The darkest hour is just before the dawn

by StarryKnight09

Summary

“Is this Peter Parker?”

“Yes…”

“This is Dr. Nguyen. I’m sorry but your aunt’s been in an accident and we’re going to need you to come to Queens Memorial as soon as you can.”

Peter's life shatters with a phone call. The last person he expects helps him pick up the pieces.

Notes

I saw Spiderman: Homecoming this last weekend and this idea wouldn't leave me alone so I finally just had to get it all out. I hope you enjoy!
Chapter One

The ringing of the house phone shattered the silence of the night. Peter jumped nearly a foot in the air from his place on the couch and fell to the ground in front of the coffee table disoriented. It took him another couple rings for him to get his bearings. He’d been waiting for Aunt May to come back but he must have fallen asleep on the couch.

“Hello?” He answered the phone at the same time he noticed it’d been over an hour since May had left to get ice cream. A small kernel of worry seeded. What was taking her so long?

“Is this Peter Parker?”

“Yes…”

“This is Dr. Nguyen. I’m sorry but your aunt’s been in an accident and we’re going to need you to come to Queens Memorial as soon as you can.”

“Oh my god. What happened? Is she ok?” Peter panicked.

“We can talk in person when you get here. Do you have a way to get here?”

“Um y-yeah. I’m leaving right now.”

“Ok we’ll talk soon.”

“Ok. Bye.”

Peter had never webbed anywhere faster in his entire life.

“Is there anyone we can call for you?” Peter knew the doctor was just trying to be nice but it was the completely wrong thing to ask in the moment. His aunt had just died. He knew he was all alone. The man didn’t need to rub it in.

“Can I just have a minute alone with her?” Peter’s voice was barely above a whisper, not once glancing away from his aunt’s body.

“Of course. Take as long as you need.” The click of the door reverberated throughout the silent room as the physician left, finally leaving Peter alone with Aunt May.

If Peter didn’t know better he could’ve convinced himself she was just sleeping, except for the milky whiteness of her skin and the complete stillness. It seemed wrong that someone could die so quickly with no visible signs of injury.

Severe internal bleeding they’d said. She’d died almost instantly. She hadn’t suffered. Peter wondered if she’d been scared. If she’d been aware in her last brief moments. If she’d known she was dying. What her last thoughts had been. If they’d been of him.

Peter reached out a shaky hand but couldn’t bring himself to touch her. He didn’t want to feel the coolness of her skin, the certainty of death. He let his hand drop down by his side and a small sob erupted from him.
“Aunt May?” He whispered. “Please?”

No response. Of course. People didn’t come back from the dead except in dreams. If anyone should know better it should be him.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” He bit his lip and forced himself to finally lay his hand against her cheek. It was cool just like he’d known it would be. No warmth of life. She was gone. He was truly alone now.

“No.” He whined against the unfairness of the world as the tenuous hold he’d had on his emotions broke. He sobbed brokenly and fell forward to rest his head on his aunt’s chest and hold her in his arms.

The unresponsiveness of his usual demonstrative aunt sent a knife straight into his heart. He’d never get to feel her hugs again. Or hear her laugh at his jokes or wake up to the smell of her cooking. He’d never get to talk to her again. His thoughts continued to spiral downward as he cried uncontrollably.

He had no concept of how much time had passed when he heard a quiet knock on the door. Tears still silently fell down his face but at some point he’d lost the energy to cry aloud.

The door opened but he didn’t care enough to face whoever had walked in.

“Peter? I’m Ms. Walker. I’m one of the social workers here at the hospital. Can I talk to you?”

Peter didn’t respond, unbidden memories surfaced of the last time he’d had to deal with people like this woman - when his parents had died.

The woman cleared her throat awkwardly. “It’s been brought to my attention that your aunt was your last living relative. I need to talk to you about where you’re going to stay from now on.”

“I have a friend I can stay with tonight.” Peter croaked. Ned’s parents wouldn’t mind if he crashed there.

The woman cleared her throat again. Peter wondered blearily if maybe it was a tick.

“I meant where you’re going to stay more permanently.”

And oh god. How could Peter not have thought of that? He was a genius after all but somehow he hadn’t made the connection that these people wouldn’t just let him go live home alone since he was technically still a minor. A minor that went out nightly and risked his life to fight crime.

“I’ll file for emancipation.” Peter mumbled. “I can take care of myself.”

The social worker didn’t seem to be expecting that if the extended silence was any indication. “So you have a job? A way to support yourself?”

“Just go away.” Peter finally snapped, his grief finding a new outlet in anger.

“Peter I’m sorry for your loss but we really need to talk about your future.”

His future? Now? While his aunt’s body was barely cold? Was this lady nuts?

“There’s a nice family I have lined up that you can stay with. They have another foster son about your age.”
Foster son? He wasn’t going into foster care.

“I’m not staying with some strangers.” He said, voice steely as he finally raised his head to look at this woman who wanted to destroy his life.

“Peter I’m afraid you don’t have any choice.” Funny, she didn’t look like she felt bad about saying that.

“Leave me alone. I’m not going anywhere with you.” Peter said icily. “Get out!”

She didn’t make any move to leave and it was the last straw.

“Get the fuck out!” Peter screamed and grabbed some medical instrument nearby and threw it toward her so it narrowly missed her head. It slammed noisily against the wall and fell to the floor.

Well at least she was leaving, her calm composure finally broken. Peter couldn’t help the brief feeling of satisfaction that came over him at the sight.

“And don’t you dare come back.” He threatened as the door closed behind her.

He took a few deep breaths to try to calm down, emotions rolling. He glanced back down at his aunt and thought of what she’d have to say about his outburst and suddenly the tears were back.

He pulled his phone out from his pocket. The clock on the screen read 2:45AM. He scanned through his contacts to Ned’s number and his thumb hovered over the call button for a few long seconds but he didn’t push it. There was no doubt in his mind that Ned would let him stay with him. He was a good friend. But the thought of having to actually talk to his friend or watch his friend interact with his parents who were both still alive and there for him made Peter pause.

He was just about to press call anyway when he remembered someone else he could call. He hadn’t spoken to Happy since after the Vulture debacle almost 8 months ago and he didn’t even know if the call would be welcome, but before he could second guess himself the phone was ringing against his ear.

“Hello?” Happy answered groggily, clearly he’d just woken up.

“Hey Happy.” Peter said quietly.

“Peter?”

“Yeah it’s me.”

“Hey kid what’s going on? Are you ok?” There was worry in his voice.

Was he ok? That was a complex question. Was he dying? No. Did he feel like he was? Yes. He was so far from ok it wasn’t funny but he wasn’t physically injured, which is what Peter knew Happy was actually asking.

“Peter?” Happy’s voice was sharper this time.

“I-I need help.” Peter croaked.

“Where are you?”

“Queens Memorial Hospital.”
“Are you hurt?”

“N-no.” He tried to answer but it came out as a half sob instead.

“You’re scaring me here kid. What happened?”

“My…my aunt was in a car accident and…” Suddenly he couldn’t bring himself to say it. Saying it out loud solidified it. Made it real.

“Is she ok?” Happy prompted when Peter made no move to continue after a long silence.

“No. She didn’t. She-“ Peter took a deep breath to steady himself and called on all his courage to continue. “She didn’t m-make it. And I-. I’m sorry. I just didn’t have anyone else to c-call.”

I don’t have anywhere to stay, remained unspoken.

“I’m sorry kid.” Happy responded and Peter was sure he was about to let him down gently. Why did he think Tony Stark’s chauffeur or asset manager or whatever he was now would help him in the middle of the night? He wasn’t the man’s responsibility anymore. He’d turned down Mr. Stark’s offer to join the Avengers and hadn’t heard a word from the man since.

“That really sucks. Just sit tight ok? We’re going figure this out. Don’t leave with anyone ok?”

“Ok.” Peter rasped.

“It’s going to be ok kid. We’ll be there soon.”

We?

Time passed but Peter had no idea how long it’d been since he’d called Happy. It could’ve been minutes or hours. Peter was just thankful that stupid social worker hadn’t come back. No one had disturbed him. He’d resumed his position lying over his aunt, the cold silence broken only by his intermittent choking sobs.

At least until outside the door some kind of ruckus erupted. There were raised voices and arguing but Peter couldn’t bring himself to try to hear what was being said. Maybe someone else was angry they were being taken away to stay with strangers.

Although as the arguing got closer, one of the voices sounded oddly familiar.

“I don’t care. If you don’t like it you can call my lawyers.” The voice said tersely and Peter frowned because it almost sounded like-

Suddenly the door flew open and there stood Tony Stark. Of all the possible scenarios that had played through Peter’s mind after calling Happy, this definitely hadn’t been one of them.

The billionaire took in the sight before him for a few long seconds before turning to slam the door shut on whoever stood behind him with a curt, “Give us a minute.”

Silence reverberated through the room. Tony just stared at Peter, taking in the tears running down his face and his position draped over his aunt’s body.
Tony pulled off his sunglasses, because of course he was wearing sunglasses even though it was the middle of the night, and Peter finally saw his eyes. The brief look of anguish that greeted him was something Peter would never forget, but it was quickly replaced by a resolve that was definitely more familiar.

Without a word, Tony crossed the distance between them and before Peter even knew what was happening, Tony’s hands were on him and he was being pulled gently away from his aunt and toward the billionaire. Everything seemed to move in slow motion and Peter felt like his brain was a step behind.

“C’mere kiddo.” Tony said softly as he turned Peter toward him and encircled him with his arms in a careful hug.

Peter scrunched his eyes shut and buried his face in the man’s chest, bringing his own arms around him and clutching the back of his suit in a desperate grip.

“It’s ok. I gotcha.” Tony mumbled and apparently those were the magic words to make Peter break down again. He wept into Tony’s expensive suit as the man just held him.

“I’m sorry.” Peter managed to get out at some point between sobs.

Tony just hushed him and held him tighter, behavior Peter never would’ve imagined from the genius.

Tony just let Peter cry against him, making no move to dislodge him even as Peter cried himself out and his sobs faded to soft sniffling.

“Are you ready to get out of here kid?” Tony asked into his hair.

Peter froze for a second at the thought of leaving Aunt May but then he nodded in agreement.

“Are you sure?” Tony asked, sensing his hesitation. “There’s no rush. We can stay as long as you want.”

“No. I-I want to go. Please.” Peter mumbled into Tony’s chest.

“Ok.” Tony said but still made no move to leave.

Peter realized Tony was waiting for him to make the first move, so he took a deep breath and forced himself to let go of the man but he didn’t get far. Tony roped one arm around his shoulders, keeping him tucked close against his side as he and picked up Peter’s backpack on the floor for him, shouldering it himself.

“All right let’s get out of here.” Tony said and placed the sunglasses back on his face before opening the door to leave, running straight into the previous social worker from hell.

“And just where do you think you’re going?” She asked, all uppity.

“Like I said before I’m taking the kid. If you have a problem with it you can call my lawyers.” Tony’s grip around him tightened and he shouldered past the woman toward the exit.

“Mr. Stark there’s a protocol to follow. I don’t care how famous you are. You can’t just take a child!” She stepped in front of him, trying to halt his escape.

“Well I am so you can move out of the way.”

“You have to apply to foster a child. There are safety parameters to think of, responsibility you’re
taking on.”

“He’s fifteen not four.” Tony growled as he pushed passed her again and continued walking. A surprised expression crossed the woman’s face, as if she couldn’t quite believe Tony Stark knew Peter Parker’s age.

“I’ll call security!” She threatened.

Even Peter couldn’t hold back a scoff at that.

“Go ahead! I’m sure they’ll be a real match against Ironman.” Tony yelled back, pushing the exit door open. Finally.

“Well I never!” Crazy lady howled.

“Call my lawyers!” Tony shouted over his shoulder and then they were outside and Tony was leading him to his Audi.

He ushered Peter into the back seat, but surprisingly still didn’t relinquish his grip and climbed in beside him instead of going to sit in the front seat next to Happy.

“Back to the compound Happy.” Tony ordered as the door shut and the car drove away.

“Not the hotel?” Happy asked from the front seat.

“No I’d rather be somewhere a little more secure in case we run into some legal trouble for this.”

“You got it boss.”

“I’m sorry for the trouble Mr. Stark” Peter mumbled miserably.

“No trouble.” Tony reassured instantly. “Last week when we had to fight that giant seamonster from hell now that was trouble. This? This is not trouble.”

Peter sighed, not quite believing him but too tired to argue.

“Are you tired? Do you want to lay down?” Tony asked.

Peter shook his head. The backseat of the Audi wasn’t exactly spacious. The only way Peter could see it working was if he laid against the opposite door and he wasn’t ready to leave the comfort Tony was oddly enough still offering him.

“You’re not tired? It’s almost 4am.” Tony voiced his skepticism.

Peter just shrugged. Truthfully, he was exhausted deep into his bones but he didn’t think there was anyway he could sleep now. His mind wouldn’t shut off.

Peter caught Happy eyeing him in the rear view mirror but he couldn’t bring himself to engage with the other man. He knew he owed him a thank you but the words wouldn’t cross his lips. He was afraid that if he opened his mouth he might start crying again or scream. Because his Aunt was dead and he really was all alone now. He truly was an orphan.

He started shivering which seemed odd since he didn’t feel particularly cold.

“Are you cold?” Tony noticed his tremors right away.
“N-no.” He forced out between chattering teeth.

“He’s probably in shock.” Happy offered from the front seat, still watching him in the mirror worriedly.

At that, Tony pulled away and Peter figured this was it. He’d finally reached the limit of the great Ironman’s emotional tolerance. But instead of abandoning Peter, Tony shrugged out of the suit coat he was wearing and wrapped it around the shaking kid like a cocoon before pulling him in even closer and rubbing his hands up and down the sides of Peter’s back.

Peter found his head buried against Tony’s chest again and closed his eyes, trying to think about nothing and willing the shaking to stop.

“Come on kid. Kick your feet up.” Tony nudged at his legs and he figured out he wanted him to stretch them out on the seat, so Peter complied. He felt himself being rearranged then but Tony didn’t let go of him and eventually they found a comfortable position where Peter was actually lying down now. Huh. It was kind of nice.

Still pressed tight against his hero, finally warm and comfortable, Peter eventually fell asleep.
Chapter Two

Chapter Notes

I’ve been absolutely blown away by the response this has gotten! I really appreciate all the amazing comments. I hope this chapter lives up to everyone’s expectations.

Tony’s arm had long since fallen asleep but he still resisted the urge to move into a more comfortable position. The sight of Peter in that hospital room with his dead aunt still haunted him and brought up some uncomfortable parallels with his own past. His parents had been dead for decades but he still vividly remembered the phone call, the hospital, the funeral. Feeling completely alone. Obadiah had eventually come to pick him up but he hadn’t offered any sort of comfort. He’d just driven him home and left him there.

There was no way Tony could do that to Peter. He may not be the nicest guy but he wasn’t just going to abandon the bright spirited kid. So he’d just tried to do what he’d wished someone had done for him when his own parents had died. And if that meant a numb arm and an uncomfortable car ride that was the least he could do.

His lawyers were currently drafting up temporary guardianship papers to be submitted once the courts opened in the morning and Tony doubted there’d be any problems. People rarely said no to Tony Stark. He’d have to keep it under the radar and out of the press for Peter’s sake but it shouldn’t be a problem since the kid was a minor so legally it couldn’t leak. And he had a funeral to plan because he definitely wasn’t letting Peter deal with any of that. The terrible memory of picking out his own parents’ caskets flashed through his mind. He had no desire to inflict that particular horror upon Peter.

“We’re here boss.” Happy interrupted his thoughts as the car stopped in front of the new Avengers compound.

“Great.” He eyed the kid still sleeping on him and tried to slip out from under him but stopped when Peter groaned and shifted. He really didn’t want to wake the kid up to face the nightmare of his life. Who knew when he’d be able to fall asleep again? “Umm. Huh. I seem to be stuck.”

Happy chuckled from the front seat. “Want me to get help?”

“Yeah that’d be good.” Tony decided when another attempt to escape failed.

“I’ll be right back. Don’t move.” Happy smirked.

“Haha very funny.” Tony deadpanned.

Happy returned quickly with Captain America…because of course he did.

Tony’s car door opened and he would’ve fallen out if not for Steve’s chest. He glanced upward at the supersoldier who looked way too delighted to find him in his current position.

“I heard you needed some help.” Steve smiled.

“Yeah yeah everyone’s a comedian.” Tony groused. “Just can you…get him? I didn’t want to wake
him up.”

“That’s sweet.” Steve smiled again.

“Oh shut up.” Tony rolled his eyes but didn’t complain further because Steve moved to help him. The mass of muscle was surprisingly gentle as he leaned across Tony and carefully gathered Peter in his arms, easily pulling him off Tony and out of the car without causing him to stir.

The moment Peter was off him, the pins and needles sensation attacked his left arm. Damnit. Ouch. He stumbled out of the car without his usual grace as a result.

“You ok boss?” Happy laughed.

“Yeah just can’t feel my entire left side.” Tony joked and shook out his leg, which protested loudly as well. “Ow ow ow.”

Steve smiled warmly at his antics, and Tony took a brief moment to appreciate all the progress they’d made since their fight over the Accords almost a year ago. It had been a long hard road with many bumps along the way, but now he and Steve were closer than ever.

“So this is the Spiderkid?” Steve asked as he peered down at the bundle in his arms.

“His name’s Peter. Peter Parker. And his aunt just died so he’s going to be staying with us.” Tony said defensively, daring Steve to disagree.

“I know. I heard.” Steve said sadly, sparing another soft glance at Peter before he turned to walk back into the compound’s private entrance to the Avengers living quarters, Tony trailing behind him as Happy got back in the car to move it into the underground garage.

“Where do you want me to put him?” Steve asked as they walked into the Avengers common room.

“He can sleep in my room until I figure something out.” Steve looked surprised at the decision but didn’t argue. They continued on to the elevator in the back of the room, Friday taking them up to Tony’s suite without needing to be asked.

Tony and Steve moved silently through the suite toward the bedroom. The only other option was to put Peter on the couch and there was no way he was doing that. Oh hey kid sorry your aunt just died, take the couch, seemed insensitive even for him. He’d never set up a guestroom because he’d never needed one before. The designated extra room in his suite was full of personal technical projects instead but he figured he’d have to fix that now.

Tony held the covers back as Steve laid Peter down, carefully untangling him from Tony’s suit coat before Tony pulled the covers back up around him. The two of them backed out of the room quietly, Tony shutting the door closed with a soft click behind them.

“Thanks Steve.” Tony said quietly.

“It’s no problem. I was already up anyway. About to make breakfast for the team. We have that training exercise this morning. Remember?” Tony could tell Steve knew he didn’t.

“Oh right…that. Listen I’m going to have my hands full for the next few days at least, so you might have to count me out for a bit.”

“That’s fine Tony.” Steve grinned, seeming oddly happy about it.
“Really?” Tony asked, surprised.

“Of course. You need to take care of the kid. That’s what’s important right now.”

Tony nodded as he pulled off his tie and threw it over a nearby stool while he made his way toward his kitchenette to make coffee. God he was going to need lots and lots of coffee today.

“Do you want me to bring you up some breakfast when it’s done?” Steve offered.

“Nah I’m good.” Tony opened his fridge and a few cabinets but upon finding them all barren he frowned.

Steve chuckled and patted Tony on the shoulder as he turned to leave. “I’ll bring some food up.”

“Uh yeah I guess that’d be good. Thanks.” Tony gave him a small smile in return, already making a mental list of all the things he had to do today which now included procuring food.

“Good luck.” Steve teased and then he was gone.

Tony grimaced. He was going to need all the luck he could get. Pepper was going to be so mad in a few hours when she realized he was no longer in New York City for the third board of directors meeting in just as many days. But first coffee.

The next week passed in a blur for Peter. He’d woken up to find himself asleep in Tony Stark’s bed absolutely mortified for displacing the man even though Tony had been quick to reassure him that he wouldn’t have been using it anyway.

The billionaire had fed him and then surprised him by showing him the room he’d apparently been busy preparing for him, complete with all of Peter’s stuff from his room in Queens. Peter was too weary to even think about asking Tony how he’d managed that, so he’d just thanked him quietly and crawled into bed, which is where he’d pretty much spent the rest of the week besides the day he had to go to May’s funeral and when Tony occasionally forced him to come out for meals. He could tell he was starting to worry the man but he couldn’t find the energy to care. He just wanted to sleep because if he slept it didn’t hurt quite so much.

A knock sounded on his door but Peter didn’t respond. Tony had been getting pushier and pushier about trying to get Peter out of bed the past couple days and Peter wasn’t quite sure how he felt about that yet.

The door opened and light flooded the room. Peter scrunched his eyes shut and rolled away.

“Hey kid.” Tony greeted softly as he walked over to the bed, sitting down on the edge. “You slept through breakfast. It’s time for lunch.”

“I’m not hungry.” Peter mumbled. It was a lie. He was ravenous. Since the radioactive spider had bitten him his metabolism had run rampant and he needed at least twice as much food as a normal growing teenager, but his appetite had deserted him.

Tony sighed and gently rolled the kid onto his back to make eye contact. “Peter you can’t keep doing this to yourself. Your aunt wouldn’t want this.”
“Well it doesn’t really matter what she’d want now does it? She’s dead.” Peter snapped.

Tony didn’t respond for a few long seconds as he just observed him. Peter guessed he looked like quite a mess. He hadn’t showered in days and he’d cried himself to sleep again last night. Undoubtedly his bleary red eyes and dried tear stained cheeks gave him away. Eventually Tony seemed to come sort of decision.

“All right it’s time to get up. We’re going to have lunch and then I’m going to show you around and introduce you to some people.”

“No thanks.” Peter tried to roll back over but Tony’s grip on him tightened.

“That wasn’t a suggestion. Come on. Up.” Tony tugged on him so he was sitting up and then just kept dragging him until eventually he was on his feet out of bed. Peter could’ve fought him. He was definitely stronger than Tony without the suit but somehow he didn’t have the energy to do even that.

“Good. Now go get cleaned up.” Tony led him out of his bedroom and pushed him toward the bathroom across the hall.

Peter sighed but reluctantly acquiesced. The shower actually did him some good but he didn’t dare admit that to Tony as he sat down next to the man on a stool at the breakfast bar afterwards.

Tony gave him a small smile and pushed a plate full of pasta toward him and ordered, “Eat.”

Peter surprised himself with how fast he inhaled the food in front of him. If Tony’s expression was any indication he’d surprised him too.

“Not hungry huh?” Tony joked flatly as he refilled Peter’s plate and Peter dug into that as well.

“I can’t help it. It’s part of the spider thing.” Peter explained with his mouth full. “I need more food than normal people.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed at the admission. “And what happens when you don’t get enough food?” He was obviously thinking of the past week Peter had spent barely eating.

Peter shrugged. “My healing doesn’t work as well. I get slower. More tired. Sometimes dizzy. It’s not that big of a deal.”

Tony huffed in disagreement. “From now on no skipping meals.”

“No I mean it.” He continued when Peter opened his mouth to object. “And no more sleeping the day away. It’s not healthy.

“Mr. Stark-” Peter started to argue.

“Ah ah ah and definitely none of that.” Tony interrupted. “How many times do I have to tell you it’s Tony. No more of this Mr. Stark nonsense. Capiche?”

Peter just nodded and finished the rest of the food on his plate.

“All right now that we’ve got that all straightened out, let’s go meet the rest of the team. It’ll be good for you. You can’t hide up here forever.” Tony brought a hand up between Peter’s shoulders and guided him toward the elevator. Peter didn’t even try to argue this time.

Meeting the Avengers was a surreal experience. The elevator opened to the common room and
suddenly they were all just there. Vision and the Scarlet Witch were in the kitchen cleaning up. Hawkeye, Falcon, Antman, and Captain America were parked in front of the TV playing a video game while Black Widow and some other guy Peter didn’t recognize sat close together on the other part of the couch sectional watching.

Tony whistled sharply and Peter jumped at the noise.

“Listen up. I’ve got someone I want you to meet. This is Peter. Peter this is everyone.”

Peter rolled his eyes at the horrible introduction but then everyone’s sole attention was on him and he couldn’t help the blush that colored his cheeks.

“Um hi. Nice to meet everyone. Officially this time. Um. I mean…” Peter looked to Tony for help but the man just quirked an eyebrow at him without intervening.

“So is this kid the reason you holed yourself up in your suite for the past week? Cap’s been all mum about it.” Hawkeye asked, pausing the video game that Peter now recognized as Mario Kart.

Peter frowned. Tony had been in his suite all week? Tony hadn’t left him? He kind of just figured the man had been going about his usual routine while he hid in bed.

“The kid has a name and it’s Peter.” Tony responded evenly, not answering Clint’s question.

“Nice to meet you short stack. I’m Clint.” The archer held up a hand in a half wave, not pursing the line of questioning any further.

Peter mimicked the motion back with a half smile.

“Hi Peter. I’m Steve.” Captain America had walked over to them while Clint had been speaking and now held his hand out.

Peter shook it in a slight state of shock. “Hi. Wow. Captain America. I just have to stay sir I’m a huge fan. Huge. I’m sorry about the whole um stealing your shield thing before in Germany.”

“Traitor.” Tony mumbled as Steve laughed delightedly.

“It’s all right son. All’s forgiven. It’s good to meet you officially.” Steve turned to grin at Tony.

“Wait are you the Spiderboy?” Falcon asked as he got up as well to shake Peter’s hand.

“Spiderman.” Peter corrected as he shook the man’s hand.

“Whatsoever you say kid. I’m Sam.”

And just like that all the other Avengers were lining up to shake his hand and introduce themselves. By their first names. He met Wanda, Scott, Natasha, Bruce, and Vision. He was actually in the same room as all the Avengers and had permission to just hang out with them. Well almost all of them. Apparently War Machine was away on some military business but he’d be back next week. Peter tried to keep his inner fanboy in check but it proved to be more difficult than he thought it’d be especially when Steve invited him to come play Mario Kart with them.

“Seriously?” Peter questioned, shocked after Steve asked him if he wanted to join their game.

“Yeah maybe you can even show me a thing or two.” Steve reassured him.

“Can I?” Peter glanced to Tony for permission and the man nodded his assent.
Within a couple minutes of playing seated between Hawkeye and Captain America, a huge smile was plastered across Peter’s face.

The rest of the afternoon passed quickly with their Mario Kart tournament in full swing. Peter loved the playful banter between everyone and had no trouble joining in on it. He figured he’d feel like an outcast but the Avengers welcomed him with open arms.

Before he knew it, it was time for dinner and they were all sitting down at the long dining table to dig into the pizzas spread out before them. Peter sat down in the empty seat next to Tony and grabbed a few pieces of the Hawaiian pizza and a few pieces of the Supreme. Soon enough he found himself swept away in the teasing camaraderie at the table and enjoyed every minute of it as he quickly demolished his plate. He didn’t even feel bad going for seconds or thirds since everyone at the table ate like crazy too.

This whole day had been one of the best of his life and now that it was ending Peter suddenly felt sick with guilt. How dare he enjoy himself when his aunt was dead? He didn’t deserve to ever feel happy again when it was all his fault she’d never get the chance to live an amazing day like this. His mood instantly plummeted and he sat in a daze as the rest of the Avengers finished dinner.

“You ok kid?” Tony asked surreptitiously, having sensed the change in his mood as everyone started getting up to clear their plates.

Peter nodded shakily without looking at him, still staring at his now empty plate.

“Peter.” Tony said a little more firmly, garnering his attention so Peter looked up at him with despondent eyes.

“It’s ok if you’re not ok.” Tony continued quietly. “Now do you want to go back upstairs or do you want to stay here?”

The thought of having to put a happy face back on made him want to vomit. “Can we go?”

“Yeah. Let’s go.” Tony agreed, picking up both Peter’s and his plate and waiting for Peter to get up.

“Well this has been fun guys but it’s almost the squirt’s bedtime so we have to leave the party.” Tony announced loudly as he dropped their plates off by the sink. “You’re welcome for the pizza by the way you ingrates.”

There was a lot of good-natured grumbling and a few scattered thank-you’s for the pizza but soon enough Peter found himself back in the safety of Tony’s suite. He instantly made a beeline for bed and Tony didn’t even try to stop him. After he closed the door behind him he regretted not thanking the genius for the awesome day, but the grief was just too stifling for anything else at that point.

Peter took a few quick breaths to try to calm down but it didn’t help and before he knew it his face was buried into his pillow and he was sobbing again.

*I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry May. This is all my fault. I’m so sorry.* Played like a mantra in his mind. If he hadn’t been so messed up this never would’ve happened. If he hadn’t become Spiderman, his aunt would still be alive.

‘Peter wake up.’
‘Peter!’

Peter awoke with a gasp.

‘Are you ok honey?’ Aunt May couldn’t hide her concern. ‘This is the third time this week.’

‘Yeah. I’m sorry I woke you up.’

‘Peter please talk to me.’

‘It’s nothing.’

‘It’s not nothing if you’re having nightmares every night.’

‘It’s not every night.’ Peter argued.

‘I don’t want you to do this Spiderman thing anymore if this is how it affects you.’

‘I can handle it.’

‘But you can’t sweetheart. Can’t you see that?’

‘I’m fine. It’s just a stupid dream from something that happened awhile ago. I don’t know why it keeps bothering me.’

‘What happened?’

‘I don’t want to worry you.’

‘How about this,’ May proposed. ‘How about I run and get us some of your favorite ice cream at the drive thru at Mickey’s and we spend the rest of the night talking just me and you?’

Peter bit his lip.

‘Please Peter.’

‘Ok but only if you get the peanut butter fudge kind.’

‘Your wish is my command, but this means you talk to me. Really talk to me for once. Deal?’

Peter nodded. ‘Yeah ok. Deal.’

‘Come on get up.’

‘I’m up. I’m up.’ Peter laughed as he crawled out of bed and followed May to the living room.

‘Do you want to come with me?’ May asked as she grabbed her keys from the ring by the door.

‘No that’s ok. I’ll wait here.’ Peter plopped down on the couch.

‘Ok but don’t fall asleep on me.’ May joked. ‘I’ll be right back.’

‘Thanks May. You’re the best.’

‘Aw I love you sweetie.’

‘I love you too.’
‘I’ll be right back.’

‘Ok.’

“Wait! May! Don’t go!” Peter cried out and sat straight up in bed, still disoriented from the memory that’d re-played in his dreams.

“Don’t leave me.” He whispered but it was too late. It had already happened. May was gone. Because he was too big of a baby to deal with the nightmares from his encounter with Vulture. She’d been sweet and innocent and perfect and Peter had killed her. If he’d just gone with her he might’ve been able to prevent the accident. His spider sense would’ve picked up on the danger and he could’ve grabbed the wheel or done something. Anything. But instead he’d been asleep on the couch when she’d died. Asleep. While she was getting him comfort ice cream. How fucking poetic.

“Peter?” Tony stood in the doorway clad in a plain black t-shirt and flannel pajama bottoms with horrible bed head, rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

“I-I’m sorry. I d-didn’t mean to w-wake you u-up.” Peter’s voice shook and he couldn’t quite seem to get enough air.

Tony frowned and from one blink to the next he was sitting next to Peter on the bed, pulling him into his arms.

Everything felt too raw and Peter just hurt too much to push him away. He gripped the other man tightly as he completely broke down and cried. Again. God he was such a mess. Losing it in front of Tony Stark again. He was never going to take him seriously as Spiderman now. Somehow that thought just made him cry harder.

“Shh Peter. It’s ok. You’re ok.” Tony tried to comfort him as he held him, but the words had the opposite effect and Peter just couldn’t seem to stop crying.

When what seemed like an eternity had passed and his sobs finally sputtered out into whimpers, Tony broke the silence again. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“N-n-no.” Peter shivered and tried to pull away at the question but Tony held him tight.

“I think it would help.”

Peter shook his head violently. The last time he’d offered to talk about his nightmares his Aunt had ended up dead.

“Ok.” Tony said. “But I want you to know I’m always here if you need to talk ok?”

Peter nodded into the man’s chest.

“I’m serious Peter. Day or night. You come get me. Ok?”

“Ok.” Peter whispered when it became clear the man was waiting for some kind of affirmation. “I-I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize.” Tony sighed.

Another few minutes passed and Peter started to drift off again but he woke the instant Tony started easing him back down into bed.

“D-don’t go.” Peter pleaded, reaching out to grab Tony’s arm even though the man was still inches
away and making no move to leave.

“I won’t.” Tony soothed. “I’ll stay until you fall asleep again ok?”

“Ok.” Peter closed his eyes and was finally able to drift back to sleep with Ironman watching over him.
Chapter Three

Chapter Notes

I'm posting this chapter a little early this week. I'm going on vacation today for a little over a week but I'll have a new chapter up as soon as I get back. Thanks for all the support and encouragement! I love reading everyone's thoughts and I definitely take them into account when writing. I hope everyone likes this new chapter!

“Pepper I just can’t ok.” Tony growled over the phone, having absolutely no patience for Stark Industries nonsense after spending all night worrying about Peter. It wasn’t like Pepper couldn’t do this without him. He’d made her CEO for a reason.

“Because I can’t!” Tony poured himself another cup of coffee. His fourth of the day since being awake at 4:00AM by Peter’s nightmare and just deciding to start the day out early.

“I’m not hiding anything from you! I just- I have to stay at the compound for the next few weeks at least.”

The rest of the Avengers at the table nearby quieted at the argument.

“Yes I know. I know!” Tony rolled his eyes. She could be so damn dramatic sometimes. “Well why don’t you go to Japan then?”

Tony thrummed his fingers in irritation on the counter while he listened to her tell him all the reasons why she couldn’t go and why he should.

“I know that you’re busy. I know. I know you have a company to run. It is my company.” Tony grumbled.

“No! Ok fine. What’s the latest I could go? And it has to be? Why can’t you send that new what’s his face?” Tony grabbed the bagel out of the toaster as it popped and finished putting cream cheese on it.

“Mmhmm.” He agreed as he chewed.

“Ok ok. I said I’d go! When? No that’s too early. Pepper! Pepper if you want me to go personally you have to work with me.” He finished chewing as he listened to her chew him out.

“How about the week after that?” He suggested and took another sip of coffee, purposefully ignoring his teammates staring at him.

“Fine. Six weeks from now. Yes I’m writing it down. I don’t know why I need to. I’m sure you’ll remind me twenty times beforehand. No I’m not giving you attitude. Yes I know. I do. I do appreciate everything you do for me.” Tony sighed and rubbed a hand over his eyes. God he couldn’t take this today. “Yes. Yes. Thank you. You too. Bye.”

He hung up the phone and for a moment no one said anything, but then Barton just couldn’t keep it in. Of course.
“Wow Stark she sure has your balls in a vice.”

“Shut up Katniss.” Tony said without any real venom as he finally sat down at the table with his unfinished bagel and coffee where Steve, Sam, Clint, and Natasha already sat.

“Ouch that hurt.” Clint deadpanned before crunching on his last piece of bacon.

“So Pepper wants you to go to Japan?” Steve asked politely from the seat next to Tony.

Tony sighed. This is why he tried to never have any business conversations in front of the Avengers. They always wanted to butt into everything.

“Yes.”

“But you don’t want to go?”

Tony gave him a scathing look.

“Why?”

Tony shrugged.

“I bet I know why.” Natasha offered and Tony glared at her.

“He doesn’t want to leave the kid.”

“Ah.” Steve said, content at figuring out the puzzle.

Tony just continued to eat silently as he scanned through e-mails on his phone.

“Where is the kid anyway?” Sam asked.

“Sleeping.” Tony answered and clicked on a new e-mail Pepper had forwarded him from his R&D department. “Most teenagers don’t wake up before 8:00AM in the summer you know.”

“How would you know?” Clint laughed.

“Um because I used to be one.” Tony replied simply.

“So you’re just going to let him sleep in as late as he wants?” Sam asked.

“No.” Tony answered. “He gets until 9:30AM and then I’m going to wake him up.”

For some reason that made all the Avengers at the table laugh.

“So not that he doesn’t seem like a cool kid and all, but why is he here?” Clint asked.

Tony glanced at Steve with a frown. “You didn’t tell them?”

“I didn’t know if I was allowed to.” Steve frowned back.

“Ok I didn’t actually care that much before but now I’m interested.” Clint continued.

“Is he joining the Avengers?” Natasha guessed.

“No.” Tony retorted. God what had he been thinking officially inviting Peter to join them before? He was just a kid. A scared, sad, lonely kid.

“He’s too young.” Steve agreed. “How old is he Tony?”
“Fifteen. Almost sixteen.”

Sam whistled lowly. “You know they’re young when you’re using ‘almosts.’”

“Jesus Stark he’s a baby.” Clint said.

“So he’s not joining the Avengers. Then why is he here?” Natasha tried to keep them on track.

Tony cleared his throat. “His aunt died in a car accident last week and he didn’t have anywhere else to go so I brought him here.”

Silence met his answer. Everyone seemed shocked. Well everyone except Steve since he’d already known.

“Whoa whoa whoa. Hold on.” Sam held up his hands. “So are you like his guardian now?”

“I mean I guess technically. There was some paperwork involved.” Tony defended. “What? I wasn’t going to let him go into the system. He’s a good kid.”

“Holy shit.” Barton exclaimed.


“You do know kids aren’t like little robots though right? Even if he is fifteen.” Sam asked. “You can’t just feed him and give him a place to stay and call it a day. Especially after the trauma he’s just been through.”

Tony’s temper flared at the comment. Of course he knew that.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Clint asked. “I mean aren’t you kind of a little too busy to deal with a kid. He’s only been your problem for a week and he’s already causing issues with your company.”

“He’s not a problem!” Tony snapped. The Avengers quieted at the outburst.

“All right everyone let’s ease off on the criticism.” Steve mediated. “It’s an admirable thing Tony’s doing and we’re all going to be supportive. Ok?”

Everyone nodded and Tony’s anger slowly diffused.

“And if you need any help just let us know. We’re a team for a reason.” Steve said to Tony.

“Yeah that’s true. We can watch the kid if you need to go to Japan. Or meetings. Or…whatever else it is that you do.” Clint offered.

Tony felt oddly touched, but the thought of not being around if Peter needed him gave him a weird antsy feeling in his gut.

“Hey why don’t we take the kid for the day? I’m sure you’ve got stuff you need to do today.” Sam volunteered.

Tony hesitated. Would Peter be ok with that? He’d seem to get along fine with everyone yesterday and the distraction had been good for him, but last night had been rough and maybe this was too much too soon.

“We were going to work on some hand to hand training this afternoon.” Natasha encouraged. “I’m
sure Peter would love to learn some moves from Captain America if his not so subtle drooling over Steve yesterday is any indication.”

Tony chuckled at that. It was true. “Yeah he’d probably like that. And there are a few things I need to get done in the workshop today…”

“Great.” Steve smiled. “Bring him down for lunch and we’ll keep him entertained for the rest of the day.”

“Ok. Thanks.” Tony agreed as he finished his bagel and coffee. “I’ll see you later then.”

They said their good-byes and Tony made his way back up to his suite. Hopefully he could at least answer a few e-mails before he had to wake Peter up in an hour and a half.

Peter sighed as he rolled over to grab his phone as it buzzed, muscles protesting. Apparently hand to hand combat with Captain America pushed even his power boundaries, although it’d been crazy fun and borderline unreal. Even though he’d gone to bed two hours ago, his mind had kept him wide awake rehashing the entire day’s events, starting with Tony Stark himself waking him up after he’d blubbered all over the man the night before.

Tony hadn’t mentioned it though. He’d just strolled in already dressed for the day with coffee in hand and gently shook him awake.

“Time to get up short stuff.”

“I’m not that much shorter than you,” Peter had groaned into his pillow.

Tony had just laughed at that. “You’ve got five minutes to get up before I’m telling Friday to turn on the sprinklers.”

“You wouldn’t.” Peter had turned to squint at him.

“Oh yes I would.” Tony had threatened with a smile before he’d left.

The thing is Peter wasn’t been one hundred percent confident he would’ve won that bluff. It was the fastest he’d gotten out of bed in a long time.

Breakfast had been great. Strawberry waffles. One of Peter’s favorites. And then he’d gotten dressed and Tony had dragged him around the compound to give him a “quick” tour that had lasted a couple hours. The time had flown, though. Spending time with Tony was oddly effortless and Peter really appreciated every bit of attention the billionaire gave him. He knew the man’s time was precious.

Before he knew it, he was being dropped off back in the Avengers main living area for lunch with the team while Tony told him to have fun and that he’d be back later after he got some work done.

He’d spent the rest of the afternoon learning combat moves from Captain America. Thinking about it even now made him a little lightheaded. Natasha and Clint had even each showed him a couple things and after several hours they’d all gone back upstairs to make dinner. After their dinner of Caesar salad and spaghetti, they’d settled in to watch a movie. They’d even let Peter pick and he’d nervously chosen the newest Star Wars movie, but it’d apparently been a good choice. Clint, Sam, and Scott had cheered and Natasha had actually smiled. At least Peter thought she had. Now he
wondered if he’d maybe just imagined it.

The movie had almost ended when Tony returned, looking flustered and apologizing for taking so long. Peter had been quick to reassure him that it was fine, and the timing was actually perfect because they were just finishing up the movie.

Instead of leaving, Tony had grabbed a plate of cold spaghetti and squeezed in between him and Steve even though there hadn’t actually been an open seat there. He’d watched the rest of the movie there grumbling periodically about needing more couches.

Once the movie had ended, everyone had stayed and chatted for another hour or so before Tony had finally declared it was bedtime and they’d left. Back up in the suite, Tony had asked Peter about his day and they’d talked for almost another hour before Tony had realized it actually was getting late and had sent Peter to bed. But he hadn’t been able to fall asleep yet. He turned his attention back to his phone and clicked on the most recent text message thread from Ned.

*Hey do you want to come over for dinner tonight?*

*Have you heard from Liz since she moved?*

*I just got this amazing new computer game you have to come over and try. Are you free today?*

*Are you out patrolling again?*

*Hey do you want to come over this weekend? We can see that new Planet of the Apes movie.*

*Is your phone broken?*

*Did you know it’s shark week? How did we almost miss that? Want to come over for a marathon watch session? Or I can come over there?*

*Did you go on vacation without telling me?*

*Or lose your phone in a dumpster somewhere? I guess I wouldn’t be surprised after how many backpacks you’ve lost.*

*I can’t believe you’re seriously ignoring me for over a week. Not cool. Not how you treat your guy in the chair. Text me back.*

*Did I do something to piss you off?*

*Peter?*

*Are you ok?* The most recent text message had been sent 5 minutes prior.

Peter sighed as he re-read all the messages he’d received from Ned since his Aunt had died. He knew he was acting like a horrible friend and the radio silence had gone on long enough but he just didn’t know what to say. Plus he knew Ned was going to freak out. But enough was enough. Ned didn’t deserve this. He just had to get it over with. Like ripping off a bandaid.

*I’m sorry. It’s just been a really bad week.* Peter finally typed back and hit send before he could second guess himself.

*Bad how? Are you ok?* Ned responded instantly.

*No. Aunt May died.* The screen blurred in front of him from the tears welling up in his eyes.
Oh my god Peter. I’m so sorry. Why didn’t you tell me? What can I do? Can I come over?

I’m not in Queens.

Where are you?

Upstate.

Who are you staying with?

Tony.

Holy shit. No way.

You can’t tell anyone.

Of course not. Is this like a temporary thing?

Peter sucked in a quick breath. The question shocked him. Was it a temporary thing? He hadn’t really thought about it. Sure Tony had been amazing and hadn’t given any hint that he was going to kick Peter out anytime soon but he hadn’t exactly invited him to stay forever either. But if Tony did get sick of Peter, where was he supposed to go? The thought of having to deal with that social worker again and getting placed with a bunch of strangers who didn’t understand a thing about him made his heart race.

I don’t know.

What do you mean you don’t know? Isn’t that something you should know?

We haven’t really talked about it.

Well are you joining the Avengers now?

I don’t know.

What if that was why Tony had taken him here? Maybe he was just babysitting him while he got his shit together so he could officially join the Avengers and not be Tony’s problem anymore. Then they’d just be teammates. Maybe that’s why he’d met the team yesterday and spent the day with them again today. Maybe Steve’s training hadn’t just been for fun. Had he been sizing Peter up? Seeing if he thought he was even still worthy enough to join the Avengers? He wondered for a moment if there was special checkbox on emancipation paperwork for secret superhero as a line of work.

Peter are you sure you’re ok? Ned’s text interrupted his borderline hysterical thoughts.

I never said I was ok.

What can I do?

Can I call you tomorrow?

Of course. I’m worried about you.

I’ll talk to you tomorrow.

Ok. Good night Peter.
Peter set the phone back down on his nightstand and stared at the ceiling as his thoughts raced. Ned had unknowingly just made things so much worse. Peter admitted to himself that maybe he’d been reluctant to contact Ned because he’d subconsciously known that things right now weren’t necessarily as settled as he’d like to think. If there was ever anyone who would just tell it how it is, it was Ned. It was one of the first things Peter had been drawn to about him and why they’d remained such close friends over the years. But sometimes it sucked. Like now. Because Ned was right. Why would Tony Stark of all people take Peter in? The genius billionaire, head of Stark Industries, Ironman himself would just let a kid he barely knew stay with him for the next couple years? Because it would be years. Peter was almost sixteen but that was still two years away from adulthood, two more years of high school. Could he really expect Tony Stark to be responsible for him for the next two years? There was no way this situation could be permanent, no matter how much it might have looked that way initially. When summer ended in a couple months how was he supposed to commute to his school from upstate New York? Peter had been living in a fantasy world bubble and now that it’d popped he just felt sick.

He wasn’t little orphan Annie destined to be taken in by some nice rich guy. He was more like Harry Potter. The orphan who had a few adult figures in his life that seemed to somewhat care about him but not one that really cared enough to take sole responsibility for him. Would that make Tony Molly Weasley? No. Maybe Sirius Black? They were both eccentric, but Tony was definitely smarter. Tony never would’ve let himself get killed off the way Sirius had. Although he did have impulse control problems. Peter groaned and rubbed a hand down his face. God he was losing it. Now he couldn’t stop thinking about all the other different orphans in the history of literature and if his situation matched up with one of them better.

Well there was one thing he did know for sure. If he had to choose between joining the Avengers or being shipped off to some random family to live out the next couple years of his life, he was definitely joining the Avengers no matter how not quite ready he felt. So what if he still wasn’t over the whole Vulture thing quite yet? He’d just have to suck it up. He’d rather have nightmares every night for the rest of his life if it meant staying here and not getting kicked out to live with people who didn’t know him. He would get down on his hands and knees and beg to join if meant he got to stay. Even if it meant he’d have to give up finishing high school. Not that Spiderman needed that anyway. What had he said? He was beyond high school. So what if Peter Parker kind of maybe wanted to go to a college like MIT or Harvard or Stanford? It didn’t matter anymore. That Peter Parker had died the night of May’s car crash. And that was that. It would sort of suck though to not get to see Ned every day at school and to give up ever competing on the Decathlon team again and to never again get to nail a test question everyone else got stumped on.

Peter bit the inside of his cheek as his throat clenched. Stop it. It was time to grow up. Stupid kids cared about stuff like that and he didn’t get to be a kid anymore. God he missed May. He’d give anything to be able to turn back time and keep her from leaving the apartment that night.

Peter sat up in bed, body suddenly feeling just as restless as his thoughts. There was no way he could sleep now. Screw it. He climbed out of bed and padded silently into the kitchen, grabbing a can of diet coke from the fridge before moving onto the couch and turning on the TV. He cranked down the volume to a barely audible level and started channel surfing. Eventually he landed on the Discovery channel and tried to drown out his troubles mindlessly watching a Shark Week special on how Great Whites were misunderstood. It only half worked. His brain wasn’t buzzing along at quite the speed it had been before but he was still too worked up to sleep.

He was part of the way through the second show, a documentary on how sharks hunted, when a sleepy voice interrupted. “Peter?”
Peter turned to see Tony walking toward the couch.

“Sorry did I wake you up? Is the TV too loud?” Peter asked and instantly turned it down a couple notches.

Tony shook his head and Peter wasn’t quite sure if it was a tactic to try to wake up or in response to his questions.

“Why are you up watching TV in the middle of the night?”

“I couldn’t sleep.” Peter answered simply and turned his attention back to the TV. Except that didn’t work because Tony just moved to stand right in front of him, blocking his view.

“Nightmare?”

“No just couldn’t sleep.”

Tony frowned and crossed his arms. “Did you get any sleep at all?”

Peter shrugged.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y?”

“Hey no fair!” Peter whined.

“Mr. Parker has not yet slept tonight boss.” F.R.I.D.A.Y sold him out immediately.

“Look I’m sorry I woke you up but—”

“You didn’t.” Tony interrupted.

“What?”

“You didn’t wake me up.”

Peter just stared at the man. “Then why are you here?”

“F.R.I.D.A.Y woke me up.”

“Why?”

“Because you were out here watching TV at 3:00AM in the morning instead of asleep like you should be.”

Peter frowned. “So I did wake you up.”

Then a second passed and another before the conversation caught up with him. “Wait. You have Friday spying on me? That’s so not cool. What is this? 1984? Should I start calling her big brother? Her? It?”

Tony sighed and rolled his eyes. “Dramatic much? Now come on. It’s time to go to bed.”

He leaned down to grab Peter’s upper arm and pulled slightly but Peter jerked away.

“I don’t want to go to bed. I told you. I can’t sleep. Leave me alone.” Peter said sharply.

Tony’s eyebrows nearly flew to his hairline at the sudden ire directed toward him. Instead of leaving
like Peter demanded, Tony sat down next to him on the couch.

“Why can’t you sleep?” Tony asked.

Peter picked at a loose string on his shirt hem. “I just…can’t. I can't stop thinking.”

“About what?” Tony prodded further.

“Just…stuff.”

“What kind of stuff?”

*When you’re going to get sick of me and kick me out? Why you took me here in the first place? Whether I’m going to have to join the Avengers earlier than I really want to just so I’ll have a place to stay?* He couldn’t ask Tony any of those things though. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth and he shrugged.

“Your aunt?” Tony asked quietly.

Peter just shrugged again.

Tony sighed heavily.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Peter said defensively. “Just go back to bed.”

Tony had a pinched look on his face Peter couldn’t remember ever seeing before.

“You’re really not going to even try to go back to sleep?” Tony asked.

“No.” Peter’s eyes flashed, daring Tony to argue with him.

“Ok fine.” Tony gave in. “Well at least let me make us some popcorn.”

“W-what?” The response completely threw him for a loop. He’d expected Tony to just get frustrated and leave. Not…popcorn?

“Popcorn? You like it right?”

“Yeah but-“

“Great.” Tony continued as he stood.

A few minutes later Peter heard popping from the kitchen and the smell of popcorn permeated the suite. Tony came back, carrying a large bowl of popcorn and reclaimed his spot right next to Peter.

“Listen Tony you-.”

“Yes!” Tony interrupted and held the bowl out toward Peter. “That’s the first time you’ve called me Tony. Take some popcorn. Positive reinforcement.”

It was impossible for Peter to hold back a smile then as he took a handful and crunched on it. The stuff was delicious. Better than the best movie theater popcorn he’d ever had. Of course it was. It was probably the best brand made by the best equipment. This was Tony Stark after all.

“Um but seriously you don’t have to uh stay up with me. I’m ok.”

“No you’re not.” Tony said matter of fact as he chewed his popcorn and kicked his feet up on the
Peter didn’t respond. He turned to look at Tony and the other man immediately met his eyes.

“You’re not ok kid.” Tony reiterated somberly as he stretched his arm out on the back of the couch behind Peter. “But you’ll get there.”

Peter swallowed hard and looked away before this turned into another sob fest. He tried to focus his attention on the TV show as he and Tony devoured the popcorn.

For some reason, sitting next to Tony made all his previous worries start to melt away. It was hard to worry about Tony kicking him out or making him join the Avengers when the man was forgoing his own sleep to sit up with him in the middle of the night to eat popcorn and watch shark week. Maybe Peter had it all wrong. Maybe he should try harder to not be such a pain in the ass like he was tonight so Tony wouldn’t get sick of him. Then maybe he really would get to stay. Maybe.
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

I’m back from vacation! It was great and I even managed to get a chapter together for you guys. Thanks again for all the lovely comments! I haven’t written anything in over ten years so this has been a bit of a re-learning experience for me. I’m a little rusty. Hopefully it keeps getting better. Enjoy!

The sun on his face woke him up. It was an unfamiliar sensation after living for years with an AI charged with the responsibility of waking him up. Tony frowned and blinked awake. It took a couple seconds for his mind to catch up with the events of last night. Friday had alerted him that Peter had been up watching TV by himself in the middle of the night for over an hour. It was one of many protocols he’d added to her programming once Peter had come to stay. He’d gone out to check on the kid and…apparently had fallen asleep on the couch. Shit. He had no idea what time it was but he was pretty sure it was past 8:00AM, which was the time Pepper had told him he needed to Skype into a meeting with the board. The meeting that had already been rescheduled a few times because of Tony’s schedule. Yep. She was going to kill him.

Tony glanced at Peter fast asleep in the crook of his arm, face lax and peaceful. Tony’s lip curled up in a half grin at the sight. He couldn’t find it within himself to actually feel sorry about missing the meeting if it meant the kid got some rest. Even if it meant said kid was drooling on him. Ok that was a little gross but also kind of adorable. Oh god what was happening to him?

He opened his mouth to ask F.R.I.D.A.Y. what time it was but stopped when he realized that would probably wake Peter up and the kid definitely needed more sleep. Damn. And he was trapped. Hmm but maybe he could extricate himself this time. Eventually after some creative and very slow maneuvering he managed to get off the couch and rearrange Peter so he was lying stretched out with a throw pillow under his head. He picked up a blanket and spread it across the kid before quietly escaping to his bedroom to grab his phone. When the screen blinked up at him 7:58AM, he swore in surprise and scrambled to brush his teeth and get dressed. He could make the stupid meeting after all.

After closing all the window shades in his suite by hand for the first time ever, he tip toed out of his suite at 8:10AM, his phone buzzing in his pocket, undoubtedly Pepper calling to yell at him for being late.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. temporarily restrict access to my suite to everyone except me and Peter.” Tony said as soon as the elevator door closed behind him and started descending to take him to his office. He didn’t want someone to stop by looking for him and accidentally wake Peter up. “And let me know when the squirt wakes up.”


Tony groaned and leaned against the elevator. God he was tired. He’d gotten less than 4 hours of sleep last night and only a couple hours the night before. Even for him that wasn’t much. And he was already late for this stupid meeting so he didn’t even have time to stop in the Avengers kitchen to grab coffee. This was going to be rough.

