There's a Little Bit of Grey Area There

by Kritterrat

Summary

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“Move!” One of the two robbers yelled moving toward the aisle. This would do. Peter stood webbing one man to the checkout counter as the man threw a bottle at Peter’s feet.

“Would you like me to call your aunt and notify her of your location?” Karen continued her voice calm and detached from the situation.

“Wha- Karen, no! Just send the automated tex-” Peter jumped avoiding the glass as it shattered around. The liquid splashed up his leg. “Ha!” The bell rang. The second robber dashed from the scene. “Don’t move, I’ll be right back!” Peter called chasing after the first man’s partner.

“Sorry, I didn’t catch that, What would you like me to send?” Karen asked. Peter panted swinging after the guy. Was it him or was this guy extra fast for a normal human?

“Uhh, protocol: ‘I’m at Ned’s but Not’,” Peter ordered. The small drone detached from his chest flying off in the direction of Ned’s house. He dropped down into the alley. He wobbled slightly. Strange. The robber stood in a fighting stance trapped between Peter and the wall just a few feet behind him. “You know not to criticize your criminal finesse but--”

Danger. Peter felt it crawl from the base of his neck down to his spine. Fire seemed to burn every nerve. Ice cold fear solidified in his gut. He wasn’t moving. He couldn’t move. Unsafe. His spidey sense barrelled through him. He needed to find the source dodge it, fight it. The world was moving slower and the ground was coming closer as he tried to dodge the dart that had already found home in his neck.

Karen’s voice focused in and out of comprehension. She sounded far away. A breeze. She was gone. Why did Karen leave? Peter wanted her back, please.

“W-uh?” Peter blinked at the brown boots in front of him. He struggled to lift his head. The boots doubled, tripled and then blurred into nothing. The sedative taking hold of his consciousness.

Kkr Zzst- “Got him.” A gruff voice spoke into the walkie- talkie, smirking to itself in the dark.
“What the fuck!” Aunt May yelled. Peter visibly cringed. Oh man, he was in so much trouble. He screwed his eyes shut and turned around hoping that when he opened them again this would all be a horrible nightmare. Instead, Aunt May stared at him mouth agape.

He looked into her eyes. They were wide in fear. He steps forward. She stepped back. “Oh, Peter… After Ben? Peter… How could you…?” How could you put yourself in danger? What if you got hurt? What if… What if you died? What part of that seemed like a good idea.

“How could I not!?” He straightens. His senses scream at him to run. Gripping his mask he steps back towards the window. This was bad.

“Don’t you dare,” Her stare locks him into place. “Go out that window and you can consider yourself homeless young man.” She steps inside the room. His heart twists sickeningly as she steps closer. She wouldn’t kick him out. Would she? He’s shaking. He can’t make it stop. Her face is blurred in front of him.

May reaches a hand toward him in horrified fascination of the uniform. It looked light. She hoped it was warm, it was almost winter after all. She stared at his frame. He was looking at her. His lip quivered slightly, “A- Aunt May?” He asked. He looked trapped, she took a step back. Emotions swirled around her frame like buzzards. Each one unsure what she one she was dead set on.

Ten seconds and she collected herself. Ten seconds and she was Aunt May who buried Uncle Ben without a tear then cried behind closed doors and thin walls. Ten seconds and she was Aunt May who took Peter in without a second thought. Ten seconds and she knew exactly what was to happen next in the Parker abode.

“Take a shower. I was going to order in, but I think this requires pizza… I’m going to get some… stuff. I’m going to get some stuff.” Her voice edges on hysteria as she exits the hallway. Minutes pass before Peter can move again.

May walked briskly down the street with one reusable bag in hand. The sun hadn’t set yet and if she hurried she could be back to the apartment before it did. Spider Man. That explained a lot. The sneaking out, quitting band, quitting robotics lab, ditching school, losing the Stark internship, and the distance that had grown between them after… after Ben. Ben… she stared blankly at the mozzarella cheese. Was this because of Ben? Did Peter feel he had to stop anything like that to ever happen again? Did he feel some sort of misplaced guilt? How long ago did this start? How could she have not noticed? Something this big...

She grabbed the block of cheese and moved on to the tomatoes. May sighed picking out the ripest ones she could find. She could hear Ben now, “We are entitled to our secrets. I think I could guess a few things you wouldn’t want Peter to know about… especially in our youth.” Yeah, but it was never that dangerous Ben! She argued back in her head.

