Nobody said it was easy

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Summary

AU Peter goes to investigate a robbery at a museum and meets one of the museum workers, a beautiful woman named Elizabeth. For Peter it is love at first sight but things get a little complicated when it turns out that Elizabeth is a struggling single mother with a six year old named Neal.

Notes

I wasn't really planning on writing another fanfiction but then I heard the song "Rockabye babe" and my imagination started to go wild. This chapter is mostly a little start just to see if people would be interested in reading it or not. I'm the worst with titles so I just grabbed a random lyric from a song. English is not my first language and I don't have a beta or something; so all mistakes are mine.
Peter felt frustrated, to say the least. The guy had managed to yet again perform a perfect robbery, and slipped between their fingers without a single trace. The guy was nicknamed Scarface, since the only thing they actually knew about him was that he had a noticeable scar on his face. Other than that, the White Collar department was lost, despite spending over a year on the case and having dozens of robberies taking place all over New York. The only thing Scarface left behind was a spray painted blue smiley on the crime scene and a handful of people claiming they had seen a man with a scar on his face. No one had been able to provide more info on the guy, everyone always said the same thing, that he looked average. This robbery had taken place at a museum and the painting was worth billions of dollars, and Peter could already feel the superiors breathing down his neck. His entire career could be on the line if this case went unsolved just like all the others. The agent walked into the room that had become a crime scene in the matter of minutes. Jones and Diana were talking to the lab techs, Peter overheard the conversation and he wasn’t surprised to hear that they had found nothing. Frustrated yes, but not surprised. Peter looked around and spotted two people dressed in the museum staff uniforms, an older man and a woman with her back turned towards Peter. He headed over to them, hoping that for once someone had actually seen something. “Excuse me?” He said and the brown haired woman turned around and Peter swore the whole world stopped. It was like a movie, where two characters meet and the world around them disappears, and you know it’s love at first sight. Peter always thought those moments was unrealistic and cheesy, he didn’t believe in love at first sight, well until now. “Yes?” The woman said and Peter realized that he had been staring at her like a fool and felt incredibly embarrassed. He cleared his throat and asked the two staff members if they had seen anything, and while the man shook his head, the woman nodded. “Scarface” She said, apparently having heard of the culprit. The man said something about catching up to her later before leaving her alone with Peter so that they could talk undisturbed. “So…Elizabeth” He said, reading her nametag. “You saw him?” “I noticed him right away, he looked like he was stressed about something and he was constantly looking at his phone as if expecting a call or a message or something. He felt out of place and it was simply something about him that didn’t feel right. Then I noticed the scar and I remembered hearing about the infamous Scarface” Peter smiled at her, it sounded like she had a gut feeling just like he used to have when things wasn’t right. “Good job noticing him, have you ever considered working for the FBI?” He asked jokingly and Elizabeth laughed and it was the most beautiful sound he had ever heard. “Did you alert anyone about his presence?” “I was going to but then a man collapsed and my focus was drawn to helping him” Peter nodded, it wasn’t unusual for criminals to use distractions while they got the job done. “Do you remember anything about how he looked, except for the scar?” “He looked to be around 30, had dark hair and dark eyes. He was about this tall” She held up her hand next to him, showing that the culprit was slightly shorter than the agent himself. “That’s good. Do you think you remember enough for a police sketch?” “I could try”
It looked like this woman was a blessing, not only was she a walking goddess but she could also help him solve this case and possibly save his career.

Peter stood outside of the interrogation room, looking at Elizabeth as she described what she remembered to the sketch artist.
“Jones, I think someone is in love”
Peter flinched as he heard Diana sing song her statement to Jones who laughed and Peter could feel his cheeks heating up.
“I am not”
He denied but the pair just laughed and Jones threw his arm around his shoulders.
“You look like a lovesick puppy”
“Don’t you two have work to do?”
Peter grumbled and gently pushed Jones arm off him. The two laughed while they left to get back to their desks, and their work.
Peter shook his head and as he looked back into the room he saw that they were done and seconds later the sketch artist walked out, showing him a picture of a man.
“Show it to agent Jones and agent Berrigan”
He ordered and the sketch artist responded with a ‘yes sir’ before he walked away to find his colleagues.

Peter went into the room where Elizabeth was waiting, not sure if she could leave or not.
“We appreciate your help Elizabeth, it will really aid the investigation”
“I’m happy to help”
She smiled at him and Peter couldn’t understand how a smile could be so lovely.
It was hard for Peter to not get lost in her heavenly blue eyes as they looked at each other and Peter knew he couldn’t let her walk out of the room without at least asking her.
“I just have one more question for you, Elizabeth.”
“Go ahead, agent Burke”
“You can call me Peter.”
He said before taking a deep breath, he had never been that good at asking girls out and this woman was way out of his league.
“I was just wondering if you wanted to-”
He interrupted himself, clearing his throat while rubbing a hand on his neck. Damn, why was this so difficult?
“I know it might be unprofessional but-“
Peter interrupted himself again, struggling to get the question out.
“You want to know if I’ll go out with you?”
Elizabeth asked with a smile, she was really good and Peter felt himself blushing.
“Yes. We could get some dinner, maybe Italian?”
Elizabeth didn’t answer him, instead she just got up and walked over to him and put a hand on his shoulder. He should have known he was going to get rejected, she could do so much better than him and he had been foolish for even thinking that he had a shot with her.
“Peter, I would love to”
“But?”
He asked, sensing the word coming.
“There’s more to me than meets the eye”
“You’re married?”
Elizabeth shook her head.
“I’m single but-“
Now it was Elizabeth who was struggling to find the right words. It seemed like whatever she was about to say used to be a deal breaker for men asking her out. Maybe she was not even attracted to men? Or she was a secret spy? Or maybe she was a criminal?
All kinds of things popped up in Peter’s head and just as he wondered if she was an alien sent to earth to destroy humankind, Elizabeth finally found her courage.

“I have a child”
Well it was definitely a more realistic and normal deal breaker than her being an alien, but it was as scary, if not scarier.

“Oh”
Was all he could say and Elizabeth nodded, she seemed used to men being taken aback by this fact. “I would love to go out with you, Peter but then you have to be okay with it”
She said before grabbing a notepad and a pencil out of her purse. She scribbled down a number and gave Peter the paper.

“If you want to give it a shot, call me”
With those words Elizabeth walked out of the room, leaving Peter alone with the paper clutched in his hand.
Chapter 2

Peter returned to his office, only to find Jones and Diana waiting for him. He tried to be discreet when he put the paper in his suit pocket but based on Jones sudden grin, the action didn’t go unnoticed by the two agents.

“So you got her number, huh?”

Jones said, giving Peter a playful shove. Peter groaned in response before he sat down in his chair. For some reason his colleagues had spent the last year or so hinting that they think he should get involved in the dating world again. Peter was unsure if it was because they didn’t think he could take care of himself or if they just thought he was miserable alone.

Sure Peter agreed that he was pretty miserable alone, that’s why he got a dog. Satchmo made his home feel less empty but he still missed having someone by his side, but because of his job he never found the time to get into dating and just when it seemed that he actually found someone, the perfect woman for him, it turned out that she had a kid. That was just his luck.

“So when are you going out?”

Diana asked and Peter sighed, wishing his coworkers would just mind their own damn business.

“I don’t know if I’m going out with her”

He simply responded and the pair actually seemed shocked by this and had to take a minute to collect themselves.

“What do you mean, boss? You would be perfect together”

Diana said and Jones nodded to show that he totally agreed with her.

“She has a kid”

Peter hoped that would get some understanding from them but he was wrong, instead they looked even more confused.

“So?”

“I don’t do kids, Jones”

Diana shook her head and crossed her arms.

“Are you really going to let a kid stop you from what could be the love of your life?”

Diana said before leaving the room, Jones immediately following her.

Diana’s words stuck with him the entire day and by the time he came home, it was all he could think about. He had just met Elizabeth but he already had strong feelings for her. Maybe his strong feelings were the universe’s way of telling him that he had met his soulmate?

Peter sat down at the kitchen table, eating a reheated pizza. The food tasted weird and he found himself wondering if Elizabeth was a good chef, he couldn’t even remember the last time he had a home cooked meal.

When he went to bed that night, the space next to him felt cold and empty and he felt the need to have someone beside him.

Ever since he bought the house he imagined having someone to share it with, but it never happened. Normally it was easy to ignore the longing for someone to share his life with, he could just bury
himself in his work and forget about it. But now, now that he had met Elizabeth he couldn’t see anything else but sharing this bed with her, sharing this house with her and sharing his life with her. It was as if they were just meant to be.
Should he really let a kid stand in the way of him getting that?
No matter what he did, he would get a package deal. There would be no Elizabeth without the child. Children were messy, they were loud and they ran around, they broke things and they were annoying.
Was that a price he was willing to pay for his true love?

Peter made a beeline for the coffee, needing all the caffeine he could get. His thoughts had been keeping him up all night.
“Rough night?”
He turned around and saw Diana with a smirk on her face, as if she knew that her words would keep him up all night.

Peter grumbled in response and walked to his office. Somehow Diana managed to smirk at him everytime he looked down at the bullpen, oh she knew exactly what she did. She got into his head and wouldn’t leave.
So after spending half an hour shifting his gaze from the phone to Diana he picked the phone up and typed in the number, which he had memorized by now from all the times he had lifted the paper from his pocket and stared at it.

Peter was about to hang up when finally, she answered and her voice sounded even more lovely than he could remember.
“This is Elizabeth”
“Hi Elizabeth this is Peter”
“Oh hi”

He could hear the mix of uncertainty and hopefulness in her voice, she was probably unsure if he called for personal reasons or to talk about the case.
“I’ve been thinking and I do want to go out with you”
“That’s great! And I still want to go out with you”
Peter smiled at her change of tone, now she just sounded happy.
“So tonight 8 o’clock?”

He suggested and he could hear the turning of pages while she checked her schedule.
“Yes I can make that work”
“Great. There’s this Italian place close to your job, you know it?”
“Yes, I’ve heard it’s great”
“It is. I’ll see you there?”
“I’ll see you there”

Peter put down the phone and as he looked down at the bullpen Jones and Diana were both giving him thumbs up. Peter sighed and shook his head.

When Elizabeth walked into the restaurant she took his breath away. He had thought she was beautiful in her staff uniform but that was before he saw her in a dress.
Despite the fact that the blue dress looked cheap, it worked on her and Peter started to question if she was even human, or if she really was a goddess.

He got up and pulled out her chair for her and they started their dinner.
The conversation was light and natural and even if they had many differences, they connected. Peter didn’t think he’d ever had a conversation like that before, a conversation where you could talk for hours on end without getting bored.
Eventually they ended up talking about the little detail that almost stopped Peter from going out with her.
“So what is he like, your son?”
Peter asked after Elizabeth had finished talking about how she visited a museum with him. Elizabeth looked a little surprised, maybe it wasn’t that common for her dates to ask about her kid, especially not on the first date.
The kid’s name was Neal and he was six. Elizabeth described him as a kind, intelligent and artistic kid.
“He sounds great”
Peter said, sure the kid sounded alright when she described him but all parents described their kids as little saints, while in reality the kid could be little demon.
“Is his dad still around or is it just you?”
“It’s just me, his father has never been a part of it”
Peter gave her a sad smile, not even being able to imagine what she must have gone through.
He decided to not push the subject further and instead going back to the kid.
“I’d like to meet Neal one day”
That was a lie. He might have accepted that the kid was a part of this, but he wasn’t ready to meet the boy yet.
“Of course, but I want to get to know you first. I hope you understand that I need to know what kind of man you are before I let you meet my son”
That was totally understandable, she had no idea who Peter was and she was protective of her son, making sure that he wasn’t going to get hurt.
“I understand. So does that mean you want a second date?”
Elizabeth laughed while she tucked a curl of hair behind her ear.
“I do”
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

This might not be the "most fun" chapter since it's more or less a build up for the idea I have for chapter 4. But hopefully you will still enjoy it :) All mistakes are mine.

Every date he had with Elizabeth was amazing, it didn’t matter what they did. They could spend hours looking at paint drying and it would still be an amazing date. They took it slow, not even kissing until the end of the third date. To others it might’ve seen too slow, but for Elizabeth and Peter it was perfect, by taking it slow they got to spend a lot of time talking and getting to know each other.

For every date that passed Peter became more and more convinced that Elizabeth truly was his soulmate, his one true love.

And for every date that passed it became harder and harder to say goodbye and let her walk away. He wanted to ask her to come home with him, but he knew he couldn’t. He knew that he had to let her go home, knowing there was a little boy waiting for her there.

Peter could not go with her either, since she had yet to decide that he could meet her son.

It was by the end of their 9th date, a wonderful picnic in the park, that Elizabeth announced that she had decided she trusted Peter and that she was ready to introduce the kid.

Peter had warmed up to the thought, but that didn’t stop him from feeling anxious. So far their dates had been so amazing, and Peter had started to think about establishing a relationship with her, but if Elizabeth found out how truly bad he was with children then maybe she wouldn’t want to enter a relationship with him.

That thought made him more anxious than the thought of meeting the child and he really hoped that he could connect with the boy and that Elizabeth would believe that he could handle the kid being in the picture.

Because at this point, he didn’t want to let Elizabeth go. He didn’t want to imagine going back to his life before her.

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Peter checked his watch for the 100th time. He was waiting for Elizabeth and her son outside the Italian restaurant where they had their first date. They were late, just by a few minutes, but it was enough to make him even more nervous.

He was just thinking about calling her, to make sure nothing was wrong, when he heard her voice behind him.

“I’m so sorry we’re late”

Peter turned around and came face to face with Elizabeth, looking as beautiful as ever in a black dress.

“It’s fine”

He answered before looking next to her where the kid was standing, holding his mother’s hand tightly. He could see the similarities between the two, they shared the same dark curls and blue eyes.

The boy appeared to be younger than he actually was and the suit he was wearing was slightly too big for him.

“You must be Neal”
He said, holding out his hand. The boy grabbed it in a surprisingly firm grip and shook it.  
“You must be Peter”  
The boy said, mimicking the man’s words. 
After the introductions they walked inside and sat down at a table to start their dinner. 

Peter would be lying if he said he hadn’t been too keen to meet the child at a restaurant. He had seen plenty of kids in restaurants. They were always running around, screaming, throwing tantrums and making a huge mess. So he fully expected this child to act like just like the other children he’d seen but he was pleasantly surprised. Neal didn’t just behave, he was incredibly polite and could even keep an interesting conversation about art going, apparently Elizabeth did not lie when she said her son was intelligent. 
The kid wasn’t even messy, apart from some pasta sauce around his mouth that Elizabeth quickly removed with a napkin.  
For each passing minute Peter’s fears disappeared. He actually liked the kid, of course he wasn’t delusional enough to believe that Neal would always be this well behaved, but it seemed that he really was the good kid that Elizabeth described him as.  
By the end of the night he even ended up having a couple of inside jokes with the kid that not even Elizabeth understood. 

Before they were done, Neal went to the bathroom and as soon as the kid disappeared Elizabeth looked at Peter with an excited smile, but anxiety clearly showing in her eyes. 
“So what do you think?”  
“You were right, he’s a great kid”  
The fear disappeared from her eyes and she was just pure happy. He could understand her fear, their entire relationship was depending on Peter and Neal accepting each other. 
When the kid returned, Elizabeth prompted him to give the agent a hug and the boy did so without any protests. 
Normally a child hugging him would feel awkward but when he crouched down and Neal put his small arms around him, it actually didn’t feel that bad. 
It seemed that his wish to establish a connection to the child was actually coming true. 

At work Diana and Jones kept pestering him about the meeting and after just two hours he broke down and confessed to actually liking the boy. His co-workers seemed happy about this but he didn’t miss Diana’s smug ‘I told you so’ smile.  
Peter was thankful that Diana managed to get into his head and make him give Elizabeth a call.  
Here he was, just two months later, and he was not only more in love than ever, but he also liked her kid and was warming up to the thought that one day he could end up being the boy’s stepfather. 
Before meeting Elizabeth, he would’ve never ever been able to picture himself as a stepfather, or even a father figure but now here he was imagining what it would be like to not only share his life with Elizabeth but also share it with Neal. 

Peter was positive that he could do this, have Neal be a part of his life, at least he had been until Elizabeth called him two days later asking him if he could babysit Neal.  
The kid’s regular babysitter was busy and Elizabeth had to fill in for a sick coworker at the museum. Peter didn’t know too much about Neal’s regular babysitter, except that he was a paranoid, peculiar man with no permanent address or phone number. The guy didn’t even have a last name, or a first name for that matter. He was just called some weird name like Izzy or Ozzy or maybe Lassie. 
The guy sounded really shady and Peter didn’t even want to begin to imagine what the man could be doing. Probably robbing a bank or killing someone in a dark alley. 
Elizabeth did sound really desperate on the phone and Peter had no other choice than to accept. He had to look at this with positivity, after all this could be his could be his chance to get to know the child even better and to prove to Elizabeth that he could take care of a kid. At least he hoped that he could take care of a kid without accidentally killing him.
Peter tried to convince himself that it would be fine, after all it would just be five hours alone with a six-year-old. What could possibly go wrong?
There was a knock on the door and Peter got up from the couch while Satchmo excitedly ran to the door. Peter opened it to reveal Elizabeth, dressed in her work clothes, and Neal, clutching a backpack close to his chest. Elizabeth greeted Peter with a loving smile before ushering the boy inside. Satchmo barked at the strangers and while Elizabeth happily greeted the dog, Neal backed away eyeing the dog suspiciously. He didn’t look afraid of the dog more like he didn’t trust him. “He’s not dangerous, sweetie” Elizabeth said but Neal didn’t seem entirely convinced so he looked up at Peter with a questioning look. “He’s a good boy” Peter said, something that caused Satchmo to wag his tail even faster. The boy carefully stretched his hand out and petted the dog. While the boy started to get more comfortable around the dog, Elizabeth put her arms around Peter in a loving embrace. “I really appreciate you doing this” “It’s no problem” Elizabeth checked her watch and swore under her breath. “I’ve got to go, call me if anything happens” She said, giving him a kiss before turning to her son and kissed his forehead. “Be good” She said before leaving the house.

Peter sighed as he looked at the contents of his fridge. He had completely forgot to get some child appropriate food. He had spent over an hour making sure his gun was safely locked away and that there was no other dangers in his house, but he hadn’t even thought about the food part. Peter grabbed his different take out menus, trying to figure out what option would be best suited for the child. Apart from the food issue, it had so far been easy to babysit the kid. Over an hour had passed and Neal hadn’t made any fuss at all. The kid had brought some toys in his backpack and was quietly playing with some dinosaurs in the living room. Peter stopped what he was doing and listened. It was quiet, he couldn’t hear anything from the boy. For a second he smiled, thinking that it was good that the boy behaved so well but then his smile disappeared as he remembered something. Wasn’t it supposed to be suspicious when children went dead quiet? As to prove this, Satchmo walked into the kitchen looking quite different. The dog had a black mustache under his nose and two thick, black eyebrows over his eyes. Peter didn’t know whether to laugh or to get angry.
The dog did look funny but he really hoped to God that Neal hadn’t used a permanent marker. Peter sighed before walking out into the living room, fully intent on giving the boy a light scolding for drawing on his dog, but completely froze as he saw what the child was doing.