He made it to his office and joined the meeting only 15 minutes late, actually fairly typical timing for
him. Pepper frowned at his late appearance and just rolled her eyes at his half-hearted apology, also typical. Thank god the meeting only lasted an hour and a half. Tony may have compromised more than usual for him, but he was too exhausted to care. If the majority of the board wanted to release the new Starkphone next week for publicity even though Tony wanted to wait for the few remaining bugs be ironed out, then fine. Whatever. He'd just have to fix it with post-release software updates instead.

“Tony. Tony. Tony!” Tony futilely tried to ignore Pepper’s attempts to get his attention. All the others had signed off the meeting, but apparently Pepper still had things to discuss with him.

“What?” Tony groaned from where he had his head buried in his arms on his desk.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure? You’ve been acting odd lately. Even for you.”

“I promise I’m fine.” He replied without looking up.

“Are you drinking again?” Pepper asked bluntly.

“What? No!” Tony’s head shot up and he glared at her in the computer screen.

“Well ok good. I’m just worried ok? I know we ended things awhile ago but I know how you can be, and I just wanted to make sure you’re not slipping into old bad habits without anyone else around to keep any eye on you.” Her words would’ve annoyed him if he didn’t know her so well. He knew she loved him and worried about him even though they could never quite seem to make their relationship work.

“Don’t worry. I have not gone back to my partying ways. And I have a lot of people around to keep an eye on me. I live with this group called the Avengers remember? Do you have any idea how nosy they are?” Tony complained.

Pepper smiled. “So what’s been going on with you then? Is something bothering you? Something to do with the Avengers?”

“Nothing’s bothering me. It’s just… My situation has changed somewhat.”

“Changed how? I really can’t play guessing games right now Tony. I have another meeting in five minutes.”

“You remember Peter Parker?”

“The kid you took to Germany?” Of course good old Pepper never forgot a name and she also knew better than to peg him as Spiderman over an open Skype channel no matter how secure it probably was.

“Yeah. Well… Um his aunt died. She was his guardian and he didn’t have anywhere else to go and I might’ve… I mean I sort of… took him in?”

Pepper’s face went slack in shock. “Excuse me but could you repeat that because I thought I just heard you say you adopted a teenager?”

“Well not adopted per se, but I’m his legal guardian or whatever now so yeah… Kind of?”
“Oh my god.” Pepper covered her face in her hands.

“What? Why are you freaking out? It’s not like we’re together anymore. He’s not your responsibility.” Tony scowled.

“Are you crazy?” Pepper erupted. Tony mused that if he had a dollar for every time she asked him that he wouldn’t need his company to be a billionaire. “You’re talking about a living human being. A kid! Did you think this through at all? Do you really think you’re equipped to take care of a child?”

“It’s not like he’s five.” Tony defended. “He’s almost sixteen. Hell at sixteen I was alone at MIT.”

“Yes and you turned out so well.” Pepper said sarcastically but winced as soon as the words flew from her mouth.

“I think I’ve done pretty well for myself.” Tony said coolly.

“I know. I’m sorry Tony. I didn’t mean that. This is just a really big responsibility you’re committing to. Are you sure about it? Really sure?”

Tony admitted that maybe he hadn’t thought it through all the way initially when he’d picked Peter up from the hospital. In his mind at the time, the whole thing had seemed simple. The kid needed a shoulder to cry on and a place to stay and Tony could provide that, so he had. And then Peter had needed someone to help pull him out of his funk and make him get out of bed and eat three meals a day and Tony figured he could do that too, so he had. Then the nightmares had come and the kid had clearly needed some comfort, so Tony had given it even if it meant stepping out of his usual comfort zone. And this morning when he’d woken up late for his meeting, exhausted from only getting a few hours of sleep for the second night in a row, the only thing he’d really been worried about was if he’d be able to sneak out of his own suite without waking Peter up. That in and of itself seemed telling. Maybe he should feel more scared or worried about this whole thing, but he didn’t because when it came down to it the reasoning was simple to Tony. Peter needed him, so he would be there. There was only one way to answer Pepper’s question.

“I’m sure.” Tony said with a clear finality.

Pepper stared at him for a few long seconds, searching his face, before she nodded. “Ok then. As long as you’re sure. I’ll support you any way I can.”

“Thank you.” Tony smiled back.

“Starting with trying to do whatever I can to cut back on your workload for the next few weeks to give you two a chance to settle in.”

“You’re a godsend Pepper.”

“Wait. Is this why you didn’t want to go to Japan?”

“Maybe.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me before?”

“Well I’m telling you now.” Tony argued.

“Only because I dragged it out of you. Don’t pretend like we were planning on telling me about Peter today.” Pepper bickered back.
Tony fidgeted with a pen on his desk. “Ok so maybe not, but you know now. So are we done here? Because I really need to get some coffee.”

“You haven’t had coffee yet?” Pepper was shocked. “It’s almost 10:00AM!”

“Believe me I know! I didn’t have time this morning because- Well, because of things… So if we’re done I need to go because I’m probably only 15 minutes away from a caffeine withdrawal migraine.”

“Fine go.” Pepper sighed. “But don’t forget to look over the paperwork I had couriered over to you yesterday.”

“Yes Mom.”

Pepper just ignored the dig. “Bye Tony.”

“Bye.”

Finally. Now he could get coffee.

As he ambled back to the Avengers common room, his thoughts turned to Peter. Should he just let him sleep the day away? The kid probably needed it, but then his sleep schedule would be off and he’d never fall asleep tonight. Yeah he should probably wake the kid up but not yet. If he let him sleep until noon he could wake him up in time for lunch and then Peter would get at least some sleep. But that meant sleeping through breakfast. Shit. He forgot about that. Well it was too late now and sleep was probably better for him anyway. Plus he did feed the kid popcorn last night so maybe that could count as a really early breakfast? God he sucked at this.

He walked, still distracted, into the Avengers common room and made a beeline for the coffee machine. Thank god the pot was still half full. Having to wait for coffee to brew right now would’ve been torture. He poured a cup and took a sip, moaning in ecstasy at the bitter taste.

“Wow Stark what happened to you?” Clint asked from his seat at the breakfast counter with his own cup of coffee and a crossword puzzle laid out before him.

“What?” Tony asked after taking another long sip of life’s sweet nectar. Maybe he could get through today after all.

“You look like shit.” Clint observed.

Tony just flipped him off as he walked past the man toward the couch, pulling his suit jacket off and depositing it over the back of the couch. He just needed to sit right now. He flopped down on the end of the couch next to Steve and loosened his tie.

Steve stopped sketching to look over at him and frowned. “Are you ok?”

“Oh my god. Why does everyone keep asking me that today?” Tony groaned and leaned his head back against the couch and closed his eyes. “Yes I’m fine. I didn’t get a lot of sleep last night. I’m not going to keel over or anything. Everyone can stop worrying.”

“I wasn’t worried.” Natasha said from the other couch where she sat sharpening her knives.

“Me neither. You’ve looked much worse.” Bruce said as he sipped his tea. He sat next to Natasha reading the most recent nuclear physics journal.

“Oh thanks.” Tony retorted.
“You still up for team training this afternoon?” Steve asked. They had a large scale practice scenario planned for the entire afternoon to work on team strategy.

Tony just moaned in response.

“I call not it on his team Cap.” Clint laughed as he joined them in the living room.

“I’m sure Tony will be fine.” Steve said. “Right Tony?”

“I make no promises.” Tony finished his coffee in a few large gulps and returned to resting his head against the back of the couch with his eyes closed. He just needed to rest his eyes for a few minutes to recharge and let the coffee kick in. Once he woke up a little more he’d go over those papers Pepper had sent over and then he should have just enough time to wake Peter up for lunch and still make it for the training session… He had every intention of getting up from the couch but within minutes he was asleep, the quiet of the living room interrupted by his soft snuffling snores. He didn’t catch his teammates sharing looks of surprise and then concern at his narcolepsy-like impression. He didn’t so much as stir when Bruce walked over to make sure he didn’t have a fever or later when Steve got up and started clattering around in the kitchen to make lunch.

Tony awoke a couple hours later to Steve calling his name softly and shaking his shoulder. He rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and glanced up at the supersoldier.

“Hey are you hungry? Lunch is ready.” Steve asked.

“Shit. Did I fall asleep?” Tony glanced around. The living room was devoid of people and the lights were turned down. “What time is it?”


“I’m up. I’m up.” Tony croaked as he stood and stretched. Ouch. He was definitely getting too old to be sleeping on couches. The sleep had done wonders, though. He actually felt like somewhat of a human again. “I just have to go wake the kid up. I’ll be right back down.”

“I thought he didn’t get to sleep past 9:30AM?” Steve teased.

“Yeah usually but we had a rough night.” Tony admitted and watched as a look of understanding crossed Steve’s face.

“It’s a good thing you’re doing. Taking him in. Taking care of him.” Steve said seriously.

“It’s not that big of a deal.”

“It is.” Steve insisted and Tony didn’t argue this time. He never handled praise well. Probably because his father was a bastard that had never given him any growing up even when he’d deserved it, so he didn’t know how to deal with it now.

“Make sure to save some lunch for us.” Tony joked instead.

“I’ll try.” Steve laughed. “But you better hurry up. I’m pretty hungry.”

Tony beelined it to the elevator.
“Peter. Hey kiddo. It’s time to get up.” Tony’s voice permeated the idyllic darkness.

“Nooo.” Peter moaned and pulled the blanket over his head to try to escape.

He heard Tony snort in amusement at his antics before the blanket suddenly disappeared.

“Hey!” Peter yelped and finally opened his eyes to glare at Tony who stood above him smirking with the blanket in his hand.

“I’m pretty sure that’s child abuse.” Peter complained.

Tony laughed outright.

“Pretty sure it’s not. Come on. Get up. Up up up.” Tony gave him a few soft taps on the shoulder to accentuate his words.

Peter just continued to glare. He was tired and Tony had interrupted what felt like the first restful sleep he’d gotten in forever.

“Aw you kind of look like an angry puppy.” Tony teased.

“I do not!” Peter argued. “I look fearsome and intimidating.”

“All I can say is it’s a good thing you wear a mask as Spiderman.”

Peter just stuck out his tongue.

“Yep very scary. Now come on. Time to get up. Unless you want to stay here, but then Steve will be bummed you didn’t want to eat lunch with him and a sad Captain America is not something you want to witness. It’s anti-American.”

“Wait we’re having lunch with Steve?” Peter asked.

“Well Steve and all the other—”

Peter bounded off the couch to his room to get dressed before Tony could finish.

“Sure for Steve you get up. I’m not sure how I feel about this Captain America hero worship! Ironman is way better! And you know it!” Tony called out after him.

Peter didn’t respond as he quickly threw on some jeans and a plain grey t-shirt. For a second, he considered wearing his Captain America t-shirt just to mess with Tony but there was no way his ego could survive wearing it in front of Steve. They didn’t know each other that well yet and the man would probably think he was a huge dork, which sure he was but he didn’t want Captain America to
know that.

He ran a hand through his hair to straighten it out and returned to the living room. “Ok I’m ready.”

“That was fast.” Tony remarked, looking up from his phone. “Did you even brush your teeth?”

“Um…”

“Nope gross. Go brush your teeth you heathen.” Tony pointed toward the bathroom.

Peter huffed and rolled his eyes but hurried to comply.

“Ok can we go now?” Peter asked with fresh breath as he walked back to join Tony.

“Now that you’ve completed the bare minimum of basic human hygiene? Yeah we can go.” Tony smirked and reached out to wrap an arm around Peter’s back, loosely gripping his opposite shoulder and guiding them to the elevator.

“Listen we have this big training exercise this afternoon. Will you be ok here by yourself for awhile?”

Peter frowned. “You don’t want me to come with?”

Tony shook his head. “No I don’t actually know what Steve has planned, but there probably won’t be a safe place to watch.”

“No I mean…you don’t want me to…um…participate?” Peter asked hesitantly. Maybe this was his chance. He could take part in their training exercise and prove that Spiderman was an asset so they’d let him stay. Maybe Tony was even waiting for him to ask to join in so he could offer him a place on the Avengers again.

They came to an abrupt stop, still several feet from the elevator door. Peter turned his head to catch Tony observing him shrewdly. “Why would I want you to participate?”

Peter felt like the rug had been pulled out from under him and he floundered. Had he read this completely wrong? What was he supposed to say? Was this some sort of test? What did Tony want from him?

“Peter?”

“Um…I don’t know?” Wow Parker what a convincing lie. He really needed to work on that.

Tony looked like he was trying to piece together a particularly complicated puzzle but didn’t push. “Well since it’s an Avengers training exercise, and the last time I checked you’re not an Avenger, you’re not participating.”

“Ok.” Peter agreed quietly when it seemed like Tony was waiting for some kind of verbal response from him.

Tony stared at him for another couple long seconds before he nodded once and they continued into the elevator.

“So are you going to be able to stay out of trouble unsupervised all afternoon? Otherwise I can call Happy to come keep you company.”

“No that’s ok Mr. Stark. I mean Tony!” He corrected immediately before Tony could chastise him.
“I’ll be fine by myself.”

Usually Peter wasn’t a huge fan of being left alone but it sounded kind of nice after being around people nearly constantly since Aunt May’s death. He could talk to Ned uninterrupted and not have to worry about someone overhearing. And he’d have time to just be himself and not have to put on a happy face like he’d been doing around the Avengers. Like now. As the elevator opened, Peter plastered a grin to his face that he didn’t feel.

“Hey Steve.” Peter greeted. The man stood at the kitchen island dishing up tacos on his plate.

“Good morning.” Steve responded. “Hungry?”

“Yeah!”

“Well there’s plenty of food left. Take as much as you want.”

Tony grabbed two plates and handed one to Peter, motioning for Peter to go first. “Go ahead. Knock yourself out kid. After you and Cap I’ll take whatever scraps are left.”

Peter turned stricken eyes toward Tony, suddenly worried about not leaving enough.

“I’m kidding.” Tony reassured. “Eat.”

Peter needed no more prompting. He piled his plate with tacos, nearly giving Steve a run for his money, before making his way into the adjacent room where all the Avengers sat at the long dining table. Well, everyone except Thor. Apparently he was still back home in Asgard. Or at least Peter thought that’s what Tony had said. And Rhodey who was still on some military op somewhere. And that guy with the silver arm Peter had fought in Germany, but Peter had been hesitant to ask Tony about him since they’d been on opposite sides of the fight and the man had yet to make any mention of him.

Peter eyed the table quickly. None of the empty chairs left were together, so Peter wouldn’t get to sit next to Steve or Tony. Suddenly he felt like the new kid at school walking out of the lunch line trying to decide where he’d be allowed to sit. Which was pathetic, Peter knew. He was a teenaged superhero and he was more nervous about picking a place to sit than fighting crime.

There was a seat on the end of the table next to Wanda, but Peter hadn’t spent any time with her or Vision since their initial introduction and she seemed a little intimidating, so that choice was out. The empty seat between Bruce and Scott was an option. Scott was hilarious and Bruce was super nice, but Peter figured Tony would want to sit next to Bruce. Out of all the Avengers, Bruce and Steve seemed to be Tony’s closest friends, even though Tony would probably deny until he was blue in the face that he even considered Steve an acquaintance. But Peter knew better. So that left the last seat across from Natasha and next to Clint at the end of the table. Perfect.

Besides Steve, Clint and Natasha had been the ones he’d spent the most time with the past couple days. Plus this way he’d still be close-ish to Tony, since Bruce sat next to Natasha. Not that it should matter. He was a big boy. He shouldn’t need Tony to hold his hand. He could handle not sitting next to the man, even if it did leave him feeling oddly bereft. He chewed the inside of his lip and shoved the new insecurity deep down as he pulled out the chair next to Clint and sat down, flashing a smile at the archer.

“Hey squirt.” Clint said around a mouth full of taco.

“Hey Legolas.” The comeback slipped out before he could even try to stop himself.
Tony’s loud laugh instantly rang out from the other side of the table where he was pulling out a chair to sit next to a smiling Bruce and Natasha.

“I think you’ve been hanging around Stark for too long. You’re starting to sound like him.” Clint groused but didn’t seem too offended. Peter was slowly starting to learn the personalities and nuances of the various Avengers. Clint loved to dish it out but it seemed he could take it just as well.

“Hey leave the kid alone. He’s just an incredibly good judge of character.” Tony smirked.

“Obviously not since he’s spending so much time with you.” Clint bantered. Peter wondered if maybe his choice in seat might have been a mistake.

“Careful you’re starting to look a little green. Don’t want to make Brucie insecure.” Tony shot back.

“So Peter.” Bruce interjected to stop the argument from progressing. “Do you have any big plans for this afternoon since you’ll have the place to yourself?”

“I figured I’d play Mario Kart for a couple hours and reset all the high scores.” Peter grinned wryly at Clint who held the majority of the records.

“Hey!” Clint protested.

“I’m just kidding. I don’t really have any plans.” Peter bit into his second taco. Delicious. If the Captain America gig ever stopped working out, Steve could always get a job as a chef.

Bruce frowned. “Are you sure you’ll be ok by yourself? I’m sure one of us could stay and keep you company.”

“No really I’ll be fine.” Peter could barely talk around his mouth full of taco. It was nice of Bruce to worry but sheesh he was Spiderman. Why was everyone so worried he couldn’t be left alone for one afternoon?

“I’m sure Peter will be more than happy to have some time to himself.” Natasha remarked, her own plate already empty.

Peter flashed a grateful smile at her and continued to devour his tacos. The conversation continued around him and Peter was fine with no longer being the center of attention at his end of the table.

All too soon everyone finished eating and started to slowly filter out of the room to get ready for the training exercise. Soon it was just Tony, Steve, and Peter left.

“You sure you don’t want me to come with you?” Peter tried to ask with confidence but it came out a little weak.

“No son.” Steve answered before Tony could. “This is just for the Avengers.”

Peter nodded and cleared his place. The sink was piled with dishes even though the dishwasher was literally right next to the sink. Was it so hard to just put them in the dishwasher? May would’ve had a conniption fit if he’d ever done this at home. Peter sighed and planned to do the dishes for them once Steve and Tony left.

“All right kiddo. I’ve got to take off. You sure you’re going to be ok?” Tony asked after Steve left.

“Yessss.” Peter groaned.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s available if you need anything and you know you can always call me.”
Peter frowned as he corrected. “No I can’t. I don’t have your number remember? That’s why I always have to call Happy.”

Tony blinked a couple times in surprise. “Well you won’t have to anymore. Give me your phone.”

Peter hurried to obey, handing over his phone from his back pocket.

“Are you kidding me right now kid?”

“What?”

“This isn’t a Starkphone.” Tony accused.

“Um…no?”

Tony shook his head but started typing into it. “As soon as I get back I’m fixing this gross oversight for you but for now here you go. You have my number. Please don’t sell it to TMZ.”

“Thanks.” Peter said as Tony tossed the phone back to him. Sure enough, Tony Stark was now listed under his contacts list.

“Ok now I really have to go or Cap’s going to kill me. Call me if you need anything. Anything. All right?”

Peter nodded. Why did Tony seem so nervous about leaving him alone? Was he worried he’d wreck something? It wasn’t like he was going to graffiti the walls up once he was unsupervised. May used to leave him alone all the time. A lump formed in his throat and he forced his thoughts away from her. Didn’t Tony trust him?

“Ok.” Tony seemed to be talking to himself more than Peter.

“I’ll be back soon.” He reached out to grip Peter’s shoulder briefly and then turned and left.

For the first time since coming to the compound Peter was completely alone.

Peter tried to keep busy in order to distract himself from dwelling on May and the overwhelming sadness that seemed to weigh him down every time he let his mind wander toward the events of last week. He cleaned up the kitchen until everything looked pristine. Then he played Mario Kart for awhile and even succeeded in knocking off a few of Clint’s high scores. Oops. Hopefully the archer wouldn’t actually kill him. Afterwards, he went back upstairs to Tony’s floor and reorganized his room before finally deciding to bite the bullet and call Ned.

“Peter!” His friend answered on the first ring.

“Hey Ned. Sorry it took awhile to call.”

“That’s ok man. I’m…I’m really sorry about your aunt.”

“Thanks.” Peter mumbled quietly.

“Um if you don’t mind my asking, what happened?”
“Car accident.” Peter choked out. God he could still barely talk about it. He wondered if it’d always be that way.

“God Peter. That’s…that’s horrible.”

“Yeah I mean at least it happened fast. She didn’t suffer.” This time his voice cracked and he had to jam his eyes shut to try to keep from losing it.

“Were you with her?”

“No I was at home. She-she’d-‘gone to get me fucking ice cream, wouldn’t leave his lips.

When he tried instead to say, ‘she’s dead because of me,’ what came out was, ‘Can we not talk about it?’

“Yeah.” Ned sounded upset. “Are you sure there’s nothing I can do for you? Do you need anything?”

“No I’m ok.” Peter lied.

An awkward silence settled over the conversation. He and Ned never had awkward silences. Another first.

“Are you sure? You just don’t really sound like yourself.” Ned tried.

“Well when you’re parents die you can call me and I’ll tell you if you sound like yourself.” Peter lashed out and instantly regretted it. “I-I’m sorry. I didn’t…I didn’t mean that.”

“I know.” Ned said softly. “Just…if you need anything I’m here Peter. You know that right?”

“Yeah I know. Thanks Ned. You’re a good friend.”

“I know.” Ned joked and it elicited a strangled laugh from Peter. “But seriously. If you feel up to it I think you should come over sometime soon. We could catch a flick or just hang out or whatever you want.”

“Yeah that sounds good. I’ll talk to Tony about it. Maybe I can get a ride into the city sometime.” Peter hedged. For some reason, the thought of hanging out with his friend and trying to act normal around someone who really knew him and could easily see through his bullshit sounded exhausting. He had no intention of seeing Ned anytime soon and he felt ridiculously guilty about it.

“Awesome.” Ned replied. “I still can’t believe you’re living with Tony Stark.”

“Yeah.” Peter said noncommittally. He didn’t really feel like talking about it since he was still confused about where he actually stood with the man.

“So where’d you decide to display our Lego Death Star?” Peter asked, deliberately changing the subject.

“Oh man you won’t believe where I put it!” Ned exclaimed excitedly and they spent the next twenty minutes chatting about anything and everything not related to Aunt May or the Avengers. It was the most normal Peter had felt all week. As much as Peter had initially dreaded calling Ned, he was actually sad to say good-bye when Ned had to leave. His friend promised to call him the next day, which was a small consolation.

Peter spent the rest of the evening mindlessly watching movies. When his usual dinnertime came and
went without any sign of the Avengers, Peter rummaged through the cupboards and put together a few peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for himself.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. when will Tony be back?”

“Boss and the rest of the Avengers are currently on their way back to the compound. A post-exercise debrief is scheduled for an unspecified amount of time. I estimate he should return within the next three hours. Should I contact him for you?”

“No no that’s ok. I was just curious. Thanks F.R.I.D.A.Y.”

“You’re welcome Mr. Parker.”

“Um can you call me Peter?”

“Of course Peter.”

“Thanks.” Peter mumbled and decided to go to bed. It was only eight o’clock but he felt beat. He didn’t think he’d be able to keep his eyes open for another few hours and he had no desire to accidentally spend another night sleeping on the couch if he could help it. He figured Tony wouldn’t mind if he didn’t wait up for him. See? He could entertain himself, feed himself, and get himself ready for bed at a responsible time all on his own. He could be low maintenance.

Last night he couldn’t fall asleep to save his life. Tonight he was out almost the instant his head hit the pillow.

“You’re in over your head kid.” Toomes’ voice echoed throughout the hazy darkness of the warehouse but Peter couldn’t see him. He spun around, fear escalating, but no one was there. “I warned you. Now people are going to have to get hurt.”

“Peter!” Aunt May’s called out in panic but Peter couldn’t see her.

“May! Where are you?” He ran through the empty building, searching frantically. The dust and lack of light made it difficult to see anything.

“Peter please.” She cried again, sounding closer but also weaker.

He turned a corner and suddenly she was there. Lying on the ground, covered in dirt and bruises with blood trickling out the corner of her mouth.

“May.” Peter gasped and fell to his knees beside her, wanting to hold her but afraid of making anything worse, so his hands hovered uncertainly over her. “I’m here. You’re going to be ok.”

“Why didn’t you tell me Peter?” May asked hoarsely. “Why didn’t you tell me you were Spiderman?”

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Peter lamented and his eyes fixated on the gaping hole in May’s abdomen. Blood poured out of it. Too much blood. Oh god. May was dying. He leaned forward and pressed as hard as he could on the wound. Tears leaked from his eyes. This couldn’t be happening. No no no.

May moaned in pain. “No Peter. It’s too late. You’re too late. Where were you? Why weren’t you here?”
Where had he been? How could he have let another member of his family down? How could he be Spiderman and still be so useless?

“I’m sorry.” Peter whispered over and over again like a mantra.

“You should’ve listened Peter.” Toomes bellowed, but Peter still couldn’t see the man. “You could’ve just walked away. It’s too bad you didn’t. Now your aunt has to die along with you.”

The building started shaking and Peter looked up just in time to see the ceiling start to buckle.

“Good bye little spider.” The Vulture laughed and then the warehouse collapsed around him.

“No! Help! Help!” He screamed. He didn’t want to be trapped. This couldn’t be happening again. Again?

“Peter! Peter wake up!”

His eyes snapped open with a gasp and he looked anxiously around the room, trying to get his bearings. For a split second he was confused. This wasn’t his bedroom in Queens. But then everything came flooding back. That’s right. This was his new room. Even though it had just been a dream, May was still gone. He lived with Tony Stark now, who currently stood leaning over him with grounding hands on his shoulders.

“Hey.” Tony moved his head to try to catch Peter’s gaze. “It was just a bad dream. You’re ok. You’re safe.”

Peter tried to take a deep settling breath but it got caught in his throat. Oh god. He didn’t want to cry again like a big baby. He bit the inside of his cheek and somehow managed to resist the urge to erupt into waterworks.

“Th-thanks.” He finally managed to stammer out. “Um s-sorry.”

“It’s ok. Don’t apologize. You ok?” Tony eyed him critically.

“Y-yeah. I-I’m ok. Y-you ca gn-go.” Peter really wanted him to stay but that definitely wouldn’t fit into his whole not being high maintenance plan. Shit he’d already woken the poor guy up for the third night in a row. Although maybe not. Tony still wore what looked like some new version of the Ironman undersuit. Black pants and a long sleeve shirt with blue dots interspersed on them. Not exactly sleep attire.

“You’re shaking like a leaf kid.” Tony frowned and moved to sit down on the bed instead of leaving. “Must’ve been one hell of a nightmare.”

“Y-yeah.” For some reason he was having a hard time catching his breath. The terror still felt so real. He hated that his body was betraying him like this. He was a superhero. Why couldn’t he stop falling apart over stupid nightmares?

“Can you tell me about it?”

“N-no. Please. I-I don’t… I can’t I…” Just thinking about it made the details of the nightmare rush back. The fear of losing May. A real fear that Peter had already lived. The absolute panic at the thought of being trapped under rubble again. The stupid memory that couldn’t seem to stop haunting his dreams.

“It’s ok. We don’t have to talk about it right now.” Tony’s escalating concern was easy to read on his
face and Peter wished he could stop shaking, but his body just wouldn’t obey his brain. If anything, it seemed to get worse.

“Come here kid.” Tony continued quietly as the hands gripping Peter’s shoulders pulled him up and into Tony’s chest for a careful hug. Peter hesitantly wrapped his own arms around the man and when Tony made no move to dislodge him after a few seconds, Peter griped him tighter and felt reassured when Tony did the same.

“I’ve got you. You’re safe. You’re in the safest place in the world.” Tony soothed. Peter knew he meant the Avengers compound, but Peter agreed that he’d never felt safer than that moment in Ironman’s arms. The words along with the solid embrace grounded him and the shaking slowly started to abate as he calmed down.

“I’m sorry.” Peter whispered into Tony’s chest.

“No. Stop.” Tony pulled back so he could look Peter in the eyes. With a serious intensity he continued, “Stop apologizing. I mean it. None of this is your fault. No more apologizing for things that aren’t your fault. New rule.”

“I just- I don’t mean to be so m-messed up.”

Tony sighed heavily and pulled him back into a hug. “You’ve had a rough week kid. Hell you’ve had a rough year. I think you’re allowed to be a little messed up.”

“But I… I’m Spiderman. I’m not supposed to be like this.” Peter whispered. Saying it out loud felt like a deep dark confession.

Tony’s arms tightened around him. “Hey. I’ll let you in on a little Avengers secret but you have to promise not to tell anyone. Ok? Promise?”

“I promise.” Peter said solemnly into the man’s chest.

Tony leaned down closer and said, “We’re all a little messed up.”

Peter huffed out a short surprised laugh that turned into a half sob as a couple tears trailed silently down his cheeks. He hadn’t even realized he’d been crying. God why did he always have to turn into a sniveling baby around Tony?

Tony didn’t mention the tears, but he must’ve noticed because he kept holding him, making no move to push Peter away. Peter selfishly allowed himself the silent comfort for a couple more minutes before pulling away.

Tony relinquished the hug reluctantly, letting go to cup Peter’s face in his hands and wipe his tears away with his thumbs in such a no fuss manner Peter didn’t really even feel that embarrassed.

“Better?” Tony asked lightly without any judgment as he examined Peter’s expression.

“Yeah. Thanks.” Tony seemed to find whatever he was looking for because he gave Peter a small nod and finally let go.

“Think you’ll be able to get back to sleep?” Tony’s tone of voice indicated he already knew the answer.

“No.” Peter felt weak admitting it but it was true. There was no way he’d be able to fall asleep now.
“Do you want to come tinker with me in the workshop? There are a couple suit upgrades I need to work on. You can help if you want.”

“Really?” Sure, Tony had shown him the workshop on the tour, but he never thought he’d actually get to hang out down there, let alone work on the Ironman suits with Ironman himself.

“Yeah come on. But first you should probably get changed into something you don’t mind getting dirty…or ruined.” Tony said as he stood.

“Ok!” Peter couldn’t keep the excitement out of his voice and he hurried to get out of bed. Somehow his legs got tangled in the sheets, though, and he tumbled abruptly toward the ground. Luckily, Tony was still close enough to catch him.

“Whoa. Ok slow down underoos.” Tony chuckled as he helped Peter back onto the bed to untangle himself. “No need to injure yourself in the process. The workshop will wait.”

Peter hid his blush behind a wry grin as he kicked his legs free from the covers with Tony’s help.

“You hungry?” Tony turned to ask as he walked out the door.

Peter shrugged. “I could eat.”

“Ok good because I’m starving and I’m thinking pizza sounds great right now. You don’t care if we have pizza again do you?”

“No I love pizza! I could eat it everyday.” Peter answered as he rummaged through his dresser to find what to wear. He pulled out a pair of plain black Underarmour sweat pants and threw them on.

“What kind should I order?” Tony yelled from the kitchen.

“What’s your favorite? I feel like I should know that.”

“Pepperoni and green olive, but really I’ll eat anything. I’m not picky.” Peter answered as he pulled on his oldest Captain America T-shirt. It was a faded blue shirt with the shield across the center.

Peter strutted out to the kitchen as Tony finished telling F.R.I.D.A.Y. to order two large pepperoni and green olive pizzas with breadsticks.

“I’m ready.” Peter announced and Tony glanced over at him. Peter had to work hard not to burst out laughing at his befuddled expression.

“You’re kidding me with this right now, right?” Tony pointed to the shirt.

“Hmm maybe.” Peter grinned.

“You know this Captain America obsession isn’t healthy. Does Steve know about this?”

Peter didn’t answer. He just kept smiling and followed Tony as he walked toward the elevator.

“The only reason I’m going to let you wear that is because it’s probably going to get wrecked anyway. In fact, that’s going to be my new goal for tonight. Hope you’re not too attached to it.”

“That’s ok. I’ve got tons more.”
“What?! How many more? Tell me!”

Peter couldn’t stop laughing as he leaned against the elevator wall. For how shitty this night had started out, it was actually starting to look up.
Tony groaned as he stood and stretched, his back popping from the length of time he’d spent hunched over his workbench adding improvements to the Ironman gauntlets. He wanted to keep working on them but the circuits had started blurring in front of his tired eyes, and he knew from experience that if he kept going he’d just end up electrocuting himself or worse, making a mistake. It was only early afternoon but he was exhausted. Since a week and a half ago, when he’d walked into his suite to hear Peter screaming for help in the throes of a nightmare, some variation of the scene had repeated nightly.

Tony prided himself on being able to function on minimal sleep and other life sustaining things like food, but this was starting to stretch even his endurance. Sure, he could easily stay up for 24 hours or longer without sleep if the situation called for it but he would eventually have to crash and sleep later. For the last week and a half he’d only been getting a total of maybe 4 hours of sleep a night…if he was lucky. He didn’t know how much longer he could continue to function like this. And that was his main worry. Because Peter’s nightmares hadn’t showed any sign of abating and Tony didn’t know what to do.

Luckily, the kid seemed to be fairing better than Tony. Probably since most nights he eventually fell asleep again while Tony stayed up worrying about him and then still had to be up early to fulfill his myriad of responsibilities to the Avengers and Stark Industries and as liaison to the UN, one of many eventual compromises they’d made after the Accords disaster with Secretary Ross. God the man had been a jackass. A crazy jackass on a power trip - the worst kind. Tony hadn’t been sad to completely destroy him after he’d realized the mistakes they’d made with the Accords. All in all it hadn’t exactly been easy but he’d been able to get the Avengers pardoned and they’d finally come to an agreement everyone was comfortable with. Mending all the hurt and distrust and betrayal had taken months and even now insecurities still flared up but somehow they’d returned to a semblance of the team they’d been before.

Thank god this current situation hadn’t happened in the middle of that mess. Tony had no idea how he would’ve juggled Peter with everything else. Who knew taking in a teenager would be so much work? Of course Tony knew kids weren’t easy, but he thought the sleep deprivation phase happened more at the infant stage. But even with the sleepless nights, Tony wouldn’t trade it for the world, because Peter was…Peter was amazing. It seemed like such a cliché word to use to describe him but Tony couldn’t think of anything better.

Tony thought he’d known the kid before, but after spending the past few weeks with him he’d continually been surprised by him in new ways. First of all, the kid was hilarious in a witty and refreshing way. But he was also smart, which yeah Tony had known he had to be somewhat intelligent since he attended one of the best STEM schools in NYC and had manufactured his own webbing and webshooters, but he hadn’t know he was this smart. Like more than genius level smart. Like almost Tony Stark level smart. Almost.

Tony remembered when he’d first realized it. It’d been the first time he brought Peter down to the lab to distract him after that terrifying nightmare. They’d been working on the armor and Tony had asked what Peter thought about adding some extra side panels to the suit for more firepower. Tony had already known it wasn’t feasible but he’d been trying to make the kid feel included.

“But…” Peter started but stopped himself.
“But what kid?”

“That wouldn’t work.” Peter said without any hint of indecisiveness.

“Oh and why not?”

“Because the added drag would severely compromise your maneuverability not to mention your maximal attainable velocity.”

Tony stared gobsmacked for a moment before he answered. “You’re right.”

Peter’s brow furrowed. “If you knew it wouldn’t work why’d you suggest it?”

“Just keeping you on your toes kid.” Tony quipped.

“So what would you do to improve the armor?”

“Well it’s not like I’ve actually thought about it before or anything but if you could selectively modulate the energy output from the arc reactor, you could channel the lower power settings to form a short lived energy shield instead of a repulsor blast. Um…not that you’d really need it because the armor is already so so awesome but I mean if I had to add something I guess I’d try to add that…”

“That’s…a good idea.” Tony admitted. Why had he never thought of that? It’d be easy enough to do and definitely useful in numerous situations.

Peter lit up at the praise. “Really?”

“Yeah. Let’s try it out.”

Peter had earned his respect by recognizing the error in Tony’s initial false proposal for upgrading the suit, but then he’d impressed him. And it wasn’t easy to impress Tony Stark.

“So kid clearly you’re not just a dumpster diver.” Tony remarked as he searched for a spare arc reactor to set up a test for Peter’s theory.

“Um…no?” Peter answered.

“So what makes you tick? What gets you going? What lights your fire?”

“Huh?”

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” Tony simplified it.

“Oh! Well I don’t know. I mean I love science. And I mean biology and chemistry are pretty cool and all but if I had to pick just one thing I think I’d have to pick physics. Or maybe I’ll end up combining things somehow like chemical physics or bioengineering? But who knows?”

“You’ve got lots of time to decide.” Tony said as he fiddled with the arc reactor in front of him, letting Peter watch and learn. “If you ever need any advice when it comes to physics or engineering you can always ask me, but Bruce knows more about the biology and chemistry aspect…but don’t ever tell him I said that. You two should talk.”

“Aw no Tony I-I couldn’t. He’s…I mean he’s Bruce Banner.” Peter whispered at the end.

Tony’s breath caught in his throat briefly, thinking Peter was afraid of Bruce because of the Hulk, but then Peter continued. “He completely revolutionized the field of nuclear physics even before the whole um turning green thing. He’s like…a legend.”
“What am I? Chopped liver?” Tony raised an eyebrow at Peter.

“No I mean- You’re uh obviously a legend too but you’re… He’s…” Tony tried not to laugh as Peter unsuccessfully sputtered out a reply. “He…he won’t want to waste his time with me.”

“Oh I think he will.” Tony said nonchalantly.

Peter glanced at him but didn’t say anything further.

“Now Mr. Physics did you see why I did that?” Tony asked as he cut a wire leading from the arc reactor and started stripping it.

Tony shouldn’t have been surprised when Peter answered correctly, but he was. Pride swelled in his chest even though he couldn’t take any credit for Peter’s academic prowess. He decided then and there that was definitely going to change.

Now here he was over a week later finalizing the application of Peter’s idea into his gauntlets as Peter and Bruce chitchatted on the other side of the lab about…something chemistry related. Bruce had taken to the kid almost instantly just like Tony had predicted. They’d been thick as thieves for the past week. Tony wasn’t even jealous. He was just glad Peter was having a good time.

Besides, Peter still spent more time with him than all of the other Avengers combined and he was the one that was there for him. The one that woke him up from the horrible nightmares and chased his fears away at the expense of his own sleep.

“Peter!” Bruce’s sharp cry of concern cut across the workshop, instantly garnering Tony’s attention.

“What? I was just—”

“That’s pure potassium!”

“Oh oops.” Peter paused and peered at the bottle he held in his hand, poised to dump it into a beaker. “My bad.”

Peter blushed and handed it over to Bruce who quickly snatched it away.

“Where did you even find this?”

“Um it was over there by the uh…” He trailed off guilty.

“Over there?” Bruce pointed to a high shelf. “You mean the shelf you’re not allowed to touch?”

“I thought it was potassium hydroxide.” Peter mumbled.

“What’s going on?” Tony interrupted as he walked across the lab to join them.

“Oh nothing. Peter just tried to blow us all up is all.”

“What?!” Tony asked sharply.

“I’m sorry all right! It’s not like I did it on purpose!”

“No you just decided to take something from a shelf of dangerous chemicals I forbade you from touching. There’s a reason they’re off limits.” Bruce continued his chastisement as he put the bottle back.
“Peter.” Tony said sternly.

“I-I’m sorry ok!” Peter said becoming more and more distressed now that he was faced with both Tony and Bruce’s disapproval. “I just…I thought it was potassium hydroxide. Really. And I had this awesome idea I wanted to try with it to increase the tensile strength of my webs. I wanted to surprise you! I didn’t know it was pure potassium. I didn’t know!”

The desperate quality of Peter’s voice seemed to weaken Bruce’s resolve. He pulled his glasses off a rubbed a hand over his eyes. “Just…don’t do that again. If you want to use something from that shelf ask me first, ok? So I know it’s safe.”

“Oh.” Peter agreed readily.

“Promise me.” Bruce said seriously.

“I promise.”

Bruce sighed and turned a beseeching look toward Tony who was still stuck on the whole Peter almost blowing them up thing. It took him a couple seconds to realize Bruce was waiting for him to dole out Peter’s punishment. What should he do? He could just let him get by with it. Bruce wouldn’t argue even if he didn’t agree. But then what if Peter did it again? Sure he’d promised he wouldn’t but he’d already disobeyed Bruce once and oh god what if he did it again and actually blew himself up? Shit. He had to punish him. Hopefully the kid wouldn’t hate him for it.

“Peter go to your room.” Tony said firmly.

Peter’s mouth dropped open and his eyes widened in shock at the words. “What?”

Tony’s heart broke a little at the lost expression Peter focused on him, but he refused to show it or back down. This was for the kid’s own good. “You heard me. Go to your room. No lab privileges for the rest of the day. And no TV. Or phone. Hand it over.”

Tony held out his hand.

“But…”

“Now.” Tony warned.

Peter glanced at Bruce but found no support there as he pulled his new Starkphone out from his pocket and hesitantly handed it over to Tony.

“But I promised Ned I’d call him today.” Peter pleaded as Tony pocketed the phone.

“You’ll have to call him tomorrow.” Tony said without pity. “We have rules to keep you safe. If you’re not going to follow them then there will be consequences. And if something like this happens again then we can’t trust you down here and you’ll lose your lab privileges. Do you understand?”

Peter bit his lip and nodded.

“Ok. Go to your room. I’ll be up later.”

“I really am sorry.” Peter whispered, head hanging as he left.

“Oh my god that was hard.” Tony groaned as soon as the door closed behind Peter and he was out of earshot. He turned to Bruce and frowned at the assessing expression on the scientist’s face.
“What?” He asked.

“Nothing.” Bruce smiled. “You’re just…really good with him.”

“No I’m not.” Tony argued. He had absolutely no good experience to draw upon. God he hoped he hadn’t sounded like Howard. He didn’t think he had. He hadn’t yelled. The man had always yelled at him.

“Yeah you are.” Bruce reaffirmed and clapped a hand on his back as he walked back to the lab bench to clean up Peter’s experiment.

“Boss Colonel Rhodes is back.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. interjected.

“Finally.” Tony sighed dramatically. Rhodey was supposed to return five days ago but apparently the mission had run long. Tony had started to worry even though he’d never admit it. “Where is he?”

“His personal quarters.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. answered.

“See you later Brucie bear.”

“Bye Tony.”

“Oh and thanks for keeping my kid from blowing himself up.” Tony said offhandedly as he left, then mentally paused. My kid? It had just slipped out. He’d meant to say the kid. He was sure of that. That knowing smile was back on Bruce’s face. “You’re welcome.”

“Rhodey!” Tony greeted as he barged into the man’s room without knocking. “You’re back! I was starting to worry you’d gotten sick of us and moved on to bigger and better things.”

“Nope you’re still stuck with me.” A small grin crossed the man’s face as he unpacked the duffel bag on his bed.

Tony plopped himself down on the bed, purposefully invading his friend’s personal space as much as possible.

“You could at least take your shoes off.” Rhodey griped and turned his attention from unpacking to where Tony lay on his bed, frowning when his eyes took in his friend. “Are you ok?”

“Sure why wouldn’t I be?” Tony deflected.

“The circles under your eyes have circles.” Rhodey observed. “When was the last time you slept?”

“Last night.” Tony wasn’t even lying. He had slept last night…for about three hours.

“Uh huh.” Rhodey obviously didn’t believe him.

“It’s true. I mean I didn’t sleep a lot but I did sleep. But enough about me. How did the new upgrade on the legs work on your little vacation?”

“The upgrade worked great and it wasn’t a vacation.” Rhodey pulled a handful of dirty shirts out and threw them across the room into the hamper.
“I’m sorry. Trip? Retreat?”

“The *mission* went fine. The US government and United Nations thanks us. I’m sure they’ll send you a briefing on it.”

“So what took so long? Having too much fun sipping pina coladas in the desert?”

“Our extraction was delayed. Some red tape problem. Typical bullshit government operations.” Rhodey grumbled.

“Careful there Colonel. What if Uncle Sam heard you talking like that? Or worse Captain America?” Tony stage whispered.

Rhodey snorted.

“Admit you missed me.” Tony smirked.

Rhodey glanced over at him. “I might have missed you a little.”

“Ha I knew it. You can barely go a day without me.” Tony flopped sideways, tangling his legs in Rhodey’s duffel bag to try to annoy him.

“I take it back. I didn’t miss you at all.” Rhodey pushed at Tony’s feet, finally freeing his empty duffel and tossing it over by his closet.

“Ouch. Words hurt you know.” Tony grinned up at him.

“So are we going to talk about the fact that you adopted a kid?” Rhodey stood over him, hands on his hips.

“What? How did you…” The abrupt question shocked him. “Pepper told you didn’t she? Wait how did she even get ahold of you? Because I’m pretty sure I was told to respect the whole radio silence thing.”

“Like that would get in her way.” Rhodey raised an eyebrow. “Yeah she called me. She was worried about you. Did you really adopt a kid?”

“Undertook guardianship of.” Tony corrected.

“Same difference.”

“No actually—”

“Does this have anything to do with why you’re not sleeping?” Rhodey crossed his arms.

Tony groaned and covered his face in both hands.

“Yes all right.” He admitted, rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands before dropping them back down on the bed. “The kid has horrible nightmares and I haven’t gotten a full night’s sleep in almost two weeks.”

Rhodey’s expression softened. Tony felt like he was betraying Peter’s confidence but this was Rhodey. He hadn’t told anyone else, although he figured most of the Avengers suspected. Maybe his friend would have an idea to help him out.

“What are his nightmares about?”
“Hell if I know. He won’t talk about them. God knows I’ve tried but he just clams up. I mean…I feel like I’m failing him. But he won’t talk to me. I don’t know what else to do.” The uncharacteristic confession left him feeling vulnerable.

Rhodey sighed and sat down on the bed facing Tony.

“How brilliant ideas? I’ll take anything you’ve got.” Tony tried to bring levity to the words but it fell flat.

Rhodey cradled his chin with his hand, other arm still across his body, a position Tony recognized as one he took when deep in thought.

“You have to make him talk about it.” Rhodey said after a few moments.

“I’ve tried—”

“No Tones you have to make him. If it’s this bad he obviously needs to talk to someone or it’s just going to keep festering.”

“And just how am I supposed to make him talk to me?”

“I don’t know. You’re the genius. Figure it out.” Rhodey smirked.

Tony rolled his eyes. “You’re a great help.”

“So when do I get to meet this kid?” Rhodey asked.

“You can meet him right now if you want.” Tony answered as he got up. “I sent him to his room earlier so I’m sure he’s not that happy with me but maybe getting to meet you will help.”

Rhodey let out a surprised laugh. “You sent him to his room? For what?”

“Playing with stuff in the lab he knew he wasn’t allowed to touch and almost blowing himself up.”

“That’s fair.” Rhodey nodded, still chuckling as he followed Tony out of the room to go meet the kid.

Tony sat on the couch in his suite channel surfing. Rhodey had left half an hour ago after spending the entire day with him. Peter had been a definite hit. Tony had allowed him out of his room to hang out with him and Rhodey until after dinner when he’d sent the kid back to his punishment. He’d gone reluctantly, clearly bummed he wouldn’t get to spend more time with the two men and Tony had used the moment to ram the point home that he should’ve listened to Bruce and that actions have consequences.

After Peter went back to his room, Tony had poured drinks and he and Rhodey had talked and reminisced for the rest of the night. It’d been nice. He’d never admit it but he’d missed the man. They hadn’t hung out just the two of them in a long time and Tony made a mental note to remember to make more of an effort in the future.

Tony clicked through a few more channels before giving up on finding anything worth watching. He turned the TV off, set the remote on the coffee table and stood. He walked to Peter’s room and quietly opened the door, eyes settling on the teenager fast asleep in bed with his arm splayed up over
his head. His sleep looked so peaceful it was hard to imagine something like nightmares interrupting it.

Please stay asleep. Please stay asleep. Please no more nightmares tonight. Tony thought as he closed the door and went to his own room to go to bed. He knew better than to hope that he’d actually get much sleep tonight, but at least now he had somewhat of a plan. He’d even mentally rehearsed what he planned to say. He just hoped it worked.

“You missed.”

“No I didn’t.”

Peter glanced around and realized too late that the struts of the building were gone.

Oh shit.

Cement collapsed all around him with a thunderous roar broken only by the Vulture’s laughter ringing in his ears.

He was pinned. Everything hurt. He couldn’t see. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t breathe. Oh god he was going to die. He didn’t want to die. Please no. Please.

“Help me!” Peter screamed. “Someone please! Help!”

The plea took all of his air. He was suffocating.

He heard someone calling his name.

“Peter!”

Peter gasped awake as his eyes flew open and fixated on Tony. He sighed in relief.

“It was just a dream kid.” Tony gathered him up into his arms, a position Peter was all too familiar with from the past couple weeks. “Just a dream. You’re ok. You’re safe.”

Peter tried to slow his panicked breathing. Dammit. Why wouldn’t these stupid nightmares just stop?

“Peter this isn’t working.” Tony said. “We can’t go on like this.”

We can’t go on like this. We can’t go on like this. It echoed in Peter’s brain like a bad record caught on repeat. Oh god. This was it. Tony was going to kick him out. What did he expect after disrupting the man’s sleep for two weeks? Even he’d noticed how tired Tony looked lately. But maybe… maybe he could go find Steve and beg to stay. He didn’t need an entire room. He could sleep on the Avengers’ couch.

“I thought maybe you just needed a little time, so I haven’t pushed.” Tony soldiered on. “But you’re not coping. This isn’t healthy. We need to talk about what’s bothering you.”

What? Tony wasn’t kicking him out? He wanted him to…talk? But he didn’t want to talk. He couldn’t.

“I-I can’t.” Peter protested.
“Why? What are you so afraid of?” Tony asked.

_That you’ll think I’m weak._ He thought it but couldn’t say it.

“It’s just me Peter.” And when did Tony Stark become _just me_ to Peter Parker? “You can talk to me.”

“Don’t you trust me?” Tony prodded further. It was a low blow but Peter knew the man wasn’t above playing dirty.

“I do. I do.” Peter mumbled miserably into Tony’s shirt. “It’s just…”

“Just what? Please just talk to me. Let me help. Aren’t you tired of keeping it all in?” Tony asked softly as he brought a hand up to cradle the back of Peter’s head. And god Tony was right. He was tired. So so tired. Tired of not sleeping. Tired of the nightmares. Tired of feeling like a weak failure. Tired of worrying that Tony was going to throw him out. Tired of missing Aunt May. Tired of feeling guilty.

Exhausted, defeated, and ensconced in the safety and security of his mentor’s arms, his resolve weakened and suddenly the words slipped out. “It’s just the last time I said I’d…said I’d talk about it…May died.”

But once he started, the word vomit confession wouldn’t stop. “She’s dead…she’s dead because of me. Because of these stupid nightmares. Because I had to be a hero. If I’d never become Spiderman she’d still be here. It’s all my fault.”

“Your aunt’s death wasn’t your fault Peter. It was an accident. A car accident.” Tony argued.

“No you don’t understand. She never would’ve been in the car that night if-if it wasn’t for me. I woke her up with one my nightmares and she went to get me ice cream and then we were going to talk about it but then-then she got h-hit. She n-never came back. And it’s all my fault.” He cried into Tony’s shirt.

Tony inhaled sharply at the confession. “Peter. No. That wasn’t your fault.”

“It was.” Peter entreated. “She d-died getting me ice cream. Because I-I couldn’t just get over the stupid Vulture thing.”

“What stupid Vulture thing?” Tony’s voice held a peculiar intensity like he knew just how close Peter was to telling him everything.

“No you don’t understand. She never would’ve been in the car that night if-if it wasn’t for me. I woke her up with one my nightmares and she went to get me ice cream and then we were going to talk about it but then-then she got h-hit. She n-never came back. And it’s all my fault.” He cried into Tony’s shirt.

“N-no. The b-building.” He couldn’t believe he was actually talking about it. He tried to bury his face further into Tony’s chest and clenched his fists desperately in the man’s shirt.

“What building?”

“He-he collapsed a building on me. And I was stuck and I couldn’t get out and it h-hurt. And I tried to call for help but no one c-came. I thought for sure I was…I-I was going to d-die there.”

“Oh my god.” Tony whispered and his hold on him tightened frantically, just short of painful.

“How did you get out?” The genius sounded like he was going to be sick. Kind of how Peter felt
right now.

“I just d-dug myself out and went after him. I didn’t really think about it but then after… I-I kept dreaming about it. That I’m stuck and I can’t get out and it’s c-crushing me and I keep calling for help but n-no one ever comes.”

“I’m sorry Peter. I’m so sorry.” Tony’s apologized into his hair. “That never should’ve happened. Never. That’s on me.”

“It’s not your fault.” Peter argued. “I was s-stupid.”

“No you were just acting like a typical teenager. I was the grown up. I should’ve known better. I was the one responsible for your safety and I took away your biggest safeguard. That will never happen again. I promise.” Tony sounded gutted. “From now on you’ll always have the suit. You’ll always be able to call for help and I’ll always come for you. Always. Ok?”

Peter nodded. He couldn’t quite believe he’d admitted all of that to Tony but he didn’t regret it. If anything, he almost felt better. Lighter. Unburdened. He sniffled into Tony’s shirt and was met with the smell of a mix of engine oil, fresh laundry detergent, and spicy cologne. Tony’s characteristic scent. One that Peter was starting to associate with safety and comfort. He just wished that didn’t scare him so much.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys liked this chapter! I went back and forth with a lot of Tony's dialogue in this chapter and I'm still not sure if I'm 100% happy with it. I think it works with his character development but let me know if you disagree. I love the feedback!
Chapter Seven

Block block punch. Block punch block punch. Ouch. Captain America’s fist made brief contact with his chin but the force of it barely moved his head. Steve pulled all his punches during training and at first Peter had been annoyed about it, but after the supersoldier had landed the first ten in the span of just a couple minutes he was grateful Steve hadn’t listened to his protests.

“You’re leaving yourself open when you attack.” Steve chastised. “Try again.”


“You’re off balance right now.” He noted.

“No I’m not.” Peter protested.

Steve’s raised eyebrow was the only warning he got before the man nudged his planted leg. Peter went toppling to the ground.

“You were off balance. Don’t compromise your mechanics even if you’re tired.” Steve said patiently. “That’s enough for today.”

“I’m not tired. I can keep going.” Peter argued even as a bead of sweat trickled down his forehead. He and Cap had been at it for hours, but he wasn’t ready to quit. His ego stung a little at the fact that the man still looked fresh and pristine.

“I’m sure you can.” Steve offered a hand and pulled him to his feet. “Same time and place tomorrow?”

Peter sighed. “Fine. Tomorrow.”

Steve laughed at Peter’s clear disappointment. “Aren’t you hungry?”

As if on cue, Peter’s stomach let out a loud rumble and he threw an abashed look toward Steve. Maybe it was his lot in life to embarrass himself in front of all the Avengers.

“I guess I am.” Peter confessed with a smile.

Steve clapped him on the back and led him toward the elevator. “Come on let’s go eat. You did a good job today. Your blocks are getting better.”

“Really?”

