one of the downed crew members in order to appear taller.

“What’d this one do? Call you ugly, because, buddy, you can’t really hold a guy accountable for telling the truth.” Rocket said.

Yondu hawked the next piece of half-chewed food at Rocket’s feet. “Just dealing with a healthy disagreement among my crew. Good for morale.”

Drax frowned. “Disagreements are unhealthy. Disagreements lead to broken bones.”

Yondu peered at Drax and scoffed. “Certain members of my crew thought we’d be better off if I weren’t in charge. I disagreed.”

Kraglin appeared at Yondu’s elbow. “Great, you people can help us clean up the mess, considerin’ you’re the cause of the trouble in the first place.”

Gamora stared. “Excuse me?”

“We was hired to turn you all in to the Sovereign.” Yondu said.

“Why have you not?” Drax asked.

Yondu shrugged. “Eh, that gold woman was stuck up. I didn’t like her. I don’t follow anyone I don’t care for, that’s why I’m a Ravager.”

“You and I have that much in agreement.” Gamora said coldly, thinking of Ayesha flirting with Peter. She hadn’t said as much, but it had bothered her.

Yondu sat back down around a pisspoor campfire. “What are you people doing here anyway?” He looked among them, seeming to realize something. “Where’s Quill?”

The adrenaline from the crash seemed to leave them en masse as they remembered what they came here for. Gamora and Rocket shared a look before Gamora spoke.

“That’s why we’re here actually. We need to talk to you about Peter.”

Peter was strung up again, and he couldn’t think. He felt like his brain was on fire and all he could see was light, but at the same time the power from the planet was vast and uncaring and so cold. He felt surrounded by freezing fire, and he thought he was going blind, and he couldn’t stop screaming.

Somewhere, in a dim part of himself, he could feel his father’s evil spreading across worlds in some distant part of the galaxy. The most rational part of his mind was aware that he wanted to stop it. He didn’t want to do this. As awful and hodgepodge and dangerous and frequently uncaring as the galaxy was, he kind of liked it the way it was. Peter tried to summon that force inside him, to stop Ego from draining him, but every inch of that power he had felt before was surging away from him, like silk slipping through his fingers so fast he got rope burn.

He felt tiny, insignificant, but somehow like his pain was the only thing left in the universe. Had Ego succeeded? Was it just the two of them now? How long had he been here? Peter was confused and in pain. He couldn’t concentrate on a thought long enough for it to fully form.
After what could have been years for all Peter knew, the light slowly dimmed a little, and he could think again. His wrists hurt so much he was doubtful if he would be able to move his fingers, and he was suspended over the room. It was a scary feeling of vertigo. Logically, he knew he was only a few feet off the ground, but it felt like much more, and he couldn’t move his head to look. There were tight tendrils wrapped around his neck, wrists, upper arms, thighs and ankles. He vaguely remembered grabbing Ego’s hair and ripping out a good-sized chunk of it.

He panted and shuddered. Every time this happened, he felt worse than the time before. Peter could hear Ego pacing around underneath him, and he craned his head around to catch a glimpse of his father at the end of the room. He wasn’t even paying any attention to him, and was muttering to himself.

“What the hell does she think she’s doing?” Ego’s skin seemed to ripple weirdly, and then he spun on his heel and walked out of the room. The instant he went out of sight, the bonds holding Peter in the air disappeared and he crashed back to the floor. The back of his head slammed into the hard floor, and black dots exploded across his vision. Peter cried out and tried to get his body to react. For the longest time, all he could do was shake. It was the kind of fully-body, out-of-control shaking he would get if he had hypothermia. He couldn’t do anything to stop it, and painful aftershocks ran through him.

Biting his lip, Peter managed to roll over and got his arms under control. Still shaking from pain and nerves, he pushed himself into a sitting position. He saw there was blood on his shirt and touched his face. Ego had gotten tired of him fighting back and had hit him so hard Peter was worried his nose might have broken. Although there was a lot of blood, he was relieved to find out with a little probing that it hadn’t broken.

Peter looked around him at the empty hall. He had been on his own for about ten minutes, and Ego still hadn’t come back. Realizing this might be his only chance, Peter moved over to a set of stairs and shoved himself to his feet, grimacing. Everything went black for a moment and he collapsed, but after a minute of deep breathing, Peter managed to get vertical and stay that way.

“Come on, asshole, you’ve gotta get out of here. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and let’s go.” Peter muttered to himself, swaying on his feet and gripping the wall for dear life. With one ear listening for Ego coming back, Peter made his slow way to the entrance of the hall. He felt jumpy, guilty, like he was doing something wrong.

“How fucked up is that, huh? My dad’s a maniac who’s been torturing me, and now I feel guilty for trying to leave. Great job, Quill, real well-adjusted you are.” Peter grunted. He had to take a short break halfway up the steps, sitting down and panting. His limbs would barely take his weight.

He could hear Rocket’s voice in his head, and for one confused moment he thought he saw the raccoon standing in front of him with his arms crossed. “And now you’re talking to yourself, Star-Lord. Not a great sign.”

Peter frowned, blinking a couple of times. The image of Rocket wavered and swum, but was still sort of there. “What? Why are you calling me Star-Lord?”

Rocket snapped to attention, giving him an enthusiastic salute. His voice was characteristically sarcastic, but weirdly tinny, like he was hearing a bad recording. “Because I bow to your wisdom, O great leader.”

Peter heaved himself to his feet, closing his eyes until the image of Rocket went away. “Ah, Jesus. Now I’m hallucinating. Great. Great.”
Rocket’s bad-recording voice yelled after him. “Hey, shitmunch. If I was a hallucination, could I do this?”

Peter turned around to see the almost-transparent Rocket sprout Groot arms that pushed him six feet into the air where he did a somersault. Peter blinked several times, but the hallucination stayed stubbornly visible. “Rocket wishes he were that tall.” He muttered, continuing his torturous way up the stairs.

Every second that passed made Peter all the more sure his father was going to come walking back into the room. He knew he was working on borrowed time, but he could only move so fast. His progress was maddeningly slow, and he knew it was only a matter of time before an iron grip descended on his shoulder. Every tiny sound behind him made him jump, sure the jig was up. However, he got all the way up the steps. He thought about his communicator somewhere in Ego’s palace, but it was somewhere up 4 more flights of stairs. There was absolutely no way he was making it that far.

Instead, Peter set his sights on the front door. A few more staggering steps and he pulled it open. It was incredibly heavy and he was almost blown open by a gust of air, like the pressure in the area was being stabilized. Outside, it was late afternoon bordering on dusk, the sun setting over the horizon in the distance. Peter cast about wildly for Ego’s ship. It had to be around here somewhere. He had no idea how to pilot it, but he hadn’t spent his entire childhood with Ravagers for nothing. If Yondu had instilled anything in him besides the constant fear of being eaten, it was how to properly hijack a ship. He’d do what he always did. Figure it out.

After a fruitless ten-minute search, Peter was tiring quickly. There were far fewer things to hang onto out here, and he kept having to stop every few seconds to catch his breath. There was something wrong with his eyes, they kept blurring, and it was almost impossible to keep them focused.

Peter knew he was out of time when the wind picked up out of nowhere, almost blowing him sideways across the platform. The sky above darkened into clouds and thick drops of rain began to land on his head. Ego must have discovered he was missing.

“Fuck fuck fuck.” Peter said desperately. His choices at this point were sitting around waiting for Ego to show up or taking his chances on the rest of the planet. As the storm picked up, Peter lowered himself over the side and skidded down a muddy embankment while he was pelted by rain.

A cool terror gripped him when he was down the hill and heard his father’s voice, magnified beyond normal human levels shouting from somewhere back in the palace. “PETER! PETER, YOU GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW!”

Peter lost his balance and skidded to his knees at the base of the hill. It was hard to hear anything over the howl of the wind, but if he had ever been more sure of anything, it was that he needed to get away from Ego.

As someone who was considered dangerous in any corner of the galaxy, Gamora felt confident in saying that Yondu Udonta was a dangerous man. She doubted that there was much that would make him flinch. She had just seen him kill members of his own crew without batting an eye. Which was what gave her such a nasty jolt when Rocket told him Peter had gone off with his father. It was there one moment, gone the next, but Gamora could have sworn she saw a flash of
fear cross Yondu’s face. Not for himself, but for Peter.

“Ego? That stuck-up, big-headed… You saying Peter went off with that bastard, and ye haven’t heard from him in a week?” Yondu had gotten to his feet and paced back a step or two.

“Yeah. You know him?” Rocket asked.

Yondu turned back around, and anger marred his features. “You’re telling me you just let him walk off with him?”

Rocket bristled. “Well, we didn’t let him do anything. The guy’s his father.”

Yondu shook his head. He couldn’t seem to stay in one spot. “That ain’t all he is.”

“I’m guessing you know him then?” Gamora asked.


Yondu glanced at Kraglin, who shrugged. “You might as well tell them, boss. Everyone else in the damn galaxy knows by now.”

Yondu told them everything he knew about Ego, about the kids that disappeared, and his decision not to turn Peter over. Gamora felt ill.

“What was he doing to these children?” Drax asked. Even he seemed uncharacteristically serious.

Yondu shrugged. “I don’t know, but once I noticed the kids I brought were gone by the next time I brought one, I decided I wasn’t going to do it anymore. I was stupid and greedy, but I ain’t a monster.”

Gamora was still trying to digest the concept. “These were all his children? I- I don’t understand what he would need with that many children.”

Yondu looked over at her, miserable. “Nothing good.”

Rocket jumped back in. “Hang up. Why didn’t you just tell Quill about this? If you’d told him his dad was a psychopath, maybe he wouldn’t have gone with him.”

Yondu snorted. “You don’t know Peter as well as I thought then. You try telling that kid not to do something. He’ll jump in a molten vat just to spite ya. If I had told him about it, he’d have taken the first ship straight to him.”

“Well, we have to find him. Do you know how to find Ego’s planet?” Gamora said. If she was nervous before, there was now a fire lit under her to get there as quick as possible.

Yondu was shaking his head. “Changed every time I went there. He sent me new coordinates every time. It’s been years since I’ve been in contact with him. He could be anywhere by now.”

Gamora stepped back. “Well, we need to find a workable ship, and figure out how to get to Ego.”

Yondu stood up behind them. “You need a ship, I’ve got a ship. It’ll be faster that way.”

Gamora frowned. “What do you care?”
Yondu shrugged. “Don’t. But that little shit stole from me. I’m not gonna pass up an opportunity to twist his ear. This mess here with my crew is his fault anyway.”

Even Rocket didn’t dare make a joke about Yondu going soft, but they all saw through him.

Gamora had almost forgotten that Nebula was there until she sidled up to her and whispered into her ear. “You have a visitor.”

Gamora turned and put one hand on the hilt of her sword. The rest of them tensed, but it became clear their visitor wasn’t dangerous.

A small, nervous-looking alien garbed in green walked into their clearing. She threw her hood off to reveal two thin antenna emerging from her forehead. She looked like the stress of walking up to a group of armed strangers was going to be too much for her. She wrung her hands, but mustered up the courage to call out.

“Which one of you is Peter Quill?” She asked in a quavering voice.

Rocket and Gamora shared a look before Rocket leveled his blaster at her. “And who might you be, sweetheart?”

She squeaked and her antenna twitched, but she kept stumbling through what she had to say. “My name is Mantis. And I came here to warn Peter Quill that he is in danger.”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Gamora twitched and had to restrain herself from jumping on Mantis. She settled for resting a hand on the hilt of her sword. Her grip on it was so tight the edges left marks in her hand. “And what, exactly, do you know about Peter Quill?”

Mantis looked between each of them, antenna twitching. Her face fell as she took in each of their expressions. Her voice was halting. “Oh, no. Is he gone already?”

“Look, I think I speak for everybody here when I say I’d appreciate it if you’d start talking before I’m forced to shoot you. Or before I decide to do it for fun.” Rocket shot out.

“Yes, speak, strange bug lady.” Drax spoke up. He seemed to find her exceedingly strange.

Mantis’ eyes seemed to widen, and they grew shiny like she was about to cry. “I came as fast as I could. I followed you from the airport. I did not think Ego would come so fast. I thought I had more time to find you.”

“You know Ego?” Yondu’s voice was sharp.

Kraglin, still standing behind Yondu, noticed the small crowd growing at the edges of their camp. “Uh, boss? Maybe we should have this conversation somewhere a little more private.”

Yondu grunted and beckoned them all inside their ship. After the entire group had filed into the ship, they took up positions around the room. Mantis was wilting under the cold looks from the group, but she still seemed determined to have her say.

“I know Ego. I have known him for many years. I lived with him on his planet. He is, he has a lot of ideas. He likes, he likes to plan things, and when he found out where his son was, I knew I had to do something. I knew I had to warn him, so I came here and followed you, but I think I’m too late. I did not move faster.” Mantis was starting to ramble, and she was getting teary, which made the rest of them uncomfortable. She seemed to be tapping into the mood of the entire group, but emoting really wasn’t any of their things.

“What does he want with Peter?” Gamora snapped.

“Where is his planet now?” Yondu added.

“How do we find him?” Rocket said.

Mantis looked back and forth between all of them. Their impatience and rapid-fire questioning seemed to just fluster her. She gaped for a few seconds. Gamora could feel her patience running out of rope.

Groot hopped down from Rocket’s shoulder and ran over to Mantis. He reached up his short arms to her. She blinked at the little creature in confusion, but then picked him up. When she touched Groot, a strange thing happened. Her antenna lit up, and the anxiety seemed to leach out of her. She seemed to adopt Groot’s cheerful, easygoing nature. Her face smoothed out and she smiled down at Groot.
“I am Groot!” Groot announced happily, stroking her cheek with a vine.

Groot’s calm gave Mantis the focus she needed to keep talking. “I am sorry for being confusing. I get flustered sometimes. You must know who Ego is. He is a celestial, he has great power. He can be kind sometimes, but he also… I’m not sure how to put it. He thinks a great deal of himself.”

Rocket snorted. “Like father, like son.”

His joke disturbed Mantis. Her worry ebbed back a bit. “Ego has had many children. Many come and many go.”

Yondu’s face darkened. “Get on with it, girlie. What are you doin’ here?”

“Ego has been looking for his son, for Peter, for many years now. He was the only child of Ego’s that he never met. When we heard about a man from Earth who held an Infinity Stone in his bare hand, Ego knew he must be his son. He found out where he was, and he was going to go find him. That was when I left. I knew I had to find him first. I am so sorry to know I have failed.” Mantis said.

Mantis’ reluctance to explain the situation was deepening everyone’s sense of dread. Drax was the one to vocalize it. “Little one, where are all these children you speak of? What does he want with Peter?”

Mantis’ eyes swum, and she told them. Nobody spoke. The room seemed to be tunneling around Gamora’s vision. A hot flush of anger and fear rushed over her skin.

“What the hell is it with megalomaniacs and trying to destroy the galaxy? Gods’ sake,” Rocket swore. “Can’t they leave well enough alone?”

Yondu was barely moving. His eyes shone in the dim light of the cabin. “You’re tellin’ me… He’s done this before? To all the other kids?”

Mantis held Groot to her chest in moral support and nodded. “All of Ego’s progeny came, and all of them disappointed them. None of them had the celestial gene. It was horrible. It was torture. I couldn’t let him do it to another of his children.”

Gamora thought of her childhood, being pushed by her father to fight, to train, to change. She was beaten and pushed until nearly every ounce of softness was taken from her. All for her father, because of what he wanted, and what he thought was best. She clenched her fists, ground her teeth. Fury, never far from her mind, pulsed inside her at the thought of Peter being subjected to anything close to what she had gone through. She had been torn apart and built anew. What Thanos did to her was nothing short of murder.

She looked over at Nebula, who was no longer standing off to the side in disinterest. She had straightened up from the wall, ramrod straight, every line of her body full of tension like a bow string. She looked down at Mantis, and her words were slow and deliberate. “He just discarded them when he was done with them? He killed all of his children? Just because they didn’t give him what he wanted?”

Mantis was quiet. “Every one.”

They all jumped as Yondu wheeled around and shot a hole through the wall. The fin on his head burned and glowed. He didn’t turn back around. His shoulders were set.

“How do we find him?” Rocket asked. He was already running through every conceivable type of
explosive he could fit into this ship to bring along.

“I’m afraid I don’t know how. When I left, I did not think I would have to find his planet again. Yesterday, I tried to locate him. He lets me help him sleep, so I have a connection with him. But I think he felt me looking, and pushed me out. I don’t know how to find him.” Mantis said.

Gamora didn’t realize how much of her emotional state was showing on her face until Drax turned to look at her. She had thought she was showing a stoic face, but Drax did something she didn’t expect. He came closer and laid a hand on her arm. Her first instinct was to twist his wrist around and throw him off, but she allowed the touch to continue. For some reason, it was comforting.

“We will find him. He is part of our family, and we will not leave him behind.” Drax said to her, his voice as soft as it would ever get.

Gamora felt frozen. She looked at him, but all of a sudden needed to get out of that small room. She couldn’t breathe, and spun on her heels, hair whipping out behind her as she strode out of the room, leaving everyone else to make a plan. She walked out of the ship, and found herself growling and cursing at the sky. There was a spare pile of salvage that she kicked hard. It flew halfway across the clearing and landed dented beyond all recognition.

All she could think about was how a fortnight ago, Peter was still with them. She had walked in on him in the cockpit where he had figured out how to hook up speakers so that music played throughout the ship. He had pressed play on one of the slower songs that he told her were called ‘ballads’. When he saw her standing in the doorway, he smiled, his red-tinted hair being set off by the glint of stars outside the window. She felt almost like she were intruding on him in this private moment. She would never tell a soul, but this was the Peter she liked the best. As entertaining as cocky, on-top-of-the-world Peter was, this softer one she saw in private moments like this was what stuck with her. He had asked her to stay and listen to music with him, and looking at his wide open face, she had accepted. The Peter who danced around and dared her to join him, knowing without her telling him that she wanted to.

She couldn’t stop thinking about it. The crinkles at the corners of his eyes when he smiled. It made no sense for her to be focusing on this. She should have been with the rest of them, formulating a battle plan, doing what she was born for. But here she was, the idea of never seeing Peter’s smile again one of the worst things she could imagine. She hated feeling this way. She knew developing attachments like this was dangerous, but it was far too late.

Nebula’s precise footsteps came up behind her. Gamora didn’t turn to look. “I will help you, sister.”

Gamora turned to look at Nebula. She was angry as ever, but for once, it wasn’t directed at Gamora. “I will help you kill him.”

And although Gamora didn’t say a word, although no comforting touches were exchanged, Gamora felt just a little bit better.

Peter was completely soaked through by the time he made it all the way down the hill. The rain surged sideways, swirled in eddies, and came up from the ground. He had seen some weird things during his time in space, but nowhere where the weather ignored gravity.

The wide-open fields of wheat stretched out in one direction, quickly turning to sludge and mud
under the storm. Peter decided to stick to the gardens, where there was more cover. He stumbled and ran. Adrenaline was giving him the strength to walk fast enough, but it felt like empty calories. The second it wore off he’d collapse back on the ground.

Peter’s frantic breathing came out as he pressed himself against alien vines and purple insects crawling their way across the garden walls. He flinched violently when a bright crack of lightning ripped across the sky, except instead of jagged bars of light, the bursts of light seemed like giant eyes staring down from the heavens. Peter pressed himself into the vines and tried to stay still until the lightning passed.

Despite the pounding rain, those colorful orbs that had so delighted him upon his arrival were blowing about the path. Every time a raindrop hit one of them, they separated and separated again, bouncing around the area like a separating flock of birds. Peter shouted when one exploded in front of his eyes. He swiped at the air like he was trying to clear a windshield.

He saw another cluster a few feet in front of him explode in a kaleidoscope of color. Peter began to go down another slope, and he couldn’t stop grumbling to himself as he was surrounded by the whimsical creations of Ego’s planet. “You know what, fuck you, stupid bubbles, and fuck this planet and my stupid dad and fuck this storm.” He knew he was petulant and childish, but he felt half-delirious and panicked, and it felt better to throw aspersions at everything around him. The rain pounding around him wasn’t helping him focus. He slid down another step, cracking his knee on stone this time. He gasped in pain, but forced himself to his feet.

He got a fright when he turned the corner to see a life-sized marble statue of Ego surrounded by the luxuriant hedges. Peter leveled a finger at it, at the smooth face turned beatifically to the ground. “And an extra special fuck you to you.”

Something slammed into the ground a few feet from Peter. His feet were sprayed by shattered ice. After a moment, another one slammed into the ground. It was hailing, jagged balls of ice whizzing past his head every few seconds. Peter could just feel Ego’s anger in the gesture.

A piece of hail slammed into the divot between his neck and shoulder, hard enough to leave a bruise. Peter cast about, looking for some sort of shelter he could get into. The hail seemed to be getting bigger and bigger, and it might be dangerous to stay out here.

After another turn of the corner, the open fields stretched out again. There was a shimmer at the horizons of his vision. Peter squinted and looked closer. Drax was in the middle of the field, standing with both of his rapiers extended into the air, his head angled back into the storm. He was laughing, triumphant. He was absolutely in his element.

This time, Peter just accepted the hallucination. Even though it wasn’t real, he felt better seeing one of his friends here. As much as he fancied himself a loner, he always fared better with someone else. Another flash of lightning illuminated the sky and Drax thrust one rapier as if in defiance of it, then turned to Peter and gave him a thumbs up. It was a strangely comforting gesture.

Drax began shouting something, but the storm was too loud for Peter to hear it. After a second, Drax pointed with one hand, across the windswept field. Peter followed his finger to see a dark spot maybe three hundreds yards away. It looked like a cave.

“Thanks, man.” Peter muttered. The hallucination of Drax smiled and then disappeared in the next crash of thunder. He decided the best way to get over to shelter was just to make a run for it. He wished desperately he had his jacket, because he could have thrown that over his head. As it was, all he was wearing was his thin shirt and pants. If he only had his mask, this would be a cakewalk.
Bracing himself, Peter made a run for it. Hail and rain pelted him, coursing down his face and into his mouth. If it was raining any harder, he could have been drowned just being outside. He made his limping way across the field, finally collapsing just inside the mouth of the cave.

The cave was damp and cold, but at least it was out of the storm. Listening to the thunder rage outside, Peter wondered how long he would be able to hide here. Once his eyes adjusted to the darkness a little, he noticed there was a light coming from farther down, an open cavern beyond this narrow mouth.

Peter heaved himself up and walked toward the light. The wind surged into the cave, making a high howling sound. It was only the wind, but it made him shiver. When he finally made it into the cavern, he didn’t know what he was looking at.

A towering pile of something bleached and white filled the cave. Peter frowned and went closer, picking one up and examining it closer. It was an arm bone, and it was small. Peter dropped it with a cry. It was then he realized what he was seeing. The cavern was full of hundreds and hundreds of bones, all different sizes and shapes.

Peter’s eyes widened; he gaped. Fear curdled like acid through his veins. “Oh, my god. Oh my god.” His voice was ragged. These were children’s bones, some bigger than others, but there were so many of them.

Ego’s voice echoed in his mind. *My other children all disappointed me*. Peter’s stomach lurched and before he knew what he was doing he had doubled over and retched. He could almost see it, Ego coming here to dump each successive child here without a thought. He had the celestial gene, and Ego’s draining was excruciating. He couldn’t even imagine what it was like for the others. A helpless fury at his father filled him.

His reverie was interrupted by the loudest clap of thunder yet and a blinding flash of lightning filling the cave. Peter fell and shaded his eyes. By the time it faded, Ego was standing at the mouth of the cave, face set in anger. The storm seemed to howl in with him.

“What do you think you’re doing? I don’t like having my time wasted, and I’d suggest you don’t test me.” Ego hissed. He seemed taller than normal, filled with anger and the storm. The lines of his face pulsed with light. He seemed less human than normal.

Peter jumped. When Ego took striding steps toward him, he scuttled backwards across the floor in a desperate attempt to get away from his father. He couldn’t think straight, his heart was slamming against his ribcage. The wind howled.

“Wh-what is wrong with you?” Peter stammered, voice shaking as hard as he was.

Ego slowed, looking down at his son. “Excuse me?”