“Neal!”
Neal jumped, not expecting the man’s sudden appearance. Peter walked over to him and grabbed the marker from his hand before assessing the damage. The kid had decided to decorate his wall. Luckily the boy had only had the time to draw a tree and half of a dog before Peter interrupted him.

“You are not allowed to draw on the wall”
He scolded, using his best authority voice.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know”
Neal answered, looking at him with his big blue eyes and an innocent smile. The kid looked so innocent that it was hard to not let him off the hook.

“I’m pretty sure your mom has told you to not draw on the walls”
The boy didn’t confirm nor deny, he just kept flashing him that innocent little smile.

Peter thought that the wall thing would be just a bump in the road and then everything else would go smooth. He was wrong. Very wrong.

This boy was not the same boy that he met at the restaurant, no quite the opposite actually. Even if Peter knew the boy would misbehave sometimes, he didn’t think it would be this bad.

It started when they were gonna eat the pizza Peter had ordered and Neal started to whine about not liking it, despite the fact that he chose his own toppings.

After spending ten minutes whining he threw it on the floor, something Satchmo was very happy about.

“Neal eat your food”
Peter ordered but Neal didn’t listen. Instead the kid looked him right in the eyes as he grabbed another piece of the pizza and threw it on the floor.

“Okay, that’s it”
He said, in his most stern tone, and moved the pizza carton out of the boys reach, which caused the boy’s lip to wobble and tears appear in his eyes.

The agent felt guilty, sure the kid had been misbehaving but he couldn’t deny the kid food. He really didn’t want Neal to tell Elizabeth that Peter hadn’t been feeding him.

So he caved, he grabbed a pizza slice and placed it on Neal’s plate but before he even opened his mouth to tell the child to eat it, the boy smiled and threw it on the floor.

Peter sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. Why was Neal being so difficult all of the sudden? It was like he wanted to piss the agent off.

Maybe Neal was conducting a test of his own, to see how well Peter handled a child pushing the boundaries.

That thought worked as a motivator for Peter, he was going to show both Elizabeth and Neal that he was capable of taking care of a kid.

“Oh Neal I think you need a timeout”
As expected, the child didn’t like his words and responded by sticking out his tongue at Peter and then jumping off the chair, running away.

Peter looked at his watch, only 2 and a half hours left.

Peter didn’t think he’d ever been this exhausted before, how could such a tiny body contain so much energy?

Neal had been running around the house, jumping on the furniture, broken a vase from Peter’s mother, fought a timeout for 20 minutes until Peter gave up and made Peter close to deaf from all his screaming.

He’d rather do a month’s worth of boring mortgage fraud cases than to deal with a six year old.

The agent buried his head in his hands, as Neal was jumping next to him on the couch.

Elizabeth should be here any minute now and then this experience would officially be over.
Neal stopped bouncing as Satchmo ran to the door, and just seconds later a knock was heard.

Peter expected the kid to be happy over his mother’s return but the boy surprised him by starting to cry.

The agent rushed to the door so that Elizabeth could deal with the upset boy. She rushed in before Peter could even say hello, and within seconds she had the young child wrapped up in her arms, whispering comforting words to him.

“What happened, baby?”

She asked and Peter thought that the boy was crying because he was scared of his mother punishing him for his bad behavior or something along those lines. He definitely didn’t expect the words that came out of the boy’s mouth.

“Peter hit me.”

Elizabeth’s eyes met his and he was quick to shake his head. How could he say something like that? Surely an intelligent kid like Neal would know that it was a very serious thing to lie about.

“Elizabeth, I didn’t”

He said, wanting to say more but not finding the words. Here he thought that he actually survived and that it meant good things for their relationship, but now the lies of a six year old could ruin everything they built up over the past couple of months.

“I need to talk to my son”

Was all she said before she carried Neal out of the room and left Peter alone.

How was he supposed to prove his innocence? How could he make Elizabeth believe him over her son?

It felt like an eternity later that Elizabeth returned into the room, this time alone.

“Elizabeth, I promise I didn’t-”

“I know”

She answered, cutting him off mid sentence.

“It’s not the first time Neal made that claim without it being true”

That calmed Peter down a bit, Elizabeth knew that he hadn’t hurt her son and that it was just a ‘the boy who cried wolf’ situation going on here.

“Peter”

There was something in her tone that caused his heart to speed up again.

“I don’t think this is going to work”

She said, her voice quiet and filled with emotion.

Peter couldn’t believe her words, he had thought that things were going to go up from here. Sure this babysitting session had been one of the worst experiences in his life, but he had survived it without losing his cool. With time he would get more experience on how to deal with the child and this whole thing could really work out.

This was something he pointed out to Elizabeth.

She didn’t look happy when he recounted all the numerous ways that Neal had been misbehaving.

“Peter, I am so sorry for what he put you through and I’m also every impressed that you made it through without snapping...but it’s not about you”

Peter frowned, he had proved that he had the potential needed to be a step father. He had believed that, that would be enough for them to start a real relationship.

“It’s not about you at all, it’s about Neal. He wanted me to be angry at you, he purposely misbehaved in an attempt to scare you off”

She had seen this before, he could hear it in her voice.

“I just...don’t think this will work. Neal is not ready for this kind of change, perhaps he’s just too young”

Peter could already feel the pain in his heart, he did not want to end this, he did not want to let her go.

“Kids gets used to changes. You shouldn’t let your son stand in the way of your happiness, of true love”
Peter had never mentioned the words ‘true love’ around her before since he wasn’t sure if she shared his feelings, but now looking into her eyes he knew that she felt the same. Elizabeth too believed that this was true love.

“I love you, Elizabeth”
Peter said, it was the first time he had said it to her.

“I love you too Peter but I have put him first, it’s what parents do. You have to sacrifice a lot to protect your child”
Carefully, she reached out and touched his cheek, gently caressing it. She looked at him with tear filled eyes and a sad smile.
There was something about her eyes and her sad smile that made Peter believe that this was about more than making Neal happy, it felt as if there was more to the story.
Maybe Elizabeth felt some insecurities of her own, that was standing in the way of their relationship. Before Peter had the chance to ask her about it, Elizabeth left the room and returned seconds later with Neal holding her hand.

“I’m sorry Peter”
She said before opening the door. The boy looked back at him and the agent could clearly see the guilt in his eyes. Neal really had been planning this, he had wanted to break them up.
As the door closed behind them, Peter sat down on the couch.
Neal seemed to like him in the restaurant, why did he suddenly change his mind and decide that Peter had to go?
Peter just couldn’t understand how the child’s mind worked.
Satchmo walked up to him, gently pushing his hand with his muzzle. Peter reached out for the dog who tried his best to comfort his master.
He tried to comfort him because Elizabeth broke it all of. Elizabeth was gone. She was really gone. That thought caused his heart to break and for the first time in years, Peter cried.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately my father is in the hospital and it's not looking good. Right now it is unclear if he will survive.
As you could imagine this does not only take up a lot of my time but it also affects me mentally.
My point here is that it might take a while before the next update, depending on if my dad gets better or not.
I will not abandon this story, I will just need some time to deal with everything and some time to be with my family.
Thank you for understanding.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I’m finally back and despite everything I’ve been going through I managed to get this chapter together. I hope you’ll like it :) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was hard, living without Elizabeth. 
Peter went back to living the way he had been before he met her, but it didn’t feel the same, not even close.
He felt empty and his days felt dull and boring. Not even his job managed to get his thoughts of Elizabeth.
This was new to him, he had never experienced a break up like this before.
Not even the break up with his college girlfriend, that he dated for three years, gave him this empty feeling.
It was crazy how they managed to build such a strong connection in such a short span of time.
He wondered if she felt the same emptiness that he did, if she had a hard time sleeping and a hard time living her life without thinking of him.
He wondered if her heart was broken too.

At first Peter had decided to give her some space, hoping that she would start to miss him and come knocking on his door telling him that she made a huge mistake.
But the week went by without a single peep from Elizabeth.
The lack of messages from her caused Peter to really worry. He had fully expected her to come back but he slowly started to realize that maybe she wasn’t going to.
That’s when he grew desperate.
He wasn’t going to let her go without a fight, he wasn’t ready to lose her.
So he had tried to call her several times but she never answered him. He had even stopped by the museum but she wasn’t there and her coworker kindly, but firmly, told him to not come here again and to give Elizabeth some space.

Peter sat down on his couch, a pizza slice in one hand and a beer in the other. Satchmo walked over to him, ready to lay down by his master’s feet like he always did.
It was probably Peter’s loneliness that caused him to break his own rule of no dogs allowed on the couch. Satchmo gave him a confused, uncertain look as he patted the space next to him.
“Come here boy”
The dog didn’t hesitate before jumping up on the couch, laying down next to Peter, placing his head in the man’s lap and wagging his tail.
Peter turned on the TV and zapped through the channels until he found some game to watch.
Normally he loved watching a game while eating pizza and drinking a nice, cold beer but now he couldn’t even find any enjoyment in that.
The game was boring and unconsciously he found his gaze drifting to the wall where a certain six year old boy had decided to show off his art skills.
Neal’s artwork was still there, Peter hadn’t removed it yet since it was one of the few memories he had left of Elizabeth and her young son.
Even if he didn’t like that the kid had been drawing on the wall in the first place, it felt wrong removing it now.
Neal had acted like a wild animal that night, doing whatever he wanted without stopping for anyone or anything and he had almost made Peter go insane and in the end the kid had broken the couple up. Despite all this, Peter felt no resentment towards the child. He would go through that night babysitting the little troublemaker fifty times over if it meant that he got Elizabeth back.

The rain was pouring down outside and Peter couldn’t help to think that it was the ideal weather. The world outside his window was gray and dull and it matched his mood perfectly. Peter felt bad for the other agents that were still working hard while he was just sitting in his office, staring out the window. He was unable to focus on his work and he honestly didn’t see the point in even trying.

There had been no new robberies or even sightings of the criminal. There was a knock on the door and when Peter turned around he was met by a very confused looking Jones.

“Uhm...there’s a kid here asking for you”

For a second Peter was as confused as Jones. A kid? Why would a kid show up at the bureau looking for him? He didn’t know any kids, well except for Neal. As soon as he realized that, he flew up from his chair and hurried out of his office and there in the middle of the bullpen was Neal.

The boy was completely soaked, there wasn’t a single dry patch on his clothes and water was still dripping from his hair.
The child was shivering as the jacket he was wearing was way too thin and not at all waterproof. He wasn’t even wearing boots, just thin sneakers.

Peter hurried down to the boy, ignoring all the looks the other agents were throwing at them.
He took off his suit jacket and wrapped it tightly around the boy’s tiny frame.
Neal looked like he had been in the rain for a while which suggested that he had walked here, but from where?
Why was he even here all alone, how had an unattended, drenched kid made it to the office without a single person stopping him and most importantly where was Elizabeth?
“Where’s your mom?”

He asked with a soft voice while he brushed the hair away from Neal’s forehead, feeling the damp, cold skin against his hand.
“Mommy is gone”

Neal answered, his lip starting to wobble as he was on the verge to tears.
“Where’s your mom?”

Peter repeated, this time in a more demanding tone.
“Mommy is gone”

Neal answered, his lip starting to wobble as he was on the verge to tears.
“T they took mommy”

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to thank you for all the kind words and support regarding my father. Unfortunately just 12 hours after I posted the last chapter my dad passed away due to complications in the hospital. He was only 41 and everything has been very sudden.
It’s been a very hard time for me and my two older brothers but we have had an amazing support from family, friends and even amazing strangers on the internet.
Thank you, it really warmed my heart that you took the time out of your day to think of
me and write kind words :)

Chapter 6

I just wanted to thank you again for all the kind words regarding my father. It really warmed my heart.

Peter did his best to remain calm as to not scare the boy even more, even if he wanted to ask Neal a million questions at once.
“Tell me what happened”
He asked as calmly, and professional as he possibly could.
“They knocked on the door and mommy opened”
The boy said, and Peter could see how the kid was struggling to not break into tears.
“Two men came inside”
“No they had black masks”
Damn, Peter had hoped that the kidnappers had showed their faces so that they could easier identify them and that would make it easier to find the woman he loved, but of course he had no such luck.
“One grabbed mommy and she told me to run, but I wasn’t fast enough. He grabbed me and mommy said she’d do anything if they let me go. The man said if I told the police he’d kill me”
Peter felt sick to his stomach, just the thought of a grown man threatening to kill a child made him want to punch something, or someone.
“I went to you Peter, cause you’re not the police you’re FBI”
The boy said before a sudden thought seemed to enter his young mind and he looked even more fearful than he had before.
“That’s okay, right? They won’t kill me for this?”
Peter couldn’t find any words; no person should ever have to worry about getting killed and especially not an innocent kid.
He reached out and he pulled the boy into his arms. Luckily Neal didn’t protest, instead he just threw his arms around Peter’s neck and buried his face in the agent’s shoulder as he finally allowed himself to cry.
No matter what Neal thought of Peter, and no matter how brave he tried to be he was still so very young and he needed an adult to take care of him and make him feel safe.
“You did the right thing, buddy”
Peter assured him as he rubbed his hand over the kid’s back. Of course, Peter knew that in the bad guy’s eyes FBI was just as bad as the police but he wouldn’t tell Neal that.
He wasn’t going to scare Neal even more and he wasn’t going let anyone hurt the child.

The first thing Peter did after starting the car was turning the heat up to its maximum.
It took a few minutes but finally the boy stopped shivering. He was sitting curled up in the passenger seat, still with Peter’s suit jacket wrapped around him.
The agent knew that it wasn’t really safe for the kid to ride without a car seat or to ride in the front seat but he chose to disregard that for now.
He wanted to make sure the kid was warm enough and that he stayed awake, since Peter had never been at Elizabeth’s house he had to rely on the boy’s directions.
Thankfully Neal knew the way since he, as Peter had suspected, had walked all the way to the bureau.
Peter started to feel more and more uncomfortable for every turn they took, they were driving into the worse, unsafe neighbourhoods, where drug dealers and other criminals stayed. When the boy told Peter to stop he hoped that the boy was going to say that he had directed them entirely wrong and they didn’t live here at all but instead the boy pointed to a building and said that it was home.
The building looked like it would fall apart any second and Peter couldn’t understand why they let people live in a building that looked like it should have been condemned a long time ago. Peter and Neal both stepped out of the car, and so did Diana and Jones who had followed in a car behind them.
“This is where you live?” Peter asked and received a nod from the kid.
“We’ve lived at worse places”
He added casually and Peter felt genuine shock. He and Elizabeth had never talked about their finances but he had always assumed that she had enough to get by, but by the look of her home she was struggling more than he had originally thought.
Peter looked around, his eyes landing on a middle-aged man who had collapsed in the bushes, a bottle of cheap booze clutched tightly in his hand.
From this angle, he looked like he was dead, and he really didn’t want Neal to witness that, he had been through enough today.
Diana seemed to be able to read his thoughts because she discretely inched closer to the collapsed man and placed her hand on his neck, sighing in relief as she felt a pulse.
“Wanna show us inside?”
The boy answered with a nod before he walked to the building, passing the collapsed man as if he saw that every day, and he probably did.
Neal opened the heavy door before leading them up several flights of stairs, all of them creaking dangerously beneath them and Peter swore that the stairs were going to collapse under them any second now.
Neal finally stopped by a door and pushed it open to reveal the small, rundown one-bedroom apartment that Elizabeth and Neal called their home.
The apartment was very bare, with very little furniture and the furniture they had looked to be very old, Peter guessed that every single item was at least twice as old as Neal.

The agent asked Jones and Diana to check for any signs of the kidnapping before he walked through the living room and peered into the small bedroom. It was also bare, with just a double bed and a handful of toys spread out on the floor.
He heard small footsteps approaching him and soon the kid was standing by his side.
“Why don’t you get changed?”
He asked, remembering that Neal was still wearing his soaked clothes. Neal took off the suit jacket and handed it back to Peter before going to the wardrobe.
“Can you dress yourself?”
Peter asked, realizing that he had no idea how much a six-year-old could do on his own.
“Peter, I’m six”
The boy answered, with way too much sass.
“Well okay. After you’ve changed you can go ahead and gather the things you need”
Neal looked up at him with a look that reminded him of a deer in the headlights.
“What do you mean? Where am I going?”
The boy stuttered and Peter had to take a second to wonder if the boy seriously thought he would be allowed to stay here on his own.
“Neal you can’t stay here alone”
“I have nowhere else to go”
Peter walked into the room and crouched down in front of the upset child.
“Do you have a daddy Neal? Or some other relatives, like any grandparents?”
“I don’t have a daddy, he didn’t want me and my grandparents are mean to mommy, they don’t like us.”