The checkout line is longer than she hoped. Her foot taps the ground anxiously. Was it smart to leave him alone? What if he… She shook her head firmly from those thoughts and checked out.
She gets home just as the streetlights begin to shine. She took a deep breath. You are May Parker you can do this. I am May Parker I can do this. Just walk in and make a Parker pizza with your nephew. No big. She affirmed to herself as she slipped inside.

“Alright” May stated slipping off her shoes at the door. “Ready?” Peter nods and gets up cautiously from the coffee table. His hair is still wet from the shower. She wishes he’d use the hair dryer or at least a towel, he used to get sick like that.

“Here’s how this is going to work. First, you are going to tell me everything. Starting from the beginning and ending to this moment here where we are making pizza. Is that clear?”

He nods stepping into the kitchen.

“Good.” She hands him a bowl. They start on the pizza with practiced ease. Peter’s eyebrows furrow, he can’t remember when they’d done this last.

“Remember the tour my science class took of OsCorp labs around last year sometime?” Peter begins.

May nodded grabbing the flour. Peter told her almost everything. He skipped watching Uncle Ben die, though that she knew. He skipped the part where Ned had found out and the other sixteen, or so, other little parts where he’d been hurt or almost drowned. She kept her cool for the most part. That’s what worried Peter the most. Though, when he tells her about Tony Stark and the internship being a ploy, May did speak.

“You’re telling me he took you to Halfway across the world and didn't even think to tell me? Really. Either of you? You don’t even have a passport! How did he do that? What if you were stuck in Germany? You battled with Captain America? ” Questions pour from her mouth without warning. She needs to know more.

Peter looks at her a sheepishly. “I have one, now. I mean it’s fake but, I mean it had to be, but he gave me the suit to protect me in Germany! And he was there too! Mr. Stark wouldn’t let anything happen to me, I mean he means well. Like he tried to get me to stop, cause it was dangerous with the Vulture, so he took my suit away to get me to stop. ” He babbles hoping she won’t put two and two together and figure out Mr. Toomes and Vulture are one in the same and knows his identity.

“What do you mean he took away your suit?” She questioned slamming the oven shut.

“Uhh, it was my fault really. He told me to kept off their radar but I couldn’t let them get away with what they were doing. Besides I don't think Mr. Stark or Happy we’re taking me seriously. He gave it back! And that's great cause it really protects my identity and it’s got all these cool--” He tries to placate.

“Them? Who? The government?”

“Huh? No, the guy’s who worked for Vulture, the dude with the metal wings. You know the guy I stopped from taking those power core things.” Peter clarifies. May purses her lips and lets him continue, though the question burns in her brain: Did Stark make him sign to the Registry? He must have. Fear pitches in her gut.

He continues with the rest of the story till the end till the part where he sits on the couch and she joins him with two plates of pizza. May asks more questions. Peter answers them. They sit in silence. The tension returns and sits along side them. May almost asks if it would like some pizza too.

“You’re grounded. I want your phone, web solution, and both suits. The laptop stays in the living room for homework only. School starts and you are there until the end of it or decathlon meetings.
School ends and you’re doing you homework here in this house. Do you understand?”

“Aunt May no! Please! I’ll do anything! Just--” Peter begs. This is the day he never planned for because Plan A was to never get caught by May. May’s jaw sets stubbornly.

“Do you understand?” She repeats.

Peter wilts against the couch. “Yes.” May stands collecting the dishes and putting them in the sink. Peter sets off to his room.

“How long?” Peter asks as he hands his things over. He looks so young a frail to her. She wants to pull him into a hug and never let go. She wants to say forever. You’re too young for this. I can’t lose you. Not you too. Instead, she shakes her head and closes her door behind her.

“It could be worse, it could be drugs, least this is helping people.” The Ben in her head says collected and cool as a cucumber.

Is it bad to wish that it had been drugs? She asked herself laying down on Ben’s side of the bed. The Ben inside her head chuckles.

May doesn’t sleep that night. Her mind tosses and turns wrestling out what she should do next. Ben is no help. “Everyday is a danger May. You can’t protect him from who he is or who he wants to be. In fact, you may just lose him if you don’t accept this piece of him.”