Peter pointed at the pile of bones. “They were your children, weren’t they? I don’t, I don’t understand…”

Ego twitched. “How many damn times do we have to have this conversation, Peter? If I didn’t know better, I’d say you were being deliberately dense.”

Peter shook his head. “Nothing is worth this. I don’t know how you managed to convince my mom you were a real person.”

Ego swept his cape behind him and sunk onto his haunches in front of Peter. His eyes glittered. “Anything worth doing involves a little bit of trial and error. I would have hoped you’d have gotten
a sense of perseverance from me, at the very least.”

Peter’s eyes watered and his voice came out in a whisper. “Trial and error?” The worst part of Ego was that he looked so similar to Peter, to what he had imagined and hoped his father would look like as a kid. He would have taken the deadbeat dad he’d always imagined in a heartbeat over this sparkling, angry god.

If Peter was horrified by his father, Ego seemed to be equally disgusted by his son. “God, didn’t you grow up with Ravagers? I would have thought that Centaurian captain would have smacked a little sense into you. I knew Udonta wasn’t the man for the job when he didn’t turn you over. If he had just done like I paid him, this would have been a lot easier.”

Peter blinked. “What?”

Ego tilted his head and raised his eyebrows. “He never told you? I paid Udonta an exorbitant price to hand you over to me. I have no idea why he didn’t. Can’t imagine why he’d want a snot-nosed kid running all over his ship. At least I never had to deal with any of them for long.”

Peter had wondered without cease why Yondu had taken him from Earth, but he had never gotten a straight answer no matter how many times he asked, and he asked a lot. He wasn’t sure what to make of this revelation. Yondu had just told him to stop asking stupid questions and brushed him off, but Peter always wondered.

“Did you give him a hard time too?” Ego frowned. “He was perfect until he decided to grow a conscience. He just didn’t understand what I was trying to achieve here.”

Peter silently thanked the stars Yondu had a heart beating somewhere deep under his tough skin, no matter how small. If Yondu had done as he was paid to do, Peter would have been here with his father for years. As miserable as he was now, he couldn’t imagine he would even be a person anymore after years of this.

Ego tired of reminiscing and stood up, his heavy cape rustling about his feet. “Let’s go. You’ve had your fun.”

Peter inched back. “No.” He shook his head.

Ego leaned down to grab his arm. Crackling ozone hissed off of him from the storm. “I’m not asking. I’m your father and you’ll do as I say.”

Peter was shaking from nerves and cold, but he held his ground. “And I’m not coming.”

Ego yanked on his arm, nearly pulling it out of its socket on his way to his feet. Peter struggled and out of instinct shoved a palm into his father’s chest to get away from him. A strange thing happened. A flash of blue light appeared out of nowhere as a wall between the two of them, launching Peter backwards off his feet. As he flew backwards, he saw Ego’s shocked face. He landed on his back on the pile of bones. As Ego recovered his balance and came after him, Peter sunk his palms into the bones in search of ground, feeling the same terror and pain as generations of children before him.

As Ego advanced on him with a snarl on his face, Peter slammed his palms into the ground and every bone in the cavern rose into the air, like they were dangling from invisible strings. Ego halted, staring up at them. “How are you doing that?”

Peter felt like an icepick were shoving its way through his eye socket. He panted but tried to keep doing whatever it was he was doing. It had been a product of pure panic and instinct. He had no
idea how he was doing this.

“Leave me alone or these go through your head.” Peter struggled through the sentence, his wavering voice undercutting the authority of his statement.

Instead of backing off, Ego stayed where he was, an angry grin like a challenge adorning his face. “You can’t keep that going for more than a few seconds.”

Peter grimaced, and with a great deal of effort managed to launch a few of the bigger pieces at Ego’s head. Ego was caught off balance and had to throw a hand in front of himself while the projectiles burst apart around him. Peter’s bared teeth were an equal demonstration of effort and grim satisfaction.

The bones shivered in the air, and Peter lost what tenuous hold he had on them as they fell back to the ground in a cascading crash. A gust of wind blew into the cave and Ego lowered his hand. He was in a towering rage now, and he strode toward Peter with no more need for conversation.

Peter tried to lunge out of his way, but Ego sent one of the tendrils of light out to snake around his neck once and pull up. Peter choked and spluttered as he was hoisted first to his feet and then farther so only the tips of his toes touched the ground.

Ego turned around and Peter was pulled after him. He kicked his legs and reached up hands to claw at his neck in any attempt to loosen the noose around his neck. It felt like trying to grab hold of a live wire. Ego led the way out of the cave, and Peter had no choice but to stumble after him.

The open fields outside the cave were illuminated by strange purple light from the roiling clouds. All of the hail had frozen in the air, hovering but not falling. Peter would have wondered at it if he hadn’t been suffocating. He could just get enough air in to not pass out, but he was growing more panicked every second. His tongue felt too big for his mouth, and he kept making raspy choking noises.

They were halfway back to the palace when Ego spun back around. Low, purple clouds spun and rolled over their heads. Lightning crashed and then stayed frozen in the air, throwing harsh lines across Ego’s face, exposing the lines of his skull. “Why are you making me do this to you, Peter? None of the others gave me this kind of trouble.”

Peter kicked and choked. He couldn’t really focus on Ego. Ego was looking at him as if he really was unhappy about the situation. “I think I know where we went wrong. You don’t believe I really loved your mother. You were going along with me until then.”

Peter twisted his head in what was meant to be a shake of the head.

Crocodile tears began to fall from Ego’s eyes. “I loved her, as much as I could. You’re all I have left of her now. We’ll just both have to get used to that.”

Ego walked back to the palace, and Peter twisted and stumbled after him. They got back inside the hall and Ego released Peter. He fell onto the ground and heaved in a huge breath. The sudden rush of air into his lungs sent him into a coughing fit. His throat felt like it was on fire.

“If you loved her, you wouldn’t have put that tumor in her head.” Peter croaked.

“You’re wrong, Peter. Sometimes you have to do things you don’t want to. That’s life. Take it from your father.”

Peter was about to retort again, but Ego waved a hand. “I think that’s enough talking for today.
You really need to learn how to listen, or we won’t be getting along very well.”

Two taper-thin tendrils of light shot across the air and wrapped themselves around Peter’s already sore neck. They sunk into his skin and he had the strangest sensation of them wrapping around his vocal cords. He tried to say something, but no sound emerged from his mouth.

Peter scratched at his neck as if that would do anything and stared at his father with big eyes. Ego pointed back at the cage. “Now get back in there or maybe I’ll decide you need a harsher punishment.” When Peter didn’t move, his face hardened. “Now.”

Still massaging his throat, Peter pushed himself back to sit in the cage, wrapping his arms around his knees. Ego slammed the door closed and looked in on him. “And don’t ever try and run away again. I don’t know where you thought you were going to go.”

Ego left, and Peter leaned against the wall, still curled into a ball. He held his hands in front of his chest and tried to summon that power he had tapped into in the cave, but he was too drained. After a second, he lowered his hands in defeat. He only now realized how cold he was. His clothes were all still damp from the storm and the bars of his cage were chilling against his skin.

He was tired, and in pain, and very lonely. He couldn’t help a few tears tracking their way down his cheeks. Ego was right. He had no idea where he was trying to go, he had just panicked. The helplessness of his situation hit him. He closed his eyes and tried to summon up a happy memory, but everything that came to mind made him feel worse. His mother’s outstretched hand, Gamora’s hair floating about her head as she froze to death in space, the scattered remains of Groot in the debris after he had sacrificed himself.

Chapter End Notes

Gamora and Yondu won’t be happy about this. Somebody get Ego a #1 Dad mug. Next chapter: a heist of sorts and a phone call. Seriously, your guys’ comments have been really encouraging and wonderful :) I’ll update in a couple days.
When Gamora and Nebula rejoined the group, nobody else had come up with any brilliant ideas of how to find Ego.

Yondu was staring at Kraglin like he was a particularly bothersome ant. “Are you telling me… your genius idea is to just fly around the galaxy until we find the planet?”

Kraglin threw his hands and made a noise of protest. “I didn’t say that! I meant you’ve been there before, we could retrace our steps.”

Yondu’s fin was still glowing on his head, which was a bad sign for Kraglin’s continuing health. “You trying to piss me off?”

“I’m just saying there are only so many planets in the galaxy.” Kraglin objected.

“There’re more planets in this solar system than there are brain cells in that head of yours.” Yondu hissed out before turning around and digging his fingers into the scarred table in the center of the common room.

“Bug woman. Are you saying you have no way of getting back to the planet?” Drax asked. He had been very interested in the way Groot had altered her mood. While Gamora had been outside, she had told them about her empathic abilities.

Mantis looked up from where Groot was scurrying up and down her arm. “I tried already yesterday. He pushed me out, and I’m afraid that puts us at a disadvantage. He knows I have left by now, and might know that I would come to you. He could know we are coming.”

Gamora sneered. “Good. I want him to know I’m coming for him.”

Rocket was going through a bag of homemade firecrackers. He lit up. “Nova Corps has a base on this planet. What if we just blow the shit out of them until they agree to tell us where Ego is.”

“Rocket! Serious suggestions only. We don’t have any time for foolishness.” Gamora snapped.

Rocket’s ears flattened against his head and he gave her a resentful look. “Forgive me if I don’t stand here and get all weepy, but I am taking this seriously. You’re not the only one who’s worried about Quill.”

There was an uncomfortable silence. Gamora sat down in one of the chairs around the table and rubbed her temples. “You’re right. I’m sorry, Rocket. That was unfair of me. What were you saying?”

“Don’t worry about it. Okay, so maybe we don’t blow them up, but Nova Corps is here. They have a database of every planet in the galaxy. How much do you wanna bet they have information not open to the general public?” Rocket said.

Gamora thought about it, and the more she thought about it, the more she liked the idea. “Okay. Do you think they would tell us?”
Rocket nodded. “Yeah, the question is how far will our good will get us?”

“Ten feet past the front door.” Nebula noted in a monotone voice.

“Oh ye of little faith!” Rocket said. “They love us over there! They love me over there specifically. I’m a lovable guy.”

Drax straightened up and put one fist into his other hand. “We walk into their headquarters. We take one of their puny guards hostage and tell them we will kill him if they do not surrender to us.”

Nebula and Yondu seemed to be on board with this plan, but Gamora sighed and vetoed it. “No, we’d just end up in jail for the night, and that won’t do anyone any good.”

“I am Groot!” Groot yelled from his spot on the table.

Rocket turned to him. “Hey, Gamora said serious ideas only.”


Rocket put his hands on his hips like a disappointed parent. “Well, that’s an insanely dangerous plan. How would you get past the biometric-“

“I am Groot.”

“Okay, now you’re just insulting me. Of course I know how to disable-”

“I am Groot.”

“You better be sure about this.”

“I am Groot!”

Rocket turned to the rest of them who had been watching the back-and-forth like a tennis match. “Groot has an idea.”

“Yeah, I gathered that.” Gamora said drily.

“Care to enlighten us, badger?” Yondu said.

Rocket puffed himself up. “Badger? What the hell is that? That cooler than a raccoon?”

Yondu shrugged. “I don’t know. I heard Peter say it once. Thought I’d try a new insult on for size.”

“For all you know, that could be a good thing. A badger could be an eighteen-foot tall killer droid. So I’m gonna take it as a compliment.” Rocket huffed.

Yondu was busy picking his nails. “Wasn’t meant as one.”

Gamora threw her hands up. “Guys, can we please get back to business?”

“Oh, right.” Rocket told them the plan, which involved Rocket disabling the Nova Corps alarm system while two of them snuck in the back and took Ego’s location off of their computers while the rest of them caused a distraction. They were good at distractions.

Rocket disappeared for a minute into his bag, rummaging around until he pulled out a small
triangle-shaped piece of machinery.

“Looks like a piece of junk.” Yondu said, peering down at the small object in Rocket’s hand.

“That’s funny, because I was about to say it looked a lot like you.” Rocket quipped. “Now, what I need is for somebody to take this into their front lobby and get this as close to a computer as you possibly can. It’s a neat little thing that clones machinery. If you can get this in and out, I should be able to download diagnostics of their security and disable the whole system.”

Gamora was nodding. This felt like a real plan. “Okay, I’ll do that. How long after you get it can you be ready?”

Rocket shrugged. “Two, three days?”

Gamora was dismayed. “Days?”

He shrugged. “Look, I don’t like it any more than you do, but that’s an optimistic estimate. Normally it would take about a week. I’ll go as fast as I can.”

Gamora turned back to the group. “Okay, so that’s our plan unless anyone can think of anything that would be faster? Any ideas at all?”

Nobody said anything until Mantis cautiously raised her hand. The rest of them had sort of forgotten she was there. “What if you just asked?”

They stared at her. “Asked?” Yondu said it like it was a dirty word.

She blinked. “Yes. You said you have helped these people before. They might tell you if you just asked them.”

Drax laughed once, loud and abrupt. “That was humorous. I like this bug lady. She says things that are not true in a serious tone of voice.”

Mantis seemed a little confused. “I was not joking. At least take me with you when you go to drop off this piece of machinery. I am good at reading a room. I can tell you whether the people there are suspicious of your intentions.”

Gamora agreed reluctantly, although she had her doubts about Mantis’ usefulness. Rocket conscripted Kraglin and Nebula into scavenging for machinery he would need. Gamora could see Nebula wasn’t as annoyed about this as she pretended to be.

They all split up on their tasks, impatient but glad to finally have a plan of action.

Peter was freezing. As a celestial being, Ego didn’t really have any need for central heating, and as a result, the hall was fairly chilly. The storm outside had soaked him through, and although his clothes had dried, that didn’t mean Peter had warmed up any. He wasn’t sure whether the shivering was from nerves, exhaustion, or cold, but it was probably all three. It was the constant kind of shivering that made his muscles feel clenched and painful. If it was just a little bit warmer, he could relax. He thought resentfully of Ego’s heavy cloak.

Ego had left him alone for hours, which was fine by Peter. He had only managed to get an hour or two of sleep before he’d jerked awake again. He wasn’t sure he had ever been more tired, but
sleeping involved at least a minimal sense of safety. Ego was starting to take a toll on him. Peter’s back ached from pressing up against the bars of the cage. He had already tried every possible sitting position, but they were all uncomfortable. The cage was just too small. It was the icing on top of this shitty, shitty cake. Ego could have locked him somewhere where there was enough room to stretch his legs or walk around a little. Hell, he had enough space. An entire planet of space. Peter was being treated like a misbehaving dog.

His throat still felt weird. He could breathe fine, but there was a lump in his throat he couldn’t get rid of. It was a weirdly dehumanizing gesture to cut off his voice, and Peter tried not to let it bother him as much as it did. His main coping mechanism was terrible jokes and sarcasm, and without that he was vulnerable. He was doing his best to keep a level head, but it was getting harder and harder.

The only thing that was keeping him going was the fact that he had a secret from Ego. He kept it as a burning brand against his chest, as fragile as a lit candle in a strong wind. It had been a few hours, and he was able to summon up a small blue light between his cupped hands. It was no bigger than a marble, but it was something. He huddled against the side of the cage, trying to be as secretive as he could in case Ego walked in. Even this small effort was enough to tire him out, but he kept at it. It was the only thing he could control, and it comforted him as much as a blazing wall of light between him and his father.

The door to the hall opened, and Ego strode in. Peter flinched and the light died.

“I hope you’ve had enough time to think about your actions.” Ego said. “I know you think I’m being cruel, but I just had to lay down a few ground rules.”

Peter looked down at his feet. He didn’t want to look at his father anymore. He just wanted to be left alone for long enough to get his head straight.

“I hope you’re ready to behave yourself now.” Ego said. He was apparently waiting for a response. “Are you?”

Peter closed his eyes and nodded.

The door of the cage sprang open. “Good. Then get out. You wasted a lot of my time yesterday.”

Peter hesitated before getting out, pulling up on the cage door to get to his feet. He followed Ego to the middle of the room, unconsciously trying to make himself smaller. A deep feeling of shame sat heavy in his gut. There was a part of him screaming to fight, to run, that just because he couldn’t talk didn’t mean he couldn’t make Ego’s life hell, but there was a much bigger part of himself who thought that it would be so much easier just to do as he was told.

Ego turned around and Peter winced, bracing himself. But instead, Ego started talking again, his favorite activity. “See, Peter? See how much easier it is when you just listen to me?”

Peter nodded again, listlessly, just to give the impression of cooperation. Ego smiled at him and stepped closer. “One of these days we’ll look back on all of this as growing pains. When it’s just us, you’ll see this was all for the best.”

Peter flinched and took a step back when Ego moved forward and took his face between his hands. His hands came up defensively. “You’re a good son. Or you will be, at least.”

He let Peter go, and he only had a few seconds of freedom before the light was back. They wrapped around wrists and ankles and hoisted him up. Peter closed his eyes, not wanting to see
himself be impaled again. Small feelers found his temples and sunk into him and before he knew it he was being impaled again. His mouth opened in what would have been a scream, except no sound came out. The horrible feeling of being drained was back. He fell limp.

He lost sight of the hall, his eyes blazing with the light. Peter began to fight a little. He didn’t want to go back to that bright void, where the only thing was distant planets being colonized by the blue light.

With a great deal of effort, he managed to separate himself from the light. With little sense of reality, he found himself sitting in a sanitized waiting room. He just accepted it, as it was loads better than the alternative.

Before he could relax too much, he saw Gamora leaning against the opposite wall, lines of tension the same as the first time he met her. He tried to say her name, but only a soft puff of air came out.

Gamora was looking at him, but something was wrong. Her nose was wrinkled in disgust and she made no move to come closer.

Gamora, Peter tried to say.

“I know you’re hoping that I’m coming to find you.” Not-Gamora said, voice cold.

Peter nodded.

Gamora crossed her arms and stalked closer, standing over him. “Why?”

When Peter just looked confused, she continued. “Why should I come find you? You’ve given up already.”

I haven’t … Peter mouthed. It seemed important to make this point.

“Sure looks like it to me. Do you know what Thanos did to me? My ‘father’? It was brutal and repetitive and a hundred times worse than anything you’re going through. You think I just rolled over and gave up?” Gamora continued.

Peter blinked tears away. I know you went through hell. I’m sorry, he tried to say. He grimaced and rasped out air, but no words.

“You’re damn right you should be sorry. What makes you think you deserve me to come after you? We’re hardly friends, it’s laughable that you think I’d be interested in you. You’re loud, obnoxious, immature, and incredibly selfish. The ego you must have to think someone like me would ever want to be with someone like you.” Not-Gamora hissed.

Peter flinched as if she had struck him. These were all things he had thought, and although he knew this wasn’t real, and though he knew Gamora would never say anything like that, it still hurt to hear her say them.

“You’re helping him, Peter. You’re letting him destroy the galaxy. He’s the only kind of father you deserve.” She said.

I don’t want to! Peter tried to say. This seemed important to get across, crucial. But no matter how much he pushed out air, he couldn’t make a sound.

Gamora’s cold face shut down and she left him on his own. “You’re on your own, Peter. Just like you’ve always been.”
After that point, Peter lost what tenuous hold he’d had over his mind, and he was sent back into the light.

Gamora strode through the marketplace with Mantis by her side. After going through the plan a few times with Rocket, they had broken up. Gamora was hoping they could get through the whole walk without a conversation, but Mantis, having won over the rest of them, was hoping to get on Gamora’s good side as well.

“This is a good plan! I think we should feel good about this plan.” Mantis huffed, having to speed walk a bit to keep up with Gamora.

Gamora, distracted, hummed. “I’ll feel good about it when it works.”

They drew to a halt across the square from the Nova Corps headquarters. They had armed guards standing outside, and a large diplomatic crew was milling about the front.

Gamora clocked them and then tied her hair back and pulled her sleeves down so she’d look a little more professional. “When that big group goes in, we’ll join the crowd. They’ll be distracted for long enough for us to do what needs to be done.”

There was nothing to be done until the group decided to move, so Gamora kept one eye on them and considered Mantis. Before they left, Mantis had shown everyone the practical uses for her empathic abilities. Drax had found it highly entertaining, and even Kraglin had let her try it out on him.

“So, that thing you do. Does that work on everyone?” She asked.

Mantis smiled at her. Despite their dire situation, Gamora couldn’t help but be endeared a tiny bit. “You are wondering if it would work on you.”

Gamora nodded.

“It would. I could show you?” Mantis said.

Gamora hesitated. If they had been in front of the others, there was no way in hell Mantis would be getting anywhere near her. However, they were alone, and she was curious. Mantis stretched a hand out to her, and Gamora held up a finger. “If you try to alter my emotions in any way, you’ll be going home with a broken wrist.”

Mantis took Gamora’s hand. Gamora got an exceedingly strange, unpleasant feeling of being seen. It might not have been uncomfortable for everyone, but she didn’t like it. Mantis seemed to stiffen a little. Her antenna glowed.

“You love him.” Mantis said.

Gamora jerked out of her grip immediately. “What?”

“Peter. You love him. That’s who you were thinking of.”

Gamora huffed a protest, but it didn’t seem worth lying to Mantis.

“You feel very protective over him, but you are upset because you keep thinking about him being hurt.” Mantis said. It was eerie how she seemed to pick up not thoughts from Gamora’s head, but
the truth behind them. The raw emotion with none of the bullshit rationalizing that got piled on top of it. “Many of the things that bothered you about him when you first met are now endearing to you. You pretend to be irritated when he goofs off, but you like it. You think of him as a warm light…”

Gamora cut her off. “Okay, that’s enough of that. I get it. I don’t need to hear it.”

Mantis frowned at her in confusion. “It is not a bad thing to love someone. Why do you act like this is a shameful thing?”

“Where I come from, it was.” Gamora muttered, but she noticed that their group was moving. With a sense of relief, she moved them along. There was no more time for sharing their feelings.

Gamora and Mantis adopted the straight backs of the people in front of them and filtered through the door. One by one, the visitors went through security. It became immediately obvious that the place was already in chaos. The place seemed to be staffed through the ceiling, and people were running every which way on their rushed way to meetings. Gamora frowned.

“What’s wrong with them?” She muttered to Mantis.

Mantis’ antenna were glowing softly. She thought hard. “I’m… not sure. Something bad is happening. Most everyone in here is very very worried about something. I can’t see what.”

Gamora caught sight of a Nova Corps employee on the other side of the security barrier hurrying past. She recognized him from after they had saved everyone from the Infinity Stone. She passed the clone device to Mantis and pointed at the guards’ station. “You take care of this. I’m going to see if I can figure out what’s going on.”

Mantis immediately looked terrified, but set herself to the task. All the guards were focused on the people going through the metal detectors, so she pressed the clone device to one of their computers and watched a slow-moving progress bar flicker on the tiny display screen. She tried to appear as casual as possible.

Gamora caught the attention of the man, who came a little closer. He was holding a pile of papers and looked absolutely frazzled. “Gamora, right? What are you doing here?”

“We’re on the planet, just dropping in.” Gamora breezed past the truth. “What’s going on here?”

The man let out a desperate laugh. “You could tell me that, and I would be grateful. Truth is, nobody around here quite knows what’s going on. It’s pandemonium. There’s some, blue, growth spreading all over a few planets at the edge of the quadrant. Nobody knows where the hell it came from, but it’s causing a lot of damage.”

Gamora thought she might have an idea. “Is anyone hurt?”

The man shrugged. “There were some casualties the first day, yeah, but thankfully less than there could have been. We’ve been evacuating the areas affected, so there isn’t anybody around where it’s growing, but it just keeps spreading, and we have no idea how to stop it.”

Gamora spoke slowly. “What if I could tell you what was going on? That we might be able to stop it if you gave us some information only you have access to.”

The man was already backing away from her. “Look, I’m sorry, but the likelihood of that backfiring on me is really high, and I’m already 20 minutes late for a meeting as it is. I’m sorry, but we’re just too busy here.”
Gamora turned around and her heart leapt into her throat to see one of the guards advance on Mantis with a frown on his face. Gamora pushed through the crowd to get to her, but she needn’t have worried about it. Mantis put a hand on his shoulder and whispered something in his ear. Immediately, the guard’s face smoothed out and he turned back around, coming back to the metal detector without a second look at them.