He immediately got curious about Elizabeth’s parents, but he knew he shouldn’t push it. If Elizabeth or Neal wanted to tell him about them they would do it when they felt like it. The important part was that they were out of the picture which meant Neal was all alone, so he guessed that his only option was to call CPS and get him a place to stay until Elizabeth was saved. But foster or group homes were often far from the best and Peter really didn’t want to hand Elizabeth’s son over to strangers and just hope that he would have a good time. But what other options were there? What was he supposed to do with the child?
Chapter 7

I just yet again want to thank you for all the positive reviews. It's such an amazing feeling to know that people appreciate your work :)

Peter left the room while Neal got dressed and walked back to Jones and Diana.
“Anything?”
“No, nothing. Apart from the kid’s story there’s nothing pointing to a kidnapping taking place here” Peter swore under his breath, this was going to be hard. There were no clues, no known motive and no suspects. All they had was the story of a six-year-old. Peter almost hoped that Neal was making the whole thing up, but he had seen the fear and desperation in Neal’s eyes and knew that there was no way the boy was lying.
“So what happens now, boss?”
This wasn’t their usual kind of case, normally they would let the police or some other department deal with kidnapping cases missing a connection to white collar crimes, but on the other hand this wasn’t an ordinary kidnapping case. Peter couldn’t let anyone else handle this, not when it was Elizabeth.
“I’ll talk to Hughes”
He answered and his coworkers nodded, he knew that they understood how important this case was to him.
“What about the kid?”
“Neal doesn’t have a father or any other relatives to stay with, I have no choice but to contact the CPS”
Peter answered with a sigh.
Jones and Diana simultaneously crossed their arms and gave him a ‘are you kidding me?’ look. Peter frowned, what did he miss? Was there an obvious solution glaring him right in the face?
“What?”
“Why don’t you take him?”
Peter must have heard her wrong. He, take care of Neal? Did he not tell them about what happened the last time he took care of Neal?
It could take days before they found Elizabeth, maybe weeks.
If five hours watching Neal was a disaster he didn’t even want to begin to imagine what a week watching Neal would be like.
Before he had the chance to protest to the ridiculous idea, Jones asked him a very important question.
“What do you think Elizabeth would want?”
He didn’t think Elizabeth would be too happy with him just dumping her son with some strangers. He knew very well that some people was foster parents for the wrong reasons and kids ended up getting hurt in foster systems, and he didn’t think group homes would be better.
Neal was a small child, he could easily become a victim for bigger, older kids.
Peter had promised himself that he wouldn’t let anyone hurt Neal, and sending him away was not honoring that promise.
“I could stay with Mozzie”
Peter’s thoughts were interrupted by a small voice next to him and when he looked down he saw Neal, now dressed in dry clothes.
“Neal, do you know where Mozzie is?”
The kid slumped his shoulders in defeat, realizing that he couldn’t win this one. Peter wasn’t sure he’d let Neal go with this ‘Mozzie’ even if the man was around. Sure, he was Neal’s babysitter but Peter’s gut was telling him that there was something off about that guy. “You’re going with me Neal” He said and he saw the kid look surprised before he looked ready to protest the decision. “Unless you want to go to a group home” For a second he wondered if Neal even knew what a group home was but he got his answer from Neal’s reaction. The boy violently shook his head before grabbing Peter’s hand. “I’ll go with you Peter and I’ll be good. I promise” “Don’t make promises you can’t keep Neal” By the time Peter made it home, he was completely exhausted. He had decided to stop by a store on the way home to get some more child appropriate food. At first Neal had stayed by his side just like Peter ordered him to do but the child quickly got bored and despite Peter watching the kid like a hawk, he managed to slip away and Peter had to spend the rest of the shopping trip chasing after the boy. He just wanted some peace and quiet for a second but he had a feeling that Neal would not let that happen. Neal proved him right by immediately starting to play wildly with Satchmo, and Peter wondered how in the world the kid could still have so much energy in him. He could still remember the chaos Neal left behind the last time he was here so he didn’t dare to leave the boy alone for even a second. Luckily by the time dinner was ready, the boy had managed to not break anything. Peter feared eating with the child but Neal actually ended up behaving, although he did sneak some food for Satchmo when he thought Peter wasn’t looking but the agent decided to let it slide. After dinner Peter managed to find Bambi on the TV, after refusing to let Neal watch any of his movies despite Neal insistence that his mommy would be fine with him watching movies suited for an older audience. At first the boy was sulking but soon he forgot all about his moping and started to watch the movie. Peter looked at the kid who was giggling when Bambi was struggling to stand up on the ice and then looked at the dog who were sleeping on the floor and his heart was filled with a warm feeling. The whole scene felt so domestic and he could definitely get used to this kind of life, except he would want Elizabeth by his side. When the movie ended Peter checked his watch, realizing that time had just flown by. “Hey Neal, when’s your bedtime?” “10” He answered quickly without hesitation, the kid was a really good liar. “Nice try buddy, how about 6PM huh?” “It’s 7 and 8 on weekends” Neal responded after the threat of an early bedtime. Peter checked his watch again, it was getting close to 7 but since it was Friday he’d let the boy stay up for another hour. Before sending the kid off to bed, Peter brought him along for Satchmo’s walk and the man realized how much he’d missed having someone to walk with. Sure, Satchmo was good company but the dog couldn’t talk after all. After the walk Peter made sure that Neal got changed into his pajamas and that he brushed his teeth, it surprised him how easily he could slip into a parent role even if Neal seemed annoyed about the
man bossing him around.
He showed Neal to the guest room and the boy crawled into the bed before looking at Peter with big puppy eyes.
“Can Satchmo sleep in the bed with me?”
“He’s not allowed on the beds”
The boy looked disappointed and his eyes filled up with tears that he tried to blink away.
At first Peter was confused by the boy’s reaction before he remembered that there had only been one bed in their apartment which meant that Neal was probably used to having someone next to him.
He felt for the child, Neal had been keeping up a brave face but the agent knew that it must be scary for Neal to not have his mother around.
Peter looked around the room and spotted a book sticking out of Neal’s bag.
“Do you want me to read to you?”
He asked and the boy nodded so he grabbed the book, and smiled when he saw the title.
Peter could remember his parents reading the exact same book to him when he was around Neal’s age.
He sat down on the edge of the bed and started to read ‘Clifford the big red dog’ to Neal and by the time Peter reached the last page, the boy was fast asleep.
“Good night kiddo”
He whispered before he left the room, leaving the door ajar.

Peter squinted his eyes, trying to see what time it was. It was just past 1 in the morning and for some reason Satchmo had woken him up by whining and licking his hand.
“Go back to bed, Satch”
The dog didn’t listen, instead he whined even louder before running to the door and back again.
Satchmo kept repeating the action and he had to do it four times before Peter’s tired brain realized that the dog wasn’t going crazy, he just wanted his master to follow him.
Peter yawned and got out of bed, following the dog out into the hallway and then Satchmo showed him to the guest room.
Before Peter even reached the room, he could hear a quiet sniffle and when he peered inside the room he saw Neal curled up in the corner, quietly crying.
“Neal, you okay?”
The boy jumped at his sudden voice before shrugging his shoulders.
Peter turned on the light and instantly saw the reason for Neal’s crying. There was a big damp spot on the bed and it didn’t take a genius to understand what had happened.
“Nightmare?”
Peter asked and Neal nodded before wiping some tears away from his face, that was bright red from the shame.
“I’m sorry”
“It’s nothing to apologize for. Accidents happen, bud”
The agent spent the next minutes getting both the kid and the bed cleaned up and when he was done he tucked the boy back into bed.
“Do you think you can fall asleep again?”
Neal nodded but his eyes betrayed him and Peter looked at the dog and sighed.
“You know what? I’ll make an expectation for tonight. Satchmo can sleep on the bed”
A smile appeared on Neal’s face and he quietly thanked Peter as the man instructed the dog to lay down next to Neal, who immediately threw his arms around the dog.
Peter was just about to leave the room when Neal’s quiet voice could be heard again.
“Peter is mommy dead?”
The man froze at the question and he suddenly got a clue what Neal’s nightmare had been about.
“No Neal. I think she’s okay”
“Will you find her?”
“Yeah, Neal. I’ll find her”
The boy didn’t answer so Peter left the room and went back to his own bed.
I'm sorry for the absence, I've just been really low lately and it's been hard to find the motivation to write, but I finally managed to get a chapter together and I hope you will like it :)

Peter woke up by a loud bang and he was out of the bed before he had even woken up fully. He hurried out of the room, stopping by the guest room but finding the bed empty. His heart started to beat faster, what if the men had found out about Peter’s involvement and had now broke in and kidnapped the boy?

The agent hurried down the stairs before he ran to the door and found no sign of forced entry and the alarm hadn’t been touched. He relaxed slightly before he went into the living room where he was met by Satchmo, the white dog was too relaxed for a break in and-

Wait white dog? Satchmo wasn’t white. Peter looked at his dog again and realized that the animal was covered in a white powder. Suddenly he knew exactly where he would find the kid. He walked to the kitchen and there the missing boy was, standing on the top of the counter and surrounded by flour.

Neal was looking down at the flour, seemingly lost in thoughts. He was probably thinking about how he would hide the evidence. “Neal, what are you doing?”

The boy jumped before looking up at Peter with an innocent smile. “Pancakes” Neal answered before proudly pointing toward a bowl filled with a pancake batter. Peter sighed before he saw that the kid had even managed to turn on the stove, wasn’t it supposed to be child proofed?

Neal noticed him glancing at the stove and it seemed as if the kid could read his thoughts. “You just have to press a button before being able to turn it. It’s not rocket science Peter” Of course something as simple as a child lock wouldn’t be able to stop Neal. The kid was smart, but that didn’t mean that Peter felt comfortable with having a six-year-old cooking unsupervised. Peter grabbed Neal and lifted him off the counter and placed him on the floor, he didn’t want to risk the boy falling down and hurting himself. “You can help me cook but you’re not allowed to cook without an adult around okay?” Neal immediately started to argue this decision. “It’s either that or you’re not allowed to cook at all” Peter said, perhaps a little stern than he intended but seriously why couldn’t Neal just follow simple rules without arguing?

In the end the pancakes turned out pretty good, and with Peter’s help and supervision the house wasn’t burned down to the ground. The boy happily ate pancakes until he was so full that he couldn’t take another bite and Peter managed to get a couple down as well. He couldn’t remember the last time he ate pancakes, he wasn’t sure if he had even had pancakes since he moved out from his parents’ house. Peter even placed a pancake in the dog bowl, and Satchmo quickly g ulped it down. As he was cleaning up the mess created on the table, Neal’s tiny hand grabbed his pantleg.
“Peter?”
The boy sounded scared and he was just about to ask Neal what was wrong when he heard Satchmo growl behind him.
The agent turned around and saw that his dog had made his way over to the door and was now staring at it, seemingly sensing something or someone on the other side of the door.
It was rare for the animal to react in this way, he’d normally became excited when he heard something outside the door. Satchmo’s behavior was definitely cause for concern and Peter immediately went into his agent mode.
“Stay here”
He told Neal before he started to walk towards the door, and for once the kid actually listened to him. Satchmo suddenly jumped against the door, emitting a bark which caused Peter to hurry to the door. When he opened it, Satchmo pushed past him and ran out before he could stop him.
The dog had a good reason for doing this, seeing as a man dressed in black was running away from the door. Satchmo was close to biting the man’s ankle when the stranger managed to slam the gate shut in the dog’s face, successfully getting rid of the dog who angrily barked after the escaping man. Peter’s instincts were telling him to run after the man but he couldn’t leave the child unattended, so he had no choice but to let the man go.
“Satchmo! Come here!”
The dog didn’t look too pleased over the fact that he had to let the stranger run, but he also seemed to understand that there was no other choice.
Satchmo came to a halt on the doorstep, sniffing an envelope that Peter had somehow completely failed to notice.
“Good boy”
He praised the dog before he grabbed the envelope and turned it around, freezing when he saw a very familiar symbol on the front.
It could be a total coincide, smileys were a common symbol after all but it was something distinctive with the way it was drawn and the clear blue colour used.
“Is that the symbol that Scarface thief uses?”
Peter groaned as he heard the voice behind him.
“Didn’t I tell you to stay?”
The boy ignored him and instead reached out for the envelope, snatching it from Peter’s hands.
“How do you know about Scarface anyway?”
“I read about him in the newspaper”
Neal answered before opening the envelope and taking out its contents. The kid looked at the paper for only a second before suddenly dropping it to the ground, seemingly in shock.
Peter looked down at the paper, and he immediately found the cause for Neal’s reaction. It was a note for Peter but the text wasn’t what caught their attention but the picture attached with a paperclip.
The picture showed Elizabeth, tied to a chair, looking pretty beaten up.
It hadn’t been very hard to gather up Jones, Diana and a handful of other agents and meet at the bureau, despite it being their day off.
They were all eager to find this Scarface dude and they were all very eager to help Peter find Elizabeth.
Of course, Peter didn’t have a babysitter available so he was forced to bring the child with him to the office.
Neal was still visibly shaken up from having to see his mother in that state and he refused to believe Peter when he tried to assure the kid that his mother was fine.
Sometimes Neal’s intelligence was a curse, it would have been so much easier if Neal was a naïve child who believed that adults knew everything.
He felt uneasy leaving the child alone in his office while he went into the conference room to have a walkthrough of the case with the other agents, he just hoped that the kid would stay for once.
The last thing he needed now was to lose the boy as well.
The walkthrough went by relatively fast since they hadn’t received that much new information, apart from the fact that there was now a connection between the kidnapping and the man they had been chasing for over a year. The note didn’t give them much except that it revealed the motivation for the kidnapping. It all came down to that damn sketch made of the perp’s face.

He somehow found out that Elizabeth was the one to help them create the sketch and he was now demanding for all copies of it to be destroyed.

If they did that then they would have further demands, if they didn’t however Elizabeth would be the one to suffer.

It wasn’t a tough choice to make, for Peter it wasn’t even a choice at all.

He dismissed the other agents before turning around towards the board where the note and the picture was now placed.

Peter hadn’t seen Elizabeth in over a week, and now seeing her again in this state made him furious, if he ever came face to face with this Scarface guy then he didn’t think he’d be able to stop himself from beating the man into a bloody pulp.

The man had been a pain in the ass when it came to his work but now he had entered his personal life and that was something Peter couldn’t accept.

That made him question if the man knew about Peter’s connection to Elizabeth or if he was just chosen since he was the lead investigator on this case?

If he did know about their connection, did that mean that Scarface knew about Neal as well?

That thought caused him to rush out of the room and over to his office, thinking that seeing that Neal was fine would calm his worries for now.

His office however was empty and he quickly turned around, scanning the bullpen trying to spot the kid but he wasn’t there either.

Peter slowly walked down the stairs and to one of the desks. He had made sure that two agents were in the bullpen working, just to prevent Neal from wandering off.

“Where’s Neal?”

He asked them, his voice dangerously low and both of the agents looked up at Peter’s empty office in confusion.

The agents looked at each other before one of them tried to stutter some excuse but Peter just left them, not wanting to hear their explanation for letting the kid disappear right in front of their noses.

He stopped in the middle of the bullpen, unsure about what to do.

He didn’t think that someone had managed to get in here and kidnap Neal, but that didn’t mean that someone hadn’t grabbed the boy once he was out of the agents’ sight.

Peter closed his eyes, trying to calm his racing heart. He couldn’t deal with a kidnapped child as well, things were bad enough as it was.

“Peter, are you okay? You look like you gonna be sick”

He immediately opened his eyes and there Neal was, and he didn’t have a single scratch.

Peter placed his hand on the kid’s skinny shoulder, as if he had to touch him in order to be sure he was really there.

“Where were you?”

“Bathroom”

He released a sigh of relief before lightly scolding the boy.

“You need to tell someone before you leave”

“But I was fine”

Neal protested and Peter realized that the boy might not understand the severity of the situation.

He crouched down in front of him and placed his hands on the boy’s shoulders.

“Neal, I was worried that you had gotten kidnapped, just like your mom”

The kid’s smile disappeared and it was replaced with a guilty look.

“Please, always make sure that an adult knows where you are okay?”

Neal nodded and Peter just hoped that the boy really did understand.

The boy surprised him by throwing his arms around the agent in a hug. Peter didn’t hesitate to return
the hug.
His heart was still racing from the freight Neal had given him and the kid seemed to sense it, because he suddenly felt the need to reassure him.
“I’m fine”
The boy whispered in his ear and Peter couldn’t help but smile.
Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say that this is more or less a filler chapter but I do hope that you will like it anyway :]

It seemed as if Neal actually understood the seriousness of the situation because the boy had a sudden change in behavior. All of the sudden Neal reverted back to the kid he had met that night at the restaurant, when Neal had acted like a little angel.

Peter had for example been able to make it through a shopping trip without Neal leaving his sight for even a second and he just hoped that the boy would be able to continue to act like an angel for the rest of his stay.

One thing was for sure, Neal’s good behavior made this whole babysitting situation so much easier and so much more enjoyable.

It was actually so enjoyable that Peter forgot about the looming threat of the kidnappers, at least until Monday morning when he heard Satchmo bark from downstairs.

He immediately abandoned his task of tying his tie and hurried out of his bedroom almost running right into Neal as the kid left the guest room to check out Satchmo’s barking as well.

“Stay here”

He told Neal who pouted but did as he was told.

The dog was barking like crazy while repeatedly jumping against the door, the dog seemed enraged as if he could sense the evilness in the person Peter assumed was on the other side of the door.

When he opened the door he was, as suspected, met by an envelope on his doorstep. Although he had no idea how they could possibly know that they had done what they demanded.

He looked around but this time the man that left it was long gone and with no one to chase, Satchmo laid down by the door, clearly sulking.

Peter opened the note and yet again he was met with a picture of Elizabeth and his anger boiled up as he noticed that she had a bleeding wound on her forehead that had definitely not been there on the last picture.

He swore that when he got his hands on the kidnappers, he would give them a taste of their own medicine.

“Peter can I come down?”

He quickly tucked the note and picture away in his pocket, not wanting the child to see yet another picture of his mother in that state.

“Yeah, it’s okay”

Neal slowly came down the stairs, his schoolbag clutched tightly in his arms.

“Was it another note?”

“No, it was just the neighbours making some noise”

The boy looked skeptical but didn’t ask any further questions.

Just like Elizabeth’s apartment building, Neal’s school looked like it should have been condemned years ago, or at least been given a proper renovation.

The playground equipment looked like it was decades old and Peter wondered if it was even safe for the kids to play on it.

Neal looked at his school with dread in his eyes and the agent felt a little mean dropping the kid off when he clearly didn’t want to be there.

“You okay?”
“Yeah, I just don’t like school”
Neal answered before grabbing his bag and opening the door.
Peter was slightly surprised by his answer, sure it wasn’t unusual for kids to dislike school but Neal had seemed to be the kind of kid that genuinely liked school and learning new things.
“Remember if you see anyone suspicious or if anything’s wrong tell an adult”
Neal nodded before mumbling a goodbye before closing the door and walking towards the building.
Peter had informed both the principal and Neal’s teacher about the situation, and placed an agent outside the school but despite taking these repercussions it felt wrong leaving the boy.

The new note demanded that they would not only stop chasing Scarface but also destroy all the evidence they had in the case.
Even if Peter was willing to do whatever it would take to get Elizabeth back, his hands were tied and they couldn’t comply.
They spent the entire day trying to find another way but when Peter returned to Neal’s school that afternoon they were nowhere near closer to finding Elizabeth.
It not only frustrated him but also made him fear for Elizabeth’s safety. What would happen to her if they didn’t do what was demanded?
He was a little late and there were only a handful of kids still waiting for their ride and he tried not to worry when he didn’t see Neal among them.
Peter got out of the car when he spotted a teacher and his worry disappeared when the teacher had seen Neal play in an old wooden playhouse located at the edge of the playground.
The first thing he heard as he approached the playhouse was Neal’s voice and Peter smiled, thinking that the boy was talking to an imaginary friend or something like that.
Then he heard another voice, a darker voice that was definitely an adult and not another child.
Imagining the worst, he grabbed his gun and when he opened the door to the playhouse he pointed the gun at the stranger.
“Get away from him”
Peter ordered while both Neal and the stranger looked at him with shocked faces.
“Peter, it’s okay”
Neal said only to move so that he was in front of the stranger.
“Neal come here”
“It’s okay, Peter. It’s Mozzie”
Peter looked at the strange man before slowly lowering his gun.
Why was Neal’s odd babysitter here, and why were they having a secret conversation in a playhouse?
“Mozzie noticed we were gone and when he couldn’t find mommy, he found me”
Neal explained, as if he could read the agent’s thoughts.
“What’s with the hiding?”
“The teachers might know me but your agent would most likely believe that I was trying to kidnap young Neal”
Mozzie explained and Peter frowned.
Was the agent that obvious or was Mozzie just really observant?
“Well Neal, we’re going home”
He said, eager to get Neal away from the man. Even if Neal knew and trusted him, Peter didn’t and his gut was still telling him that there was something off about the man.
“But Peter, I told Mozzie about mommy and he can help”
“How?”
“He has contacts, he can ask around and find out more about Scarface”
Neal said eagerly, while Mozzie looked less than pleased with the kid’s words.
The connections Neal was talking about was without a doubt criminal but if it could help them find Elizabeth, he was willing to let it slide.
“Okay, do what you can”
Mozzie nodded before saying goodbye to Neal and getting out of the playhouse. The short man looked up at the agent and gave him a stern look.