“Would I lie to you?” Steve asked.

“Maybe?” Peter cocked his head and squinted at him, trying to read him.

Steve’s chuckle broke off with a peculiar look when he glanced at Peter.

“What?” Peter asked. “Do I have something on my face?”
He reached a hand up, ready to rub away whatever was making Steve give him that funny look.

“No. You just…looked exactly like Tony for a second there.” Steve admitted. “I think you’re starting to pick up some of his mannerisms.”

Peter didn’t really know what to do with that. A small part of him soared with happiness at the thought of emulating Tony but another part worried maybe Tony would think it was weird if he thought he was trying to imitate him. Even though he wasn’t. At least not on purpose.

The elevator doors opened and Steve ushered Peter out before he could think of a response.

“Speak of the devil.” Steve joked as they walked into the kitchen to find Tony waiting in front of the coffee machine with a Chinese food container and chopsticks in hand.

Tony turned around. “I’ve been called worse.”

“Hope you like orange chicken Cap. That’s all that’s left.” Tony nodded toward the kitchen island where a few Chinese containers sat.

“Love it.” Steve said.

Peter scrunched up his face. Dang. He hated orange chicken. He walked over to the fridge and opened it, hoping there were some leftovers he could eat instead.

“What are you doing kid? The food’s over there.” Tony asked.

“I don’t like orange chicken.” Peter said offhandedly as he scoured the barren fridge. Hmm. Leftovers weren’t a common occurrence for the Avengers, so unless he wanted to eat ketchup he’d have to figure something else out.

“You like cashew chicken?” Tony walked over to Peter as he closed the fridge.

“Yeah but you said—”

“Here take it.” Tony shoved the container he’d been eating out of into his hands.

“But…this is yours.” Peter frowned at the nearly full carton.

“What are you a germ freak? I took like two bites. You’re not going to get my cooties.”

“No…just…but…what are you going to eat?”

“I happen to love orange chicken.” Tony smirked at Peter’s stammering as he picked up one of the containers on the counter and took a seat next to Steve at the breakfast bar.

Peter frowned but didn’t argue further. If Tony loved orange chicken why had he picked cashew chicken instead?

“Less thinking. More eating.” Tony called to Peter.

Peter sighed and took a bite of the cashew chicken as he walked over to sit next to Tony. He half listened as Tony and Steve chitchatted about Avengers business and Peter tried not to feel left out. Sheesh what did he expect? For Tony to always give him 100% of his attention? That wasn’t fair. Especially after the man had been so great to him.

Since Peter had finally broken down a couple weeks ago and talked about his nightmares with Tony,
they’d actually started getting better. They hadn’t completely dissipated but now he only had one or two a week instead of every night, and Tony was still always there to talk to him about them. Who knew talking actually helped? Now if he could just summon enough courage to talk to Tony about the future and what his plans were with Peter maybe he could stop worrying so much. Peter liked to think the two of them had grown close over the past month, and the more time he spent with the man the more ridiculous his fears of being kicked out seemed but he just couldn’t quite seem to shake them.

Ned harassed him about it constantly. Just ask him Peter. Just ask. You’ll feel better. He’s not going to kick you out. And Ned was probably right but Peter was still scared because what if Tony didn’t actually plan to keep him? Right now everything was fine and he could pretend everything would stay that way, but what if he asked and Tony told him he was going to have to leave? Peter didn’t know if he’d be able to survive that.

A warm hand settled on his shoulder and Peter turned to catch Tony frowning at him.

“You ok kid? You’re not doing your usual word vomit thing.”

“Yeah I’m fine. Just um…tired.” Oops wrong thing to say. Tony just looked more concerned at the admission.

“You try sparring with Cap and see how you feel.” Peter continued, expecting Tony to smile at the jest but he didn’t take the bait.

Instead he turned toward Steve who just quirked an eyebrow and shook his head. Sometimes Peter hated their uncanny ability to have entire conversations without saying a single word.

“Yeah I don’t think so.” Tony looked back at him. “Try again.”

“I uh—”

Before Peter could think up another excuse a blaring alarm interrupted.

“What is that?” Peter yelled, hands over his ears.

“A priority alert.” Tony answered as he pulled out his cell phone and flipped it sideways, a hologram displaying explosions erupting in New York City caused by some kind of weird looking robot things.

Steve looked up toward the ceiling, “F.R.I.D.A.Y. have the Avengers assemble. Tell them we're wheels up in five. We’ll debrief on the way.”

“Yes Captain.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. said.

“Suit up.” Steve told Tony as they both stood.


“No you stay here.” Tony said sternly.

“But—”

“This is a job for the Avengers son.” Steve said.

“But I want to help! I can help! It’s my city too!”
“No Peter.” Tony said again.

“But—”

“I said no!” Tony yelled and Peter felt like he’d been struck. Tony had never yelled at him like that before. He caught Steve watching the exchange and that made it sting even more, but then hurt turned to anger.

“You can’t tell me what to do! If I want to help I can help!” Peter shouted back and a vindictive part of Peter hoped it hurt the other man as much as getting yelled at had just hurt him.

Tony looked absolutely shocked at the uncharacteristic outburst for a moment before he seemed to recover and a grim expression crossed his face.

“I’ll meet you in the Quinjet Cap.” Tony’s dismissal of the other man was clear, even though his eyes never left Peter’s.

Steve left without a word. Peter and Tony just continued to stare at each other.

“You’re not coming.” Tony broke the silence after a few moments.

“If…if you leave me here I’ll just follow you.” Peter threatened.

A brief glint of something Peter thought looked like fear crossed Tony’s eyes before the angry resolve returned. “Oh really? You think so?”

Tony reached out and grabbed Peter’s wrist and started dragging him toward the elevator.

“Stop it! Let me go! I’m going to New York!” Peter ripped his arm out of Tony’s grasp easily but just as he turned around to escape, Tony grabbed him again and continued pulling him toward the elevator.

“Oh no you’re not.” Tony rebuked harshly. This time when Peter tried to break the genius’ grasp he wasn’t able to. Glancing down he noted Tony had activated his wristwatch gauntlet and had a hold of him with it.

“Hey!” He protested and tried to squirm out of it but it was useless. The grip was firm and unyielding but not quite tight enough to leave bruises.

“My rooms F.R.I.D.A.Y. Make it quick.” Tony ordered as the elevator door closed behind them and the elevator ascended at triple the speed Peter was used to. Within seconds the doors opened again and Tony dragged Peter into his suite, finally releasing him.

“You are going to stay here and wait for me.” Tony ordered pointing a finger at him in emphasis. “And when I get back you and I are going to have a little chat.”

“You can’t stop me.” Peter declared. As soon as Tony left he’d figure out a way to get to the city.

“Oh yes I can. F.R.I.D.A.Y. Peter is not allowed to leave this floor under any circumstances.”

“Understood Boss.” The AI answered.

“You-you can’t do that!” Peter protested.

“Watch me!” Tony said as he walked back into the elevator.
“This isn’t fair!”

“Life’s not fair kid.” It was such a flippant Tony Stark thing to say. Peter had never been angrier with him.

“I hate you!” The words burst from Peter’s lips in a blaze of righteous fury, a familiar burn he hadn’t experienced since before Aunt May had died.

The elevator doors closed before Tony had a chance to respond but Peter knew he’d heard him.

As soon as they closed Peter rushed over and pushed the down button over and over again but it didn’t light up.

“Peter, as I know you heard, you are not allowed to leave this floor per Mr. Stark’s instructions.” F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s explained.

“Argh!” Peter punched the doors and then kicked them a few times. They didn’t so much as dent. A distant part of him was impressed. Wow what were these things made out of? He squeezed his fists into his hair and slammed his back into the doors, the back of his head hitting hard enough to jar him. He let his legs crumple under him and slid down to the floor in despair. It wasn’t fair. He’d just wanted to help and now he’d ruined everything.

Peter stared blankly forward. He couldn’t believe he’d told Tony he hated him. His anger now spent, it turned rapidly into regret.

Well at least now he could forget about asking Tony if he was going to keep him. There was no way he’d be allowed to stay now. Tears burned in his eyes. He tucked his head into his knees and cried silently and this time there was no one there to comfort him.

I hate you. I hate you. I hate you. Tony rubbed a hand over his eyes and tried to pay attention to the briefing and the fight plan Steve was going over. Somehow he couldn’t seem to focus. Those three little words had hurt more than when the shrapnel had embedded in his chest in Afghanistan.

“Any questions?” Steve asked. “Everyone clear on the plan?”

What was he supposed to do again? Oh whatever. He could wing it. For all the planning they did before missions it all usually went to complete shit within a few minutes anyway.

“Ironman? You know what you’re supposed to do?” How did Steve always know when he wasn’t listening?

“Kick some ass?” He improvised and the response was met with a few scattered chuckles.

“You’re going to drop Hawkeye off at the best strategic position and then fly air support and try to work out if these things have any weak spots.” Steve repeated patiently.

“Yes got it.” He wondered what Peter was doing. Well whatever he was doing at least he was safe. I hate you.

“Are you ok?” Steve asked as Tony remained uncharacteristically silent.

Tony shrugged.
“Did something happen between you and Peter after I left?”

“Oh you know the usual. We had a nice mature discussion about all the reasons he couldn’t come with us. He was very understanding about it. So much so I had to lock him in my suite. He told me he hates me.” Tony rambled as he fiddled with his gauntlet.

“You know he didn’t mean it.” Steve reassured.

“Peter doesn’t hate you.” Bruce said from next to him.

“Yeah that kid idolizes you.” Sam piped in. “It’s sickening.”

“Welcome to being a parent.” Clint joked from the pilot seat. “If they don’t tell you they hate you at least once a month, you’re not doing it right.”

“Amen.” Scott agreed.

“But I’m not—”

“What? His parent?” Rhodey asked. “Then what are you?”

“His…his guardian.”

Wanda scoffed. “Same difference.”

“I agree. Children are apt to say things they don’t mean to those they love in anger. We all know Peter does not hate you.” Vision agreed.

Tony frowned.

“All right guys, as fun as this little pre-battle heart to heart has been, it’s time to go. We’re here.” Clint said as they hovered above where the enemy robots were tearing up buildings.

“You sure you’re good to go?” Steve asked Tony quietly as he grabbed his shield.

Tony nodded and pushed the I hate you from his mind. He had to. He needed to focus now. “I got this Cap. Let’s go birdbrain!”

“Be gentle. It’s my first time.” Clint joked as Tony picked him up. Tony laughed at the horrible innuendo and took off as the rest of Avengers disembarked around him.

Peter lay curled up miserably on the couch, face buried in a throw pillow. After the elevator, he’d tried the balcony door and the windows to no avail, so he’d given up and turned the TV on instead. It’d been broadcasting the fight in New York until about an hour ago when it had ended with the Avengers victory and Peter had turned it off, preferring the quiet for his dark thoughts. From what he could see on TV, no one on the team seemed to have gotten hurt. Peter had worried endlessly that something would happen to Tony and that the last words he said to the man would be I hate you. God how could he have said that? He was such an ungrateful brat. After everything Tony had done for him. No matter how mad he’d been at him it wasn’t an excuse to say that. Had his experiences with his parents and aunt and uncle taught him nothing about the tenuousness of life?

The elevator doors hummed open and Peter squeezed his eyes shut in the pillow as his heart started
to race. This could be it. These could be his last moments with Tony before the man kicked him to
the curb. He listened as footsteps walked slowly toward him until they came to a stop right next to
him.

“I’m sorry.” He said miserably, apology muffled by the pillow, but he wasn’t able to face Tony. “I
didn’t mean it. I don’t hate you.”

Tony let out a long sigh before he answered quietly. “I know.”

A heavy silence settled over them. Neither said anything for a few long moments, but then Tony
broke the stalemate by sitting down on the edge of the couch by Peter’s waist. A few seconds later, a
hand settled on his back. The warm weight radiated reassurance and security, and Peter felt his eyes
sting again at the comfort he wasn’t sure Tony even wanted him to feel.

“What happened today can never happen again.” Tony said.

Peter kept quiet and waited for the other shoe to drop.

“The type of enemies we get called on to fight as Avengers…” Tony paused and sighed again before
continuing, voice steady and unapologetic. “They make the Vulture look like child’s play.”

Peter flinched hard and he knew Tony felt it under his hand. That was a low blow. Only Tony knew
about that and now he was using it against him. It made him feel ripped open and raw.

“You’re not ready for that yet. So when I say you need to stay here. You need to stay here.
No arguing. No threatening to follow us. You just listen. Understand?”

Peter bit the inside of his cheek so hard he tasted blood.

“I said do you understand?” Tony emphasized each word slowly but didn’t yell.

Peter nodded into the pillow, not trusting his voice.

“Ok.” Tony said voice soft again. “I’m not…I’m not doing this to hurt you Peter. I’m just trying to
keep you safe. That’s my job now all right?”

“Will you look at me please?” The hand on his back moved up and down.

Peter shook his head.

“There you are.” Once Peter lay on his back, red-rimmed eyes on Tony, Tony gave him a small
smile and it broke Peter’s precarious hold on his emotions.

“I’m sorry.” His face scrunched up and he tried to turn his head away so Tony wouldn’t see him cry
again, but before he could, Tony pulled him into his arms.

“Shh it’s ok. I know. I’m sorry too.” Tony said.

“No you shouldn’t be sorry. I was horrible to you. I was being a stupid asshole. I said I hated you.
Just because I was mad. I didn’t mean it. Something could’ve happened to you and then the last thing
I ever said would’ve been…that and I didn’t mean it. I didn’t. And I never would’ve forgiven
myself. I’m sorry.” He cried.
“Jesus kid. It’s ok. Don’t beat yourself up about it. I know you didn’t mean it. I’m sorry. You’re sorry. You’re not going to do it again. Let’s call it all good. All right?” Tony tried to calm him down.

Peter nodded. He could hear the sincerity in his tone even if the words seemed light hearted. It still took him a few long minutes to regain control of his emotions.

He took a few deep calming breaths and scrunched up his nose.

“Um Tony?”

“Yeah kid?”

“Don’t take this the wrong way but…you smell terrible.”

For a moment Peter worried he’d overstepped while trying to lighten the mood, but then Tony burst out laughing. The deep delighted type of laughter Peter only heard from him when something particularly funny caught him by surprise.

“God I love you kid.” The sentence came out more like a musing than a declaration but Peter still heard it as the latter.

As soon as the words passed Tony’s lips, Peter felt him stiffen slightly but the man didn’t take them back or turn it into a joke or say anything else at all, so Peter knew the statement had been genuine. Maybe not planned, but true all the same. An unexpected awkwardness settled over the two of them, the previous laughter gone.

Peter knew he could play it off with another joke or ignore it or change the subject completely, but he didn’t want to do any of those things. He owed Tony more. He owed him the truth.

Peter took a breath, mustering his courage, and stated softly, “I love you too Tony.”

Tony gripped him tighter for a few seconds before ruffling his hair and releasing him to stand. “All right squirt. I’ll go shower but then we’re going to have a movie night. Just you and me. So pick what you want to watch. I’ll have F.R.I.D.A.Y. order us some food. What do you feel like?”

“Schwarma?” Peter asked with a wide smile. He liked it fine but he knew it was Tony’s favorite.

Tony laughed again. “Is this you sucking up to me? Not that I’m complaining but—”

Peter reached out a foot and playfully kicked at Tony but the man dodged deftly, still chuckling as he walked toward his room.

“Your heard the kid F.R.I.D.A.Y. Order us up some schwarma. The usual.”

“Tee up a movie. I’ll be back out in a few.” Tony told Peter before he disappeared behind his bedroom door.

Peter flopped back down on the couch, thoughts elsewhere as he flipped through the different movie options. He’d really screwed up today but instead of sending Peter away, Tony had told him he loved him. And if Tony really loved him, Peter couldn’t imagine he’d ever get rid of him. Right? That wasn’t something you did to people you loved. At least he didn’t think so. He just wished he knew for sure. He should just ask. Tomorrow. He’d ask him tomorrow. If the time seemed right. Or maybe the day after…
I got a lot more writing done this weekend than I thought I would so I'm posting this a little early for you guys! As always, let me know what you think! And don't worry - I promise they'll finally have the conversation everyone's waiting for in the next chapter!
Chapter Eight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For how secure he’d felt of his place with Tony five days ago, he’d never felt more unsure now. Since their fight and its subsequent resolution, he’d barely seen hide or hair of the man. Tony had spent two solid days repairing his suit after the last battle and then there was apparently some SI crisis he was dealing with along with more Avengers issues with the government.

“Tony.” Peter walked into Tony’s office where he was currently on the phone and tried to get the man’s attention.

He held up a hand to Peter and continued to pace, arguing about something. Peter couldn’t tell yet if it was Avengers or SI related.

Peter glanced around the office before he settled into the chair behind Tony’s desk and started twirling in circles. Wow the chair was comfortable.

“This is more than a little last minute and I’m a busy man.” Tony’s voice was terse. Definitely not Pepper then. Must be something to do with the Avengers.

“When we amended the Accords we agreed—.” Yep definitely something to do with the Avengers.

Peter started getting dizzy so he stopped the chair and started twirling in the opposite direction. He just wished Tony would get off the phone so he could talk to him about visiting Ned.

“No I’ll be there.” Tony said and Peter watched him push the button to hang up.

“Tony—”

“One second Peter.” Tony said without even looking up from his phone as he thumbed a button and answered another call. “Hey Pepper. Did you talk to Weber?”

Tony kept talking so Peter sighed and spun back around to face Tony’s desk. The computer screen was lit up with holograms of Ironman armor blueprints and papers were strewn across the desk. A full cup of cold coffee sat untouched next to the mouse. Peter picked up a nice heavy pen from next to the keyboard and tossed it in the air and caught it. He tossed it a little higher. Easy. So he tried to catch it while spinning in the chair. Still easy. So he started trying to catch it behind his back while spinning in the chair. Ah. Suitable distraction. After about ten times it got boring though and Tony was still rambling on the phone to Pepper.

“Tony?” He tried again. At least this was just Pepper. Couldn’t Pepper wait for like two seconds?

Tony just ignored him and kept talking.

“Tony.” Still nothing. Seriously? He just had one question.

“Tony.” He said it a little louder.

“Peter! Not right now. I’m a little busy in case you can’t tell.” Tony snapped and then went right back to talking to Pepper.

Ouch.
“Fine. Whatever.” He mumbled as he stood and left, throwing the pen back down on the desk angrily on his way out. Good thing he didn’t actually have something important to talk to him about. He just wanted to know if he could go into the city to visit Ned. If Happy was free to drive him. Screw it. Maybe he should just ask one of the other Avengers if they could give him a ride. But he knew Tony probably wouldn’t like that and it wasn’t like he had to see Ned right this second. Whatever new Star Wars Lego thing he’d bought could wait until tomorrow. But if Tony was still too busy to give him the time of day tomorrow, he’d ask Clint for a ride. He seemed the most chill of the Avengers.

He supposed he could go spend the day with the Avengers but that’s what he’d been doing all week. He went back up to Tony’s suite instead, feeling hurt and lonely. He threw himself on the couch and sighed as he pulled his phone of his pocket to text Ned that it was a no-go today.

The rest of the day passed unbearably slowly. He and Ned texted back and forth for awhile until Ned had to go to dinner with his parents. Peter thought about asking Steve to spar with him, or Clint to play Mario Kart, or finding Bruce to go down to the lab, or just going downstairs to hang out with whoever was down in the common room, but Tony’s bad mood seemed to be catching. He didn’t feel like doing any of those things. He just wanted to hang out with Tony but the man had no time for him.

Peter was watching some cheesy made for TV movie when the man finally returned.

“Are you still pouting?” Tony greeted him as he walked in and tossed something at him.

Peter caught it easily.

“I’m not pouting.” He denied and hated that it came out like a whine.

“Sure.” Tony quipped and then nodded toward the white wrapped thing he’d thrown him. “Eat. F.R.I.D.A.Y. told me you skipped breakfast and lunch.”

“Yeah well F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s a tattletale.” Peter turned back to the TV and tossed what looked like a deli sandwich on the coffee table. Tony couldn’t make him eat.

He listened as Tony continued briskly to his bedroom and the door closed behind him. Peter tried to focus on the movie instead of how the blunt dismissal of his feelings hurt.

Only about twenty minutes had passed before he heard Tony’s door open again but Peter refused to turn to look as he kept his eyes glued on the TV.

“I have to go to DC tonight. I have a meeting early in the morning but I should be back by lunch.” Tony said, and Peter let his attention shift to the man just long enough to see he carried a black duffel bag.

Peter didn’t respond, just kept pretending to be engrossed in the TV. It figured. He’d already been practically absent this whole week, now he’d just actually be absent. Maybe this was Tony getting bored of him. He barely paid any attention to him and now he was leaving him for the first time.

“Peter eat.” Tony ordered when he noticed the sandwich sitting untouched on the coffee table.

“Not hungry.” He lied.

“Peter.” The sharpness in the tone was a warning he was too annoyed to heed.

“Just go. Wouldn’t want you to be late for your meeting…that’s not until tomorrow.” Peter said in a
monotone as he stared at the TV.

“Peter.” This time Tony sounded weary. “I really can’t do this right now.”

“Then don’t.”

“Will you just eat the sandwich?” Tony sighed.

“Fine.” Peter said but made no move to grab it off the table.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. I’ll have my phone on me if there’s an emergency but otherwise the rest of the team is here if you need anything.” In other words, don’t call me. Got it.

“Mmhmm. Bye.”

Instead of just leaving, though, Tony walked over the couch and leaned down to ruffle his hair.


Peter just rolled his eyes. “I told you I’m not pouting.”

“Well you do an excellent impression then.” Tony was looking at him with that warm amused look he got whenever Peter did something he deemed ‘cute’.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be back before you know it.” Tony ruffled his hair again in good-bye and left.

Peter didn’t know why he felt like crying. He eventually ate the stupid sandwich as he watched the rest of the movie. Once it ended, he kept the TV on to mindlessly watch the news.

“In other news, crime in Queens has skyrocketed over the past month as the masked vigilante known as Spiderman has disappeared. Leading many to ask, why has Spiderman abandoned us?” The news anchor reported.

Peter frowned. He hadn’t abandoned them, but he hadn’t really thought about being Spiderman since Aunt May died either. Now with his thoughts restless, going out as Spiderman sounded like just the thing he needed. But how to do it? If he couldn’t figure out how to get into the city to see Ned, how could he do it as Spiderman? Well Tony was gone now. He wouldn’t notice if he left, and the man had lots of cars. And Peter knew how to drive…mostly.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y.?"

“Yes Peter?”

“If I left the compound, would you have to tell Tony?”

“There is currently no protocol for that particular scenario.”

“What if I took a car?”

“There is also no protocol for that scenario. Most likely since you are fifteen and not yet the legal age to drive.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. sounded a little judgmental.

“So if I took a car and left you wouldn’t tell anyone?”

“No specific protocol exists for either of those actions.”
“That doesn’t answer the question. Would you call Tony or not?”

“Per one of my primary protocols, I would be required to call Mr. Stark given the unacceptable risk to your person inherent in those actions.”

Damn.

“But what if it wasn’t an unacceptable risk? I’d be leaving to go out as Spiderman and Tony already knows I do that all the time. He let’s me. He made my suit. I don’t think that counts as a risk he needs to know about. I mean when I lived in Queens I didn’t tell him every time I went out.”

F.R.I.D.A.Y. didn’t respond. Peter didn’t know if that meant he was winning or losing the argument.

“And um…about the car thing. I’ve driven before and I’m almost sixteen now anyway. And then I’ll have my license and be able to legally drive but does a plastic card really mean it’s any less of a risk? Shouldn’t I be practicing as much as possible to get better and thereby decrease the risk?” That argument seemed like a reach even to him.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. I just…I have to go. Please. I need to do this. But I’ll be right back. I promise. So…so you won’t tell him, right?”

“Very well.” The AI sounded regretful.

“Thanks F.R.I.D.A.Y. I owe you one!” Peter bounded off the couch to his room to grab his suit. He hadn’t touched it since he’d moved here. Hmm he better wait to take the tracking device out of it until he was out of the compound. He had a feeling F.R.I.D.A.Y. wouldn’t keep quiet about that one. Annnd he had to leave his phone so he couldn’t be tracked. He shoved it under his pillow and sprinted to the elevator.

“To the garage F.R.I.D.A.Y.”

“Even though I agree it is not of the severity to classify it as unacceptable risk, I want you to know I find this decision unwise.”

“I know.”

Peter picked out one of Tony’s less flashy Audi’s and climbed in. It was pretty close to the same car he’d taken from Flash at Homecoming. He couldn’t let the same thing that happened to that one happen to this one. Tony would definitely kill him then. He pushed the on button and the engine hummed. He depressed the brake and then put it in drive. Then slowly dropped his foot on the gas. Perfect. Easy enough. He drove to the garage door and hit the brake again to wait as the door rose. Thanks again F.R.I.D.A.Y. Once it was open he hit the accelerator and took off out of the compound. It was the first time he’d left since he’d come here.

He still remembered the way. After 15 minutes he pulled over and dug out his suit, opening it and hunting for the tracker for a good five minutes before he found it and tossed it out the window. He was sure he could always find another one to replace it later if he had to. He laid his foot on the gas and smiled as the car leapt forward. The road was straight and the sun was setting in the distance and soon he was back in the city.

Driving in New York sucked. It was really hard. He’d barely gotten to the outskirts of the city and he’d already avoided what seemed like his fifth accident, so he decided to just find a place to park and web the rest of the way. He climbed out of the car with his backpack and walked a respectable distance to an alley and changed, webbing his backpack behind a dumpster there and taking off toward Queens.
“Woohoo!” He hollered in the air. He’d forgotten how good it felt to fly and the wind whipping around him washed all his worries and melancholy away.

He spent the rest of the night in Queens being the friendly neighborhood Spiderman. He stopped twelve muggings, ten carjackings, and four armed robberies. Overall, a busy night. He promised to himself not to go so long between outings next time. Who would’ve guessed his presence was a deterrent? It felt good to know. He might not be an Avenger but he wasn’t useless. People counted on him.

A clock in a nearby store window read 4:16am. People would be getting up soon and starting their day and he actually was pretty tired. It was time to go back to the compound. He swung back to the alley where he’d left his backpack, indulging in some acrobatics along the way. He changed quickly and started back to the car.

He turned the last corner he knew the car was parked behind, keys in hand, about to press the unlock button, when he looked up and saw Tony Stark leaning against the car door with his arms crossed. Oh fuck. He must’ve made some sort of noise because the man turned his head in his direction and their eyes met. Peter saw relief cross them before it changed into concern.

“Are you ok?” Tony crossed the distance between them quickly, already looking him up and down for injuries.

“Yeah um I’m fine.” Peter’s voice cracked. Oh shit oh shit. He was in so much trouble.

Tony ran his hands reverently over his shoulders, arms and ribs before turning him around to do the same with his back before righting him and then running rough hands through his hair, leaving it in complete disarray. Seemingly satisfied, he pulled Peter in for a tight hug and held him there for a few long seconds before letting go.

“Get in the car.” He ordered tersely. Yeah he was definitely pissed.

Peter bit his lip and obeyed. Tony climbed into the driver’s side, started the car and they sped away. The silence was suffocating. Peter glanced over at the man and he radiated anger. His entire body was tense and his knuckles were white from their hard grip on the steering wheel. He stared straight ahead and didn’t even look at Peter.

The minutes passed and still Tony didn’t say a word. It was a disturbing departure from his usual hyperverbal self. Peter kept debating back and forth if it’d be better to stay quiet or say something. When they were about half way back to the compound Peter couldn’t take it anymore.

“What um…what are you doing here? I thought you had some important meeting.” Peter asked and apparently that was the incendiary charge needed to set Tony off.

“I did! I did have an important meeting Peter!” Tony exploded. “I had a really important meeting that I’m going to miss now because my kid decided to run away and go gallivanting around New York all night as some sort of cry for attention!”

“I didn’t run away and it wasn’t to get attention. You weren’t even supposed to know.” Peter argued.

“Peter!” Apparently that didn’t help his case.

“How’d you even find out? F.R.I.D.A.Y. said she wouldn’t tell.” Peter mumbled.

“I asked Steve to check on you when you weren’t responding to any of my text messages or phone
“Oh.” Peter swallowed hard. He hadn’t considered that possibility. Maybe he should’ve taken his phone with him.

“Oh is right. And just how do you think I felt when Steve called me and said that not only were you not in my suite but you’d apparently left the compound entirely?” Peter looked out the window as Tony continued ranting.

“And then when I track your phone I find out it’s still in your room. Where you obviously left it on purpose. So I talk to F.R.I.D.A.Y. and she tells me you stole one of my cars and took your suit to go be Spiderman, but somehow convinced her not to inform me, which I can promise you will never happen again. Oh and lo and behold I find the tracker to your suit in a ditch outside the compound. So I hunt down the car you took but by then you were already long gone.”

Tony took a few calming breaths.

“Do you have no sense? What were you thinking? What if something had happened to you? Huh? What then? No phone. No tracker. No way for me to find you. No way to call for help. No way to ensure your safety. Fuck Peter. We just talked about this!” Peter flinched as Tony slammed a hand down hard on the steering wheel in anger.

“No we talked about how I can’t go out with the Avengers. I still get to be Spiderman.” Peter argued back.

“Yes but with the safeguards I put in place. And not without telling me.”

Peter looked down at his hands.

“See this is the part where you attempt to explain yourself.” Tony continued.

“No? Nothing to say for yourself?”

“Nothing you want to say to me? An apology maybe for scaring the shit out of me? For making me miss my meeting? No? Nothing?”

“So sorry to inconvenience you.” Peter glared out the window.

Tony huffed angrily and Peter turned to glare at him.

“No one made you come after me.” Peter said. “You could’ve still gone to your stupid meeting. It’s not like you’ve cared about what I’ve been doing all week anyway.”

“Oh so this was a cry for attention.”

“No. I don’t need anything from you. I know better.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means I’m not an idiot. I get that you’re busy and important and I’m just some stupid kid you feel some misplaced responsibility for and sooner rather than later you’re going to get sick of me or I’m going to do something that’s pisses you off and I’ll have to figure out somewhere else to go.”

“What?” Tony slammed on the breaks and yanked the car over to the side of the road. He threw it into park and turned to give his full attention to Peter.
“Is that really what you think?” His eyes bore into Peter’s. “That this arrangement is some temporary thing?”

“Isn’t it?” Peter challenged.

“No.” Tony answered instantly. He ran a hand down his face, something Peter knew he did when he was frustrated.

“How long have you been worrying about this?” Tony asked. All the man’s previous anger had seemingly vanished.

Peter shrugged. It’d felt like forever.

“Peter you do know I’m your legal guardian right?” Tony reached out and gripped his shoulder.

“What?” Peter blinked, absolutely blindsided, and he knew Tony could tell.

“Yep signed papers and everything. So your staying with me isn’t…temporary. I’m in charge of you kid. You’re not going anywhere.” Tony gave his shoulder another squeeze.

“Since…since when?”

“Since the day after I picked you up from the hospital.” The day after Aunt May died.

“Oh. But… This whole time?”

Tony nodded. “This whole time. You ok?”

“Yeah. I just…I thought… So you…you’re really going to keep me?” He finally stammered out the question he’d wanted to ask ever since he’d moved in. That was what ‘legal guardianship’ meant right?

Tony rolled his eyes and smirked. “Yes I’m really going to keep you. Ok?”

Peter nodded. His head spun. Tony was his legal guardian. And he had been the whole time. The whole time. He wondered if the other Avengers knew. Probably. He’d been the only one in the dark.

The man watched him closely for a few more seconds before putting the car back in drive and continuing on toward the compound. At least now the silence between them was no longer stifling.

“I’m sorry I worried you.” Peter mumbled, head resting against the window, as they neared the compound.

“You’re still very grounded.” Tony said.

Peter sighed, breath misting the window. “And I’m sorry about your meeting.”

“Yeah well it’s just the president. No biggie.”

“What? Seriously?” His looked over at the man. He didn’t seem to be kidding.

“Seriously.” Tony deadpanned.

Peter gaped.

“Like I said – grounded.”
Peter let his head fall hard back against the window. Damn.

“Why did you come after me?” Peter asked miserably. “You could’ve sent someone else. Like Steve or Bruce. Then you still could’ve made your meeting with the president.”

“I had no idea where you were. If you were hurt. If you were bleeding out in an alley somewhere. How could you think I’d send someone else to try to find you?” Tony asked as he pulled the car into the garage and put in park.

Peter frowned as he watched Tony unbuckle his seatbelt and then turn to look at him, clearly gearing up to say something. Apparently heart to hearts in cars were going to become a thing for them.

“If tonight is any indication, clearly we need to work on our communication.” Tony took a deep breath before continuing. “Peter, you come first. Maybe it didn’t seem like it this week. And I’m sorry. I know I’ve been busy. And no that doesn’t mean I can give you all my attention all the time… but you need to know that when it comes to important things like this, when it matters, you will always come first. No matter what. Ok?”

“But…it’s the president.” Peter protested.

“Kid, you come before my company, before the Avengers, and definitely before the president. Got it?” Tony’s words sounded like a promise.

Peter nodded as a sort of daze settled over him.

“Good. Now come on. Let’s go. It’s way past your bedtime.” Tony prompted and climbed out of the car. He stopped and opened the trunk with his own set of keys, and pulled out the suitcase armor he must’ve stashed there before Peter had found him by the car. It gave Peter an idea.

“Hey if you take the armor I bet you could make it back to DC in time for your meeting.”

“I bet I could.” Tony agreed but just kept walking to the elevator, Peter a step behind him.

“Ok but um isn’t DC that way?” Peter pointed toward the closed garage door.

“Yep.”

“You’re going the wrong way.” Peter was confused.

“No I’m not. I’m not going to DC today kid.” Tony said as they got in the elevator and F.R.I.D.A.Y. took them to their suite without needing to be asked.

“Why not?”

“You really think I’m going to leave you here alone after the stunt you just pulled?” Tony quirked an eyebrow up at him as the elevator deposited them at their suite.

Peter pulled a face. “I wouldn’t be alone.”

“Yeah that worked out so well last time.” Tony dropped the Ironman suitcase down next to the couch before sitting down.

Peter noticed the black duffel bag he’d seen Tony leave with sat by the armchair. Tony must’ve flown back from DC and then taken the suit straight into the city. He walked past it and sat down on the couch next to Tony.
“Nope. Nuh uh. Go to bed.” Tony put a hand on his back and gave him a nudge.

“But—”

“Bed.” Tony repeated and this time he pushed him a little harder but Peter still resisted.

“What are you going to do?”

“Work.” Tony replied as he picked up a Stark tablet from the coffee table.

“But you’ve been up all night. Aren’t you tired?”

Tony gave him an unimpressed look. “Yes I’m very very tired but I’m also a grown up so I can get by with much less sleep than you. You’re still a growing kid, so you need all the sleep you can get if you have any hope of getting taller.”

“Is that why you’re so short?” Peter joked. “Not enough sleep as a kid?”

“Careful kid. You’re already grounded for a week. Want to go for two?”

“A week?!” Ned was going to kill him.

“Yep starting now so you better go to your room and get to bed.” This time when Tony pushed at him, Peter stood with a heavy sigh. “Night kid.”

“Fiiine. Good night Tony.” Peter knew he shouldn’t feel happy right now. He was grounded for a week and he’d pissed Tony off and made him miss a meeting with the president, but as he walked to bed it was still hard to keep a smile off his face. He felt almost giddy with relief. Tony was his legal guardian. Tony was keeping him. And he’d planned to this entire time.

Chapter End Notes

All of your comments have been so amazing and inspiring! I wanted to give you guys more than one chapter this week. I hope it lived up to the build up! Let me know what you think!
“Thank you Mr. President. Yes. You’re welcome. I’ll talk to you soon. Bye.” Tony pocketed his cellphone. The president’s aide hadn’t been happy about Tony blowing off the meeting on such short notice, but luckily he’d agreed to switch it to a phone meeting instead.

He rubbed his eyes. God he was tired. The kid was trying to kill him. He should just go to sleep. He’d finished the last bit of critical work he needed to get done before his phone call with the president, so he could go to bed if he wanted to, but he knew himself and he knew sleep would be impossible right now. The buzzing anxiety he’d felt under his skin since Steve first told him Peter had run away still hadn’t remitted even though he knew the kid was currently safe and asleep in his room. He should know. He’d only checked three times in the past couple hours.

Tony sighed. If he wasn’t going to sleep then he definitely needed caffeine. Maybe there was coffee downstairs. But was it worth the energy it’d take to go get it? Or should he just make his own? Such a dilemma.

He pushed off the couch with a groan and walked to Peter’s door, cracking it open to check on him again. He was still fast asleep in the same position he’d been in half an hour ago, buried under the covers with just his hair sticking out. Somehow just looking wasn’t enough. It wasn’t helping to alleviate his remnants of fear.

Tony crept in quietly and carefully pulled the blanket down to uncover Peter’s face. He looked even younger asleep. The corners of his mouth tugged up at the sight. What if something had happened to the kid while he’d been running around? While Tony hadn’t had any way to protect him. Peter may be young and naïve but Tony knew this world. It wasn’t forgiving. God there were so many other ways last night could’ve ended. He could’ve gotten hurt or worse. An unbearable tightness gripped his chest at the thought.

But nothing had happened. Peter was fine. He was right here in front of him, perfectly fine. So why couldn’t Tony just calm down? What was this insane unremitting worry that had taken up residence inside him?

Without thinking about it, Tony reached out and brushed the kid’s hair back from his forehead. He was warm, alive, breathing. He was perfect. And fine. And safe.

He ran his hand through Peter’s hair a couple more times before leaning down to drop a kiss on the kid’s temple. A warm feeling settled in his chest where it mixed with the anxiety already there. Usually Tony hated feelings but this one was different. He wondered if this was how parents felt. It was terrifying. He straightened out the covers around Peter and mustered all his self-control to turn around and leave the kid to sleep. It was definitely time for coffee.

“Did you find Peter?”

“Where’s the squirt?”
“Is the kid ok?”

Tony was instantly greeted by his teammates questions the second he stepped into the common room. Everyone was already up and looked worried. Of course Steve had told them.

He knew how much Steve and Bruce cared about Peter but he hadn’t realized the kid had wormed his way into the hearts of the rest of the team too. When had that happened?

“Yeah I got him. He’s fine.” Tony waved their worries away and grabbed the coffee pot and poured himself a cup.

“And you couldn’t have spared a few seconds to let us know that? Cap here was worried sick!” Clint complained.

“Oh Cap was worried huh?” Tony prodded. He took a sip of his coffee as he walked toward the couches where everyone sat with the TV on low in the background.

“That’s what I just said.” Clint replied.

“I would’ve told you but I didn’t realize Cap had told everyone what happened and you were all holding some sort of weird vigil. Or whatever this is.” Tony gestured toward where all the Avengers were gathered. It was a tight squeeze. Tony was oddly touched on Peter’s behalf.

“So Peter’s ok?” Steve asked.

“Yeah he’s completely fine. Thank god.” Tony sat in the only open seat, an armchair, and closed his eyes.

“So he really stole one of your cars and ran away?” Bruce asked hesitantly.

“He didn’t run away. He went to the city to go do his vigilante thing. Apparently he thought he could stay up all night fighting crime and get back here without anyone noticing.” Tony clarified.

“He’s getting to be kind of a handful for you huh?” Sam smirked, clearly amused by the situation. Tony just glared at the man.

“Wait can we go back to the whole stealing a car thing? Peter really stole one of your cars? That doesn’t sound like him.” Natasha seemed surprised.

“Well let’s see… He abandoned his phone here, somehow convinced F.R.I.D.A.Y. not to tell on him, took one of my cars, ripped the tracker out of his suit, and drove all the way to the city to fight crime all night. But yeah let’s focus on the car bit.”

Scott whistled. “Cap didn’t tell us all that man. Just that the kid was missing. He’s lucky he’s ok.”

“Wow he really is a little shit huh? I like him more and more everyday.” Clint grinned and Tony threw a nearby cork coaster at him, which he dodged easily.

“What’d you do?” Natasha accused.

“What did I do?” Tony asked indignantly.

“Well he obviously didn’t do this unprovoked.” Natasha opined. “He’s a good kid.”

“I didn’t do anything.” Tony denied. “I mean I might’ve been a little busy this week but—”
“You’ve been ignoring him all week.” Wanda corrected. She usually kept more to herself and didn’t participate in these types of group things but apparently Peter had grown on even her. “We all saw it.”

“I wasn’t ignoring him. I was busy.”

“You were ignoring him.” Rhodey chimed in.

Tony’s jaw dropped. “Et tu Rhody?”

“Peter has spent more time with us this week compared to any previous weeks.” Vision observed impartially.

“We’re not saying you haven’t been doing a great job with Peter. You have been. But this week…” Rhodey broke off briefly and looked around at all the other Avengers. “This week you kind of pushed the kid aside. Maybe this acting out wasn’t completely out of the blue.”

Tony opened his mouth to protest out of habit but then he stopped and bent forward, dropping his head into his hands instead. He knew they were right. Hadn’t he said it himself to Peter? That his running away had been cry for attention. Because he knew he hadn’t done a good job of paying attention to him this week. But it was only supposed to be temporary. Once things calmed down he was going to spend more time with the kid. What a shit excuse. He’d acted just like Howard this week. God no wonder why Peter had been worried he was going to toss him aside.

“You’re right.” Tony groaned into his palms.

“Excuse me?”

“Did I hear that right?”

“What?”

“Can you say that again?”

Tony sat up and leaned back into the chair, ignoring the teasing statements of his team.

“It’s been a rough week.” He admitted. “But I…I should’ve made more time for him.”

“It’s not your fault Tony.” Bruce tried to reassure him. “You’ve got a lot on your plate.”

“Yeah who would’ve guessed the kid would go all Grand Theft Auto just because you were a little busy.” Clint said.

Tony’s lip quirked slightly at Clint’s comment. As much as they laid into each other, Tony counted Clint as one of his close friends.

“We’re all at fault.” Steve said decisively. “We all knew how busy Tony was and we didn’t make more of an effort to get Peter to engage with us. We waited for him to come to us and I’m pretty sure he spent a lot of time alone. We need to do better next time.”

“There won’t be a next time.” Tony promised, voice like steel.

“Well if there is we’ll do better. Right guys?” Steve glanced around at the rest of the Avengers.

Everyone nodded in agreement and a solemn quiet settled over the group.
“So…where is the little thief?” Sam asked after a few moments of reflection. Out of all of them, he hated quiet the most.

“Upstairs. Sleeping.” Tony took another drink of his coffee.

“Obviously. He had a big night.” Clint joked.

“Wait didn’t you have that meeting with the president this morning?” Rhodey asked suddenly.

“Oh man you stood up the president because Spiderman ran away? Does he know that’s why?” Sam laughed and most of the rest of the team joined in.

Tony flipped him off.

“Tony you missed the meeting?” Steve asked seriously. Only he and Rhodey knew how important it was.

“No I didn’t miss it. We talked on the phone instead. It’s all good El Capitan. Don’t worry. We’ll talk later.” Tony yawned and slumped further in the chair.

“Maybe someone else should be sleeping too.” Wanda hinted.

“Yeah you look beat Tony.” Bruce frowned at him.

“Well I have been awake for…” He glanced at his watch. “27 hours.”

“And you’re drinking coffee?” Of course Natasha called him out.

“Tony!” Steve again.


But oh shit Steve was walking over to him. He grabbed his mug and quickly chugged the rest of it. He knew where this was going.

“Come on Tony.” Steve grabbed his arm and pulled him to a stand while at the same time divesting him of his now empty mug. “Time for bed. Everyone say good night to Tony.”

A chorus of good nights and sly smiles came from the Avengers.

“I would object on principle but I’m just too tired.” Tony said as he allowed Steve to lead him away by the arm. Truthfully, he thought maybe he could actually sleep now. The knot of anxiety had unraveled enough.

“Bring the kid down here when you wake up!” Clint yelled after them.

“Can’t.” Tony called over his shoulder. “He’s grounded for a week.”

“What does that mean? We can’t see him?” Clint asked.

“No. He just can’t leave our floor.”

“Well we’ll come visit then. Right guys?”

There were murmurs of agreement all around. Tony half-heartedly waved a hand as he and Steve got into the elevator. The idea of all the Avengers invading his space sounded horrible but he’d deal with
it later when he wasn’t already asleep on his feet. Tony rested his head against the elevator wall as it took him up to his rooms. Exhaustion leaked into his bones. Apparently worrying over teenaged superheros made you really tired.

“Come on.” Steve nudged him and Tony opened his eyes and realized they’d arrived at his floor. Steve walked him to his bedroom and watched as he toed off his shoes and crawled into bed still in his clothes. He was too tired to take them off.

“You need anything?” Steve asked.

“No I’m good.” Tony replied, turning his face from his pillow. “Thanks.”

“Night Tony.” Steve said as he turned the light off and closed the door behind him. “Sleep well.”

“Mmm.” He replied into his pillow, already dead to the world.

“Where is he?!?” Tony ran through the hallway leading to Medbay.

“Tony.” Natasha stopped him at the end, placing her hand on his shoulder. Her eyes were sad.

“No.” Tony choked out a denial. His voice shook. “Where is he?”

“We got to him as fast as we could but… It wasn’t fast enough. I’m sorry. He’s gone.”

“No!” He pushed passed her.

“Tony wait—”

No no no. It couldn’t be true. He came to a stop. Steve was crouched on the ground in front of the door, face buried in his hands with Sam attempting to comfort him.

“Tony.” Sam grimaced when he saw him.

Steve looked up at him and Tony took in the red eyes and tear tracks running down his face.

“I’m sorry.” Steve gasped. “I’m so s—.”

Tony crossed the remaining distance and burst through the door.

Peter lay on the Medbay bed in his Spiderman uniform, not moving. No one else was there and he wasn’t hooked up to any equipment. It was eerily quiet. Tony walked toward him, slower now, afraid of what he knew he’d find. As he got closer he noticed the mask was off and Peter’s face was snow white. No. He reached a trembling hand out and touched his cheek. It was ice cold.

“No!”

Tony shot up in bed, breathing hard.

Holy shit. A dream. It was just a dream. A dream a dream a dream. Peter was alive. Peter was fine.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Tony croaked past the panic. “Where’s Peter?”

“Peter is currently asleep in his room.” His AI answered instantly.
“He’s ok?”

“Yes boss.”

He closed his eyes and concentrated on slowing his breathing. Wow it’d been awhile since he’d been that shaken by a nightmare.

“Would you like me to call someone for you?” F.R.I.D.A.Y. inquired.

“No I’m fine.” He pulled back the covers and climbed out of bed. “What time is it?”

“It is currently 4:23PM. You have been asleep for approximately 7 hours.”

“Shit.” He hadn’t meant to sleep for that long.

“Also I was asked to inform you upon awakening that the Avengers plan to partake in team dinner at 7:00PM tonight in your quarters.”

“Wonderful.” Tony griped as he made his way into his bathroom to brush his teeth and shower. It looked like he was going to be the one punished for Peter’s transgressions. Typical.

He felt a little better once he was clean and clothed but the memory of the nightmare still stuck with him.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. time?” He asked as finished pulling on a Black Sabbath t-shirt over a long sleeved white shirt.

“It is 4:45PM. Captain Rogers and Dr. Banner will be arriving shortly to begin dinner preparations.”

“Wait what?” Tony finished toweling his hair dry and tossed it in the hamper.

“Captain Rogers and—”

“No I heard you the first time. It was a rhetorical question. Do I need to do some routine maintenance your code? I mean you did just let a teenager outsmart you and now this?”

“Per my most recent self diagnostics I am functioning at optimal capacity.” Tony could hear the attitude in the tone.

“Yeah you just keep telling yourself that.” Tony sniped as he walked toward Peter’s room to wake him up. Did arguing with an AI you created count as talking to yourself?

He opened the kid’s door, not bothering to be quiet like the last times. Not that it mattered. Apparently Peter slept like the dead. His mind momentarily flashed back to his recent nightmare at that thought and he shook his head to clear it.

Tony smiled softly as he took in Peter’s new position in bed. Instead of being hidden by the covers like before, now he was completely entangled in them. He lay on his stomach with one leg sticking out while a part of the comforter was literally wrapped around him like a cocoon. His right arm was buried under his pillow and his left hung off the edge of the mattress.

“That doesn’t look comfortable.” Tony said, but Peter didn’t even stir. He really was a deep sleeper.

Tony sat on the edge of his bed and shook him softly. “Hey kid. Time to rise and shine.”

Still nothing.
“Peter? Peter.” Tony’s tried louder and he shook the kid a little harder, refusing to worry yet.

Peter groaned. Finally.

“Come on kiddo. Time to wake up. You’re going to sleep the day away. Well what’s left of it…”

Peter grunted and rolled from his stomach onto his side, squinting up at him. “Tony?”

“Who else?” Tony smirked.

Peter’s squint turned into a frown before he just closed his eyes again. “Tired.”

“No no sleepy time’s over.” Tony shook him again, more forcefully and annoyingly this time.

Peter ignored him and stubbornly kept his eyes shut.

“You want to get up. Steve and Bruce will be here soon to make dinner. And I know how much you love Captain America.” Tony teased.

“Mmm no. Just wanna sleep.” Peter complained.

“You don’t want to see Captain America? Are you sure you’re feeling ok?” Tony joked and pressed his hand to Peter’s forehead for a few seconds before ruffling his hair.

“I can see him tomorrow. He lives here remember?” Peter yawned and rubbed his eyes.

“Aw the hero worship’s worn off. Steve’s going to be so bummed when I tell him.”

“Keep it up and I’ll wear one of my Captain America shirts to dinner. I know how much you love that.” Peter glared up at him. Well at least he was awake now. Kind of.

“Speaking of…” Tony stood and rubbed his hands together. “Lights F.R.I.D.A.Y.”

The room burst into light and Peter cried out in protest. Within a few steps Tony stood in front of Peter’s dresser. He pulled open the top drawer. Socks and unmentionables. Not it. Then the second drawer. T-shirts. Bingo.

“Hey! You can’t go through my clothes!” Peter objected from behind him and Tony heard as he started struggling to extricate himself from the blankets he was tangled up in.

Tony swiftly pawed through the squirt’s shirts. He really was a science nerd, but some of the shirts were actually pretty funny.

“Oh looky what we have here.” Tony’s face lit up as he pulled out a black shirt with the Ironman mask on the front. He held it out to show Peter who was almost free of his covers.

“Tony!” Peter groaned in embarrassment.

“How come I’ve never seen this one before?”

“Because I live with you.” Peter said as if the answer was obvious. “I can’t wear those shirts.”

“Shirts?” Tony asked with glee. “As in plural?”

He turned back to the drawer. Science shirt, plain shirt, plain shirt, Captain America shirt. Yep that one he threw on the ground. Band shirt, plain shirt, ah ha. A red t-shirt with Ironman aiming his
repulsor. He held out his next find like a prize to Peter who snatched it away instantly. The kid sure got up quick when he was motivated.

“All right. You’ve had your fun.” Peter shoved it along with the Captain America t-shirt from the floor back into the drawer and slammed it closed.

“But I didn’t even get through half of them.” Tony tried to pull at the drawer but Peter stood in front of it, keeping it closed.

“You saw enough.” Peter said with consternation.

“Oh so there’s more?” Tony smiled and Peter rolled his eyes.

“Just answer this. Who do you have more shirts of me or Cap?”
The blush that colored the kid’s cheeks was answer enough.
Tony cackled happily.

“What’s going on in here?” Steve peeked his head in the door. As soon as Tony saw the terrified look on Peter’s face, he lost it and bent over in a fit of laughter.

“Am I missing something?” Steve asked.

“No!” Peter yelled as Tony tried to stop laughing long enough to sell him out. “Everything’s fine! We’re fine. We’ll be right out.”

Tony watched in disbelief as the kid closed the door on a confused Captain America. That only made him laugh even harder and he dramatically collapsed to ground, trying to catch his breath.

Peter stood over him with his arms crossed as he waited for Tony’s laughter to start to taper off. “Are you done yet?”

“Whew.” Tony said as he got ahold of himself and sat up. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d laughed like that.

“Don’t hurt yourself.” Peter said in annoyance, but when Tony held his hand out he instantly pulled him to his feet.

“Careful or I’ll tell Cap about your t-shirt collection.” Tony smirked.

“You wouldn’t.” Peter studied him, trying to figure out if he was serious. “Please don’t.”

“I won’t if you hurry up and shower and get dressed. Apparently the whole team’s coming up for dinner.” Tony bargained. He didn’t care if Peter wore the pajama pants and white t-shirt he currently had on for dinner but he figured the kid would.

“Ok. Wait why are they having dinner up here?”

“Because I told them you’re grounded and they wanted to see you. They were worried about you.” Tony said as he opened the door to leave.

“You told them?!”

“No I told Cap and Cap told everybody. Didn’t you know Captain America’s a huge gossip?” He yelled out the last question so he knew Steve would hear.
“Tony! God you’re so embarrassing!” Peter yelled back. And then it was his turn to get the door slammed on him. Hmm somehow not as funny on the receiving end.

He heard Bruce and Steve laughing from the kitchen, so he made his way over to join them.

“What was that all about?” Steve asked as Tony took a seat at the breakfast bar to watch Steve and Bruce cook.

“Kid’s getting sassy.” Tony replied as if that explained everything. He pulled out his phone to check if any fires had sprung up that needed his immediate attention while he’d slept.

“Wonder who he learned it from.” Bruce smiled as he chopped up some weird looking vegetable thing.

Tony spared him a glance but didn’t argue.

“So things are all right between the two of you?” Steve asked.

“Yep we’re all good Cap.” Tony said.

“Yeah it seemed like it.” Steve smirked, alluding to the previous scene he’d walked in on. “I think it’s cute.”

Tony glared at him over his phone. “Ew. Don’t make me puke.”

Bruce snorted. “Careful Steve you know how Tony is with discussing emotions.”

“Yeah it gives me hives.” Tony sent a quick text to Pepper about an upgrade he’d almost completed for R&D.

“We’re onto you Tony. You care about this kid. A lot.” Steve continued.

Tony looked at him but didn’t disagree. “Your point?”

“It’s a good look on you. The Dad thing.”

“I’m not his Dad.” The denial was reflex but the sad pang after saying it was new.

“I’m…” He frowned. He’d told everyone over and over again he was Peter’s guardian but now that word didn’t seem quite right. It didn’t encompass everything he’d grown to feel about the kid. It was too sterile, uncaring. A guardian was someone who made sure their charge received the basic necessities and care. That wasn’t what he was to Peter. Not anymore. Not after he’d spent so much time comforting him, worrying about him, hanging out with him, teaching him. It was more than his father had ever done for him. Hell he was more of a father to Peter than his actual father had been to him.

“You’re his Dad.” Bruce claimed with an encouraging smile.