Gamora ran over to join Mantis, who was just peeling the cloning device off the computer. “What did you just do to him?”

“I just told him to relax, that everything was all right, and he didn’t need to worry.” Mantis said like it was no big deal.

Despite herself, Gamora was a little impressed. “Okay then. Nice job. Let’s get out of here so Rocket can get started.”

Peter had been left alone again. After he had finished draining Peter, Ego said he wanted to see some of his handiwork. He had left the palace, and Peter wondered if he had left the planet. Not that it did him much good.

After managing to get thirty minutes of uninterrupted sleep, Peter was awake again. He had managed to summon up the small marble of light again, and hadn’t done anything beyond hold it in his hands. His head was pounding with the beginnings of a migraine. He was worried that the black spots at the edge of his vision weren’t going away, and actually seemed to becoming permanent. He had heard about head trauma causing problems with vision.

Peter watched the blue marble in his hands with dull eyes. His thoughts turned to the rest of the Guardians. He hoped they were looking for him, although his hopes weren’t high that they’d find him. His hallucination of Gamora had shaken him. He told himself over and over again that it was stupid, but that didn’t change how real it had felt.

As he thought of his friends, the blue marble in his hands flickered. He snapped back to attention, worried it was fading. After a moment, he saw something else was happening. It was changing color, from Ego’s cold blue to warm gold spreading throughout the sphere. It grew a little in size and even warmed in Peter’s hands, sending much-needed heat into his palms.

A tentative, barely-there smile broke his face. He pulled his hands in close to himself, wondering at its size. He could feel what little strength he had left ebbing away as a result of creating this ball of light, but that was all right. Peter thought he would do almost anything to keep this light aflame.

The gold light’s proximity to Peter began to tug at something. For one frightening moment, he thought he was choking, but instead the two tendrils of Ego’s light that had been wrapped around his vocal cords were being teased out, rising out of his skin and into the air where they withered and died. It was an unpleasant sensation, something being pulled out of his throat, but he was glad when they were gone. Peter was sent into a coughing fit, pressing his mouth against his shoulder so as not to drop the light. With a burst of wonder, he realized he was making noise again. Scratchy, weak noise, but it was his voice nonetheless.

Peter got to his knees, cupping the light in his hands. He wondered if this would be able to break the lock. He automatically moved toward it but froze. What if Ego found out? There was no way off this planet, this wouldn’t be a way to escape, it would just succeed in pissing Ego off. He was better off just staying here.
Peter hovered between moving forward and staying here. Cold blue began to inch back into his ball of light. His heart pounded at the thought of being found out again. But then he thought of what Gamora said about surviving Thanos, about the horrible stories Rocket let slip out when he got drunk enough, the horror stories Yondu told him about his youth to convince him the galaxy was a dangerous place. They all shared something in common. They didn’t give up. Not a one of them. Peter took a deep breath and strengthened his resolve. If his friends, if his family could go through what they did and survive, the least he could do was break the lock and get out of this cage. He didn’t know how much time he had left, and he wanted to see his friends at least once more.

The ball of light glowing gold, Peter snaked his hand outside of the bars and pressed it into the lock. There was a hissing snap and a soft puff of smoke and the ball of light dissolved, but the cage door swung open.

Heart pounding fit to burst, Peter got out of the cage and stood up. He knew his communicator was still in the palace somewhere, and this time, he was going to find it.

Groot sat in one of the copilot seats, dwarfed by its giant size. Gamora and Mantis had gotten back, and they were all downstairs arguing while Rocket tried to hook up all the salvage Nebula and Kraglin had gotten.

Groot didn’t like it when the rest of them were fighting, so he stayed up here in the cockpit. He liked it in the cockpit. It was where the group liked each other the most, when they were hopped up on adrenaline from outrunning aliens or bounty hunters or whoever it was trying to kill them that week.

A pinging sound came from the control panel above Groot, which meant there was a message coming in. Groot pulled himself onto the panel and hit the button next to the screen. There were a few moments of static and then an image coalesced on the screen.

It was Peter, holding the screen with shaking hands and looking at the door every few seconds. He appeared to be crouched against a wall in a dark room. When Groot saw Peter, he lit up.

“I am Groot!” He cried loudly.

Startled, Peter’s eyes went back to the screen. When he saw Groot, his face softened and his entire body seemed to deflate. “H-hey, buddy. You have no idea how good it is to see you.” His voice was hoarse and hard to understand, but Groot didn’t care.

“I am Groot!” He repeated.

“Hey, Groot, would you mind getting one of the others?” Peter asked, voice quiet.

“I am Groot!” Groot chirped, hopping down from the control panel to scurry out of the cockpit and down the stairs. In the common room, everyone was sitting around the table while Rocket tried to explain the mechanics of what he was doing. Yondu was arguing with him just for the sake of argument, Drax was still insistent that taking someone hostage would take much less time, and Nebula was back to standing in the corner with her arms folded.

Groot tried to get Gamora’s attention, but she waved him off. “Groot, I’m busy. Can it wait until later?”
“I am Groot!”

“He says it’s important.” Rocket translated without looking up from the guts of the machine he was tinkering with.

Gamora sighed and scooped Groot up. “Okay, but this has to be quick, Groot.”

She carried him back up the stairs to the cockpit. He hopped down and pointed towards her co-pilot’s seat. She sunk down into the seat and looked down at the screen, which was showing a live transmission. For a long second, she didn’t even recognize who it was calling. Her heart dropped into her stomach and she clapped a hand over her mouth.

It was Peter. He had dozed off in the few seconds it took Groot to find Gamora, and for a few frozen seconds, she just took him in. He looked awful, there was no other way to put it. His hair was disheveled and matted, and there were deep circles under his eyes. There were a few bruises littering his jaw like someone had grabbed it tight, and he had a slow-healing busted lip. Anger coiled in her gut at the man who did that to Peter. She saw red, and had to make a concerted effort to keep that out of her voice.

“Peter?” She asked.

He jerked awake, and looked around disoriented for a few seconds, unsure of what he was doing. But then he looked at her with bleary eyes and recognition came back in. She could have cried from the expression on his face. He looked exhausted, beat down, and more than anything else, scared. She wanted to wipe anything that made him look like that from the face of the galaxy.

“G-Gamora, hey. Hey.” His voice was hoarse (From screaming, a nasty part of her mind noted) and halting, but he drank in her face like it was the only thing keeping him going.

“Oh, Peter, are you okay?” Gamora asked. She knew it was a stupid question, but she couldn’t think of what else to say.

Peter heaved in a stuttering breath that sounded like it could turn into sobs at a moment’s notice. “Well, Gamora, I’m only going to say this once and then never again, but you were very right. My dad is a dick.”

Gamora’s hand brushed the display screen, wishing he was here so she could run her fingers through his hair. She whipped her head to the side and screamed. “Guys! Get in here right fucking now!”

“Peter, we’re looking for you as fast as we can, but is there anything you can tell us to speed up the process? We know you’re with Ego.” Gamora said.

Peter looked at her with exhausted eyes. His eyes seemed to swim like he was having a hard time focusing them. “Gamora, about what you said. You were right, I’m sorry, you shouldn’t have to come after me..”

He was trailing off, sounded delirious. Gamora clenched the table. “What? Peter, I never said that, what are you talking about?”

There was a crash of feet, and the rest of them piled into the room. “What’s going on?” Rocket asked.

Gamora was lost for words, just pointed at the screen. They all piled in around her, Yondu on her right, Rocket and Drax on her left.
Rocket snapped. “Peter, man, where are ya?”

Yondu cursed under his breath. The blue of his skin seemed to darken in anger. “Goddamn it to hell, boy. What did that bastard do to you?”

Peter opened his eyes again. The right eye was bloodshot. Gamora could see an angry red line around his throat. “Oh, my god, it’s good to see you guys. I- I don’t know how much time I have until he finds me.” His eyes flicked away from the screen again toward the door.

“Look, I- I wanted to say something, I think.” Peter frowned, fuzzed out again for a few seconds. Gamora locked eyes with Rocket. He looked worried. “It’s okay that you guys won’t find me. I don’t think there’s a way to stop him anyway. I want you guys to get out of here before it’s too late. I need to know that you guys are going to make it.”

Yondu practically shoved everyone else out of the way of the screen and thrust a finger at it. “Quill, you quit talkin’ like that right now. I didn’t raise ya so you could just give up and die. We’re comin’ to find you, and we’re going to kill that bastard father of yours, and then I’m going to kill you myself for being such a dumbass.”

Peter gave them such a look of dead-eyed acceptance it broke Gamora’s heart. “You can’t kill him.”

“I have killed many things that people had said could not be killed.” Drax said. “I have never failed before.”

Rocket jumped in. “Yeah, idiot, I crashed your ship for the second time. You can’t kick off until you chew me out about it.”

Peter adjusted his grip on the communicator and they all saw the bruises on his wrists. Gamora was holding a spare circuitry board and it snapped in half in her grip, the broken pieces flying everywhere.

Peter opened his mouth, but there was a deep booming and a burst of static that went through the connection. Peter whipped his head to the side to stare at the door, his face contorted in fear.

“Hey, can you do me a favor?” He asked desperately.

“What, Peter?” Gamora said.

He looked back at her. “Just stay on the line until we get disconnected.”

Rocket leaned over the screen. “Peter, run, you idiot! Hide somewhere.”

He shook his head in dejection. “There’s nowhere for me to go. I just wanted- I just wanted a chance to say goodbye before-”

Gamora cut him off. She refused to listen to this. “Peter, are you listening to me? Listen well. We’re coming to get you. We are not going to leave you there, okay? I don’t care what you say, it’s not going to happen. Do you believe me?”

Peter maintained eye contact with her, but she could tell he didn’t believe her. Before anyone could say anything, the door behind Peter burst open. There was a rush of the curtains and Peter dropped the communicator. There was a reaching hand and then a burst of static and the call was disconnected.
Gamora leapt to her feet, paced back and forth. She pulled a knife from her boot and shoved it point first into the wooden table near the wall. It felt good, so she did it again. And again.

“Rocket?” She hissed in a barely audible tone of voice.

“You don’t have to tell me. I ain’t gonna sleep ‘til I get this done.” Rocket said, backing down the stairs. He didn’t look at any of the others, and his voice sounded a little strangled. Groot stroked his nose.

Gamora pulled the knife out of the table with a grunt of effort and turned around. It felt better to hold it like she was ready to use it.

Yondu’s fin was glowing and his arrow was hovering at his hip. “Reckon you and me are gonna have some competition.” He growled.

“How so?” She asked.

“Who’ll get the honors of slitting that piece of shit’s throat.” He said. He looked like he wanted to take a few extra steps beyond slitting Ego’s throat, and Gamora was right there with him.

She had never seen Peter like that before. She was going to do whatever she could to get her cocky, irreverent Peter back, even if she had to fly all the way across the galaxy to do it.

Chapter End Notes

Wow uh, this one got long, but that felt like a good place to cut it off. Also, if there was any doubt, I promise there is going to be some asskicking and a hefty dose of comfort at the end of this, because goddamn is Peter gonna need it. Again, all your comments are keeping me very motivated. Thank you! Update in a couple days.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All in all, it took Rocket four days to jerry-rig together a passable computer and download the diagnostics from the device Gamora and Mantis had gotten out of Nova Corps. The process seemed to include a lot of cursing, banging, and asking everyone else to get increasingly improbable things for the process. Rocket had finally stopped doing that after he convinced Kraglin to get him half a pound of very poisonous and very illegal chatroot from the market and Yondu cussed him out for a quarter of an hour for wasting their time.

The mood on Yondu’s ship for those days was thick, uncomfortable. They didn’t usually spend this much time planning, their general course of action was to fly in and start throwing punches. Gamora and Drax had gone into the marketplace on the first day to stock up on supplies and get a few extra weapons.

They had dropped by the Milano to get the rest of the stuff they’d left behind that they couldn’t live without. Gamora had gone into Peter’s room and carefully filled a small bag with some of his clothes. She took the time to fold them into neat squares instead of tossing them in like she did with her own things. He would need them.

After a time, it became repetitive to barge in on Rocket and ask him how it was going. He had snarled at her the last time she came in. “It’ll be ready when it’s ready! I’m going as fast as I can.”

The only thing left to do was wait, but none of them were made for waiting. Yondu had taken to standing in the common room doing target practice with his arrow or whatever weapon was lying around. There was a pretty substantive dent in the western wall by the second day.

Gamora had taken to wandering the ship. She wanted to be ready the second Rocket was good to go, but that didn’t leave her anything to do but worry. She and Nebula had tried some sparring, but her heart just wasn’t in it.

On the third night, she couldn’t sleep. She could hear Rocket in the loading bay talking to Groot as he worked. The light coming up from below and their murmuring voices were comforting, just knowing that some progress was being made was the only thing keeping Gamora from tearing her hair out.

Drax and Mantis were both fast asleep in the common room. Drax had challenged her to a drinking contest half as a joke, but was delighted to find her species was much better at holding their liquor than even he. Gamora wished she had been able to join him in blowing off steam, but she had never been very good at that even under the best of circumstances.

There was a soft light coming from one of the rooms she hadn’t been in. The door was half open, so Gamora peeked in. Yondu was sitting on the side of a bed looking at a strange, small doll with bristly hair in his hand. There was an odd expression on his face that on somebody else might even have been sadness.

Yondu glanced up sharply to see Gamora staring in at him.

“Oh. Sorry. I didn’t mean to pry, it’s just… the door was open.” Gamora said, already backing up to leave him alone.
Yondu surprised her by shrugging. “Nah, it’s fine. I wasn’t doing anything anyway.”

Gamora slipped into the room and hovered awkwardly in the doorway. She felt she had been invited into some sort of private space. The old bedroom seemed to be currently a storeroom, although there were some signs of past habitation. There was a small line of little figurines made out of scrap lined up on a shelf.

“This used to be Quill’s room.” Yondu said, completely unprompted. “In the early days, didn’t have enough room, so I just stuck him in whatever room had an extra bed, but none of the crew’d let him in their room for long. They said he snored, so I had to clear out this one for him.” He snorted. “Imagine that, some skinny Terran kid buggin’ a bunch of Ravagers cuz he snored.”

Gamora sat down in an empty chair across from him. “Rocket sends Groot into Peter’s room sometimes to drop petals on his face, hoping it will stop the snoring. It hasn’t worked yet, but it is funny to see him get up in the morning with flowers stuck to his face.”

Yondu shook his head. “I always figured he was playing it up. He knew if he pissed enough people off he’d get his own room. The little bastard sure knows how to play a room.”

Gamora found herself smiling. “That sounds like Peter.”

It didn’t take long for her thoughts to return to the expression of fear on Peter’s face the last time she saw him. She firmly pushed that out of her mind.

“What are all those?” Gamora asked, pointing at the line of figurines on the shelf.

Yondu sniffed. He looked strange in this room, when he wasn’t striding about in his leather jacket barking out orders. “Quill used to take garbage off of the planets we’d land on. Just pieces of trash like this, and he’d make little figures out of them. He said they were called actioned figures or somethin’ like that anyway. I thought they were pretty stupid, but whatever. Stopped him whining about wanting to go home.”

Gamora picked one up, a small, crudely-shaped man with basic red painted on. Something about it reminded her of her own childhood, having to make do with none of the normal comforts of being a kid. The small row of toys made her immeasurably sad, imagining the small boy sitting alone in his room so very far from home doing the best he could under the circumstances. She and Peter weren’t so different.

Yondu was still holding the strange troll doll. Gamora decided to dive in and ask a personal question. “You care about him, don’t you?”

Despite all of Peter’s vehement assertions to the contrary, Gamora had always gleaned an underpinning of affection in his voice whenever he talked about Yondu. Beyond all the rightful anger of being separated from his home, there was something deeper there. Yes, he had taken him from his home, but in a sense, Yondu had also raised him. Gamora didn’t believe there was all bad or good in anyone, and Yondu had a little bit of both.

Yondu gave her a requisite sneer, but he didn’t put much effort into it. “The kid was good at fitting into small places. He saved me a lot of work.”

“Sure. That’s why you want to find him now.” Gamora said. During her time with the other Guardians, she had started to learn how to affectionately tease, although she couldn’t say she was very good at it yet.

Yondu leered at her. “What about you, huh? Figured you was too stuck-up to even look at him
Gamora shrugged. “Peter has a way of growing on you.”

Yondu grunted but didn’t say anything. The both of them had reached the limits of their ability to have an emotional talk.

“Do you think we’ll find him in time?” Gamora asked. She half-hoped he wouldn’t answer her.

This time Yondu’s expression was fierce. “We will. That boy stole from me. Twice. I ain’t letting him slip out of my grasp this time.”

Ego could feel his light spreading across the universe, and it was good. It wasn’t as fast as he would like, but all good things took time. It would be worth it in the end. That was what he got for having to rely on other inferior species. If only he could have reproduced with another of his kind, this entire process would have been less bothersome. Too bad he was the only one.

The only cloud on his thoughts was Mantis. She had always been too soft for her own good. He thought she had been happy living on his planet, that was until he started talking about finding his son. She had never been happy with what happened with his other children, but she should know that he had the right to deal with his children as he wished.

Since she disappeared, he wondered if she had gone off to find Peter’s friends. It wouldn’t bother him much except for her ability to put him to sleep. He didn’t like something like that running off without his supervision.

He was standing on the balcony outside his palace overlooking his gardens. It was the best view, knowing that everything he saw was him, perfect in shape and form.

He strolled back to his hall, unhurried. With all the extra power from Peter, he was feeling stronger than he had in years. He rued the wasted years in between. Not for the first time, he thought with annoyance of Udonta. If he ever saw him again, he’d enjoy wiping the man from existence with a snap of his fingers, just on principle. He had tried to keep something of his, and Ego didn’t take to that.

The brilliant light streamed through the hall, bouncing off every surface and illuminating the entire place. It was beautiful. He looked up at his only son, who was making it possible for him to achieve the Expansion, the point of his existence. He was so much more troublesome than his other children. He struggled to see any of what he had loved of Meredith in Peter.

Peter was hung in the air again, blue light seeming to come out of his skin. He twitched occasionally, but he had blessedly stopped screaming. Ego thought he might have overdone it a little bit, one of Peter’s arms hung at an awkward angle from him pulling it back. He admitted he might have gotten a little angry when he found out Peter had disobeyed him again. He had grabbed Peter by the hair and dragged him downstairs before stringing him up. If Peter was going to insist on being uncooperative, he could just stay up there until he learned his lesson.

Peter’s eyes were open but unseeing, filled with the light of galaxies. The trick that had worked on all his other children failed the first time on Peter, but Ego thought he had been broken down enough this would keep him compliant for the time being.

Peter shared Meredith’s auburn curls and her taste in music. Although he had crushed the
Walkman, Ego was still able to summon up the music that had been on it. He concentrated and the strains of *Brandy* began to play through the hall. Out of all of Meredith’s music, Ego liked this one the best.

Up above him, Peter twitched and blinked. His eyes began to clear and a frown crossed his face. He began to struggle against the light. Ego sent another tendril of light to wrap around his arms, pulling tight against his broken arm. Peter whimpered from pain and stopped moving. His eyes had become his own again. They were dim with pain but lucid enough.

“Don’t.” Peter croaked.

Ego stepped closer, tapping an ear. “I’m sorry, couldn’t hear that?”

Peter swallowed with great effort. His voice was strangled and barely more than a whisper. “Don’t play this song.”

Ego looked at him coldly. “I thought you liked this song.”

Peter watched him with hurt eyes. He was struggling to remain conscious. He was pale as death. “Why do you hate me so much?”

Ego tipped his head to the side. His son had some strange notions that he wasn’t about to try and unravel. “I don’t hate you. I didn’t hate any of my children.”

Peter bit back a sob that was caught in his throat. His hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat.

Ego continued. “You’ve spent a lot of years on your own, doing whatever you wanted. I don’t mean to break this to you, but that’s not how the world works. There are consequences. It’s time to grow up, Peter.”

Despite the throbbing pain from his broken arm, Peter drew from his deep well of stubbornness. “I don’t know about you, Dad, but I learned how to share in kindergarten.”

Ego flared his nostrils and hit Peter, rocking his head backwards. Blood spattered his chin. With a snap of his fingers, he tightened the cord around Peter’s broken arm, pulling it behind his back until it felt like the bones were grinding together. Peter screamed, bucking in the air but he was held too tight. Ego held him like that until Peter began to cry and beg.

“How long is it going to take you to learn that I don’t have to hurt you as long as you cooperate with me?” Ego asked. He really didn’t understand Peter’s rebellious streak. What was the point in trying to postpone the inevitable?

Ego stepped forward and tapped Peter’s forehead again, sending him back into the stars. Peter’s eyes grew luminous with galaxies and he fell limp again.

The light streamed, and Ego’s influence grew.

It was hours later that Ego was pulled from his reverie again when the light began to stutter. He frowned and looked up at Peter. His face was slack and the light around him was fading a little. Something seemed wrong, and it was only after listening for a moment that he realized Peter wasn’t breathing.

With a wave of his hand, the strings holding Peter snapped and he slumped to the floor, completely boneless. Ego rushed over, bent over Peter and moved his head from one side to the other. His eyes were closed and he was completely unresponsive.
Ego frowned, placing one hand on Peter’s chest and sending a spark of power into him. Peter’s body jerked but he didn’t react. Ego did it once more, twice. On the fourth try, Peter’s eyes flew open in a panic and he heaved breath into his lungs. He rolled over and fell into a coughing fit.

Ego sat back on his heels and sighed in relief. Just because Peter was immortal didn’t mean his all-too-human heart wouldn’t give out once in awhile. He patted his cheek. In his blind panic, Peter tried to fight him off, but Ego persisted.

“Atta boy. Don’t worry. I won’t let you go. I’m your father, and I’m here for you now.” Ego murmured.

Eyes wide in panic, Peter didn’t seem to find this as comforting as Ego did.

At long last, Rocket was ready to go. Out of Yondu’s whole crew, only Kraglin agreed to come along to find Peter. The ones who were left after the purge went their separate ways. They packed up camp and took Yondu’s ship to a spot a mile out from Nova Corps headquarters. Once they got in, they knew they were going to have to get out fast. Yondu and Kraglin stayed at the ship, ready to go as getaway drivers.

Rocket had a makeshift backpack with his device in it. All he needed to do was get within broadcast range of the building and he’d be good to go. Gamora, Nebula, and Drax had armed themselves to the teeth and were ready to cause a distraction while Mantis and Groot snuck in the back and got Ego’s location off the computer.

Normally, everyone would have been hopped up on adrenaline, excited for the day, but their worry over Peter left everyone’s mood dampened.

They all gathered outside the ship. Gamora put her sword into its sheath. Drax cracked his knuckles. “Let’s get this done quickly, everyone.”

Rocket hoisted his bag on his bag. “You know, you’re not very good at pep talks.”

“Well, when we get Peter back, he can take care of that for us.” Gamora said. That was enough of a pep talk, and they all set out for the headquarters.

Mantis carried Groot in her hands, crouching in the back watching the two guards posted there. Rocket had scrambled up a tree a few hundred yards away, and he typed some commands into the computer before giving Gamora’s group the thumbs up. Mantis saw the light above the door turn yellow.

Drax went first, running in with a battle cry and lobbing a grenade at the door. Nova Corp employees scrambled and an alarm went off. Gamora and Nebula went in after him.

Mantis knew this was her cue, and ran forward towards the guards. They were distracted by the alarm, but turned in suspicion at her approach. Before they could say anything, she grabbed both of their hands. “You two are feeling tired today and would rather take the rest of the day off.” Her antenna glowed, and the guards’ jump of suspicion flattened into acquiescence. They walked off, dropping their weapons on the ground and Mantis walked through the door.

“I am Groot.” Groot whispered at her, pointing up the stairs toward a floor index. She followed the signs for Records while a series of explosions rocked the building. People ran past her toward the
front of the building, and nobody paid any attention to the two of them. Mantis tried to make herself look as innocuous as possible.

After a few wrong turns, they made it to the door of the Records Room. Nobody was manning the door, but it was locked tight. This was where Groot came in. Mantis bent down and unscrewed one of the air vents with a screwdriver Rocket had given her. Groot hopped down and gave her a little salute.