“Take care of the kid or I’ll personally kick your ass”

He threatened before he walked away.

The man was odd, to say the least, but you couldn’t deny that he really seemed to care about the kid. He just hoped that the man cared enough to be ready to give him all the information he found, even if it meant betraying his contacts.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

I finally managed to get another chapter together and hope you will like it. I would also like to take the time to wish you a merry Christmas (or happy holidays if you don’t celebrate Christmas) :D

After Mozzie left Neal got out of the playhouse as well and the first thing Peter noticed was that the kid had a big bruise on his cheek. It wasn’t that unusual, he knew that children got hurt all the time but despite knowing this his mind immediately imagined that some other kids had hurt Neal.

“What happened to your cheek, bud?”
“I got the ball in my face when we were playing soccer.”
Neal said in a confident voice, but Peter could’ve sworn that he saw something in the boy’s eyes, fear maybe, before it disappeared and Neal flashed an innocent smile.

“So no one hurt you?”
He asked and Neal averted his gaze before shaking his head.

“It was just an accident.”
Perhaps the kid was telling the truth and Peter had just been damaged from work and saw bad guys where they weren’t any, but there was something about Neal’s behaviour that made him suspect that maybe something was going on.
He promised himself to keep an eye on the boy, just to be certain that the boy wasn’t having problems in school.
They walked back to the car and drove home in silence.
The first thing Neal did was to look for any notes on the doorstep, but of course he couldn’t find any.

“Are you sure there haven’t been another note?”
Neal asked, sounding worried and Peter shook his head, answering that there hadn’t been any note this morning or anything delivered to the office. He didn’t want to get him even more worried with the note and he especially did not want to tell him that there had been a demand that they couldn’t meet.

Peter was intent on keeping Neal out of this and letting the adults handle it.

However, the kidnappers had no problem involving the child, something Peter found out just two days later. He had just picked Neal up from school and had gone upstairs to put his gun away in the safe when Neal yelled his name, sounding scared.
The agent instantly grabbed his gun again and hurried down the stairs, almost falling several times.
He ran into the living room with his gun drawn but instead of seeing any kind of threat, he just saw Neal sitting on the floor staring at something in his hands.
Peter got a bad feeling in his stomach and he didn’t even have to guess what Neal was looking at.

“Give me the picture, buddy.”
He said in a calm voice, but Neal showed no sign of even hearing him.
Peter crouched down and gently pried the picture out of his hands before he looked at the picture. Just like the previous ones it showed Elizabeth tied up in a chair, but this time she wasn’t alone in the picture. A masked man, all dressed in black, was standing behind her and he was pressing a large knife against her throat.
It was hard for Peter to look at it and he couldn’t even imagine how hard it had been for Neal to see it.
He looked up and saw that Neal had buried his head in his hands, and his whole body was shaking as he quietly cried.

Peter pushed the agent in him away as he let his parental instinct take over.

He sat down on the floor and then pulled the crying child onto his lap, Neal responded by throwing his arms around Peter’s neck, clinging to him like a life line.

“They’re gonna kill my mommy!”

Neal said before letting out a heart wrenching sob and burying his face in Peter’s shoulder.

Peter hugged the boy tighter before stroking the kid’s back in an attempt to comfort him.

“They’re not going to kill your mom, I won’t let that happen, kiddo.”

Of course Peter couldn’t guarantee that Elizabeth wouldn’t get killed and he was pretty sure that Neal knew that as well but for now he decided to not question it.

“I miss her.”

He said instead and Peter answered that he missed her too, even Satchmo let out a whine as if he could understand them and wanted to say that he missed Elizabeth as well.

When Neal finally calmed down, Peter wiped the tears from his face before he lifted the boy off his lap and placing him next to Satchmo, who started to lick the boy’s face.

Peter smiled at Neal’s soft giggles as he grabbed the photo again and stood up. He spotted the note on the floor and grabbed that as well.

The note was different as well, because this time it had a small plastic bag stapled to the top right corner of the page and inside of it was a lock of brown hair, Elizabeth’s hair.

He read the note, and just as he feared Scarface had somehow found out that they hadn’t complied and now he was unhappy, threatening to make Elizabeth pay for their unwillingness to do what he asked.

Peter let out a frustrated sigh and placed the items on the table, unable to look at them any longer.

Then a sudden thought appeared in his head, how did Neal get the note and photo?

Had someone been in the house and left it inside?

The thought made his stomach turn and he looked at the boy who was rubbing the dog’s stomach.

“Hey Neal, where did you find the note?”

“It was in my backpack.”

Peter froze because the kid’s answer was so much worse. This meant that they had wanted Neal to find the note, they knew that he was connected to Peter and the FBI and the scariest part of all; they showed how easily they could get to Neal.

There had not only been an FBI agent watching the school but all of the staff had been on the lookout for anything suspicious and still they had managed to leave a note in Neal’s backpack.

“Peter, are you okay?”

Neal had stopped rubbing Satchmo’s stomach and now both the boy and dog was staring at Peter who had probably been letting some of his worry show.

“You’re not going back to school.”

If they had managed to get to Neal’s backpack without anyone noticing, it wouldn’t be that much harder for them to get to Neal and Peter was not going to risk anything.

Peter felt incredibly paranoid and every little sound from outside or every little movement from Satchmo made him reach for his gun. Since he had brought Neal home he had always kept his gun locked away so that Neal and his sticky fingers wouldn’t get to it, but now he felt that he couldn’t keep Neal safe without it on him.

Perhaps he was overreacting but if there was even the slightest chance that Scarface or one of his associated decided to pay them a visit, he wanted to be ready for it.

The agent thanked himself for this choice when his dog suddenly flew up from the floor and started to bark at the backdoor.

He made sure that Neal stayed back before he got his gun and slowly started to walk towards the door.

Peter momentarily stopped as whoever was out there knocked on the door, he didn’t think that the
kidnappers would knock but he still didn’t lower his gun until he carefully pushed the curtain aside and saw who was standing outside.

He let out a sigh of relief before he opened the door for the other man.

“We need to stop meeting like this, suit.”

Mozzie said and pointed at the gun in Peter’s hand and he put it back in his holster. Neal realized that there weren’t any danger and came running, throwing himself at Mozzie and giving the man a big hug.

“Why can’t you just use the front door like normal people?”

Peter asked, frustrated that the man’s odd behaviour had created a false alarm.

“Precautions.”

Mozzie simply answered and Peter was about to point out how weird that was but managed to stop himself in the last second.

First of all, he couldn’t be sure that his house wasn’t being watched by someone and second of all he remembered Elizabeth telling him that it was impossible to argue with Mozzie about his paranoia.

“I’m guessing you have some information?”

“As a matter of fact I do, but you’re not going to like it.”

Peter didn’t like the sound of that but he still asked Mozzie to go on.

“I couldn’t get any information about the guy himself, but I did manage to find an interesting contact.”

“And?”

“He has a contact in the FBI, more specifically in the White Collar department.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Surprise! I got really inspired all of the sudden and managed to get another chapter together and I hope you will like.

I would like to thanks for all the comments and kudos and then I would also like to wish you all a happy new year and hope that 2018 will be a great year for all of us :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning Peter had to force a sleepy, grumpy Neal into the car while he himself had needed two cups of coffee just to be able to function.

None of them had been able to get a good night’s sleep, Peter couldn’t fall asleep because the thought of having a mole was eating him up alive and Neal had nightmares about his mother being killed.

Peter wouldn’t mind staying home and sleep all day, but he had to get to work, now that he had new important information, and before that he wanted to stop by Neal’s school to update the teacher about the situation as well as pick up some things for the kid to do during the day.

Since he didn’t dare to have the child anywhere but by his side, he had to at least make sure that Neal was entertained so that he wouldn’t complain or wander off.

Once at the school he left Neal out on the playground, with clear instructions to find him or one of the teachers if he saw anyone who shouldn’t be there, while he went inside.

It felt like the safest option right now, he would be safer on the playground with other children and a couple of teacher than he would be waiting in the car or even having an agent watching him.

Neal’s teacher was very understanding of the situation and she gladly handed him some work that could last for a week, if Neal needed to stay out of school for a longer time, but not before she talked about how well the boy was doing in school, especially praising his art.

Despite the fact that Neal wasn’t even his son, Peter couldn’t help but feel proud.

When he made it outside he again he spotted Neal talking to three other boys, who looked like they were a little older than him.

Peter were slowly walking towards them, not wanting to interrupt their conversation, when one of the older boys, without any warning, pushed Neal to the ground while the other boys started to laugh.

“Hey!”

Peter called out, instinctively reaching for his gun but stopping himself in the last second, realizing that pulling a gun on a school playground wasn’t a good idea.

The three boys turned around and their faces filled with fear before they scattered and ran away.

Neal got up from the ground and at least he didn’t look like he was hurt, he just looked annoyed.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine can we go now?”

Neal brushed off the dirt from his clothes and Peter was reminded of Neal’s scraped hands and knees a couple of days ago, when he thought that maybe someone had pushed the kid.

“Are they usually mean to you?”

“Please don’t get involved in this.”

Peter’s protective instincts had been activated and if it weren’t for the fact that it was kids, he would have gladly found them and taught them a lesson for hurting the kid he had sworn to protect.

“Neal, if they’re being mean to you I have to know.”
“No you don’t, you’re not my dad so you don’t have to care about me!”

Peter was taken aback by the anger in Neal’s voice and he wanted to question why the kid had gotten so upset but Neal decided to take off running towards the car and Peter had no choice but to drop the subject for now and follow him.

When they walked into the bullpen that morning, Peter no longer felt the same warm, happy feeling he usually got in the place that was more or less his second home, instead he felt like he was surrounded by enemies.

He looked at the people he used to trust with his life and wondered which one of them had been betraying him, and he realized that he couldn’t even suspect any of them.

He had never seen them as anything else but a sort of family, and then one bit of information had managed to shatter that.

There were only two people in the bullpen that he could look at and not see an enemy, Jones and Diana would never do something like that, it was unthinkable.

Therefore, he brought Neal and the only two people in this office that he trusted into his office to tell them about yesterday’s events.

Jones and Diana were just as shocked as Peter had been when Mozzie dropped the bomb on him and just like he had, they questioned if it could really be true.

“I’m afraid so.”

He said when Jones asked if he was sure. He had spent hours and hours thinking of it, but Mozzie had been certain that the information was correct and it just made sense.

This Scarface guy were always a step ahead of them and it was the obvious explanation to why he knew when they followed through on his demands or not.

His two confidants looked out at the bullpen and he could see the same distrust on their faces that he felt when he walked through the doors.

“First of all, I want to find out who left the note in Neal’s backpack yesterday, if it was our mole or one of the bad guys.”

Jones volunteered to go to the school and ask around while Diana volunteered to stay in Peter’s office to keep Neal company.

Peter meanwhile decided to question the agent that had been watching the school for the past days, suspecting that he could be innocent since he hadn’t been around the office when they were discussing the notes.

“Neal, remember that right now you shouldn’t trust anyone but me, Jones and Diana, okay?”

He never thought he would have to warn the kid about his own agents but he also couldn’t risk anyone getting to the boy.

“I won’t even talk to anyone else, I promise.”

Neal said before turning towards Diana.

“Diana, can you help me with this math problem?”

He asked and pointed at the math book he had started to work with during the agents’ conversation.

Diana happily went over to the boy and started to help him, and Peter could leave the office knowing that Neal would be in safe hands.

Peter told the agents that he would call them in one by one to have a conversation about their wellbeing, it wasn’t unusual since they were very keen on making sure that the agents were happy and felt satisfied with their workplace environment.

It was a much safer way to go then to suddenly wanting to talk to agents in private, because that would most likely make the mole nervous.

He started with agent Ford, who had been the one watching Neal’s school.

Peter decided to start with asking the man about yesterday but he hadn’t seen anything out of the ordinary.

“And you watched the school all the time?”

“Yes, didn’t take my eyes off it. Well, except when I went home for my lunch break.”
“Lunch break?”
Peter hadn’t known anything about a lunch break, as far as he had been concerned Ford had been eating lunch in his car just like a classic stakeout.

“Yeah? You sent agent Collins over yesterday saying that I deserved a lunch break and that he would take over?”
Agent Ford sounded nervous all of the sudden but he seemed more nervous about going against the order of never leaving the school than him having something to hide.
He should be nervous, considering that Peter had never sent Collins anywhere, come to think of it agent Collins hadn’t been around the office at all yesterday.
Peter dismissed Ford before he leaned back in his chair, looking at agent Collins who were sitting at his desk, slowly typing on the computer.
He didn’t know the agent that well, he just knew that the 40-year-old agent still lived with his mother and that he was what some people would call weak-minded.
In that way he was the perfect candidate, as long as Peter had known him he had never taken any own initiatives and he was easily influenced by others, and he could imagine that it would be easy to manipulate or blackmail the man.
Peter called in some other agents before Collins, just so that he wouldn’t suspect that the conversation with Ford had led to revealing that he’d been at the school yesterday.
He was just about to fetch Collins when Jones called to inform him that a teacher and a janitor had both seen an agent in the school building yesterday.
The agent they had described did not sound like agent Ford at all, but it did sound exactly like Collins.

He made the decision to wait for Jones to return before he talked to Collins.
One thing you could say about the agent was that he was a very friendly guy, and it was hard for Peter to understand that the man could ever be their mole, manipulated by someone else or not.
“I know you were at the school yesterday.”
Peter said to immediately let Collins know what this was really about and the agent paled.
“I just wanted to let Ford get a break, it’s not that fun sitting in a car all day. So, I just took his place for an hour or so.”
It sounded innocent enough, like the man was just doing a favor but Peter knew better than to trust him.
“So, you just sat in the car the whole time?”
“Yes, that’s correct.”
“Two people saw you in the school building.”
“Well, uhm I can explain.”
He said while he started to fidget with his tie.
Agent Collins looked up at the two agents and for a second it looked like he was about to get up and run before he did something neither of them expected, agent Collins started to cry.
“I’m sorry.”
He managed to say between the sobs before wiping some snot away with the sleeve of his shirt.
“I put that horrible note in the backpack. I’m sorry.”
Even if Peter was angry at the man, he couldn’t help but feel sorry for him at the same time.
The agent was clearly regretting what he’d done and his reaction strengthened Peter’s suspicion about Scarface blackmailing or manipulating him into this.
He wasn’t fond on that idea, but at least it was better than one of his agents going against him willingly.

“What have you been giving Scarface information about the case?”
He received a nod as an answer and he leaned back in his chair while he waited for the agent to calm down so that they could have an actual conversation with the sobbing man.
“How long?”
Peter asked once Collins had calmed down.
“Since the first robbery.”
It was unbelievable, one of their own agents had been feeding information to their perp all along, no wonder they had such a hard time catching the guy.

“Why?”
“My mother is very sick, agent Burke. I couldn’t pay for her hospital bills, but then he showed up at the hospital offering to pay me for information. I couldn’t say no, I love my mother very dearly.”

Peter slammed his fist on the table, surprising both himself and Collins.
He could understand the desperation Collins was in, but it didn’t justify what he did. It didn’t justify that Elizabeth had been taken from him, or that she had been taken from her son.
“So, does Neal, but because of you his mother is in the hands of some psychopath!”
“I’m so sorry. I had no choice but to tell him.”
“What do you mean?”
“He asked me who provided the phantom sketch and I had no choice but to tell them about Elizabeth.”

Peter just froze, trying to process what the man had just said. Agent Collins was not only their mole but he was direct responsible for Elizabeth getting kidnapped.
All sympathy he ever felt for the man was gone and he saw red, he lunged at the man and if Jones hadn’t been there to stop him in the last second Agent Collins would be a very sorry man.
“You better tell me where to find Scarface!”
He shouted at him, no longer caring about if anyone could hear him.
“I can do better, sir. I can tell you where Elizabeth is.”

Chapter End Notes

I would just like to say that I hope you didn’t think that solving the mole situation was too rushed, I just wanted to hurry it along so that I can bring Elizabeth back :(
Hey guys I’m back.
I apologize for the absence, I’ve just been struggling a lot with my depression lately so it’s been hard to find the motivation to write.
That being said I can’t say that this is the best I’ve ever written but I did my best and hopefully you’ll like it.

As soon as agent Collins had given him an address, Peter left the room and let Jones handle Collins, he didn’t trust himself to be in the same room with the bastard for much longer.
He stopped by his office where Diana was sitting by the desk, going through some files while Neal was lying on the floor, reading a book while fighting to stay awake.
Peter opened the door and asked Diana to step outside, while Neal watched them with a curious look.
He updated her on Collins confession and by the end of it, she looked just as pissed off as he felt.
“Is there anything I can do?”
“I want you to take Neal back to my place. If all goes well we’ll find Elizabeth and I can bring her back there.”
“Got it, boss.”
They walked back into the room and Peter crouched down in front of the boy.
“Listen buddy, Diana is going to take you back to the house while I go and check out a lead okay?”
“Do you know where my mommy is?”
Neal asked, while sitting up. The hopeful look on the kid’s face made him want to really tell him about the new information, but he didn’t want to get his hopes up in case Collins were sending them off on some wild goose chase.
“Not yet, but we might be getting closer.”
Neal’s face fell and he nodded solemnly before he started to pack up all of the schoolbooks.
As he put his backpack on, he let out a big yawn.
“Can I get some coffee before I go?”
The boy asked, giving Peter the puppy eyes. Neal could already be a handful sometimes, and Peter didn’t even want to imagine what it would be like with the kid hopped up on caffeine.
“Absolutely not.”
“Mommy lets me.”
Neal said with a pout and Peter laughed before ruffling the boy’s hair.
“Nice try, buddy.”
He then turned to Diana, who was watching the exchange with an amused smile.
“Remember Diana, don’t believe anything he says.”
He warned and Diana laughed, promising that she wouldn’t before the two left the office.
Now that he knew Neal was taken care off, Peter could go and hopefully bring his mother back to him.