“Yeah…maybe I am.” Tony murmured to himself.

“You are.” Steve agreed.

Tony’s thoughts whirled. If Tony was Peter’s Dad then that made Peter his…son. The idea wasn’t as far of a reach as he thought it’d be. He already thought of Peter as his kid. He’d even caught himself saying it out loud the past couple weeks. But he didn’t want to just think of Peter as his kid. He realized he wanted it to be true. He wanted Peter to be his.
“I think we broke him.” Bruce laughed at Tony’s uncharacteristic silence.

“Gave him a lot to think about apparently.” Steve agreed.

“I have to make a phone call.” Tony said and abruptly stood and high tailed it to the balcony, shutting the glass door behind him for privacy and ignoring Steve and Bruce’s concerned looks.

Tony dialed his lawyer and he answered on the second ring even though it was past five on a Friday. That’s why he paid the guy the big bucks.

“Evan? It’s Tony. Hey you remember that guardianship paperwork you did for me a little while back?”. 

Evan did. Of course.

“Well how long do you think it would take you to draw up adoption paperwork instead? Yeah. I want to adopt the kid."

Chapter End Notes

I've had a great time writing this story so far and reading all your comments. I hope you guys like the direction this is going. Let me know!
Peter couldn’t shake off the fatigue dragging him down. The shower had helped a little but he still felt off. Slower. Not quite normal. He eyed his bed longingly. Part of him was glad the Avengers wanted to join them for dinner but the other part wished they weren’t coming so he could blow off dinner and go back to bed. He turned away and walked out before he could be tempted to crawl back under the covers.

Steve and Bruce were busy cooking in the kitchen. Peter looked around and noticed Tony was out on the balcony on the phone.

“Hey guys.” Peter greeted Steve and Bruce. “What are you making? It smells great.”

“Curry chicken.” Bruce answered. “I did a short stint in India awhile back. Picked up some traditional recipes.”

“Cool. How can I help?” Bruce and Steve both smiled at his offer and seemed somewhat surprised. He supposed Tony hadn’t offered to help but he’d had manners ingrained into him from a young age.

“We’ve got this Peter. Why don’t you go watch some TV?”

“Ok if you’re sure.” Peter hesitated.

Steve nodded so Peter walked over to the couch and laid down. He meant to close his eyes for just a second but before he knew it he was out like a light.

It felt like no time at all had passed before someone was shaking him awake again. Why couldn’t they just leave him alone to sleep?

Peter opened his eyes and was met with Tony’s concerned face.

“You ok kid?”

“Yeah.” Peter croaked and tried to force himself awake. He didn’t want to make Tony worry even though he was starting to worry himself. Why was he so tired?

“Let him sleep Tony. He’s probably just tired from last night.” Steve’s voice carried across the room.

Tony frowned from where he leaned over him, ignoring Steve. “You sure?”

“Uh huh.” Peter stood quickly to prove it.

“Ok. Come sit with me at the big kid table then.” Tony joked as he started walking back to the breakfast bar.

Peter followed him but after a couple steps he paused. The world seemed to spin around him and sounds warped. He took another couple steps, trying to will the odd feeling away but that only seemed to make it worse. He looked up toward Tony but the edges of his vision started fading away. God he was really dizzy. What was happening?
“Tony.” Peter tried to call out but it came out more like an entreaty.

Tony turned around but Peter couldn’t make out his face as the blackness stretched across his vision. Oh shit.

“I—” He tried to explain that he felt off, weird, dizzy, but before he could, the darkness encompassed him. Distantly, he felt himself falling forward as his legs gave way. A detached part of him was embarrassed he was about to biff it in front of everyone but even that started to float away along with gravity. Everything went black.

Sounds returned first. Voices.

“Bruce! Bruce get over here!”

“What happened?!”

“Steve run down to the lab and grab my bag. Hurry.”

Then touch. He was lying down. Nothing hurt. Maybe he hadn’t face planted after all, or maybe he just couldn’t feel it yet. Someone cradled him in their arms.

“Peter? Peter can you hear me? Peter! Open your eyes!”

The voice was bossy and he was so tired. He ignored it.

“Peter!” A new voice. Then pain flared across his chest and he groaned. His eyes opened without his consent and he found Bruce kneeling over him. The man pulled his fist back from where he’d been rubbing it across his sternum.

“Peter? Are you with us?” Bruce asked once he noticed he was awake.

“Mmm.” He hummed. Talking seemed like too much work right now. His eyes slipped closed again.

“No. Stay awake.” Bruce shook him and he opened his eyes again. “Tell us what’s going on.”

“I don’t know. Just got dizzy.” He mumbled and even that was hard to get out.

“You’re dizzy?” Bruce clarified and then glanced above Peter.

“Yeah.” Peter frowned then followed his gaze to Tony’s panicked face. He realized then that he was half sprawled out in Tony’s lap on the floor. He must’ve caught him when he’d fallen.

Now that he was flat on his back he started to feel a little better, his vision started to clear and all his senses returned in full force. He blinked a few more times. He was still exhausted but he didn’t feel quite as bad as before.

“I think…I think I’m ok.” Peter decided and tried to sit back up but Tony kept a tight grip on him.

“Just sit tight for a second kiddo. Let Bruce do his thing.” Tony spoke and then placed a hand on his forehead. “He doesn’t feel warm.”

“I’m not sick.” Peter denied. He didn’t know quite what this was but it wasn’t that. He watched as Bruce took his pulse and felt his forehead himself.

“He’s been more tired than usual today.” Tony said to Bruce and Peter frowned. He didn’t realize Tony had noticed that.
“Peter did you get hurt when you were out as Spiderman last night?” Bruce asked.

“No.” Peter denied instantly. He hadn’t.

“Are you sure?” Bruce’s voice was serious. “Nothing hurts?’

“Yeah. I’m fine.” Peter huffed out a reply.

Bruce ran his hands over his head then down his arms and legs before pushing over his chest and abdomen, clearly finding nothing.

“Here Bruce.” Steve reappeared, handing Bruce a large black bag before kneeling down on the floor on the other side of Peter, a worried look on his face.

This was getting ridiculous. He felt better now. Peter tried to sit up again. Instead of letting him go though Tony readjusted his hold and pulled Peter back against him so he was now half reclined against his chest instead of his lap.

“Oh my god I’m fine.” Peter groaned as Bruce started taking his blood pressure.

After a few moments of sitting, though, his head felt heavy and he got tired of holding it up so he let it fall back to rest against Tony’s chest. He was still so tired.

He waited patiently as Bruce listened to his heart and lungs, not finding anything. Then he pulled out some other contraption and pricked his finger with it. Ow. What the hell?

Bruce waited for the machine to beep then frowned.

“Peter when was the last time you ate something?” Bruce asked him as he put the machine down.

“Um I don’t know. I had a sandwich yesterday but that was it.” He answered.

“Your blood sugar’s in the toilet. No wonder why you’re dizzy.” Bruce explained as he got up and walked over to the fridge and returned with two bottles of coke. He knelt back down next to Peter and uncapped a bottle.

“Drink that.” Bruce said as he handed the coke to him.

Peter took a few sips.

“All of it.” Bruce instructed.

Peter sighed then threw the bottle back and chugged it. When he was done Bruce handed him the second bottle.

“Finish this one too.”

The second one took a little longer. His stomach already felt full from all the carbonation after drinking the first one, but he eventually managed to finish the second bottle after taking a couple breaks. When he handed the empty bottle back to Bruce, the scientist nodded at Tony.

“Let’s get him on the couch. We’ll give that some time to absorb and see if it does the trick.” Bruce instructed.

“Need help?” Steve offered.
“No I got him.” Tony said from behind him and suddenly he was being lifted in the air and carried the short distance to the couch where Tony deposited him down gently before sitting on the edge to keep an eye on him. Completely unnecessary. He totally could’ve walked.

“Feeling any better yet?” Bruce asked from right behind Tony.

“I don’t know.” Peter frowned.

“Just rest for a bit.” Bruce instructed.

Tony ran a hand through his hair and Peter closed his eyes. He let himself just enjoy the feeling of being taken care of for the first time in a long time. Aunt May used to do something similar when he was sick but it’d been years since that had happened. Mainly he’d just tried to hide everything from her ever since the spider bite.

Time blurred as Peter dozed, half awake, until he felt his finger being pricked again. He opened his eyes to find Tony in the same position as before and Bruce standing next to him staring at his little machine.

“Better.” Bruce said after a moment then smiled down at him. “How do you feel?”

Peter frowned and tried to assess himself. The world seemed back in focus again and he wasn’t so bone tired. He felt pretty normal actually.

“Good.” He replied with a big grin and abruptly sat up. “Not dizzy at all.”

“Are you sure he shouldn’t just take it easy for the rest of the night?” Tony worriedly asked Bruce from where he still sat on the couch close to Peter. “We can do this dinner thing tomorrow instead.”

“No he’s perfectly fine now and more food is the best thing for him. Peter, you can’t let yourself go so long without eating next time. One sandwich in 48 hours is obviously not enough for your metabolism. Got it?”

“Yeah. Thanks Bruce.” Peter nodded then stood and Tony followed, hovering closely.

“You sure you feel ok?” Tony asked.

“Yeah.” Peter smiled at him.

“Because you said you were fine before and then you tried to swan dive into the floor.” Peter could tell Tony was still anxious.

“I promise I feel fine.” Peter rolled his eyes.

“I reserve the right to be skeptical for the rest of the night.” Tony said.

Turns out that meant keeping Peter within arms reach, but Peter didn’t really mind. He was just glad he felt normal again. Plus, dinner was amazing and he had a great time with the Avengers even if they did give him a lot of crap for the stunt he’d pulled the night before. He knew enough now to know it was just how they showed they cared. For his first day of being grounded, it’d been pretty awesome. Minus the whole passing out from not eating enough thing. But whatever. No one was perfect.
Tony fidgeted and paced in the Avengers kitchen as he waited for the coffee maker to finish. Why did he have to wait for coffee to brew? He was Tony Stark. Note to self, figure out design for new instant coffee maker. Not for mass production. Just for himself.

For how little sleep he got last night and his lack of caffeine consumption so far, he was wired. He was awaiting Evan’s phone call about the adoption paperwork. God he was adopting a kid. He was really doing this. He knew he’d be on edge this morning from that fact alone but then he’d watched Peter pass out yesterday and that had just made all his anxiety worse. The sight of Peter falling forward limp toward the floor replayed itself over and over in his mind. Even though it’d been nothing. The kid had been fine, just short on food apparently. And how could that not be his fault? How did he have any right to ask Peter to be his son? When he couldn’t even feed him reliably?

“Wow you’re twitchy even for you.” Clint’s observed as he walked into the kitchen, breaking Tony’s train of thought.

Tony glanced at him but then turned his attention back to the coffee pot. It was almost done. He drummed his fingers on the counter impatiently.

“What’s going on?” Clint asked slowly, modulating his tone to make it more of a joke instead of the serious inquiry it actually was.

“Nothing.” Not the most convincing lie.

“Really? Because it kind of looks like you’re about to self combust.” Clint said shrewdly. “Is it something to do with short stack? Is he ok?”

“He’s fine. Maybe. I’m adopting him. So that’s probably going to fuck him up.” And he hadn’t meant to say any of that. Apparently the word vomit thing that commonly plagued the kid was catching. At least the coffee was done now. He grabbed the pot and tried to pour it into his mug but his hand was shaking and he just ended up spilling it onto the counter. “Dammit.”

“Oh. Wow.” Clint said and pulled the pot from his hands before he could hurt himself. He finished pouring Tony’s coffee for him before pouring a cup for himself and then wiping up the counter. “Dammit.”

“So clearly you’re freaking out.” Clint didn’t sugarcoat it.

“You think?” Tony couldn’t help it. It was second nature to lash out whenever he found himself vulnerable.

“It’s good you’re freaking out. It’d be a bad thing if you weren’t.” Clint tried to awkwardly reassure him.

“Really? This is you trying to make me feel better?”

“You’ll be fine.” Clint smirked.

“ Doesn’t feel like it.” Tony admitted and took a long drink of coffee.

“No that absolute terror you’re feeling right now? Yeah. It never goes away. Better get used to it. Comes with the territory. You’re going to need to buck up man.” Clint said with uncharacteristic seriousness as he patted him on the back.

“You suck at this.” Tony deadpanned.
“I know. Listen. You’re afraid of screwing up. Believe me we all are. But we all screw up. And I hate to break it to you but you’re going to screw up too. A lot. But you’ll survive. He’ll survive. You’ll figure it out. It’ll be great. Kumbaya and all that shit.” Clint said then sipped his coffee.

Tony choked out a little laugh.

“Does the kid know?” Clint asked after a few seconds of silence. “That you’re adopting him?”

“No. Not yet. No one knows. It was kind of a spur of the moment decision.”

“That’s so unlike you.” Clint joked.

Tony just glared at him.

Clint laughed but then offered, “I won’t tell the rest of the team if you don’t want me to.”

“No it’s fine. They can know. As long as no one tells my kid before I get a chance to talk to him.”

“Your kid.” Clint stated, amusement clear. “See? You’re already his Dad.”

Tony opened his mouth to deflect with his typical sarcasm but he ran a hand through his hair nervously before admitting instead, “I know.”

Clint beamed at him. “Oh man that kid’s already got you wrapped around his little finger huh?”

“Shut up.” Tony cuffed him on the back of the head as he got up and left, Clint’s laughter following him out.

Over the next few days he had similar conversations with all the various other Avengers. Apparently birdbrain had a big mouth for a spy. Although Tony had given him permission to tell people he didn’t think it’d spread like wildfire like it had. The Avengers really were a big bunch of gossips. They were all supportive, though, which Tony found kind of surprising. He knew they all really cared about Peter now and he was Tony Stark. Not exactly the model for responsibility let alone fatherliness, but no one objected to his plan to adopt him. But some of them did have questions. Like Steve right now.

“So you know we all think this is great and all but have you thought about school? How’s Peter going to get to school from here? Are you going to homeschool him? Because I really don’t see that working out.” Steve asked from his seat next to Tony on the couch. Peter had gone to sleep an hour ago but Tony hadn’t been tired so he’d come down to the common room to hang out with team. They were in the middle of Love Actually. Vision’s choice.

“Well gee I hadn’t thought about that at all.” Tony’s tone dripped with sarcasm.

“Steve’s just trying to help.” Natasha chastised from Tony’s other side as she whopped him lightly on the head.

“Ow.” Tony fake glared at her and rubbed his head.

“Oh please that didn’t hurt.” Natasha rolled her eyes.

“So Tony, school?” Bruce asked.
“Of course he’s going to school. He’s going back to his school. He’s had enough change in his life as it is recently. I’m not going to take him out of his school and away from his friends.”

Amused grins from the Avengers met his heartfelt announcement.

“And just how do you plan to do that? It’s not really a realistic commute from here unless you’re going to fly him back and forth as Ironman everyday.” Steve said. “Please tell me that’s not your plan.”

“That’s not my plan.” Tony responded but didn’t elaborate.

“You’re not going to have Happy drive him back and forth everyday are you? That’s too much time in a car for a kid. And definitely too much kid time for Happy.” Rhodey joked.

“No. Not doing that either.” Tony said.

“Ok so... What’s your plan?” Bruce asked.

“You’re going to make me say it?” Tony asked, glancing around the group. “Come on guys there’s obviously only one feasible option.”

No one ventured a guess and most of the team had puzzled expressions on their faces.

Tony rolled his eyes. “And they say we’re strategic geniuses... I’m moving back to the city.”

Jaws dropped all around.

“What?”

“No way.”

“You’re kidding.”

“When were you going to tell us this?” Steve asked.

“I just did.” Tony smirked. “Surprise!”

It was Tony who ended up surprised when he noticed the sad and shocked looks the team gave him.

“Come on you said it yourself. Peter has to go to school. There aren’t really any options around here, and like I said after everything that’s happened I don’t think it’s healthy to pull him out of the school he already knows and likes. Where he already has friends. Plus it’s a really good school.” Tony explained. “And it’s not like I have to live here. It’s easy enough to come back and forth as Ironman when I need to.”

“Do you have a place picked out yet?” Steve asked and he had a particular glint in his eye that he got when he had an idea.

“I’m looking into different real estate options. Nothing’s set yet.”

Steve glanced around the room, taking in everyone’s expressions, before he spoke. “I don’t like the idea of splitting up the team.”

“Don’t be so dramatic.” Tony rolled his eyes. “The team’s not splitting up. Peter and I are just going to be living somewhere else.”
“But we’re going to miss the kid!” Clint protested.

“I’ll bring him by on weekends.” Tony smirked.

“Who’s going to be my lab assistant?” Bruce asked.

“Who’s going to help me beat Clint at Mario Kart?” Sam asked.

“Yeah the kid was starting to grow on me. I don’t want him to leave.” Scott chimed in too.

“Ok wow. Well clearly I was wrong about you guys missing me. You only care about my kid. I see how it is.” Tony feigned hurt.

“Well obviously we’d miss you too.” Rhodey said.

“Uh huh sure.”

“Tony. Are you sure you’ve really thought this through? Who’s going to watch Peter when you’re busy?” Natasha asked.

“He’ll be at school.”

“Ok yes. For part of the day. But what happens if you have to go away on business last minute or as Ironman? Who’s going to watch Peter then?”

“I have… Happy. I can add babysitter to his resume.” Tony waved his hand as if that answered everything.

“Yeah the two of them get along so well. What happened the last time Happy was in charge of Peter?” Natasha prodded.

Tony’s eyes flashed. He didn’t like to be reminded of that mistake. Peter had almost died. Most of the team didn’t even know about that. He shouldn’t be surprised Natasha did, master spy and procurer of information that she was.

“Exactly.” Natasha read his eyes. “You’re really going to tell me you’d trust Happy with Peter again?”

“I trust Happy with my life.” Tony defended his friend.

“I know. But do you trust him with Peter’s?” Natasha entreated, boring into his eyes.

“No.” Tony admitted and looked away. He felt like a horrible friend, but it was true. He didn’t trust Happy with Peter.

Natasha nodded and shared a significant glance with Steve. Steve gave her a small nod.

“I think we should come with you.” Natasha offered.

“What?” Tony was taken aback. That definitely wasn’t what he’d expected to hear.

“I agree.” Steve said instantly. “We should all stay together. What does everyone think?”

“Move back to the city? Is that even a question? Hell yeah! It’s boring as hell out here.” Sam chimed in.
“I’m in.” Clint agreed.

Soon enough everyone had confirmed they wanted to move back to the city.

“Wait a minute. Where are we all supposed to live? We’re not exactly a small group and we’re going to need labs, training facilities, etc.” Bruce was always the voice of reason.

“So Tony any chance we could get the Tower back?” Steve turned to him and asked.

“The Tower? You mean the one I just sold? You’re telling me you want me to buy it back?” Tony asked.

“Yes?” Steve raised an eyebrow then egged him on. “You’re Tony Stark aren’t you?”

Tony stared at Steve for a few seconds before he sighed. “Ok fine. I’m going to look like an idiot but I’ll have my PR people play it off as my delightful eccentricity.”

“Yeah we’re moving back to New York!” Clint cheered.

“We’re already in New York, idiot.” Natasha rolled her eyes.

“New York City.” Clint clarified. “Oh shut up you knew what I meant.”

“Just to be clear.” Tony held a hand up. “Are we moving the entire headquarters back or just the team?”

“I think…” Steve frowned and thought for awhile, obviously weighting the pros and cons of both options. It took long enough that Sam started hummin the jeopardy theme song and Steve threw a pillow at him.

“Just the team.” Steve decided.

“Good. My thoughts exactly.” Tony nodded and flipped his phone out to send a quick e-mail to his poor real estate agent about his new intentions. The man was probably going to kill him.

“This is going to be awesome!” Scott opined. No one disagreed.

Chapter End Notes

I felt kind of so-so about this chapter but I hope you guys still enjoyed it. This chapter is just a little past half way through the story, and I’m planning on the story ending at the end of summer. I’m thinking about doing a part 2 that picks up in the fall though. What do you guys think? Thanks for all the amazing feedback so far!
Chapter Eleven

Peter’s week of being grounded passed quickly. For a punishment it sure hadn’t seemed like it. It’d been way better than the week before. Tony was around way more. For the first couple days after Peter’s impromptu swoon he’d actually been kind of clingy. And pushy with food. Apparently Peter had freaked him out a little. Whoops. To be fair, he’d never gone that long without eating so he hadn’t realized what would happen.

Even though Tony’s fretfulness was a little annoying, part of him was secretly happy the man was paying so much attention to him. Tony did as much work as possible from his suite instead of his workshop and office. The couch and coffee table were now a disaster littered in papers, tech, and coffee mugs. Whenever Tony couldn’t be there, one of the other Avengers was around instead. Regardless, it was still a relief when his grounding ended.

“Hey squirt. Did the warden finally spring you?” Clint greeted Peter as he walked into the Avengers common room.

Peter grinned. “Yep. I’m a free man! What are you doing?”

Clint finished tying his shoes and was just about to answer when Sam burst in.

“Come on man hurry up! We’re waiting on you.” Sam whined.

“I’m ready.” Clint said and stood.

“Is the rugrat coming with?” Sam gestured to Peter standing by Clint.

Clint cocked his head. “I don’t know. You want to come with?”

“Come with where? What are you doing?” Peter asked excitedly.

“It’s a secret. You in? Yes or no?” Clint asked.

“Yeah. Yeah I’m in.” Peter answered.

“Ok let’s go.” Clint grabbed Peter’s shoulder and led him toward the elevator and to the top of the base.

“Oh my god. Oh my god. Are we going somewhere in the Quinjet? Holy shit! This is so awesome! I can’t believe it! Are you going on a mission? Am I going on a mission with you? Do I need to get my suit?” Peter couldn’t keep his excitement in.

“Pipe down half pint. It’s too early in the day for this shit.” Sam complained as they boarded the jet.

Natasha, Scott, Rhodey, and Steve were already aboard.

“The squirt’s coming with us.” Clint announced as he walked in.

“I don’t know if that’s such a good idea.” Steve hedged.

“Come on Cap. He’s been cooped up all week and Tony has those meetings in the city today. The
kid’s bored. Let him have some fun.” Clint argued.

“Fine.” Steve gave in easily.

“But now the teams aren’t even.” Scott complained.

“We’ll count Cap as two people.” Clint smirked and helped buckle Peter into a seat next to Steve.

“Teams? What are we doing?” Peter tried to rein in his enthusiasm but his eyes gave him away.

“You didn’t even tell him what we’re doing?” Steve asked.

“I didn’t have to. The kid wanted to come without even knowing.” Clint smirked.

“Peter.” Steve pinched the bridge of his nose.

“What?”

“First lesson in superhero training kid. Never go somewhere with someone without knowing the plan first. It can end up biting you in the ass.” Clint patted him on the head and walked to the front of the jet to pilot it.

“What?”

The rest of the Avengers in the Quinjet laughed.

“He’s just messing with you kid.” Rhodey reassured.

“I hope you like paintball.” Steve answered Peter’s question with a smile.

“Really? Awesome!” He got to ride in the Quinjet to go play paintball with the Avengers. Best. Day. Ever.

Peter sprinted through the woods, nimbly dodging the paintballs shot at him. They’d taken the Quinjet up to some remote area in Canada where the Avengers did a lot of their larger scale training exercises and apparently paintball. Steve, Sam and Natasha faced off against Rhodey, Peter, Scott, and Clint. So far they were tied at 2-2. This was round 5. Besides a break for lunch, they’d been at it all day. Apparently the Avengers really went all out when they played. Peter really shouldn’t be surprised they adopted the whole work hard play hard philosophy.

Peter ducked and avoided another shot at his head. Sam was the one currently chasing him. Peter and Clint were the only ones left “alive” on his team. It was currently them against Sam and Steve. He twisted around as he ran and got a couple shots off himself, only narrowly missing his target, when his spidey sense went off. Before he could react, the front of his foot got caught under a thick root and jerked him to an abrupt stop, twisting his ankle at a harsh angle. He hit the ground hard and tumbled. He winced as he rolled on his back. Ow.

“Kid you ok?” Sam ran over to him.

Peter blinked a couple times. Nothing hurt too bad.

“Kid?”
“Yeah.” Peter found his voice. “Just got the wind knocked out of me.”

Sam frowned down at him, trying to assess the truth in the words.

“You sure?”

“Uh huh.” Peter glanced over and noticed his gun was still within easy reach.

“Well in that case…” Sam aimed his gun at him with a smirk, and Peter sprung back into action. He swept his leg under Sam’s feet so the man fell to the ground, his shot at Peter going wide. Peter grabbed his gun and within a second he’d nailed Sam with a shot to the chest.

“Gotcha.” Peter grinned.

“Dirty pool.” Sam complained then yelled loudly, “I’m out!”

Peter pushed himself to his feet and took a step, then grunted in surprise when his ankle flared in pain and he toppled back to the ground.

“Shit. You did get hurt.” Sam was hurrying to get back up now.

“No no I’m ok. It’s nothing.” Peter denied. Really it was probably nothing compared to injuries he’d gotten before on patrol as Spiderman. He forced himself to stand again and slowly tried putting weight on his bad ankle. Ow ow ow. Yeah that wasn’t going to happen.

“I’m out!” Clint’s voice rang across the woods. Damn. It was just him and Cap left now.

“Here sit down squirt.” Sam grabbed his upper arm to steady him.

“No I’m fine. I can play.” Peter protested.

“Yeah I don’t think so.” It did look kind of hopeless. How could he beat Cap with a bum ankle?

Peter looked around his surroundings and slowly a smile spread across his face. He had an idea.

“You’re out so you can’t help Cap or it’s cheating.” Peter pointed a finger into Sam’s chest.

“Hate to break it to you but there’s no way you’re going to win kid.” Sam laughed.

“Wanna bet? Just watch. And remember. No cheating.” Peter threatened and then slung the paintball gun over his shoulder and jumped using his good leg. He heard Sam’s cry of surprise as Peter grabbed a low hanging branch and swung himself up, then did the same thing to get at the branch above that one.

“Well I’ll be damned.” Peter heard Sam mutter from the ground as he watched him climb up with only one good foot.

“No cheating!” Peter yelled back down as the sound of moving brush came closer. Peter watched as Sam looked away from him, respecting the rules of the game. He wasn’t going to give Peter away. Peter sat on a branch, back against the trunk about 20 feet off the ground and took aim with his gun.

Wait for it. Wait for it. Steve’s approach got louder and then he was there.

“Where’d he go?” Steve asked Sam.

“You know I can’t say.” Sam said sarcastically.
Almost there. Just a little closer. There. He was right under Peter at the perfect angle. Peter pulled the trigger and laughed at Steve’s surprised expression when the paintball caught him right in the chest.

“Ha we win! Steve’s out!” Peter yelled in victory. Steve’s eyes instantly found him up in the tree.

“Time for you to get down now!” Sam yelled up at him.

“Ok.” Peter agreed and carefully stepped from one branch to the next. Getting down was harder than climbing up. Usually this would be nothing, but with one foot it got a little more complicated. He was almost to the last branch when he accidentally put weight on his bad ankle and slipped.

“Shit!” He cried out and then he was falling.

Straight into Captain America’s arms.

“I got you.” Steve said after he deftly caught him. “And language.”

“I think I just lost years off my life.” Sam complained from next to Steve.

“I thought you were more coordinated than that.” Steve chastised as he placed Peter back on his feet then frowned in concern and grabbed his arm when Peter wobbled.

“Kid hurt his ankle.” Sam sold him out. “But he refused to quit.”

“And you let him climb a tree?!?” Steve sounded pissed. Uh oh.

“Yeah I let him.” Sam glared back at the criticism.

“Did we really win?” Clint asked as he joined them along with Natasha, Scott, and Rhodey.

“Yes.” Peter said proudly. “I shot Captain America.”

Steve rolled his eyes at the well meaning laughter from his teammates.

“It’s time to head back. Peter hurt his ankle.” Steve motioned to the kid he still had a grip on.

“What?” Rhodey frowned.

“What happened?” Clint asked and hurried over to Peter.

“Really it’s fine.” Peter protested. “It’s embarrassing. I was bested by a tree root.”

“Can you walk on it?” Clint asked as he crouched down to try to see his injury.

“No he can’t.” Sam answered for him.

“Clint leave his shoe on until we get back.” Natasha rebuked as Clint reached for Peter’s laces. “It’ll help with the swelling.”

“I’m ok guys. Really. I heal fast. It’ll probably be completely normal by tomorrow.” Peter couldn’t believe how much a group of people that got shot at on a regular basis was overreacting over a hurt ankle.

“Tony’s going to kill us.” Clint remarked and stood, not being able to see anything with Peter’s shoe still on.

“Oh shit.” Rhodey agreed.
“Language!” Peter’s joke was met by appreciative smiles.

“Ok time to go.” Steve said and everyone started walking back toward the Quinjet.

Peter frowned. This was going to hurt. He steeled himself to try to walk when suddenly the ground was swept out from under him and he found himself back in Steve’s arms being carried toward the Quinjet.

“I can walk.” Peter protested, ego smarting, and Clint snorted from where he hovered nearby at Steve’s side.

“Yeah let’s not try that.” Natasha said from Steve’s other side. “Walking on it could make it worse.”

“Well he already climbed a tree on it so…” Sam scoffed.

“You did what?” Clint seemed shocked.

“Oops?” Peter offered.

“You guys! We won!” Scott mumbled in consternation. The rest of the team shook their heads in agreement.

“Which floor?” Natasha asked as the team walked into the elevator after departing the Quinjet.

“Which ever one Stark isn’t on.” Clint said like it was obvious.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. is Tony back yet?” Steve asked, Peter still in his arms and complaining about it.

“Guys I can probably walk by now. Seriously. I heal fast. Like fast fast. It doesn’t even hurt that bad anymore. Hello? Come on guys.” Peter whined.

“Mr. Stark recently arrived. He is currently in the common room.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. answered and the elevator started moving.

“We didn’t say we wanted to go there F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Clint argued.

“Mr. Stark has already been informed of Peter’s apparent injury per one of my protocols regarding him.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. explained. “Per another protocol I’m required to take Peter to him when requested.”

“Well fuck.” Clint said, resigned.

“Wait. How many protocols does he have for me?” Peter asked.

“437 protocols currently exist pertaining to you.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. said.

Peter gaped. Holy shit. That was a lot. He couldn’t even think of what like 20 of them could possibly be.

“Yeah he loves you kid. And now he’s going to kill us.” Clint said right before the elevator door opened.

Tony stood there, obviously waiting for them, arms crossed and angry. He wore a charcoal suit with
a white shirt and a navy tie, red tinted sunglasses perched on his face. He cut an imposing figure.

“What happened?” Tony’s voice was cold.

“It wasn’t their fault!” Peter tried to defend them but he knew he probably didn’t look that convincing cradled in Steve’s arms. He really didn’t want Tony to kill them and right now it kind of looked like he would.

Tony’s eyes softened slightly when they landed on him but then he looked back up at Steve and they turned steely again.

Steve walked out of the elevator straight toward Tony. Wow Cap really was brave. Then he brushed right past the man on the way to the couch where he set Peter down, back against the armrest. Peter winced slightly when it jarred his ankle. Ok maybe it did still hurt a little bit.

“What happened?” Tony asked again, voice getting louder. Or maybe it just seemed that way because he stood right next to Peter now.

“We were playing paintball at our spot in Canada and the kid tripped and hurt his ankle. He’s fine. He had fun.” Clint said.

“I did. I had fun! Until that stupid root got the better of me. And our team won! Because I shot Captain America.” Peter noticed the edge of Tony’s mouth twitch up at that. He knew he’d like that.

“And then I fell out of a tree. But Steve caught me.” Peter rambled on. He couldn’t help it. Tony called it his word vomit problem.

“What? You fell out of a tree?” Tony’s amusement disappeared. Shit he should’ve stopped at the whole shooting Captain America thing.

“Kid!” Clint groaned.

“Just a little bit?” Peter winced. “But I’m fine!”

“He’s ok Tony. He’ll probably be completely fine by tomorrow.” Natasha tried to defuse the situation.

“He better be.” Tony threatened and placed a hand on the top of Peter’s head while he continued to glare at the Avengers. “But see you know that’s not the part that pisses me off.”

“Oh here we go.” Clint sighed. “Ear muffs kid.”

“No it’s not funny!” Tony roared, fury apparent. “What pisses me off is that you think you have the right to just take him without asking me. In the Quinjet! To fucking Canada! To play paintball! Really?! And then he gets hurt? And still no one calls me?! I have to find out from fucking F.R.I.D.A.Y.?”

Peter frowned. He didn’t think his leaving with the Avengers was that big of a deal. Why was Tony so mad?

“Tony—” Steve started to explain.

“No! He doesn’t belong to you! I don’t care how much you like him. He’s my kid! You can’t just take him! You have to ask me!” Peter blinked at the semantics. My kid? He knew Tony was his guardian now, but it still felt good to hear him refer to him as his kid.
“We’re sorry.” Steve apologized. “And it won’t happen again. Right guys?”

“Yeah we’re sorry man.” Clint said sincerely.

“Sorry.” Scott mumbled.

“Our bad.” Sam winced.

“I’m sorry Tony.” Rhodey hung his head.

“We weren’t thinking.” Natasha agreed.

They all looked appropriately reprimanded. Earth’s mightiest heroes. Taken down by Tony Stark’s verbal vitriol. It was impressive and a little scary. Peter hoped he wasn’t going to yell at him too.

Tony’s anger seemed to slowly deflate out of him with their apologies and Natasha was the first one to make a move. She walked toward Peter. Peter noticed Tony watched her warily. He realized then that even though Tony had a hand on his head, the man’s back was to him. He faced the Avengers who stood a respectable distance away. The arrangement looked almost like he was shielding Peter from them. But that was silly. Right?

For a second it seemed like Tony wasn’t going to let Natasha past him but at the last minute he relented. Natasha crouched down on the couch at Peter’s feet and loosened the laces of the shoe on his bad foot. She pulled the shoe off slowly but it still hurt. He couldn’t quite hold back a grunt of pain.

“Careful.” Tony admonished and Natasha rolled her eyes at him. He let go of Peter to join Natasha at his feet, watching her closely.

Natasha peeled his sock off and Peter winced. When she got a look at his ankle, she whistled.

“How bad is it?” Clint asked from where he sat on the other couch next to Steve. The other Avengers had skedaddled to the kitchen as soon as Tony had finished yelling.

“You really did a number on this.” She told him as she rolled his jeans up so she could get a better view. She took his foot in her hands and moved it every which way before prodding his ankle in different spots. Peter was surprised it still hurt so much. When she pushed over a particularly sore spot he gasped and involuntarily jerked away. Natasha frowned and looked up at Tony.

“It might actually be broken.” She admitted.

The anger was back in Tony’s eyes.

“We’re sorry Tony.” Steve apologized again.

“Why are you sorry?” Peter rolled his eyes. “I’m the klutz that tripped.”

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. where’s Bruce?” Tony asked.

“Dr. Banner is in his lab.”

“Have him meet us in the Medbay.”

“What? No. I’m fine. Seriously. This will be completely healed by tomorrow.” Peter objected.

“If it is broken and it heals wrong he’ll need to have it re-broken to reset it. And that’ll probably
mean surgery.” Clint put in his two cents.

“Clint!” Peter whined. The archer was supposed to be on his side.

“Come on let’s go kiddo.” Tony said and picked him up. Peter winced when it jostled his ankle.

“I think you’re getting heavier.” Tony groused but he didn’t seem to have any actual difficulty carrying him.

“Do you need help?” Steve offered.

“I think you’ve done enough.” Tony replied. Peter sighed. Tony was still mad at his teammates and Peter couldn’t help but feel like it was his fault.

“I’m sorry Tony.” Peter said when they were alone in the elevator.

Tony frowned down at him. “You have nothing to be sorry about. This wasn’t your fault. Those other dunderheads though…”

“Please don’t be mad at them. It was nice of them to let me tag along. I really did have a lot of fun.”

“Hmm.” Tony said noncommittally. In other words, he didn’t agree but he wasn’t going to argue with Peter about it. Peter decided not to push it.

They arrived at Medbay and Tony deposited him carefully on the bed Bruce already stood next to.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. told me what happened.” Bruce said. He examined his ankle. Doing almost the same thing Natasha had just done upstairs. Peter wondered where she’d learned it. Mostly he just wished they’d stop messing with it and leave it alone to heal.

A few X-rays later and they confirmed he actually had broken it. But luckily everything was in place, so Bruce just splinted it.

“We’ll check it again tomorrow.” Bruce told Tony. “But until it heals he needs to stay off of it. I guess now we’ll get to find out how fast his healing factor actually works.”

Tony didn’t seem to appreciate that last comment and Bruce escaped his glare by handing Peter a pair of crutches. Peter eyed them with dismay.

“Don’t you have one of those walking boot things I can use?” Peter had seen a classmate in one before after she’d broken her foot.

“Nope. Like I said, you can’t put any weight on it while it heals.”

“Ok fine.” Peter positioned the crutches under his arms and stood. The splint weighted his leg down. It was uncomfortable. This was going to suck. “Can we go now? I’m starving.”

“After you kid.” Tony motioned for him to lead the way and he and Bruce followed him back upstairs.

Back in the common room Tony helped him get comfortable on the couch while the majority of the team was still in the kitchen working on dinner. Or avoiding Tony. Probably a bit of both.

“Damn. Broken huh?” Clint asked as he watched Tony settle a pillow under his splinted leg and Peter started channel surfing.
“Yeah it’s broken.” Tony turned to glare at Clint.

“It’ll heal.” Clint shrugged and even Peter knew that was wrong thing to say. It just set Tony off again.

“No thanks to you. I know exactly who the instigator behind all of this was.” Tony pointed a finger at the archer.

“Hey! I didn’t break his leg.” Clint argued.

“No but you—”

“Can you two stop fighting?” Peter whined from the couch as he fiddled with the remote, trying to turn up the volume. “I can’t hear the TV.”

Tony and Clint both looked at him in disbelief before they shook their heads in oddly similar reactions.

Thankfully, no fighting erupted again for the rest of the night. They all ate dinner informally in the living room and had an impromptu movie night. Peter fell asleep halfway through the second movie. He couldn’t help it. Healing made him tired.

He half woke when he felt himself being lifted again. His head lolled sideways and landed against something warm and soft that smelled like Tony. It took him a long couple seconds for his tired brain to put it all together and realize Tony must be carrying him up to bed. Hmm. That was nice of him. He really didn’t think he could navigate crutches right now.

Just when he was almost out again he felt Tony lowering him into bed. A pillow was carefully tucked under his leg before the covers were pulled up and tucked around him. He figured that’d be it but then Tony brushed his hair back and kissed his forehead. Peter kept perfectly still. A few seconds later he heard the click of his door as it shut. Peter frowned. Had that really happened? Or had he been dreaming? It had seemed real. Peter was too tired to think about it further. He decided to just enjoy the warm feeling that had encompassed him and let sleep carry him away.

His leg didn’t heal in just a day. It took four. Peter thought it felt completely back to normal after two but Bruce kept arguing with him and Tony sided with Bruce instead of him. Of course. But now he was being set free! As soon as Bruce took the splint off he was gone. He hopped off the Medbay bed and took off in a sprint.

“Peter I didn’t say you could run on it yet!” Bruce called from behind.

“Peter!” Tony didn’t sound happy either.

But his leg was fine. Sure it was still a little stiff and sore but that was nothing. It felt so good to be able to move again. He had so much pent up energy. He made it to the stairwell and sprinted up the stairs to the common room. He knew F.R.I.D.A.Y. would’ve refused to take him in the elevator and that would’ve ruined his dramatic exit.

“I’m free!” Peter proclaimed as he bounded into the common room, jumping on and off the couches and running in circles. Clint was the only one around to witness it and he was clearly amused with his prancing around.
Peter was in the midst of doing a back flip off the arm of the couch when he heard Tony sternly call out his name. He stuck the landing with just a twinge in his leg before he turned to find Tony and Bruce watching. Dang they got up here fast.

“I think your kid’s on speed.” Clint said to Tony.

“Peter you need to take it easy for at least another couple days.” Bruce advised.

“You said it wasn’t broken anymore.” Peter argued.

“It isn’t but it’s not completely back to normal either. It’s newly healed. It’s vulnerable to re-injury. So stop tempting fate.”

Peter rolled his eyes but plopped down on the couch next to Clint. “Fine. See? I’m sitting. No longer tempting fate.”

“I have a conference call in 5 minutes. Can I trust you to behave until I get back?” Tony asked as he checked his watch.

“I’ll keep an eye on him.” Clint offered.

“Yeah because you’re so good at that.” Tony threw the shot out but he still left Peter with Clint. Bruce followed him out.

“I’m sorry he’s still mad at you.” Peter said to Clint once they were gone.

“Don’t worry about it kid. He’s not really. He’s just especially touchy and stressed out right now. We’ve all just been collateral damage.”

“What’s he stressed out about?” Peter frowned. He hadn’t noticed. Was something going on with SI?

“You.” Clint answered honestly.

“Me?” Peter frowned. “Why? Because I got hurt?”

“Well that’s definitely part of it, but… You’ll find out soon enough.” Clint ruffled his hair. That sounded kind of ominous.

“Hey isn’t it your birthday tomorrow?” Clint changed the subject and Peter reluctantly let him.

“Yeah!”

“You’re going to be what? Fourteen?”

“Sixteen.” Peter punched Clint in arm in jest.

“Oh yeah that’s right. Well birthday boy, you want to play some Mario Kart?”

“Sure.” Peter agreed quickly and Clint got the controllers together. As they played, Peter completely forgot about Clint’s previous cryptic comments about Tony.

Chapter End Notes
I had to throw in a little shameless Peter whump. I hope everyone liked it. We'll get back to more emotional stuff in the next chapter. Let me know what you think! All of your responses really motivate me.
Peter’s eyes snapped awake. It was his birthday today! He was sixteen. Old enough to get his driver’s license. He bounded out of bed and raced to get showered and dressed in record time. Something smelled good. He wondered what Tony had made. Last year Aunt May had taken him out for birthday brunch to their favorite greasy spoon in Queens. They did it every year for his birthday. It was their little tradition. Aunt May. He realized with a pang that he hadn’t thought about her much lately. It took the wind out of his sails. She was dead and here he was practically bursting with excitement over turning 16. He was a horrible person.

He frowned as he sat down on the edge of his bed, trying to swallow past the lump in his throat. He missed her. He wished she could be here to celebrate with him. He closed his eyes and tried to visualize her face and remember how she used to smile at him. But the picture in his mind seemed blurry and indistinct, like he couldn’t quite remember every perfect detail of her face.

Peter yanked the drawer of his nightstand open and pulled out a small black leather photo album. He opened it and started paging through it. He hadn’t looked at it since she’d died. It had hurt too much, but now it brought a small measure of comfort because here she was memorialized in photos. Peter would always be able to see her face.

He stopped at a picture taken from his birthday last year. The waitress had taken it. They’d been in the middle of eating the massive chocolate cake and ice cream birthday dessert the restaurant was known for. Peter had whipped cream on his nose and was laughing. They both wore dorky birthday hats. May was always into that, things that embarrassed him.

May smiled at the camera. She looked so carefree and happy. Completely worry free. She hadn’t known he was Spiderman yet in this picture. There was no hint that she was destined to meet her imminent death in less than a year. No idea it’d be the last birthday they’d ever celebrate together. The picture blurred as tears filled his eyes. What kind of a mess was he? He’d been awake for less than 20 minutes and his emotions were already all over the map.

He heard a soft knock on his door and then the sound of it opening before he had a chance to respond. Peter sniffled and hastily wiped at his eyes before looking up, already knowing who he’d see.

“You know using F.R.I.D.A.Y. to spy on me really isn’t fair.” Peter rasped as he watched Tony walk towards him. “Maybe I want to be alone right now.”

“You don’t.” Tony said without a hint of indecisiveness as he sat next to Peter and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. He looked down at the photo album in Peter’s lap, still open to the birthday picture.

“That’s a good picture.” Tony observed.

“It was last year.” Peter explained softly. Peter already felt better with Tony sitting next to him, more grounded.

“It seems wrong to be happy when she’s gone.” Peter confessed. “Like I’m betraying her or something.”
“She’d want you to be happy.” Tony said.

Peter nodded. He knew it was true even though he still felt guilty.

“Especially on your birthday.” Tony nudged him and it earned a small smile from Peter.

“Yeah.” Peter agreed and closed the album slowly before setting it on his nightstand.

“Did you make me birthday brunch?” Peter teased as he turned to look at Tony.

“Of course.” Tony smiled back. “You hungry?”

“Starving.”

“Come on then birthday boy. Let’s eat. We’ve got a big day ahead of us.” Tony stood and led Peter out to the kitchen, arm still around him.

When Peter saw the spread he couldn’t keep the laughter that burst free.

“You didn’t make all this.” Peter accused. The kitchen counter was literally covered in food. Any kind of food Peter could imagine. Muffins, bacon, eggs, hashbrowns, pancakes, sausage, fruit, waffles, bagels, pastries.

“I procured it.” Tony clarified.

“Even I can’t eat all this.”

“Meh eat whatever you want. We’ll give the scraps to Steve.”

Peter laughed again and piled a plate high with food before taking a seat at the kitchen table. Tony sat across from him with a more modest plate.

“This is so good.” Peter said after his first few bites.

“Glad you like it.”

“What are we doing today?” Peter asked excitedly.

“Finish eating and you’ll find out.”

Peter smiled and dug in while Tony regaled him with some stories about his own teenage birthday antics.

“I can’t eat anymore.” Peter finally declared after he finished his third plate of food.

He set his head on the table. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been this stuffed but everything had tasted so good.

“Don’t make yourself sick on your birthday.” Tony smirked.

Peter groaned. “Too late.”

“Maybe this will perk you up.” Tony said and then pulled a small wrapped box out of his pocket and placed it in front of Peter.

“Happy birthday kiddo.”
Peter examined the box and then looked from Tony’s face and then back to the box.

“I have no idea what this is.” He admitted.

“Open it.” Tony encouraged.

Peter unwrapped the present to uncover a plain black box. He opened that to find another black velvet box. A box within a box. It almost looked like a jewelry box but he knew Tony hadn’t gotten him jewelry. He opened it and was met with a set of keys.

“Oh my god.” Peter whispered.

“Did you get me a car?!” He screeched and looked at Tony with wide eyes.

“I got you a car.” Tony confirmed with an ear to ear grin.

Peter pulled out the keys and recognized the insignia instantly. “No way! This is too much! You got me Audi?! Oh my god this is so awesome!”

Peter flew out of his chair and almost knocked Tony over in his excitement to hug the man in appreciation.

“Thank you thank you thank you!” He said as Tony laughed in his embrace.

“Let’s go for a ride.” Tony suggested.

“Yes!” Peter practically skipped all the way to the garage.

Tony led him directly to his car. It was a sleek silver model. Peter thought it was perfect, the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“This is really mine?” He asked as he ran his hands over it.

“It’s really yours.” Tony chuckled. “Now do you actually want to drive it or would you rather just keep drooling all over it?”

Peter rolled his eyes but climbed into the driver’s seat. Tony got into the passenger side.

“You do actually know how to drive right?” Tony clarified.

“No I actually discovered teleportation technology and didn’t tell you and that’s how I got to New York that other time.” Peter raised an eyebrow at him and pushed the start button.

“Funny.” Tony said sarcastically.

“I know how to drive.” He confirmed and put the car in gear. He drove it out of the garage and onto the road. There was no traffic around. The roads were completely deserted. Peter shot a quick glance at Tony and then slammed his foot down on the accelerator. Smiling wide as it quickly went from 40 to 60 to 80 to 100mph.

“This car is awesome!” Peter exploded with happiness.

“Uh huh time to slow down.” Tony gripped the armrests.

Peter edged it further. The speedometer climbed up to 120mph.
“Peter slow down.” That was Tony’s serious voice. Damn. Peter glanced over at him as he laid off on the accelerator.

“Don’t look at me! Eyes on the road.” Tony reprimanded. “Are you trying to give me a heart attack?”

Soon enough they were cruising along at 60mph, which seemed slow to Peter but Tony didn’t look like he was in danger of having a heart attack anymore.

“Take the next left.” Tony instructed.

“Why? Where are we going?” Peter asked.

“You want to get your license right?”

“Yeah!”

“Take a left.”

Tony directed them to the nearest DMV not in the city and waited while Peter went through all the necessary hoopla and walked away with a driver’s license. He held it out like a prize to Tony who examined it before handing it back.

“Good work kid.” Tony smiled and they got back in the car.

They drove around for awhile, just talking and listening to the radio, until Peter was ready to head back. It was nice. If that’d been it, Peter would’ve been content. A perfect 16th birthday. But apparently it wasn’t.

When they got back to the compound, Tony led him to the common room where the team was waiting for his birthday party. The room was covered in confetti and streamers and balloons. It looked like birthday had thrown up on it. And there was a huge cake on the breakfast bar along with another massive spread of food and a pile of presents. Wow.

Happy birthday’s rang across the room from all the Avengers as he and Tony walked in.

“Hey squirt! Happy birthday!” Clint said as he placed a birthday hat on him and then on Tony. Most of the Avengers wore them. Clint blew on his noise maker and then held it in the corner of his mouth like a cigar.

“What’d he get you?” Clint asked as he nodded to Tony.

“A car!” Peter smiled.

“Stark got the kid a car! Who didn’t see that coming? Raise your hand. Yeah everyone saw that coming.” Clint joked as he glanced around the room to amused faces.

“Shut up Katniss.” Tony said without any real bite.

It turned out the Avengers knew how to throw a party. The food was amazing and they really seemed to like their booze, drinks ranging from beer to scotch. If Peter thought they were kind of rowdy at baseline it was nothing compared to a couple drinks later. Peter actually wasn’t sure who was having more fun, him or them.

Before cutting the cake they all sang happy birthday to him. Peter could feel the blush heat his cheeks as he blew out the candles. Afterwards they made him sit down and open presents while they
all ate cake. He told them over and over it was too much and they didn’t need to get him anything but it all fell on deaf ears and he ended up with a lot of awesome gifts. How many people got to claim the Avengers sang happy birthday to them and bought them presents? Peter worried his face would be sore in the morning from all the smiling.

Once the cake was gone and the presents had been opened, Clint roped Peter into a card game.

“Damn are you sure you’ve never played this before?” Sam asked as Peter won his 5th hand of blackjack in a row. Peter took his chips as Scott dealt out another hand to Clint, Peter, and Sam.

“It’s not that complicated.” Peter said matter of factly.

“Tony I’m taking your kid with me to Vegas when he turns 18!” Clint called across the room to Tony where he stood talking with Steve and Rhodey. The comment drew his attention and he walked over to the group playing around the coffee table.

Peter won again while Sam and Clint both busted.

“It’s beginners luck.” Scott said.

They played five more rounds and Peter won four of them. After an hour of playing, Peter’s pile of chips had grown to three times the size of anyone else’s.

“Seriously how are you so good at this?” Clint asked him.

“I don’t know. How are you so bad at it?” Peter smirked.

“You’re just on a streak. Just wait. Luck’s about to turn my way.” Clint bantered.

“It’s not luck.” Peter argued. “It’s analyzing the odds.”

Steve let out a surprised laugh from where he, Rhodey, and Tony watched, garnering everyone’s attention.

“What’s so funny?” Scott asked.

“I know how he’s winning.” Steve declared.

“How?” Sam asked.

“He’s counting cards.” Steve smiled.

“Well it’s not that hard. We’re only using two decks.” Peter motioned to the stack.

It was Tony’s turn to laugh now.

“Isn’t that what you’re supposed to do?” Peter frowned.

“What the hell.” Sam said.

“You little genius cheater.” Clint threw his cards at him.

“Ok. Who wants to play poker?” Scott asked.

Rhodey, Steve, and Tony joined in.

Turns out Peter had a horrible poker face. It came as a surprise to absolutely no one.
The evening passed quickly and all too soon it was over.

“Time to call it a night kiddo.” Tony decided and patted him on the knee.

Peter frowned but didn’t argue. It wasn’t that late yet. Only ten o’clock. And no one was complaining about them leaving early, which was somewhat atypical. Peter caught a few significant and not so discreet looks the Avengers shared amongst each other at their exit. Weird. Peter didn’t really know what to make of it.

“Good night guys.” Peter said before they left. “Thanks again! This was an awesome birthday!”

The Avengers bid them good night and he and Tony went back up to their suite.

“Why don’t you get ready for bed and then come join me on the couch?” Tony suggested.

“Ok.” It wasn’t that odd of a request. He and Tony frequently watched a movie before bed, but usually that was if they weren’t already hanging out downstairs. He washed his face, brushed his teeth, changed into his pajamas and then came back.

Tony sat on the couch, fidgeting with a manila envelope. Peter sat down next to him. The man almost seemed oddly nervous as he placed the envelope on the coffee table and turned his body to face him more directly.

“Peter there’s one other thing I wanted to give you today. Offer you. Ask you.” Tony stumbled over his words awkwardly. He seemed to notice it and smiled mockingly at his own discomfort.

“Um ok?” Peter had no idea what this was about.

“These past couple months have been…let’s just say life changing.” Tony continued.

Peter frowned, but he agreed. Yeah they’d been fairly life changing for him too. Life changing was an interesting word choice, though. It could be used to describe something good or bad.

“And I just want you to know I’m not…I’m not trying to replace your Aunt.”

“I know.” Peter said. He had no idea where Tony was going with this but for some reason it seemed important to offer him that reassurance.

Tony smiled wryly at him before his expression turned serious again.

“Before you came to live with me, I definitely never imagined myself in this sort of role. Having to take care of a tiny human.”

“I’m not tiny.” Peter automatically objected.

Tony smirked as he held his hand up, and he still looked nervous so Peter listened.

“But then you were here…and I did the best I could. And…I think I’ve done ok.”

Peter nodded. It was true. Tony had been great.

“The thing is…I never could’ve guessed how much you’d grow to mean to me.” Tony took a deep breath before he continued on. “And I…I like being your guardian but lately…I don’t think that’s what I want anymore.”

Peter’s heart fell to his feet.
Tony seemed to see the sudden fear in his eyes because he clarified quickly, “Because it’s not enough. It doesn’t encompass how I feel about you. I want to be more than just your guardian.”

Now Peter was just confused. What did that mean? More than his guardian?

“You don’t understand what I’m getting at.” Tony observed.

Peter shook his head.

Tony sighed and ran a hand through his hair anxiously. “Peter you…you’re…”

He seemed to be searching for the right words. Peter couldn’t remember a single time he’d ever seen Tony struggle to speak.

“You know I love you kid.” Tony said decisively as he looked into his eyes. “And I don’t want to just be your guardian anymore. I…I want to adopt you Peter. I want you to be my son. What do you think?”