“Go on, little Groot. Hurry. I don’t know how long Gamora can distract them.” Mantis whispered, checking around her worriedly for anyone to notice her.

Groot turned around and ran down the air vent toward the records room. Mantis held her breath, waiting for the biometric security alarm to go off, but Rocket had done his work well. Groot got through easily.

Mantis was worried about Groot’s ability to understand what it was he was supposed to be doing, but Rocket had coached him through it for hours last night, showing an amount of patience that Mantis was surprised to learn he possessed.

Eventually, the alarm stopped ringing, but the yelling and chaos from downstairs continued. She leaned against the wall, hoping she looked casual, but then realized that with all this chaos, looking casual would be even more suspicious.

Every second that passed seemed to take forever. Mantis’ anxiety was through the roof when she finally heard the soft, pattering footsteps of Groot coming back through the vent. He was holding an information chip over his head in triumph.

“I am Groot!” He squeaked. Mantis picked him up.

“This is it? Ego’s location is on this chip? Groot, it is very important that you got the right thing.” Mantis said seriously. She felt his certainty through her antenna and knew he had succeeded.

“Good Groot. We have to go.” Mantis tucked the chip into her pocket and ran back the way she came.

She was halfway down the stairs when an angry voice screamed after her. “Hey! You! Stop! What are you doing in here? Identify yourself.”

Mantis peered behind her to see three guards with their weapons up jogging toward her. There were too many of them for her to do her trick. She broke into a run, hearing their shouts behind her.

She could feel them gaining ground, and just barely made it out of the building, slamming the door behind her. Groot whipped strong vines across the door as a temporary hold against the guards slamming their shoulders against it. Mantis ran full-tilt back toward Yondu’s ship, forgetting to pace herself.

“Nebula!” She heard Gamora scream from somewhere behind her. “Let’s go! Now!”

Mantis was startled by Drax running right past her. He was covered in dirt and debris and he was grinning. The two of them got back to the ship, running up the ramp past Yondu who was waiting impatiently.

“Ya get it?” He barked at Mantis. She nodded, panting from her run.

“Kraglin, start her up!” Yondu shouted at the cockpit.
“Aye aye, captain!” Kraglin shouted back. The ship’s engines flared to life and they eased off the ground a little. Drax was peering after the ship, looking for the two sisters, who were running full tilt toward them with a small cadre of Nova guards shooting after them.

They were two hundred yards away, their faces a twin display of concentration and bared teeth.

“Go!” Gamora screamed, waving her hand at them. The guards were right at their heels.

“Take off, Kraglin! We gotta get out of here!” Yondu yelled.

Before Rocket or Drax could argue, he whipped a rope ladder out of a drawer and secured it to the floor before dropping it out the hatch. The ship was two hundred feet above the ground by now. The engines roared and wind whipped past their faces. Rocket was leaned over, shouting at Gamora to run faster.

Gamora jumped first, hooking her elbow into the rope ladder and being yanked off the ground. Nebula was a few feet behind her, and it seemed like she was going to be left behind before she leaped farther than it seemed possible because of her cybernetic enhancements. Gamora reached out a hand and grasped her sister hard so that she wouldn’t fall.

Bullets and rays from the guards whizzed past them, and they were screamed at as they continued to climb through the air.

Drax and Yondu cranked the wheel that pulled the rope ladder into the ship. With a scream of effort, Gamora hoisted Nebula up so she also had a handle on the ladder. They swung sickeningly in the wind, Nebula getting a touch too close to the engines at one point. Finally, they made it up to the hatch and crawled inside, collapsing to catch their breath. Yondu slammed his hand against the button to close the hatch, and the loading bay sealed itself. Kraglin picked up the speed and climbed out of the atmosphere.

They knew they only had so long before the Nova Corps got ships out in the air to fly after them, so at his first opportunity, Kraglin sent them through a jump to a random spot in the galaxy. The ship wheeled out into the stars, orbiting a red dwarf.

For a long moment, everyone in the ship just sat in silence, catching their breath. The quiet was abrupt, and their blood was still up.

“Everyone good?” Rocket asked. Drax laughed, Nebula cursed, and Gamora checked her arm, which had been nicked by a flying bullet. It was only a flesh wound, and she sighed in relief.

Yondu held a hand out to Mantis. “Right, let’s see what we got.”

Mantis pulled the chip out of her pocket and gave it to him. It seemed like such a small thing to have caused so much trouble. Everyone still working on catching their breath, they all tramped up the stairs after Yondu to the cockpit. Even Kraglin turned around from the copilot’s chair and watched as Yondu stuck it into the reader. A line of code flashed across the screen.

Rocket hoisted himself up and typed a few commands in. A crude star map popped up on Yondu’s ancient screen. One small quadrant flashed. Rocket zoomed in and a small line of coordinates flashed on screen. He input that into the ship’s navigation system.

Yondu grinned, his crooked teeth a bright contrast against his blue skin. “Now I got your number, ya bastard…” He muttered.

He turned to the rest of them. They were all out of breath from the chase, but not a one of them
looked ready to back down. A vicious look took over his face. “Let’s go get our boy back, why don’t we?”

Chapter End Notes

Phew, okay. Sorry this is a slower chapter, but have no fear! Next chapter we're finally getting a rescue on our hands. I'll get it posted in a couple days here, and it'll be a long one to make up for this shorter one. The response to the last chapter really blew me away, thanks guys :)}
The hyperjump to Ego’s planet was long and uncomfortable. Standard procedure was stopping after every couple jumps just to give the body enough time to acclimate itself to the new environment. An hour was the accepted guideline. Ne’er-do-wells like Yondu and the Guardians generally gave it fifteen minutes before moving on. Today, they just didn’t have the time to waste, so after one hundred stops, they stopped for five minutes, everybody on their hands and knees heaving in huge breaths before moving forward again. Four of those stops later and Yondu’s ship was left orbiting a big red planet.

For ten straight minutes, everyone on the ship was left panting and nauseous. Gamora staggered to her feet first. There was a moment of doubt where she didn’t know whether she was going to make it. Her stomach lurched, but then settled, and then she felt solid. One by one, everyone else recovered from the jump and got up, steadying themselves. They all joined Gamora by the shield looking out over Ego.

Ego’s planet was smaller than Gamora expected. It was mostly red in color, but thick blue lines ran through it like veins. There were some mountain ranges and deep craters that made it look like the planet had a face. A huge, frowning face.

Rocket sat back and looked at Mantis. “Alright, darling, your time to shine. What can you tell us about Dick Brain down there?”

Mantis blinked. “I’m not sure… What would you like to know?”

“Let’s start with weaknesses.” Gamora said.

“He… He does not have many.” Mantis said.

“You said something about putting him to sleep. Can you try that?” Rocket broke in.

Mantis began to look nervous again. “Oh, I don’t know. I am able to put him to sleep when he wants to. I have never tried to do it when he doesn’t want.”

“Well, there’s a first time for everything, eh? That’s your job.” Rocket said.

Yondu had pulled on his jacket again and tested how sharp his arrow was with his thumb. “Destroy the planet’s core, destroy him, right? That’s what you said before.”

Rocket bared his needle-sharp teeth and held up a bomb with a timer he had ready. “Oh, I’m already there.”

Drax was standing up and ready to go. “I have never killed a planet before. I am excited to try.”

Gamora nodded. “Remember, everyone, priority one is getting Peter out of there. We get Peter and then we kill him.”

Drax spoke up. “I will take Mantis down to put Ego to sleep. You find Peter.”

Kraglin was off to the side. “Am I the only one who thinks this isn’t a very solid plan?”
Yondu whipped his coat collar up against his neck and scoffed. “We’ve done enough plannin’. Let’s get in there. I’m tired of waitin’.”

Gamora couldn’t have agreed more. “Yes, let’s go.”

Kraglin stayed behind as their getaway driver again, and the rest of them took the smaller ship out. Yondu and Gamora piloted, undocking from the bigger ship with a hissing snap and easing out into open space. They flew toward the planet, hissing through the atmosphere of the mountain ranges making up Ego’s brow. Mantis directed them toward the palace where he lived.

There was a cracking fissure in the ground that led to an uneven set of steps deeper into Ego’s crust. Mantis, Drax, and Groot got off there, giving the rest of the group a thumbs up as they set off for Ego’s core.

Gamora pulsed in outside Ego’s palace. The four of them peered up at the spires and delicate windows glinting in the sun. “He’s the only one who lives here. The hell does he need a palace for? Who’s he trying to impress, the show-off.” Yondu grumbled.

“The guy named himself Ego. Pretty sure he’s just trying to impress himself.” Rocket hoisted a blaster onto his back.

Gamora eased down on the courtyard right outside the building, taking grim pleasure in seeing their engines scorching the unblemished marble floor. She switched off the engines and they all held their breath, waiting for something, but there was still no sign from the palace. An eerie blue light illuminated the entire place.

Gamora felt a tension in her temples that usually preceded a fight. She leapt to her feet, one hand on her sword. “Come on. Let’s get Peter.”

Yondu led the way down the steps, his jacket flapping behind him, fin glowing red. As they waited for the bay doors to open, Gamora put a hand on Nebula’s shoulder. “You don’t have to do this, you know. You don’t owe us anything.”

“Except for trying to kill you a couple dozen times.” Nebula said, looking at her sister with a complicated expression that Gamora didn’t think would be uncomplicated for quite a while.

Rocket barked out a laugh. “Was that a joke? Damn, I did not think you had it in you. Today’s just a day for firsts, innit.”

Gamora tried a smile, but she was too nervous. “Thank you.”

Nebula shrugged her hand off, but softly. “Don’t mention it.”

The four of them stepped out of the ship into a windy afternoon. Gamora’s hair flew about her head and Yondu’s jacket snapped against his knees in the wind. They all armed themselves and looked toward the big double doors. Blue light streamed from an unseen source, and now that they were actually here, they all felt a little nervous about what they were going to find.

Gamora and Yondu led the way, striding across the courtyard with purpose and matching expressions of determination. With a deep breath and a nod at each other, they each grabbed a door and pulled it open. They were surprisingly heavy, and they both strained until they stood all the way open.

A little more cautious now, they moved into the hall. It was made of white marble, columns everywhere like a nest of trees obscuring the view. The blue light was everywhere but there was
nothing to hear. They paced in, checking around the corners in case there was something there.

They were all startled by a sharp snap. Gamora and Yondu whipped their heads over to see Rocket picking up something he’d stepped on. It was Peter’s Walkman, discarded on the floor and smashed to bits. Gamora was absolutely furious. She had seen Peter risk his life once to get that Walkman back. He wouldn’t have let anyone break it without a fight. As if it needed any help, her fury at Peter’s father grew a little more.

Yondu took it out of Rocket’s hands and turned it over a few times to see whether it was salvageable, but it looked beyond fixing. Yondu growled wordlessly and stuck it in his pocket anyway.

They finally turned the last corner where the hall opened up and froze solid. There was Peter in front of them, strung up by dazzlingly blue strings of light. His wrists and ankles were held tight to keep him from struggling, and he was impaled through with another blue spear. His head was cocked to the side, his mouth yawned open, and his eyes stared. There was something wrong with them, full of starlight and crowding out his normal green. If not for the occasional twitch, he might have been dead already.

Gamora gasped, clapping a hand over her mouth. Tears came unbidden to her eyes as she looked at her friend. Yondu looked horrified. Mantis had told them what Ego was doing, but knowing and seeing were entirely different.

“Peter? Peter! Can you hear me?” Gamora called, her voice shaking a little. There was no response at all. The eerie light made it look like the life was quite literally being leached out of him.

“Peter, boy, answer us!” Yondu said gruffly. He was too far above their heads for any of them to reach.

Rocket would have joined in his friends’ calls, except his eye was caught by something else by the side of the room. The cage was still sitting there, door hanging open, and at the sight, Rocket’s eyes darkened and his grip tightened on his blaster. The bolts still attached to his spine ached. He let out a string of curses. “Oh, that sick fucking bastard.”

Gamora and Yondu looked at what he was pointing at and their faces tightened. “It’s so small.” Gamora hissed.

Yondu looked at the motionless Peter, anger marring his features. “Right, we’re getting him down right now.”

A voice came from the other side of the hall, echoing. “No, you’re not.” Ego said, strolling into the room from the balcony. He had his hands clasped behind his back, and seemed remarkably unconcerned with the intruders. He took them in with a cool kind of disdain.

They wheeled around to glare at him with hatred. “Hey, you evil asshole, sorry to interrupt your evening plans, but we’ll be taking our friend and getting out of your hair.” Rocket growled, voice low and hackles raised.

Ego blinked but didn’t move. “And you are?” He paused before widening his eyes a little like he had just recognized them. “Ah, the Guardians of the Galaxy. Who came up with that, anyway? It’s a little silly to have a name for yourselves, isn’t it?”

“This coming from the guy named Ego.” Rocket sniped.

Gamora unsheathed her sword with a sharp sound and leveled it at Ego. “Cut Peter down. Now.”
Ego smirked. “Or else what?” Gamora could have killed him.

Gamora and Yondu both moved forward with intent to maim. “Or else-”

Ego raised a finger. A blue line appeared on Peter’s throat and tightened. He began to choke. Gamora and Yondu slammed to a halt, horrified.

“Stop it!” Gamora screamed.

Ego lowered his hand and Peter fell slack again. It was eerie how he just hung there.

“You wouldn’t kill him.” Yondu barked, trying to cover up his uncertainty with gruffness.

Ego was dismissive. “No son of mine is going to die, but that doesn’t mean he can’t feel pain.”

They were all frozen, staring up at Peter’s loose form. He looked so small and fragile up there.

Ego had peered at Yondu and recognized him. “Yondu Udonta! You are a hard man to find. You and I had a deal. But since I am a man of my word, and my son is here safe with me, I’ll hold up my end of the bargain. Eight hundred-fifty units, was it? We’ll make it an even thousand, just to make it easier.”

Ego reached into his pocket and pulled out a bundle of money, tossing it at Yondu’s feet. Yondu didn’t move to pick it up. He looked a little ashamed.

“If I had known what you was doin’ to those kids, I never would have brought ‘em here.” Yondu said.

Ego lifted an eyebrow. “How heroic of you.”

“We’re taking him with us. Step aside.” Nebula said. She was tired of bargaining with megalomaniacs.

Ego’s patience wore thin, and he strode forward to stand under Peter. “What right do any of you have to come here? I’m his father, and what I do with him is none of your business.”

“Yeah, well, we’re making it our business.” Gamora said.

“We’re his family.” Rocket said.

Ego sneered. “Well, isn’t that cute-”

All four of them tired of Ego at the same time. Yondu’s shrill whistle pierced the air and his arrow went flying for Ego’s head. Rocket and Nebula opened fire on him, and Gamora swung with her sword and stabbed him through the chest. Punched through with holes, Ego stumbled back and looked down at himself in disbelief. Yondu’s arrow had left a hole right through his head, and blue light leaked out. “What the hell did you do that for?” He snarled.

Rocket shot him again. By now, he was more hole than man. The steady light in the hall stuttered, and the light holding Peter in the air began to fail. He slipped and crumpled to the floor. Once the light was gone, his eyelids began to flutter, and it looked like he was starting to regain consciousness.

They all started to run towards the pair. Ego grunted and threw a hand up. A wall of blue light slammed up between them. Rocket was going so fast he bounced right off of it.
Gamora pounded her fists on the wall and screamed. “Peter!”

Peter shook his head drowsily and started to turn his head toward her voice. He looked completely out of it. Ego leaned down and yanked him to his feet by the scruff of his shirt. He gripped the back of his neck in one hand and his arm with the other. Still shot through, Ego sent huge tentacles of light punching through the ground to open up a giant hole in the ground. He dragged Peter in with him and they both disappeared.

“No!” Gamora shrieked, kicking the wall hard.

Yondu had already turned around and was running back toward the ship. “Come on! Let’s get down there.”

The four of them ran up the steps and started up the ship. Rocket pulled them into the air and back toward the fissure they had left before. Gamora sat down at the radio and pulled it up. “Drax! Mantis! How’s it going down there?”

Drax’s crackly voice came in and out. “We… his core… Mantis tried…”

“Well, try harder!” Gamora yelled and put it down. She ran to the front of the ship and watched with impatience as they careened down through the planet’s crust. Rocket used Yondu’s explosives to blast through layers of rock and stone. Debris crashed against the ship, and everyone lost their balance. It was a rough ride.

At long last, Rocket blasted through the last of the mantle and they emerged into Ego’s core. It was a huge green cavern with more of the electric blue veins running through everything.

Rocket pointed at a spot way in the back of the cavern. Behind a layer of protective shielding was a glowing brain. “That’s it! If we can destroy that, we destroy Ego.”

The ship careened to a halt above Drax. They jumped out of the ship and ran over. Every vein in the cavern was lit up, and a howling wind ripped at them. Groot was sitting on Drax’s shoulder and Mantis was crouched on the ground with her hand in a light fissure. Her face was contorted in a grim expression of concentration.

“I thought you said you could make him sleep!” Yondu shouted over the sound of the wind.

“She is doing the most she can.” Drax said. He seemed to have grown very fond of Mantis over the past week.

“I have weakened him as much as I can! But- he is still getting power- from another source. Without cutting him off from that, I cannot do anything.” Mantis said through gritted teeth. Her face was red with effort.

They all looked across the cavern. A hundred yards away, Ego had landed again with Peter. The places where they had shot him were closing up, but he looked off-balance. They ran forward. He turned around at their approach, face contorted.

Drax threw a rapier at Ego and he repelled it with a flick of his wrist where it fell a few feet away. With the other hand, he made a motion like he was twisting a rope around his wrist before hoisting it up. Peter gasped as he was hoisted into the air again. He struggled weakly before he was stabbed through again. His eyes flew wide open and he screamed.

It was a horrible sound, cracked and wild and full of agony. It went right to Gamora’s heart. She wouldn’t forget that sound for a long time. She ran full-tilt at Ego, but before she could get to him,
he waved his hand and she was pushed off-balance to slam against the wall. She grunted in pain and struggled back to her feet.

Rocket and Yondu emptied their entire clips into Ego, but he repelled each of the bullets. His hair was floating on the wind, and he seemed to grow more terrible every second. He glowed with light.

“Peter is going to stay right here with me! I’m his blood, and you’re not going to come between me and that.” Ego shouted, tightening his grip on Peter. Peter kicked and screamed. Veins stood out on his neck.

“Peter! It’s me, Gamora! Can you hear me? If you can hear me, you need to break the connection with Ego! Peter!” Gamora shouted desperately, pacing back and forth just outside of Ego’s reach.

Yondu joined in. “Boy, you best wake up now!”

Ego smiled. “He can’t hear you.”

Gamora continued to shout Peter’s name, but it wasn’t working. No matter how much they yelled, Peter was beyond their reach. He jerked in Ego’s grip.

With a sudden burst of inspiration, Gamora remembered Peter’s broken Walkman. She ran back to Rocket, who was still trying to shoot Ego. “Rocket! Do you have any copies of Peter’s music?”

He looked at her, confused. “Yeah, but I don’t know why- Oh. Oh!”

She nodded at him, and he ran back to the ship, this time with Groot on his shoulder. He practically leaped up the steps and tore through his bag, looking for the things they’d taken off the Milano. He found the copy he’d made of the music and ran up to the cockpit, slamming it into the reader. He grabbed wires and plugged them in and turned the volume on the speakers as high as it would go.

“What do you think, Groot?” He asked, scrolling through the few choices.

“I am Groot!” Groot pointed at one selection.

Rocket smiled. “Nice choice.”

He hit play, and the Earth band ELO’s “Mr. Blue Sky” began blasting out of the outer speakers. Gamora felt her heart lift at the sound.

Ego frowned. “What the hell is that? What are you doing?”

“Peter, you remember this song? You always told me it was one of your favorites! Remember that time we had to fly through that asteroid field, and you said this song was the only reason we made it through!” Gamora shouted over the sound of the music, gazing desperately up at Peter.

For a long moment, it seemed like the song wasn’t going to do anything. Peter seemed out of their grasp. Then Gamora saw something. Peter’s face twitched, and he blinked a few times. His eyes seemed to clear, became his own again. He frowned.

“There you are, Quill! Come on, boy!” Yondu laughed.

Peter shook his head slowly, seeming to come out of a deep sleep. He was panting hard, but he was struggling to figure out what was going on around him. He lifted exhausted eyes up to see Gamora standing there with mingled concern and hope in her face.
“G’mora?” He mumbled.

Ego watched this with annoyance. He gave up on defense, and began going on the offense. All of the Guardians had to scramble as glowing spears of light erupted from the veins in the ground and went after them. Gamora leapt to the side, barely missing getting flattened, Rocket flew up into the air with a cry, and Yondu sent his arrow through tentacle after tentacle, while they slowly got closer to him. For the moment, everybody was so focused on their own survival, they all forgot about Peter, including Ego.

Peter hung in the air, mind cloudy but getting a little clearer. He knew he was being drained again, but something felt different. He heard something, his favorite ELO single. For a second, he thought he was hallucinating again. Every inch of his body ached, and he didn’t know why he was hearing this. This song made him think of nights aboard the Milano trying to convince everyone else he had good taste, his mom dancing in the kitchen with him, Yondu screaming at him to turn down that racket, he needed his beauty sleep, goddammit.

Peter blinked slowly. Along with ELO, there was gunfire and screaming. Screaming that sounded familiar… He frowned. Through his exhaustion, he focused his vision, but what he saw didn’t make any sense. He wasn’t in the hall anymore, he was in a huge underground cavern. Ego was standing under him, shooting beams of light at his friends.

Panic electrified him, and he opened his eyes all the way. His friends, Gamora, Rocket, Drax, and Groot were fighting off Ego’s light on every side. It even looked like Yondu and Nebula were here. This had to be another hallucination. He was worried he had finally lost it. Nothing he was seeing made any sense.

A particularly vicious strike from Ego sent Rocket flying into a column of stone. He crumpled to the floor and didn’t get up again. Drax was slashing at three tentacles at once. Yondu was being covered by layer upon layer of stone. Gamora had been grabbed by one leg, and she was scrabbling at the ground as she was pulled toward a ledge.

Peter’s face twitched and he clenched his hands together. Ego could hurt him all day, but he wasn’t going to let him hurt his friends. Peter felt a righteous anger surge through his chest, and it felt so much better than helpless pain and fear. His skin began to glow, first blue and then deepening into gold.

Ego faltered, his light weakening a little bit. Rocket got to his hands and knees, shaking his head. Gamora slid to a halt just before falling over, and Yondu’s arrow broke through the light. Their attention all returned to Peter.

Peter didn’t know what was happening to him. He felt filled with an unstoppable power, but while Ego’s light was cold, his was warm, filling his veins with a molten fire. Ego turned around to see Peter glowing gold, fists clenched and face open.

For the first time, a flicker of fear crossed over Ego’s face. This was as heartening to Peter as an entire armada of Nova ships cruising down on them from the heavens.

“What do you think you’re doing?” Ego snapped at him, commanding as ever. “Stop that.”

Peter’s eyes flashed gold and he opened his fists, the pain from his broken arm forgotten for the moment. A ball of golden light began to grow between his hands. It was like had gotten his second wind, that all he needed was to see his friends in danger. Ego’s tendrils holding Peter in the air sizzled away like they were being burned off. His feet returned to the ground. A small crease in his brow showed his concentration.
“Leave them alone.” Peter said, static electricity popping through his lips as he spoke. With his golden eyes, he didn’t even look human.

“Peter, I want you to think very carefully about what you’re doing.” Ego said, backing up a step. Peter took one step forward.

“I said, leave- them- alone.” Peter repeated.

Ego tried a different tactic. “Peter, I am your father and you will do as I say.”

Rocket staggered to his feet. “Kick his ass, Quill!”

With his uninjured hand, Peter lunged forward and grabbed Ego’s forearm. They both blazed bright for a moment. Burning golden light sparked off of them like fireworks. Peter’s gold overwhelmed them both, and Ego shrieked in anger as he was burnt out from the inside. His human form blazed and began to dissolve. Peter was screaming in effort and there was one more blaze of light before Ego disappeared. Mantis gave a cry of triumph as the veins from Ego fell dark.

“Okay, he’s asleep, but I can only hold him for a few minutes!” Mantis cried.