Peter had expected an abandoned building, somewhere remote where no one could see or hear anything that was going on, but instead the location turned out to be an ordinary house in an ordinary neighbourhood.
There were children playing on the street, several neighbours outside tending their garden or walking their dogs and on the way, he had even spotted signs about neighbourhood watch.
It didn’t feel like a house where criminals could bring a kidnapped woman and keep her there for this long without anyone noticing. That of course, was also a perfect way to blend in so Peter kept his hopes up. Peter got out of the car and walked towards the house, followed by a couple of other agents as well as a tac team. The neighbours stopped what they were doing and curiously watched the action taking place right in their seemingly safe neighbourhood. An unlocked door allowed them to walk in and surprise the man who was standing in the kitchen, getting a beer out of the fridge. For a second Peter thought that the man was innocent and they were in the wrong house, until he spotted a handgun lying on the counter next to the man. “Freeze, FBI!” The man froze before lifting his hands up and slowly turning around before one of the agents walked over to cuff him. “Where is she?” Peter asked the man, he was quiet as he weighed his options, and after a couple of seconds he made the smart choice. “Basement.” He let the tac team go down into the basement first to clear it, he heard them yell before a couple of shots were fired and then finally they called for him and he rushed down the stairs. On the floor was two men, one of them bleeding from his shoulder and the other one clutching his bleeding knee. Peter couldn’t care less about the men, all he could focus on was the big, locked door that they had been guarding. He didn’t even have to ask for a key before a member of the tac team handed him a key, presumably taken from one of the men. The door opened with a loud creak and he could barely hold back a sob as he saw Elizabeth sitting curled up in a ball in the middle of the sound isolated room. “Elizabeth!” He called out while he rushed to her side, she immediately lifted her head, looking at him in disbelief and it took a couple of seconds for her to realize that it was really him. As soon as Peter managed to help her stand up, she threw her arms around him and gave him a passionate kiss. Tears of joy were rolling down her cheek and she carefully touched Peter’s cheek, as if she still couldn’t believe that she was being saved. “Neal?” She suddenly asked, her voice hoarse but worried. “He’s fine. Neal’s safe.” He assured her and once she knew that her son was okay, she allowed herself to break down and cry while Peter held her tightly.

The paramedic finished bandaging up a wound on Elizabeth’s forehead before she told Elizabeth to get some water and food into her and plenty of rest and she would be just fine. Peter released a sigh of relief, glad that she hadn’t sustained any serious injuries. Elizabeth hadn’t even wanted to get checked out by the paramedic at first, she had just insisted that she was fine and that she needed to go back to Neal. Peter had to practically force her to sit down and let the paramedic quickly check for any serious injuries, while her colleagues worked on the wounded men. “Can we go now?” Elizabeth asked while flashing him puppy eyes, and he couldn’t help but laugh at how much she reminded him of her son in that moment. After getting a bottle of water from the paramedic, they got into the car and left the house. During the ride Peter told Elizabeth the story about how Neal had shown up at his job, soaked to the
bone after walking all the way from their home in the pouring rain.
Her face immediately paled, not at all liking that her 6-year-old had walked that far on his own.
Because of her worried reaction to that part, he decided to wait before telling her about Neal
receiving a note and being forced to see that horrible picture, instead he moved on to informing her
that Neal had been staying with him.
She stayed silent for a minute or two before she looked at him, with gratitude in her eyes.
“Thank you. You didn’t have to do that.”
“Elizabeth, I love you. Taking care of your son was the least I could do, besides I really like Neal,
he’s a good kid.”
She smiled at him before she placed her hand on top of his and squeezed it slightly.
“I love you too.”

As soon as they entered the house, they could hear Neal giggling while Diana jokingly accused him
of being a cheater.

Peter looked at Elizabeth and saw that the sound of her child’s laughter brought tears to her eyes.
Elizabeth waited in the hallway while Peter walked into the living room and saw them playing yatzy
by the kitchen table.
“Hey Neal, I’ve got a surprise for you.”
He said, trying not to smile too much and give it away. The boy turned and looked at him, with an
excited look on his face.
“What is it?”
“Close your eyes.”
Neal closed his eyes while letting out an excited giggle.
Elizabeth walked into the room and towards her son, her crying almost giving her away.
She sat down on her knees next to the chair while Peter, Diana and even Satchmo quietly waited for
the big reveal.

Elizabeth reached out her hand and gently touched his arm and it seemed as if the magical
connection between a parent and their child kicked in, because Neal instinctively knew who it was
and opened his eyes.
Neal stared at his mother for a couple of seconds before it finally seemed to hit him that it was really
her.
“MOMMY!”
He cried out before leaping off the chair and into her arms. The boy tried to voice all of his questions,
tried to say at least something, but the young child was suddenly overwhelmed by his emotions and
instead he started to cry.
Neal clung on to her as if she was a lifeline and she held him just as tight, rubbing his back.
“It’s okay baby, I’m back. I’m okay.”
Peter felt like crying himself and even Diana’s eyes seemed to be watering.
In a way the scene was truly heartbreaking to see because all of this should never have happened,
they should never have to be separated and spend every day worrying, not knowing if the other one
was okay or even alive.
At the same time it was truly heartwarming to see mother and child reunited again, and see the strong
connection and love between them.
Neal continued to cry while Elizabeth rocked him, and whispered comforting words to him until the sobs turned into sniffles.
“I wanna go home.”
Neal sniffled and Peter knew that Neal didn’t just want to go home, he wanted to go back to normal, go back to the safety he felt before all of this happened but Peter also knew that things would never be the same after this, it was the kind of incident that stayed with you for the entire life. They would always remember that she had been kidnapped by Scarface, and they would never feel as safe again.
The thoughts of Scarface made Peter realize that none of the men in the house matched the leader’s description.
The men in the house had been simple pawns, and Scarface was still out there.
He couldn’t let Elizabeth and Neal go back home, even if he would order an agent to watch over them, Peter would be worried about Scarface would go after Elizabeth again or even try to kidnap the kid.
He also wasn’t particularly fond of the idea of them going back to that crappy apartment, it wouldn’t surprise him if the ceiling fell in on them or if there was mold somewhere that would make them sick.
“I don’t think you should return home just yet”
He said and Elizabeth lifted her head and gave him a questioning look.
“The man behind all of this was not in that house, he’s still out there and who’s to say he won’t go after you again.”
Elizabeth didn’t look convinced and he could see her getting ready to argue.
“Who’s to say he won’t go after Neal.”
At least that convinced her, judging by the way his words made her tighten the grip of the boy even more and how she placed a kiss on top of Neal’s head.
“Where are we supposed to go then?”
“You could stay here!”
Peter winced at how eager he sounded and he cleared his throat before trying to sound more professional.
“I mean, you are welcome to stay here. I can have an agent posted outside the house 24/7 and personally I would feel much better knowing that I can protect you and Neal”
Elizabeth thought about it for a couple of seconds before nodding, she seemed to have realize that staying in an FBI agent’s house was safer than staying in her apartment.
“Is that okay with you Neal?”
Even if the boy nodded, Peter could see that he was hesitating and that both confused and hurt Peter. He thought that he had gotten closer to the kid during the time he had been staying here, and he thought that Neal felt the same, so why was he opposed to staying in his house for a while longer?
“Great, we’ll stay here then!”
Elizabeth said before standing up again while Neal got back on the chair. “I need to take a shower.”
She then announced, she hadn’t had a shower or change of clothes since she was kidnapped so she was understandably not feeling that fresh. “Of course, come on I’ll show you where the towels are.”
He followed her upstairs and showed her the towels and grabbed an old hoodie and a couple of sweatpants that she could wear while her dirty, smelly clothes could be washed.
Peter then returned downstairs where Diana and Neal had just finished up their game, and by Diana’s complaining it was obvious who the winner was. “I would have won if you didn’t cheat.” She accused him and the boy placed a hand on his chest, acting completely shocked by the accusation.
“Diana, I would never do such a thing.” Neal promised but there was something about Neal’s innocent smile that made Peter believed that the kid had cheated, even if he wasn’t completely sure how you could cheat in a game built on chance. “Diana, I was wondering if you could swing by Elizabeth’s apartment and pick up some clothes and other thing she and Neal might need.” “On it, boss.” She answered and got up before pointing her finger at Neal. “I want a rematch, kid and the next time I will kick your butt.”
Neal just giggled as an answer, making it clear that he didn’t for one second believe that Diana would beat him.
As Diana left the house, Peter sat down on the chair previously occupied by her and looked at the boy.
Peter sat quiet for a while, mentally debating on how he should talk to the kid, if he should ease in to his question or if he should just ask him point blank. In the end he decided upon the latter, simply because he just wanted to know. “Neal, I know there was some problems in the beginning but I want to ask you now, if you’re okay with me and your mother dating.” The kid released a deep sigh, as if he had been dreading to get this question. “Peter, I like you but only as a friend.” Peter had to restrain himself from laughing at Neal’s words, because it sounded like he was being dumped a six-year-old. “I don’t want you dating my mom.” Neal said and Peter couldn’t help but feel disappointed, and still very confused as to why the boy didn’t want them to be in a relationship. Was he just simply being possessive over his mother, not wanting to share her attention with anyone else? “Why not?” Peter asked but received no answer, instead the boy just looked away and refused to meet the agent’s eyes.
They spent a couple of minutes in silence before he realized that he wouldn’t be getting an answer on his question, so instead he got up from his chair. “Why don’t you bring Satchmo out in the backyard while I check on your mother?” Neal jumped off the chair excitedly and brought the golden retriever outside, both of them happy to go out in the fresh air and play.
Just to be sure, Peter scanned the backyard for any potential threats and when he didn’t find any, he walked up the stairs and over to the bathroom.
There was no water running, but there was another sound coming from the room. At first, he had a hard time identifying it but as soon as he did, he felt the worry surge up. “Elizabeth, is everything okay?” He asked as he knocked on the door, but she didn’t answer instead she just continued to sob.
“I’m coming in.”
He waited a few seconds, giving her the time to protest but when no protests came he opened the
door and walked inside.
Elizabeth’s hair was wet and she was dressed in the clothes he gave him, so she had managed to take
a shower but at some point after that she had ended up crying on the floor.
He didn’t need to ask her why she was crying because he already knew, he simply couldn’t imagine
how anyone could get kidnapped and be fully okay afterwards.
It must be a horrible experience, especially when you were taken away from your child like that and
then spend several days locked in a room, not knowing if you would see said child again or if you
would even make it out alive.
Peter sat down next to her and she immediately leaned her head against his shoulder, while he put his
arm around her and just held her as she cried.
“I’m sorry.”
She said once the sobbing had turned into sniffles.
“You have nothing to apologize for.”
“I’m trying to not be affected by it, I’m trying to be strong, for Neal, but it’s really hard to be stronger
than you feel.”
“It’s okay to be affected by it, you’ve been through hell.”
Elizabeth smiled as Peter placed a gentle kiss on top of her head.
“You’re a good man, Peter Burke.”
She said before standing up, and looking at her face in the mirror. He could understand why she
didn’t want to show her weakness in front of Neal, few parents wanted that.
“Can you go and check on Neal? I’ll be down in a minute.”
Peter placed another kiss on her head before leaving the bathroom to go and check on the boy and
the dog.

Elizabeth managed to pull herself together, and if he hadn’t witnessed it he could never have guessed
that she had broken down at all.
She even managed to cook a simple but delicious meal and Peter was amazed by her cooking skills,
he honestly didn’t think he’d ever had such a delicious homecooked meal before since both him and
his parents were terrible cooks.
After the meal they had all ended up on the couch and watched some kid friendly movie until it was
time for the boy to go to bed.
Neal didn’t want to go to bed because he didn’t want to leave his mom at all and she spent over an
hour upstairs before she returned downstairs, looking completely exhausted.
Elizabeth then sat down on the couch next to him and yet again leaned her head on his shoulder and
Peter pulled a blanket over them as his body was filled with a warm feeling.
It just felt so natural, it felt as if they were a family and Peter could easily see himself sitting on the
couch snuggled up to Elizabeth and watching TV for the rest of his life.
He didn’t even shy away from the thought of dealing with a stubborn kid who didn’t want to go to
bed, no quite the opposite it just felt natural too.
Despite these feelings he knew that they were far from a family, even if Neal liked him he didn’t
want him to date Elizabeth and he didn’t even know how he should view his relationship with
Elizabeth, if they even had a relationship.
Peter tried to focus on the TV but his thoughts kept going back to the same place, so when there was
a commercial he muted the TV to finally address the elephant in the room.
“Elizabeth, I need to ask you something.”
She looked up at him, urging him to go on.
“I just need to know if there’s still a relationship between us or not.”
Elizabeth sat up straighter and she stayed silent for a couple of seconds, making Peter feel slightly
anxious over what her answer would be.

“Peter, you know that I love you and that I never wanted to end our relationship. It’s just that Neal—“

“Doesn’t want us to date, I know. I asked him before and he said that he only likes me as a friend.”

He interrupted and Elizabeth cracked a small smile at her son’s choice of words before it disappeared again.

“You can’t take it personal, Peter, it’s just that he—“

She interrupted herself, seemingly struggling with the best way to explain it before she finally just ended it by saying that it was a long story.

Peter answered that he was willing to listen to that long story, but also made it clear that there was no pressure. Even if he desperately wanted to know why Neal was so opposed to their relationship, he didn’t want to pressure her into talking about it either.

Elizabeth suddenly excused herself, saying that she needed to get some fresh air and walked out the backdoor with the dog following eagerly, Satchmo would never miss an opportunity to go outside.

Chapter End Notes

I was thinking about telling some of Elizabeth and Neal’s backstory, mostly about why Neal don’t want them dating.

If I do that, it would most likely be told in dialogue, is that something you want or would that be too tedious to read. Let me know :)
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

I managed to get another chapter together despite all the things going on right now, kudos to me :P
As always thanks for the comments/kudos, it’s a big motivator and reading the comments are always the best part of uploading a new chapter, so thank you!

As promised, I wrote the backstory and mostly in dialogue, hopefully it will be readable :)

Peter started to get a little worried when 15 minutes had passed and still no sign of Elizabeth. It was quite chilly outside and she wasn’t wearing warm clothes, which was clear when she finally returned inside, shaking like a leaf.
As soon as she sat down he put his arm around her and as she snuggled up to him, he draped the blanket around them again.
Peter had fully expected her not to be ready to talk, so he was more than a little surprised when she did.
“I was abused by my dad.”
She said, dropping a bombshell that reminded him of how Neal had told him that his grandparents were mean.
He wasn’t sure what to say so instead he just took her hand and squeezed it gently and she responded by squeezing back.
“I ran away to New York on my 18th birthday and I soon met what I thought was the love of my life.
He was a charming, handsome, artist and I thought I would spend the rest of my life with him but then I got pregnant and he told me to choose between him or the baby. I picked Neal of course”
Peter shook his head in disbelief, he understood that some people didn’t want to become parents but the very least you could do was to talk about it instead of forcing an ultimatum on her.
“Then I lived alone for three years before John came along. I had somehow gotten into my head that as a single mother I should be happy about any attention from men at all, so I didn’t think twice before jumping into a relationship with him.”
It was evident on her voice that it was hard to talk about it, so he reached for the remote and turned the TV off before he hugged her tighter to his chest, to show that she had his full attention and that he was showing her support.
He wanted to say something, to respond to her story, but he didn’t know what.
“John didn’t like children, he acted as if every second he spent with Neal was a big sacrifice and that he always deserved a reward. He thought he was a hero every time he took Neal of my hands for a few hours. He both hated and neglected my child and it took me way too long to see that. I thought I was done with dating after that but then a year later I met Mark.”
It was easy to see a pattern here, so far the men in Elizabeth and Neal’s life seemed like jerks and it was no wonder that Neal was scared of letting another man in.
“Mark was the nicest guy both to me and Neal. He acted like a real father to Neal and they became very good friends. We had lived together for three months when something suddenly snapped in him and he started to get violent. He yelled, and when he got angry he took it out on me. I stayed with him, maybe because he always apologized or maybe because I was so used to it. Then one day he hit Neal and all I saw was my mother just standing by, letting my father hit me and I wasn’t going to be
like her, I wasn’t going to let my son have the same life as me.”
At this point the tears had started to roll down her cheeks and even if she was very upset, she also seemed relieved about talking about it.
He guessed that this was the kind of things you bottled up inside.
“We had nowhere to go, so we had to spend the night on the street before Mozzie found us. He helped me find an apartment and he became a good friend to me but mostly to Neal. That day I decided to never date again, but then I found you.”
Elizabeth looked up at him, and she looked so beautiful that he couldn’t resist to kiss her.
After the kiss she leaned her head against his chest again while quietly sniffing, and he thought that she was done talking for the night but was yet again proven wrong.
“That’s why I made sure that you knew from the start that I have a kid that’s my number one priority and that’s why it took so long for you to meet him, because I wanted to make sure you were a good person.”
“And you’re sure of that now?”
“I knew you were different ever since the babysitting incident, even if Neal was on his very worst behaviour you shouldered through it, something John or Mark would never have done, but I didn’t know for sure until just now, when you willingly cared for Neal in my absence. It would’ve been so easy for you to just hand him off but instead you took care of him.”
Elizabeth sat up straighter before grabbing his hand and looking into his eyes.
“I made a huge mistake breaking up with you, I knew that Neal was just acting out because he was scared of you being like them and I put aside my own happiness because I didn’t want him to feel scared or uncomfortable. I am willing to start our relationship back up again, but only if you are ready to take care of Neal and love him unconditionally. I want him to have a positive father figure, all he has now is Mozzie who’s more of a big brother with a bad influence.”
Peter couldn’t help but smile at that last part, he could easily picture Mozzie trying to lure Neal into whatever shady business he was doing.
When it came to the more serious part of her words, he was surprised that he didn’t have to think twice about his decision.
At first the thought of Elizabeth having a son almost scared him away but now the kid had really grown on him and now he just saw Neal as an extra bonus.
“I want a relationship with you and with Neal.”
Those words were enough for Elizabeth and she threw her arms around him and he was quick to hug back.
Elizabeth had a dark past but Peter swore that he would do everything in his power to make sure that both her and Neal’s future would be as bright as possible.