Peter gaped. What? Tony wanted to adopt him? Why? It kind of seemed like this was coming out of left field. But as the idea percolated maybe it didn’t seem all that crazy. Since Tony had taken him in, he’d bent over backwards for him time and time again. He’d spent night after night losing sleep to help Peter with his nightmares. He’d blown off the president to chase after him. He’d yelled at the Avengers for taking him somewhere without asking. He punished him when he misbehaved. He worried about him. He spent time just hanging out with him. He took the time to teach him in the workshop. He carried him to bed when he fell asleep on the couch. He was just always there for him when he needed him. In the deep secret recesses of his mind he’d already started to think of Tony as his Dad. He just never thought the man would ever feel the same way. But now that Tony had given voice to the desire, it seemed right. Obvious. He wanted to be Tony’s son. He wanted Tony to be his Dad.

“You don’t have to answer right now. You can think about it.” Tony said when Peter didn’t respond right away.

“No I…” Peter paused and swallowed nervously. “I’d like that.”

“You would?” Tony sounded surprised.

“Yeah.”

“Are you saying yes?” Tony asked with barely restrained excitement.

“Yes.” Peter answered.

Tony reached out and hugged him.

When they broke apart Tony grabbed the manila envelope on the table and opened it. He pulled out a stack of papers that were earmarked in several places.

“This is the adoption paperwork.” Tony explained to him. “It just needs your signature to be finalized and then we can submit it tomorrow.”

Wow this was moving fast. Peter thought it’d take weeks or months. Not this same day. Tony noticed his surprise as he handed him a pen.

“Are you sure?” Tony asked. “I don’t want you to feel pressured.”
“No. I’m sure.” Peter reassured him as he uncapped the pen. He really was. He hoped Tony didn’t notice his hand shaking slightly. It was excitement not nerves. Okay maybe it was half excitement, half nerves. Or a third excitement, two thirds nerves. Whatever. What did it matter? Why was he even nervous at all? He wanted this. He did.

Tony pointed at the line he needed to sign on. Peter hesitated, pen hovering right over the paper.

“Are you sure?” Peter echoed back at him, looking up at Tony with wide eyes. He couldn’t quite believe that Tony Stark wanted him. To be his son. He was just Peter Parker. Some nobody kid from Queens. This all felt kind of surreal. Like he’d wake up tomorrow to find out it’d all been a dream.

“Very sure.” Tony answered instantly.

“Ok.”

Peter took a deep breath.

And signed.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the wonderful comments! Let me know what you think of this chapter!
“Tony I really can’t push this off anymore. I need you to go to Japan.” Pepper stood in front of him with her hand on her hips.

“Now’s not a good time Pepper. In case you forgot I’m kind of in the middle of adopting a kid.” He answered as he rubbed the grease off the wrench in his hand with a towel.

“I know.” Pepper sighed. “And you know I wouldn’t ask you to do this if I had any other choice.”

“Yeah well even I know that ditching him right after adopting him would send a mixed message.” Tony argued. He still couldn’t quite believe Peter had said yes when he’d asked him a few days ago.

“It’d just be for a week Tony. It’s not like you’re abandoning him. I’m sure he’d understand.” Pepper gave him a small smile.

Tony grunted as he threw the now clean wrench back down on his workbench.

“You could take him with you.” Pepper offered.

“And what’s he supposed to do while I’m working all day?” Tony turned the towel on his hands, wiping them clean.

“Take in the sights. Travel. It’s Japan.” Pepper said as it if was obvious.

“By himself? He’s sixteen.” Tony said with disbelief.

“I traveled alone when I was sixteen. I know you did too.” Pepper said. “Or maybe he could bring a friend.” Tony knew if Peter picked a friend it would be that Ned kid and he could only imagine the kind of trouble the two of them would get into, so that was definitely a hard no.

Tony didn’t respond so Pepper continued, “With or without Peter you need to go. If we put this off any longer we’re going to lose this acquisition. And you and I both know there’s no way we’d be able to justify that at the next shareholders meeting.”

Tony knew she was right. He threw the towel down angrily. “Fine.”

“You’ll go?”

“I’ll go.” Tony agreed. Shit.

“Thank you.” Pepper said sincerely.

“So now that that’s settled, do I get to meet this boy you’re making your son? I didn’t drive all the way up here just to argue with you in person for old times sake.” Pepper teased. She’d been extremely busy the last couple months, in part because she’d tried to take the load off of Tony, so she hadn’t had a chance to visit.

“He’s actually at his friend’s house right now.” Tony winced.

“You’re kidding.” Pepper frowned.
“He’ll be back for dinner though if you want to stay.” It was only 10:00am.
“I can’t. I have meetings in the city all afternoon.” Tony could hear the regret in her voice.
“Another time.” Tony placated.
“I’ll hold you to that.”
Tony nodded.
“I’ll have your jet ready tomorrow at 8:00am. Don’t forget. And I’ll let Mr. Izuki know you’ll be available to meet with him when you arrive.” Pepper instructed.
“Yeah yeah.” Tony waved her off as she left, heels clicking.
He picked up a screwdriver and absently twirled it in his fingers as he considered the project in front of him. He scratched his head. Maybe he needed to replace the resistor but that wouldn’t fix the energy problem. His phone rang, interrupting his thoughts.
“Stark.” He answered.
“Mr. Stark this is Evan. I wanted to let you know the adoption paperwork we submitted was approved today. Peter Parker is officially your son. Congratulations. Let me know if there’s anything else I can do for you.”
“Thanks Evan.” Tony said.
“Have a good day.”
“You too.” Tony hung up and stared at his phone for a few seconds. Huh. He was a Dad. He didn’t feel any different. He figured he’d feel different. But mainly he was just distracted with trying to decide whether or not to take Peter with him to Japan. He tapped the screwdriver against his workbench. He didn’t want to leave him for a week right after adopting him but at least here he’d have the rest of the team to keep him company. If he took Peter with him they’d get to see each other in the evenings but he’d be left alone all day. No perfect answer. He’d talk to the kid, to his son, when he got back home and see what he thought.

“Holy shit!”
“You can’t tell anyone.” Peter tried to rein his friend in.
“Holy shit!” Ned exclaimed again.
“Ned.”
“Ironman’s adopting you?!”
“Ned!” Peter covered Ned’s mouth with his hand. “Someone might hear you.”
Peter gave him a few seconds to calm down before he pulled his hand away slowly. They both sat on the floor of his friend’s room with pieces of Legos and a barely formed Millennium Falcon in front of them. He’d spent all morning with Ned regaling him with stories and catching him up on
everything that had happened. He couldn’t believe it’d been 2 months since he’d last seen his friend. They’d never gone that long without seeing each other since becoming friends.

“No one’s going to hear me. My parents aren’t home, remember?” Ned said once he had the ability to talk again.

Oh yeah. Maybe Peter was a little on edge.

“So are you going to be like Ironkid?” Ned asked as he went back to digging through the Legos for a piece he needed,

“What? No! I’m already Spiderman.”

“Well yeah but if you’re going to be Ironman’s son he could make you your own suit and you could be like his Iron side kick or whatever.”

“Are you insane?” Peter shook his head. “He already built me a suit. My Spiderman suit. The one you hacked. Remember? I know he does.”

Ned winced.

“Plus I’m pretty sure being in the Ironman armor would put a damper on all my actual powers.”

“But you wouldn’t even need them if you were in the armor. That’s the best part! Like why would you have to be able to climb up walls if you could fly?”

“I like my powers.”

Ned rolled his eyes. “You at least have to try the armor out sometime just for fun. I mean you’re probably like one of the only people in the world he’d let do that.”

“I don’t think Tony would let even me do that.” Peter laughed but then thought about it. Actually Tony would maybe let him if he really wanted to. In the workshop. Under highly supervised and probably not so fun conditions. But still it could be cool. Maybe he’d ask him sometime.

“I still can’t believe you call him Tony. And now he’s adopting you! Seriously man that is so awesome!” Ned beamed.

Peter gave him a small smile in return. It was pretty cool that Tony was adopting him but Peter also felt somewhat guilty, like he was replacing Aunt May.

Ned seemed to notice Peter’s less than enthused reaction. “I mean not awesome that your aunt died and all but I mean for how things could’ve turned out you have to admit this is pretty awesome.”

This was why Ned was his best friend. It was like he could read his mind.

“Did your aunt and uncle adopt you when you went to live with them?” Ned asked hesitantly.

“No.” Peter answered as he pressed a Lego piece onto the partially built strut in his hand. He didn’t meet Ned’s eyes. He’d thought of that himself already. Why Aunt May or Uncle Ben had never adopted him. Maybe they’d never really thought of him as their son. No that wasn’t fair. They’d always treated him like their son. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that they would’ve felt disloyal to his actual parents or something if they’d done that. Like they were trying to replace them. Well they were both gone now so he’d never get the chance to ask them to find out for sure.

“Um so you’re not switching schools or anything are you?” Ned tried to change the subject when
Peter stayed quiet.

“I don’t think so.” Peter hoped not.

“You don’t think so? You don’t know?! Peter you have to come back to school. You can’t leave me all alone!”

“I’m sure Tony would’ve said something by now if I wasn’t going back.” Peter didn’t know who he was trying to reassure more, himself or Ned.

“So what you’re going to drive all the way back and forth everyday?” Peter had already told Ned about Tony’s awesome birthday present for him.

“I will if I have to.” Peter decided.

“But what about traffic? You’d have to get up super early every day. That’s going to suck. And what about Decathlon and Spiderman stuff?”

Peter shrugged and fiddled with the Legos in his hands.

“It’ll be fine. I can get by on less sleep than normal people.”

“Yeah but even you need some sleep.” Ned argued.

“I’ll figure it out.” Peter shrugged again. He’d have to talk to Tony about it. Maybe it’d just slipped the man’s mind that Peter still had to finish school.

“Hey do you want to go get lunch?” Peter asked as his stomach growled. “I’d kill for a sandwich at Delmar’s. I haven’t had one in months.”

“Sure.” Ned put the Lego pieces in his hand down. “But afterwards we’re coming back and working on this. You promised.”

Peter laughed. He wasn’t as into the Lego thing as Ned and Ned knew it, but he figured it was the least he could do to try to be a good friend. He’d done a pretty crappy job so far this summer.

“Deal.”

“Hey Happy.” Peter greeted as he got into the car. Tony hadn’t wanted him driving in the city yet even though he had his license so he’d had Happy drive him to Ned’s and pick him up.

“Hey kid. Did you have fun with Fred?”

“Ned.” Peter corrected as he buckled up.

“Right.” Happy smirked. Peter knew he’d gotten his friend’s name wrong on purpose.

“So you had fun?”

“Yeah it was great.” He started rambling about all the things they’d done. To be honest, he’d kind of missed Happy. He hadn’t seen him around much since moving to the compound. Apparently Happy spent the majority of his time in the city helping Pepper out. He thought the man might’ve missed him too if the careful listening and smiling were any indication. Usually Happy didn’t like it when he
talked so much.

“So I heard about the adoption.” Happy interjected when Peter finally paused to take a breath.

“Um…yeah.” Peter tried not to let his discomfort show. He wasn’t sure where this was going.

“Tony’s like a brother to me.” Happy continued, glancing in the rearview mirror at Peter. “So if he’s adopting you that kind of makes you my nephew.”

Peter blinked. That hadn’t been what he’d expected the other man to say.

“So as my new nephew and as a belated birthday present I have a surprise for you.” Happy continued.

“Really? What?” Peter frowned. He didn’t see any presents in the car.

“I hear you like to drive fast.” Happy quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah.” Peter agreed.

“Have you ever driven a racecar?”

“No way! Seriously?!”

“Seriously.” Happy said. “We’re going to the race track.”

“Awesome!” Peter bounced up and down on the seat. “And I get to drive?”

“You get to drive.” Happy smiled.

When Happy had mentioned racecars Peter had been thinking about the typical Nascar type of racing, but when they got to the track he was surprised to see a Formula One car.

“No way! I get to drive that?!” Peter looked up at Happy with wonder in his eyes.

At Happy’s nod, Peter bounded over to the blue and white car. It was so so cool. He couldn’t believe this was his life. Ned was going to be so jealous.

“Whose car is this?” Peter asked as he examined all the buttons on the interior.

“Your Dad’s.” Happy answered as he pointed to the Stark Industries emblem on the side that Peter had missed in his enthusiasm.

Peter’s brow furrowed slightly as he replayed the answer in his head. Your Dad’s. It was the first time someone had referred to Tony as his Dad. But Tony kind of was his Dad now that he was adopting him. Did that mean Peter supposed to call him that now? Did he even want to? Would that be weird? Should he ask him? That didn’t seem like something you were supposed to ask someone…

“Let’s maybe not tell him we were here though yeah?” Happy clapped him on the back.

Peter’s jaw dropped. “He doesn’t know we’re here?”

“What he doesn’t know won’t kill him.” Happy dismissed. He turned and gestured over to a man walking toward him.
“Peter, this is Vince. Vince, Peter.” Happy introduced him to the man. “Vince is going to show you the ropes and then you'll get to drive.”

“Hi Peter.” The man smiled at him as he led him away from Happy and the car. “First things first, you need to change.”

“I'll wait over here.” Happy pointed to a nearby spectator bench when Peter turned around to see if the man was following them.

Soon enough Peter returned holding a helmet and all decked out in a black and blue flame retardant racing suit with Stark written across the chest.

“If you don’t want him to know we’re here it’s probably not smart to keep taking photo evidence!” Peter told Happy when he caught him grinning and taking pictures on his phone.

“I can’t help it! You’re so cute!” Happy teased. “Besides I’m just sending a couple to Pepper. It'll be fine.”

Peter rolled his eyes and ignored him while he listened closely to Vince. The man explained everything three times and then asked Peter questions to make sure he understood. Peter just itched to get in the car. Finally he got to climb in and Vince helped buckle him in. Happy took even more pictures of him once he was in the car. Vince explained all the buttons again and the theory and technique behind driving and he had Peter run through a few fake driving scenarios to prove he was prepared. After what seemed like forever, Vince was finally ready to set him free and then Peter was off.

Racecar driving was awesome. It evoked a similar feeling to webslinging but even better, and he didn’t think anything could ever be better than webslinging. After the first five laps at a slower pace to get the hang of it, Vince let him go fast. It was so so amazing. Vince stopped him a couple times to give feedback but otherwise he was free to drive until Happy pulled the plug and told him it was time to go.

“Shit we’re going to be late.” Happy complained on the way back to the car.

Then it was Happy’s turn to do his own speed racing. They made it back to the compound in record time but they were still an hour late.

“Remember kid. Mum’s the word.” Happy reminded him as they walked in together.

Peter made a zipper motion across his lips as they got into the elevator.

“Well if it isn’t two of my favorite people.” Tony greeted as they arrived and then checked his watch in an exaggerated motion. “Only an hour late. So…what were you up to?”

“Traffic was bad boss.” Happy explained quickly. A little too quickly. Peter had to fight back a wince.

“Oh huh.” Clearly Tony didn’t believe them.

Tony stalked over toward them and placed his hands on Peter’s shoulders, staring him in the eyes. “Why are you late kid?”

Oh shit. Did Happy really expect him to lie straight to Tony’s face? He couldn’t do that. He was a horrible liar and he knew it.
“Um… We… I… You see…” Peter looked nervously to Happy for help. The man just shook his head back and forth violently. “Traffic?”

“Hmm.” Tony released him and pulled out his phone, scrolling through it then turning it toward Peter. “So…this isn’t you?”

On Tony’s phone was a picture of Peter in his Stark racing suit, holding a helmet under one arm while he talked to Vince.

“Or this?” Tony flicked the screen to another picture of him leaning over the car while Vince pointed to something on the dash.

“Or this?” A close up picture of him in the racecar with his helmet on as he gave a thumbs up to the camera.

“See? This is why I told you not to take pictures.” Peter said pointedly to Happy as he gestured to Tony’s phone.

“Where’d you get those?” Happy asked, shocked.

“Pepper sold you out.” Tony said, still not smiling.

Happy winced.

“Next time ask me first.” Tony commanded seriously as he glared at Happy.

“Sorry boss.” Happy looked suitably reprimanded. “It was for the kid’s birthday.”

Tony eyed Happy long enough that Peter started to worry, but then he abruptly seemed to relax.

“All right let me see them.” Tony waved Happy closer.

“See what?” Happy frowned.

“The rest of the pictures.”

Happy handed his phone over and Tony started going through them.

“They’re so damn adorable.” Tony smirked.

“I know.” Happy agreed.

“Oh my god. They are not!” Peter protested vehemently and stomped off to the kitchen. Tony and Happy just ignored his outburst.

“I think this one’s the best.” Tony said to Happy after a couple seconds as they hovered over the phone together.

“No this one is.” Happy grabbed the phone and found a different one to show Tony.

“Oh that one is good.”

Peter rolled his eyes and opened the fridge. He pulled out a yogurt and started eating it.

Suddenly Tony and Happy burst out laughing together at some other picture. Peter sighed and took another bite of yogurt.
When he finished the yogurt and it looked like they were no nearer to being done looking at pictures, Peter decided to head to the bathroom to shower. He felt sort of dirty and sticky after driving the racecar. And he was pretty sure he smelled like gasoline.

When he came back out, Happy was gone and Tony was in the kitchen dumping a box of noodles into boiling water. Peter felt a little bad he hadn’t gotten a chance to thank Happy again before he’d left because the racecar surprise had been pretty awesome. Peter walked into the kitchen and hopped up to sit on the counter right behind Tony.

“So did you have fun driving my car?” Tony asked when he turned around at the noise and noticed Peter.

“Yeah it was great!”

Tony nodded as he wiped his hands on a towel and then slung it over his shoulder. “I can take you again sometime if you want.”

“Really? That’d be awesome!” Peter had thought Tony would be mad about him driving the racecar, not encourage the behavior further.

Tony gave him a nod and then stirred the pasta a couple times before turning back to Peter. “My lawyer called me today. The adoption paperwork was approved this morning.”

Peter blinked. That had been fast. So the whole time today while he’d been with Ned and driving the racecar, Tony had already been his Dad and he hadn’t even known. Had Happy known? Is that why he’d referred to Tony as his Dad earlier?

“Oh. Did Happy know?”

“What?” Tony looked absolutely flummoxed at the question. It was an odd look for him. “No. Why?”

Peter shrugged. “Just something he said earlier.”

Now Tony was studying him like he was trying to piece together whatever was going on in his head.

“Hey do I get to go back to my school when it starts in the fall? Ned wants to know.” Peter changed the subject. He didn’t really want to talk about the whole adoption thing yet. He needed a little more time for it to sink in first.

“Ned wants to know?” Tony asked knowingly.

“He doesn’t want me to ditch him.” Peter shrugged and tried not to fidget under Tony’s assessing look.

“Well what do you want to do?” Tony asked.

“I mean I’m fine with whatever.” Peter hedged. He didn’t want to disappoint Tony in case the man already had a different plan. Not getting to go back to his school seemed like something survivable now. Maybe he’d gained more perspective since May had died. Or since Tony had asked him to be his son.

“Peter.” Tony walked over and dropped his hands to the counter on each side of his knees, boxing him in. “Tell me what you want. I think I already know but I want to hear it from you.”
“I…I want to go back.” Peter admitted. “But I don’t have to! If it’s a problem or if you had something else planned already it’s totally fine.”

“There was that so bad?” Tony asked and patted his knee. “It shouldn’t be so hard for you to tell me what you want kiddo.”

“I just don’t want to be a problem.”

“You’re not a problem. You’re my son now remember?” Tony said.

Peter gave him a small smile.

“I was already planning on you going back to your school in the fall. I hadn’t had a chance to talk to you about it yet but we’re actually going to be moving back to the city in a couple weeks.” Tony turned back around to stir the pasta again.

“We are?” Peter’s eyes widened. That definitely wasn’t what he’d expected. That scenario hadn’t once come to mind when he’d been considering all of his possibilities regarding school. “Where are we going to live?”

“The Tower.”

“I thought you sold it.”

“I did.” Tony smirked. “And then I bought it back this week.”

Peter frowned. “But why? We don’t need that much space. Do we?”

“No we don’t, but the rest of the motley crew wants to come with us so I have to put them up somewhere.”

“The Avengers are moving back to New York?!” Peter exclaimed.

Tony laughed at Peter’s surprise. “They better be or I just took a big hit in the real estate market for nothing.”

This was great. He got to move back to the city, be closer to Ned, go to his school, patrol as Spiderman, and still live with all the Avengers. It was better than anything he could’ve hoped for.

“You happy with that plan?” Tony asked as Peter smiled.

“Yeah. It’s…perfect.” There was no better word to describe it.

“Good.” Tony turned the stove off and brought the pasta to the sink to drain it. Peter watched as he added a jar of sauce and mixed it together before grabbing a couple plates from the cupboards and handing one to Peter.

Peter took a healthy serving and then took a seat at the table. Tony followed and sat across from him.

“Listen there’s another thing I need to talk to you about.” Tony said. “There’s a business trip I’ve been putting off for awhile now that it looks like I can’t put off any longer.”

“Ok.” So Tony had to go on a business trip. That made sense. It didn’t seem like that big of a deal to Peter. He didn’t know why Tony was looking at him the way he was, like he was sorry.

“It’s only for a week but I have to leave tomorrow morning.” Tony explained. “And I know this is
the worst timing but... I don’t really have a choice.”

“Where are you going?” Peter asked.

“Japan. Tokyo. I have to work on a merger we’re doing.”

Peter nodded.

“Anyway I wanted to ask you if you’d rather come with me or stay here.”

“You’d take me with you?” Peter asked, surprised.

“Of course. If you want to go. I’m going to be busy while I’m there so you’d have to figure out what to do with yourself during the day but we’d get to see each in the evenings.”

When Peter didn’t comment, Tony continued. “Or you could stay here and the team could keep you company while I’m gone. It’s up to you.”

“Um...” Peter thought about it. He really didn’t want Tony to leave him for a whole week, but he remembered how much it’d sucked the last time Tony was busy and had barely had time for him. He didn’t really want to hang around all day by himself. If he stayed here at least he could visit Ned and hang out with the Avengers. Besides, it was just a week. “I’ll stay.”

“You sure?” Tony asked.

“Yeah I’m sure.” He’d be fine.

He was so far from fine. To be fair, he’d had no idea Tony’s absence would mess him up this much. He’d thought he’d be fine. He wanted to be fine. But he was so not fine. He did a pretty good impression of being ok during the day. The problem was at night. He couldn’t sleep. His nightmares had returned in full force but they were different this time. They weren’t about May or the Vulture anymore. They were about Tony. Tony dying.

And he didn’t need a degree in psychology to analyze that. Clearly he was worried about losing another parental figure in his life. He got that. He did. So why did his subconscious feel the need to keep tormenting him with it? Because Tony wasn’t physically present? That was dumb. And he knew it. Was he going to fall apart every time Tony had to go somewhere? Because that would definitely suck.

He huffed and rolled over in bed. The hologram clock on his nightstand read 12:15AM. He was exhausted but he was afraid to sleep. His brain wouldn’t let him rest even though his body begged for it.

At least Tony would be back in a couple days. The kicker about all of it was that he enjoyed himself during the day. Over the past five days, he’d visited with Ned and hung out with the Avengers. Yesterday he and Ned had finished the Millennium Falcon, and today he’d spent time in the lab with Bruce, sparred with Steve, and helped make dinner with Wanda and Vision.

Tony called him every night to check in and they usually talked for almost an hour. It was nice. Peter just wished it was enough to make these new nightmares go away.
He forced his eyes shut and tried to think of nothing. He just needed to sleep. He needed it so badly. He was turning into a zombie after five nights of this and people were starting to notice. Yesterday Bruce, Clint, and Steve had asked if he was ok and he’d caught Rhodey and Natasha eyeing him suspiciously. He needed sleep. He had to sleep. Please. Eventually his wish was granted.

“Peter run!” Tony yelled from behind him.

Peter turned and was faced with robots chasing Tony down the street.

Why wasn’t Tony in the Ironman suit? He was vulnerable without it. And where were the rest of the Avengers? Peter looked around. Why were they alone?

“Peter!” Tony screamed.

Peter dodged out of the way of a bullet. Tony had almost reached him. He was only a few feet away when Peter watched in slow motion as one of the robot’s bullets met its mark and Tony stumbled forward.

“No!” Peter lunged toward him and caught him before he could hit the ground. He lowered him down onto his back. The bullet had hit him in the chest. Blood soaked his shirt. It was everywhere. It was too much to survive.

“No please no.” Peter tried to stem the flow uselessly.

“Peter go. Run.” Tony tried to order him, to make him leave before the robots overran them.

“No. I’m not leaving you.” Peter cried.

Tony reached a hand up to touch his cheek with bloody fingers. He opened his mouth to say something but then the light left his eyes. His hand fell limply back to the ground. He was gone.

“No. No no no no no. Please. Don’t go. Please Tony. Come back.” He cried into the man’s bloody chest. He should be running. The robots were going to kill him soon but he didn’t care. He hurt too much.

He looked up. They were almost upon him. He closed his eyes.

And gasped awake. He sat up in bed and took a few deep breaths to try to calm his racing heart. Dammit. The clock read 3:37am. Definitely not enough sleep for the night but there was no way he was going back to bed now.

“Peter would you like me to contact someone about your distress?” F.R.I.D.A.Y. asked.

“No. No F.R.I.D.A.Y. I’m fine.”

“Would you like me to call Mr. Stark?”

“No. I’m…I’m sure he’s busy.”

“Unlikely. It is early evening in Tokyo.”

Oh yeah that’s right. Big time difference. They were like 13 hours ahead or something, so it’d be like almost 5pm there.

“No. D-don’t call him.”
“Very well.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. made her displeasure at his decision clear. They hadn’t been on the best of terms since Peter had gotten her in trouble for letting him run away.

Peter stood up and got dressed.

“I’m going down to the lab.” Might as well be productive. He knew he technically wasn’t allowed down there alone but what Tony didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him.

F.R.I.D.A.Y. didn’t respond.

Peter made his way down to the lab and set about making webbing at what had become his workbench. He poured the ingredients together and yawned. He just needed to add the potassium hydroxide. He’d tried it a few weeks back and it had increased the tensile strength just like he’d thought it would. Since then he’d been using it every time, although Bruce still always insisted on double checking the beaker before Peter poured it in. Well Peter wasn’t waking Bruce up at almost 4:00am for this. That was ridiculous. Plus he knew exactly where the beaker was. He grabbed it off the shelf right where he remembered putting it away earlier that evening.

He covered another yawn with his hand while he waited for the webbing to reach the appropriate consistency. Perfect. He dumped the potassium hydroxide in.

His spidey sense erupted in warning. Peter realized the mistake he must have made within a millisecond. Still too late.

Oh fu—.

The world exploded.

Chapter End Notes

I had a lot fun writing this chapter. I hope you guys enjoy it just as much! Sorry about the cliffhanger. I'll try to get the next chapter up soon. Let me know what you think! Your comments give me life!
Tony chewed the last bite of his room service steak as he finished looking over the final acquisition contract they’d discussed this afternoon. The terms looked acceptable and the legalese seemed iron clad to him but he’d have to send it to his lawyers and Pepper to be sure before signing. He attached the contract to an e-mail and sent it off. God knows the damn thing had taken long enough to work through. He admitted Pepper had been right to send him personally to take care of it. It just sucked being away from his kid for so long. He missed Peter. He hadn’t realized how much he’d miss him until he was away from him. He literally thought about the kid all the time. What he was doing. If he was eating enough. What he’d think of the stupid joke he heard at one of the meetings. If he was having fun with the Avengers. If he was getting enough sleep. The hour a day talking with him on the phone wasn’t enough time.

Well at least he’d get to leave tomorrow evening. Factoring in the length of the flight and the time change, he should make it home just in time for dinner with Peter. God he was going to be so jet lagged, but he’d tough it out for the kid. His phone buzzed in his pocket. He glanced over at his nightstand clock and quickly did the math for what time it was back in the states. Maybe Pepper was calling, although it’d be early even for her. Or maybe Peter but why would he be up? Unless maybe he’d had a bad dream. He quickly pulled the phone out of his pocket and frowned when he saw Steve’s name on the screen. Odd.

“Steve isn’t it like 4:30 in the morning there? Why are you calling me at 4:30 in the morning?” Tony joked even as a twinge of worry seeded itself deep in his gut.

“Tony listen to me.” Steve was using his Captain voice. The worry exploded. “There was an accident. Peter’s hurt.”

“What do you mean he’s hurt? What happened?” Tony was instantly up and grabbing the suitcase armor.

“He was down in the lab and there was an explosion. Peter got caught in the blast.” Steve explained.

“What?! Why the fuck was there an explosion? And what the hell was he doing down there in the middle of the night? Who was with him?” Tony snapped, but his heart raced as his mind supplied so many worst-case scenarios for what could’ve caused the explosion. The Ironman armor finished assembling around him and the phone call transferred instantly to his suit. He opened the balcony door of his hotel and took off.

“I don’t know Tony. I don’t know. No one was with him. And…we haven’t really had time to figure out the details yet.”

“No one was with him?! So he was just down in the lab all alone and something exploded? How do you not know what caused the explosion? What the fuck have you clowns been doing while I’ve been gone? How could you let this happen Steve? I trusted you! How could you let this happen to my son?” Tony lashed out. Being angry was an easier emotion to give into right now than the fear that suddenly threatened to consume him.

“I know. I’m sorry Tony.” Steve sounded miserable. “I’m so sorry. There’s no excuse.”
“Can I talk to him?” Tony was struck with a primal need to hear Peter’s voice. To know he was ok.

“Who?”

“Peter.” Tony said impatiently.

“He’s been unconscious since it happened.” Tony’s stomach twisted.

“He’s…he’s hurt pretty bad but Bruce thinks he’s going to be ok.” Steve continued.

“He thinks?” Oh god. Tony’s breath came in little puffs as he tried to keep it together. He couldn’t panic yet. He couldn’t panic. He had to make it back to Peter.

“Bruce says he’s stable right now.” Steve tried to reassure him. “Just…I think you should come home.”

“I’m coming. I’m already on my way.” The armor was a lot faster than taking his plane but it was still going to take hours to get back.

“Ok. I’ll…I’ll call you if anything changes.” Steve hung up.

Tony spent the rest of the journey vacillating between anger, guilt, and absolute terror.

The first thing he became aware of was the pain. He was in pain. His head was going to explode. Explode. Why did that word seem familiar?

“Umgh.” He groaned.

“Peter? Can you hear me? Can you open your eyes?” The voice was loud. Everything was too loud.

“There you go.” Peter blinked and the blurry visage of Captain America swam into view.

Peter frowned. Even that hurt.

“He’s awake.” Steve sounded relieved.

“Peter can you look at me.” Peter’s eyes flicked to the voice at his right. Bruce was here too. Where was here? What had happened? Why did his head hurt so much?

“What?” He croaked out, further words getting stuck in his throat.

“Here. Small sips.” Bruce held a straw out for him and Peter took a drink.

“What happened?” He asked again, mouth moistened.

“You tell us. What do you remember?” Bruce asked.

Peter noticed by then that he was in the compound’s Medbay. But why? He’d been having a hard time sleeping. He’d had a bad dream? And gone downstairs to the lab and… Oh. Oh no.

“I screwed up.” Peter rasped. Maybe he needed more water.
Bruce’s lips were pursed but Peter could tell he was really worried. Steve looked scared. It was a disconcerting look on Captain America.

Before he could say anything else his head throbbed harshly.

“My head.” He winced and tried to bring a hand up to touch it but Bruce intercepted it and set it back down on the bed.

“You hit it pretty hard. You’ve been out for hours. We were starting to worry.” Bruce explained. God it really really hurt. He felt terrible.

“I want…” He squeezed his eyes shut against the pain. “I want Tony.”

“He’s on his way Peter.” Steve reached out and held his hand. Usually that would annoy the hell out of him but right now he’d take any comfort offered.

“Where is he?” Why wasn’t Tony here? He should be here. Shouldn’t he be here?

“He’s in Japan remember? But he’s on his way. He’s coming.”

“Please. I-I want him.” He didn’t even care that he sounded weak and whiny. Like a child. He hurt and his thoughts were fuzzy. “Please. I need Tony. I want Tony. I-I want my Dad.”

“I know buddy. I know.” Steve looked stricken as he squeezed his hand tighter. “I called him. He’s on his way. I promise. He’ll be here as soon as he can.”

But Peter wanted him now. He needed him now. A spiking pain drove through his skull. It was too much. He was going to— He barely had time to turn his head to avoid choking on his own puke.

“Peter!” Throwing up was the worst thing he could’ve done for his head right now. The worst. Lights erupted behind his eyes. Oh god. Was his head still attached? Did it actually explode? Once he was done gagging he didn’t even have the energy to open his eyes again to check. Shit he was pretty sure he’d just puked on Steve. He moaned. He heard Bruce and Steve calling his name but he felt consciousness slipping and for once he welcomed the escape.

Tony landed at the compound in the Ironman suit. He’d never pushed his armor harder. As soon as it opened around him, he took off running. He darted into the elevator and gasped out “Medbay.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. understood instantly. The elevator dropped like a rock. The doors opened and he sprinted toward the only occupied bed, still breathing hard from fear more than exertion.

Bruce stepped in front of him.

“I want to see him.” Tony tried to push past him but Bruce blocked him. “Let me see him.”

Bruce grabbed his shoulders. “He looks pretty bad but he’s going to be ok. He’s going to be ok Tony. Ok? Do you hear me?”

Tony nodded and brushed past Bruce once the man released him.
He was at Peter’s side instantly. Bruce was right. Peter looked terrible. His eyes were closed. He was pale and his forehead was swathed in bandages making his hair stick up funny. A nasal cannula delivered him oxygen. His right arm and chest were bandaged and he was covered in tubes and wires. He looked so young and helpless.

Steve stood and relinquished his seat next to Peter to make room for Tony. Tony barely spared him a glance as he leaned over Peter and ran a hand gently over his hair before cupping his cheek, avoiding anything that looked painful. Peter didn’t so much as stir at the contact but he was warm. Alive.

“He was awake a little while ago. He was asking for you. He said he wanted his Dad.” Steve said softly.

Peter had been asking for him, had called him Dad, and he hadn’t been there. He jammed his fingers roughly into his eyes to try to stem the tears at that thought.

Steve’s hand landed on his shoulder and gave it a squeeze. Tony tried to pull himself together.

“I’m ok.” Tony said gruffly.

“He’ll be ok. He’s a tough kid.” Steve reassured him. Tony reached out and grabbed Peter’s hand.

“What’s wrong with him? How hurt is he? Because he looks…” Tony’s directed the questions at Bruce who stood on the other side of the bed.

“He has a serious head injury but no intracranial bleeding. First and second degree burns over his right arm and chest. He must’ve been turning away before the explosion. Four broken ribs on his left side. Overall he’s really lucky. That kind of blast would’ve killed a normal person.” Bruce winced a little after the last statement.

Tony closed his eyes at the report and gripped Peter’s hand tighter. He took a deep breath.

“What the fuck happened?” How could this have happened? He’d trusted his friends to keep his kid safe and they hadn’t. Peter was broken. He was lying in front of him broken. He never should’ve left him. This was his fault.

Steve and Bruce exchanged a long look but it was Steve that started talking.

“I was asleep when F.R.I.D.A.Y. sounded the alarm that there’d been a explosion in the lab. And that Peter was down there.” Steve paused as he rubbed a hand over his face and took a shaky breath. “I got there first. Peter… He was… He was out cold on the ground and the place was just decimated. It looked like he got tossed clear across the lab into one of the workbenches. Bruce got there right after me. We got him out and brought him here.”

Steve took another breath and continued with the ghost of a smile, “The rest of the team was here too until Bruce kicked them out a couple hours ago. They’ve been downstairs trying to clean everything up.”

The visual of Peter lying limp on the ground of the lab wouldn’t leave his brain. Tony shook his head. “Why was he down there in the middle of the night in the first place? And what the fuck set off that kind of explosion? You have to know by now.”

This time Bruce took the lead and explained. “From what we pieced together with F.R.I.D.A.Y., Peter had a nightmare and decided to go down to the lab. He was working on his webbing and he picked the wrong container off the shelf. He probably wouldn’t have made the mistake but I’d just cleaned up and reorganized everything before I went to bed. He picked up the one that was pure
potassium. He must’ve been tired or distracted because he didn’t double check the label. When he poured it in…well…boom.”

Tony shook his head. “He shouldn’t have been allowed in the lab alone.”

“We know Tony we—” Steve started.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Tony interrupted Steve to address his AI. He’d been talking to himself, not the other man. “Why did you let Peter in the lab by himself?”

“Peter is allowed full access.”

“No. Not alone.” Tony knew he’d made some protocol to that effect.

“The current protocol requires me to inform you if Peter attempts access alone, not restrict him. You were not present in the facility so no one was informed.”

“Amend the protocol F.R.I.D.A.Y. Peter is never allowed access to any of the labs or workshops alone. You’ll restrict his access and inform me.”


God how could he have let this happen? Sloppy. He’d been sloppy. How many of the other protocols regarding Peter weren’t perfect? Peter never should’ve had the opportunity to be in the lab unsupervised. It was dangerous. As this just proved. He thought of all the other things he could’ve accidentally gotten into alone. Even more volatile chemicals. His tools. The welding torch. The Ironman armor. An arc reactor. God. If he’d screwed up messing around with an arc reactor he could’ve leveled the compound.

“This isn’t your fault Tony.” Bruce said. “Peter went down there alone. He had to have known he wasn’t supposed to. He took an ingredient off a shelf he’s not supposed to touch. This isn’t on you.”

“So what? You’re saying this is his fault? He deserves what he got?” Tony shot daggers at Bruce.

“Of course not! It’s no one’s fault. It sucks but Peter’s going to be ok. He’s going to be hurting for awhile but he’ll heal. That’s what’s important. Not playing the blame game.” Bruce reasoned with him, voice soft.

Tony ran a hand through his hair. He didn’t mean to lash out at Bruce but he felt frantic. Peter was hurt. He’d left him and he’d gotten hurt. He was his Dad now. It was his job to keep that from happening and he’d already failed.

“You said he had a bad dream? That’s why he went down there alone?” Tony asked as he watched Peter breathe. He needed to understand the complete sequence of events that had led to this so he could ensure it never happened again.


He frowned. That was an odd piece of information for F.R.I.D.A.Y. to include. He wondered if there was a reason. If there was something more to this situation.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y? Is there anything you want to tell me?” Tony ran a hand softly over Peter’s hair.

The slight pause before her response was answer enough. “Per the privacy protocols in place I’m not able to share that information unless specifically requested by you.”
Tony’s eyebrows shot up. So there was something she wanted him to know but couldn’t bring up herself without prompting.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. tell me everything.” Tony commanded.

“Yes boss.”

She did. It didn’t paint a pretty picture.

Voices interrupted the darkness. He couldn’t make out what they were saying and he didn’t want to. If he tried he might leave the darkness and that would be bad. He couldn’t remember why but he knew he wanted to stay in this bliss of nothingness.

He floated for awhile, but the voices gradually grew louder. The dark was fading away. Sensation was coming back. Ow. That’s right. That’s why he didn’t want to leave the darkness. It really hurt.

He groaned as consciousness returned.

“Peter? Are you awake kiddo?”

He didn’t want to be awake. But that voice was nice. He opened his eyes and it took him a couple seconds to get reoriented. Oh yeah. The lab accident. He’d gotten hurt. He was in the Medbay. And Tony wasn’t—

Tony was here.

“Hey.” Tony hovered over him, looking stressed. He gave him a small smile when he saw Peter was awake.

“You’re here.” Peter observed.

“I’m here.” Tony squeezed his hand.

Peter hummed. Talking was hard. His head was splitting. But he was happy Tony was here. It unfurled a tense kind of something within him.

“How are you feeling?”

“My head hurts.” He wanted to touch it to make sure it was still whole but Tony had a hold of his left hand and his right arm along with his chest felt tight and sore.

Tony’s face twisted at the admission as if he was the one in pain. “I know.”

The hammer behind his eyes was worsening. This was why he didn’t want to be awake. He closed his eyes and couldn’t hold back a whimper.

“Can’t you give him anything?” Tony sounded desperate.

“In a minute.” Bruce was still here.

“Peter squeeze my hands.” Bruce put his fingers in his palms. Peter listened. Bruce ran him through a bunch of other commands and asked him dumb questions like what his name was and where he was.
It was tiring him out and ratcheting up the pain in his head.

“One more thing Peter. Open your eyes for me.” Peter really didn’t want to but he did it anyway.

“Follow my finger.” He did but it made his head hurt even worse. Ow fuck.

And then without warning Bruce shined a bright light into his eyes. It felt like he’d plunged hot needles into this skull.

He gasped as his pain rocketed and his apparently well honed upchuck reflex kicked in. Bruce must’ve seen it on his face because he quickly turned him on his side and then he was puking all over Tony where he sat perched on his bed.

God this was the worst. It hurt so much. Why did it hurt so much? Why weren’t they helping him? He felt like he was dying. It even hurt too much to cry. He whimpered pitifully.

“Do something!” Tony yelled and the volume shot even more daggers into his skull.

“I am. I am.” Bruce sounded flustered. “One second.”

“Hurry up!”

“I’m giving you something for the pain Peter. It’s going to be better soon.” Bruce tried to reassure him.

He couldn’t respond. His whole world narrowed to pain. It was his entire existence. Until...finally it wasn’t anymore. It slowly eased off until it didn’t feel like his head was at risk of bursting into a million pieces.

Someone wiped his face and mouth with a warm washcloth. Peter’s eyes flicked open again. Tony. Oh god he’d thrown up on Tony.

“I’m sorry.” His tongue felt thick and his words came out slurred.

“It’s ok.” Tony finished wiping his face and set the washcloth aside. “You feel better?”

Apparently he felt better enough to start crying. He was so tired and he hurt.

“I didn’t mean to. I didn’t mean to throw up on you. Or Steve. I threw up on Captain America.” He said the last part as if it was the worst thing in the world that could’ve ever happened.

Tony tried to shush him. “It’s ok Peter. I don’t care. And I promise Steve doesn’t care either. We just want you to feel better.”

“And I-I didn’t mean to blow up the lab. It was an accident. I’m sorry.”

“Shh it’s ok. We don’t need to talk about that right now. You’re going to be ok. Bruce just gave you some good medicine. It’s going to help. Just close your eyes and let it work.” Tony ran a hand over his hair.

“Close your eyes kiddo.” Peter did. Tony’s hand kept running through his hair. It was nice even though his head pounded.

He felt sleep pulling him down. He was glad Tony was here. He knew how busy the man was but he really didn’t want him to leave. He blamed the wuzziness from the drugs for what came out of his mouth next. “Don’t go.”
“I’m not going anywhere.” Tony soothed. “I’ll be right here when you wake up.”

His head still hurt but he felt better knowing Tony wouldn’t leave him. He let the drugs do their job and wipe the world away.

The next time he woke up it was instant. One second he was asleep and the next moment he was wide awake. He blinked a few times. His head still hurt but it felt better than the last couple times he’d woken up. It was almost bearable. But he felt really woozy and kind of nauseous. How long had he been asleep? He turned his head and instantly found Tony. The man was dressed in a pair of green scrubs, legs up on Peter’s bed, slouched in a chair, fast asleep. He still loosely held Peter’s hand.

Peter took the moment to take stock of himself. Besides his head, his right side and arm constantly burned and his left chest twinged with every breath he took. Something tickled his nose. He slipped his hand from Tony’s and scratched at it. He fumbled with the cannula he encountered there, trying to pull it off.

“Hey. Leave that.” Tony snatched his hand back up and pulled it away to resume holding it while he adjusted the cannula on Peter’s face so it was properly back in place.

“It itches.” Peter complained and Tony dropped his legs back to the ground and stretched, waking up.

“Are you feeling any better? Bruce upped your pain meds quite a bit.”

“Mmhmm.” Maybe that explained the weird feeling.

“I feel funny. Floaty.” Whoops he hadn’t meant to actually say that out loud.

Tony’s eyes glinted slightly with amusement but the rest of his face still looked worried.

“What—” He paused to clear his throat when his voice cracked. “What time is it?”

Tony glanced at his watch and answered. “Late.”

Peter didn’t appreciate the purposefully vague answer. “F.R.I.D.A.Y. what time is it?”

“It is 3:22am.” So he’d been here for a whole day already? And he still felt this bad? He must’ve really messed himself up.

“You must be feeling better.” The amusement spread from Tony’s eyes to a slight quirk of the corner of his mouth.

“Can I—” He had to clear his throat again. It was so dry. “Can I have some water?”

“Yeah.” Tony hurried to get him some. He came back with a glass.

Before Peter could figure out how to sit up to drink it, Tony sat down on the bed next to him and snaked an arm under his neck and propped him up while he held the glass to his lips. Peter knew he’d probably be embarrassed about the fact that he couldn’t even sit up on his own later but right now the water tasted too good to care. He drained the glass. Tony pulled it away and lowered him back down. The brief up and down took it out of him and left him feeling kind of breathless and
dizzy.

“You ok?” Tony asked, obviously noticing his discomfort.

Peter tried to wave away his concern but his hand ended up doing more of an uncoordinated flop.

“Just tired.” He downplayed it.

“Then go to sleep.” Tony had a soft expression on his face Peter couldn’t remember ever seeing before.

“But I just woke up.” Peter protested weakly even as his eyes closed. He didn’t even know why. He knew there was no way he was going to be able to stay awake. This sucked. Awareness fled just as quickly as it’d come.

Peter blinked awake, confused. He was pretty sure that just a second ago he’d been on a boat but now he was staring at a ceiling. Where was the sky? Hadn’t he just been on a ship, bereft, rocking back and forth in the middle of the ocean? The ceiling slowly spun in front of him and he still had the sensation of rocking. Was he on a boat with a ceiling? Was that a thing? He wasn’t having fun. The rocking wasn’t so great. He felt pretty sick. He groaned and closed his eyes again.

“Kiddo?”

Was someone on the boat with him? He thought he’d been alone. Or had there ever been a boat? Had that been a dream? Or was he dreaming now? Why was it so hard to think?

He opened his eyes again and Tony’s face came into view. Peter frowned. Tony looked fuzzy or scruffy or whatever the word was, and worried. Was he worried because they were trapped on the boat?

“Why are we on a boat?” Peter mumbled.

“What? Peter? Are you awake right now?” Tony leaned in closer.

“I wanna get off the boat.” Peter whined. He really did. All the rocking was starting to make him nauseous.

“We’re not on a boat. Hey.” Tony shook him a little when his eyes slipped closed again. “Do you know where you are Peter?”

“Mmhmm.” Peter did. Right? He was…somewhere. The answer slipped from him.

“Tell me where you are.” Tony commanded.

He was… He had to cheat. He opened his eyes again and looked around. There were beds and medical equipment and it looked like...

“Hospital.” Peter answered. Was he in a hospital on the boat? No that didn’t sound right.

“No you’re not in a hospital. F.R.I.D.A.Y. get Bruce down here.” Tony sounded worried.

“You’re in Medbay remember? At the compound. You had an accident in the lab. Any of this
“ringtong any bells?” Tony tried.

The boat was called the compound? What accident?

“Peter?”

“I wanna go home.” Peter mumbled.

“You are home buddy.”

“No.” Peter whined. “I don’t want to live on a boat.”

Was this his home now?

“What? Peter we’re not on a boat. Open your eyes and look.” Tony sounded scared now. But if they weren’t on a boat why was everything rocking with the waves?

“What’s going on?” Bruce was here too. Were all the Avengers out here with him in the middle of the ocean?

“He seems really confused.” Tony answered, obviously agitated. “He doesn’t know where he is.”

“Peter.” Bruce said his name and Peter opened his eyes and his gaze slowly focused on him. “Can you tell me your name?”

“Peter.” Peter frowned. That seemed like a stupid question.

“What’s your last name?”

“Um…” He tried to remember.

He heard Tony make a small noise of dismay at the hesitation.

He had a last name right? What was it again? Everyone had a last name. And his was... Oh yeah. “Parker.”

“Do you know where you are?” Bruce was taking out a penlight.

Hadn’t Tony just told him? What had he said? Something that hadn’t made sense. He couldn’t remember.

“Peter?” Bruce prompted and shined a light in both of his eyes. It hurt but not as much as he expected it to. Why had he expected it to hurt?

“Where are you Peter?” Bruce asked. Hadn’t he just asked that? Hadn’t Peter answered? What was the answer?

“Um…” He closed his eyes. He was too tired to think. “I don’t know.”

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Bruce asked.

“I was on a boat.” Peter whispered.

“You weren’t on a boat. There was no boat kiddo.” Tony said softly.

Peter opened his eyes briefly and he caught the concerned look that passed between Bruce and Tony. No boat? Nothing made sense. His head hurt and he was nauseous and tired.
“I’m going to take a couple pictures of your head Peter. Just sit tight ok?”

Bruce and Tony were talking to each other. Or maybe they were trying to talk to him. Peter wasn’t sure. The noises faded away until suddenly he was back on the ship. Floating. The sun beat down on his face and a breeze ran through his hair. He could smell the ocean spray as he leaned over the railing and watched the still blue water below him. The rocking wasn’t so unbearable anymore. It was almost soothing.

Chapter End Notes

Ah! Sorry does that count as a cliffhanger again? It's not that bad right? Apparently I love hurting Peter. I'll admit this chapter kind of got away from me. Every time I re-read it I kept changing and rewriting things so I finally just decided to stop and post it. I hope it turned out ok. Please let me know what you think!
Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You had a chance to look it over? Yeah I think it looks good too. What do the lawyers say? Of course. Well when they’re done let me know. Yeah if they don’t want to change anything then send it over and I’ll sign it. Uh-huh. I know. Yeah. Thanks again for taking care of everything. I know it’s not exactly— No. I don’t know. We had a little scare this afternoon but Bruce says he’s doing better now. Yeah. He’s going to be ok. No. Thanks though.”

Peter frowned and opened his eyes to the sound of Tony’s voice. The man was sitting in the chair next to his bed talking on the phone while he studied something on the Starkpad on his lap. Peter took a couple of steadying deep breaths. God the whole room was spinning. It was making him really nauseous.

“Yeah I’ll give you a call later and let you know. Thanks Pepper.” Tony hung up but didn’t look up at Peter. He kept staring at this Starkpad thoughtfully.

“Tony?” Peter croaked. He felt like he was slowly losing the battle against his nausea.

“Peter!” Tony got up instantly and sat on the edge of his bed. “Do you know where you are? Do you remember what happened?”

“Medbay. I blew myself up.” Peter tried to answer lightheartedly but it came out rough instead.

“Thank God.” Tony said.

“Thank God I blew myself up?” Peter frowned.

“No that you remember. Do you remember waking up earlier and being confused?”

“No.” Peter wracked his brain but he had no recollection of that.

“No more boats?” Tony smiled at him.

“What? No. I think… Maybe I had a dream I was on a boat? What happened?”

“There was some swelling but Bruce fixed you. Don’t worry.”

“Swelling where?”

“Your head.” Tony tried to sound nonchalant.

“You mean my brain?”

Tony just waved a hand at him as if he shouldn’t worry. “It’s all better now. You’re better. You’re better right?”

Then Tony was eyeing him critically again.

“Um sure. Actually can I sit up?” Peter asked. Maybe that would help with the ridiculous queasiness.

“Yeah.” Tony moved his bed up into a more reclined position and helped prop him against a few
more pillows.

Shit maybe the change in direction was a bad idea. It seemed to make the pain in his ribs and the dizziness worse. His head throbbed. He closed his eyes and tried to take a few deep breaths through his nose.

“What’s wrong?” Tony frowned at him.

“Nothing. Just…” Shit he was going hurl in the very near future. He really didn’t want to puke in front of Tony or on Tony again. “Can I go to the bathroom?”

“No. You’re not allowed out of bed yet. Or did you just miss the part where I told you your brain was swelling earlier and you barely knew your own name?”

Peter swallowed hard.

“Peter?”

“I don’t feel so good.” Peter admitted and dropped his head back against the pillows trying in vain to control his body’s need to vomit. “I think…I’m going to be sick.”

He felt more than saw Tony jerk down to grab a basin.

“Here sit up.” Tony pulled him farther forward so he was half leaning on the man with his face over the basin.

“No.” Peter moaned. This was humiliating “Can I please just go to the bathroom?”

“Nope sorry kiddo. Gonna have to do it this way.” Tony’s hand rubbed his back.

Peter tried to shake his head that he didn’t want to but that was definitely not one of his brightest ideas. It just set it off. He knew he was going to be sick but the suddenness of it still surprised him. Ouch and puking still really hurt his head. When it finally stopped, Tony handed him a bottle of water and he swished it around to clean his mouth out before spitting that out in the basin as well and then taking a few hesitant sips. Tony leaned him back against the pillows then walked to the corner of Medbay to discard the basin.

“Feel any better?” Tony asked when he came back.

“Not really.” Peter complained.

“Are you going to be sick again?”

“Probably.” Peter admitted. “But not right this second.” The spinning hadn’t lessened at all and the nausea still came and went in waves, each one cresting a little higher than the last.

Tony grabbed another basin. Where were those things coming from? He watched with half lidded eyes as Tony settled into the bed next to him but still left a little space between them. He couldn’t figure out if the proximity was comforting or irritating right now. If he wanted the man closer or farther away. At least Tony was pretending to fiddle with something on his phone instead of just staring at him.

Peter closed his eyes. Maybe if he could sleep it would go away. But his wish wasn’t granted. Between the pain and the nausea, he was too miserable to sleep. He tried to just concentrate on his breathing instead. He would not puke. He would not. Mind over matter. The room was not spinning.
He was not nauseous. Yeah not really working. He made it maybe ten more misery filled minutes before he realized he was losing the battle again. He groaned. Dammit. No.

He opened his eyes and tried to sit up again. Tony helped him instantly and held the basin out for him as Peter deposited his stomach contents into it. God. When was the last time he’d even eaten anything? How could he even have anything in there to throw up?

“Ugh.” Peter said in disgust after he rinsed his mouth out again. He hated being sick. He watched blearily as Tony got up and got rid of the dirty basin before grabbing another clean one and coming back. He hoped Tony wasn’t regretting the whole adoption thing. This probably wasn’t what he’d envisioned.

“Sorry.” Peter mumbled to the man sitting next to him.

“Don’t be.” Tony said easily, as if cleaning up Peter’s puke was the least objectionable thing in the world.

Peter sighed as his eyes fell shut again. This time he made it almost fifteen minutes.

“God this sucks.” Peter lamented as Tony kept rubbing his back after he’d been sick again. “Why is this happening?”

Instead of getting up again, Tony just set the dirty basin aside on the table next to the bed.

“Bruce says it’s from the head injury.” Tony answered as he indicated the phone in his hand that he’d obviously been using to text message the other man. “He says you just have to make it another couple hours and he can re-dose your medication.”

“Well whatever he’s giving me must suck. This is bullshit. I want better drugs.” Peter complained jokingly but really he was serious.