The rest of them forgot about Ego for a moment. Their attention returned to Peter who was swaying where he stood. The gold light faded and then he was just Peter. He started to fall, and Gamora ran forward and caught him. She cradled the back of his head and eased him down to the ground.

He blinked up at her owlishly. Getting rid of Ego had taken a lot out of him, and he was back to being foggy and confused. Gamora tried to be careful of his bruises. She pulled back a little when he hissed in pain from his arm. She wondered if it was broken. She smiled weakly down at him. “H-hey, Peter. It’s okay, I’ve got you now.”

“This ‘s nicer than the last hallucination I had…” Peter slurred, his eyes half-closed. His face was a patchwork of bruises, old and new.

“Peter… We’re really here.” Gamora started. Yondu was standing at her elbow, looking down at Peter in concern. He must have burned through all of his strength going after Ego like that.

Peter started to drift off, and she shook him lightly to keep him awake. “I know this isn’t real because you’re no’ yellin’ at me…” Peter mumbled.

Rocket was knelt down explaining to Groot how to set off the bomb. It was pretty touch-and-go, Groot didn’t seem to understand the difference between the timed release and the trigger button. But, they only had a limited time before Ego came back, so they knew they had to use the time Peter and Mantis had earned them.

It was only a few seconds after Groot ran off with the bomb when the ground began to rumble again. An angry blue light began to grow across the cavern, coalescing into Ego’s shape. It started with his skeleton and grew in around him.

“Peter, we are going to have to have a real talk about your behavior.” Ego said, his hair growing in along his head along with the skin of his nose.

Peter flinched, hugging his broken arm closer to him. Gamora swooped in and placed a kiss on his forehead and stood up. There would be time to comfort Peter later after they dealt with his father.

Yondu and Gamora stood side-by-side between Peter and Ego. Gamora’s teeth were parted in a
snarl. “You stay away from him.”

“Okay, girl, I gave you every opportunity to back the fuck off, but now you’re pissing me off.” Ego snapped.

Gamora’s eyebrows rose. “Girl?” She took her sword and lunged for him. He jumped back, but her sword sliced a line through his torso. If he had been mortal, it would have been fatal. He came up with another tentacle that pushed Gamora off the edge. She dropped soundlessly.

“No!” Nebula screamed, jumping after her, cybernetic arm at the ready to stop her fall.

Yondu was left as the only thing between Peter and Ego. Yondu’s fin flashed and he sent the arrow flying. It pierced right through Ego’s chest, but when Yondu whistled to bring it back, Ego reached out and snapped it in half.

Yondu switched tactics, taking out his blaster and shooting. He was growling. “You keep away from him now. I wasn’t gonna let you get your hands on him twenty years ago and I’m not gonna start now.”

Instead of attacking, Ego stopped for a moment, tilting his head to the side in thought. He seemed to realize something, and his eyes blazed in what seemed to be amusement. “Oh, I see what this is about.”

“The hell you talkin’ about?” Yondu growled, dropping the empty clip on the ground and groping in his pocket for the extra. He snuck a quick look at Peter, at his pale stillness.

“You’re fond of him. You think that just because he grew up crawling around the vents of your ship you’re like a father figure for him.” Ego said, not moving forward for the moment.

“That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.” Yondu said, although privately thinking this guy really had his number.

Ego seemed to find the whole thing very funny, which was pissing off Yondu even more. Drax had been making his way over to the pair, but Ego sent more tendrils his way to fight. “Well, let me tell you, Udonta, there’s a lot more to being a father than that. Blood counts.”

Yondu got the clip in and shot a few more holes into him just to keep him at bay. “What, like sticking ‘im in a cage and draining the life out of him? You killed every single one of your kids, what would you know about being a dad?”

Ego threw his head back and laughed. “You think you’re a good father? You? A disreputable criminal with nothing but a tin shield to your name? What did you ever teach him except for how to steal and lie?”

Yondu straightened up, feeling every ounce of righteous anger he had held back this past week. He waited until Ego got closer. “I never said I was a good dad, but I reckon I’ve done a damn sight better than you.” Before Ego could say anything, he emptied the entire clip into Ego’s head. His human form withered and fell apart, but it only took a few seconds for him to start to regenerate.

The entire cavern was rumbling by now, light whipping everywhere and stone pillars coming up from beneath to rearrange themselves. On the other side of this stretch, Gamora and Nebula came crawling up from below after jumping off a moving pillar. They collapsed on the ground, out of breath, but Gamora scrambled to her feet to come check on Peter.

“Where are we at, Rocket?” Yondu shouted. Rocket was 20 feet in the air keeping an eye on
“Well, our survival is banking on an infant tree knowing how to work heavy explosives, so I’d say our chances are spotty at best.” Rocket shouted, swerving out of the way and shooting apart another one of Ego’s tendrils.

Rocket shot up another couple feet and shaded his eyes. Groot was scrambling out of a small crack in the earth and running towards them.

“Well, that’s our cue! We’ve got five minutes everyone, let’s get the hell out of here!” He shot away to pick Groot up. Drax had grabbed Mantis, who had been hit in the head with a piece of flying debris.

Peter was sitting up, shaking his head groggily. “What’s going on?”

Yondu and Gamora both swooped in, picking up an arm each and practically carrying Peter toward the ship. There was a roar behind them and Ego rematerialized.

“You don’t have the right to take my son from me!” Ego screamed.

Peter’s bloody face blanched. He began to fight them, in his panic thinking they were Ego. Two huge tentacles slammed into the ground in front of the three of them, blocking them from getting back to the ship.

Ego came up behind them, arms raised to crush both of them. Peter wheeled around, unsteady but on his own two feet. “Don’t!” He slurred.

Ego paused. “Come over here and cooperate and I’ll think about it.”

Peter stumbled a few steps closer to his father.

“Peter, no!” Gamora shouted, but she was blocked by another tentacle of light.

Ego grinned in triumph and grabbed Peter’s shoulders in a bruisingly tight grip. “It’s going to be beautiful, Peter. You’ll see. Everything from horizon to horizon just us. You and me. I know you’ve always wanted a father. I can give you anything you want after we get this nasty business out of the way.”

Peter faltered. He appeared about to collapse. The pain from the past couple weeks was weighing down on him. In his exhaustion, he just wanted to believe what he’d always wanted; that his father, whoever and wherever he was, cared about him, that just because he lost his mother and home and spent all these years fending for himself, at the end of the day there would be someone who loved him, despite how little he might deserve it.

Ego’s fingers dug into his shoulders. Peter seemed to deflate into Ego’s embrace. Ego leaned in with bright eyes, sensing Peter’s surrender. “I’m tired.” Peter mumbled into his shoulder.

Ego tightened his grip. “I know you are. Your mother would have wanted the two of us to get to know each other. It doesn’t have to be this hard, Peter. If you listen to me, it can be so easy.”

Peter slumped against his father. Tears spilled over, but he was way past being self-conscious about it. Everything was so cloudy, and none of this felt right. Hadn’t there been something about his friends? He was so tired and he just wanted to stop fighting, and his father was here promising him what he’d always wanted.
Gamora shouted from behind him. “Peter, don’t listen to him! He’s not the only one you have! You have us too!”

Peter blinked and turned his head. Ego tried to stop him from looking. Gamora and Yondu were standing on the other side of the blazing wall of light, and behind them by the ship were the other Guardians, Rocket, Drax, and Groot.

“Just because that man shows up when you’re fully grown with notions in his head, that don’t make him your dad!” Yondu called.

Some of the fog around Peter’s head lifted. Just because Ego was his father, that didn’t mean he hadn’t found another family somewhere along the way. This time, it was much harder to summon up his golden light. The most he could do was make his skin glow gold, but it was enough to make Ego let him go as if he were burning. Veins of blue light skittered across his skin, trying to break the gold. Peter closed his eyes and had only one thought in his head: his friends had all come here for him, and that was enough. His light blazed gold.

Ego narrowed his eyes. “If you do this, you’ll die someday. You won’t be any different than anyone else.” He tried one last-ditch attempt to convince Peter.

Peter wavered, but forced out what he needed to say. “Yeah, I always figured I was gonna die young. I prefer to play the odds.”

Peter stepped back and Ego’s barrier parted around him. Ego snarled and sent a tendril of light to hook under Peter’s chin, forcing his head back. Gamora and Yondu came up on either side of Peter and shot Ego one last time. With a cry of anger, he flew back and they all heard the beginnings of the explosion start beneath Ego’s brain.

Peter stumbled and Yondu caught him, lifting him up in his arms and running full-tilt back to the ship. The second they and Gamora got into the ship, Rocket pulled off, outracing the explosion all the way out of the atmosphere.

Their delirious joy was dampened a bit by the sight of Peter, who had passed out the second Ego died. Without his connection to Ego, all his injuries had caught up to him in an instant.

“Peter, boy, come on. Wake up for me, why don’t’cha?” Yondu tried shaking Peter’s shoulders lightly, but he was completely out.

“Get him into the infirmary.” Yondu barked, and Gamora and Drax helped carry their limp friend as they raced away from the flaming wreck of Ego’s planet.

Chapter End Notes

So Peter's superpower is basically his love for his friends (that and being an a-hole, of course) and I am Very emotional about it. Also fuck you, Yondu ain't dying on my watch. Anyways, bring on the angst and hugs. I'll update by early next week! Thanks for reading, y'all.
Drax was the only one able to easily carry Peter, and he maneuvered him into an empty room with a bed. His head lolled to the side as Drax laid him down on the bed. Everyone felt an unnatural stillness in the room as they all took in Peter. He seemed so small and quiet, neither of which matched up with the Peter they knew.

“Should we… let him sleep?” Rocket’s indecision also felt uncharacteristic.

Gamora shook her head. “We have to see what injuries he has. I think he has a broken arm. He was holding it strangely.”

Yondu cursed. Nebula left to give them some privacy. Mantis hovered behind, feeling like a third wheel. “If any of you need my services, I would be happy to help. When he is awake, I could ease his pain a little.”

“The last thing he needs is someone else poking around inside his head.” Yondu snapped.

Mantis wilted and Gamora gave her what she hoped was a supportive look. “Thank you for offering to help. If we need your help, we’ll ask.”

Mantis nodded and left, shutting the door behind her. Groot had climbed up on the bed and sat next to Peter’s head. He placed small hands on the tip of Peter’s ear and looked up at them with wide, sad eyes.

“I am Groot?” He asked in a quiet voice.

Rocket was unlacing Peter’s boots and pulling them off, lining them up carefully under the bed. Gamora took a breath and braced herself before easing Peter up into a sitting position and pulling his shirt off over his head. When his torso was revealed, she gasped and her face tightened.

Peter was a patchwork of bruises from head to toe. He had heavy bags under his eyes, marks littering his cheeks and jaw, and the aforementioned choking line across his neck. The rest of him was worse. He had deep lines in his wrists from struggling. The worst was a huge, flowering purple bruise on his chest over his heart. It looked muscle-deep and very painful. It must have been from being impaled through with light. He looked thin and underfed, and his left arm was indeed at a slight angle from being broken.

“I don’t believe in any of those d’ast gods, but I hope there’s a hell somewhere for him.” Yondu snarled.

Rocket’s ears twitched as he looked at Peter. “How could a guy do this to his own kid?”

Gamora wished she had shot Ego a few more times. “Easily.”

“We have to set that arm. Let’s hope he stays unconscious for it.” Rocket said, rooting through the drawers for the supplies they would need. He came over with a scanner and ran it over Peter’s arm once.

“Well, it looks like a clean break at least. We’ll have to straighten it out and get it wrapped.”
Rocket said.

They knew they were going to be in trouble when Gamora picked up his hand. She had set more than her fair share of bones, and she was planning on doing it quick and efficiently. Peter stirred, groaning in pain. She froze, and Drax moved from his spot at the edge of the room to come behind Peter, wrapping his arms around his torso to keep him from struggling.

When Gamora looked troubled, he spoke. “It will be best for Peter if we do this fast. He does not need any more unnecessary pain.”

She nodded and adjusted her grip on his arm. Rocket was standing by with a long string of bandages.

“Alright, Quill, this is gonna hurt like a motherfucker, but it’ll be worth it. I give you one free pass to kick my ass at a later time,” Rocket said.

Peter’s eyes stuttered open as Gamora tightened her grip. When she snapped the bone back into alignment, he cried out in pain and started fighting them off. Drax had to wrap one arm tight around his chest and force his free arm behind his back to keep him from hurting himself. Peter let out a hoarse cry and tried to throw them off of him. His eyes were wild and full of pain, and it was obvious he didn’t know they were there.

“Get off. Get off me.” Peter croaked, kicking his feet and twisting his head in a mad scramble to get away from them.

Gamora had a tight hold on his bicep so he didn’t move the broken arm any more. “Peter, Peter, hey, it’s okay. It’s me, Gamora. Drax, Rocket, and Groot are here too. We’re just setting your arm. I know it hurts, but it’ll be better in a second.”

Her words didn’t sink into Peter’s mind at all. He bucked and kicked, his breath coming in short, unsteady gasps. He whimpered in pain again when Rocket jumped up and started wrapping the hardening bandages around his arm, starting at his forearm.

“Hey, Quill, just relax, okay?” Rocket grunted, trying to concentrate on his job and get it done as quickly as possible. Peter’s confused cries of pain were turning his stomach. He didn’t know they were trying to help.

Peter pushed against Drax uselessly and started to hyperventilate. His voice was hoarse and desperate. “Stop, fuck. Stop it! I’ll do it, I promise I’ll do it, just please stop.”

Drax was trying his best to be firm but gentle. “Friend Peter, it is all right. You are among friends. Just concentrate on breathing.”

Peter was completely gone. He shrieked when Rocket’s fingers reached the broken bone and began to cinch the bandages around it. He was like a wild animal with no grasp on his surroundings. All he knew was that someone was hurting him.

All three of them muttered comforting words, their hearts breaking a little when Peter didn’t respond at all. He just sobbed through their ministrations, until finally Rocket had tied the last end of the bandage around his arm. The bandages allowed him to bend his elbow, but the rest of his arm stayed straight.

When Rocket finished the bandage, Drax released his hold on Peter. Peter rolled over and clutched his arm to his chest, hiccupping sobs shaking through him. He shook and when Gamora tried to reach out to comfort him, he leaned over the bed and retched. Nothing came up, and he lay back
down, skin beaded with sweat.

Gamora tried to comfort him, but he flinched violently when her hand touched his good shoulder, and so she drew back.

“Hey, Quill, you should drink something. I guarantee it will make ya feel better.” Rocket tried, but Peter didn’t respond. After a few minutes of shaking, he drifted off again. He didn’t have a lot of strength left, and it seemed without the immediate threat of bodily harm, he was out like a light.

Drax and Rocket eased Peter onto his back. He was unconscious again, but a frown creased his features, and he was curled into himself protectively.

“Damn it, Quill…” Rocket said softly. That was all there was to say. They all felt a little sick from what they had to do. Groot climbed up into the divot between his neck and good shoulder, lying down and stroking Peter’s face softly. Rocket found a flat pillow and eased it under Peter’s head, and Gamora pulled a blanket up around him. There didn’t seem to be anything they could do about his other injuries except for letting him rest.

Rocket realized Yondu hadn’t moved during this entire ordeal. He was standing in the corner with his arms crossed. It was a little hard to tell, but he looked paler than usual. His face was unreadable. When he saw Rocket looking, he turned around and strode out of the room.

“Someone should be here if he wakes up. I will take first watch.” Drax said.

Gamora shook her head. “Oh, you don’t have to do that. I can watch him.”

Drax’s voice was halting. “I… have not watched over someone I cared about when they were ill. Not since my daughter. I would like to.”

Gamora and Rocket nodded, giving Drax a light touch on the arm. They weren’t about to admit it, but they were both exhausted. Gamora looked back at Peter. “If he wakes up, please come get me.”

Drax and Groot stayed to watch over Peter, Groot’s quiet murmuring a steady sound in the room. Rocket disappeared somewhere, and Gamora thought about going to sleep. She was bone-weary, but the horrible sounds of distress from Peter kept creeping into her mind. She knew she’d just end up staring at the ceiling. Instead, she wandered into the common area where Nebula was sitting on her own with a bottle of Ergon moonshine somebody had picked up on a supply run. Gamora sat down across from her and wordlessly grabbed a glass and poured herself a healthy dose and downed it with a grimace.

Nebula didn’t say anything. This is what Gamora liked about her. She loved being with her newfound, loud family, but there was something to be said for sitting in silence, and Nebula understood that.

Peter slept for an entire day without incident. They kept checking in on him, but he didn’t seem to have moved at all. Rocket was a little worried he might be dead, but he placed a hand on Peter’s chest and felt his heart beat, irregular but still pumping blood. His breath wheezed out of him, and the rest didn’t seem to be doing him much good. He still looked wan and the bruises, if anything, appeared to darken.

They were all drawn into the cockpit when Kraglin started yelling over the intercom about an asteroid belt they had to go through. They made it through without any damage, but there was quite a bit of rough flying and evasive action. By the time they went back downstairs, Peter had woken up. He had staggered to his feet and was holding onto the wall with his good hand and
trying to walk toward the door.

They walked past the room and saw him at it. He was groggy and confused, clutching his arm and wavering.

Rocket rushed forward. “Woah, hey, man. How about you lie down?”

Peter kept trying to walk forward. “I have to get out of here.” He mumbled.

Gamora moved to take his arm, but the ricochet of fear over his face discouraged her. “No, Peter, you’re safe now. You need to rest. At least sit down.”

Yondu moved into the doorway to keep Peter from pushing past him. “Come on, boy, you shouldn’t be walking around.”

Peter saw his path was being blocked, and stumbled back, panicked eyes leaping between them. “No, no, I have to get out of here before he comes back.”

“Ego is not coming back, Peter. He is gone.” Drax tried to reassure him.

Peter twitched when he heard Ego’s name. He let out a strangled noise that approximated a laugh. “He’s coming back, and he’s going to be mad. He’ll hurt me again. He told me not to leave the cage, but I did. I never learn. Fuck, I never learn.”

“Peter…” Gamora tried.

Peter was working himself up into a panic. “You don’t understand! He killed my mom, I have to get out of here.”

Gamora’s eyes flashed. “He did what?”

Peter tried to walk forward again, and Yondu put a hand on his chest to stop him from moving. Peter flinched like he had been struck. “Let me out of here. Let me go. Please, I don’t want him to come back.”

“Sit down. Just sit down for us.” Gamora tried again. Peter lashed out, and out of instinct, she caught his fist. He tried to pull away from her, and she tried to steer him gently back to the bed. He was starting to cry, and he jumped and flinched like a cornered animal.

They tried to give him a little space, but there wasn’t a lot of room in here. Rocket tried to grab Peter’s other hand and guide him back to the bed. Peter collapsed on the edge, not having a lot of strength in his legs. His voice was still hoarse, sobbing protestations now.

They all tried murmuring words of comfort, but their closeness was making things worse. He hunched into himself, his hands still held by Gamora and Rocket. No matter how much they tried, he wasn’t getting any more lucid. His hair fell into his eyes and he shook.

Yondu sat across from him and even tried his best, but Peter just kept asking them over and over again to let him go in a broken voice. He was getting worse, not better. Not even Groot’s plaintive soothing did any good.

Mantis appeared in the doorway, and her eyes were swimming with tears from the awful mood in the room. She walked in.

“Please, let me help. He is very afraid and in pain. I can help.” She said.
They hesitated. They didn’t want to do anything else to Peter against his will, but it was simply too horrible to leave him like this. They moved to make room for her.

Peter saw her coming with panicked eyes and tried to push her off, but she placed one gentle hand on his cheek and her antenna glowed. “You are safe now. You are with friends. There is no more need to be afraid.”

His eyes dimmed and he stopped sobbing. His face smoothed out and he looked blank all of a sudden. “I’m safe?” He was almost monotone.

Gamora leaned in and carded reassuring fingers through his hair. “Yes, it’s okay now.”

Rocket held out a canteen of water. “Here, drink this.”

Peter drank without protest. He allowed them to move him around, like he had no will of his own. Gamora thought this was more disturbing than the sobbing wreck he had been a few seconds earlier, but he really needed rest.

“Get some sleep now.” Yondu said, gruff. He also looked troubled.

Peter nodded slowly, like he was drugged. “Okay.” He mumbled.

They maneuvered him onto his back and he closed his eyes almost immediately and fell asleep.

Rocket grimaced. “Jeez, I feel gross now.”

“It will only last for a short time. By the time he wakes up again, he will be back to normal. Which means he will be in pain.” Mantis said sadly.

After that, they didn’t want to leave him. Rocket climbed up between Peter and the wall and put his hand over Peter’s. Drax sat on his other side still holding one hand. Groot curled up on Peter’s chest and Gamora sat near his head and ran her fingers through his hair, carefully and methodically fixing all of the tangles and mats. Even Yondu sat down a few feet away and stayed.

They felt fragile, like maybe their presence would be enough to help Peter. This wasn’t a thought any of them put into words, but they all felt that maybe just by being here, together, they could spin a protective circle around Peter, that maybe he could get better.

When Peter finally woke up in his right mind, Rocket was curled up in the chair opposite of the bed fast asleep. Peter blinked up at the ceiling and didn’t move. He felt like he was coming down from the worst hangover of his life, he was still bone-weary, and every muscle in his body ached, but this time he was lucid enough that he remembered what happened.

Rocket stirred and sat up to see Peter awake. His nose twitched in surprise. “Uh hey, Peter. How you feeling?”

Peter cleared his parched throat and experimentally tried to sit up before discovering that was a terrible idea. He closed his eyes. “What happened?” He croaked.

Rocket’s heart sank. “You don’t remember?”


“We came to get you. You almost died.” Rocket said. “He’s gone, Peter. He’s gone and he ain’t ever coming back, I promise you that.”
Peter frowned. He looked at Rocket with hurt hollows for eyes. “Are you sure?”

Rocket sat up and leaned closer. “Sure as I am that I’m a better pilot than you.”

“Oh.” Peter said. That was all. He turned his eyes back to the ceiling.

“Quill, I’m just. I’m really sorry it took us so long to find you. When I think about what you… Well, I’m just sorry.” Rocket stumbled through the sentence. He wasn’t quite used to offering condolences.

Peter nodded, still not meeting Rocket’s eyes. “Sorry I needed saving. Not very leader-like.”

Rocket hopped onto the bed to be closer to Peter. “Hey, come on. That’s. That’s stupid. He was supposed to be your dad, and instead he tortured you. It’s just, he was…” Rocket devolved into a long string of curses, half of which Peter didn’t even recognize.

Peter forced himself to sit up. When all the blood rushed to his head, his vision went black for a few seconds. He took a few deep breaths until he could continue. “No, it.. I was stupid. I should have done something more. I should have fought him off or, or, I don’t know, killed myself so he couldn’t use me like a battery. I let him do whatever he wanted…”

Peter trailed off, his voice quiet and colorless. Rocket wrinkled his nose. “Come on, don’t be an idiot. That bastard was torturing you for two weeks and feeding you all sorts of bullshit why you should be okay with it, but you held on, didn’t you? You survived, and in a situation like that, that’s the bravest thing you can do.”

The tips of his ears flushed in embarrassment, but he just told himself he’d make fun of Quill relentlessly once he was better to make up for it.

“Take it from me. I know a little something about brute survival.” Rocket said, running a hand over the bolts in his back.

Peter looked at him and then looked away. His fingers found the edge of the bandage on his broken arm. It was a dull, ever present ache. He pinched the bridge of his nose. Despite sleeping for almost three days now, he still didn’t feel any better.

“Man, sorry about the arm. That was really rough.” Rocket pointed at the bandage.

Peter creased his brow again. “That wasn’t a dream? Jesus.” He ran his hands over his face and stayed that way for a long moment.

“Hey, when’s the last time you ate something? You should really eat.” Rocket said.

Peter didn’t respond to that, just groaned. “I need to take a shower.”

Rocket put his hands up. “Woah, hey, hey. You need to eat and then sleep again.”

Peter swung his legs over the side of the bed with effort. “I’ve been sleeping.”

“See, that’s the funny thing about sleep, you actually need more of it.” Rocket hopped down, but Peter was determined to stand.