After the talk Elizabeth was exhausted, which was totally understandable considering that just a couple of hours ago she was still kidnapped, and she went to bed early.
Peter stayed up and watched an old action movie until he was tired enough to go to bed as well, he let Satchmo out in the yard for a last chance to do his business, before they both went upstairs.
The dog settled on the dog bed while Peter brushed his teeth and then crawled into the bed where Elizabeth was already fast asleep.
He was filled with an indescribable, warm feeling as he was finally in his bed without the space next to him feeling empty and cold.
Peter started to drift off, with a smile on his face, when a sudden sound brought him back to full alertness.
It was the creaking that the door made when you opened it, and it was followed by small footsteps.
“Mommy?”
A soft, quiet voice called out and despite it being so quiet, it managed to break through Elizabeth’s slumber.
“Yes, baby?”
Elizabeth answered before Neal quietly told her that he had a nightmare and asked if he could stay
with her. She turned around to look at Peter but before she could even voice the question, he patted the space between him and Elizabeth. “Come here, bud.” The kid immediately climbed up on the bed and plopped down in between them. His mother was quick to wrap her arms around him and pull him close to her in a comforting embrace. Neal put his head on her chest and it didn’t take long for the child to fall asleep to the sound of his mother’s heartbeat. Elizabeth gave him a tired smile and mumbled “thank you” before she fell asleep as well. Peter stayed awake for a couple of minutes just to look at Elizabeth and Neal, while his body was filled with that warm feeling again. He heard Satchmo move from his bed to the floor next to Peter, so he turned around and looked down at the dog with a smile. “We’re lucky aren’t we boy?” Peter whispered to the dog while he reached down and petted the dog’s soft head. Satchmo let out a soft whine, as to answer his question and Peter chuckled before he too fell asleep, with the wonderful, warm feeling still lingering in his body.
Hello again people!
I'm sorry for the late update.
Long story short (and without bothering you with my problems), I just wanted to say that I am in a pretty bad place mentally right now and I'm really struggling to see the meaning with everything, sadly that also includes that I'm not really seeing the point of me writing my fics.
That being said, I'm not going to give up on my fics but the updates may take longer depending on my mental state.
Motivating comments is appreciated but of course in no way necessary.

A note for this fic is that I couldn't get any good ideas, so this is more or less another filler chapter, hopefully you won't mind.

CHAPTER 15

Peter was awakened by a sharp poke in his side and he groaned before he twisted his body away from whatever was poking him.
“Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter, Peter.”
His name was whispered several times and he let out another groan as he realized that the 6-year-old was not going to let him go back to sleep.
He opened his eyes and looked at the boy, who was leaning over him while looking like he was about to burst from excitement.
Where did children even get all that energy from, and why couldn't they at least share it?
“What?”
He asked, apparently too loud because Neal put a finger over his mouth and hushed him.
“Don't shush me.”
Peter said, a little grumpy from being woken up this early in the morning, a look on the clock told him that it was a whole hour before the alarm went off.
Neal ignored him and instead he looked over his shoulder to make sure that Elizabeth was still fast asleep.
“I wanna make mommy breakfast.”
Some of the grumpiness disappeared when Neal explained himself, it was very sweet of the kid to want to make his mother breakfast, he just wished that the idea hadn't entered his mind so damn early.

They ended up making Swedish pancakes with strawberry jam and a bowl with a simple fruit salad, since Elizabeth loved both of them according to the boy.
They decided to make it a breakfast in bed so Peter placed the food and a cup of newly brewed coffee on a tray before he carefully carried it upstairs.
Neal went ahead and peeked into the room to see if the smells of pancakes had woken her up, but found that she was still sleeping like a baby.
Neal jumped up on the bed and crawled over to his mother, gently shaking her shoulder.
“Mommy wake up!”
Elizabeth woke up with a start, her brain programmed to recognize her son's voice even if she was in
a deep sleep.
“What's wrong, sweetie?”
She immediately asked in a tired but worried tone, thinking that Neal had woken her up because something had happened.
Peter chose that moment to gently place the tray on her lap and Elizabeth looked up at him in surprise.
“We made you breakfast!”
The child exclaimed and pointed at the tray, where they had managed to make the food look picture worthy.
Tears welled up in Elizabeth's eyes as she kissed Neal on the forehead and thanked him.
She then turned to Peter and motioned for him to lean down, which he did without any hesitation, and she placed a gentle kiss on his cheek.
The kiss caused the 6-year-old to scrunch up his face in disgust, but he quickly stopped when he received a pointed look from his mother.

Even if the breakfast was meant for Elizabeth, while the boys would eat downstairs, they all ended up sharing it, and Peter was once again hit by that warm feeling.
Neal put some jam on Elizabeth's nose and she tried to reach it with her tongue to lick it off which caused the boy to let out those adorable giggles.
He smiled like an idiot when he watched them, it was so incredibly easy for him to imagine a life with them, and so easy to imagine an alternative universe where they were a family.
The thoughts filled him with an indescribable happiness, but of course the good feelings couldn't last forever.
As soon as Elizabeth left the bed to go to the bathroom Neal started to glare at him.
“I don't want you to date her.”
Neal repeated the words from yesterday but at least this time Peter didn't wonder why he was against it.
“You could date someone else.”
The kid suggested and Peter just sighed.
“Neal, I don't want to date someone else.”
He frowned at him, not at all understanding that Peter only had eyes for Elizabeth and no one else.
“You could date Diana instead, she's nice.”
“Oh believe me I'm not her type.”
Neal opened his mouth to protest but quickly closed it again when Elizabeth returned.
“What are you boys talking about?”
“Nothing.”
Neal answered before jumping off the bed and walking to the door, giving Peter a last glare before he left the room.
“Elizabeth, I don't want to pressure you but maybe you should talk to him about us.”
She sighed before promising to sit down and have a talk with him later.

Peter didn't really want to leave the house and go to work, his mind kept replaying different kind of scenarios where Neal and Elizabeth got hurt and kidnapped.
He really wanted to stay at home and protect them, but he had to go to work so that they could, hopefully, catch this guy soon.
In the end catching Scarface was the best way to protect them, even if it felt almost impossible to say goodbye and walk out the door.
He didn't leave them all alone though, he had placed two agents outside the house, one in a car in the front and one watching the backyard.
Despite that, he kept worrying and he called both the agents and Elizabeth every single time he got a minute over.
The day felt impossibly long but it finally ended and Peter rushed to his car. It felt good, knowing that there was someone waiting for him when he arrived home. Sure, Satchmo had always made him feel welcomed home but the thought of not only an excited dog but a beautiful woman and her child greeting him made that warm, wonderful feeling come back. When he walked through the door though he was only greeted by a surprisingly calm Satchmo, he learned why the dog wasn't as excited as usual when he walked into the living room and felt the tension in the room. Satchmo didn't like it when humans fought or when there were tension between them and he preferred to stay away. When the dog had greeted his master, he walked up the stairs to escape it. Neal was on the floor, and based on his clenched fists and the tears rolling down his very red cheeks he was in the middle of a temper tantrum. Elizabeth was sitting by the table, head in her hands, and he couldn't tell if she was sad or frustrated or maybe both. “What's going on here?” He asked, in a calm voice, but received no answer from any of them. Neal got up from the floor and suddenly his anger was directed at Peter, and he instantly realized why the kid was so upset. Elizabeth had done as she promised, she had sat down and told him that they were going to give it another shot, and Neal had, as expected, not taken it that well. The boy suddenly started to yell at Peter, but the agent couldn't really understand everything since the kid was so upset that he kept stumbling over his words and all that came out of his mouth was an incoherent mess. He did however hear four, loud and clear words that left the 6-year-old's mouth. “I hate you, Peter!” The kid was obviously trying to get a reaction out of him, trying to get him to show his “bad side” just like the other men, based on the challenging look in his eyes. Peter could however see something else in his eyes too, he saw fear and that's why he didn't take any of Neal's angry words to heart. The boy was terrified of ending up in a bad, abusive situation again and Peter couldn't really do anything but show the kid that he wasn't like them, show him that he was better than them. “I wish you were dead!” Neal said with an angry, challenging voice and Peter had to admit that those words stung a little even if he knew that Neal was just trying to get a rise out of him, trying to make him show that he was just as bad as the others. “That's enough.” Both Neal and Peter froze at the low, threatening tone Elizabeth used and Peter was glad that it wasn't directed at him. That tone scared the living daylight out of him. “Stupid mommy.” Neal said in a low voice because apparently the kid had a death wish. Peter saw the anger in her eyes and for a second he thought that he would have to stop Elizabeth from strangling her own child. “Neal, go up to the guest room and don't come out until you're ready to be nice again!” The order was in that same terrifying tone and Peter didn't even want to know what would happen if Neal decided to defy her. “Fine!” Neal yelled, sticking his tongue out at his mother before stomping up the stairs while muttering quietly to himself. As soon as her son left, Elizabeth sat down again and the anger seemed to transform into sadness. Peter didn't hesitate before rushing over and putting his arms around her, promising her that he would get over it and it was all going to be okay.
At least he hoped that it would all be okay.
Hello again people!
I just want to say thanks for the comments/kudos and especially thanks to the support I have gotten, it's amazing how some strangers on the internet can really brighten up my day so thanks.
A couple of weeks ago I moved to my very own apartment which is both good cause it gives me the peace and quiet I need for my writing but it has also been really bad for my mental health.
On a more positive note, I'm getting a cat this Saturday (a cat that happens to be one of the kittens our family cat gave birth too) and I'm really excited for his arrival.
I'm also very inspired in general right now so I'm hoping to update this story again in maybe a week or so.
Okay I'm going to stop ramble about my life so you can read the story.
Thanks for reading :)

Chapter 16

It was very hard for him to comfort Elizabeth and make her believe that it was okay, especially since she kept trying to apologize for Neal's words as if she was directly responsible for what her kid said and did.
Peter guessed that her ex-boyfriend was the reason for her being so used to apologizing. They had sounded like the kind of people who thought that misbehaving children always equaled bad parents.
Peter, however knew that it wasn't always the case, it had been one of the first things he had learned after all; that kids could be both adorable little angels and horrifying little demons.
“Elizabeth, it's okay.”
Peter promised her for probably the 100th time, but Elizabeth didn't listen to him.
“I'm sorry I should have.”
He interrupted her by gently grabbing her shoulders and making her look at him with those stunning, blue eyes.
“You're a good mother, Elizabeth.”
Her beautiful eyes filled with tears again and there was something about the look on her face that made him believe that no one had ever told her that before, and he made a promise to himself that he would tell her that every single time that she needed to hear it.
Elizabeth gave him a gentle kiss before she started to wipe away the tears.
It seemed as if his words had finally made Elizabeth stop apologizing and realize that Peter was in no way blaming her for her son's behaviour.
“I'm going upstairs to talk to Neal.”
“Are you sure about that, Peter? I'm pretty sure that he's still mad.”
“I know but I still want to talk to him.”
She gave him a look that yet again told him that she didn't think that it was a good idea at all, but then she still wished him good luck before he walked upstairs to face the little rascal.

After knocking several times without receiving an answer, Peter opened the door and fully expected to see the kid lying on the bed, sulking but instead he was just met by an empty room.
His heart started to beat faster in his chest while he stepped inside the room, trying to convince himself that the child was probably just hiding and there was no need for panic.

“I come in peace.”

Peter said, just in case the child was hiding in order to do a sneak attack or something like that.

“Neal, I just want to talk to you.”

He continued when no boy was seen nor heard, and when he yet again received no answer he started to check every possible hiding spot in the room but came up empty.

The panic started to set in but he tried to calm himself down by reminding himself that this was Neal, was that kid ever where he was supposed to be?

Peter walked out of the room and started to check every other room, but Neal wasn't in the bathroom, he wasn't under Peter's bed and he wasn't hiding in the hallway closet.

It wasn't until he had checked out every single place that could hid a six-year-old, that he was forced to realize that Neal wasn't there and now he had to walk downstair and tell Elizabeth that her son had somehow gone missing.

Elizabeth smiled at him when he rejoined her in the kitchen and he really wished that he wasn't forced to take that dazzling smile away.

“How did it go?”

Peter took a deep breath which caused Elizabeth to tense, sensing that something was up.

“What did he do?”

“What?”

Elizabeth's voice was filled with disbelief, she was probably thinking that he must have heard him wrong.

“I checked everywhere but he was not there.”

Elizabeth's face went completely blank for a couple of seconds as she realized that she had heard him right and that her beloved little child was really gone.

Then she started to move, she bolted up the stairs and he could hear her call out for Neal as she ran through the different rooms, first she called his name in a very sweet, loving tone, then a stern one and then finally a desperate one.

Peter was just about to go upstairs again when he was struck by a sudden realization.

He looked around him and found that Neal wasn't the only one that was absent, the golden retriever was nowhere to be seen.

Had they really been so caught up with the crying and the comforting that they hadn't noticed the disappearance of both the kid and the dog?

“Satchmo, come here boy!”

He called out but the usual sound of claws on wooden floor wasn't heard.

“Satchmo, do you want to go for a walk?”

Nothing and no one could come between Satchmo and his walk, even if the dog had been trapped somewhere he would have been howling by now, and the absence of a howl was the ultimate proof that the dog was really gone as well.

The only ways out of the house, that didn't evolve getting a tiny six-year-old to lift a 30 kg dog out the window, was the front door and the back door.

Since Elizabeth and Peter had been sitting by the back door, the only option left was that Neal and Satch had managed to sneak out the front door and done so completely unnoticed by the adults.

Peter rushed out the front door, looking around him as he crossed the street to talk to the FBI agent that was still watching the house, in case Scarface decided to pay a visit.

The agent rolled down the window and smiled at him.

“Good afternoon, agent Burke.”

“Did you see Neal and Satchmo leave the house?”

He asked, not wasting any time on greetings.
“Yeah they walked out just a couple of minutes ago. I asked the kid if he was supposed to be outside alone and he said that you guys had allowed him to walk the dog around the block.”

“And you believed him?”

The agent's face suddenly turned a shade of red as he realized how irresponsible it would be to allow the small child to walk a big dog all on his own, even if it was just around the block. All it would take was one little squirrel, another dog or any other distractions for Satchmo to pull and send Neal flying to the ground.

“They walked that way.”

The agent informed him with a point of his finger before Peter hurried inside to inform the worried, sobbing mother what had happened.

Elizabeth decided to stay in the house in case her precious baby came back while Peter got into the car, hoping to find Neal and Satchmo before anyone else did.
Yay I managed to actually get an update out in a week like I hoped :D
For those of you who wants to know I have a cat now, he's a longhaired white cat with
the greenest eyes I've ever seen and his name is Tellus.
He is not a fan of my fics though because he always tries to stop me from writing them
:P

CHAPTER 17

It felt like he spent hours circling the neighbourhood, trying to spot the missing six-year-old and the
agent's loyal companion.
Peter didn't find them though which could mean everything from the kid avoiding roads that would
be visible from a car to the kid had been kidnapped.
The agent really hoped that it was the first option, the last thing they needed right now was yet
another kidnapping.
Eventually he was forced to give up and returned to his house, glaring at the agent in the car as he
passed by.
The agent bowed his head in shame and rightfully so.
First of all it had been very irresponsible for him to trust the child so easily and without asking the
adults if Neal was really telling the truth.
Second of all it was irresponsible of him to let Neal, a defenseless boy that he was supposed to help
to protect, out of his sight.
It should have been obvious that he needed to follow the kid since an unsupervised kid needed more
protection that the two adults in the house, especially since one of them was a federal agent.

Peter could hear Elizabeth sobbing as soon as he opened the front door and the sound was truly
heartbreaking.
He suddenly heard a bang and rushed over to the kitchen table where Elizabeth was located.
The agent looked around the room, trying to locate any threat before seeing that the sound had been
caused by Elizabeth throwing her phone, luckily a more tolerable old button phone and not a
smartphone, against the wall.
“He isn't picking up, why won't he pick up?!”
She said in between the heartwrenching sobs.
“Who?”
“Mozzie, I need him but he won't pick up.”
Peter didn't answer her, instead he just put his arms around the worried mother and did his best to
calm her down before she had a panic attack or something.
It took a while but eventually he managed to get her calm, well as calm as a mother with a missing
child could be.
“Elizabeth, do you have any idea where Neal would go?”
“No, I just know that there are some places where he and Mozzie use to go.”
Peter nodded, now understanding why it had been such a big deal that Mozzie wasn't answering his
phone.
“And you got no idea where?”
“Only Mozzie and Neal knows.”
Peter sighed, wondering where the peculiar man would go with the boy.
He wasn't at all worried about the man doing something creepy, he was more worried about what kind of skills the man was teaching the boy behind his mother's back.
The agent's thoughts were interrupted when Elizabeth suddenly sat up straight and looked at Peter who could have sworn that he could see a lightbulb turn on over her head.
“\textquote{I think I know where he is.}”

As soon as Elizabeth told him about her revelation, he felt the urge to hit himself for no thinking about it earlier.
It just made perfect sense, Neal was scared and upset about the whole situation so of course he would go to a place where he felt safe.
Unless something had happened along the way, the boy should have reached his destination by now which caused Peter and Elizabeth to rush to the car and then speed to their destination.
Just because Neal felt safe there it didn't mean that it was a safe place to be, it was actually quite the opposite.
Peter lost count of how many traffic laws he broke but he quite frankly couldn't care less about that at the moment.
Elizabeth got out of the car before it had even fully stopped and Peter had to really make an effort to catch up with her.
They ran up the stairs, ignoring the menacing creeks the staircase made under their feet, and they didn't stop until they reached the door.
Peter made a gesture for Elizabeth to stay back before he lifted his gun, thankful that he hadn't gotten the chance to lock it away after work and carefully opened the unlocked door, hoping to find just the child and the dog in there and no one else.

The apartment that Elizabeth and Neal called their home was luckily free from any bad guys, the only ones there were the two missing loved ones.
Neal was curled up on the bed fast asleep, the young child probably completely exhausted from walking all the way here and Satchmo was lying next to him, with one of the boy's arms draped over his body.
The dog wagged his tail at the sight of his master but he didn't move because he didn't want to disturb the sleeping youngling.
Peter smiled as he realized that his previous thoughts about Satchmo getting distracted and pulling the kid to the ground was an impossible scenario.
Even if a six-year-old walking the big dog alone was still dangerous, he knew that no distraction would have made Satchmo pull too hard.
The dog had taken a liking to Neal and that meant that he would never have allowed the kid to be hurt and especially not because of him.
Elizabeth rushed over to the bed and sat down before pulling the sleeping child into her arms.
The motion cause Neal to start waking up and when he became aware of the fact that someone was holding him, he began to thrash around in panic.
“\textquote{It's okay, sweetie. It's okay, it's mommy. It's just mommy.}”
Her soft voice and comforting voice made Neal stop his struggles and instead he threw his arms around his mother's neck and leaned his head against her shoulder.
Elizabeth just sat there, holding her boy, for a couple of minutes while the dog jumped off the bed and went to greet his owner.
Elizabeth's face changed from relieved to stern before she put the boy down on the bed again and took his small hands in hers.
“What's our first rule, Neal?”
The boy didn't answer, instead he just hung his head in shame.
His mother let go off her son's hands and instead she placed one of her hands under Neal's chin and gently forced his head up so that he was looking at her again.
“What is our first and most important rule?”
She repeated and Neal answered her in a low, guilty voice.
“We never leave each other. We stick together no matter what.”