Tony snorted next to him.

Two hours. That didn’t sound so bad. He could make it two hours.

Nope. He was wrong. He couldn’t make it. He whimpered as he finished puking for like the ninth time. At least he thought it was the ninth time. He’d kind of lost count. The constant nausea in and of itself was wearing him down but now his stomach muscles were starting to hurt and his throat burned. Not to mention his ribs ached and his head pounded, and he still had like an hour left before his promised relief. Who knew how many more times he could puke before then? Too many. And it wasn’t like there was even anything left in his stomach anymore. Not even bile. The last couple times had just been uncomfortable dry heaves. He was pretty sure he was dying.

“I’m dying.” Peter declared.

“You’re not dying.” Tony sounded tense beside him.

“Feels like it.”

“You’re not dying.”

“Everything hurts.” Peter groaned. “Dying would be better.”

“No it wouldn’t.” Now Tony sounded even more tense.

“How is it even humanly possible to puke this much without dying? Is it the spider thing? Would I
actually be dead right now without it?”

An odd and tight expression crossed Tony’s face.

“What?” Peter asked. “Oh my god would I? I wasn’t serious…”

“No. You can’t die from throwing up.”

“I’m pretty sure you can…” Not that he actually thought he would. The annoying IV in his arm would prevent that.

“You’re not dying. You didn’t die in the explosion. You’re not going to die from this. Stop talking about dying.” Tony sounded like he was half panicking. It was a complete overreaction. Peter replayed the conversation in his head and abruptly put it all together.

“Oh my god. Would I have died in the explosion if I wasn’t Spiderman?” Peter asked.

Tony looked pained.

“Tony?” Peter implored as he tried to ignore the building nausea.

“Maybe? Probably… Yes.” Tony kind of seemed like he was going to throw up now too.

Wow. That was wow.

“But you are Spiderman so you’re going to be fine. So stop talking about dying.” Tony ordered.

Peter took a breath to say something…and ended up puking instead. Good thing Tony was getting real quick with the basin.

After enduring another half an hour of torment, Peter seriously didn’t think he’d be able to make it through a second half an hour.

“This sucks.” He groaned and fell boneless back against the pillows as Tony set the still empty basin aside. God dry heaving was the worst.

“I know.” Tony said sadly.

“I feel terrible.”

“I know.”

“I just want it to stop.” Peter admitted softly and then hated himself a little for it.

He didn’t even make it another ten minutes until he was puking again. At least this time some bile came up. It was better than dry heaving. It was pathetic that he knew that. Everything was starting to hurt more and more and he was so sick and exhausted and all he wanted to do was sleep but the nausea wouldn’t release its unrelenting grip on him. He kind of wanted to cry.

“I can’t do this anymore.” Peter whined to Tony. “I can’t. Please. No more.”

He was too miserable to even care that he was begging. He wondered if anyone had ever used intractable vomiting as a form of torture. It would totally work.

“You’re going to be ok. You just have to make it another twenty minutes.” Tony tried to cheer him up.
“No. I can’t. I can’t.” Peter didn’t care that he sounded like a baby.

Tony wrapped an arm around him and pulled him in closer so Peter’s head rested on his chest under his chin. He’d been giving him his space before, which Peter realized had probably kept him from embarrassing himself sooner, because the comfort completely weakened any resolve he had left to stay strong.

“Please make it stop. Make it stop.” Peter pleaded in a whisper.

“It’s going to stop soon. I promise.” Tony said into his hair.

Twenty minutes was not soon. Not soon enough. And oh god who knew how long it’d take for the medicine to actually kick in and start working. What if it took another hour. He couldn’t take that. He’d already reached his breaking point. He whimpered.


“I would if I could kiddo. You know I would. I wish I could trade places with you.” Peter knew he meant it. Tony sounded wrecked as he ran a hand over the back of his head.

“We’ll get through this. I’m right here.” Tony said and it made him feel a little better.

God he was glad Tony was here. Suffering through this alone really would’ve sucked. Actually, suffering through it with anyone except Tony would’ve sucked. He didn’t get a chance to think about it much more because he had to take a break to puke again.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. how long until Bruce gets down here?” Peter thought Tony sounded pretty distraught as he helped hold him up while he gagged.

“I’ve already informed him of Peter’s worsening distress. He is currently on his way.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. said.

Only a few seconds later Bruce walked in right as Peter finished upchucking. Although that was probably the wrong word since nothing had actually come up. Tony tried to hand him the water but he was too tired to take it. He ignored it and let his head fall back against Tony’s chest instead. He’d been kidding about dying before but now he actually felt horrible enough to kind of be worried about it.

“Hey.” Tony held the bottle of water in front of his face.

Peter just grunted and turned his head away, into Tony’s shirt. He didn’t want it. It wasn’t even worth the effort of rinsing his mouth since nothing had even come up and he was just going to puke again anyway.

“We’re not doing so great huh?” Bruce asked as he stood next to Tony and looked down at Peter.

“No. We’re not.” Tony seemed pissed. “Can you get the good drugs out now?”

Tony took the words right out of his mouth. Oh god yes please. Bruce turned to glance at the monitors and Peter watched him do a little double take and frown before looking back at Peter.

“What?” Tony had obviously caught it as well.

“How much has he been vomiting?” Bruce asked Tony.
“I don’t know. A whole fucking lot. Why?”

Bruce turned his attention back to him. He grabbed his hand and pinched the back of it and then took his pulse.

“What?” Tony asked when Bruce had finished. Peter could tell he was starting to get worried. Peter was too worn out to care.

“It’s fine. He’s just a little dehydrated.”

“He’s dehydrated? Aren’t you giving him fluids? How could he get dehydrated?” Tony accused.

“Calm down.” Bruce held a hand up. “I just need to give some more fluids. It’s going to be fine. Let me get the meds.”

Yes meds. Definitely get the meds. Less talking, more drugs. Peter watched as the other man swiftly drew some syringes up from different vials.

“I’ve got the good stuff for you Peter.” Bruce said as he walked back over with three syringes and a clear IV bag in hand.

Peter couldn’t waste the energy to acknowledge what Bruce was saying right now. He just needed whatever was in those syringes. He watched listlessly as Bruce attached the bag of fluids to the IV site in his arm and then cleaned off the IV on the back of his hand and started injecting one of the syringes. Peter hadn’t even realized he had two IV’s. It took longer than he thought to empty the syringe. He just hoped it worked fast.

Bruce frowned at his lethargy. “You really don’t feel good huh buddy?”

Peter just blinked. He didn’t want to risk shaking his head because then he might get sick.

The second syringe went in. Bruce screwed the third syringe on the IV and paused to throw a significant look at Tony before talking to him.

“This one’s kind of strong. It’s going to make you really sleepy.” Bruce warned.

Peter frowned. He didn’t think it’d be possible to feel any more tired than he already did.

Bruce started pushing it in slowly. “And it might make you feel a little funny but it’s ok.”

What did that mean— Oh. Whoa. He felt really weird. Like he was flying away but really heavy at the same time. He didn’t like it. It must’ve shown on his face.

“You’re ok kiddo. I’ve got you.” Tony said.

The syringe was only about half in. He looked up at Tony but his eyelids started to feel really heavy. He blinked a couple times. It was getting harder and harder to keep them open. Tony looked relieved. Why did he look relieved? Peter felt out of control and he didn’t like it. He tried to tell Tony.

“I don’t…” He forgot what he was going to say as his eyes flickered shut and consciousness was whisked away.
If Tony had thought the time he’d been dying of palladium poisoning, or the time he’d been captured by the Ten Rings, or the time he and Steve had beat the crap out of each other had been the lowest points in his life, he’d been wrong. This definitely was. This was the worst. Watching Peter suffer and not being able to do anything to make it stop was absolute torture. He wished it had happened to him instead. Or that he could take Peter’s pain and misery onto himself. But he couldn’t. And it was absolutely agonizing.

At least Peter was finally getting better. Four days later. Tony was over the moon about the fact that Peter wasn’t hurting so much anymore but the flip side of it was that the better Peter felt, the more stubborn he got.

“When can I get out of here?” Peter whined from where he was pressed against Tony’s left side. They both lay in the kid’s bed in Medbay propped up on a pile of pillows watching Modern Family on a Starkpad.

“When Bruce says.” Tony answered.

“When will that be?”

“When you’re healed.”

“I am healed.” Peter argued.

“Hmm.” Tony said noncommittally. He knew Peter wasn’t quite as healed as he wanted them to think.

“Bruce is being ridiculous.”

“Hmm.”

“Is that all you’re going to say?”

“Hmm.”

Peter huffed angrily as he sat up and pulled away like he planned to get out of bed, so Tony wrapped an arm behind his shoulders and tugged him gently back against him, careful of his injuries.

“Why are you so antsy?” Tony asked. “Got somewhere important you need to be?”

“Yeah. Not here.” Peter grumbled.

“Why? You don’t want to watch Modern Family with your old man?” Tony joked.

“I’d rather do it upstairs.” Peter scoffed but at least he wasn’t trying to escape anymore.

“Well you’re stuck down here for the time being so just relax.”

Peter sighed heavily but Tony felt as Peter slowly gave in and started to relax against him.

“Besides I’m giving you a free pass while you’re down here but once you’re back upstairs you and I are going to talk.” Peter’s eyes flicked up nervously to him at that.

“Fine. I’ll stay.” Peter said as if he actually had a choice in the matter and went back to watching Modern Family.

By the end of the next episode, Peter was fast asleep in the crook of his arm. Yeah, sure he was
obviously completely healed. He still couldn’t stay awake for longer than an hour or two at time but he was totally fine. Tony leaned down and kissed the top of his head.

“How’s he doing?” Bruce’s voice was way too amused at catching him in the act of showing real emotion.

“You tell me.” Tony challenged.

Bruce came closer and started fiddling with the bandages on Peter’s arm and chest. When Bruce touched a particularly sensitive spot over his broken ribs, Peter groaned and rolled away in his sleep, unconsciously burrowing in closer to Tony and draping his arm across Tony’s chest so his back was to Bruce.

Bruce chuckled at their new position. Peter cuddling him.

“Oh shut up.” Tony rolled his eyes.

“The burns are almost healed. The head injury and his ribs are going to take a little longer but he doesn’t need to stay down here for that. I’ll release him tomorrow.”

Tony nodded. “Good. Otherwise you might need to tie him down soon.”

“He still needs to rest for the next week or two, but that’s going to be your problem.” Bruce smirked.

“Thanks.” Tony said sarcastically.

Bruce smiled at him.

Tony looked back down at Peter then to Bruce again. “Not that I don’t think you’ve done a bang up job but isn’t he supposed to heal faster than this? I mean he walked off a broken leg after four days. It’s been four days Bruce. Why is this taking so long?”

Bruce took his glasses off and cleaned them on his shirt as he answered. “The only explanation I have is that the leg was one injury and he was relatively healthy prior to it. This is several serious injuries and from what F.R.I.D.A.Y. told us he was sleep deprived leading up to them. It’s taxed his healing reserve. But he is healing. Just not as quickly.”

Tony sighed. He just wanted Peter to be better.

“Do you need anything?” Bruce put his glasses back on and pushed them up further on his nose as he eyed Tony clinically this time.

“Coffee?”

“I’ll bring you some food. It’s almost dinner time.”

“And coffee?” Tony asked hopefully.

“No coffee.” Bruce shook his head. “If you want coffee you’ll have to get it yourself.”

“I’m not leaving him.”

“Tony he’s fine. I think he’ll survive if you take a break to get some food and coffee and a shower.” Bruce scrunched his nose at that last suggestion. “You’ve been down here for over four days straight. You’re starting to look like a hobo.”
“I’m not leaving him.” Tony glared at Bruce.

“Fine.” Bruce held up his hands in surrender. “I’ll be back with food later.”

Bruce left. Tony turned Modern family off and started working instead. It wasn’t the easiest thing in the world answering e-mails one handed but he wasn’t about to move Peter.

He was in the midst of answering his 5th e-mail when Peter jerked awake violently. He lifted his head and looked around frantically.

“Whoa kiddo. You’re ok.” Peter looked up at him and Tony saw the lingering terror on his face. A nightmare then. Like one of the ones F.R.I.D.A.Y. had told him about.

Tony expected Peter to notice their position and pull away but instead he stared at Tony with wide eyes for a few long seconds before resting his head back down and holding onto him even more snugly. Tony frowned as he set down the Starkpad so he could wrap both of his arms around the kid.

He was no stranger to Peter’s nightmares but he’d thought they’d gotten better and he’d thought the two of them had gotten to the point where Peter wouldn’t hesitate to come to him with them. Apparently he’d been wrong. He’d talked to Peter everyday while he’d been gone and the kid had never even hinted at how much trouble he was having. It worried him.

“What’s going on Peter?”

“Nothing.” He mumbled into Tony’s chest. Lying about it. Even more concerning. Tony sighed and tried to decide if he wanted to have this conversation now or later. He really didn’t want to put it off but he also didn’t want to push when Peter was still hurt.

“What was your dream about?”

“Nothing. It’s fine.” Peter hadn’t refused to talk about his nightmares in weeks. This was something new then. Something not Vulture or May related. Otherwise he’d already be telling him.

“Peter.” He prompted more sternly.

“It was just one bad dream. Stop overreacting.” Peter murmured. Maybe Tony would’ve believed him if he didn’t already know the truth and if Peter wasn’t still holding onto him so tight.

“Don’t lie to me Peter.” He said softly, purposefully keeping the edge out of his voice.

“I’m not.”

“What have your nightmares been about?” Tony tried again.

“It was just one. I’m fine.” Peter sounded exhausted. This was exactly why Tony didn’t want to do this now.

“Why are you lying to me?” The question was more curious than accusing.

“I’m not.” Hmm Peter was getting better at lying. Also concerning.

“I talked to F.R.I.D.A.Y. about this past week.” Tony said.

Peter froze.

“She told me everything.” Tony continued.
“Everything?” Peter asked so quietly Tony barely heard him.

“Everything.” Tony reiterated.

“Oh.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? We talked everyday. You had every opportunity to bring it up.”

“I didn’t want to bother you.” Peter mumbled, sounding barely awake. “You were busy. It was fine. I had it handled.”

Tony sighed. The worst part was that he knew Peter believed what he was saying.

“You didn’t have it handled kiddo and you know I’m never too busy for you.”

He felt Peter yawn against him.

“We’ll talk more when you’re feeling better. But we are going to talk about this.”

“Mmhmm.”

Tony stayed quiet and waited as Peter’s breathing evened out and his grip on Tony loosened as he fell asleep. He didn’t know how he could feel like Peter was so secure while in his arms but at the same time still so breakable. God being a Dad was hard.

Chapter End Notes

No cliffhanger this time! I tried to get this chapter up as fast as possible. No permanent brain damage for Peter. I know some of you were worried. Let me know what you think of this one! Your comments make my day!
“Thanks Bruce.” Tony said. Peter watched as the man took the pill bottle Bruce handed him. Peter’s pain medication. Yeah right he wasn’t going to take those anymore. They made his head all fuzzy and sleepy.

Peter was only half paying attention to the exchange. He was too busy practically twitching with excitement to get out of the sterile Medbay as he finished tying his shoes on the edge of the bed. Bruce had already unhooked him from all the stupid medical equipment. Thank god.

“Ready to blow this popsicle stand?” Tony asked after he’d finished talking with Bruce.

“More than ready.” Peter stood as Tony hovered closely. Peter hadn’t done much walking yet. Just the few steps back and forth to the bathroom by his bed the past couple days, and that usually wiped him out.

“All right let’s go. Say good bye to Bruce.”

“Bye Bruce.” Peter smiled and gave him a half wave as they walked toward the elevator. “Thanks.”

“No problem Peter. Feel better. I’ll see you later.” Bruce smiled back. He didn’t look like he was mad. Peter hoped he wasn’t too upset with him about the whole blowing up his lab thing.

Huh Peter had never realized how big the Medbay actually was. He’d been on one of the corner beds, far from the elevator for privacy, which he’d appreciated, but now it kind of sucked. It was a long way to walk. But he refused to let on to how hard it was because then Bruce or Tony might make him stay here longer. He just needed to make it to the elevator. And he did.

The doors closed and Peter breathed his own silent sigh of relief. But when the elevator started it’s ascent, Peter stumbled hard at the sudden dizziness it incited. Tony grabbed him instantly, steadying him with a firm grip on his upper arm and pulling him closer against him.

“Peter?” Shit. Tony sounded worried.

“I’m ok.” He said instantly. He was not going back to Medbay.

He must not have sounded convincing enough because Tony didn’t let go of him. Usually Peter would’ve objected but right now the floor didn’t seem quite so stable. If anything, he leaned more of his weight into Tony.

“Maybe Bruce was wrong. Maybe this is too soon.”

“No! I’m ok. I’m ok.” Peter forced himself to straighten.

Tony eyed him skeptically but before he could say anything else the doors opened to their suite and Peter quickly stepped out, forcing Tony to come with since he refused to relinquish his hold on him.

Peter headed straight for the couch but before he could get there, Tony started pulling him in the opposite direction. Toward his bedroom.

“No no no. Couch couch couch.” Peter tried to resist.
“Bed bed bed.” Tony insisted.

“Nooo. Tonyyy.” Peter held the y in an exaggerated whine to be as obnoxious as possible as he was dragged to his bedroom, but the protest fell on deaf ears.

Tony pulled the covers on his bed back with his free hand and guided Peter to sit down. Then he crouched down in front of him and started untying his shoes, pulling each one off and tossing them to the side. He grabbed Peter’s socked feet as he stood, bringing them up with him and twisting them over the bed so Peter was forced to lie down or hold himself up awkwardly, which he didn’t have the energy to do. Well played. Tony pulled the covers back up over him in a no fuss manner.

“I’m not tired.” Peter protested. He totally was. He’d been awake all morning. For like three and a half hours straight. It was the longest he’d gone without sleep since getting hurt.

“You are.” Tony said knowingly. Before he could stop it a yawn broke out across his face. Traitorous body.

“See?” Peter glared at Tony’s smirk.

“You need anything?” Tony asked.

“You’re leaving?” The question was out of his mouth before he could stop himself. He knew it wasn’t fair. He knew Tony hadn’t left his side once the entire time he was in Medbay. For days. Now that he was better he was sure the man had a lot of work to get back to and here he was being needy.

“I mean…it’s fine. You should go. I’m fine. I’m sure you’re busy. You must have like a ton of stuff to do. Um to catch up on.” Peter avoided Tony’s eyes as he spoke but glanced over at him when he’d finished talking. He caught Tony studying him intently.

Without saying a word Tony grabbed the Starkpad on Peter’s nightstand. He walked around the bed to the other side and toed off his shoes before settling down next to Peter on top of the covers.

“We still need to finish that last episode of Modern Family.” Tony said as he brought up Netflix. As if that was of vital importance and he had nowhere else he needed to be. “Is this good? Can you see ok?”

“Yeah. Thanks Tony.” Peter mumbled as he rolled toward the man so could see better. They both knew he wasn’t thanking him for being able to see the screen.

Peter hadn’t even realized he’d fallen asleep until he woke up again. Damn. What was with him? Shouldn’t he be completely back to normal by now? From what he could remember, he’d only made it through like 10 minutes of that Modern Family episode before he’d conked out.

Peter sat up in bed. Tony wasn’t there. Of course he wasn’t. What did he expect? For Tony to just sit with him while he slept? He’d done enough of that while Peter was down in Medbay. It wasn’t like Tony could stay right by him for forever. Ridiculous. Well at least he hadn’t had any bad dreams. He glanced around to try to get oriented but the shades were closed so he had no idea if it was night or day.
“F.R.I.D.A.Y. how long have I been asleep?”

“Approximately three hours. It is currently 2:37PM.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. answered.

Awesome. He hadn’t slept the entire day. Maybe he was getting better. He whipped the covers off himself and stood but had to pause and rub his eyes against the dizziness it provoked. Ok maybe not quite all better yet. But he refused to sit back down. He felt disgusting. He needed a shower and Tony wasn’t around to tell him no like Peter knew he probably would. After a few long seconds, he started to feel steady enough to move again. He grabbed some clothes and walked to the bathroom, locking the door behind him and turning on the shower.

He unwrapped the bandages from his arm and chest and caught his reflection in the mirror. The skin on his right shoulder and chest was bright red like a really bad sunburn and the other side of his chest was bruised. He yanked the bandages off that were wound around his head. There was a dark bruise and a bump over his left temple with an overlying cut covered by steristrips. He looked like a mess. He forced himself to look away and climbed into the shower under the spray. The warm water irritated his burns but finally getting to clean off all the grime and sweat felt amazing. Totally worth a little discomfort.

“Peter. You ok in there?” Tony knocked on the door.

Peter rolled his eyes even though it shot a spark of pain through his head.

“Yeah I’m fine! I’ll be out in a minute!” He answered as he rinsed the shampoo out of his hair.

“I’ll be right out here if you need me ok.” Tony said. He sounded worried. Peter sighed. The man had asked him to be his son and he’d repaid him by blowing himself up and making him worry.

Instead of enjoying the rest of his shower he hurried to finish up. He dried off and got dressed, pulling on a pair of sweat pants and the shirt he’d grabbed in the dark, noting with chagrin that he’d accidentally grabbed his grey Stark Industries t-shirt. Oh well. Whatever. He rubbed his hair with the towel to try to dry it out more but stopped when it aggravated the bruise on his head.

He hung his towel on its hook and opened the door to the bathroom and stopped. Tony stood literally right there. Peter didn’t know why he felt a flash of annoyance at the hovering when only ten minutes ago he’d been upset to wake up alone.

“You ok?” Tony looked him up and down.

“Yeah.” Peter brushed past him and walked toward the living room. The shower had taken more out of him than he wanted to admit and now he needed to sit down, but not in bed. On the couch.

“Nice shirt. Where’d you get it?” Tony asked with amusement as he followed close behind. Of course he’d noticed the stupid shirt.

“Expo.” Peter decided just telling the truth would take less energy. He didn’t think Tony would just let it go.

“Which one?”

“I don’t remember.”

“You don’t remember?!” Tony asked in his fake hurt voice.

Peter sighed as he plopped down on the couch more carefully than usual.
“Maybe the one from a couple years ago?” He guessed.

“I can’t believe you don’t remember all of my Expos in perfect shiny detail. That hurts.” Tony sat down next to him.

“Hey I remember the one where you saved me.”

“Excuse me what?” Tony raised an eyebrow at him.

“You know the one with that Hammer guy when all those drone things went crazy? Well one of them was going to blow me away, but I was dressed up like…like you so I thought that meant I could take him, which duh totally wouldn’t have worked, but before it could kill me you were there…and you blasted it and told me good job and flew away. It was pretty cool.” Peter shrugged.

“You probably don’t remember.”

“That was you?” Tony paled.

“You remember?”

“Of course I remember!”

Peter had a hard time reading his face. He seemed a combination of scared, confused, and shocked.

“Um…are you ok?” Peter asked when Tony kept staring at him blankly.

“I’m processing.”

A few long moments later Tony finally seemed to snap out of it.

“I’ll need to finish processing later.” Tony decided as he rubbed a hand over his forehead.

Peter frowned at him.

“Shesheh kid way to ruin my day.” Tony shook his head and tried to give Peter a wry smile but it just looked pained.

“Sorry?” Peter didn’t get what was such a big deal. The whole Expo thing had happened a long time ago. Nothing had happened. He was completely fine now. So why was Tony still looking at him funny?

Tony huffed. “Yeah well it was already going to be a rough day anyway.”

Peter blinked. “Why?”

“We need to talk.”

Oh.

“Now?” Peter hated how high that came out. God he really didn’t want to do this now. His head pounded and his ribs ached, and all the standing in the shower had sapped his energy. He wouldn’t be able to put up much of a fight.

“Yeah now. What you want to reschedule?”

“Yeah.”
“For when?”

“Never?”

That finally got a real smile out of Tony.

“Nope. You know the saying. Don’t do the crime if you can’t do the time.”

“Am I grounded again?”

“So you want to start with that part of the talk? Punishment?” At least Tony didn’t sound mad.

Peter shifted uncomfortably.

“Ok.” Tony said decisively. “You’ve lost all lab privileges for the next two months.”

Peter’s jaw dropped. That was so much worse than what he’d imagined.

“What?! That’s… But… I won’t do it again! I promise! Come on Tony please! I need… You can’t… Two months?”

“It’s not up for debate.” Ok now he sounded a little mad. “You won’t set foot in the workshop or the lab for two months. You knew you weren’t allowed down there alone and you did it anyway. You deliberately disobeyed me.”

Peter couldn’t hold Tony’s gaze anymore. The disappointment hurt.

“And you messed with chemicals you knew you weren’t supposed to touch. You knew better Peter. You knew better. You broke the rules Bruce and I both made to keep you safe. You should be happy it’s only two months.”

Peter looked down at his hands.

“So tell me why.”

“What?” Peter frowned and looked back up.

“You knew better so why’d you do it kid?” Tony’s eyes looked softer now.

“Um I…” He fidgeted. “I don’t know.”

Tony made an abrupt buzzer sound. “Try again. Better start talking or I’ll make it three months.”

Peter’s eyes widened. That was so not fair. And he could tell Tony wasn’t kidding. Dammit.

“I-I-I couldn’t sleep so I thought… I thought I should at least do something productive. I didn’t think it’d be a big deal. I just… I wasn’t thinking.” He looked back up at Tony who twirled his finger in a keep going gesture.

The thing was Peter knew exactly what Tony was waiting for him to admit. He just didn’t want to.

“You’re really going to make me say it? F.R.I.D.A.Y. already told you.” Peter scoffed.

“I want to hear it from you.” Tony said seriously. “Like I should have last week.”

“I was having nightmares all right? I was having stupid nightmares and I couldn’t sleep so I went down to the lab. I know I shouldn’t have but I did it anyway. And I was exhausted because I hadn’t
slept all week and I picked up the wrong chemical. I made a mistake. And I’m sorry ok? I’m sorry.” Peter ranted, resentful over being forced into the admission.

“I know.” Tony said and waited.

“And I didn’t tell you about the dreams because they’re stupid.” Peter wrung his hands in his lap. “And I thought they’d go away but they didn’t. But then you were coming home soon anyway so I thought it’d be fine and I could wait.”

“You were going to tell me when I came home?” Tony sounded surprised.

“No. I don’t know. I just… I just thought they’d stop when you came home.”

Tony’s eyebrow shot up at that. “So they’re something to do with me then?”

Peter shrugged.

“Peter.” Tony said sternly.

“I kept…” God he couldn’t do this. He couldn’t admit this to Tony. Could he? It’d leave him completely exposed. His deepest fear laid bare. Tony would know everything. Know how scared he was of losing him. How clingy and not strong he actually was.

“I kept dreaming that… that…”

He took a deep breath while Tony waited patiently. Just say it. Get it over with. Spit it out.

“You left and then I kept having dreams of you dying ok?” He confessed in a rush.

Peter chewed on his lower lip and snuck a glance at Tony. He looked sad.

“I’m not going anywhere kiddo.” Tony wrapped an arm around him and tugged him against his side.

“You can’t promise that.” Peter whispered. He’d lost too many people to delude himself.

“I know.” Tony lamented into his hair.

Peter snorted. “You’re supposed to promise anyway. Not say I know. God what kind of Dad are you?”

Oh shit he hadn’t meant to say that last part. It’d just slipped out.

“Yours.” Tony didn’t even miss a beat with his answer.

Peter’s lip twitched. “You’re supposed to promise anyway. Not say I know. God what kind of Dad are you?”

Oh shit he hadn’t meant to say that last part. It’d just slipped out.

“Yours.” Tony didn’t even miss a beat with his answer.

Peter’s lip twitched.

“I can’t promise nothing will ever happen to me but I promise I’ll be careful ok? As careful as I can be. But you have to promise me the same thing. Fair deal?”

Peter nodded.

“And can you do something else for me? Can you just come to me next time something’s bothering you? I don’t want to get called by Steve again in the middle of the night telling me that—” Tony broke off with a huff. “Can you just try to do that for me? So I can keep what little sanity I have left?”
Peter sighed. “Yeah.”

“Ok.”

Peter appreciated the comfort Tony was offering him but the position they were in was starting to hurt his ribs. He tried to surreptitiously shift his weight to get more comfortable and was immediately released.

“Are you hurting?” Tony studied him then checked his watch. “You’re late for your meds.”

“I don’t need them. I’m fine.” Peter said even as he tried to readjust his position on the couch again. Tony noticed. He stood and came back with a glass of water and Peter’s pills in his hand.

Peter didn’t move to take them. “I don’t want them. They make it hard to think.”

“You don’t need to think. You need to rest. I’m not arguing with you about this. You’re in pain. Take them.” Tony’s tone of voice brooked no argument.

Peter huffed in protest but took the pills. He closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the couch. His head was throbbing and his ribs ached.

“Come on kiddo lay down.” Tony guided him down so his head settled against a pillow and then covered him with a blanket. He heard Tony fussing with stuff around him but he was too tired to care. Lying down felt so much better. He just hoped he’d be able to make it through the day sometime in the future without needing a nap.

Tony sat in the armchair next to the sofa and watched Peter sleep. He’d done a lot of that over the past few days but to be fair the kid had been sleeping a lot. His thoughts buzzed. Peter was having nightmares because he was afraid of losing him. Tony had known leaving him for a week had been a bad idea but he’d done it anyway. He’d given Peter the choice to stay or come with him when he should’ve just insisted he accompany him. He’d thought Peter would be ok here alone. He’d trusted Peter would talk to him about his problems but he hadn’t. Why hadn’t Peter trusted him? Tony felt like he was floundering.

And then to find out Peter had almost died as a child. Even as a little kid he’d been brave and diving into danger. Before the Spiderman thing. Tony remembered that moment. Remembered it vividly. The little kid that had stood up to the drone. It’d been dumb luck he’d noticed him and just happened to be fast enough to intervene in time. If Tony had showed up a second later… Well, Peter wouldn’t be lying on his couch right now. This moment never would’ve existed. Tony’s world would’ve been a darker place and he never would’ve even known. Wouldn’t have ever realized this amazing thing he’d almost missed out on.

Tony stood and rearranged the blanket around Peter and then walked to the elevator. He took it down to the common room. He needed a distraction and he knew Peter would be asleep for at least another couple hours if the last couple days were any indication. F.R.I.D.A.Y. had orders to inform him immediately once the kid woke.

“Look what the cat dragged in.” Sam said as Tony joined the Avengers in the common room.

Tony practically threw himself down on the loveseat, exhausted.
“You don’t look like a Yeti anymore.” Bruce observed shrewdly from the armchair across the room. “I see you finally found the time to shower and shave.”

Tony grunted in reply and threw an arm over his eyes.

“How’s Peter?” Steve asked from the other couch while he, Sam, and Clint played some new video game.

“Better. Still sleeping most of the day.” Tony answered.

“So now that the squirt’s out of Medbay does this mean you’re finally lifting your completely ridiculous no visiting restriction?” Clint asked without looking away from the TV screen.

“I suppose.” Tony sighed. He knew the restriction hadn’t been ridiculous. Peter had been in no shape to see anyone while he’d been downstairs. He’d been hurt and sick and he’d needed time to just get better without having to put on a brave face, which Tony knew he would’ve felt he had to do if anyone would’ve come to visit.

“Yes!” Clint cheered. Tony couldn’t tell if it was something from the video game or at being able to see Peter.

“How about we do a team movie night tonight? You can bring Peter down.” Steve suggested then swore at something in the video game.

“Language.” Tony joked and Steve just rolled his eyes, still intently pushing the buttons on his controller.

“Movie night sounds good.” Tony agreed. He knew Peter would probably fall asleep halfway through but at least it’d make the team happy to see him.

“How about that new French movie that just came out? It won almost every award at Cannes.” Bruce proposed.

Everyone groaned.

“God no man. No more foreign movies. Not after that last one you made us watch.” Sam complained.

“That one was good!” Bruce defended.

“No it wasn’t. It was bad enough it was in Italian but it was in black and white and all the people in it did was stare at each other, smoke, and drink coffee.”

“It’s not my fault you weren’t cultured enough to get it.” Bruce smirked.

“No that movie was terrible.” Steve said.

“Yeah you lose movie picking privileges for the next month.” Clint agreed.

“I say we watch—”

“Why don’t we let Peter pick?” Tony suggested, knowing this conversation could go on for forever if he didn’t step in.

“Good idea. Let half pint pick. He usually picks good ones.” Clint nodded then swore as he threw his controller down. “Dammit Cap! You totally hung me out to dry there.”
Steve chuckled. “Oops.”

Clint stood and walked into the kitchen. “I’m ordering pizza. Who wants some?”

“It’s not even 3:30PM.” Bruce frowned.

“So? I want a snack!” Clint yelled back.

“I want pizza too!” Sam chimed in.

“I can always eat.” Steve agreed.

Bruce just shook his head.

Tony was already pulling out his wallet.

“Hey Stark—” Clint came back with the phone over his ear, holding their favorite pizza menu from the fridge.

“Here.” Tony tossed his wallet at him and Clint caught it deftly. “Get me a large pepperoni and green olive while you’re at it.”

“I want sausage.” Sam said.

“You would.” Clint smirked.

“Is everything an innuendo to you?” Sam sighed.

“Pretty much yeah. How about you Steve?”

“Not everything’s an innuendo to me.” Steve answered.

“Stop messing with me. What kind of pizza do you want?”

“You know I love a good sausage.” Steve smirked.

Clint barked out a laugh along with everyone else. “Stop. I’m trying to order.”

“I think my ears are bleeding.” Tony joked.

“Banner you want pizza or no?”

“I’ll just eat Steve’s sausage.” Bruce deadpanned.

Everyone laughed again. Tony figured it was good the public didn’t know how often the Avengers acted like a bunch of immature idiots.

“You guys are trying to kill me.” Clint complained and walked back out to the kitchen to finish ordering in peace.

A few seconds later the Avengers alarm rang and instantly shattered the happy mood.

“Boss, Peter is awake.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. informed him a split second later. Tony rolled his eyes. Of course he was. You’d have to be deaf to sleep through that alarm.

“Fuck!” Sam swore at the same time and threw down the controller. “We almost had it. This is the worst timing ever.”
“No the worst timing would’ve been a few days ago.” Steve said as he set down his controller and met Tony’s eyes.

“Can I actually change the delivery time to six o’clock instead? And can I add two large pepperonis, a large cheese, a large Hawaiian, and two large Supremes? Yeah I’m sure. Here let me give you the credit card number quick.” Clint spoke hurriedly.

Tony stared at Steve. It was true that a few days ago would’ve been worse. Peter was mostly better now but he still wasn’t back to normal. Someone had to stay with him. And what if something happened while they were gone? What if there was some setback? It was unlikely but not impossible, not worth the risk. So Bruce had to stay. And if Bruce stayed then there wasn’t really any actual reason for Tony to stay except that he wanted to. He could see the same thoughts passing through Steve’s mind. Steve glanced over at Bruce before meeting Tony’s eyes again.

“If Bruce… I can…” Tony couldn’t make himself offer to go.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. what’s the situation?” Steve asked without looking away from Tony.

“It appears an enhanced elephant-type creature is tearing through Manhattan. NYPD has been unsuccessful so far in their attempts to subdue it.”

“New York again? Well at least when we move back it’ll save on our transit times.” Sam said as he stood. 


“Tony and Bruce stay.” Steve decided as he stood and gave Tony a small nod.

Tony opened his mouth to halfheartedly argue like he knew he should, but before he could, Steve continued. “It’s fine. I know you want to stay. I’ll call you in if we need you, but it doesn’t sound like we will.”

“Can I stay too Cap? I have this hangnail that’s been bothering me. I might not be at the top of my game.” Clint whined.

“Yeah my neck’s been a little tight. Maybe I should stay too.” Sam interjected.

“No. No one else is staying.” Steve said assertively as he rolled his eyes. “F.R.I.D.A.Y. is the rest of the team on their way to the Quinjet?”

“Yes Captain.”

“Let’s go. We’re the slow ones.” Steve said and ignored Clint and Sam as they made a spectacle of reluctantly following.

The elevator opened before they got there and Peter stepped out, rubbing his eyes, with his hair stuck up funny on one side from where he’d slept on the pillow.

“Hey Peter.” Steve smiled and ruffled his hair on the way past him into the elevator. “You’re looking a lot better buddy. Hold down the fort with your Dad while we’re gone.”

Peter frowned and looked around, finding Tony on the couch, making no move to follow the rest of the team out.
“See you later half pint.” Sam ruffled his hair too and followed Steve into the elevator.

“Hey squirt when we get back we’re doing movie night and you’re picking, so start thinking about what you want to watch. Pick something good. Don’t let me down.” Clint waggled a finger at him in jest before ruffling his hair too and disappearing into the elevator.

Peter watched the door close behind them and shook his head slightly before making his way over to where Tony was still reclined on the loveseat.

“You’re not going?” Peter asked him as he lay down on the couch the other Avengers had just vacated. Tony hated how surprised he seemed.

“Nah figured I’d stay here. I’m not a fan of rampaging jungle creatures.” He answered as he turned attentive eyes on Peter, looking for any hint of pain.

“Huh?” Peter rubbed his eyes, still obviously groggy.

“There’s some elephant thing running around in New York City.” Bruce translated. “Steve didn’t need us for it.”

“Oh. Hey Bruce. Long time no see.” Peter greeted as he noticed the other scientist for the first time. Usually the kid had better powers of observation.

Bruce frowned and studied Peter critically over his glasses. “You feeling ok?”

“He just took his painkillers. Apparently they make him a little loopy.” Tony explained even as he continued to watch Peter closely.

“Wait did you say something about an elephant?” Peter frowned, clearly not quite with it.

“The team went to kill a crazy elephant.” Bruce explained again.

“Oh.” Peter blinked lazily, losing the fight against sleep. “Like Dumbo?”

“Sure kid. Just like Dumbo. If Dumbo was an enhanced evil elephant...” Tony joked.

Bruce snorted and they both watched as Peter’s eyes slipped closed.

“How are you ever going to break it to him when Captain America kills Dumbo?” Bruce joked.

“I’m glad you find it funny.” Tony raised an eyebrow at him.

“Maybe I need to go down on his dose a little.” Bruce admitted.

“I’d rather have him sleepy than in pain.” Tony argued.

“Stop talking about me. I can still hear you.” Peter mumbled.

“Our bad. We thought you were asleep.” Tony held back a laugh at Peter’s offended tone.

“M not.” Peter gave a sleepy sigh but didn’t open his eyes.

Tony held a finger to his lips at Bruce and watched as Peter’s face went lax. It only took a couple minutes. Tony got up to grab the blanket on the couch and draped it across Peter. The kid didn’t stir.

“Now he’s asleep.” Tony said as sat back down on the loveseat.
“If it’s really hitting him this hard I want to halve his dose.” Bruce continued quietly. “Give him one pill instead of two next time. You can always give him the second one if he needs it.”

“Fine.” Tony reluctantly agreed.

“Besides he shouldn’t need them anymore at all in another day or two.”

“Good.” Tony couldn’t wait until Peter was back to his normal overly energetic self.

“Did you get a chance to talk to him about the nightmares yet?” Bruce asked as he went back to paging through the medical journal in his lap. Bruce and Steve had both been there when F.R.I.D.A.Y. had explained the extent of Peter’s nightmares to Tony.

“Yeah he’s afraid of losing me. That’s what they were about. Me dying.”

“Makes sense.” Bruce nodded. “He lost his parents, then his uncle, and now his aunt. Then you took him in. All he has is you. He must be terrified of losing you.”

“I thought you didn’t like to do the whole armchair psychology thing.” Tony raised an eyebrow at his friend.

“Yeah well I don’t have anything better to do right now.” Bruce turned another page in the journal.

“So what do you think triggered them?” Tony asked after a few moments.

“Probably you going to Japan. You left him for the first time and it stressed him out.” Bruce said like it was obvious.

“So not the adoption?” Tony frowned.

“That could be part of it too.” Bruce shrugged. “You’re officially his Dad now. I’m sure he was afraid of losing you before but now that your relationship is something more concrete it’s probably even scarier.”

“Hmm.” Tony thought through everything Bruce had said. It made sense. Now he needed to figure out how to fix it. “What should I do?”

“Talk to him. Be there for him. It’s all you can do.” Bruce looked over at him. “You’ve been doing a great job so far. Just keep doing what you’re doing. The rest will work itself out.”

Tony scoffed. “Doesn’t feel like it. Feels like I have no clue what I’m doing.”

“You know what to do Tony.” Bruce argued. “That alarm went off and the first thing you thought about was Peter. Not being Ironman. Not the Avengers. Peter. And that you didn’t want to leave him. Not because you couldn’t. But because you didn’t want to. You didn’t leave him once the whole time he was downstairs in Medbay. You’re already a good Dad. You know what to do. You need to give yourself more credit.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes and Tony watched Peter, fast sleep and drooling on the throw pillow.

“I’ve never been so scared in my life.” Tony suddenly admitted in a whisper, like a dirty secret.

He heard Bruce set the journal down and wait for him to keep going.

“When Steve called me and said…” Tony swallowed hard and looked over at Bruce. “I’ve never
been so scared.”

Somehow just admitting it made him feel a little better.

“After everything I’ve been through… This is what scared the shit out of me.”

“I know.” Bruce answered softly.

“And the worst part was he got hurt while he was here. Where he’s supposed to be safe. I’m supposed to keep him safe. I’d do anything for him. I’d die for him.” Tony professed and took a couple shaky breaths as he ran a hand through his hair.

“You’re his Dad.” Bruce said as if that explained everything, explained all these strong twisty feelings inside of him.

Tony glanced back over at Peter before dropping his head into his hands. After a few seconds he looked up and made eye contact with Bruce again, and suddenly he was confessing what had been secretly bothering him, what he’d unsuccessfully tried to push deep down and out of his mind ever since he first saw Peter hurt on that Medbay bed.

“I don’t…I don’t think I can handle letting him be Spiderman again.”

Chapter End Notes

You guys have all been so great I thought I’d update this a little early. Some of you were asking if I have a specific update schedule and I don't really. My goal is to do at least one chapter a week but lately I've have extra time to get more writing in so I guess it's been more like two chapters a week. As always, let me know what you think of this one! I always love hearing if people have any particular favorite parts of a chapter because it helps guide my planning for future chapters.
“Tony.” Bruce said his name like he’d personally wronged the man.

“I know. I know.” Tony lamented.

“You can’t take Spiderman away from Peter. It’s who he is. He can’t stop being Spiderman anymore than you can stop being Ironman. Remember what happened the last time you tried to take his suit away?”

Tony closed his eyes. Of course he did. He was the one that had told Bruce about it. Peter had gotten buried by a building and then almost died in a plane crash. Oh god had he been hurt then? Tony didn’t even know. How could he not know that? And he knew he couldn’t take Spiderman away from Peter. He knew that. No matter how much he may want to. But he also didn’t know how he could survive letting his son go out and risk his life on a daily basis. It was an impossible situation.

“I know. I just…I don’t…God Bruce I don’t know what to do.” Tony’s voice broke at the end and unbidden tears formed in his eyes. He hated himself a little bit for showing weakness in front of his friend, but if he was going to lose it front of anyone he was glad it was Bruce. Tony dropped his head into his hands again as a small sob broke free.

“Hey.” Bruce hurried over to sit down next to him. His friend put a hand on his back and started rubbing it up and down in comfort. “This is the fear talking. You had a scare but Peter’s fine.”

Now that he’d started, Tony couldn’t seem to stop crying into his hands. It was like all the stress and fear and everything over the past few days was finally spewing from him. In the form of mortifying waterworks. Tony couldn’t even remember the last time he’d cried like this. Silent tears sometimes while he was alone, sure. But this? Not in forever.

“He’s fine.” Bruce continued. “And you and I both know you’re going to do absolutely everything you can to keep him safe as Spiderman. It’s going to be ok Tony. It’s going to be ok.”

“I can’t…I can’t lose him Bruce. I can’t.” Tony managed to say around the tears.

“I know.” Bruce yanked him into a hug so he was crying against Bruce instead of into his hands. “And you won’t. You won’t.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes I do. Because I know him and I know you. Peter’s going to be fine. The two of you are going to be fine.” Bruce kept rubbing his back.

But even with the reassurance Tony couldn’t seem to stop crying.

“I-I’m sorry.” He sputtered into Bruce’s chest.

“It’s ok.” Bruce said softly. “You’ve had a horrible week. You need to let it out. Just let it out.”

It was true. Seeing Peter hurt and being helpless to do anything about it had been absolute hell and now that he knew Peter was going to be fine and he finally had a moment to think and to breathe…it
was like he couldn’t breathe. All the panic and the terror he’d pushed aside and buried to be able to be there for Peter was resurfacing now. In a completely embarrassing way. But he couldn’t seem to stop and he knew Bruce wouldn’t judge. So he gave in and cried on Bruce as his friend held him tight.

An embarrassingly long period of time passed before Tony finally managed to calm down. He took a few deep breaths before he pulled away from Bruce, running a hand over his face to wipe his tears away as he sniffled.

“Thanks.” Tony snuck a glance at Bruce. The man looked worried about him but he didn’t see any pity there. He knew he wouldn’t.

“You ok?” Bruce asked, an arm still slung around his back.

“Yeah.” Tony croaked. “Sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Bruce said instantly. “You feel better?”

“Yeah.” Tony gave Bruce a small smile.

Bruce gave him a smile back.

“Can we not tell anyone about this?” Tony joked.

Bruce snorted. “Don’t worry. No one would believe me anyway.”

“True.” Tony smiled bigger. “How about we just never speak of it again?”

Bruce rolled his eyes as he gave Tony another pat on the back and stood. This was why Bruce was one of his best friends. He knew when to be there and he knew when to back off.

Bruce grabbed the remote and turned the TV on, cranking the volume down, as he walked back to his chair. The footage of the Avengers in New York played on the news station. They clearly had the situation well under control. Tony sighed. Well at least he wasn’t going to get called in to help. He got to stay here with Peter. He looked over at the kid…his son. He was still fast asleep. Thank god he hadn’t been witness to his little breakdown.

Tony laid back down on the loveseat, facing Peter instead of the TV. Apparently crying took it out of you. Who knew? He glanced over at Bruce who’d gone back to reading his medical journal. Bruce was awake. He’d get him if Peter needed him. Tony stared at Peter and when his eyes felt heavy and closed, he let them.

Something tapped his forehead. “Wake up sleeping beauty.”

Tony frowned.

“Wakey wakey.” The tapping got harder.

Tony blinked awake and flinched hard. Clint stood over him.

“God not the face I want to wake up to.” Tony complained.
Clint laughed. “Come on. Pizza’s here.”

Tony groaned and sat up, rubbing his eyes and hoping there wasn’t any evidence left on his face of his previous meltdown.

“How’d it go?” He asked Clint as he yawned.

“Fine. It was easy. Boring. You’re lucky you got to take a nap instead.” Clint clapped him on the shoulder then turned to walk to the kitchen where most of the other Avengers were grabbing pizza.

Tony stretched and stood. He walked over to where Peter still lay asleep on the other couch. He sat down and ran a hand through the kid’s hair.

“Peter.” He said quietly, trying to wake his son up less abruptly than Clint had woken him.

“Peter.” He tried a little louder.

He watched as Peter frowned slightly, eyes still closed.

“Wake up kiddo.”

The frown turned into flickering eyes that opened and easily found Tony’s.

“You hungry? It’s time for dinner.” Tony said as Peter yawned widely.

“What are we having?” Peter asked as he sat up. Tony caught the slight wince he tried to cover up but decided to wait until after Peter ate something to push more meds on him.

“Pizza. I ordered your favorite. Pepperoni and green olive.” Tony answered as he stood and helped pull Peter to his feet.

“That sounds amazing.” Peter said still rubbing his eyes as he made his way over to the kitchen.

“Hey Peter.” Steve smiled at him and handed him a plate, hovering almost as close as Tony.

“Hey Steve. How was the…elephant thing?” Peter turned to Tony for confirmation. He nodded.

“Dead as a doornail now.” Clint answered.

“Shh don’t tell the kid you killed Dumbo.” Bruce said then snorted as Tony laughed as well.

Peter just frowned at them like they were crazy. “Did I miss something?”

“No just something you said earlier.” Bruce explained.

Peter frowned deeper, clearly unsuccessfully trying to remember.

“Whatever.” Peter gave up and mumbled as he piled his plate high with pizza. It made Tony happy he was eating so much. He hadn’t had much of an appetite yet.

“So squirt did you figure out what movie we’re watching tonight?” Clint asked

Peter shrugged. “I don’t care. Whatever you guys want.”

“No you’re picking.” Clint said.

“I don’t want to pick.” Peter walked back to the couch and plopped down in the middle. Tony
followed right behind and sat next to him. Steve took the seat on Peter’s other side, obviously wanting to be close to the kid too. Tony knew this whole experience had shaken him as well.

“Pick a movie short stack!” Clint ordered as he sat down on the loveseat.

Peter raised an eyebrow at him and took a bite of pizza. “Fine but you owe me. Galaxy Quest.”

“Yes!” Clint pumped a fist in the air. Everyone knew Galaxy Quest was one of Clint’s favorite movies. “Play it F.R.I.D.A.Y.”

The movie started up. The rest of the Avengers filed in finding spots to sit. Some of them ended up on the floor. Tony made a mental note to make sure he had more furniture for the common room in the Tower.

Tony watched as Peter finished the pile of pizza slices on his plate. He held himself stiffly. Tony could tell he was in pain and trying to hide it. He dug into his pocket and pulled out the pill bottle, uncapping it and taking out one pill instead of two this time. He handed it to Peter who rolled his eyes.

“I’m fine.” Peter said.

Tony leaned over and spoke into Peter’s ear so no one else could hear. “Take it or I’ll have no choice but to embarrass you in front of everyone and you’ll end up taking it anyway.”

He straightened up and watched as Peter tried to figure out whether or not he was bluffing. Peter must’ve come to the conclusion he wasn’t because he took the pill from him with a huff. Smart kid.

“You’re being ridiculous.” Peter complained but swallowed the pill. Tony took it as a personal victory.

Near the end of Galaxy Quest Tony felt a weight fall against his arm. He looked over and found Peter had fallen asleep against him, head resting on his shoulder. He slowly snuck his arm up and behind the kid’s head, being careful not to wake him. He tugged Peter closer against him so his cheek settled against his upper chest before turning his attention back to the movie. He caught the other Avenger’s shooting amused glances at him but he ignored it. They’d all obviously been worried about him.

After Galaxy Quest they picked another movie but Tony said good night as he picked Peter up and carried him to the elevator. He took Peter to his room and settled him into bed before going to his own room. It was the first night he’d spent in his own bed since before he went to Japan. He crawled in and sighed. God it was so comfortable. He loved his bed with its perfect mattress and its high thread count Egyptian cotton sheets. He couldn’t remember the last time he fell asleep so fast.

“Boss it appears Peter had a nightmare.” F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s voice woke him up.

Tony groaned and turned to look at his alarm clock. It was 3:44am. Well at least he’d gotten some sleep. He buried his face into his pillow. He wanted to go to Peter but at the same time he wanted to see if Peter would come to him. Especially after the talk they’d had.

He waited, and just when he figured enough time had passed and he was ready to give up and go check on the kid himself, he heard his door open. Thank god. Maybe he was actually doing
something right. He listened with his face still pressed into his pillow as the kid slowly padded
toward his bed. He should make this easier for him and sit up but he knew he had to let it play out.
He had to make sure Peter would follow through. Would ask for what he needed.

Finally he could tell Peter stood right next to him but he didn’t make a sound.

Come on kid. You can do it. Tony thought but he didn’t so much as twitch as he waited.

A long minute passed before he heard the kid sigh heavily and then there was a hand on his back
shaking him lightly.

“Tony?”

Tony practically burst with happiness inside. Peter had come to him. Hadn’t been scared to ask him
for comfort. He rolled over and blinked the sleep out of his eyes as he finally got to look up at the
kid. He looked scared and kind of sick.

“Hey kiddo.” The greeting came out rough from sleep. “Did you have a bad dream?”

Peter nodded, eyes still wide and nervous. “I’m sorry I woke you up I just—”

“It’s ok.” Tony interrupted before Peter could say anything else.

“Crawl in.” Tony pulled the covers up on the other side of the bed.

Peter walked to the other side of the bed and didn’t hesitate to get in. Peter settled in on his stomach,
looking exhausted and already close to sleep again.

Tony reached an arm across and rubbed Peter’s back in comfort. “Do you want to talk now or in the
morning?”

“Morning.” Peter sighed as his eyes closed.

Tony nodded and closed his own eyes. “Ok. We’ll talk in the morning. You’re safe. I’m safe. I’m
right here. Wake me up if you need me ok?”

“Kay.” Peter mumbled into the pillow.

Tony forced himself to stay awake until he could tell Peter was asleep again then he dozed off within
seconds.

Peter woke slowly. His head and his ribs ached. He shifted uncomfortably and his eyes opened.
They were met with an unfamiliar ceiling. It took another few long seconds for the events of the
night before to come back. Right. He was in Tony’s room. In Tony’s bed. He turned his head to the
other side of the bed. It was empty. Tony must be awake already. The hologram clock on the
nightstand read 9:49am. Wow he’d slept a long time and he still didn’t really feel like getting up.

He remembered the last time he’d woken up in Tony’s bed. It’d been his first night here and he’d
been absolutely mortified he’d taken Tony Stark’s bed. They’d come a long way from that moment.
Tony was his Dad now. This was his Dad’s bed and he didn’t want to get up yet. He rolled over and
closed his eyes again, face scrunched into the pillow. He took a deep breath. It smelled like Tony. It
was relaxing. Comforting.
Speaking of Tony… Peter heard the door open.

“Hey kiddo. F.R.I.D.A.Y. said you were awake.” Tony said.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. lied.” Peter mumbled into the pillow. “Still sleeping.”

Tony chuckled and Peter felt him sit down on the edge of the bed.

“I made chocolate chip pancakes.” Tony tempted him. “Your favorite.”

“Really? I didn’t hear the smoke alarm go off.” Peter smiled into the pillow.

“That was one time.” Tony said.

Peter took another deep breath, savoring the feeling of warm safety before he rolled over onto his back and smiled up at Tony. “It was two times.”

Tony snorted then reached out and ran a thumb over his forehead. “This looks a lot better. It’s barely even bruised.”

“It feels better.” Peter said. He still had a headache but he’d gone over fourteen hours without any pain meds. His ribs kind of ached too, but overall he wasn’t feeling too bad.

“Good.” Tony said and kept studying him. Peter just waited. He knew what was coming.

“You want to tell me about your dream?”

Peter shrugged. “It was just like all the other ones. You died. I couldn’t save you.”

“I’m fine. I’m right here.” Tony reassured.