She knows he’s right.

“I need to talk with Stark,” May states sipping her coffee and leaning against the counter. Peter sits across from her at the bar chair among the bills and junk mail.

“You need to talk with Mr. Stark?” Peter’s voice cracks as he chokes slightly on his cereal. “You can’t just...j-just talk with Mr. Stark!” His voice raises in incredulity as his aunt stares him down. Disappointment clearly shown in her features. He shrinks into his chair. “I have… one number. It’s not Mr. Stark, but Happy is the guy I report to…”

May nods and hands him the phone. “Here. Make it happen.”

“Does this mean...?” Peter asks hope spurring in his chest. May sends him a warning look.

“It means I’m thinking about it.” Peter nods enthusiastically. Worry strikes her heart like a match. But maybe yelling at talking to Mr. Stark would douse that flame.

It doesn’t, but he gives her access to the GPS function on Peter’s suit, and his personal number if she had any concerns. Though she somehow doubted it was really the reason he gave her that number.

Peter is standing on the ceiling when she comes into his room. That’ll take some getting used to. She leans against his door. “You’re grounded for this month. No suit. Curfew is 7. After that, there are going to be rules.”

Peter jumps down and hugs her. “Thank you, thank you thank you.” He pulls to look at her grinning.

“Rule one: no more lying, no more secrets alright?” She hugs him tight and buries her nose in his shoulder. It’s the closest she’s felt to him since Ben.
Chapter 2: Lies and Deception

A week later Peter flops onto Ned’s bed with a sigh.

“Well, I mean, that’s not too bad. You’ll just have to wait a month! ’Sides your quarter grades will be better.” Peter nodded absentmindedly to his friend’s words. He has an idea. “Oh no. I know that face, Peter, that face gets us in trouble and by us I mean usually me!”

“I just have to go a month without the suit.” Peter sat up and leaned over Ned’s desk. “I can make more web solution, find parts for the web shooters, then with my Guy in the Chair,” Peter gave Ned a significant look. Ned groaned internally. Peter looked like a puppy begging for food scraps on meatloaf Wednesdays. Ned was totally going to get in trouble for this, he could feel it without the spidey sense. “I can fight crime without anyone having to see me! I’ll stay in corners and shadows.”

“No- Dude, this is a bad idea.” Ned deadpanned shaking his head.

“No, no, it’s a brilliant idea.” Peter reaffirmed jumping up from the bed.

“Peter--’ Ned protested looking up from his 1,381 piece Millenium Falcon lego set.

The young superhero steamrolls through with his plan, “See, I could stealth up your drone,” Drone was a loose term for the piece of wayward flying machinery that Peter had put together for Ned’s birthday. “And you could fly it around Queens looking for crime. Meanwhile, I put on a hoody and some goggles and stop it from rooftops and stuff!” Peter spreads his arms wide pacing the small expanse of Ned’s room “It’s perfect! It’ll be like old times.”

“Dude… no. I-I can’t do that. What if someone finds out your identity man. Hoodies and goggles aren’t a super suit made by Iron Man!” Ned bites the inside of his cheek. He didn't like the fact that there were old times without him. He'd liked to think of the old times when Peter Parker and Ned Leed's didn't keep secrets from one another. He could understand why May grounded Peter. Ned wished he could do that too. Peter had kept Spider-Man a secret for seven months from Ned. If he hadn't come over that day Ned's certain that he still wouldn't know. It makes him wonder what else he doesn't know. What else is Peter not telling him?

“Pleaseee. It’ll only be Tuesdays through Fridays from 3-6pm. Guy in the Chair” Peter panhandles shamelessly to Ned. “You’ll still have time for homework and stuff! I swear.” Maybe this is a chance Ned thinks swinging back and forth in his chair. A chance for them make up for those seven months of deception.

“Oh no, not this again. Remember last time we did this? You got stuck in that base? No one found out, but if they had! I mean it was cool, but--” Ned twists nervously in his chair. Peter notices. Ned’s close to breaking down and saying yes. He can tell.

The easy part is fixing up Ned’s drone, fixing up some old web slingers to a makeshift hoodie suit. It’s insanely hot when the sun’s out, but it works. It’s like old times Peter muses. Holding your phone
to your ear as you sling into danger, however, is much harder. Least May believes him when he tells her it fell. It’s technically the truth.