Peter felt tears starting to gather in his eyes, that rule perfectly showed the strong bond that they shared and also told him how important it was for them to always stick together, even in bad situations like the struggle with the ex-boyfriends and the obvious but never mentioned economic struggle Elizabeth had.

“You’re not allowed to just leave me like that, Neal.”
That sentence was delivered with so much emotion that showed just how much Neal simply taking off had hurt her.
“I’m sorry, mommy.”
Neal apologized and threw his arms around her again.
“I just wanted to go home.”
“I know, honey, but we can’t be here it’s not safe.”
“That’s why I brought Satchmo along.”
Neal looked back at Peter, acknowledging his presence for the first time since they had arrived.
“Sorry for stealing your dog.”
Peter just smiled and told him that it was okay, he guessed that both he and Elizabeth preferred this option in front of the kid being all alone.
“Listen, Neal, I am the parent here so I get to decide where we live, alright?”
Neal nodded and Elizabeth kissed the top of his head while mumbling.
“You’re grounded until you’re 30.”
Peter smiled at the interaction before the sudden sound of footsteps was heard outside the door and he quickly pulled out his gun again.
Elizabeth saw his movement and tightened her grip around her child.
The door opened and Peter pointed his gun at the man who automatically took a step back before giving the agent an unimpressed look.
“Please suit, can we meet just once without you waving your gun in my face?”
I planned to get this update written much earlier but then Sweden was given the hottest summer in over 200 years and my brain practically melted. That being said any mistakes made is the weather’s fault :)

Also I was accepted into a writing course at the university and it’s thanks to my fanfiction writing, and all the motivating words from readers, that I had the motivation to apply to it so I just want to say a big thank you for giving me confidence in my writing :)

I have to admit that I completely forgot that why I brought Mozzie into the mix in the last chapter so I had to improvise and wrote the first idea that popped up in my mind. Hopefully you will like it anyways :)
Peter had been skeptical to the idea and he wasn't sure if it had been Elizabeth's puppy eyes, Neal jumping up and down while saying please a million times or a combination of them both that had finally caused him to cave.

Mozzie even ended up riding in the car with them even if he looked like a caged animal the whole ride.

As they arrived at the townhouse, Neal immediately grabbed Mozzie's hand and dragged him along for a tour since the man had only seen the kitchen and living room at his previous visit.

The sport bag was left by the door and even if Peter felt the urge to open it and look inside, a pointed look from Elizabeth made him leave it alone and respect the man's privacy.

While Neal showed Mozzie around with Satchmo eagerly following them, Peter and Elizabeth walked into the kitchen to start dinner.

Peter let Elizabeth take control and helped with things that he couldn't screw up, such as peeling the potatoes, cutting the vegetables and setting the table.

While he was setting the table he heard Neal loudly whisper to Mozzie.

“Sometimes mommy kisses Peter and it's gross.”

“Hey!”

Peter called out and looked at the kid with a faked stern look but the boy just started to giggle.

The agent was amazed by how the child had managed to go from the angry kid who just took the dog and left to the kid who was loudly giggling, looking like he had never been happier.

Soon Elizabeth announced that dinner was served and while walking the short distance between the couch and the kitchen table, Neal announced that he wanted to sit next to Mozzie probably fifty times.

Then once seated at the table the six-year-old started to loudly protest when he wasn't allowed to have wine just like the three adults had.

Mozzie actually looked open to the idea to give the kid wine while Elizabeth, of course, wasn't.

Peter started to massage his temples as the child just got louder and louder, getting closer to a full-on tantrum for every second that passed.

Elizabeth finally managed to defuse the situation by giving the boy some strawberry lemonade in a wine glass.

The red liquid looked almost identical to the red wine they were drinking and that seemed to be good enough for Neal.

Peter realized that the boy had never cared about the wine in the beginning, he had just wanted to copy Mozzie.

There was an obvious admiration in Neal's eyes when he looked up at Mozzie and Peter thought back to when Elizabeth had talked about Mozzie not being a father figure to Neal but a big brother figure.

Neal looked up to Mozzie and copied him in a way that younger siblings used to do, which scared Peter a little bit since he didn't want to see Elizabeth's son grow up to be the same kind of shady character as Mozzie was.

After dinner they decided to play a game, mostly because Neal had flashed his puppy eyes, while eating some ice cream for dessert.

Peter didn't really have any board games suitable for younger children so eventually they decided to play Trivial Pursuit where Neal and Mozzie was a team since it didn't seem fair for a six-year-old to be on his own against three adults.

He had expected that the boy would be mostly rolling the dice and reading some questions but he was surprised by how many questions Neal could actually answer, even if most of them was in the culture category.

“Which artist is credited with developing linear perspective?”

Peter asked, certain that the duo wouldn't know the answer but he was yet again surprised by the child.

“Brunelleschi.”
Neal answered with a smug smile, his pronunciation sounded a little off but since he was only six Peter had to ignore that.
“Correct.”
He muttered and Neal turned to Mozzie and gave him a high five.
Peter turned to Elizabeth who shrugged her shoulders, just like she had at every question Neal had answered.
“I don't know where he has picked that stuff up.”
“Are you sure they're not cheating?”
Elizabeth just laughed at him before turning her attention to the duo who continued their seemingly never-ending streak.

The duo ended up winning and as they were cheering over their victory, Peter crossed his arms while quietly wondering how he could've ended up in third place.
“Looks like someone is a sore loser.”
Elizabeth said teasingly and placed a gentle kiss on his cheek which caused all irritation to just disappear into thin air.
“Time for bed, sweetie.”
She told Neal as she started to put the pieces and cards back into the box.
“Mommy nooo.”
Neal protested and Elizabeth glared at her son and Neal glared back.
It all turned into a staring contest that none of the others dared to get involved in.
It felt like the two stared at each other for an eternity, Neal had clearly inherited Elizabeth's stubbornness, but finally Neal realized that he couldn't win and adverted his eyes.
“Can you read a story for me, Moz?”
He asked his friend and the man agreed and they went upstairs while Elizabeth went to clean up in the kitchen before she would join the pair upstairs.
Peter walked to the front door, planning on taking Satchmo for a walk but stopped dead in his tracks when he spotted the big sport bag.
Elizabeth was busy in the kitchen, Mozzie was upstairs with Neal, his bad feeling had returned and his fingers were itching to open it.
He should have respected Mozzie's privacy, he knew that, but he just couldn't stop himself from sneaking closer to the bag and quietly opening it.
Inside it was a small white, cardboard tube, the kind you would use to store a rolled-up poster in.
Why would Mozzie have a backpack with nothing but a tube in it?
He should let it go but he couldn't so he grabbed the tube and opened it and just like he suspected there was something in the tube.
Peter took it but instead of finding a rolled-up poster, he found a rolled-up painting.
With shaky hands he unrolled it and his heart sank into his stomach as he recognized the painting.
It was a stolen painting but not just any stolen painting.
It was one of the paintings that had been stolen by none other than Scarface himself.
"Peter, what are you doing?"
He jumped as he heard Elizabeth's voice behind him and he turned around to see that she was looking at him with a disapproving look.
She was obviously not happy over the fact that he had been looking inside Mozzie's bag but at the moment Peter didn't care what she thought.
"Look at this, Elizabeth."
He told her and showed her the painting and she gave him a confused look, not recognizing the painting.
"It's one of the paintings stolen by Scarface."
Peter told her and he could see how she wasn't sure how to react to his words.
"Are you sure?"
"Yes."
"Well, I'm sure Mozzie has an explanation."
Elizabeth was quick to defend Mozzie and he could see in her face that there wasn't any suspicion at all.
She didn't believe that Mozzie was related to Scarface in any way.
Peter however suspected the worst and several different theories popped up in his head, everything from Mozzie working with the man to Mozzie somehow being Scarface.
Then before Peter had the chance to hide the painting, footsteps were heard and Mozzie suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs, his eyes fixated on the painting in Peter's hands.
The paranoia was evident on the man's face and Peter placed the painting back in the bag before slowly raised his hands, showing that he meant him no harm.
"I just want to talk to you, Mozzie."
Mozzie shook his head, obviously not trusting the agent, before he backed away from the stairs and out of their sight.
"Please Mozzie."
Elizabeth called out and her friend did return shortly after that, but he didn't return alone.
Mozzie had his arm around a very confused looking Neal's throat and even if the grip wasn't hurting the kid at the moment, Mozzie just needed to apply a little more pressure to choke the boy.
Peter glanced over at Elizabeth who looked both shocked and scared, not at all expecting this reaction from her friend.
"Please Mozzie, Peter's not a bad guy here."
She tried to reason but the man just wouldn't believe her.
"He's a fed, Elizabeth!"
It was sad to see how the paranoia had poisoned Mozzie and how he just couldn't trust the agent, no matter what they said.
"I just want to talk."
Peter repeated but his words fell on deaf ears.
"I'm going to leave this house and if you try to stop me, Neal is going to suffer."
The threat was carried out in a shaky voice and it was clear that it was not a threat that Mozzie wanted to make.
Mozzie did care for Neal, Peter remembered how Mozzie had threatened him on the schoolyard the first time they had met and he didn't think that the man was actually capable of harming the kid that he had been so protective of.
At the same time, he knew what desperation could do to a man so when Mozzie made it down the stairs, he made sure that both him and Elizabeth backed away to give him some space.
Peter had to take this seriously, in case there was even the slightest chance that Mozzie would make good on his threat.

Mozzie grabbed his bag containing the stolen painting and opened the door, then once he was outside he released his grip on the boy.

“I’m sorry, kid.”

He said and ruffled the boy’s hair before he took off into the night, leaving the three remaining people frozen in place, trying to understand what had just happened.

Neal was the first one to move, the child turned around and looked at his mother with big, sad eyes before he looked over at Peter and the sadness was suddenly transformed into anger.

The six-year-old lounged towards him and the agent didn't even get a chance to protect himself from the sharp kick on his shin.

“I hate you!”

The boy cried out while trying to kick him again but this time Peter was prepared for it and could easily protect himself.

“You scared Mozzie away! I hate you!”

Neal yelled as Elizabeth grabbed him before he could try to kick the agent once more.

Once in his mother's arms, the kid broke down and started to sob while hugging her tightly.

Elizabeth looked up at Peter, her blue eyes filled with unshed tears and mouthed “it's not your fault.”

It took a little over two hours for Elizabeth to get the kid to calm down and then get him into bed again and when she returned downstairs she was clearly exhausted, both physically and mentally.

She sat down next to Peter on the couch and he carefully put an arm around her, not sure if she was mad at him or not.

When the arm wasn’t rejected, he pulled her slightly closer and kissed her on the top of her head.

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have looked through the bag. I didn't know that it would be that bad and I didn't know it would put Neal in danger.”

“It's not your fault.”

Elizabeth answered and looked up at him.

“I don't know why Mozzie has that painting but I know that he just got spooked and he would never actually hurt Neal.”

She really believed that Mozzie was innocent and Peter really hoped that she was right and that the man wasn’t connected to Scarface.

“Neal doesn't actually hate you, he's just upset and confused about Mozzie's actions.”

Elizabeth explained and Peter nodded, he had started to understand the kid more and this was far from the first time that the boy had been angry at him.

After all, it had only been a couple of hours since the child had been mad the last time and told Peter that he hated him and wished that he was dead.

He sighed and just wished for this whole Scarface ordeal to be over soon so that they could catch a break and actually work on building their relationships and try to be a family.

They spent the rest of their evening watching TV together even if none of them could really focus on the movie since they were both lost in their thoughts.

“PETER WAKE UP!”

Peter woke up with a start, immediately sitting up and looking around the room, confused about what had woken him up.

“PETER!”

The sound came from downstairs and it only took him a second to identify the sound as Neal yelling and it sounded urgent.

He jumped out of bed and hurried downstairs, almost falling several times, and didn’t stop until he spotted the six-year-old, still dressed in his Batman pajamas, standing by the dining table with the dog by his side.

“What's going on, buddy?”
Peter asked as he looked around, trying to locate any threat.
He could swear that his heart completely stopped when instead of answering, the boy picked up a
note from the table.
Peter realized that Elizabeth wasn't here and now that he thought about it, she hadn't been in the bed
with him either.
He suddenly feared that she had been kidnapped again and this time they had been in the house
while they were asleep and no one had noticed, not even Satchmo or the FBI agent outside.
With shaking hands, he took the note from Neal and once he started to read he realized that Elizabeth
hadn't been kidnapped but that didn't mean that the note was something positive.
She had left.
Elizabeth had left the house and went to find Mozzie and she didn't know when she would be back.
Even if this meant that she wasn't tied up in a basement somewhere again, it meant that she was out
there alone without him being able to protect her and without any FBI agent watching her which
meant that she could be in danger.
Peter looked down at Neal and he saw that the kid was thinking the same thing as him.
Elizabeth might not return at all.
Chapter Notes

I'm sorry that this update took so long.
I wanted to update this much sooner but unfortunately life got in the way.
I've been forced to use all my writing inspo for my uni course, which is pretty boring at
the moment.
My brother also had a baby, which sadly for many reasons isn't directly a positive thing
for me.
My best friend more or less abandoned me and my mental health has been at an all time
low, my depression has made me sleep for 15-18 hours a day or to have completely
insomniac nights.

Warning, I did both write and edit this chapter while I was severely sleep deprived so I
do apologize if there are more errors than usual or if the “quality” is lower than usual.

As always, thank you for reading :)

CHAPTER 20

There was one thing that Elizabeth made very clear in her note and it was that he wasn't going to go
after her, instead she wanted him to stay and make sure that the kid was safe.
Despite these very clear instructions, Peter wasn't going to just sit at home and hope that the woman
he loved was going to make it back in one piece.
For all he knew Scarface or one of his men could've just been waiting to get to Elizabeth again and
she had given them a perfect opportunity.
He looked down at Neal, the wobbling of his lower lip revealing how close he was to bursting into
tears.
"I'm sure that your mother is fine."
He tried to reassure him but it was evident by the look that Neal gave him that the boy didn't believe
him.
Neal was smart enough to understand that his mom could possibly be in danger.
"I'm going after her, alright. I'm going to see if Diana or Jones can watch you."
"I wanna come with!"
Neal protested and Peter immediately shook his head.
It was one thing to go after her despite her telling him not to, but if he brought Neal along she would
be furious.
"Sorry kiddo, you're staying here where you're safe."
Peter answered and ruffled the boy's hair before he started to walk towards the stairs to get his
cellphone from upstairs.
"You don't know where to look."
He stopped dead in his tracks at Neal's words, realizing that the kid was right, Peter had no idea
where Mozzie used to go.
Peter turned around and saw the smug look on the child's face, he was very aware that he had the
upper hand here, and he sighed in defeat.
"Fine, go and get dressed but you're explaining this to your mother."
Peter checked out place after place, while Neal waited in the car, losing his hope more and more for every place that turned out to be empty. By the time Peter walked out of the last place, that Neal knew of, emptyhanded, they were both worried, agitated and feeling hopeless. "Are you sure that you don't know any other place?"

Peter asked as he got into the car again but Neal didn't know anywhere else. Defeated, they were forced to return back to the house where there was still no sign of Elizabeth.

Neal was clearly not happy with the result of the search because the first thing he did was to angrily kick the couch.

"Neal, I'm sure she's alright."

Peter repeated, even if he knew that the kid wouldn't believe him. "I don't care. I don't care if she's alright or not!"

"You don't mean that."

Neal turned around and faced him, big tears were rolling down his red cheeks.

"She left me! She said that we don't leave each other but she left!"

He yelled before pushing past Peter and running up the stairs.

Peter sighed and sat down on the couch, feeling just as angry at Elizabeth as Neal was. He fully understood that she cared a lot for Mozzie and that it was important for her to know the truth about him, but he could come up with a lot better options to reach Mozzie than to just leave. Even if he was a little honored that Elizabeth had trusted him enough to leave her most precious thing in the world with him, her son, he also couldn't help to be angry at her for leaving all the responsibility with him.

The two of them didn't have a good day, they spent most of the time just waiting for Elizabeth, unable to distract themselves from the worry.

They ate dinner in silence, none of them having an appetite and just ate because they had to. Eventually it was time for Neal to go to bed and there was still no sign of Elizabeth, which made them fear the worst.

"I'll wait up for her and I'll wake you if she comes home, alright?"

Peter told Neal as he tucked the worried six-year-old into the bed and promised that if she wasn't back by tomorrow, he would get all the backup he could and look for her again.

He walked downstairs and sat down on the couch, wiping the tears away from his cheeks.

The last time he had at least known that she was alive but now he had no idea where she was or if she was still breathing and that scared him.

It didn't help that he was an FBI agent because that just made him assume the worst.

He turned on the TV, even if it was more of a background noise than something that he was actively watching.

Peter jumped when he felt something touch his shoulder and he opened his eyes, realizing that he must have fallen asleep.

He looked to his side, expecting to see Elizabeth or even some bad guy pointing a gun at him but instead he saw Neal standing next to the couch.

It was obvious by the kid's shaking that he was scared and upset.

"Hey buddy, you okay?"

He greeted in a soft voice but the kid didn't answer, instead he just climbed up on his lap and leaned against his chest.

Peter put his arm around the small body and hugged him.

"I didn't mean it. I do want mommy to be alright."

The child said with a sniffle and Peter hugged him even tighter.

"I know."

Neal seemed unable to fight the tears for any longer and his sniffling quickly turned to sobs.

Peter didn't know what else to do than to just hug him and rub his hand over his back, trying not to
Once Neal's crying died down, the child looked up at him again.
"I'm sorry Peter, I don't hate you."
Peter gave him a small smile, he had almost forgot that it hadn't been that long since the kid had yelled at him.
At this point it was almost comical how often the kid seemed to change his mind about him.
"I'm not like them, Neal."
He said, unsure if Neal would know who he was referring to but judged by the way the kid adverted his eyes he knew.
Neal tensed up and it was clear that he was not comfortable with talking about the men that had come into their life and hurt both him and his mother.
"And I will spend the rest of my days proving it if I have to."
Peter continued and he wasn't lying, he was willing to do that, spend every day proving to Neal that he didn't need to be afraid of him, proving that he would never ever hurt him.
He must have fallen asleep again because he suddenly he was awoken yet again but this time it was by a kiss on his forehead.
He opened his eyes and saw Elizabeth standing there, looking down at him with a big smile.
Peter opened his mouth but before he had the chance to say something she hushed him and pointed next to him where Neal was lying down, fast asleep with his head on Peter's lap.
He looked around and realized that it was morning, meaning that Elizabeth had been gone for 24 hours.
It was a little tricky to get up and replace his lap with a pillow but eventually he did it and could go to the kitchen where Elizabeth was making coffee.
Before he could talk her, he had to throw his arms around her and hug her tight, just as a way to prove to himself that this was real and that she was really there.
"I'm sorry."
She said as the hug ended.
"I know it was stupid to leave but I've been talking to Mozzie and if he gets full immunity, he will tell you everything you need to know about Scarface."
Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say that I really appreciate all the kind comments, even if I'm not always responding (because I'm too socially awkward)
I do apologize for any mistakes or if any of the writing seems rushed.
I did rush to get this together since it's my birthday the 13th and I have decided to gift myself a week off from the stress of writing, social media and internet in general and just spend some time with my family, my friends and my beloved cat.