“I know that.” Peter rolled his eyes. Rationally he did know that, so he saw no reason why Tony would need to know that part of the reason he’d snuck into the man’s room last night was because he needed to reassure himself of that fact. Or that the reason he’d been able to fall asleep again so fast was because he’d been sure Tony was safe since he’d been right beside him.

“And it’s not your job to save me.” Tony said seriously.

Peter couldn’t keep the unconvinced look off his face. If it ever really came down to it there was no way he wouldn’t try to save Tony. He’d do anything to keep Tony alive. He couldn’t lose him. The mere thought of it left him feeling shaky and breathless. He’d lost everyone important to him. Tony was all he had left now. He wouldn’t survive losing him. He wouldn’t.

“Hey.” Tony frowned. Peter tried to school his expression. He hoped his thoughts hadn’t crossed his face but it seemed like they had. “I’m right here kiddo. You’re stuck with me.”

Peter tried to smile but it came out as more of a grimace.

“We’ll get through this ok? It’ll get better.” Tony reached out and ruffled his hair.

Peter nodded.

“Just remember I’m here for you. I’m glad you came to me last night. You can always come to me.”

Peter searched Tony’s face, looking for any hint of untruth and only finding sincerity.
Tony held his gaze unflinchingly before he gave him another small smile. “Ok? Pancakes?”

Peter nodded and sat up. “That sounds good.”

“Thanks Tony.” Peter said sincerely as he stood.

“Don’t mention it kid.” Tony slung an arm around him as they walked out to the kitchen.

The pancakes were great. Just what he needed. Somehow Tony always seemed to know exactly what he needed even when Peter himself didn’t. He was a good Dad like that.

Chapter End Notes

I think this chapter is a little more than 3/4 of the way through the story, but I'm definitely planning on doing a part 2 because I just have too many more ideas to get out yet! Thanks again for all your lovely comments. They really make my entire day! Let me know how you think this chapter turned out!
“Hey guys. Do you know where Tony went?” Peter greeted as he walked into the common room and looked around, not finding the man upon first glance. F.R.I.D.A.Y. had told him Tony was in the common room when he’d asked her upstairs, but he clearly wasn’t anymore. Tony and Peter had been watching a movie together on the couch upstairs but apparently Peter had fallen asleep and when he’d woken up he’d been alone. He’d been let out of Medbay four days ago and even though he’d healed enough so at least nothing hurt anymore, he still couldn’t make it a whole day without at least two naps. It was starting to frustrate him.

“How mean your Dad?” Steve corrected from where he sat sketching on the couch. “He just went downstairs to help Bruce to finish packing up the lab.”

Peter frowned at the Dad comment. Ever since Tony had adopted him the Avengers had started calling Tony his Dad whenever they talked to Peter about him. At first, Peter had thought it was just their weird backwards way to show they approved of the adoption, but now he wondered if it was for some other reason since it still hadn’t stopped and it’d even started to get more pointed and obvious like Steve’s little correction just now.

Peter sat down next to Steve. Wanda and Vision sat on the loveseat facing each other and playing what looked like Go Fish.

Rhodey, Clint, Sam, and Scott lounged on the floor right in front of the TV playing some shooter video game. It was the new one they’d apparently gotten about a week ago that they still hadn’t been able to beat. Frankly, Peter thought it seemed to be turning into somewhat of an unhealthy obsession, but he hadn’t had a chance to try it himself yet so he didn’t want to judge. And he didn’t think they’d let him join at the moment since it looked like they were in the middle of a game. They were so absorbed in it he didn’t think any of them had even noticed him walk in.

Peter sighed. He was bored and he knew he couldn’t go down and hang out with Tony and Bruce because the lab was off limits. Strictly. Tony had embarrassed him yesterday when he’d kicked him out in front of Bruce when Peter had just gone down to ask the man a question. Peter had thought he just couldn’t work down there for the next couple months but apparently Tony hadn’t been exaggerating when he’d said Peter wouldn’t be allowed to set foot there.

“Hey Steve do you want to go spar?” Peter tried.

Steve looked up at him over his sketchpad and raised both eyebrows. “Depends. Did Bruce say it’d be ok?”

“Yeah it’s totally fine. I’m good.” Peter lied.

“Ok so you won’t mind if I double check with your Dad?” Steve asked as he set the sketchpad down. There Steve went with the whole Dad thing again.

“No!” Peter said quickly. “I mean…never mind. I don’t really feel like sparring anymore actually.”

Rhodey snorted from his position on the floor while Steve just gave him a knowing look and went back to sketching.
“Dammit dammit. No no no. Shit!” Clint yelled at the screen where his character’s screen flashed red as he died.

“You idiot. How did you fall for that?” Sam shook his head but didn’t look away from his own character’s screen.

“Fuck you.” Clint tossed his remote.

“Hey—” Steve chastised from the couch.

“Yeah yeah language. I know.” Clint interrupted before Steve could say it himself. He stood and stretched.

“Hey rugrat when’d you get here?” Clint asked when he noticed him on the couch.

“A couple minutes ago.” Peter shrugged then threw a discreet sideways glance at Steve to make sure he wasn’t paying attention before asking. “Hey do you want to go down to the gym?”

“Peter.” Steve said his name like a warning without looking up from his sketch.

Peter gave a dramatic sigh and complained, “Come on. I’m fine.”

“Have Bruce corroborate that and then you can go do whatever you want.” Steve said.

Peter rolled his eyes. He knew if he asked Bruce right now he would lose.

“But I’m boooored.” Peter whined.

“I’ve got an idea.” Clint smirked. “Follow me kid.”

Peter got up and instantly started trailing Clint to the elevator.

“Where are you going?” Steve asked. He sounded suspicious.

“Don’t worry about it.” Clint replied in his most obnoxious fake Brooklyn accent.

“I can’t help it. I know you.” Steve wasn’t amused.

“Ouch.” Clint mimed taking a bullet to the heart but still avoided Steve’s question. Peter figured that boded well that where they were going would actually be something he’d enjoy.

“No gym!” Steve commanded as the elevator doors shut.

Clint gave Peter an evil smile and pushed the button for the gym.

“Yes!” Peter cheered. This is why he loved Clint.

“Don’t get too excited. We’re just making a pit stop there to mess with Captain Underpants.” Clint smirked.

“Oh.” Peter grinned. “Ok.”

They walked into the gym and wandered a slow circle around it before getting back into the elevator.

“That was probably just enough time for Cap to tattletale to your Dad.” Clint laughed and pushed the button for the garage this time.
Peter couldn’t hold back a laugh at the visual that evoked.

“Where are we really going?” Peter asked.

“Out.” Clint answered.

“I seem to remember you telling me something about never going somewhere with someone without knowing the plan first.”

Clint barked out a laugh. “Smart kid. You’ve got a good memory.”

Peter beamed but didn’t ask anything more as he followed Clint across the garage toward the archer’s car.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. if the squirt’s Dad asks I took him with me to run some errands.” Clint said out loud before he climbed into car. Peter crawled into the passenger side.

Clint started the car. “That counts as asking right?”

Peter laughed again. “Um sure?”

They sped out of the garage.

“Are we actually running errands?” Peter didn’t think that sounded all that fun, but it would still be better than sitting around the compound bored.

“Of course not. What do you take me for?” Clint pulled a pair of sunglasses on from the dash and then handed an extra pair to Peter. “I need some air. What about you? Do you need some air?”

“Yeah air sounds good.” Peter nodded.

“Great. There’s this waterfall hike nearby that I think you’ll like.”

“Really? That’s awesome!”

The drive only took about twenty minutes and it passed quickly. It was easy spending time with Clint. Probably because he was just a big kid at heart.

Peter got out of the car where they’d parked off the side of the road. He waited as Clint grabbed a backpack out of the backseat and shouldered it before making his way toward a narrow unmarked dirt path along the side of the road.

“You didn’t take me out here to murder me and hide my body did you?” Peter joked after seeing the sketchiness of the hiking path.

“Damn. You got me.” Clint deadpanned.

Peter chuckled as he followed the archer further along the path. It was really beautiful. The path was well packed with dirt and after thirty feet or so it gradually opened up into a wider trail. The forest around them was dense but the sun still trickled through the foliage. Peter took a deep breath. He loved the smell of the fresh woody air.

They’d walked for twenty minutes or so along a moderate incline when Clint stopped to dig through his backpack. He pulled out an unopened water bottle and threw it at Peter who caught it deftly.

Peter uncapped it and downed half of it. A thin sheen of sweat had broken out across his forehead.
Usually this kind of exertion would be nothing to him, but now he realized he felt a little tired and winded. Clint’s eyes narrowed at him.

“You sure you’re up for this?” Clint asked. “We can turn around if you want.”

“No! I’m fine. This is great.”

Clint watched him a little longer before he gave a small nod. “Ok let’s keep going. We’re almost halfway there.”

When Clint started off again he slowed their pace down but Peter didn’t mention it. After another fifteen minutes of hiking they reached a stream and the trail turned to flank it. The rumbling of the brook was soothing. Peter felt like nature was melting all his stress away.

Clint made them take a couple more breaks as they finished hiking the rest of the way. The entire hike ended up taking a little over an hour. The trailhead ended at a large waterfall that cascaded into a pool that became the river they’d been following. The spray carried toward him and cooled his hot skin. Peter could see a rainbow in the mist at the base of the waterfall. It was beautiful.

“Wow.” Peter whispered.

Clint smiled at him and led them over to large tree and sat down so his back was against it. He patted the ground next to him and Peter followed suit and sat. He had to admit he was pretty tired from the hike, but not in a whoops he’d overdone it way. It was more of the satisfied worn out feeling he got after a hard workout.

Clint handed him a bag of trail mix and another bottle of water. Peter took them readily. They sat in companionable silence for a while just watching the waterfall as they ate. Peter made quick work of the entire bag of trail mix so Clint handed him a granola bar.

“How’d you find this place?” Peter broke the silence when he’d finished snacking.

“I have my ways.” Clint said mysteriously.

“Pinterest huh?” Peter joked and Clint rolled his eyes. Peter watched as Clint toed off his shoes and rolled up his pants and waded in the shallow part of the pool. Peter got up and instantly copied him. They waded around and hunted for cool river rocks and tried to find the best ones to skip across the water. When their feet got numb from the cold, they climbed up on a big rock at the edge and dried off in the sun. The sun warmed his face where the waterfall’s spray licked at it. He was so relaxed. Peter felt himself start to doze off. Just as he was on the edge of sleep, Clint nudged him.

“Hey squirt we should probably head back.”

“Ok.” Peter agreed and blinked away the sleepiness from his eyes as he put his shoes and socks back on. He yawned and followed Clint back down the trail away from the waterfall. He threw another glance back, trying to take a mental snapshot of nature’s splendor.

“Thanks Clint.” Peter said appreciatively.

“Don’t mention it. I needed to get out.” Clint smiled at him. “It’s the one thing I’m going to miss when we move back to the city.”

“But the Avengers aren’t selling the compound. It’s still going to be headquarters right? You can still
come up here.” Tony had explained the plan to keep HQ upstate to him a couple days ago.

“True.” Clint agreed. “Just can’t be as spontaneous about it.”

“Yeah.” Peter nodded. “Are you looking forward to moving back to the city though?”

“Does a bear shit in the woods?” Clint turned around to raise an eyebrow at him.

“You’re so classy.” Peter teased.

“What about you?” Clint asked. “Are you excited to be going back?”

“Yeah. I’m just glad I get to go back to my school. And it’ll make the whole Spiderman thing a lot easier.”

“You’re going to like the Tower. It makes the compound look like a cheap motel.” Clint stepped over a tree trunk and held a small branch out of the way as Peter followed.

“Really?”

“Uh huh. There’s a bowling alley and a pool and a basketball court.”

“What? No way.”

“Way.”

“Tony didn’t tell me that.” Peter couldn’t believe the man hadn’t mentioned that.

“Maybe your Dad wanted to surprise you. Or he forgot. You can never really tell with him.”

Peter snorted. That was true. At least Clint hadn’t corrected him when he hadn’t called Tony his Dad. Although the constant Dad Dad Dad all the Avengers were throwing at him was starting to mess with his thoughts a little. He was starting to think of Tony that way in his head because that’s how everyone always talked about him now. Like when he’d woken up alone on the couch earlier he’d wondered where his Dad had gone instead of where Tony had gone.

The hike back down almost felt harder, which seemed counterintuitive because it was downhill, but after fifteen minutes his legs kind of felt like jelly and he was tuckered out. Usually he’d be napping right now.

Well screw you body. Tough it out. You don’t need a nap. Stop being a baby. One nap a day is bad enough. You’re Spiderman. Peter thought angrily to himself. He’d caught Clint discretely watching him and he knew he probably looked wiped out.

They were only about a third of the way back down when Peter tripped over nothing and would’ve gone sprawling forward except Clint turned at the noise and caught him under the armpits.

“Let’s take a break.” Clint suggested as he righted him and looked him over. Peter could see the worry on his face. He guided Peter to sit down against a tree along the trail and handed him some water. Peter took a few sips as Clint crouched down in front of him.

“Maybe you weren’t up for this yet. I forgot how steep this trail was.” Clint said.

“No I’m ok.” Peter denied. “Just give me a minute.”

Clint reached out and grabbed his wrist. For a second Peter thought he wanted the water bottle but
then he realized he was taking his pulse. He tried to pull away but Clint had a good grip on him. He seemed dismayed when he finally let go.

“I’m sorry kid. This was a bad idea.” Clint apologized.

“No it wasn’t.” Peter argued. “It was a great idea.”

Clint gave him a little half smile before he stood and pulled his phone out of his pocket.

“What are you doing?” Peter frowned.

“Nothing.” Clint started texting something on his phone. “Don’t worry. Just rest for a bit ok?”

Peter sighed and closed his eyes, letting his head fall back against the tree. Maybe if he could just take a quick power nap he’d have enough energy to make it the rest of the way back down.

Tony picked his phone up from his workbench when it buzzed with a new text message alert. He’d spent the last few hours with Bruce safely packing up the more hazardous items in the lab, and they’d just finished. The explosion had done a lot of superficial damage but very little had actually been destroyed, so there’d still been a surprising amount left to pack for the move. Bruce had just left and Tony was about to do the same.

*Hey can you come get your kid?* Tony frowned at the new message from Clint.

*Why? Is he sick of you already?* Tony asked and then frowned as he checked his watch. F.R.I.D.A.Y. had told him Clint had taken Peter out to run errands after Tony had rushed up to the gym when Steve had told him Clint had taken Peter there, only to be met with an empty room. Clint and his twisted sense of humor. That had been almost three hours ago. Kind of a long time for errands.

*No. So don’t get mad but we’re not actually running errands.*

Tony’s eyebrows flew up at that. No good ever followed when Clint prefaced something with ‘don’t get mad’.

*What have you been doing? Why do I need to pick Peter up? He better be with you.* Tony texted back quickly.

*Calm down. He’s with me. He’s just a little tired.* Tony frowned at Clint’s response.

*Stop talking in riddles. What’s going on?* Tony was getting impatient.

*I took the squirt hiking but I think he’s too wiped out to make it back to the car.*

Tony’s blood boiled.

*You did WHAT?*

*I know. I’m sorry ok. Can you just come get him? I don’t really want to have to piggyback him down. I don’t really think he’d let me and I don’t want him to hurt himself trying to tough it out.*

*Where are you?* Tony sighed as walked over to the armor.
I just told you we were hiking Einstein. The middle of nowhere. Just track my phone.

Tony did. He found the location and sent the coordinates to his suit.

I’ll be there in five minutes. And you’re on my shit list.

I know.

It only took him a few minutes to make it there. He landed in front of Clint on the trail and stepped out of the armor. His anger must’ve shown on his face because the man took a little step back when he looked at him. Clint motioned to where Peter sat, asleep against a tree but unharmed.

“Listen I’m sorry ok? The kid was bored so I thought he’d like to go for a walk.” Clint apologized quietly, obviously trying not to wake Peter up.

“He would’ve been fine with a walk. This is not a walk.” Tony hissed as his indicated the steep trail they stood on. “Jesus Christ Barton. He’s still healing and you traipse him up Everest?”

Clint rolled his eyes. “We were on our way back down not up. And it’s not that steep. Usually he could run up and down this without breaking a sweat.”

“Yeah when he’s healthy. Which he’s not yet. He still sleeps like five hours a day.”

“Well I wouldn’t have taken him here if I’d known that. It’s not my fault you don’t share any of that information with us.” Clint tried to defend himself.

“If you’d told me what you were actually planning to do instead of some bullshit about running errands I would’ve told you it was a bad idea. Goddammit! This is why I want you idiots to talk to me first when it comes to my kid!” Tony’s eyes flashed.

Clint sighed. “Sorry.”

Tony glared at him.

“Look he’s fine.” Clint placated. “He’s just tired. He probably could’ve even made it down but I didn’t want to risk it.”

“How considerate of you.” Tony retorted but his tone didn’t have as much bite to it.

“You know I care about the kid.”

The kicker was Tony did know.

“I wouldn’t do anything to hurt him.” Clint’s voice was uncharacteristically soft and sincere.

“Yeah I know.” Tony sighed and ran a hand through his hair.

Clint nodded and looked away.

“If I take him back will you be fine to make it down by yourself?” The question itself was unspoken forgiveness.

“Yeah. And I’ve got my phone on me just in case.”

Tony nodded and then walked over to Peter. He knelt down in front of him and gave him a gentle shake. Peter’s eyes opened easily. That was one thing that was getting better. He wasn’t as hard to
wake up. He could see the confusion that crossed Peter’s face at seeing him there.

Peter rubbed his eyes, still half asleep, and gave him a little frown before asking with bewilderment. “Dad?”

Peter glanced around. “What? How’d you get here?”

Tony was still stuck on the whole getting called Dad thing. It was the first time Peter had addressed him that way. Sure Steve had told him Peter had called him that before but he hadn’t been there to hear it. He couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face.

“He’s Ironman remember? He took the armor.” Good thing Clint answered for him because it hadn’t even registered that Peter had asked him a question. The archer sounded way too amused. He clearly knew the moniker had affected him.

“Did Clint call you?” Peter sounded offended now as he pushed off the ground to stand and Tony stood with him. “Because he shouldn’t have. I’m fine. I can make it back to the car.”

“I’m sure you could but you’re not going to. Come on. You’re coming back with me so you can take a nap in your own soft clean bed instead of against this hard dirty tree.” Tony gently pulled Peter with him toward the Ironman armor.

“But—” Tony could tell he was tired because he barely put up a token resistance.

“Nope. No buts except yours in bed.”

“What about Clint? We can’t just leave him.” Peter frowned.

“Birdbrain will be fine.”

“I’ll be fine kid.” Clint gave him a half wave. “I’ll see you back at the compound.”

Tony got back into the armor and swept Peter up and took off before he had a chance to argue.

As soon as they were in the air Peter started wiggling.

“What are you doing?” Tony frowned.

“I want to see if I can see the waterfall from up here.” Peter answered and then tried to crane to see behind them. It set his balance off and Tony had to correct quickly to keep Peter in his arms.

“Hey! Hold still. I don’t want to drop you.” Tony ordered.

“You wouldn’t drop me.” Peter rolled his eyes but stopped moving. Tony smiled at the absolute certainty in Peter’s tone.

Peter settled down and watched the ground pass below for the rest of the short trip. Tony could tell he was tired but trying not to show it. They landed on the roof of the compound and Tony set Peter back on his feet before stepping out of the armor and leading him to the elevator. He let F.R.I.D.A.Y fly the suit back through the open hatch down to the workshop.

When they got down to their suite Tony gave Peter a suggestive nudge toward his room. “Go take a nap. I’ll wake you up for dinner.”

Peter didn’t even grumble at what he usually perceived as babying. He headed straight to his bedroom. He must be exhausted. Fucking Clint.
Tony spent the next ten minutes picking up around the kitchen and the living room. He loved Peter but the kid was messy. When he got everything back in order he wandered over to Peter’s room to check on him. He was dead to the world, sprawled out face down on top of the covers, shoes still on. Tony sighed as he gently pulled his son’s sneakers off and unfurled the blanket at the foot of the bed and covered him with it. Clint was definitely still on his shit list. He shut Peter’s door quietly behind him and made his way down to the common room.

“Hey Tony.” Steve greeted.

“Hey. Have they been there all day?” Tony asked as he sat down on the couch next to Steve and gestured to Rhodey, Sam, and Scott in front of the TV.

“Yep.” Steve answered with amusement.

“That’s sad.” Tony shook his head.

“Shut up. You have no idea what you’re missing out on!” Sam said.

“No I mean it’s sad you still haven’t managed to beat that stupid game.” Tony taunted.

Rhodey flipped him off.

Tony glanced back over at Steve and couldn’t keep the huge smile off his face. “Guess what.”

“What?” Steve raised an eyebrow at him.

“Peter called me Dad.” He examined his fingernails as he said it, like it wasn’t the huge deal it actually was and delight wasn’t practically bubbling from him.

He looked back up at Steve who had just as big of a smile on his face.

“I don’t think he even realized he did it.” Tony added.

“I mean he was still kind of half asleep.” Tony’s brow furrowed in thought.

“Maybe he didn’t mean to say it. Should I ask him if he meant to say it? Is this something I should talk to him about?” Tony nervously rambled.

“No. Don’t make it into a big deal. You don’t want Peter to start overthinking it. Like you are right now. Just enjoy it and let it be.” Steve advised.

“So you don’t think I should say anything? Not even to tell him it’s ok if he wants to call me that?” Tony didn’t know why he suddenly felt so insecure.

“I think you should say nothing.” Steve reiterated.

“Listen to Steve. Say nothing. Otherwise the kid’s going to get all in his head. You know how he is.” Rhodey added. Tony hadn’t thought they’d been listening.

“Yeah don’t make it weird.” Sam threw in his two cents.

“Fine.” Tony acquiesced and watched them play the stupid video game for about ten minutes before he got bored. How could they play that thing all day?

Finally, he couldn’t take it anymore, so he did what he did best and brought the attention back to himself. “Hey listen up! Since everyone’s here, I want to make a blanket reminder announcement
“Not everyone’s here.” Scott interrupted. “Like only half of us are here right now.”

“That the moving company I hired will be here in two days to move everything so if your shit’s not all packed up by then it’s your problem. Not mine.” Tony continued loudly, ignoring Scott.

“I’m already packed.” Rhody said.

“Yeah me too.” Sam said.

“I packed last week. I can’t wait to get out of here.” Scott chimed in.

“Steve?” Tony asked when he remained conspicuously silent.

“I’ll pack tomorrow.” Steve said as he shaded something intently on his sketch.

“Who would’ve guessed Captain America would be the procrastinator of the group?” Tony joked.

“Are you packed?” Steve jabbed him with the back of his pencil.

“That’s neither here nor there.”

Steve snorted.

“Yeah don’t act all high and mighty. We all know that out of all of us here you’re going to be the one that’s not packed and ready.” Sam said.

That was…probably true. He hadn’t actually started packing yet. Guess he knew what he was going to spend all day tomorrow doing. Or he could hire some people to do it for him. Yeah who he was kidding? That was what he was going to do.

“Hey who wants Thai for dinner?” Scott asked abruptly.

“We’re not having Thai. I’m making lasagna.” Tony announced.

He thought everyone was being a little dramatic when they paused their video game and turned to look at him skeptically.

“What?” He asked.

“You’re cooking?” Rhody asked.

“You guys do know I cook for Peter like all the time now right?” Tony quirked an eyebrow.

“Is that why he’s so skinny?” Sam joked.

“Hey I do ok!” Tony defended. “It’s been weeks since I set off the fire alarm. Right F.R.I.D.A.Y?”

“That is correct boss.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. answered. She didn’t sound very impressed.

“Peter called me Dad so I’m making lasagna.” Tony declared.

“That makes absolutely no sense. Those two things are in no way related.” Rhody frowned.

“But doesn’t lasagna take like a couple hours to make?” Scott frowned.
“Yes which is why I’m going to go start on it right now.” Tony said as he stood.

“So when this doesn’t turn out, can we order Thai?” Scott asked.

Tony threw a throw pillow at him.

Peter snapped awake. He’d had some kind of weird dream. He couldn’t remember the details of it now but he knew it hadn’t been a nightmare. He was always unlucky enough to remember those. He rolled over and clutched at the blanket. Blanket? He frowned. He remembered being too tired to do anything but collapse on top of his bed earlier. But now he was under his throw blanket and someone had taken his shoes off. His Dad. He stretched. Dad. Dad. Why was that niggling something in the back of his mind?

Peter sat up in bed abruptly. Had he called Tony Dad earlier? He wracked his brain. When he’d woken up against that stupid tree he’d been dead tired and his defenses had been down and he’d said… Oh shit. He had hadn’t he? But Tony hadn’t said anything. Maybe he hadn’t noticed? Or maybe he didn’t care? Maybe he’d liked it? Peter remembered he’d smiled at him. Had he smiled at him because he’d called him Dad? Why hadn’t he realized he’d done it at the time? Oh man, had he called him Dad before and not realized it? He didn’t think so…

This was all the team’s fault. They’d planted it in his head with their constant Dad this Dad that talk. God he was so embarrassed. He ran a hand down his face and flopped back on his pillow. He stared at the ceiling and tried to figure out whether or not he should say anything to Tony. Maybe he should apologize. But that’d be weird because Tony was his Dad now so calling him that hadn’t been wrong per se. And he wasn’t actually sorry about calling him that. Just embarrassed. And bringing it up would just bring attention to it and be even more embarrassing. So maybe he should just ignore it. Pretend it didn’t happen.

“Hey kiddo time to get up!” The object of his thoughts burst through the door. Peter was glad his room was dark because he felt his cheeks heat at the sight of the man.

“How long have you been awake?” Tony frowned when he noticed Peter wasn’t asleep.

“Like ten seconds.” Peter yawned and stretched again. It’d probably been more like a couple minutes but whatever. “I was trying to decide if I wanted to get up.”

“Yes you definitely want to get up. It’s time for dinner. I made lasagna.” How was Tony so full of energy? He seemed almost peppy.

“Come on we’re eating downstairs with the team. Chop chop.” Tony prompted when Peter just kept staring at him.

“Do they know you made the lasagna?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes. And if we don’t get down there it’ll all be gone because I’ll have you know I make an amazing lasagna.”
“Uh huh.” Peter said skeptically still making no move to get up.

“I’ll have F.R.I.D.A.Y. turn the sprinklers on.”

“Empty threat.” Peter laughed. That was Tony’s favorite taunt to get him out of bed.

“Maybe before, but now we’re moving out the day after tomorrow so if you have to sleep on the couch for a couple nights…” Tony shrugged like it’d be no big deal.

“I’m getting up.” Peter sighed and crawled out of bed. “But because I was going to anyway not because I believe you.”

“Whatever you need to tell yourself.”

Peter ran a hand through his hair a couple times and followed Tony to the elevator. His shirt was wrinkled from sleeping in it so he tried to smooth it out with his hands without any improvement. Whatever. It wasn’t like any of the Avengers would care.

When they walked into the common room, Peter huffed a laugh. Rhodey and Sam were still playing that ridiculous game. Scott looked like he was pouting on the couch. He’d apparently died in the game.

“Are we going to have to stage an intervention soon?” Peter asked, motioning to them.

“I was just wondering that myself.” Steve joked where he finished tossing a salad in the kitchen. “Come eat guys or I’m unplugging it.”

After some well meaning complaining, the video game was saved and turned off and all the team sat down to eat.

Peter plopped down in the empty seat next to Clint.

“Hey kid.” Clint grinned when he saw him. “You good?”

“Yeah.” Peter smiled back. He didn’t really want Clint to start talking about this afternoon. He didn’t want the rest of the Avengers to know they’d gone hiking and he’d been too weak to make it back and he’d needed his Dad to come get him. It was embarrassing. Thankfully, Clint seemed to sense he didn’t want to discuss it because he didn’t say anything more.

Peter took a bite of lasagna. “Wow. This actually is really good.”

“Don’t sound so surprised.” Tony said from where he sat on his other side. “I told you I make a mean lasagna.”

“It is good. Thanks Tony.” Steve agreed.

The rest of the Avengers followed suit, and Peter could tell Tony was pleased. He told them it was his Mom’s recipe, which made more sense since Peter was pretty sure he remembered Tony’s Mom had been Italian. Dinner was nice. The conversation flowed freely and Peter took the time to be thankful that the team was moving with them to New York. He really would’ve missed them otherwise.

After dinner some of the team scattered to work on packing but a lot of them decided to stay to watch a movie.

“Come look at what I picked up on the drive home.” Clint elbowed Peter as the rest of the group
walked toward the living room.

Peter followed him into the kitchen where the archer pulled out a stack of pies from the fridge.

“Dessert?” Clint asked him.

“Yes!”

“Hey who wants pie? I’ve got blueberry, cherry, peach, and apple.” Clint called out to the others in the living room.

Everyone wanted pie. Of course. Peter helped Clint dish it up. Clint cut and plated the pieces while Peter did the whipped cream and delivery honors.

“What kind do you want squirt?” Clint asked when they were the only two left without pie.


“How about one of each?”

“Perfect.” Peter grinned.

Clint dished the pie up and then took a piece of blueberry for himself. Peter topped his own slices with whipped cream.

“What about me?” Clint asked when Peter was about to set the Rediwhip canister down.

“Oh you want some?” Peter shook the can up.

“Yeah. Whipped cream me up.”

“Well if you insist.” Peter didn’t really know what came over him but suddenly he was spraying Clint in the face with the container.

The look of absolute shock on Clint’s face was totally worth it. So was seeing him covered in whipped cream. It was glorious. Peter laughed manically.

“What’s going on over there?” Steve asked. Peter realized Clint was partially hidden behind a beam so none of the Avengers in the living room could see what’d just happened. Too bad.

Clint licked his lips first then wiped a hand across his eyes and tossed the whip cream from his hand down onto the counter.

“Oh kid you’re so dead.” Clint threatened and then lunged at him.

Peter still cackled as he dodged and took off running, still holding the can. Clint chased right behind him, face partially covered in whipped cream. Peter’s feet took him toward the living room because if he was going down then the rest of the team was going to see Clint in all his creamed up glory first.

They all burst out laughing when they caught sight of Clint. Ha. Victory. Peter ran in a circle around the living room then toward the kitchen table. There wasn’t enough space for him to gain much speed on the archer, so he couldn’t get enough ground between them to try to escape up a wall. He needed a different strategy. He paused at the kitchen table so he and Clint were on opposite sides. When Clint zigged, Peter zagged, keeping the table between them.

“Give up now and maybe I’ll go easy on you.” Clint offered.
“Never!” Peter taunted. “You can’t catch me.”

Clint’s eyes glinted at the challenge. “We’ll see about that.”

The next second the archer bounded over the table. Peter’s eyes widened and he just narrowly escaped. Clint almost got a handful of his t-shirt. Peter sprinted back toward the living room. The Avengers hadn’t stopped watching them. Peter feinted right and then went left. He thought he was being clever but apparently Clint hadn’t fallen for it because the time he’d sacrificed to try to fake him out gave the archer opportunity to catch up with him. Suddenly he was being tackled. He let out a little grunt of surprise even as Clint carefully cushioned his fall so he didn’t hit the ground and instead landed on top of the archer.

“Hey! Careful!” Peter heard Tony warn Clint tensely and Peter opened his mouth to reassure him he was fine when suddenly Clint started attacking his sides with his fingers. Oh god Clint was tickling him. This was worse than getting whipped creamed. Peter thrashed as he giggled.

“Ticklish huh?” Clint taunted.

Peter laughed as rolled on the floor and brought the can of whipped cream up and emptied it into Clint’s face again in defense but the man still didn’t relent, although the rest of the team clearly found the whole spectacle hilarious.

“S-s-stop.” He could barely talk. He was insanely ticklish. He let go of the can so he’d have two hands to try to defend himself, but even then he couldn’t seem to gain enough control to push the other man away.

“N-no more.” Peter giggled. “I give. I-I give!”

“I don’t accept your surrender.” Clint grinned evilly and just kept tickling him. He deftly dodged any attempt Peter made to dislodge him. God this was so embarrassing. How could Clint be winning? He wasn’t even enhanced.

“H-help.” Peter tried appeal to the Avengers. Peter guessed he didn’t sound distressed enough for anyone to actually help him since he was giggling madly, but really he was getting a little desperate for it to stop. He was maybe even regretting spraying Clint in the face with the Rediwhip. Just a little. Maybe.

“No one’s going to help you squirt. This is well deserved.” Clint teased.

“Gah. S-stop.” Peter tried swatting Clint’s hands away but they just came right back before he could escape and tickled him harder.

“D-Dad.” Peter implored. The last resort plea just slipped out in his desperation. Peter had meant to say Tony but for some reason Dad had come out. He wasn’t exactly clear headed at the moment on account of the tickle torture.

“All right that’s enough.” Tony said and then suddenly Clint released him as he fell sideways. Peter caught his breath on the ground and realized Tony must’ve given Clint a little kick to get him off. They were on the floor right in front of the couch where Tony, Steve, and Bruce sat.

Peter watched as Clint shot Tony a challenging look before he snatched the Rediwhip container off the floor and sprayed Peter in the face before getting up. Ok tickle tortured and covered in whipped cream. Maybe not worth it to mess with Clint. He just laid there and tried to finish catching his breath.
“Don’t make me separate the two of you. I will if you can’t play nice together.” Tony joked.

“He started it.” Clint simply said as he walked back to the kitchen.

“Yeah real mature. It’s not like you’re the adult.” Tony scoffed.

Peter lifted a hand to his face to wipe the whipped cream off his eyes as he sat up.

Clint came back with a clean face, his and Peter’s two plates of pie balanced in one hand, and a towel. Clint tossed the towel at him and handed Peter’s pie plate to Tony before he sat down on the loveseat next to Natasha and started eating his own pie.

Peter wiped the whipped cream off his face with the towel and then staggered to a stand before sitting down between Tony and Steve on the couch. Tony handed him his plate as Bruce pushed play on the remote. Apparently they’d already decided on a movie.

Peter decided the whipped cream tasted much better on his pie than on his face. He focused on the screen and tried to ignore the delayed embarrassment he felt at the fact that he’d accidentally slipped up and called Tony Dad again. This time in front of everyone. It was a little atypical that no one was teasing him right now. Maybe it wasn’t as big of a deal as he was making it out to be. Or more likely it was a big deal, which was why no one was razzing him. Tony wasn’t saying anything about it either. If he didn’t want Peter to call him that he’d tell him right? Peter took another bite of pie and decided to think more about it later. The movie playing had potential. Overall today hadn’t been bad. Not bad at all.

Chapter End Notes

He finally said the D word! What'd you guys think? Believable? This was such a fun chapter to write I just kept going with it and it ended up a lot longer than I planned. Probably because Clint’s one of my favorite Avengers to write. Thanks again for all the lovely feedback! I’m not kidding when I say it makes my day! Let me know how this chapter went! And if there were any particular favorite parts.
“This place is so awesome!” Peter practically skipped as he took in their new suite at the Tower. Their living room and kitchen were bigger than the one at the compound and everything just seemed sleeker, shinier, newer. And the wall to wall windows were amazing. Peter decided instantly those were his favorite part. The view was unprecedented. He dropped his duffel bag on the ground and sprinted to the windowed door that led to the balcony, yanking it open and stepping outside. No actually this was his favorite part. The balcony was amazing! There was a grill and some lawn chairs. Peter bounded over to the chest high railing and pushed himself up on his hands so he could lean over, trying to find a good spot on this building or another close by building he could use to web to as Spiderman in the future.

He leaned further over. Maybe he saw a good spot… He brought his knee up on the railing to try to see better. Suddenly a hand grabbed his t-shirt and yanked him backwards back onto the balcony ground.

“Jesus kid. Are you trying to give me a heart attack?” Tony asked, looking a little spooked when Peter turned to look at him.

“Come on.” Peter laughed. “I’m Spiderman remember?”

“Yeah and that would definitely save you if you fell from here without your *webshooters.*” Tony chastised.

Peter blushed. Oh whoops. That’s right. They were packed up and not on his wrists right now. Whatever. There was no way he would’ve fallen.

“I was just trying to see if this was a good spot to jump off from.” Peter tried to explain, but if anything, Tony just paled further.

“No jumping from balconies or out windows without adult supervision.” Tony said sternly.

“But—”

“Nope. No arguing. I reserve the right to spot you until I know it’s safe.”

Peter rolled his eyes.

“I’ve jumped off buildings tons of times.” Peter boasted as they walked back inside.

“Yeah not really making me feel better.” Tony responded.

“Hey can I go out as Spiderman tonight?” Peter asked excitedly. It’d been way too long and being back in the city made him itch to get back to it.

“Oh I’m sorry did I miss the part where Bruce cleared you?” Tony bantered as he picked up Peter’s duffel bag and started walking toward a hallway off the living room.

“But I’m fiiiiine.” Peter whined as he followed.

“So that nap you took in the car on the way here was because you were bored with me?” Tony
called him out.

Peter sighed heavily.

“This is your room.” Tony indicated the door in front of him and waited as Peter stepped forward and opened it.

“Wow.” Peter said appreciatively when he entered. The room was twice the size of the one at the compound and all his furniture was already in place. Tony had hired people to pack everything up and move it. Peter hadn’t needed to lift a finger, which was definitely not something he was used to. He noticed there was new stuff too. He had his own little lounge area in the corner with a small couch and a beanbag chair in front of a TV console. His desk was in the opposite corner. His dresser was by his bed and he had his own walk in closet. His own bathroom. And his own balcony!

“This is so awesome!” Peter explored the room, taking everything in. His feet unconsciously led him to the balcony door. He opened it and stuck his head out. It was more of a Juliette balcony, just a couple feet of space and a railing, but it’d definitely work for coming and going as Spiderman.

“Yeah let’s go ahead and lock that for now F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Tony said once Peter came back in the room.

“Wait what? No!” Peter protested. He tried the door he’d just closed and found it stuck. “Come on!”

Tony snorted.

“Why’d you give me the room with the balcony if I can’t even use it?” Peter asked.

“I didn’t. They’re in all the rooms.”

“Really?” Wow this place really was fancy.

Tony nodded and set Peter’s duffel down on the floor by his bed.

“You like it?” Tony asked after a few more seconds of watching Peter wander around.

“Are you kidding? I love it!” He really really did.

Tony shot him a pleased smile.

“All right let me show you the rest of the place.”

Tony led him back out. Tony’s bedroom was right across the hall from him. The room down from Peter’s was an extra guest room and the room next to Tony’s was his office. That was kind of nice. Peter wouldn’t have to go too far to find the man when he was working. There was also an extra bathroom at the end of the hall.

“Where’s the workshop?” Peter asked curiously as they walked back out to the living room together. He sat down on the couch and Tony followed to sit down next to him.

“Below us.”

Peter huffed. Of course it was below them. They were in the penthouse. Everything was below them.

“Can we go see it?” If their suite was this much cooler than the one at the compound how much more awesome was the workshop?
“Depends. Has it been two months already?” Tony raised an eyebrow at him.

“Seriously?” Peter complained.

“Seriously.” Tony deadpanned.

“This sucks.”

“It wouldn’t be a good punishment if it didn’t suck.” Tony responded flippantly as he pulled out his phone.

Peter rolled his eyes when he thought Tony wasn’t looking.

“I saw that.” Tony tapped at his phone.

“What?” Peter asked innocently.

Tony glanced up at him unimpressed.

“Hey can I go visit Ned later?” Peter hadn’t seen his friend since before he’d gotten hurt.

“Not tonight.”

“Why not?” Tony was saying no to him? He almost never said no to him. Although when Peter thought about it he hadn’t really had a lot of opportunities to do so this past summer.

“The team has some kind of housewarming party thing planned for tonight.” Tony flapped his hand as he read something on his phone, only half paying attention.

“Oh ok. Cool! Well I could go now and still be back in time for it.” Peter offered the perfect solution. He could explore the rest of the Tower later. He got to live here after all.

“Not today Peter.” Tony repeated.

“How about tomorrow?”

Tony looked up at him and furrowed his brow slightly.

“Why don’t you have Ned come over here tomorrow?” Tony suggested, but that just sounded stressful. Peter knew Ned was going to flip out the first time he came over. Actually probably every time he came over. He didn’t really feel up to dealing with that yet.

“Why can’t I go there?” Peter blinked. He didn’t understand why Tony seemed reluctant to let him visit his friend. It couldn’t be because of the whole suit hacking incident could it? Otherwise why would he have let him visit all those times before without protest?

“You still need to cool it for a little while.”

“I’m visiting Ned. Not going out as Spiderman.” Peter scoffed. Cool it? It wasn’t like he and Ned were going to be roughhousing.

“I want you where I can keep an eye on you for now. When you’re feeling better you can go to Ned’s.” Tony stated as if that was completely reasonable. Peter felt his temper flare. He couldn’t go out as Spiderman yet, and now he couldn’t even see his friend just because he fatigued a little easier than usual. What the hell?
“Oh my god! I feel fine. I’m fine! What’s it going to take for you and Bruce to believe me?” Peter yelled as he gestured animatedly and stood from the couch.

Tony’s eyebrows shot up at the outburst. Peter glared at him with his arms crossed for a couple more seconds, daring the man to speak and suddenly itching for a fight, but Tony just calmly watched him. The frustration dancing under his skin begged for an outlet.

“You-you’re being so ridiculous!” He turned with a huff and an eye roll and stomped back to his room and slammed the door.

“I love you too!” He heard Tony call after him and it just pissed him off more.

He stood in his room with hands clenched at his sides and seethed. For a second he rationally admitted that yeah he was a little mad at Tony but mainly he was mad at himself and his body for being so slow to heal. The constant irritation over being subpar for the past week was eating away at him and now it’d inevitably boiled over. He paced back and forth trying to cool down but after fifteen minutes he was just more worked up. He wanted to be fine. No he was fine. He was. He could prove it.

He eyed the open area in his new room. Definitely enough for some small scale acrobatics. Before he could second guess his decision, he flipped a few times and then ended on a backward summersault, sticking the landing easily. Before he could second guess his decision, he flipped a few times and then ended on a backward summersault, sticking the landing easily. But just as he smirked at his success the world gave a sharp tipsy turn like his brain hadn’t quite caught up with the fact that he’d stopped moving. His instincts led him to abruptly rebalance to counter the ground seemingly moving but since the ground wasn’t actually moving, he ended up falling in a heap to the floor instead, disoriented enough that he couldn’t even manage to get a hand out to catch himself. It felt uncannily like the floor had come up out of nowhere and smacked him. He took the impact hard on his left shoulder and the elbow of his arm dug into his previously injured ribs. Ouch. He winced and let out a little grunt of pain before taking a shallow breath and rolling onto his back. The ground still felt like it wasn’t quite steady beneath him but it was more settled than before. Shit. Ok so maybe he wasn’t quite as fine as he thought.

“Kid!!” Peter heard Tony call out not even ten seconds later as his bedroom door wrenched open. Fucking F.R.I.D.A.Y. Peter really needed to talk to Ned about how to hack her so he could have at least a modicum of privacy once in awhile. She told on him for everything.

Peter levered himself up as Tony hurried over to him.

“Are you ok? What happened?” Tony asked as he reached out to help Peter.

“Um nothing. I tripped.” Peter pushed away at the helping hands and managed to make it back to his feet on his own. He was still mad at Tony.

“You tripped?” Tony glanced around on the floor with a frown. “On what?”

Ok maybe that hadn’t been the most well thought out lie. There was literally nothing around that Peter could’ve tripped on.

“Can you just let it go?” Peter sighed. “It’s nothing. I swear. I’m fine.”

“Don’t make me ask F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Tony threatened but mainly he still just looked anxious.

“You know most kids don’t have some AI spying on them all the time so they can actually lie and get away with stuff.” Peter complained as he brushed past his Dad and picked up his duffel bag and settled it on the bed as a distraction.
“Oh so you are lying.” Tony trailed him closely. “About tripping or about being fine?”

Peter unzipped his duffel bag. There wasn’t much in it. Just his Spiderman stuff and a few other things he hadn’t entrusted to the moving people.

“Peter.” Tony prompted, tone serious.

“Ok so I maybe tried to do a couple flips.” He heard Tony suck in a sharp breath of air.

“And I maybe got a little dizzy and fell.” He continued quickly as he unpacked his Spiderman suit and set it on the bed, his ego smarting.

Tony grabbed his shoulders and spun him around so suddenly it almost made him dizzy again. The man’s eyes darted over him.

“Did you get hurt?”

“No I’m fine.”

“Did you hit your head?” Tony asked borderline frantically.

“No.” Peter frowned.

“You’re sure you didn’t hit your head?” Tony cupped his face in his hands and turned it back and forth, looking for any evidence to the contrary.

“Yes I’m sure. I landed on my shoulder. You can stop overreacting now.” Peter said as he pushed his Dad’s hands away.

“I want Bruce to check you out quick just to be sure. He was adamant about not letting you hit your head again. He said it could be dangerous.” Tony gave him a gentle push backward so he was forced to sit on the bed.

“No! This is what I was just talking about. I’m perfectly fine. I didn’t hit my head.” He said angrily.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. can you ask Bruce to come up here for a minute?” Tony ignored his protests.

“Nooo.” Peter whined and flopped backwards on his mattress in displeasure.

“Yes Peter.” Tony sounded a little angry now.

Peter rolled his eyes and turned to stare at the ceiling instead of Tony who stood with his arms crossed looking sternly down at him.

“None of this would be necessary if you’d just listen.” Tony continued.

“It’s not necessary at all.” Peter complained. “You’re just wasting Bruce’s time.”

“Who’s wasting my time?” Bruce asked as he walked in the room.

“Peter thinks I am.” Tony explained then frowned. “You got here fast.”

“I was already on my way up.” Bruce smiled. “I wanted to talk to you about an idea for the lab layout but it looks like that can wait. What’s going on?”

“Underoos here thought he’d try some acrobatics and apparently he got dizzy and fell. He says he
didn’t hit his head, but I don’t think he’d tell me if he did.” Tony explained.

“Peter.” Bruce reprimanded sternly.

“I didn’t hit my head. I’m not lying. I’m fine.” Peter felt like a broken record.

“Let’s just be sure.” Bruce tried to be reasonable as he reached out a hand. “Here sit up.”

“It’s like talking to a wall.” Peter mumbled to himself but allowed Bruce to pull him back up so he was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Bruce ran his hands over Peter’s head looking for any sign of injury. Peter sighed heavily at the scrutiny but allowed it. He patiently let the man shine the stupid light in his eyes and run him through the rest of the exam he’d become intimately familiar with while down in Medbay.

“He looks fine.” Bruce told Tony once he finished. Tony nodded in relief.

“You didn’t hurt anything else when you fell did you?” Bruce asked.

Peter shook his head at the same time Tony said, “He told me he landed on his shoulder.”

“Which one?” Bruce reached out.

“This one.” Peter indicated his left one and lifted it and rolled it to prove it didn’t hurt. “I didn’t hurt it. It probably won’t even bruise.”

Bruce prodded it and moved it every which way, seemingly satisfied.

“It’s fine.” Bruce agreed as he let go of his arm and continued prodding along his neck and down his left side.

“See? I told you.” Peter snapped at Tony.

He was distracted glaring at Tony so he didn’t manage to suppress the slight flinch when he felt a small flare of pain where Bruce pushed against his previously broken ribs.

“That hurt?” Bruce immediately noticed.

“No just ticklish.” Peter lied. It really didn’t hurt that bad. It was just sore.

Bruce focused on the same spot and pressed harder, watching his face for any hint of pain. Peter kept his expression blank but accidentally gave himself away when he unconsciously leaned away.

“Uh-huh that’s what I thought. Shirt off.” Bruce ordered as he grabbed the lower hem of Peter’s shirt and started pulling it over his head before he could argue.

“I just caught myself with my elbow. It’s nothing.” Peter explained as Bruce leaned closer to examine his side as he continued to prod and centered in on one particularly sensitive spot.

“Just bruised.” Bruce decided after a few moments, looking over at Tony who’d come closer to take a look for himself. “He’s fine.”

“Great. Just like I said. Can I have my shirt back now?” Peter asked with a bored tone and held his hand out to Tony who held it. He gave it back and Peter shrugged it on swiftly.

“Peter I want you to listen to me.” Bruce leaned in close so he was eye to eye with him. “You can’t
do stuff like this ok? We all know you’re frustrated and you want to be back to normal, but wanting it doesn’t just make it so. You could really hurt yourself if you try to push it. And I know it’s hard because you feel a lot better and that’s great, but you’re not all better yet. Your head’s still healing. It’s why you’re still so sleepy.”

Peter frowned at Bruce’s mention of that. He thought only Tony knew about that but apparently they must talk about him behind his back.

“And it’s why you got dizzy doing something that normally wouldn’t phase you. So until you’re completely healed you need to take it easy. You cannot hit your head again while you’re still hurt. If you did it could be very very bad. Do you understand?” Bruce said firmly.

Peter nodded, feeling small at the scolding. It felt different than when Tony did it, more embarrassing.

“Ok.” Bruce gave him a smile and ruffled his hair before glancing at Tony. Peter could tell he was trying to read the room to decide if he should stay or go now.

“You guys can talk if you want.” Peter offered with a shrug. “I have to finish unpacking anyway.”

Tony studied him for a few seconds before acquiescing to the obvious dismissal.

“Ok.” Tony said as he and Bruce walked out.

His Dad stopped at the door briefly and gave him a somber look as he held a finger out. “Behave yourself.”

“Yeah yeah.” Peter said good-naturedly this time. Tony seemed to accept that meant Peter would actually listen and he left, closing the door behind him.

Peter sighed and finished unpacking the few things from his duffel. It only took a couple minutes. Then he settled in on his bed and pulled out his phone to text Ned. He figured it wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world to invite Ned over tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this chapter's a little shorter than usual but I hope I made up for it with the extra long one last week. I think there will only be about 3 chapters left in this story but I'm already working on a rough outline for part 2 so hopefully there won't be a huge wait between the two. Let me know what you thought of this chapter! I always love to read everyone's comments.
I’m almost there. So where do I go again? Peter read the text message Ned had just sent him. Peter didn’t know how many more ways he could describe where to go. It wasn’t that complicated but Ned seemed nervous.

Like I said before you just walk straight back to the elevator in the right corner and it’ll take you up here. Peter typed out.

Ok but are you sure it’ll be ok? Isn’t there security? What if they stop me? Are they going to stop me? I didn’t bring my ID. Ned’s anxiety was palpable.

No one’s going to stop you. It’ll be fine.

I just find it hard to believe they’ll just let someone walk in and take an elevator to Tony Stark’s penthouse without getting stopped.

It’s not actually that easy. Peter smirked.

What? You just said it was. Dude this isn’t funny! Are you messing with me? Ned kept freaking out.

Do you want me to just meet you in the lobby? Peter offered.

Yes! Ned replied instantly.

Fine I’ll meet you there. How far away are you?

Like a block.

Ok I’m coming down now.

Thx.

Peter shook his head and laughed slightly as he stood from the couch.

“What?” Tony asked from where he laid on the loveseat doing some kind of design work with a special looking pen on a larger version Starkpad that had hologram and interactive capabilities. Peter hadn’t asked him about it but he was pretty sure it wasn’t something available to the public, just something Tony had designed for himself.

“I’m going to meet Ned in the lobby. He’s being a chicken.”

Tony didn’t respond as he chewed on the pen and turned something over on the hologram, studying it.

“I’ll be right back.”

“Uh-huh.” Tony was clearly distracted by whatever he was working on. He probably hadn’t heard a word Peter had said.

“Or maybe we’ll just go out and grab some food, wander around the city for awhile, catch a
movie…” Peter said to himself as he walked toward the elevator.

“Not funny. Don’t leave the Tower.” Tony finally called out after him as Peter stepped into the elevator.

“No promises.” Peter joked and then laughed at the look on Tony’s face right as the elevator door closed.

“Mr. Stark would like you to know that if you decide to leave the Tower you won’t like the consequences.” F.R.I.D.A.Y.’s voice came blandly over the elevator speaker as it descended.

Peter rolled his eyes. “I’m not planning on going anywhere F.R.I.D.A.Y. I was just kidding. Tony needs to chill out.”

“Would you like me to relay that message?”

“Um no.”

Peter’s ears popped as the elevator continued to descend. He lived in a building that was so tall his ears popped going up and down. It was sort of crazy. The elevator reached the lobby level and the door opened. When he stepped out, he instantly found Ned loitering awkwardly by the main entrance. His friend noticed him right away and Peter gestured for him to come over. Ned hurried to him, eyeing the man at the security desk suspiciously as if he couldn’t quite believe he wasn’t about to be tackled.

“Come on.” Peter said as he stepped back into the elevator and motioned for Ned to follow. “Remember please try to be cool.”

“Oh my god Peter. Oh my god I can’t believe I’m actually in Avengers Tower. Are you going to introduce me to the Avengers? Is Captain America here? Can I shake his hand? Holy shit Peter. This is so awesome! I can’t believe this is happening to me. I’m so glad I’m best friends with you.”

“See? That right there. Not being cool. Just try to get all of that out right now. Please don’t embarrass me.” Peter said, knowing deep down that the request was useless.

“I can’t help it. I’m so excited. This is like the best day of my life!”

“Just please don’t make it weird.” Peter sighed heavily. Yep he was screwed.

“Hey where are the buttons?” Ned looked around the elevator and frowned at the blank walls.

“This is the private elevator. There aren’t any buttons. F.R.I.D.A.Y. runs it, so no one can access the Avengers part of the Tower who isn’t supposed to.” Peter explained.


“She’s the AI Tony designed. She pretty much runs the Tower. Right F.R.I.D.A.Y?” Peter tried his hand at flattery. He was slowly trying to get back into her good graces.

“That is correct.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. replied.

“Oh my god.” Ned squeaked out.

“It is nice to meet you Ned.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. greeted politely.

“Um you too.” Ned whispered at the ceiling then looked to Peter with wide eyes and mouthed ‘holy shit’.

“You can geek out later.” Peter said. “For now just um try to keep it together. For me. Please?” Peter was practically begging.

“Yeah sure. No problem. Of course. I got this.” Ned nodded but he still sounded a little breathless from excitement.

The elevator stopped.

“Be cool.” Peter warned again.

The doors opened and Peter stepped out. His dad hadn’t moved from his spot on the couch and he hadn’t seemed to notice them yet.

“Holy shit!” Ned exclaimed when he caught sight of Tony.

“Ned.” Peter chastised and ran a hand down his face.

The noise caught Tony’s attention. He set his work down and made his way over to them.

“You-you... You’re—“

“Tony Stark.” His Dad held a hand out to Ned. Peter could see the glint of amusement in his eyes.

It took Ned a couple seconds to remember he needed to hold out his own hand in order to shake it. He still looked like he was in shock. Peter didn’t get it. Not anymore. Tony was just Tony. In an abstract way he knew that sure Tony was Tony Stark. His Dad was Tony Stark but that wasn’t who he was to Peter anymore so it was a little weird watching Ned completely fanboy out over him.