Peter dodges a fist that flies towards his face. “Swing and a miss!” He webs it and the guy’s other hand. Then the feet to the ground for good measure. “Did you happen to see where the lady went? You know who owns the purse?” He questions the mugger. He swings the purse on his finger.

“Mutant freak. Thinks he’s better than everybody else cause he can do things others can’t. Well, fuck you kid!” The man shouts spitting on Peter’s shoes. Peter slaps the note onto the man’s mouth and swings out of the alley way. Mutant freak? Peter frowns. Yeah well, you’re a mutant jackass. He quips aloud to the breeze. He wishes Karen was there to hear it.

He leaves the purse on the fire escape outside the Lady's window leaving another note. Ned says that’s creepy. Peter argues it's weirder to go in and return it. He hates they can’t call the police. No video, no proof, and traceable cell phones. Ugh. He needs his suit back. That man will be back on the streets in a matter of hours.

Peter changes at Ned’s and walks home. They’ve worked out a system. Peter’s backpack stays at Ned’s. If he’s late he tells May he’s hanging with Ned or if he’s really late he tells her Ned’s mom invited him for dinner. He goes hungry those nights, but it’s worth every crime fighting second of it. Tonight, however, he makes it early.

Peter slips off his shoes and drops his backpack by the door. The news drones on as Peter slumps into the couch.

“Hi Aunt May, Ned helped me with Spanish. School was school. How was your day? Why Peter I’m glad you asked. My day was good, slow, but good. Are you hungry?” May teased him from the kitchen. Peter turns into the couch to face her.

“Aunt Mayyyyy,” he groans into the couch cushions rolling his eyes. She chuckles good naturedly.

“I’m ordering in. Chinese or Thai food?” She questions. Peter shifts himself back towards the tv.

“Ummm… Chinese.” May nods dialing the number on the bright orange menu. Peter watches the news with disinterest. May always puts it on when she gets home, he knows better than to mess with it. Uncle Ben tried once. Peter smiled fondly at the memory. Aunt May had chased them around the apartment as Peter and Ben had thrown the remote around. It broke when Peter had fumbled and tripped on part of the carpet. The scar where he split his lip is long gone, but the crack in the remote remains scotched taped up on the table. He picks it up and runs his thumb along it. A strange wave of sadness wraps around him. He stares at the news caster’s abnormally large left ear to make it go away.

“And now for CrimeWatch with Alexa. Alexa take it away.” The newscaster with the large left ear orders. Peter turns off the tv with lightning speed. There was a picture of him in the makeshift suit. Shit. He turns cautiously to Aunt May. Her back is turned and she’s still on the phone. He breathes a sigh of relief.

“Hey! I was watching that!” May exclaims as she puts her phone down. The lie bubbles up from his throat.

“I just… Can we not watch the crime section? Please… I don’t want to see who I didn’t save today.” His voice quiets at the end of the sentence. He’s surprised by the truth of that statement despite it being a lie. May hugs his shoulders from over the couch.
“Yeah, sure. Crime isn’t why I put it on anyway.”

Peter tilts his head up at her, “Why do you put it on?” He asks curiously.

“Weather. Always good to pretend to know about. Plus those dog stories they have every once in awhile.” May sits by him. They don’t talk about how he saved a dog and was on the news once. Or the time when Uncle Ben changed the channel. Or the fact Peter lied to her most of this year. They talked about small things. That project in English or that funny customer Aunt May had to stand behind at CVS.

It’s late well, early when Peter clammers off to bed. Homework is boring, and there’s so much time to do it now it takes forever. He sets his phone to go off in the morning and falls into a dead sleep.

Peter awakes just before his alarm to a text that screams Tony Stark. Peter wonders if he sent the text at this time just to deprive Peter of those few precious moments of sleep.

Unknown:

Don’t be stupid.

Attached is the same picture that was on the news. Peter curses internally. He forgot Aunt May’s eyes weren’t the only eyes watching him. Ned and he will have to lay low for a couple of days. Peter grits his teeth and gets ready for the day. One step forward two steps back.