As always thank you so much for reading :)
He had known that Mozzie was important to the pair but calling him family was a big deal, so for their sake he decided to trust Mozzie.

It took a lot of time and a lot of discussing before his colleagues finally decided that they would take a chance and trust Mozzie as well.

Mozzie looked around the room nervously as he sat down on the kitchen chair. The man had flat out refused to go to the bureau so eventually they had decided to have the interrogation in Peter's house with Jones, Diana and Elizabeth there to listen as well since Mozzie had demanded that they weren't going to record his words and that Elizabeth would be there. Elizabeth had Neal sent upstairs but Peter could hear a low creak from the top of the stairs meaning that the boy was trying to slowly make his way down it to eavesdrop.

“How do I know that you haven't planted any bugs?”

Mozzie asked while his hands went under the table, feeling around for any potential bugs.

“Don’t worry Moz. There’s no bugs, I’ve checked.”

Elizabeth said, with enough confidence in her voice to make the paranoid man believe her lie.

“Alright then.”

Mozzie answered before nervously fidgeting in his seat. Elizabeth had told Peter that Mozzie was not at all comfortable with being a snitch, which was one of the reasons for his nervousness, and the only reason he had decided to tell the truth was because he was afraid that Scarface would go after Elizabeth again, or even worse that he would go after Neal. Mozzie took a deep breath before he started to speak with an uncharacteristic weak and shaky voice.

“Scarface doesn’t exist, not really.”

Peter gave the short man a skeptic look before looking back at Elizabeth who nodded at him, urging him to continue listening.

“Scarface is not a person, not the Scarface you know. The Scarface that you’ve been looking for is really a couple of different men with similar features. All of them in their 30s, around the same height, same body type, dark hair, dark eyes and a fake scar.”

Peter still felt very skeptical, a part of him wondered if Mozzie was just spouting conspiracies while another part had to admit that what Mozzie was telling him wasn’t entirely impossible. Most witnesses could only describe simple features like that and it was only Elizabeth that had gotten a good enough look of the man to create a police sketch.

“There's a man in charge of all of this, he's like a puppet master controlling everyone while he sits on the sidelines, never putting himself at risk. The men working for him are either payed or are blackmailed into working with him.”

Peter leaned back in his chair while he thought it over. If Mozzie was telling the truth, it was a pretty brilliant plan, the man controlling it would get away with several heists without ever risking himself getting caught.

It was the men working for him that risked getting caught and with the, probably, large amount of money payed or the blackmailing the men wouldn't give him up if they were caught.

“What's this guy's name?”

“Matthew Keller.”

Peter wrote down the name on a notepad so that they could see if they could find the guy in any police records.

“And how do you fit in, Mozzie? You do not exactly fit the Scarface profile.”

“Keller has several other people working for him as well. I have only worked a handful of jobs, been a distraction at the museums or doing other things, like hiding paintings until Keller locates a fence.”

That explained why Mozzie had been in possession of that painting. Mozzie didn't have much to say after that except that he knew of a place Keller used to be, but of course the man had several places so it wasn't even sure he would be at that location.

Peter got up from his chair and went outside for a whispered discussion with Jones and Diana and
eventually they all agreed that they would take a chance and believe Mozzie. Once inside they all grabbed their coats, ready to go to the bureau and convince the other agents to first look into Keller and then check the location out. As they walked towards the door, he could hear the stairs creek slightly as the small feet hurried to sneak up them again. “Don't eavesdrop, Neal. It's rude.” Peter called out before the three agents left the house, hoping that this Scarface nightmare would be over soon.

Chapter End Notes

I just want to point out yet again that I have completely forgot what my original plan was so at this point I'm just improvising, but hopefully you still like what I came up with.
The location Mozzie had sent them to was a normal looking house, not unlike the one where they had found Elizabeth. Peter had once again expected something a little more private or more remotely located but it seemed like these guys liked to hide in plain sight. His phone beeped and he took it and looked at the email that he had received. The email was from another agent and it had Keller's file attached. He opened it up and skimmed through it. Matthew Keller had been a person of interest or a suspect in over a dozen cases, all of them relating to art theft, forgeries and fraud but there had never been enough evidence to get him convicted, something that Peter hoped he could change now. He was staring at the picture of Keller, feeling nothing but hate for the man who according to Mozzie had been responsible for Elizabeth's kidnapping, when the passenger door opened and made him jump. "There's definitely something fishy going on in there." Diana told him. Even if he had decided to trust Mozzie, he had sent Diana to check out the house, just to make sure that they hadn't been sent to the wrong location and was about to barge in on some innocent, unexpecting family. "What are we gonna do, boss?" Diana asked and Peter chewed his lip while he thought about it. If there were even the slightest chance that Keller was in there, he wanted to take it. "Let's move in." He answered and Diana nodded.

On the count of three they burst through the door and surprised the two men that were sitting by a table, one of the smaller paintings laid out in front of them. One of the men put his hands up in defeat while the other one practically flew up from the chair and ran out the glassdoor leading to the backyard. He only made it a few meters before Diana, who had been quick on her feet, tackled him to the ground. With the help of another agent she brought the struggling man inside. Peter looked at the men and realized that none of them were Keller. He felt his heart drop as he realized that this might have been his only chance, Keller would sooner or later notice the men's absence and would probably be able to figure out what had happened to them. He would then hide somewhere, a place these men didn't know about. This all meant that Keller would be out there and Peter would have to continue to worry about Elizabeth and Neal's safety. He was thinking about all of this, the worry gnawing on him, when they heard a toilet flushing from upstairs and then the sound of a faucet running. A door opened, the sound of footsteps were heard and then the stairs creaked as someone walked down them. "What are you guys doing down here? It sounds like-" The man went silent as he saw all the agents while Peter smiled when he saw that the man was none other than Matthew Keller. The size of the house had made him hear the loud noise the agents had made as they barged in, but it hadn't been clear enough for Keller to identify the sound.
He glanced around as if he was looking for an escape route before he gave up and slowly put his hands up while giving Peter a calm smile.
"You win, Burke."
He said while an agent cuffed him.
"It's a cute boy your girl's got. You know I still have friends out there, maybe I should ask them to pay him a visit. It's Neal right?"
Peter knew that the man was just trying, and succeeding, to provoke him but that knowledge didn't stop the anger from taking over.
He would've lunged at the man if it hadn't been for Jones, who quickly noticed his anger and stepped in between the two men.
The other agents led the three men outside while Jones looked at Peter.
"You should go home."
"Jones I need to-"
"We'll handle it, okay? You should go home and update Elizabeth, she's probably worried."
Jones was right, he needed to update Elizabeth and he shouldn't be to close to this, at least not right now.
Keller seemed to know exactly what buttons to press and Peter didn't want to lose his cool and step over the line.
"Thanks Jones."
He patted the other agent on the shoulder before he walked out of the house.

As soon as he walked through the door, Elizabeth got up from the couch where she had been watching a movie with Neal.
"How did it go?"
She asked anxiously.
"We found Keller and two of his henchmen."
"Does that mean it's over, are we safe?"
"There's still a lot of work to be done and people to find but it should be over soon. With Keller arrested, you should be safe."
Elizabeth visibly relaxed, relieved that this whole thing would soon be a thing of the past.
Peter was really looking forward to closing the Scarface case, not only because it had been a long and difficult case but also because with Scarface out of the way he could focus on Elizabeth and Neal, he could focus on building a family with them.
"If we're safe can we go home?"
The boy asked from the couch, having heard their conversation.
Elizabeth looked over at Peter and the agent thought that this was his chance.
"I guess you could but I was thinking that maybe you guys could stay here."
"I don't like to be dependant on others."
Elizabeth immediately answered, assuming that he offered them to stay because he pitied her, that he felt sorry for her because she had bad economy and lived in a rundown apartment.
Sure, it was part of the reason, after all their apartment building looked like it was going to collapse any minute and he hated the thought of them living in an unsafe home, but he also offered because he wanted them close to him and make it easier for them to become the family he wanted them to be.
"I know that, you're one of the strongest women I know, El."
He told her and he was telling the truth.
It took a lot of strength to go through all the things she had and still be the kind, caring and hopeful person that she was, and it took a lot of strength to go through all that and still be able to raise her wonderful son all on her own.
Peter admired her for it, he certainly did but he also knew that he was able to help her, to get a weight of her shoulder, by sharing his home, his economy and by helping her with her child.
"I want you to stay here because I love you, Elizabeth. I love you more than anything else in the world and I want you here because my house is so cold an empty without you and Neal here. I want
to see you everyday, I want to see Neal everyday, I want to become a family and I want to-
He was cut off by Elizabeth who practically threw herself at him, hugging him tight as the tears ran down her cheek.
"I love you."
She whispered and kissed him.
"But mommy, I wanna go home."
Neal whined from the couch, ruining the moment.
Peter looked over at the kid, fearing that his protests would make Elizabeth decide to go back to their apartment.
Elizabeth let go of Peter and walked over to the couch, crouching in front of her son.
"I think that we're going to stay here, alright?"
"But mommy I don't wanna."
Neal whined and Peter could see the insecurity in the blue eyes.
The boy wasn't being difficult, he was just still insecure, still scared that Peter would turn out to be just like Mark, the guy that was so nice in the beginning before suddenly snapping and turning violent.
"It's going to be okay, sweet face."
She said before pulling the child into her arms, hugging him tight.
"I think Peter and Satchmo is the family that we always dreamed of."
Chapter 23

I finally got an update together yay!
I took a break from writing in January and was planning on updating my fics in February but then my mental health got even worse and I’ve been struggling with it ever since.
I appreciate all the kudos/comments I’ve gotten and they’ve been my motivation to get this together.
It might not be the best update but at least it’s an update :)

CHAPTER 23

After some crying and some convincing, Neal finally agreed to staying at the house but it was clear that he was only doing it for his mother’s sake.
Over the next couple of days the boy changed completely, he was suddenly always on edge and always making sure that he wasn’t too loud, too energetic or too annoying.
He could talk loudly and happily with Elizabeth but then Peter would walk into the room and he suddenly lowered his voice.
It was obvious that Neal was expecting Peter to turn violent now that they lived in the same house, just like Elizabeth’s ex Mark had suddenly snapped after three months of living together, and therefore he did his best to take up as little space as possible in order to not provoke Peter.
It truly broke Peter’s heart to see the boy change every time he walked into the room but he knew that there was nothing he could do about it.
Neal still didn’t believe his promise to never hurt him and even Elizabeth’s words fell on deaf ears.
All he could do was to keep showing the kid kindness and give him time to realize that this time it was different.

It was Saturday morning almost a week after they had accepted his offer to stay with him and Peter had just returned from his walk with Satchmo when Elizabeth walked down the stairs, looking apprehensive.
It would have been cute how much her worried face looked like her son’s if it wasn’t for the fact that he recognized her expression as her wanting to say or ask something but was scared of how he would react.
Sometimes he honestly considered to ask Jones and Diana to track John and Mark and then make them feel as afraid as they had made Elizabeth and Neal feel.
“What’s up, hon?”
He asked causing her to relax a bit and smile.
Peter had first called her “hon” the other day and it had just felt right so now it had become their go-to pet name for each other.
“I just talked to my boss at the museum and a co-worker couldn’t make it to their shift today. She asked me if I could work instead.”
“Do you feel ready to go back?”
He asked her in a concerned tone.
Even if Elizabeth had handled the whole kidnapping situation better than most, she still had nightmares and sometimes complete breakdown.
“Yeah, I just want things to go back to normal.”
Then I think you should do it.”
She gave him a nervous smile before asking the question who was the reason for her worry.
“Would you mind watching Neal? If not I could-”
“I would love to watch him.”
He interrupted and the relief spread over her face.
Despite the fact that Elizabeth trusted him and even if she knew that Peter cared about her son, she still showed the fear of inconveniencing him.
He couldn’t really blame her for it, once you had gotten used to thinking a certain way it was hard to just shake it off.
“Thank you! You’re the best.”
She gave him a quick kiss and told him that she loved him before she left the room to call her boss back.

Neal hadn’t been too happy over his mother going back to work and leaving him with Peter, at least based on the whining and the stomping Peter could hear from upstairs.
The kid tried to keep her from leaving by flashing her his big, blue puppy eyes but the mother stayed strong and left the house anyway.
As soon as she had left, the sulking boy sat down on the stairs and waited as if Elizabeth would suddenly change her mind and come back.
Peter decided to give Neal his space, so he sat down in front of the TV and watched some comedy show while once in a while glancing over at Neal.
It took a couple of minutes before the kid got bored and realized that him sitting on the stairs pouting wouldn’t make his mom return.
He left the staircase and grabbed some papers and crayons before sitting down at the kitchen table.
For a while they just sat there, Peter watching TV and Neal drawing.
It was a commercial for some baking appliance that gave him the idea to bake something.
Peter had very little experience of baking but he remembered how Neal had loved being in the kitchen when he had stayed with him before, and it would be nice to surprise Elizabeth when she came back.
He turned the TV off and walked over to Neal, noticing how the kid immediately tensed up.
“Hey buddy, I was thinking about baking something. What’s your mom’s favourite?”
Peter asked and for a moment he thought that he wouldn’t receive an answer but then he heard Neal answer him, barely audible.
“She likes chocolate muffins.”
That didn’t sound too complicated and he could remember Elizabeth buying some paper muffin cups last time they were at the supermarket.
“Thank you.”
Peter said before he walked into the kitchen.
After finding an easy recipe online he started to get the things he would need and just as he anticipated it didn’t take long before he saw that Neal was watching him.
“You wanna help me?”
The boy only thought about it for a couple of seconds before nodding and walking into the kitchen to help him.
At first the kid was quiet and just did what Peter asked him to do but then when Neal was going to mix all the ingredients using the electronic hand mixer, he accidentally put it on the highest speed which caused the mixture to splatter all over the counter and on both of them.
Neal immediately tensed up, clearly expecting to get hit or scolded, but when Peter just laughed the feat turned into surprise before he fully relaxed and even smiled.
After that the tension in the room disappeared and Neal even started to willingly talk to Peter and every time they made a mistake, like overfilling one of the muffin cups which caused it to fall and spill the batter, they both laughed about it.
Peter even put some chocolate batter on Neal’s nose and the kid quickly retaliated by putting even
When the muffins came out of the oven they smelled absolutely delicious and it was actually Neal who had to stop Peter from grabbing a muffin while it was still too hot. They waited until the muffins cooled down a bit before they did a taste test and high-fived as they both considered it utterly amazing.

It felt like forever before Satchmo rushed to the door which was an indication that Elizabeth was on her way.

“Why don’t you go get your mom while I get the muffins?”
Neal nodded eagerly and ran to the door to greet his mother while Peter grabbed the muffins and put them on a neat display on the kitchen counter.

“Mommy!”
Neal yelled as the door opened and judging by her surprised yelp the boy had probably thrown himself at her.

“Close your eyes, mommy!”

“What?”

“It’s a surprise.”

Soon the boy came back, more or less dragging Elizabeth along.

He stopped when he was in front of the counter where Peter had placed the muffins.

“You can look now!”

Elizabeth opened her eyes and looked truly surprised at the goodies in front of her.

“Chocolate muffins! My favourite.”

She exclaimed and reached for one while Neal more or less bounced from excitement next to her.

“Did you guys make these?”

Peter nodded and Elizabeth looked like she was about to cry.

She took a bite while the boys looked at her, excited to see what she thought of them.

“This might be the best muffins I’ve ever had.”

Elizabeth said and her son let out a happy squeal before Elizabeth hugged Neal and thanked him and the did the same with Peter.

Neal started to tell Elizabeth everything that they had done in the kitchen, including a very dramatic recreation of the hand mixer incident, and both of the adults notice how he happily babbled on despite the fact that Peter was in the room.

Monday soon came along and Elizabeth decided that it was time for Neal to return to school, something that the boy wasn’t too happy about.

Despite flashing his puppy eyes and begging her to let him stay home, Elizabeth managed to get the kid into Peter’s car so that he could drop the kid off on his way to work.

He also promised to pick him up since Elizabeth was going to work a later shift at the museum.

Peter dropped the boy off at school before going to work where they had gotten a new case, this one involving a theft of a rare diamond.

Time just flew by and soon Peter found outside the school again.

He had arrived to the school late so he had expected Neal to be waiting for him but to his surprise there was no kid waiting at the pick up spot.

Thinking that his teacher might have let him wait in the classroom he got out of the car and walked towards the building.

He came to a halt as he saw three very familiar kids and he got a really bad feeling in his stomach.

Peter remembered the last times he had been on the school’s playground with Neal, the time when those three boys had been mean to Neal and then the time when Neal had hid with Mozzie in the playhouse that said boys were now circling like vultures around their dying pray.

Peter started to march towards them and as one of the boys noticed him they scattered, something that only intensified the bad feeling he felt.

When he reached the playground he peered through the small window on the side house and saw the boy he was looking for, sitting and trembling while holding onto the door handle with all of his
might in order to make it hard to get the door open. 

Peter walked over to the door and knocked on it. 

"Neal, it’s me.”

He called out which caused the door to swing open and to his surprise the six-year-old threw himself into his arms.

Peter hugged the shaking boy tightly before he pulled him back to be able to see his face and was met by two blue eyes filled with fear and a bleeding nose.

He felt a sudden urge to chase after those boys but knew that they were far away by now.

“I-I’m sorry.”

Peter frowned, not at all understand why he felt the need to apologize.

“Mark always said I had to learn to fight back but I couldn’t. I was too weak-”

"Stop.”

Peter interrupted and his hate for Mark only grew, the man knew about the bullying and didn’t do anything to stop it.

“You’re not weak, kiddo. They are, okay?”

He said and even if the child didn’t look convinced, he slowly nodded.

Peter took his tie of and folded it before putting it under Neal’s nose to stop him from bleeding all over the place.

“Does your mother know about this?”

Peter asked even if he already knew the answer.

If Elizabeth had known about the bullying she would have done everything she could to stop it and she certainly wouldn’t send her son to school if she knew he would get hurt.

“Mark told me not to tell her.”

Neal mumbled.

“Well we’re going to tell her and then we’re going to make this stop.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

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