Tony smirked.

“Oh my god.” Peter said, mortified. “I told you not to make it weird.”

“I’m sorry but—” Ned indicated Tony with a hand. “Come on!”

“Yeah you’re definitely not meeting anyone else today.” Peter said as he grabbed his friend’s arm and started dragging him to his room.

“No I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to. I’ll be better.” Ned pleaded.

“Nope you already blew it.” Peter said.

“Can I just meet Captain America? Peter? Come on. Please!”

Tony laughed delightedly behind them. Peter quickly shoved Ned into his room and closed the door. Ned didn’t really look all that sorry for embarrassing him. His friend glanced around his bedroom with the same wide-eyed look that had graced his face since he got into the elevator.

“Dude I can’t believe this is your life!” Ned exclaimed.
The truth was sometimes Peter couldn’t either.

They spent the rest of the morning hanging out in Peter’s room.

Tony knocked on the door a couple hours later and peeked his head in to ask, “What do you kids want for lunch?”

“Sandwiches?” Peter suggested. He glanced over at Ned who gaped at Tony.

“Ned?” He prompted.

“Um yeah a sandwich sounds uh sounds great.” Ned stuttered.

“Ok. I’ll order some up.” Tony raised an eyebrow at them and left.

“Is this going to be a problem?” Peter joked. “Are you not going to be able to visit me?”

“No!” Ned denied instantly and Peter just laughed.

Thirty minutes later they sat at the kitchen table for an early lunch eating deli sandwiches. Peter had to admit that wherever Tony had ordered them from was almost as good as Delmar’s. But not quite.

“Mmm.” Ned said appreciatively after a couple bites. “This is almost as good as Delmar’s.” It was uncanny that he’d stated exactly what Peter had just been thinking.

Ned seemed to realize that the remark could’ve been construed as a slight and quickly backpedalled. “I mean. These are really really good Mr. Stark. So good. Thanks. And um thanks for letting me come over to visit Peter.”

“You’re welcome.” Tony replied then easily continued the conversation. “Where’s this Delmar’s? Because if it’s better than this I’m going to have to try it myself.”

“Oh it’s this awesome deli Peter and I go to all the time in Queens. The owner’s really nice. He says hi by the way Peter. And hey actually I was talking to him the other day and did you know he’s still a Spiderman fan even after you blew up his building last year?”

“What?” Tony asked sharply.

“I didn’t blow up his building. The robber with the alien gun did. Why would he be mad at me?” Peter defended himself and took another big bite of his sandwich.

“When was this?” Tony asked.

“Last year.” Ned explained. “Right before the whole Liz’s Dad thing, right?”

“Liz’s Dad?” Tony sounded confused.

“You know. The Vulture? He was Liz’s Dad. Liz went to school with us. She was the Decathlon team captain. Well she used to be I guess. Her and her Mom had to move to Portland after Peter got her Dad thrown in prison. Hey have you heard from her at all this summer?”

“Um no I haven’t.” Peter answered.

“Wait a minute. Hold on.” Tony held a hand up. “The Vulture was your classmate’s dad?”

“Yeah.” Ned answered eagerly. “The girl Peter was crushing on too.”
“Ned.” Peter groaned.

“He took her to Homecoming.” Ned continued and then glanced at Peter. “Well you tried to I guess. Before everything went to shit and you had to go chase down her Dad instead after he figured out you were Spiderman and threatened you in the car after dropping you guys off. You really do have the worst luck man.”

“Peter.” Tony’s voice was quiet but Peter could hear the intensity in it. “This guy knows who you are?”

“Uh… You didn’t know that.” Ned observed then winced at Peter. “Sorry man.”

“This guy knows who you are?” Tony repeated the question louder.

“Peter saved his life. I mean it’d be pretty shitty of him to try anything.” Ned tried to defend him.

“Yes because criminals are always so honorable.” Tony scoffed angrily.

“He’s in prison. He can’t get to me.” Peter shrugged as he ate his sandwich. Before he’d been more worried because he didn’t want him to get to May, but now May was gone and no one knew Tony had adopted him. And even if they did, it wasn’t like they’d go after Tony unless they had a death wish. He was Ironman.

“Even if he’s in prison he can still get to you. Being in prison doesn’t mean you’re completely cut off from the outside world. He could take a hit out on you.” Tony ranted.

“I’d think if he was going to do that he would’ve done it by now. It’s been almost a year.” Peter said even though he felt a small flutter of fear at the thought.

“He could sell the information.” Tony seethed.

“Sell it for what? He’s in prison.” Peter argued.

“I’m not explaining how prison works to you.” Tony shook his head.

“Well what was I supposed to do? He figured out who I was but it’s not like I could do anything about it!”

“Um should I go?” Ned asked awkwardly.

“No.” Tony answered then rounded on Peter again, “Does anyone else know you’re Spiderman?”

“No.”

“Are there any other big secrets you’re keeping from me?” Tony accused.

Peter considered it for a moment. “I don’t think so.”

“You don’t think so?”

“To be fair I didn’t think this was some big secret. I wasn’t trying to keep it from you. It just never came up.”

“Yeah because why would you willingly tell me your secret identity has been compromised? Why would I ever need to know that? That really doesn’t seem all that important.” Tony’s voice dripped with sarcasm.
“Seriously guys I can go.” Ned offered again.

“No. Stay.” Tony stood. “I have to go deal with this.”

“What are you going to do?” Peter frowned as he watched Tony walk away, leaving his half eaten sandwich on the table. Peter couldn’t think of a single thing the man could do to fix this.

“I’ll be down in the workshop.” Tony said, not answering the question, as he disappeared in the elevator.

After a few seconds, Ned turned to him. “Dude can we go down to the workshop too?”

“Not now.” Peter sighed.

“Why? Because he’s mad?”

“No. I uh can’t go down there right now.”

“What? Why?”

“Remember when I said I sort of got hurt last week?”

Ned nodded.

“Well I kind of blew up Bruce’s lab doing something I wasn’t supposed to, so um, I’m not allowed down there for the next two months.” It was embarrassing to admit.

“You blew up Bruce Banner’s lab?”

“Uh yeah.” Peter crumpled up the sandwich wrapping in front of him as he finished eating.

“Your life is crazy.” Ned decided.

“Yeah.” Peter sighed and then was struck by an idea. “Hey do you want to go try out this new video game the Avengers got? They’ve been trying to beat it for two weeks and I haven’t had a chance to try it yet.”

“Hell yeah.”

“Ok. Let’s go. But if anyone’s down there you can’t freak out.”

“I won’t. I won’t.” Ned nodded.

“Promise?” Peter asked skeptically.

“Scout’s honor.” Ned held up his right hand in the characteristic gesture.

“That doesn’t count. You were never even in the boy scouts.” Peter rolled his eyes.

“How do you know? I could’ve been.” Ned argued as they made their way down to the common room.

“You weren’t. Were you?”

“No.”

Peter shook his head but couldn’t help the smile that crossed his face. He’d missed his friend.
Thankfully no one was there when the doors opened and the place was remarkably clean again. They’d had an impromptu housewarming party last night, and some of the team had celebrated a little too hard. Ok most of the team. Actually that was probably where everyone was. In their own suites recovering. Or finishing unpacking. Peter was just glad he and Ned had the place to themselves.

He glanced at Ned and caught him gaping.

“Cool huh?” Peter smiled. The common room was exponentially better than the one at the compound. Pretty much everything was. Clint hadn’t been lying when he’d told Peter the Tower was way better. He could see why the Avengers had been eager to move back here.

“Yeah.”

They settled in front of the TV and Peter turned the console on.

“Oh I love this game!” Ned exclaimed when the screen flashed on.

“You’ve played it?”

“Yeah I bought it a few weeks ago. It’s not that hard to beat but you have to know the cheat codes.”

“Let’s do it.” Peter grinned.

“Your wish is my command.” Ned smiled back.

A few hours later, he and Ned were on the last level. Ned was right. This game really wasn’t that hard. He couldn’t believe the team had been trying for the past two weeks to beat it unsuccessfully. He was kind of embarrassed for them.

“What the hell? What level is that?” Sam’s voice suddenly interrupted his concentration. Peter immediately hit the pause button, already anticipating Ned’s next freak out. He twisted around and watched as Clint and Sam sat down on the couch behind them.

“The last one.” Peter smirked.

“Who’s this?” Clint asked, indicating Ned.

“Oh yeah sorry. This is my friend Ned.” Peter introduced. “Ned, this is Clint and Sam.”

Ned just stared, mouth agape. Peter elbowed him hard.

“H-hi.” Ned stuttered, star struck again.

Peter rolled his eyes.

“How long have you two been playing?” Clint asked.

“I don’t know. Since like 11:30am.”

Clint glanced at his watch. “Only three hours?!”
“What the fuck?” Sam said.

“Yeah this game isn’t really that hard. It’s kind of embarrassing you guys haven’t been able to beat it yet.” Peter taunted.

“No way. There’s no way you’re going to beat this game. It’s impossible.” Sam declared.

“Just watch.” Peter laughed.

“Ready?” He asked Ned.

“Ned!” He prompted again when his friend just kept staring at Clint and Sam.

“Huh?” Ned turned to him.

“Ready?” Peter indicated the game.

“Oh yeah. Sure.”

Peter pushed play. It took them less than ten minutes to finish the level and beat the game.

“Ha! Told you!” Peter celebrated at Sam and Clint’s surprised expressions.

“How’d you do that?” Sam accused.

Peter just smiled at him as he stood and stretched. Fatigue pulled at him and he yawned. He caught Clint surreptitiously scrutinizing him.

“Where’s your dad?” Clint asked.

Peter ignored the look he saw Ned giving him out the corner of his eye at hearing Tony called that name.

“Workshop.” Peter answered shortly as he tried to rub the tiredness from his eyes. He knew why Clint was asking and he didn’t appreciate it. He wasn’t a little kid that needed to be managed. Or put down for a nap.

Clint was about to say something else when Steve walked out of the elevator with Bruce and Ned instantly squealed, “Oh my god!”

“You promised you’d be cool.” Peter chastised instantly.

“You’re Captain America!” Ned continued as he stood, blatantly ignoring Peter.

“Dude!” Peter pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I’m sorry Peter. But holy shit! That’s Captain America! This is the best day of my life!”

“Well I see where we rank.” Sam said in jest to Clint.

Steve took it in stride, smiling as he walked over to Ned and shook his hand.

“You must be a friend of Peter’s.” Steve said as he shook Ned’s hand, and Peter remembered his manners.

“This is Ned.” Peter introduced him.
“Nice to meet you son.” Steve said. “I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“You have?” Ned gasped.

Steve gave him a nod.

“Oh my god Captain America’s heard about me.” Ned said in shock and then looked over at Peter. “You talk about me with Captain America?”

Peter rolled his eyes.

“Call me Steve.” Steve insisted.

Ned’s mouth dropped open.

“And this is Bruce.” Peter sighed as he indicated the man standing next to Steve. Bruce was barely suppressing his laughter at the shameless Cap hero worship.

Ned reached out to shake the other man’s hand numbly. Peter was a little worried he might spontaneously combust.

“You’re amazing.” Ned complimented the scientist dreamily.

Bruce didn’t seem to know what to do with the remark. “Um thanks?”

Steve, Clint, and Sam all started laughing. Yep this was just about how Peter had envisioned this going. Totally embarrassing.

“Oh my god Peter. I’m so glad you’re Spiderman.” Ned professed, not even caring about everyone’s apparent amusement. Ok even more embarrassing.

“So what are you guys up to?” Steve seamlessly tried to start up a conversation as he and Bruce sat down. Peter sat back down on the floor in front of the TV and started winding up his controller to put it away.

“Watching the kids beat that stupid game.” Sam answered.

“They beat the game?” Steve’s eyebrows shot up,

“Yeah.” Clint sighed.


“We’re just that good.” Peter joked.

“We used the cheat codes.” Ned offered instantly, obviously eager to help the Avengers in any way possible even if it was just how to beat a video game.

“Ned!” Peter had planned on lording this over all of them for the next week or so. Now that was ruined.

“Cheat codes?” Clint asked.

“Yeah this game’s notoriously unbeatable without them.” Ned explained.

“What are they?” Sam asked.
Ned started to describe the cheat codes they’d used to beat the game while the Avengers listened readily. Peter lay down sideways on the floor and propped his head up on an arm as he watched Ned use the controller to teach Clint the correct cheat combination for one of the levels. A few minutes later Peter was thoroughly bored but Ned seemed to be enjoying himself. He probably loved all the attention. Peter yawned again. He wished he wasn’t so tired. He flattened his arm out on the ground so he could lay his head on it instead of holding it up. He blinked heavily as he watched Ned explain another combination. Maybe it’d be ok if he just rested his eyes for a second…

Chapter End Notes

Not as much Tony and Peter interaction in this chapter but lots of Ned! He was so much fun to write. What did you think? The next chapter will be up next Friday. These next couple weeks are a little crazy for me but there will still be updates! Only two chapters left. Thanks again for all the support and wonderful comments!
Chapter Twenty-One

Tony finally felt like he could breathe again. He’d hacked the prison’s surveillance where Adrian Toomes aka the Vulture was being held and he’d had F.R.I.D.A.Y. analyze all the video and audio from the past year to make sure the convict hadn’t told anyone else about Peter or hatched any kind of elaborate scheme to hurt him. Surprisingly, he hadn’t. The only time Peter had ever been mentioned had been when one of the other inmates had asked Toomes if he knew who Spiderman was and he’d denied it. But that didn’t mean Tony trusted him. He still needed to eradicate any possible threat to Peter, so he’d pulled some strings with the higher ups that he knew and had Toomes transferred to the Raft where he’d truly be cut off from the outside world. And yeah maybe that was a little harsh, but Tony didn’t care. He would do whatever it took to protect his son.

Speaking of Peter, he read the text message he’d just gotten from Steve. *Your son’s asleep on the floor up here. Do you want me to send his friend home?*

Tony glanced at his watch. 2:55pm. He hadn’t meant to stay down here that long. He’d planned on sending Ned home earlier knowing Peter usually got tired around 2:00pm. Although he’d almost made it to 3pm today. Maybe this was progress.

*I’ll do it. I’m on my way up.* Tony texted back.

“Shut it down F.R.I.D.A.Y.” Tony said as he left the workshop. The lights turned off and the door locked behind him.

He walked off the elevator into the common room to Ned enthusiastically regaling Steve, Clint, and Sam about something with a video game controller. He met Bruce’s eyes from across the room and the man inclined his head to the floor in front of the small couch he sat on. Tony padded over and his eyes softened when he noticed Peter fast asleep on the carpet.

“Hey Ned.” Tony said and instantly garnered his attention. “I think it’s time to call it a day kid. You can come back and visit later.”

Ned’s brow furrowed in confusion at the sudden dismissal but then it turned into a full-fledged frown when he noticed Peter passed out on the floor.

“Is he ok?” Ned asked and Tony could tell he was worried.

“He’s fine.” Tony reassured. “Do you need a ride home?”

“Um no I’m good. Thanks though.” Ned stood and shot another concerned glance toward Peter before addressing the rest of the group. “It was uh nice to meet all of you.”

“It was nice to meet you too Ned.” Steve smiled and the rest of them followed suit and said their good-byes.

The kid gave them all a little wave and then got in the elevator and left. Once he was gone, Tony turned his attention back to Peter. He bent down and eased his arms under the kid’s neck and knees before standing with a small grunt, careful to lift with his legs. Peter wasn’t heavy per se but he wasn’t exactly light either. He took the few steps toward the couch.
“Move.” He ordered and Clint, Sam, and Steve scrambled to get off the couch. Once they were out of the way, he set Peter down. He covered the kid with a blanket and eased a throw pillow under his head before taking a seat in the small space left between the pillow and the end of the couch. After he was settled in, he grabbed the remote control and propped his legs up on the coffee table.

“Movie?” He asked the room.

“Sounds good to me.” Clint agreed from where he and Sam now sat on one of the other couches. Steve was perched on the loveseat next to Bruce. The extra seating space was so much better than the compound.

After only fifteen minutes of arguing, a fairly short amount of time for them, they settled on a flick and F.R.I.D.A.Y. dimmed the lights. He glanced down at Peter still sleeping peacefully. The volume on the TV didn’t seem to be too loud. Tony brushed the hair back off his kid’s forehead and let his hand settle there, loosely resting on his head. Peter’s hair was getting really long. The kid needed a haircut or pretty soon he wouldn’t be able to see through the mop. Tony leaned back against the cushion. Peter was safe next to him. Adrian Toomes was locked up far away on the Raft. His teammates surrounded him. He could finally unwind.

Peter came awake slowly, trying to orient himself. A situation he’d found himself in way too many times this past week. He’d meant to just rest his eyes for a minute on the floor but obviously that hadn’t happened. He must’ve fallen asleep and now he was lying on something soft, clearly not the floor. Someone must’ve moved him and he hadn’t even woken up to notice. He was warm and comfortable and a reassuring weight rested on his head. It took him a couple seconds to figure out it was someone’s hand. His dad’s. He was just about to let sleep claim him again when he remembered Ned. Shit. He was a bad host.

His eyes flickered open. He was on the couch in the common room, the lights were dimmed and some action movie played on the screen in front of him. Bruce, Steve, Clint, and Sam were still here but Peter didn’t see Ned. He rolled onto his back as he scrunched his eyes shut and stretched. The hand on his head moved to resettle on his forehead. He opened his eyes and they instantly met Tony’s before slipping closed again with a sleepy sigh.

“Waking up?” Tony asked, amused.

“Mmm.” He hadn’t decided yet. He was still tired and oh so comfortable. “Where’s Ned?”

“I sent him home.” Tony said softly and the hand on his forehead brushed his hair back.

Peter felt kind of bad about that. He’d conked out on his friend.

“You haven’t been asleep very long.” Tony said it like an observation but Peter read the underlying suggestion to it. That he probably needed more sleep. For once he didn’t disagree. He didn’t think he could get up right now even if he wanted to.

Peter rolled over so he was facing the back of the couch instead of the TV. He felt Tony readjust the blanket over him when the movement dislodged it. That was nice. He sunk back to sleep in seconds.
He woke up later to the smell of food. Had he slept through dinner? That was a long time. His eyes snapped open. The team must’ve ordered Chinese food because everyone had a characteristic white take out container in hand as they watched what Peter recognized as Skyfall. He sat up and frowned when his head throbbed. Ow. Why did his head hurt?

“Hey.” His dad said from the same spot at his side. “You hungry?”

Peter rubbed his eyes and glanced at Tony. The truth was he wasn’t. He actually felt kind of crappy but he knew refusing food wouldn’t go over well for him.

“Sure.” He said as he dropped his feet on the ground so was sitting instead of lying down. He gathered the pillow and blanket up and tossed them toward the opposite end of the couch.

“Here.” Tony handed him a container. Sweet and sour chicken. His favorite. How did Tony remember this stuff?

“Thanks.” Peter took the food and the plastic fork. “What time is it?”

“Seven.” Tony answered. “Ned must’ve worn you out.”

Peter frowned as he picked at his food. That was a long time. He hadn’t slept that long in days. And now his head hurt again. Maybe he should say something, but then Tony would freak out or whatever and it was probably nothing anyway. He managed to eat about half the container before closing it and setting it aside on the coffee table so Tony wouldn’t notice he hadn’t finished it. He tried to watch the movie but for some reason it seemed to make his headache worse. The team constantly bantered about what Bond should be doing differently and other better strategies but Peter didn’t feel like joining in.

“You’re quiet.” Uh oh. Of course Tony would notice. “You ok?”

“Yeah.” He gave Tony a small smile. He just needed some Advil. Maybe there was some up in their suite. Or an aspirin. Or anything. “Um actually I’m going to go back upstairs. I have to call Ned.”

Tony frowned at the excuse but didn’t protest when Peter stood, said good-bye to everyone and left.

As soon as he got back to the penthouse, Peter went straight to the bathroom in his room and opened the medicine cabinet. Empty. Dammit. He tried the bathroom in the hallway next. Also empty. Tony’s room was the only one left. He hesitated for a few seconds at his door before deciding to enter. Tony’s bathroom’s cabinet had a ton of junk in it. Shaving cream, razors, aftershave, nail clippers, tweezers, rubbing alcohol, Q-tips, cologne, lotions, soap, band aids, antacids, ah ha Advil. Thank god. He snatched the container up.

“What are you doing?” Peter started violently at Tony’s voice and whipped around. Tony didn’t look mad at finding Peter in his bathroom going through his stuff, but he didn’t exactly look happy about it either.

“Um…”

Tony zeroed in on the bottle of Advil in his hand. Whoops. He’d forgotten to hide it.

“You came in here for this? What’s wrong?” Tony frowned and took the Advil from his hand.

“I just have a headache. A normal headache. I didn’t want you to freak out about it.” Peter sighed.

“Do you usually get headaches?” Tony asked.
“Well no but—”

“You slept all afternoon and now you have a headache but instead of telling me you sneak up here to steal this?” Ok he was mad.

Peter rubbed his temples. “Can I just have a couple of those? You can yell at me later.”

Tony pursed his lips but after a few seconds he unscrewed the bottle and handed Peter two pills. Peter dry swallowed them right away and Tony made a face. Peter watched as he grabbed a clean glass from his bathroom counter, filled it with water, and handed it to him. Peter took it graciously and drank it to wash the pills down.

“Come on.” Tony guided him out of his bathroom and back to the couch in the living room. “Sit.”

“Here.” Tony handed him the TV remote after Peter sat down, but he didn’t take it.

“I don’t want to watch TV. It bothers me. Makes it worse.” Peter said as he stretched out and laid down against the cushions. There was no reason to waste the energy pretending to be fine now that Tony knew his head was bothering him.

He gazed up at Tony and met his assessing stare unflinchingly.

“Can you please try not to overreact for once?” Peter huffed when Tony continued to stare at him. “It’s seriously just a headache. I promise.”

“Oh you promise.” Tony said sarcastically. “So you got your medical degree when I wasn’t looking?”

Peter sighed heavily. He knew Tony could be snarky but he usually he wasn’t like that with him, especially when he wasn’t feeling well. “Are you still mad at me about the whole Vulture thing?”

“What? No.” Tony answered but didn’t say anything else. He still looked twitchy and unhappy.

Great.

“Then why are you being like this?” Peter complained.

“Like what? Worried about you? Oh I’m sorry. I thought that was my job.”

Peter rolled his eyes at the sass. “I’m fine. Can’t you just wait like half an hour to see if the Advil works before you go running to Bruce?”

Tony still had his lips pursed and he didn’t look inclined to agree.

“Tony come on. Please. It’s really not that bad.” Peter practically begged. He didn’t want a little headache to get completely blown out of proportion. At this rate Bruce was going to think he was some kind of wilting flower.

“Fine.” Tony agreed tersely. “But if it’s not completely gone in half an hour I’m talking to Bruce.”

“Deal.” Peter gave Tony a small smile. He could just say it was gone regardless and put an end to this nonsense.

“And don’t even think about lying to me.” Tony pointed a finger at him accusingly. “Believe me. I can tell when you’re lying. You’re a terrible liar.”

Or not.
“I would never lie to you.” Peter responded cheekily.

“When right there? Lying.” Tony didn’t look amused.

Peter snorted a short laugh. He actually felt a little better. Maybe the Advil was working.

Tony glared down at him for another long few seconds before he gave in and sighed. “You’re going to turn me grey kid.”

“There’s hair dye for that?” Peter offered.

“Don’t be cute.” Tony scolded.

“Oh I’m sorry. I thought that was my job.” Peter jokingly reiterated Tony’s previous words to him in an attempt to ease the tension.

Tony just raised an eyebrow at him and walked away.

Peter frowned but didn’t ask where he was going. He closed his eyes and rubbed them to try to ease the lingering ache behind them. He heard Tony running the water in the kitchen but he didn’t feel like getting up to see what he was doing.

Peter kept his eyes closed even when he eventually heard Tony walk back toward him. Tony didn’t say anything but a second later an ice cold washcloth was set over his forehead and eyes. Peter could help the small groan of relief that sprung from him.

“Better?” Tony asked. And it was. So much better. Especially since Tony didn’t seem irritated with him anymore.

“Yeah. Thanks.”

Peter felt Tony grab his lower legs and pick them up so he could sit down on the couch before resettling them in his lap. Peter thought about saying something sarcastic about how they had more than one couch for a reason, but he knew Tony just wanted to be close because he was worried. When he worried he hovered. And trying to keep him from hovering just made it so much worse, so Peter just resigned himself to it. And to be honest, as much as it annoyed him, Peter kind of appreciated the proof that Tony cared.

They sat together in silence for awhile, Peter half asleep and Tony tapping away at something on his phone, until Peter realized his headache had finally faded away. Apparently Advil, a cold washcloth, and some quiet really did do wonders. He pulled the damp washcloth off his head and sat up. Tony turned his attention toward him at the movement.

“You ok?” Tony asked. He looked sort of tense.

“Yeah I feel a lot better actually.” Peter answered and couldn’t keep the surprise out of his voice. “Headache’s gone.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.” Peter rolled his eyes as he set the washcloth on a magazine on the coffee table.

“So you don’t care if I turn the TV on then?”

“No. Go ahead.” Peter shrugged and shifted backward against the couch armrest so now his feet barely grazed the side of Tony’s thigh instead of across his lap.
Tony picked Tombstone, claiming it was an old classic. Peter had never seen it but he didn’t miss the opportunity to throw out a shot about Tony being an old classic himself as they settled in to watch. Tony kept eyeing him periodically throughout the beginning of the movie until he seemed satisfied that the headache really must be gone. Only then did he seem to actually relax. Peter started to feel a little guilty about making him so obviously worried over the headache thing, and probably the falling asleep on the floor and sleeping the whole afternoon away thing, oh and the Vulture thing. Hmm. So really the entirety of the day. Whoops.

“Um sorry about kind of being a handful today.” Peter said with a wince once he’d realized it.

Tony let out a little snort and shot him an amused glance.

“And uh sorry about the whole Vulture knowing my identity thing. I really didn’t mean to keep it from you, and it’s not like I haven’t been worried about it, but I knew there wasn’t really anything I could do about it so I just kind of tried not to think about, you know?” Peter rambled.

“Well you don’t need to worry about it anymore. It’s taken care of.” Tony said cryptically.

“Wait. What does that mean?” Peter frowned.

“Shh.” Tony said as he went back to watching the movie where everyone was in the middle of some sort of gunfight.

“Tony? What do you mean it’s taken care of?” Peter tried again.

Tony patted his knee distractedly. “It means I took care of it. Like I said I would. I don’t want you to worry about him anymore. He’s somewhere he can never get to you.”

“Oh my god did you kill him?!” Peter’s voice squeaked. Would Tony really do that for him? Have someone killed in cold blood to protect him? No way. Right?

“What?! Of course not! You think I’d do that?” Tony turned to him in surprise.

“Well no, but the way you just said that sounded sketchy as hell. Like some Godfather-esque kind of shit.”

“Hey. Language.” Tony chastised with a frown. “I didn’t kill him. I had him moved somewhere more secure.”

“More secure than prison?” Peter was flummoxed. What did that even mean?

“I don’t want you to stress about it. It’s my problem, not yours.”

“How is it not my problem? I caused it.” Peter argued.

“Because you’re the kid and I’m the dad, so it’s my job to fix the stuff you can’t when you screw up. Got it?”

Peter just blinked. He was a little hung up on the fact that Tony had called himself dad. It was the first time he’d done that. Maybe that meant he didn’t mind when Peter called him that.

“I took care of it. You’re safe. That’s all you need to know.” Tony continued more softly and gave his knee what was meant to be a reassuring squeeze. Too bad it seemed to hit him right in the funny bone.

He barked out an involuntary laugh and gave Tony a little kick. “Stop. You know I’m ticklish.”
Tony grinned at him and for a second Peter was worried he was about to be all out tickle attacked, but instead Tony just patted his knee again before turning back to the movie. Peter still had so many questions he wanted to ask but he could tell Tony wasn’t going to indulge his curiosity, and honestly he was just glad to know he didn’t have to worry about it anymore. It’d been a constant nagging concern in the back of his mind for the past year and now in under a day Tony had taken care of it just like that. He felt like a weight had been lifted off him. He really wanted to thank Tony, but he knew his dad wouldn’t like that and it’d probably start another ‘serious conversation’, something he definitely wanted to avoid.

For a moment, Peter let himself feel fortunate. It seemed ridiculous because realistically he was probably one of the unluckiest people ever, having lost so many loved ones in his life, not to mention getting bitten by a radioactive spider, but right now he couldn’t help but feel like he’d lucked out because for how amazing Tony was as a businessman and a superhero, he was even better as a dad.

The next week flew by. Ned visited a couple more times because Tony still wouldn’t let Peter leave the Tower since he had yet to make it through the day without needing a nap. Peter couldn’t believe he wasn’t completely back to normal yet. It’d never taken him this long to recover from an injury before. He’d even heard Tony and Bruce talking about it the other night when they’d thought he’d been asleep. Apparently Tony was worried about him, but Bruce wasn’t as surprised about the lengthy convalescence. Bruce had explained that the type of head injury he’d sustained would’ve killed anyone else so there really wasn’t a precedent for how long it’d take Peter to completely recover. But he was recovering. He’d only napped for half an hour today.

The good news was school started tomorrow, in eleven hours to be exact, and Peter couldn’t wait because there was no way Tony was going to keep him home from school just because he still needed a late afternoon nap. He’d finally get to escape. He practically buzzed with excitement as he packed all the stuff he’d need in his backpack including the note from Bruce that said he wasn’t allowed to participate in gym class yet due to a concussion. He was actually happy about that. He hated gym class. He always had to pretend to struggle when he knew he could easily show up everyone, but he hadn’t been an athletic phenom before the spider bite so he couldn’t be one now. Sometimes it grated on his nerves though.

He set his backpack on the floor and picked up around his room. He and Ned had left the place a little trashed yesterday and Tony hadn’t said anything about it yet but he’d given him a look when he’d come in earlier and seen the disaster. When it was back to a relative semblance of order, he made his way out to the kitchen to grab something to drink.

Tony and Steve still sat next to each on the couch pouring over stacks of papers, exactly how he’d left them a few hours ago after dinner. Peter wasn’t sure what the papers were because Tony had deflected the question when Peter had asked earlier, but he knew it had something to do with the government’s regulation of the Avengers and it had both men all worked up.

Peter grabbed a bottle of coke out of the fridge and unscrewed the cap, the hissing noise finally garnering their attention.

“What are you still doing up?” Tony asked when he noticed Peter in the kitchen.

“It’s only like nine o’clock.” Peter raised an eyebrow and took a long drink as he walked over to them.
“It’s after ten.” Tony corrected with a glance at his watch. “And you have school tomorrow.”

Peter rolled his eyes and took another drink. “It’s fine.”

“No it’s not fine. And you shouldn’t be drinking caffeine before bed.” Tony frowned when he noticed the coke.

“It’s not like I’m drinking coffee.” Peter challenged, eyeing Tony’s nearly empty cup of coffee on the table.

Steve snorted and Tony shot him a look.

“I’m an adult. That means I can drink coffee whenever I want.”

“Whatever.” Peter sipped at the bottle in his hand as he tried to surreptitiously catch a glance at some of the papers on the table.

“All right hand it over.” Tony held out a hand for the soda.

Peter took a little step back and took another long deliberate drink. Steve barked out a laugh at the open defiance.

“Give it.” Tony ordered, tone turning more serious. He didn’t seem to be in a very playful mood tonight.

Peter didn’t know why but something inside him rankled at the command. May never would’ve cared if he stayed up late or drank a coke before bed. Who did Tony think he was?

He raised an eyebrow at the man and drank the rest of coke down in a few long gulps before capping the empty bottle and tossing it to him.

“Stop trying to tell me what to do. I’m sixteen not six.” Peter said and then walked away.

“Could’ve fooled me. You’re sure acting like you’re six.” Tony called out after him. “And you better be going to bed!”

Peter rolled his eyes even though Tony couldn’t see it. He managed to gather enough self control to shut his bedroom door silently instead of slamming it shut like he really wanted to. He didn’t want Steve to witness that. Peter didn’t even know why he stayed up late or drank a coke before bed. Who did Tony think he was?

He continued to stew as he brushed his teeth, washed his face, and changed into his pajamas. He climbed into bed because he wanted to. Not because Tony had told him to.

“Lights F.R.I.D.A.Y.” He requested and his room turned an inky black. He grabbed his phone off his nightstand and started texting Ned to complain, but he just ended up getting more annoyed when his friend didn’t seem to understand why he was so pissed off.

I’m just saying that if I want to drink soda before bed then I should be able to. And I don’t need him telling me when to go to bed. I’ll go to bed when I want! I’m not a baby. Peter tapped away angrily.

I don’t know what you want me to say Peter. My parents don’t let me drink soda after dinner. And I hate to break it to you but most people our age still have a bedtime. Mine’s 10pm on school nights
and 11pm on weekends. Ned texted back.

But you’re texting me right now. Peter argued. It was 10:30pm.

Well yeah but my parents don’t know that. They think I’m asleep.

May never cared when I went to bed. Peter tried to explain so Ned would get it.

Well yeah but May was like super lax. You do know that right? I mean I doubt anyone else our age could’ve gotten away with sneaking out all the time like you did to be Spiderman. Ned’s response didn’t really make him feel better.

So you’re saying May was a bad guardian? Peter typed back angrily. He didn’t know why he seemed to be itching for a fight.

No. But maybe a little…irresponsible? Don’t get mad. Too late.

I’m just trying to be straight with you. Most parents have rules for their kids. Especially a bedtime. If that’s pissing you off I’m just worried this is going to be a bit of a rough adjustment for you. Ned continued before Peter could curse him out for the earlier May comment.

Like you might want to prepare yourself that you’re not going to get to run as free anymore. If Tony wants you in bed by 10pm then you’re obviously not going to be allowed to go out patrolling until 3am.

Peter hadn’t even thought of that. He’d just assumed that once Bruce gave him the all clear he’d go back to living his life like he used to, which meant coming and going whenever and patrolling at night. Sometimes until 3am if it was busy. But if Tony was going to get on him about caffeine before bed then somehow he didn’t see him letting him stay up all night as Spiderman.

Shit. Peter texted back. Ned might be right…

It’ll be ok man. Ned tried to reassure him. We can talk more tomorrow. I’ll see you at school. Night.

Night. Peter replied.

Well fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! Only one chapter left. I'm planning to post it by next Friday. I hope this chapter turned out ok. I ended up adding to it and re-writing a lot of it yesterday. Let me know what you think!

I also want to thank ScarletNightFury for making an amazing cover for this story! Head on over to https://nightstatic01.deviantart.com/art/The-darkest-hour-is-just-before-the-dawn-709437071 to check it out!
Chapter Twenty-Two

Peter groaned as F.R.I.D.A.Y. blared his alarm for third time that morning.

“Snooze F.R.I.D.A.Y.” He mumbled into his pillow. Damn. Getting up at 6:30am was rough when Peter had gotten used to sleeping in past 9am.

“The chance of you making it to school on time is significantly decreasing.” F.R.I.D.A.Y. responded but the alarm turned off. Peter couldn’t bring himself to care. He wanted more sleep. A minute later his door clicked open.

“I’m all for being fashionably late kiddo, but maybe not on the first day of school.” Tony’s voice cut through the sleepy haze.

“Tired.” Peter complained into his pillow as he felt the man sit down on the edge of his bed.

“Normal tired or tired as in you’re not feeling up to this yet?” Tony asked.

“Normal tired.” Peter answered.

“That’s what you get for staying up so late.” Peter could hear the judgment in his voice.

“It wasn’t that late.” Peter protested.

“Uh-huh.” Tony said skeptically and then a second later the covers were being ripped off him. “Time to get up.”

Peter groaned and curled up in a ball as the cool air assaulted him.

“Let’s go.” Tony said and then hands grabbed him under the armpits and started pulling him out of bed so his legs slid to the ground and he had no choice but to stand. He sighed and rubbed his eyes as Tony manhandled him to the bathroom.

“We’re leaving in twenty minutes.” Tony warned as Peter slowly reached for his toothbrush, still barely awake.

Luckily, the shower finally woke him up. Afterwards, he hurried to get dressed in jeans and one of his typical science pun t-shirts. He shouldered his backpack and made it out to the living room just in time.

“You’ll have to eat in the car.” Tony said as he hunted through the cabinets and the fridge and pulled out a banana, a granola bar, and a yogurt.

“Here. We’ve got to go.” Tony said as he handed him the food items and then led him to the elevator. He seemed a little flustered.

“You don’t have to drive me. I mean I could drive myself or take a cab or the subway or something.” Peter offered.

“I’m driving you.” Tony said decisively.
The elevator took them to the underground garage and Peter followed Tony to one of his favorite, most expensive Audi’s. Peter eyed its characteristic Stark license plate as he walked over to it. Tony had some numbered variation of the plate on all of his cars.

“Get in.” Tony commanded when Peter paused at the passenger door.

“Um isn’t this a little too flashy?”

“What?”

“People are going to notice if you drop me off in this car.” Peter explained.

Tony considered the words for a few seconds.

“Right.” His dad ran a hand through his hair and glanced around the garage. “We’ll take your car.”

“Ok, but if you get even one scratch on it…” Peter joked as they walked over to his car. It was the most discrete car in the garage and the license plate didn’t say Stark. It was just a normal New York plate.

Tony smirked at the comment and climbed in. Peter followed and hurried to chow down his breakfast. Tony got him to his school with ten minutes to spare.

“You sure you have everything?” Tony asked after he stopped the car at the curb in front of the school and Peter started pulling his backpack up from by his feet.

“Um…” Peter thought about it for a second. He thought he did. Oh wait. Shit. He’d forgotten to pack a lunch. And he had exactly two dollars in his wallet. Not enough to buy lunch. Maybe he could bum some money from Ned.

“What? What’d you forget?” Tony read the dismay on his face.

“My lunch.” Peter admitted.

“You can buy lunch right?” Tony asked.

“Yeah.” Peter confirmed with a frown.

Tony shifted on the seat and fished out his wallet from his back pocket. He opened it and grabbed a bill and handed it to Peter. “Here.”

Peter took it and gaped. It was a crisp $100 bill.

“This is too much.” Peter argued and tried to hand it back. “I only need like ten dollars.”

“Take it.” Tony said as he put his wallet back. “I don’t carry small bills kid. Just keep the change.”

That’s right. Tony was a billionaire. A hundred dollars was probably nothing to him but it was a lot of money to Peter.

“Um thanks.” Peter said appreciatively as he tucked the bill in his pocket.

“All right. You good?”

“Yeah.”
“Ok. Remember you can call or text me if you need to duck out early.” Tony offered. In other words if Peter got too tired to make it through the day. He really didn’t think that’d be a problem.

“I’ll be fine.” Peter rolled his eyes and reached for the door.

“What? I don’t get a good-bye hug?” Tony joked with fake hurt.

Peter sighed at the dramatics but turned back around and leaned over to wrap his arms around his dad.

“Have a good day today.” Tony squeezed him back before releasing him.

“I will.” Peter smiled at him and pulled at the door handle.

“Happy will be here at 3pm sharp to pick you up. I have some meetings this afternoon but I should be home by 5pm.”

“Ok.”

“Ok. Love you kiddo.”

“Love you too.” Peter answered and flashed another smile at Tony before closing the door behind him and swiftly walking away. He didn’t want to be late.

He noticed Ned standing at the foot of the stairs in the spot where they usually met each other before school. He started walking over to him and was suddenly struck by the absolute normality of it. He couldn’t even remember the last time he’d felt normal. Like his old self. Like his life hadn’t been completely flipped upside down this past summer. The last time he’d met Ned on the stairs at school May had still been alive and he hadn’t even spoken to Tony in months. Now she was dead and Tony was his dad. But Peter’s school routine remained the same. He struggled to wrap his head around it.

“Hey Peter.” Ned greeted as he came up to his friend, and Peter nodded to him.

“You ok?” Ned asked after a few seconds when he remained uncharacteristically silent.

“Yeah.” Peter answered as he glanced around. “It’s just a little weird being back here.”

“Yeah it sucks that summer’s over.” Ned didn’t understand what he’d actually meant.

“We better get going or we’re going to be late.” Ned continued as he started walking up the stairs.

Peter followed a step behind. He almost felt like he was having an out of body experience. Before today, school had remained preserved in a bubble, the only thing still left untouched by the upheaval in his world. Now it wouldn’t be.

He followed Ned on autopilot as they dropped their stuff off at their lockers and took what they needed to their first class. Peter’s head still spun as he took a seat in a desk in the back next to Ned. The bell rang seconds later.

The teacher walked up and down their rows to pass out their advanced calculus textbooks. Peter tried to ignore the worried glances Ned shot him at his reserved mood.

“Peter are you sure you’re ok?” Ned whispered as their teacher started writing equations on the board. “Do I need to call Mr. Stark?”

He shot a sharp glance at his friend. After he’d fallen asleep on Ned last week, he’d had to explain to
him about how he still wasn’t quite recovered from the lab explosion, which had subsequently turned his friend into an even worse worrier than his dad.

“I’m fine.” Peter whispered back forcefully.

“You know it’d be easier to believe you if you didn’t say that all the time. Even when you’re clearly not.” Ned hissed back.

“Well this time I am. It’s just hard being back here. The last time I was here May was still alive. It’s…strange. Just drop it.” Peter tried to explain quietly as he glared.

“Oh.” Ned looked upset now. “I’m sorry dude.”

“It’s ok.” Peter tried to turn his attention back to the teacher, jotting the equations from the whiteboard down in his notebook. After a few minutes he glanced back over at Ned and caught him staring at him.

“Stop it.” He hissed as he looked back at his notes and continued writing.

“Stop what?” Ned asked.

“Stop looking at me like I kicked your dog.”

Ned opened up his mouth to reply but was interrupted by the teacher, “Boys? Is there something terribly important you need to share with the rest of the class? Or can it wait until later?”

Peter’s cheeks heated as the entire class turned to look at him and Ned.

Ned responded first, “No Mrs. Anderson. Sorry Mrs. Anderson.”

“Yeah sorry.” Peter mumbled and ducked his head to stare intently at his notebook. He refused to look at Ned for the rest of first period.

The remainder of the day passed relatively uneventfully. Besides attending different classes, it went just about the same as all of Peter’s school days last year, except Peter got to sit out for gym class and work on homework instead, which made Ned super jealous. Between that extra study time and his study hall during last period, Peter barely had any homework left for the night. He packed up his backpack and walked out with Ned. Decathlon team didn’t start for another week, so they didn’t have anything to stay after school for yet. He’d toyed with the idea of rejoining robotics club this year, but he figured building robots with Tony was way more fun than anything they could do in robotics club.

Peter found the town car Happy usually drove right away as he walked down the front stairs of his school.

“See you tomorrow.” Peter said good-bye to Ned as he headed toward Happy.

“See you Peter. Text me later.” Ned reciprocated the good-bye before he headed in the opposite direction to go home.

“I will.” Peter agreed and crossed the rest of the distance to the car and opened the door to the backseat.

“Hey Happy.” He greeted as he crawled in.

“Hey kid.” Happy said in return. “How was school?”
“Good.” Peter smiled at him as he buckled in and they drove off.

“Yeah?” Happy prompted. “You make it through the day ok?”

“Yeah it was fine.” Peter said with a sigh. Sheesh. Did everyone know he still wasn’t completely back to normal?

“Tony wanted you to text him when I picked you up so he knew you were ok.” Happy instructed with a smirk.

Peter rolled his eyes even as he pulled out his phone to send off a quick text. *I’m with Happy. He said I’m supposed to text you to let you know I’m not dead.*

_Not funny._ Tony’s response came back only a few seconds later.

Peter sent what he thought was the perfect laughing emoji.

*You seem like you’re in a good mood. School went ok?*

*Yep.*

*Good. I’ll see you at home. Should be back a little after 5pm. What do you want for dinner?*

*Burgers?*

*You read my mind kid. Stay out of trouble until I get home. Do your homework.*

Peter sent him the eye rolling emoji at that and pocketed his phone.

“Everything good?” Happy asked with a glint in his eye.

“Yeah. Just Tony being Tony. You know how he is.”

“Oh I do.” Happy agreed with a laugh.

He chitched with Happy the rest of the way home. It seemed like all too soon they were back at the Tower. The commute sure was shorter than the one to upstate.

“Hey Happy, do you know what Dad’s naming the Tower?” The thought struck Peter as they drove into the underground garage. He caught Happy’s amused gaze in the rearview mirror at the question.

“I mean Tony.” Peter corrected instantly as he blushed at the mistake.

Happy frowned at that and parked before craning around to level Peter with a serious look.

“Listen kid. You can call him that. He adopted you. He is your dad.”

Peter shifted uncomfortably and looked away as if there was something utterly fascinating out the window even though they were surrounded by concrete.

Happy sighed heavily. “I’m not sure what he’s going to name it or if he’s going to name it at all. You should ask him.”

Peter nodded then chanced a look back at Happy who still looked a little too serious.

“All right kid. Get out. I have to go pick your dad up soon. And we both know how he loves to be kept waiting.”
Peter laughed at that and hopped out. “Thanks Happy!”

“Don’t mention it kid.” Happy smiled. “Seriously don’t. I literally get paid to do it. It’s the easiest money of my job.”

Peter beamed at the thinly veiled compliment. He got in the elevator and F.R.I.D.A.Y. automatically took him up to the penthouse without needing to be asked. He went straight to his room, unpacked his homework, and sat down at his desk to finish it. The very act made him feel like the old Peter again even though he was sitting at his desk in his room at the top of one of the tallest buildings in New York instead of his tiny room in Queens. He’d always done his homework as soon as he got home so he wouldn’t have to worry about doing it after patrolling. He decided it wasn’t a bad habit to keep. Plus he’d gotten so much done at school he just needed to finish his chemistry homework for tomorrow, which took him all of twenty minutes, so he ended up starting and then accidentally finishing his essay for English literature that wasn’t due until late next week. It was on 1984. He’d already read that book like three times before, so the essay was a piece of cake. And one less thing to do later.

He ambled back out through the living room to the balcony and plopped down on one of the comfortable lawn chairs with a contented sigh as he closed his eyes. The weather was perfect. Seventy-two degrees and sunny with a light breeze. Peter could almost smell fall in the air. His favorite season. He basked in the sun and relaxed into a light doze.

He woke up later to Tony’s hand shaking his shoulder. His dad stood above him in a in a crisp white shirt with a navy vest and a red tie.

“When’d you get back?” Peter asked as he sat up.

“Just now.” Tony answered. “Have you been sleeping out here since you got home?”

“No.” Peter shook his head. “I think only like half an hour. And I wasn’t sleeping.”

“You weren’t?” Tony smirked. He obviously disagreed.

“I was resting with my eyes closed.” Peter explained.

“Uh huh. So like the very definition of sleeping.” Tony ruffled his hair. “Do you want to come in and eat some burgers with me?”

“Yeah.” Peter smiled and stood, following Tony back into the living room to the couch. White bags and sodas sat on the coffee table.

“Casual dining tonight.” Tony said as he handed Peter a bag and turned on the TV.

“How’s that different from any other night?” Peter joked as he pulled a carton of fries and a huge juicy cheeseburger out of his bag. “Oh my god this looks amazing!”

“It is. I got them from the best burger joint in New York.” Tony endorsed as he took a bite of his own. Peter took a few seconds to marvel at how Tony could eat something so messy in such nice clothes and still stay so completely spotless and put together.

Peter took a bite of his own burger and already worried he’d dripped mustard on his shirt.

“This is delicious.” Peter praised after he’d finished chewing his first bite.

“The only thing better than their burgers is their shakes.” Tony added as he took a second to wipe his
mouth with a napkin.

“Don’t worry. I put them in the fridge.” Tony smiled when he noticed Peter discretely looking around for the shakes. “You like chocolate right?”

“I love chocolate.” Peter nodded excitedly.

“Ok good. Eat that first though.” Tony said and kept eating his burger one handed as he scrolled through the channels before settling on the movie Stargate playing on HBO. They watched it silently, too occupied with wolfing down their food to talk.

“So…” Tony paused as he swallowed his last bite and started balling up the wrappers to throw away. “I had a little chat with Happy on the way over here.”

Peter frowned slightly at that opening as he finished the last of his fries.

“He said you were wondering what I was going to name the Tower.”

“Oh. Yeah, I was just curious.” Peter said with a shrug. “I hadn’t thought about it before, but what are you going to name it? Are you going to call it Avengers Tower again? Or something new? Or Happy thought maybe nothing?”

Tony quirked his lip. “What do you think I should name it?”

“What do I think? I don’t know. I mean just keeping its old name might be easier since that’s what everyone calls it now anyway. And well all the Avengers do live here…”

“Good point.” Tony smiled at him. “We’ll keep the name. Less paperwork that way too.”

Peter smiled back and crumpled up his own wrappers. Tony took their garbage out to the kitchen and came back with two huge milkshakes in styrofoam cups with lids and straws. He handed one to Peter.

“Mmm.” Peter voiced his appreciation after a sip from the larger than normal straw. “This is good.”

“I know.”

“Hey, Happy told me something else too.” Tony continued as he drank his own milkshake. “Something I want to talk to you about. Something I think I should’ve brought up earlier but I didn’t want to make a big deal about it.”

Peter frowned and felt his heart speed up. He had a bad feeling he knew where this was going.

“Peter, you know I adopted you because I wanted to be more than just your guardian. I wanted to be your dad.” Tony gave him a small smile. “I’m your dad. You can call me that if you want to. It’s true. It’s not wrong. But you also don’t have to if you don’t want to. You can call me whatever you want. Ok?”

Peter nodded, eyes wide.

“Well except dude.” Tony continued with a joke to lighten the mood. “Please don’t call me dude. It’s like nails on a chalkboard to me.”

Peter let out a small laugh. “Ned’s the one who says that all the time. Not me.”

“Oh I’m well aware.” Tony smiled. “Just covering my bases.”
“Got it dude.” Peter said with an evil smile before he sipped his milkshake some more.

Tony just groaned and they turned their attention back to the movie. Peter thought after that conversation he should feel incredibly awkward but he didn’t. If anything, he felt relieved. Tony didn’t care if he called him dad. He wouldn’t have to pay such close attention to censoring himself every second anymore. And he’d also learned that apparently Happy had a big mouth and was unquestionably loyal to Tony over him. Definitely good to know for the future.

They watched the rest of the movie and Peter picked the next one. Tony pulled out his Starkpad and started working, but Peter didn’t mind.

“Hey did you finish your homework?” Tony asked with a little nudge when Peter’s eyes started drooping closed during the second movie.

“Huh?”

“Homework.” Tony repeated. “You done?”

“Yeah.” Peter scoffed. “It only took like two seconds.” It was a bit of an exaggeration but Peter wanted Tony to be impressed, to be proud of him.

Tony chuckled. “Of course. You’re a genius. How could I forget?”

Peter smiled at him.

“Why don’t you go get ready for bed and then come back out and we’ll finish the movie?” Tony suggested.

“Fine.” Peter said with an edge of complaint but acquiesced. It didn’t take that long to brush his teeth and wash his face. He changed into a pair of red plaid flannel sleep bottoms and then threw on his grey Ironman pajama shirt on a whim. He’d never worn anything Ironman related in front of Tony before but the shirt was one of his softest ones and he kind of missed wearing it. Besides, if Tony didn’t care if he called him dad he wasn’t going to tease him too much over his clothing choice.

Tony’s eyes twinkled when he caught sight of Peter’s shirt.

“Make a thing out of it and I’ll never wear it again.” Peter warned as he sat back down on the couch.

“I didn’t say anything.” Tony laughed.

“They were going to.”

Tony kept his mouth shut but Peter could tell he loved the shirt.

Peter pushed play on the movie and leaned into the couch, watching it mindlessly as Tony went back to working. Toward the end of the movie, he let his eyes slip closed as his thoughts circled back to the events of the school day and how weird it had been to be back there. It had made him realize how much everything had changed in such a short span of time. May was gone. And he still missed her like crazy. But his life hadn’t ended. And he wasn’t alone. Like he’d feared. Instead, he’d gained a dad. And he knew things weren’t perfect, and they probably still had a lot of things to work out, but he wasn’t afraid, because he knew that no matter what Tony would be there. Tony was his safe place.

Peter listened on the edge of sleep, as the movie ended and the room went silent when his dad turned the TV off and stood. Peter knew he should get up now but he figured it’d be fine to rest for a few
more minutes first. Or maybe he could just sleep on the couch.

Seconds later, he was gently lifted into the air and being carried to his room by his dad. Part of him knew he should stop playing possum but a larger part enjoyed the feeling of being taken care of too much. When he was set down in bed, Peter gave a sleepy sigh and rolled onto his side as Tony tucked him in. He felt Tony brush his hair back and drop a kiss on his temple. It was one of the many small signs of affection Peter had come to crave from the man.

“Hmm. Night Dad.” He mumbled as the man ran a hand through his hair again.

“Night kiddo.” He could hear the love in Tony’s voice. A moment later the lights turned off and he heard his door click closed softly.

Peter smiled into his pillow. Tony was a good dad. Whatever the future held, he knew Tony would be there for him and they would make it through. Together.

“Hello?”

“Sorry to bother you sir, but I have a guy that was recently transferred here who says he has some information someone might be interested in, and I think that someone might be you.”

“What kind of information?”

“He claims he knows who Spiderman is, and he’s willing to talk.”

“What does he want for it?” Information like that didn’t come free.

“His freedom.”

“Of course he does.” The man muttered. “What is he in for?”

“Theft. Tried to steal from Stark. Looks like the guy pulled some strings to get him sent to the Raft for it.”

The man laughed. This was just perfect.

“Well we both know how much I love Stark.”

“I know sir.”

“It sounds like a reasonable exchange. Tell him I’ll see what I can do.”

“Yes sir.”

“What’s this guy’s name?”

“Adrian Toomes. His record was spotless until he tried to nab a Stark jet full of tech about a year ago.”

“A year ago? Why is he just getting transferred to the Raft now?”

“I don’t know sir. I agree it is a little odd.”
“Hmm. Let me do a little digging. Make some phone calls.”

“Of course sir.”

“Anyway, I have to finish doing this horse and pony show for the president first. Spiderman will keep.”

“Very good sir.”

“And good work soldier.”

“Thank you General Ross.”

Chapter End Notes

Wow I can't really believe this story is over. I hope you liked it! Thank you all so much for going on this incredible journey with me! I'm so happy to have found the joy in writing again and that I've been able to share it with all of you. The amazing support from everyone has meant more to me than words can express.

And don't worry there will be a sequel! So I guess it's not *really* over. It's kind of funny because some of the comments I've read requesting specific storyline ideas are actually things I had planned to incorporate into the next story, so definitely stay tuned! I'm still finishing up the outline but I'm hoping to have something posted within the next month.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!