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, buddy, but there’s a bit of a height difference between us. I don’t think I’m gonna be able to help you with this.” Rocket tried to discourage him.

Peter forced his unsteady way to his feet and Rocket did his best to make sure he didn’t fall. The
last thing he wanted was a repeat of the other day, so he didn’t try to stop him. Peter’s face was
drawn and pale, but he made it out to the hallway, where he paused in confusion.

“Where are we?”

Rocket was hovering a few feet away. “Yondu’s ship. The Milano was pretty well scrapped,
remember?”

Peter looked at Rocket. “Yondu is here?”

“Yeah. Man, you really don’t remember, do you?”

Peter still seemed to be grappling with the basic concept. “Why would Yondu even bother?”

Rocket made a face. “Oh boy. Quill, I’ll blow up a planet for you, but I am not getting between you
and your daddy issues.”

Peter gaped at him. “Huh?”

“For the love of God, please just start walking. Or collapse or something. I’m not having this
conversation with you right now.”

The showers were only a few doors down, but it took Peter a good five minutes to make it down
there. By the time he made it into the room, he was panting and collapsed on a bench, blinking
away the black spots in front of his vision.

Rocket didn’t look comfortable with the situation. “Seriously, Peter, you don’t have to do this right
now.”

“I haven’t taken a shower in two weeks. I want to feel like a person again.” Peter said.

Rocket still thought it was a bad idea, but turned his back and left Peter to it. “I’ll be just outside.
Yell if you need anything, okay?”

Once Rocket was gone, Peter awkwardly wriggled out of his pants and pulled himself to standing.
He let out a long groan when he stepped under the hot water. It pounded down on his sore muscles.
He looked down and probed the bruise on his chest with his fingers. It hurt a lot more than he
thought it would, and he hissed. He was a lot more clear-headed than he had been the last few
times he’d woken up, but something about this didn’t feel quite real to him. Of course he was
happy to be away from Ego, of course he was. The problem was he didn’t feel enough. Something
about the whole situation just left him feeling empty. Most of all, he just felt tired.

He ended up dozing off while leaning against the shower. He woke with a start when he started
sliding down the wall. He toweled off and noticed a bag of his clothes sitting next to the lockers.
He wondered who left them there, but felt marginally better when he was wearing fresh clothes.

All in all, he thought this had gone fairly well before he tried to get up, and his knees were giving
out, and then he was on the floor. He hadn’t realized he had cried out before he heard Yondu’s
irritated voice on the other side of the door.

“Ya let him do what?” Yondu snapped, and Rocket protested and then the door flew open.

Yondu strode in and he looked so angry to see Peter fallen on the floor, and so sue him, but he had
had a very long week, and it reminded him of Ego. He flinched and then felt stupid for flinching,
stupid for falling over.
Yondu had drawn to a halt when he saw Peter’s instinctive flash of fear. That hadn’t been his intention.

“Gods, boy. I don’t know what you were thinking. You can barely stand up straight.” He said, kneeling down but slowly this time so as not to startle him.

Peter let Yondu put an arm around him and pull him to his feet. It was all he could do not to fall over as Yondu walked him back to his room. Once Peter was safely installed back in bed, Yondu was about to leave again. He still hadn’t really looked at Peter. He wasn’t sure how to act around him. He had said a lot of things he never meant to say out loud when fighting Ego, but he didn’t know how much of that Peter had heard.

“Get some sleep, kid.” Yondu grunted, ready to leave.

“How many?” Came Peter’s exhausted question from the bed. The circles under his eyes looked horrible, permanent.

Yondu turned around. “How many what?”

Peter didn’t think he wanted the answer to the question, but he felt like he had to ask it. “How many kids did you take to –” He cut off and swallowed, a weird clicking in his throat. “To my father?”

When Yondu didn’t answer, Peter kept going, voice almost inaudible and halting. “He told me about it when I– Well, I found all of them out there. He just tossed them away when he was done with them. He would have done it to me too.”

Guilt churned in Yondu’s stomach, but he had known they were going to have to have this conversation sooner or later. “Too many.” He said truthfully, coming to stand by Peter. “I wasn’t keepin’ count, but somewhere upwards of a dozen.”

“A dozen.” Whispered Peter, looking sick.

Yondu felt the need to explain himself. That didn’t happen too often. “I didn’t know what he was doing, Peter. I know that doesn’t make any of it better, but gods, when I found out–”

“I know. He told me that too.” Peter said, brow creased and unfocused eyes trained on Yondu’s chest instead of his face.

“I wasn’t going to let him do the same to you. That’s why I kept ya. You always wanted to know, well, there’s the big secret.” Yondu said. “Well, you wanna bash my brains in, never talk to me again, I get that.”

Peter looked at Yondu finally, and he looked so much like the kid he’d picked up on Terra, scared and alone, it killed him. “I should be angry, and I guess… I guess I am but… I don’t know what I am.”

Yondu was alarmed to see Peter start to cry. He didn’t know what to do, but finally sat on the edge of the bed and put one arm around Peter’s shoulders. “Hey, come on now. It’s alright.”

Peter’s shoulders shook and he buried his head in Yondu’s chest, wrapping his arms around him. “Th-there were so many of them.” He sobbed.

Yondu froze. He wasn’t in the business of comforting people. Hell, he wasn’t sure if he ever had. But in the end, the act of comforting someone you love was as instinctive as breathing. He shifted
closer and pulled Peter into him, hugging him tight like he was about to float away. “I know.” He murmured. It didn’t matter what he said, it was the simple act of saying something that gave someone comfort.

Choking sobs shook through Peter’s frame. The last few weeks of pain and fear chose this moment to hit him, and he kept crying until he was hoarse. Yondu held him close, rubbing comforting circles into Peter’s back with his thumbs.

“You’re safe now, and you ain’t alone, so don’t think y’are.” Yondu murmured. Peter couldn’t speak, but just knowing that he had Yondu even when he didn’t have Ego helped just a little bit.

Yondu stayed there with his arms wrapped around Peter until he fell asleep again. To his surprise, he didn’t feel the slightest bit embarrassed. He tucked Peter under the blankets again and did something very strange for him that nonetheless felt like the right thing to do. He brushed Peter’s hair back from his forehead before dimming the lights and leaving him alone again.

Chapter End Notes

So Peter's still got a couple things to work through. There was supposed to be more Gamora in this chapter, but it was getting a bit long, so I'll save her for next chapter. I appreciate each and every one of your kudos and comments, thank you so so much.
Peter rolled over in his sleep and his hand brushed against an iron bar. His eyes flew open. He was lying on his side in the cage. He closed his eyes, counted to four, opened them again. He was still there.

Heart hammering against his ribcage, he sat up. He wrapped one hand around a bar. It sure felt real. He felt like he was choking, like something was trying to crawl up his throat and strangle him. He lunged across the small space and shook the door. It didn’t budge. His feet were cold, and he looked down to see he wasn’t wearing shoes. Peter frowned. That didn’t make sense. He had shoes, right? He’d been wearing them this entire time. He was wearing gray sweatpants and a blue shirt, which seemed off as well.

With a choked noise of panic in his throat, Peter saw his father come down the stairs.

“Good morning, Peter. Ready to get back to it?”

Peter rocked back onto his heels and crawled backwards as far as he could go. “N-no, you’re not here.”

Ego raised an eyebrow and looked down at himself. “Sure looks like I am.”

Peter shook his head wildly. “No, no, they came to get me, Gamora and Yondu and-”

Ego laughed. “Yondu? Now I know you’re imagining things. The rest of your friends, sure, they might give it a shot, but Yondu? That make sense to you? Pretty sure he wants to kill you for stealing from him.”

Peter stared up at his father. He was right, it didn’t make sense to him. All of a sudden the idea of Yondu hugging him seemed absurd, out of the pale. The only father he was ever going to have was standing in front of him.

Ego continued. “Plus, there’s no way they would have been able to kill me, Peter. I’m a celestial, I have more power than any of you could ever dream!”

Peter shook and couldn’t help but flinch violently when the cage door slammed open. He screamed and tried to hold onto the bars, but Ego pulled him inexorably out until he was holding him up in the air, his feet dangling. Peter choked and panicked noises came out of him.

Ego pulled him closer, still smiling beatifically. “You’re my son, Peter. Did you really think I would let you go?”

Peter felt like he couldn’t move. He was helpless and nobody was coming for him after all.

Ego’s face broke apart into streams of light, and Peter jerked his head away from them. “No, no, don’t.” He pleaded.

“Peter!” A different voice came from somewhere other than Ego’s smiling mouth.

“Peter, wake up! Peter, come on, wake up. It’s okay.” The weird, echoing voice continued and
from somewhere beyond Peter’s panic he noticed he was having strange double vision. Behind Ego was Gamora’s face leaning over him, hair swinging and mouth moving, repeating his name.

“Peter, it’s just a dream. You’re only having a nightmare, come on.” Gamora’s voice strengthened. Peter closed his eyes and when he opened them again, he was back on Yondu’s ship. He was huddled in the corner of the room and Gamora knelt down in front of him, holding his shoulders.

He realized he was making horrible noises, but he couldn’t stop. He whipped his head around, looking for Ego, but everything was as it should be.

Gamora still hadn’t let him go. “There you go, Peter. Hey, come on back to me now. It’s okay.”

Peter turned back to her, great whooping breaths going in and out like he was about to fall apart. He could still feel Ego’s grip on his shoulders. Gamora’s hands had the same strength, but while Ego’s aimed to bruise and control, Gamora’s meant to hold and reassure.

It took a long time for Peter to calm down. One one level, he knew he was safe on Yondu’s ship, but his heart wouldn’t stop jackhammering away for a good ten minutes. Gamora didn’t lose patience. Once Peter’s heart was back to a normal human speed, he pushed her hands off him. His fingers rested on her forearms for a moment but she let him dictate how close she was going to get. She could still remember comforting Nebula like this for those few short months before their differences became much too pronounced for comfort. She was surprised she even still remembered how to do it.

Peter lowered himself from his defensive crouch and put his hands over his face. His broken arm still bent awkwardly under the bandage. “Sorry.” He mumbled, voice muffled around his hands.

Gamora sat down cross-legged across from him, making sure to give him space so he didn’t feel cornered. “Sorry for what?”

Peter lowered his hands and looked at her. He was still hunched into himself from the aftereffects of the nightmare. He looked ashen in the low lighting of the room. “I woke you up, didn’t I? You can go back to bed now. I’m fine now.”

“You don’t look fine.” Gamora said, voice soft.

That only made him look worse. He frowned and looked away from her. “I know you have better things to do. You can get back to it.”

Gamora didn’t move. “What was the dream about? Would it help to talk about it?”

Peter gave an aborted half-shrug. “Nothing, just. My dad.”

Gamora decided to tell him something she’d never told anyone else. “I used to have nightmares. Still do, once in awhile. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

Peter eyed her a little disbelievingly. “You didn’t have anyone around to help you, though. You could deal with it on your own.”

Gamora took in his aggressively self-reliant posture. He was sinking into himself in an effort to deal with what he was going through. “Is that what you’re worried about?”

Peter shrugged. His fingers had returned to ghost around the bruise on his chest, still tender and purple.
Gamora reached out to touch his knee. He stared at her hand. “Come on, Peter, talk to me. Think of this as a free pass to talk my ear off. Who knows when I’ll be in such a good mood again?” She smiled to show him she was joking.

Peter ducked his head down and mumbled something so quiet she only heard scattered words. She caught pathetic. A heat surged up in her chest. She hated seeing him like this. She didn’t quite know what to do here. Her specialty was assassination, not, whatever this was. If there was a six-headed creature standing in front of her, she would know to cut off each of its heads, but she was lost here. She could almost see him sliding away from her, and it terrified her. In a burst of impulsiveness, she reached out and laced her fingers through his.

Peter and Gamora both stared at the point of contact. This was uncharted territory for both of them. They locked eyes and listened to the distant thrumming of the engine and the ticking of machinery all over the ship.

Gamora tightened her grip and wondered at the strange sensation. Their fingers were both calloused and worn in different ways. Gamora’s fingers were long and full of wiry, brittle strength, while Peter’s fingers were calloused and broad. She didn’t say anything, but just hoped that Peter would choose to talk under his own volition.

He finally did. His body was angled away from her, but he didn’t let go of her hand. “I just… I don’t know why you bothered coming after me. You wouldn’t have been worse off without me.”

Gamora’s fingers stilled. “What?”

“Drax’s family was murdered, Rocket was experimented on, hell, you were beaten and pulled apart for years, and none of you ever complain about it.” Peter was speaking so quietly Gamora had to strain to hear him. “You guys all went through a lot, and if I can’t even… I should be dealing with this better. You shouldn’t have to pick up after me-”

He cut off there and Gamora had to fight the urge to shake him by the shoulders. She didn’t want to scare him. An undercurrent of steel crept into her voice. “Do you think any of us got up the day after feeling completely fine? It takes time. If we didn’t get better in one day, why should you?”

Peter was shaking his head. “It’s not the same thing.”

Gamora stood, tugging Peter to his feet. “Let’s take a walk.”

Peter looked surprised. “Oh, I’m being allowed to walk around now?”

Gamora gave him a dirty look. “Watch it, Star-Lord, or I’ll carry you.”

Peter’s lips twitched and Gamora took that as a good sign. “Yes, ma’am.”

In the end, he had to put one arm around her shoulder, and she supported him on their slow way up to the observation deck. The space was mostly empty, but somebody had set up a pile of old linen and mattresses as a makeshift couch. Gamora and Peter sat down. The huge window running along the wall looked out into a galaxy exploded into spirals and towering streams of gas in deep green and purple. The light came into the ship and bounced off them, making everything glow. The two of them watched the light show in silence for a while.

Gamora shifted in her seat to face Peter. He was sitting with arms hanging at his side. “I don’t know where you got the idea you’re useless.”
“Come on, Gamora, you don’t have to stroke my ego.” Peter’s eyes snapped shut and he flared his nostrils for a moment at his slip of the tongue. “You’re an incredible assassin, Rocket could build explosives out of some toenail clippings and leftover porridge, and I’m pretty sure Drax is indestructible. What, I can fly fast and piss people off. I’m not… I’m nothing special.”

“Is this your father talking?” Gamora fought to keep the anger out of her voice.

Peter pulled into himself again. “No! You shouldn’t have come after me, you could have died, you could’ve—”

“Even if we had, it would have been worth it.” Gamora spoke with conviction. “We couldn’t do any of this without you. We all would have failed, died probably if it hadn’t been for you grabbing that Infinity Stone.”

“Only because of my dad.” Peter said.

Gamora huffed in annoyance. “Peter, do you spend time with me because I’m useful to you?”

He frowned. “No.”

“Do you help Groot around because of what he can do for you?”

“No, of course not—”

Gamora kept going. “No, of course not. So why do you think the only reason we keep you around is because of your utility? If that’s what we were doing, we would have all lasted one week together. Here’s a secret, and if you tell anybody then I’ll kill you, but I for one am still around because I like you fools.”

Peter watched her without answering. “Just because you can’t bench-press two hundred pounds or translate alien languages doesn’t make you weak, or less than, and anyone who thinks so is a fool who won’t see you coming because of it.” Gamora finished this speech with a gust of breath. She was glad nobody else was around to hear her say things like this. Nebula would never let her live it down.

“Cut yourself some slack, Peter, please.” She said.

She pulled him closer to her, and after tensing and a moment’s hesitation, he rested his head on her shoulder. She began carding her fingers through his hair in a slow and comforting rhythm. She felt a tiny amount of the tension in his body relax.

They sat there for a long time watching the stars. Gamora listened to Peter’s breaths going in and out, feeling unimaginable relief after every single one. It had been so long since he moved she thought he’d fallen asleep again.

He spoke. His body was still, but this time the waver was back in his voice. He sounded absolutely miserable. “He killed my mom. He told me he put a tumor in her head and then sent for me when he knew she was dead.”

Gamora felt rage. She wanted to fly across the galaxy, stride across a battlefield, slashing and rending until there was nothing left. Instead she pulled Peter closer, until his upper body was resting against her. Beyond the obvious monstrosity of what Ego had done, Gamora knew how much this had to hurt Peter. She had heard him talk about Meredith with obvious warmth and love, and although she’d never met the woman, Gamora could intuit that much of Peter’s gregarious nature came from his mother.
“I’m so sorry, Peter.” Gamora murmured. That was the only thing she could think to say.

“Even, even towards the end, Mom was still talking about him like he was a fucking angel or something. She said he was composed of pure light. She didn’t know what he was like, what he’d done to her. He didn’t deserve any of her. Not a bit.” Peter was getting choked up again, but he didn’t turn to look at Gamora.

“No, he didn’t. He deserved ten times worse than anything we could have given him.” Gamora said.

“It’s just…”

“What?”

“It was just so much easier when he was just David Hasselhoff in my head. I didn’t know how good I had it. Deadbeat dads aren’t the worst thing ever.” He sighed unsteadily, and she rubbed his arm. She felt the urge to give him a chaste kiss on the top of his head, but now that he was awake, she felt a little more self-conscious about it, so she just settled for stroking her fingers through his hair until he nodded off again.

The next evening, Yondu decided Peter had spent too much time in bed. Of course, he didn’t phrase it that way, it was something like If you don’t get out of that hormone-soaked pit you call a room, I’m going to have to scrape you out of it, but it all amounted to the same. Yondu was a wordsmith.

Kraglin was the one who came to get Peter this time, sloping into the room and telling him dinner was being made.

Peter was honestly taken aback. “By who?” Among everyone on this ship, none of them were what could be described as a good cook. Dinners were usually a slapdash affair on the Milan. Kraglin shrugged. “Everyone?”

Peter shook his head. “That’s fine. I’m not hungry.” He had been sitting in bed trying to flex his sore fingers. His arm still ached and throbbed, but was starting that feverish itch that meant the bone was beginning to mend. He had spent half the day on the floor in the bathroom feeling by turns nauseous and panicked, although he didn’t want any of them to know it.

Kraglin eyed him shrewdly, leaning casually against the doorway. “Yeah, Pete, nice try. Yondu said if you didn’t wanna come, I was to drag ya. Captain’s orders.”

Usually Peter would have made a joke, but he couldn’t summon up the energy. The best he could do was roll his eyes, and that felt good enough.

Kraglin offered his arm, and Peter only had to lean on him a little. They made their slow, halting way down the hallway towards the mess hall. Kraglin didn’t seem to mind the slow pace. Peter noticed something he had oft seen in the first mate while growing up aboard Yondu’s ship; a curious mix of a schooled, amiable nature with a sharper undercurrent that he supposed was the reason why Yondu had picked him as second-in-command. He didn’t look like much, but was sharper than most gave him credit for. He had seen right through Peter anyway.

The mess hall was full of voices and movement, smells wafting through the air, some appetizing,
some not. Peter couldn’t help a moment of apprehension before they walked in.

Rocket and Groot were standing over a boiling pot on the stove. Rocket was whispering something and Groot gleefully tossed handfuls of an unidentified herb into the pot and watched Rocket stir. He loved them both, but the sight was enough to scarper what little appetite Peter had to begin with.

Gamora and Nebula were deep in conversation at the booth when they came in, and barely noticed them. Drax looked up and grinned at Peter, holding up what might be a headless fish above a cutting board.

“Friend Peter! It is good to see you walking around!” He boomed in his customary voice.

Peter let go of Kraglin and eased himself into a chair. He offered Drax a watery smile he was sure looked more like a grimace. There was no part of him that was ready for socializing.

There was a hissing thump and Yondu appeared from the other room carrying a bottle of something possibly poisonous but definitely alcoholic. “No offense to any of yous, but I ain’t spending the night with you lot unless I’m completely sauced.” He said, taking a stack of glasses from Kraglin and filling them all and passing them around. Peter reached out a hand for one, but Yondu shook his head and collapsed into the chair opposite him.

“Don’t think so, boy. This stuff would knock you on your back for a week.”

Peter protested. “Come on, Yondu. I could use a drink.”

“I said no. You haven’t eaten a real meal in weeks, it’d just make ya sick.” Yondu was peering at him with a look that made Peter uncomfortable. He looked away. He still wasn’t quite used to this whole ‘Yondu being concerned after his well-being’ thing.

Rocket turned around with a steaming ladle. “Dinner is served, ladies and gentlemen, and I’m confident in saying you might not get food poisoning from it. It’s definitely sixty-forty at least.”

The chatter in the room rose, everyone jostling around each other for a bowl and then sitting around the long table. Somebody got Peter a bowl and put it in front of him. It looked like perfectly edible stew, but Peter stared at it for a long moment. There wasn’t a single part of him that felt hungry. He had nibbled on some bread they had brought him, but hadn’t had it in him to eat a full meal.

Peter sat back and watched everyone else eat and kid around with each other. He felt weirdly separate from his friends, numb and slow. He looked down the table and blinked in surprise. There was someone sitting at the end of the table he didn’t recognize. She was similarly quiet and had been watching Peter with a strangely open expression. When he noticed her, she flushed in embarrassment and began eating with a performative zeal.

Gamora introduced her. “Peter, this is Mantis. She helped us find you.”

He had a vague memory of panicking and her hand coming to rest on his cheek. She looked up at him, tips of her antenna glowed. She smiled at him, a weird expression like she was still getting used to the custom. “Hello, Peter.”

He stared. “Uh, hey.”

“It is very good to see you doing well.”
“Well, that’s… Thanks. Sorry, who are you?” He asked.

Yondu had pushed Peter’s bowl closer to him. “You should eat.” He said with his mouth full.

Peter barely glanced at him. “I’m not hungry.”

Mantis seemed unsure where to begin. “I’m…. I lived on Ego, with your father.”

Everyone had kind of stopped eating to watch this conversation, except for Kraglin and Nebula, who were scarfing down the stew.

Peter blanched. “Were you… Did he-”

She shook her head. “No, I am not one of his children. I was orphaned and he took me in, I suppose.”

Peter was starting to look ashen and shaky again. “Your whole life? That must have been horrible.”

He breathed out.

Her mouth opened and she seemed more uncomfortable than usual. Her bottom lip trembled.

“Actually, it was complicated. Although I am appalled by what he has done, he always showed me kindness, in his own way.”

After some silent looks from Yondu, Kraglin reached across the table and pushed the bowl practically right into Peter’s hands. “Come on, Pete, eat.”

Peter whipped his head to look at him and then back to Mantis. He was getting very agitated. “How is it complicated? The guy was a sadist.”

Mantis shrugged. “I do not know if that was true. In his mind, he thought what he was doing was the right thing, even if it was not.”

Peter shoved his chair back and staggered to his feet. High points of color had appeared on his cheeks. He was running himself ragged. “The right thing? How could it-”

Gamora reached across to him. “Peter, sit down.” She soothed.

Mantis’ eyes had grown huge. She knew she was not getting through to Peter, was having a hard time communicating what she was trying to say. “No, of course it was not! I only meant what he thought.”

Peter had lost what little composure he’d gained. He laughed, a strangled, desperate sound devoid of any ounce of humor. “Oh yeah, he just thought he’d use his kids like, like cattle or livestock or something, real stand-up guy there, Father of the year, sure.”

Rocket had stopped eating as well. “Quill, Mantis came here to find us. She’s on your side, she wanted to help.”

Peter was backing up, revving himself up. “Help, yeah, okay. Sure.” His voice was getting higher, frantic. He knew he wasn’t making any sense, knew he was rambling, but the panic that had been resting one inch beneath his skin for days now didn’t care for logic.

Yondu was looking at him with concern in his eyes. Peter wanted to knock the look off his face. He was feeling cornered, confused. “Hey, take it easy, Peter. Nobody’s tryin’ to attack ya here.”

Mantis had stood up, coming a few steps closer to Peter. She also looked distressed. She
desperately wanted Peter to understand what she was trying to say, that she had known Ego for years, but known that she couldn’t let him hurt anyone else like that.

“I could help you see. Just see things from my point of view, just for a second.” Mantis stumbled through the sentence, upset.

She walked toward him, one hand raised, just to let it rest on Peter’s arm. Gamora was getting to her feet, smelling trouble. Peter’s eyes widened, and all he saw was Ego coming after him (just cooperate, do as I say now) and a sharp burst of blind panic shot through him. With a strangled gasp, Peter hit Mantis’ hand away from him, sending her off-balance to fall against the table and knock a few of the plates on the ground. She cried out, more in surprise than pain.

“Peter!” Gamora snapped, running up to get between them. Mantis was already getting to her feet, didn’t seem any the worse for wear.

Gamora’s voice seemed to snap Peter out of his panic, and he saw what he had done to Mantis. He deflated, fingers again reaching up to ghost over the bruise on his chest.

He looked around at the rest of them, who had all stopped moving for a moment. He swallowed, feeling nausea roil in his stomach. “I’m so sorry.” He choked out.

Mantis had already bounced back. She tried another smile. “It is okay. I saw you were nervous, I should have not tried to touch you, it’s all right.”

Peter was shaking his head wildly. “No, it’s not okay. I- I didn’t mean to do that, I’m sorry.”

“Really, it’s okay. I just lost my balance, I’m not hurt at all.” Mantis said truthfully.

Gamora was reaching for him, and Yondu was giving him another one of his strange looks. Everyone was looking at him, and Peter gasped again. “Sorry,” was all he managed to choke out before turning heel and getting out of the room as fast as he could.

The rest of the Guardians and Yondu were left looking at each other at a loss.

“I’ll get ‘im.” Yondu said before sweeping off after Peter.

Chapter End Notes

I always thought Mantis would have more complicated feelings toward Ego, it's never black-and-white. I'm thinking this story is going to have about two more chapters, I've got it all outlined and that feels like a good length. As always, thanks for reading. The response to it has been really great :)
When Yondu found Peter, he was sitting in the loading bay, feet tucked under him. He was holding something small in his hands, fiddling with the sharp edges. When he heard Yondu, Peter looked up and then his eyes slid away. He looked so still and small, like he was falling in on himself. A strong instinct rose up in Yondu, something he didn’t quite understand himself. For as long as he could remember, he’d been all for himself with no room left for anyone else. Somewhere along the line that had changed. Despite all his best efforts, sometime between deciding not to turn Peter over to Ego and when Peter stole his first ship and set out on his own like the Ravager Yondu wanted him to be, Peter carved out a hole in Yondu’s chest, sharing the space with his heart and his scars.

“I’m fine now.” Peter said, staring down at his feet. His voice was colorless. His knuckles stood out in white from where he was clutching what was in his hand.

Yondu swept his jacket back and sunk onto his haunches. “I’m pretty sure if I’m supposed to tell you not to hit people, that ship sailed a good fifteen years back.”

Peter didn’t laugh, but he gave him the stink eye which was a step in the right direction. Yondu looked down to see Peter playing with the controller for his mask. As Yondu watched, Peter hit the button and the mask built itself around his hands, but once it was revealed, it was easy to see it was in pieces.

“It was in my pocket, I forgot about it.” Peter said, staring at it and pressing the button so that it disappeared.

“We can get a new one built. It’s not a big deal.” Yondu said.

Peter didn’t answer. He had been back for about a week now, but the circles under his eyes and the bruises littering his body didn’t seem to be healing at all. His listless lack of energy worried Yondu. For his entire life, Peter always bounced back pretty fast. Whenever he got hurt or went through a setback, it didn’t hold him back for long. He had always had an endless fount of energy, but Ego seemed to have sapped all of that away.

“I’ve been thinking.” Peter said quietly. His fingers had returned to the bruise on his chest. It seemed to be the center of his pain.

“Mmm, dangerous.” Yondu said.

If Peter heard the joke, he didn’t respond. “Next time we get into a port to restock, I’ll get off there. I’m sure the guys want to get back to rebuild the Milano, and I know you have better things to do than float around space for weeks.”

Yondu narrowed his eyes. “What the hell are you talking about, boy?”

Peter shrugged, shoulders high and defensive. “You guys don’t have to babysit me. I don’t know if I’m, if I’m ready to do any jobs, but I won’t hold you guys back from doing it. I’ll just figure things out on my own.”

Yondu couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “You ain’t going anywhere, Quill. I didn’t fly across half the fucking galaxy to dump you off somewhere.” He growled.
Peter tensed and looked at him carefully, and Yondu realized what that sounded like. He made an effort to soften his tone. “You’re not a, a burden or anything, Peter.”

Peter looked unconvinced. Yondu realized he had to do something drastic to convince Peter. “Look, uh, Peter. I don’t like this any more than you do, but we just, ya know, have to get through it.”

Peter raised his eyebrows, and the sarcasm lurking there was almost like his normal self. “Was that your version of a pep talk?”

Yondu growled. “Listen, you little punk. I’m tryin’ to be nice here. Look, what I’m tryin’ to say is, your dad, he was a real piece of shit.”

Peter snorted softly.

Yondu felt the urge to stop talking there, give him a good pat on the shoulder and get out of there before he said anything he’d regret. However, he didn’t want to see Peter downtrodden anymore. Yondu sat next to Peter on the wall and did his best not to groan as he threw an arm around Peter’s shoulders.

Peter flinched and stared. It was one thing for Yondu to give him comfort when he was shaking and panicking, but another thing here in the quiet hangar.

Yondu kept going. “All’s I’m trying to say is, he weren’t your daddy. He weren’t all you had.”

Peter stared at him in open shock. Yondu was many things, but emotionally articulate was never one of them. Not that he was either, but hey, Yondu had raised him. Both of them sat uncomfortably in each other’s presence. They knew a nice sentiment had been expressed, but neither of them knew how to proceed. Peter felt a warmth in his chest where he had only felt cold in quite a while.

Yondu pulled Peter closer, ruffled his hair and then stood up. “So anyway. That’s that. You might want to talk to Mantis. I know ya didn’t mean her any harm, but that girl’s twitchier than you are. She means well, I think.”

After the night he’d had, Peter didn’t think he would be able to have that conversation, so he pulled himself to his feet and wandered off back to his room. Once he was in the darkened room, he lowered himself onto his bed with a long groan and laid back. He was tired but didn’t exactly relish the idea of sleep right now, not after last night.

He lay staring at the ceiling. He refused to close his eyes, knowing what would happen when he did. He almost missed the quiet sound of his door being opened and small feet shuffling toward him.

Peter rolled over and listened. A small, plaintive “I am Groot?” drifted up from the floor. Peter stretched his arm down and small feet crawled up his arm. Groot climbed up onto the bed. Peter was on his side with his feet pulled up and Groot nestled between his arms and chin. Dusty gold light rose up in the room. Groot was sending spores up into the air like he had before. They were much smaller and had a tendency to spark out, but they were soft and comforting.

“Hey, thanks, Groot.” Peter muttered, not able to keep his eyes open for another second.

Groot stroked his arm with a tiny arm and chirped. “I am Groot.”

Peter awoke a few hours later with a start. For a long moment, he stayed with his eyes closed. He
was tensed up, expecting to open his eyes to Ego’s palace again. He felt paralyzed, unwilling to send himself back to that place. After an endless few seconds, he realized there was a pillow under his head and a blanket pulled over him. With a great feeling of trepidation, he opened his eyes to see his room on Yondu’s ship. He almost started crying in relief. He hadn’t been able to sleep an entire night through yet without some nightmares. The reason for this was soon obvious. Groot was still curled up right next to his head. Peter patted him softly and lurched to his feet.

He walked out of his room to find the entire ship quiet. Everyone must still be fast asleep. His stomach growled, and he realized he must be hungry, which had to be a good sign. He followed the sounds of movement to the kitchen to find Mantis on her own, frying something unidentifiable on the stovetop.

Peter froze in the doorway, already planning a swift retreat until she whipped around to see him. Neither of them reacted for a long moment until Mantis held up a cup of coffee toward him. Peter shuffled forward and took the mug.

“Thanks.” He muttered, easing down to sit on one of the stools. He took a sip and very nearly spat it out. The coffee was piping hot but had about half a shaker of sugar dissolved into it.

Mantis was peering at him in worry. “Is it good? I was not sure how most people like to drink their coffee.”

Peter forced himself to swallow and gave her a watery smile. “It’s fine.”

Mantis lit up and turned back around to stir the pot. Now that he wasn’t in the midst of having a panic attack, Peter saw how slight and nervous Mantis was. If possible, he felt even worse for having blown up at her the other day.

“Look, about yesterday, I didn’t mean to-” He began just as she turned around.

“I’m sorry.” They both said at the same time.

Peter frowned. “What do you have to be sorry about?”

“I should not have brought up your fath- him.” Mantis said, eyes huge and luminous.

Peter waved a hand. “No, I shouldn’t have overreacted.”

Mantis shook her head. “How could you have not? When I- well, when I took your fear after we rescued you, I saw. Everything. I know what he did to you.”

Peter looked away, scuffing his feet against the legs of the chair. He knew he had to ask the question that had been bothering him this entire time. “Did you know them? The other kids?”

“An icy hand wrapped itself around Peter’s chest and he stuttered out a breath. Out of everything else, that cold cave was what had bothered him the most. It was just so desolate and sad, the final resting place of hundreds of children whose only crime was having the wrong father. He couldn’t say anything.

This time, when Mantis offered her hand palm up for Peter to take, he hesitated but took it. They both stiffened and closed their eyes. Her antenna glowed. Mantis felt Peter’s exhaustion and pain and fear, and Peter felt her years of loneliness with the undercurrent of steel that allowed her to
They let go both feeling light-headed, but a little bit better. Peter eyed her. “So, what, does this make you my half-sister or something?”

The surprised smile that grew across Mantis’ face made that point of warmth in Peter’s chest grow. By the time Kraglin and Gamora had stumbled into the mess hall, Peter had made Mantis laugh, a delighted screech that was too unself-conscious to be anything but genuine. Gamora smiled at the sight.

That afternoon, Peter joined Rocket and Drax in the loading bay while they worked on some repairs. Until they could get back to the Milano, they didn’t have much to do, and Gamora said she was glad Rocket wasn’t trying to build any explosives.

Peter sat swinging his legs above the two of them. Drax was holding up heavy metal panels while Rocket scurried about below banging things and yelling instructions up at them, his voice echoing.

“When was the last time anyone was in here? I’m pretty sure there are some alien life forms that have started growing on the walls, this is disgusting even by my standards!” Rocket called, followed by an especially loud clanging.

Drax laughed, the rolling of his shoulders sending the panel above him swaying. “Rocket implied he was disgusting, that is very funny.”

“Hey, Star-Munch, get me that adhesive! It’s on the outside pocket in that bag.” Rocket called up.

Peter dropped down and rummaged through the bag until he found it. Rocket was already deep in the innards of the ship, so Peter had to swing down and land underneath to hand it to him. Rocket was hanging upside down from the steel bars holding the ship together. He stretched out one hand and took the adhesive from Peter and started trying to weld two of the rebars together where they had corroded over time.

Peter was about to climb back up when an alarm went off above them. “Solar flares, Captain!” Kraglin’s stressed voice came on over the intercom. There was an expansive boom and the entire ship shook. Rocket fell to the ground and Peter was slammed into the wall. Drax cried out and the heavy panel he was holding crashed to the ground, plunging Peter and Rocket into darkness.

There were a few more swoops from the ship and loud cursing from all sides. After it was over, Drax sat up, shaking his head to clear it. “Small ones, are you alright?” Drax shouted.

Rocket’s voice drifted up from under the floor. “Fine, big guy! Get us out of here, though, wouldn’t you?”

The rough flying had left the panel wedged underneath part of the wall, which meant it would take a while for Drax to get it off of them. “Hang on! I will work as fast as I can.” Drax called.

Underneath, Rocket ran a hand over his head and laughed. It had been a close call, but the worst he was going to get was a few bruises. “The one thing I’ll never do is complain about there not being enough excitement in our lives, eh, Quill?”

Rocket didn’t immediately get an answer, and he started to worry. It was very dark underneath the floor, and with only the small amount of light filtering in from above, he crawled over to where he had seen Peter last, running his hand across the wall to find his way.

“Peter? Hey, answer me, you okay? You hurt?” Rocket called. He still didn’t get an answer.
Starting to panic now, he hurried up, running his hands blindly over the walls and the floor in search of Peter.

“Peter!” He shouted. In the end, Rocket almost tripped over him. He was curled up against the wall, and Rocket wilted in relief when he heard him breathing. “Dude, you nearly gave me a heart attack. Are you good?”

“Uh huh.” Peter gasped, breaths coming in fast and shallow.

Rocket’s eyes were starting to adapt to the dark, and he saw Peter’s face was wide and full of fear. “Did you get hit? Are you bleeding?”

Peter shook his head and clamped his eyes shut. “N-no, I’m good.”

Rocket looked him over and didn’t see any signs of injury. “You don’t look fine, what’s wrong?”

Peter wheezed in and out and didn’t answer him for a moment. “It’s just- this is a very. Small. Space.”

It dawned on him what the matter was. Rocket had no trouble believing Peter would develop a bit of claustrophobia after being locked in a cage for weeks. He could sympathize with that.

“Oh god, dude, you having a panic attack?” Rocket asked, moving closer to Peter.

Peter shook and wrapped his arms around himself. “J-just a little one. Fuck, I have to get out of here.”

Rocket glanced up at the blocked entrance above them. “Hurry up, Drax!” He shouted and then turned back to Peter. “Yeah, I know, dude, that’s perfectly understandable, just like, relax, okay? Just breathe.”

Peter let out a desperate bark of laughter. “Okay, just relax, yeah, sure! Easier said than done. My heart is going to burst, Rocket.”

His words were starting to get more strained, and his breaths started locking him up. He was starting to hyperventilate.

Rocket grabbed one of his hands and squeezed as hard as he could. “Okay, Peter, look. Listen to every word that I’m telling you. You are not in a cage, okay? You’re safe on Yondu’s ship. It’ll just be another minute or so and Drax is going to get us out of here.”

Peter’s feet kicked against the wall across from him. He tried to struggle to his feet but slammed his head against the ceiling, which only made him panic more. “Rocket, I have to get out of here right now. Right now.”

“Peter, just breathe. Just listen to me. You’re fine. You’re safe.”

Peter lunged up into a half-crouched position and began to dig his fingers into the ceiling above him, only trying harder when the panel didn’t move an inch.

“Peter, I know how you feel, but just give it a second.” Rocket tried again, pulling Peter down so he collapsed to a seat.

Peter ran his hands over his face, breaths wheezing in and out. Rocket coached him through it, just repeating calming words over and over until Drax finally managed to hoist the panel out of the
Light streamed into the space, and Rocket and Peter both winced at the light. Without a moment’s hesitation, Peter scrambled to his feet and pulled himself out. Gamora was already there, and he walked right past her when she tried to see if he was okay. Drax pulled Rocket out and checked him over.

Peter stumbled over to the wall and doubled over, dry heaved once and then stayed that way with his eyes clamped shut. His brow was covered in sweat and he waved off everyone who tried to come over and help.

Gamora stepped closer but didn’t try to touch him. “It’s okay, Peter.” She said hesitantly.

Peter stood up with a sudden movement and snarled. “Is it?” He looked furious, although whether it was at her, himself, or something else was anyone’s guess.

He seemed full of a nervous energy that was going to send him into a flying rage. He lurched to one side and dug the palm of his hand into his chest. “I can’t even do something normal without freaking out over nothing.”

“It wasn’t nothing, Peter.” Drax said.

Peter shot him a look. “Right, like it’s normal to freak out when I get stuck for like five seconds.”

“After what you’ve been through, it’s perfectly natural.” Gamora said.

Peter shook his head. “I should be better than this. I should- I should be better by now.”

“That’s not how it works, man.” Rocket tried but Peter wasn’t listening to any of them.

Before anybody could say anything else, he waved his hand and backed up without looking at any of them. “Look, sorry about this. I’ll just. Go.”

Gamora was all set to go after him, but Rocket put a hand on her arm. “Maybe give him some space.” He tried.

She looked after him, biting her lip, but followed Rocket’s advice. Peter wasn’t there when they all came together for dinner, and wasn’t in his room when Gamora went to check later on. She searched all over the ship for him and didn’t find him. Deciding he wanted some space, she decided to go to sleep.

He wasn’t there the following morning either, and Gamora wasn’t worried until Yondu cursed from his spot in the captain’s chair. He was glaring down at the control panel, and typed in a few commands to bring up another screen.

“You seen Peter?” He barked over his shoulder.

Gamora got up to join him. “Not since yesterday, why?”

Yondu slammed a hand down. “Because I’m missing one of the smaller pods, that’s why.”

Gamora felt a burst of fear and sighed. “Where’s the nearest inhabited planet?”

Kraglin was already on it, pulling up a map of the quadrant they were in. “Not far.”

Gamora and Yondu locked eyes, knowing where Peter had gone. “What the hell does he think he’s
“What are you doing?” Yondu growled.

“He was in a really bad spot yesterday. He’s not trying to leave for good, is he?” Gamora asked.

Yondu was already inputting the coordinates of the planet in. “If he’s not careful, he’s going to get himself into even worse trouble, the d’ast idiot. He was talking about doing something like this, but I thought I talked him out of it.”

“He’s worried that he’s not getting any better.” Gamora said.

Yondu pulled out and started accelerating towards the nearest planet. “Yeah, just watch him get on the wrong side of some smuggler and get himself killed. Did he even take a blaster or something?”

Kraglin checked on the armory. “Nobody unlocked the door last night.”

Yondu cursed. “When we find him, and he isn’t dead, I’m gonna kill him.”

Farther out in the sky, Peter had a good couple hours’ head start. He sat in the pilot’s chair of the ship he had stolen. He checked on his fuel before leaning back. It felt good to be back in the pilot’s seat. He felt bad about stealing Yondu’s ship without saying a goodbye, but his panic attack yesterday had convinced him. It wasn’t fair to his friends to subject them to his slow, slow recovery. They deserved better than babysitting him through nightmares and panic attacks.

He was hoping he could make it onto this planet and convince someone to switch vehicles. He had a pounding headache and he still felt a little sick from his lack of sleep, but he wanted to deal with this on his own. He was sick and tired of feeling helpless, and this mad dash, while probably a terrible idea, was better than waiting around with nothing to do but think about what had happened to him.

As the deep purple horizon of this backwater planet appeared in front of his ship, he began to ease down through the atmosphere, fully intending to work as fast as he could. He had been on his own for years before this makeshift family he’d found. He was sure he could make it, even if the thought of leaving them all behind made him feel even worse. He shoved that thought down. This had to be the right thing to do.

Chapter End Notes

Wow okay, sorry about the long wait for this chapter, I’ve been really busy in real life, but here it is! I think this next chapter will be the last one, and I’ll try to get it posted in the next week. Thanks for all the comments!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter gripped the wheel with white knuckles as the bumpy atmosphere shook his tiny craft every which way. The part of the planet he was landing on had a storm system revving up. The light in the craft dimmed as he entered cloud cover. Rain began to lash the windows and a burst of violently purple lightning burst a few dozen yards from him. He flinched and rolled away from the lightning even as it seemed to spread and ignite on the air.

He finally managed to get to a manageable height and started searching for a good place to land. The landscape on this planet was harsh and rocky, jagged mountains breaking up the horizon in all directions. Peter saw a fairly flat valley next to a rolling body of water. He eased down best he could and gritted his teeth as he scraped off the corner of a strand of rocks next to the landing spot. The engines whirred and spun as they slowed down and stopped. Peter took a huge breath and pressed his head against the steering wheel for a moment. His hands were shaking so much it had been hard to land.

He grimaced and gripped his hands together, feeling the bruises where he could still feel Ego’s tendrils wrapped around him. Piloting used to be easier than breathing, and now he couldn’t get to the ground without almost breaking apart the ship. A helpless anger at his father filled him. He almost wished he was still around so he could tell him off.

Peter hoisted the bag he had hastily packed and wrapped his jacket around his shoulders. It looked like it was going to be chilly out there. Before he left, he rummaged around until he found a scrap of paper and scrawled a quick note to Yondu and wedged it under the wheel where he’d find it.

Yondu, Sorry about stealing your ship. See you around. Peter.

He hit the button that would open the loading bay, and immediately a burst of rain-soaked wind blew into the ship, ruffling his hair and spattering him with water. He hopped down to the rocky ground and closed the door. He gave it a good pat as he set off in the direction of artificial light over the next rise.

As he walked, he felt bad about leaving without saying goodbye. He could imagine Gamora’s face when she tried to find him in the morning and he was gone, but he felt worse about forcing her to look after him. After everything she had gone through, she deserved someone looking after her, not the other way around. There was no helping it. With a small ache in his chest, he remembered the kiss she had put on his forehead when they were rescuing him. She had thought he was completely unconscious, but he remembered it. He hadn’t said anything because he wasn’t sure it would lead anywhere with him in the state he was, but the thought of what could be between them gave him a small burst of sadness.

He hadn’t gotten very far before he had to stop and take a breath. Physically, he was still pretty weak, and it didn’t take much for him to be out of breath. After a few minutes, he forced himself to keep going. The lights over the horizon didn’t seem like they were getting any closer, but he didn’t want to be out in this kind of rain for any longer than necessary. It hadn’t even been an hour and he was already freezing.

He made it to the rocky incline he had been working for. With a deep breath in, he looked up at the steep incline and didn’t relish how hard it would be to climb it. Peter pulled his jacket around his shoulders and started up. There were a few scary moments when his fingers started to scrabble at
the handholds above him. He had only made it halfway up before his calves and fingers started to tremble with the effort of climbing. He clung onto a deep divot in the rock and leaned his head against the cliff wall and heaved in a few breaths. He aimed a look below him and felt a nervous roiling at how far off the ground he was.

Thankfully, Peter was blocked from the rain by the wall, and after a great deal of effort he managed to heave himself over the top and collapse onto his back. Rain beat down on his head, and he shivered from the cold.

Finally, the lights he had seen before were only a few miles away, and he set out. Once he got closer, Peter saw it was a small base with a small grouping of tin buildings that didn’t look substantial enough to last through this planet’s weather. A half dozen land vehicles were parked outside the first building, but Peter didn’t see any ships that could leave the atmosphere.

As he stumbled closer, a pair of aliens came out of the first building to get a look at him. They were both burly, with smooth lime green skin. Peter couldn’t identify their species at a glance, and just hoped his translator was working right and they weren’t too suspicious of outsiders.

He raised a hand and stumbled closer to them. They watched him come without a change in expression.

“Hey, there! Is this your place?” He said breathlessly once he got within talking distance.

The alien on the left tipped his head and spines began to raise on his skin, taking on swirling shapes. Peter swallowed, hoping that wasn’t a sign of aggression.

“The nearest settlement is over 300 kilometers from here, how did you find us?” The alien said, voice monotone and hard to follow.

Peter plastered a salesman smile on his face and thumbed back where he came from. “Crash landed. Was hoping I could get a line on a way off this planet.”

The second alien stepped forward and studied Peter closer. “You look like you fell into a jet engine.”

Peter’s fingers found the bruises littering his face. “I lost an argument with the captain of my last ship. Thought I’d get a little change of scenery.” The lie flowed easily off his tongue, and he sent a silent apology Yondu’s way.

The aliens shared a look. They were maddeningly hard to read. “Can you pay?”

Peter shook his head, still trying to appear carefree. He hated how hard it was to maintain. “Afraid I left all my units back with my self-respect, but I can work for passage off the planet. I’m very handy.”

The aliens seemed unimpressed with Peter’s grin. He knew he wasn’t giving it a hundred percent like he usually did. His grin slowly slid off his face as the two of them conferred with each other in a series of glottal clicks and grunts his translator couldn’t help him with.

The first alien turned back to him and stepped forward. “I am Toth. This is my companion Ghant. I think we can find a use for you.”

Peter nodded and forced the smile back onto his face. “Quill. Nice to meet ya.” Toth had extended his hand to take, which surprised Peter. The vast majority of aliens had no conception of hand shaking as a greeting, but to be polite he accepted.
When Peter’s skin met Toth’s, a curious sensation coursed over him, like a hot flash. Toth’s skin was dry and rough, but the raised spines were weirdly smooth like silk. Peter had the uncomfortable feeling he was being read. As soon as seemed polite, he disconnected his hand, and when Toth turned to share another untranslatable exchange with Ghant, he rubbed his hand and noticed what looked like suction marks on his palm.

Peter followed the aliens into their base. The interior was spare and utilitarian, but what looked to be dinner was bubbling on a portable stove in the corner. Peter heaved his bag to the ground and turned back to his hosts, clapping his hands.

“So what do you fellas do here anyway? Looked like a whole hell of a lot of nothing from the little I saw.” Peter asked.

“We are miners. We go where the work takes us.” Ghant said. He was still staring at Peter in a way that was starting to weird him out. He hoped that was normal among whatever species he was.

Peter looked around the space. It seemed like they had just recently set up shop here. “Oh yeah? A lot of mining here? I don’t know anything about the place.”

“Recently, yes.” Toth said.

Peter nodded vaguely and rubbed his neck. He didn’t think he was going to get a lot of conversation out of these people. He was looking forward to getting off this planet as soon as possible.

He sat at their table and waited while they slurped down their dinner. He peered into the pot himself and whatever it was didn’t smell edible for humans, so he politely declined. The two of them didn’t talk to Peter, but had clicking conversation among themselves, so Peter leaned back on one of the armchairs and thought about taking a nap.

Before he could doze off, he was startled awake by Toth and Ghant sitting down across from him. Toth was holding something wrapped in a brown cloth.

“We’d like for you to take a look at something for us.” Toth said.

Peter sat up, ignoring the creaking of his joints. “Sure, uh, does this have anything to do with what you want me to do?”

“Yes.” Ghant said. His gaze was unnerving.

Toth held out the wrapped bundle for Peter to take, and he did, giving them another look before unwrapping it. It felt like a sharp rock, and it was heavy. The brown cloth fell away, and Peter stared. It wasn’t anything he’d ever seen before, but something about it seemed disturbingly familiar. He was holding an unrefined piece of blue ore. It glowed blue and gave off a thrum of power. It sent a deep roil of nerves through him.

“What is this?” He asked them.

Both of the aliens were peering at him now, as if waiting to see what he would do. “We were hoping you could tell us this. We have been trying to figure it out ourselves. Take a closer look.” Toth said.

Peter didn’t want anything to do with this thing, but these people were his ticket off the planet, so he let the ore drop into his right hand. As soon as it touched his skin, he stiffened and his eyes blazed blue. The ore groaned and grew in size in his hand. All of a sudden, Peter knew exactly
what this was. Ego’s essence distilled into an insidious growth. He could feel Ego’s grip wrapping around his wrists and arms.

Heart pounding on overdrive, Peter leapt to his feet with a cry and dropped the ore on the carpet where it stopped growing, but sizzled and smoked.

“What the hell is this? Where did you get this?” Peter growled.

The two aliens were also standing up, and their eyes were lit up after they saw how Peter reacted with the ore. The patterns on their skin grew and deepened.

“It’s all over the planet. We’ve been hired to find out what it is, and what it can be used for. Everyone else who touched the stuff was killed on contact. You… You can make more of it.” Toth said, teeth bared in excitement. Peter could practically feel the greed coming off of him.

Peter shook his head, backing up until the backs of his knees hit the chair. “No, I’m sorry, but I don’t want anything to do with this. Thanks for the offer, but I’ll find my own way off the planet.”

Toth shook his head, coming closer. “You can make us rich. We can make you rich. This stuff is selling like hotcakes all over the place. It’s valuable and rare.”

Peter felt nervous energy sizzling through his veins. His eyes flashed between the two of them and he tried to keep both of them within his sights. His hand groped blindly behind him for his bag. His blaster was somewhere in the bottom of the bag. “Yeah, I wish you guys luck, but I don’t want anything to do with it. I had enough of it to last me a lifetime.”

Toth and Ghant’s eyes hardened. “We can’t let you just leave. You are very valuable.”

Peter tried to shut Ego’s voice out of his head and keep his wits about him even when panic was pushing against his temples. He clocked their movements and felt his hand touch the buckle on his bag.

For a moment, all three of them stood still waiting for someone to make a move. Peter moved first, jumping back over the chair to land on his back. He plunged his hand into his bag, scrabbling for his blaster even as the two aliens pounced on either side of him.

Ghant grabbed for him, wrapping his long fingers around Peter’s arm. Peter tightened his grip on the weapon and brought his free elbow swinging around to smash into Ghant’s nose. He fell back with a cry and held his face. Peter pulled the safety off and leveled the weapon at the other alien. He stumbled back and kept both of them within his sights.

“Well, it’s been fun, guys, but I’m leaving.” Peter said, backing up and trying not to trip over anything.

“You fool, don’t you know how valuable this ore is?” Toth snarled, trying to look for an opening to lunge for him. Peter made sure he didn’t find one.

Peter spared a quick glance behind him to find the door, whipping his head back around when Toth made a move. He shot the blaster, scorching a hole in the wall beside Toth’s head. “Yeah, not to be crass, but I do not give a shit, sorry.”

Peter made a calculated move, shooting twice at the aliens so they were forced to dive out of the way. With the opening he’d made, Peter turned tail and ran, yanking the door open and pelting down the metal steps into the freezing wind and rain again.
His first thought was getting back to his ship and getting off the planet as fast as he could. This had been a terrible idea, and he cursed himself. Peter ran, checking behind him every few seconds to see if they were following him. The door to the compound yawned open, but he didn’t see anyone following him.

He only got a hundred yards before a stitch began to pull at his chest. Visions of his father looming over him kept him running even as he tired quickly. He had gotten far enough away he even saw the drop of the cliff he had climbed up to get here. Peter kept running, his exhaustion turning it into a lolling run rather than a sprint.

He thought he was going to make it when headlights careened out of the dark, cutting off his path. The hovering vehicle was almost silent, and he hadn’t heard it until it was right on top of him. Ghant rode the hovercraft, and Peter skidded to a halt, falling and scraping his hands with the loss of momentum.

He turned around to backtrack when the second vehicle came up behind him. He was bringing up his hand to shoot Toth when a stunner shot the blaster right out of his hand. Peter cried out and held his suddenly numb hand. The stun blast had rocked numbness halfway up his arm.

Both of the aliens jumped off their crafts and advanced on him, grins bared in triumph. Peter whipped around, breath coming fast. He was planning on going down fighting, and brought his good hand up to form a fist when a blow to the back of his head sent him into darkness.

Yondu was jumping off the ship almost as soon as they touched ground. There was a strong wind coming up from the east and the few people in this trading outpost were running for shelter and boarding up windows against the coming storm. Judging from the clouds on the horizon, it was only going to get worse.

Gamora and Rocket were next out, and Yondu turned around, his coat flapping around his feet. “Let’s split up! Knock down some doors until we find someone who knows something.”

Gamora and Rocket split off from the rest and starting knocking on doors. They got very mixed results. A few people were happy to answer questions, although they hadn’t seen anyone who matched Peter’s description, while many of the rest were too focused on getting into shelter to talk.

Gamora was gritting her teeth in frustration as they got yet another door slammed in their face. “Maybe he’s not here?”

Rocket turned away from sending rude gestures at the people still watching from inside the house to walk back towards the main path through town. “His ship wasn’t made for long-distance travel, and this is the only planet around. He has to be here somewhere.”

“I don’t know what he’s thinking.” Gamora raged. “Did he think we would tire of him?”

Rocket scouted the landscape for anybody else to interrogate. “We’re not exactly the most touchy-feely of people.”

Gamora hissed in dismissal. “Even so, he should know I would want him- we would want him here.”

Rocket, who had more than his fair share of pushing people away, shrugged. “I think the best thing we can do is just keep reminding him. He’s got a thick skull, you gotta explain things three times to
that moron.”

They were about to keep going to the next house when there was a scream and a corrugated iron sheet went flying through the air in the wind. There was a skinny alien with huge eyes who stood staring at the oncoming obstacle without moving.

Gamora didn’t think, she jumped forward and got her body between the iron and the alien. The wind slammed it into her, and she grunted, but thanks to her cybernetic enhancements, she wasn’t hurt. She grabbed the edges of the sheet and shoved it down to the ground.

The alien she had saved stood behind her still staring. “Get out of the way or you’ll get yourself killed, idiot!” Gamora said, a little exasperated.

The alien shuddered back to life and came forward to clasp her hand. “Thank you! I could have been killed!”

Gamora extricated her hand from his grip. “Yes, you could have.”

“Is there anything I can do for you? I have to thank you!” The alien said.

“Yeah, you seen an idiot running around here recently? I mean besides you, of course.” Rocket said, coming over to join them.

The alien frowned. “I’m not sure who-”

Gamora cut him off. “We’re looking for someone. He’s human, reddish hair, red jacket, looks like he’s been beat to shit recently.”

“Not by us.” Rocket added just in case there was any confusion on the matter.

The alien shook his head and their hearts sank. “No, I’m sorry, we haven’t seen any new people come to our planet in the last two weeks, not since those contractors.”

“Contractors?” Gamora asked without interest, already formulating a plan B.

“Yes, they came to mine for that blue ore. People all over the galaxy are looking to take some of it.” The alien said.

Gamora snapped to attention, and she shared a look with Rocket. “Blue ore? Where?”

He pointed. “A couple hundred kilometers that way. They set up a base over there to be closer to it. Nobody with any sense wants to be anywhere near it in case it starts growing again.”

Rocket raised his brow. “Worth a shot.”

“Thanks.” Gamora thanked the alien and then jogged off with Rocket to find the others.

Peter awoke to a swaying motion and a monster of a headache. He cracked his eyes open with a groan, feeling a damp spot on his temple that was probably blood. He tried to roll over, but realized his motion was hampered by cuffs fastening his hands behind his back.

His eyes flew open, and adrenaline surged through him. He was lying in the back of some kind of van filled with piles of empty boxes and a pile of tools. Peter struggled into a sitting position and
tried to shake his dizziness away. There weren’t any windows back here, so he couldn’t see where they were going.

He twisted around and tested the strength of the handcuffs, but the chain was sturdy and they were cinched tight around his wrists. Trying to blink away panic, Peter got to his knees and looked around him for his bag, but his blaster wasn’t anywhere to be seen.

“Fuck!” He hissed, trying to listen for any clues as to where he was, but the sound of the engines drowned everything else out. All of a sudden, somebody slammed on the brakes and Peter lost his balance and flew into the back wall. The engine cut out and he heard footsteps coming around.

The back opened, and Toth and Ghant stepped in. They had changed into sturdier clothes meant for working in the elements. Ghant spared him a glance and grabbed the tools and got down onto the ground. Toth stepped toward him, and Peter pretended to still be out until he got closer and he lashed out, kicking him square in the stomach. Toth doubled over with a wheeze, and Peter scrambled best he could to his feet and made a run for it. Toth lunged and grabbed his foot, tripping him into landing on his chest. He didn’t have hands to break his fall, so his forehead slammed into the floor and he groaned in pain.

“Try something like that again and I’ll break your nose.” Toth snarled, grabbing Peter by the scruff of his neck and dragging him out of the truck.

Peter stumbled but kept his feet, and turned around to face his captors. His heart was slamming in his chest, but he felt like he had reached his limit for terror for quite a while. He spat blood at their feet. “Fuck you.” He snapped.

Toth grabbed his arm in a bruising grip and started marching Peter around the truck. When he saw where they were, a real fear wrapped its tendrils around Peter. They were at the base of a huge wall of blue ore, the exact color of Ego. It seemed fairly dormant, but there were dying cords of silver coursing through it, and Peter remembered what happened to the small piece he had touched.

“What do you want with me?” Peter asked, head craned back to look at his father’s work. It was so much more impressive when he was standing right in front of it. A curl of guilt went through him at the thought that he had helped make this.

“You’re going to make more of this. You’re going to make us rich.” Toth said, hot breath rushing over Peter’s face. He could practically feel the greed coming off him. His stomach clenched, but he knew he had to make a stand. He was terrified, but he was so incredibly sick of being victimized like this.

“No, I’m not.” He said, dragging his feet to a halt.

Toth looked at him in disgust. “You don’t have a choice in the matter. Let me get one thing out of the way first thing. You don’t want to piss me off, boy.”

A bitter smile crossed Peter’s face. Things had gone so far he felt dizzy and weird. He had come out the other side of this. “Yeah, sorry to disappoint, but as far as diabolical plans go, you’re not going to beat my dad.”

Ghant looked over at them, annoyance creasing his face. “Cut off a couple of his fingers, teach him a lesson. And shut him up, I don’t want to listen to him while we do this.”

Toth reached into his pocket for a knife. “With pleasure.”

Peter felt like panic was speeding him up. He cast his eyes around both of his captors. Before either
of them knew he was going to try something, Peter planted his feet and shoved Toth to the ground and twisted backwards, wrapping his numb fingers around the gun in the holster on Ghant’s hip.

Before Ghant could do anything more than shout, Peter twisted his head around and aimed awkwardly, shooting a hole through Ghant’s chest. He collapsed with a surprised gurgle, green blood oozing out of his wound. He stared at Peter in surprise and bled out.

Toth scrambled to his feet and shouted angrily. Peter shifted and tried to repeat his success, but it was almost impossible to aim with his hands cuffed behind his back, and Toth tackled him to the ground and ripped the gun out of his hands.

Toth wrapped his hands around his neck and slammed his head into the ground. Peter gasped and saw stars.

“You’re going to regret that.” Toth snapped, tightening his grip. Peter started to choke, gasping for air and kicking his feet. His mouth gaped open and shut, and half-formed choking sounds came out of his mouth. Peter could feel his struggles weakening, and his vision started to tunnel before the alien finally let him go, swinging off of him.

Peter heaved in a huge breath and exploded into a coughing fit. Toth spared another look for Ghant, his lip curled in annoyance, before he turned back to Peter and heaved him to his feet. He dragged Peter towards the wall of Ego’s blue ore, and as much as Peter fought, he couldn’t help being pulled over.

“Look! I see it!” Drax shouted as they flew over the barren landscape of the planet. Mantis was standing at the window and she confirmed the sight, jumping a little in excitement.

Kraglin flew along the long expanse of blue ore that stretched for miles along the planet. Gamora raised her eyebrows and whistled. “I didn’t expect it to be so big.”

“This entire planet would be covered if that bastard had had Peter for any longer.” Yondu muttered, scanning the horizon for anything.

For ten long minutes, they cruised along the wall of ore and didn’t see a thing. Gamora was thinking about suggesting Peter might have gone somewhere else when a significant dent in the wall appeared. There was a makeshift camp set up with mining implements standing at attention. They were pretty far off the ground, but they could vaguely see figures moving down there.

Kraglin touched down and they all hopped down. Given their past experience, everybody already had a hand on a weapon, except for Mantis and Groot, who trailed behind the rest of them.

They drew level with a van, and saw the scuffed marks in the dirt from a struggle as well as the dead alien with a blaster hole in his chest.

“You think this is the place?” Rocket quipped, getting out blasters of his own.

They followed the path and came out at the main part of camp. They followed the sound of raised voices. They saw an alien hauling Peter whole-body towards the wall of ore. His hands were cuffed behind his back, his hair was rumpled, and he was snarling.

The Guardians broke into a run, but as they got closer, they started to slow down, not sure if they should interfere. Toth had a strong grip on Peter’s arm, trying to drag him closer. Peter headbutted
him, which only stopped him for a moment. Toth reeled back, holding his nose, and then came after him again, but he paused with his hand outstretched, and so did the Guardians, who had just gotten within shooting distance.

A curious look shivered over Peter’s face, a mixture of determination and fear, quickly surpassed by blankness. He was rooted to the spot, and his skin began to glow gold. Toth stared open-mouthed.

“How are you doing that?” He asked.

Peter didn’t answer. His eyes were blown wide. He seemed strangely not-there, and swayed back and forth although the gold only strengthened, suffusing his skin with the color. Toth got over his surprise fairly quickly, moving forward to grab Peter. Gamora unsheathed her sword, but it was unnecessary.

Peter’s chin jutted out in a quick jerk, the gold surged, and a visible shock of electricity rose off of Peter, electrocuting Toth in two decisive jolts and landing him on the ground. He was still breathing, but unconscious. Once he was gone, a violent shiver went through Peter and he blinked twice, eyes clearing.

Gamora moved forward cautiously. “Peter?”

He blinked and twitched, looking over at her in confusion. He didn’t seem to know where he was. He looked at her and then back down to the ground where Toth lay. He blanched and looked down at his fading skin. “Did I do that? How did I-”

He broke off there. He looked sick and lost. Gamora put down the sword and advanced on him cautiously so as not to startle him. “Are you okay?”

She put her hands gently on his shoulders, and he jumped like he had been shocked. He locked eyes with her and she gaped. There was gold in his pupils, but as they returned to normal, the gold slowly faded. Gamora looked behind him at the cuffs.

“Can somebody find the keys on these assholes?” She asked.


“Peter. Peter, hey. Look at me.” Gamora said.

Peter did, although his eyes kept slipping to look at Toth. “When my dad died, it should have gone away. It- it shouldn’t be in me anymore.”

“Not really a surprise that shit-for-brains lied about something else.” Yondu said.

“It was a good thing you had it now. It kept you safe.” Gamora said fiercely, clutching his shoulders. She didn’t want to let him go. A powerful feeling was rising in her chest as she looked at Peter, something she didn’t think she could control if she thought about it too long.

Peter grimaced. “I don’t want anything from him.” He threw out, anger finally rearing its head.

“Looks like you don’t have much of a choice.” Gamora said softly.

“It is not all bad.” Mantis piped up, handing Gamora the handcuff keys. Gamora turned Peter around so she could un cuff him. Peter let her do it, looking at Mantis. “You can do good with this power. You are a good person, so I can’t believe you would abuse this power.”
Peter didn’t say anything, although he felt a powerful surge of affection toward Mantis. She smiled at him.

Rocket snorted. “That’s overstating things a bit. I do think you can use it to make our ship look cooler. Giant monster heads and flames shooting out the sides. Just giving you some suggestions. Feel free to improvise a little.”

Peter rolled his eyes, and Rocket grinned.

His hands were free, but Gamora didn’t seem to want to let Peter go. Her hands found his, and they hovered together like that for a moment.

“Can we go?” Rocket wrinkled his nose. “I’m getting damp. The entire ship is going to smell weird after this stupid planet.”

Yondu agreed, but looked at Peter for a second. “If you run off again, I’m letting your dumb ass get killed. It would serve you right.”

He turned around and walked off, but Peter knew he didn’t mean it, and that simple fact buoyed him.

Peter and Gamora walked behind the others until Gamora slowed and pulled Peter to a halt beside her. They stood on the windswept plain and Gamora struggled for words for a moment.

“Okay. Two things. First of all-” She pulled him into a tight hug, squeezing him tight. He buried his head in the crook of her shoulder and breathed in the scent of her hair. They stayed like that for a moment. Finally, she pulled back.

Gamora’s face hardened. “Second of all, don’t think I’m not pissed at you. What the hell were you thinking, going off on your own like that?”

Peter dropped her hand, the look of obstinate independence falling across his face again. “It’s fine, Gamora. I dealt with it. What’s the big deal?”

A look of incredulity found Gamora’s face, an expression that had preceded more than one maiming. “What’s. The big deal?” She said, voice clipped.

Peter shrugged, shoulders defensive again. “Yeah, it all worked out, didn’t it?”

She raised her eyebrows. “You’re unbelievable.”

Peter frowned. “What?”

Gamora paced back a step or two and ran her hands through her hair in agitation. “The big deal, Peter, is that you almost got killed, again, and you don’t seem to care whether you live or die!”

“I don’t see why you’re so worked up about it. If you didn’t want to come, I could have handled it on my own. I did handle it on my own!” Peter was getting worked up himself. Both of them were raising their voices by now.

She whirled on him, one finger thrust at him. “That is not the damn point, Peter Quill.”

“And what is the point? Enlighten me, Gamora!” Peter said, exasperated by this point.

Gamora was shouting by this point, and pushed out the next few sentences in a wild rush. “The point is that I’m worried about you! The point is that I spent weeks sick to death at the thought that
you were being hurt, or, or, tortured and that I couldn’t do anything about it! The goddamn point is that I finally have you back but you seem to think that you can put yourself at risk and that we won’t care about you in the slightest! The fucking final point, Peter, is that I think I love you, and that scares me enough that I don’t need you almost getting yourself killed every other week to worry about as well!”

Gamora’s winding speech stopped with a breath. She froze. She hadn’t meant to say any of that out loud, but Peter could just be so infuriating sometimes. Peter stared at her and she stared at him.

A small expression of hope grew on Peter’s face, so fragile it could have been blown away at any second. “Do you really mean that?” He asked in a quiet voice.

Gamora searched for words, but she had said all she needed to say. Instead, she grabbed him by the lapels and pulled him into a kiss. Peter stiffened against her in surprise, but his eyes slid closed and he softened around her. She dug her fingers into his hair and he wrapped his arms around her waist. The kiss was long and deep, and a blaze of warmth grew in their chests. Peter felt lightheaded with a careful kind of happiness he had forgotten. All Gamora wanted was to pull Peter in closer to her and never let him go.

Eventually, they had to surface for air. They rested their foreheads against each other and just quietly felt each other’s presence.

“Please just. Don’t leave me again, Peter. Promise me.” Gamora whispered.

Peter held a breath and then let it go. He relaxed. “Okay.”

She smiled.

Their delicate moment was broken apart by hooting and a piercing wolf whistle coming from Rocket. They whirled around. They had forgotten that the rest of the team were standing 20 yards away and had seen the whole thing. Drax grinned and gave them both a huge thumbs up.

“It is about time!” Drax boomed.

Yondu snorted in disgust and got back into the ship. “Get in or I’m leaving you behind!” He shouted.

Peter and Gamora walked back to the ship hand-in-hand. Gamora leaned over to Rocket and bared her teeth. “If you even think about being an asshole about this, I will skin you in your sleep.”

Rocket crossed his heart, a distinct look of untrustworthiness on his face. “I would never dream of it.” His words of sincerity were belied by snickering under his breath as he clambered into the ship.

Gamora glanced over at Nebula, who wrinkled her nose and turned away. “Ugh.”

“Some things never change, huh?” Peter said.

That night they were all back in the kitchen of Yondu’s ship. They had all chipped in to make dinner, and in the wake of everyone stuffing themselves, they were all sprawled about the room concentrating on nothing more than digestion.

Peter and Gamora sat next to each other, shoulders and hips lined up together. The floor underneath them was hard, but Peter didn’t want to move. Groot had curled up on his lap and fallen asleep. Nebula and Kraglin seemed to be engaged in an intensive drinking game, and Yondu and Drax were trying to one-up each other in outrageous stories that made them look good. The stories had
quickly left the realm of possibility and were now Yondu had to beat Drax carrying a dozen orphans out of a burning house fire on his back. Mantis had drank a little too much and was content to sit with the rest of them hiccupsing slightly every few seconds with a dazed smile on her face, just enjoying having a group of friends to spend time with.

Looking around at all of them, Peter realized he felt better than he had in awhile. He was still healing, and he knew he wouldn’t be going to sleep without nightmares for a long time, but just being in the same room with his family was going a long way to making him feel better.

Gamora smiled at him. This look of softness and affection was unexpected on her face, but, Peter found, definitely not unwanted. “It’s okay that you’re not, okay right now. Just let us help you, alright?”

Peter nodded. As the evening went on, one by one they started to fall asleep, and instead of making the effort to get up and go to their separate bedrooms, they just fell asleep where they sat, using each other’s arms and legs as pillows. Rocket had ended up passed out over Gamora’s legs, and Peter was sandwiched between Gamora and Mantis, who had snuggled up on his other side. Yondu and Drax snored, and as Peter drifted off himself, he noticed his skin was glowing gold again, enveloping them all in a soft light. For the first time, he considered that it might not be all bad.

Peter fell asleep with the rest of the Guardians bunched around him, together creating a protective circle that conjured up more power than anything Ego could ever dream up. Peter slept the whole night through, with not a single thought about his father. Tomorrow, they’d get up to something a little good, a little bad, but for now, this was enough.

Chapter End Notes

I sure love the Guardians saving Peter, but I decided it was high time Peter saves himself. I was reading this over, and for a second I'm like, 'Damn, this is sappy', but then I decided I liked it that way. These guys deserve some happiness after everything they have to deal with.

So this is the end! Again, thank you every single one of you that left kudos and comments, they really mean the world. Thanks for reading, and I hope you enjoyed the ending ;)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!