When he comes back from school it’s 3:45. Ned suggested he should just go home today. Aunt May isn’t home, but it means he can improve the web slingers or refurbish the goggles. Least he can do a better job on that here, unlike Ned’s house where Ned’s siblings constantly trample through and steal the wretch Peter needs or the part that really shouldn’t be thrown down a hallway. Eight-year-olds. Peter shudders. It’s really a miracle that Ned can get any of his lego sets done. Peter dropped his bag into his room and that’s when he saw it.

His suit lying on his bed with a piece of paper covering the insignia. May’s long slanting handwriting covers the paper. Peter skims it. Excitement percolates under his skin. It doesn’t even matter that his curfew is still at 7 for the rest of this month. He’s pumping his fists in the air. Yes! He’s in the suit and out the window before the paper he was holding can hit the cluttered floor of his room.

AUNT MAYS RULES

- 100% the truth at all times.
- Curfew is 12:30. **DO NOT** break curfew
- No serious injuries.
- **No ditching school, evildoers can wait education cannot.**
- Answer all incoming calls from Aunt May at all times.
- GPS tracker installed at all times.
- **DO NOT** leave Queens unless given express permission.
• Tony Stark or Happy must go through Aunt May before any big missions.
• Grounded means No suit and No Ned.
• Phone on you at all times.
• Put your backpack somewhere safe, preferably at home.
• If anyone gets a hold of your identity this is over.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3: She Freaks Out

No one says no to Tony Stark. Sure there had been idiots who’d say no in a blue moon and then Steve a couple of times that Tony had tried to get Steve to a strip club. Explaining new things to Steve’s 1940’s mentality was the fun part. The offer was all joke, well, mostly. Recently, though, everyone seemed to be saying no to Tony Stark. In a serious manner that affected more than a night on the town. It was a strange feeling that didn’t sit well. First, there was Cap and the Accords, then Peter and the becoming an Avenger (with a capital A), then Pepper to marriage. The press had gone wild. Tony lost his mind along with them. It punched his ego straight in the gut just below the bruise left by Cap’s shield. It left him speechless. Another feeling he was not used to, and wouldn’t be making friends with anytime soon. Cause Tony Stark always has the thing to say. It’s just how it is. How it will always be. She’d come to talk with him after the press conference. He has had a fair sampling of the liquor cabinet.

“I can’t marry a man you might not come home. You can’t promise me Ironman isn’t going out to protect the world at a moments notice, fight impossible monsters, and you can’t promise me that you won’t take the ultimate sacrifice because you will Tony. I’m sorry...I can’t.”

“Pepper-” She shakes her head, and he opens his mouth again.

“Don’t. I love you, Tony, let’s just leave it at that. Alright?” She’s got that watery exasperated look he wants her to laugh away. Only he couldn’t think of a joke.

“No. Not alright. Those are excuses, how would marriage be any different than now?” He disputed. Pepper starts a brisk pace to the door and he jogs to keep up then gives up altogether. Running is too far he reasons with himself. He needs to make her stop. Come back.

“Oh, Tony. Believe me, it just will be. I know you don’t think so--” She lets out a breathy laugh that comes out as a sigh. For such a genius he was so emotionally stunted on his good days. She pauses for a second then continues. He needs her to pause again, he can win this argument. He ambled forward.

“I think I understand perfectly. Someone is scared of change, and it’s not me.” He slurs lightly. It’s mostly emotion, or it could be the booze. It’s the booze.

“Don’t patronize me, Tony. You’re drunk, we’ll talk about this in the morning. ” She promises so emptily it sounds like a plea. Her gaze is steel despite the way her chin wobbles slightly. She knows what’s coming next even before he does. She’s brilliant he thinks in the back of his mind. Another part argues that he’s not drunk.

“This has nothing to do with Ironman! You and I crossed that bridge. So let’s see what could it possibly--Oh!” Pepper increases her pace down the hallway as Tony stops and increases his volume. “I know. That year when Miss.Keaton became Miss.Potts. ’Cause Daddy didn’t love her or Mommy anymore.” It’s juvenile and low. But Tony feels like he’s won the argument until he sees Pepper’s face. Her eyes are red rimmed and narrowed. It makes him wanna go a few rounds with mark 47 then perhaps jump into a volcano while he’s at it.
“Fuck you.” She hisses. He can barely hear it on the end of the hallway, but he sees the way her lips form the words in disgust. The disgust isn’t directed onto him, rather to herself. The sentiment, that, that’s for him. She’s gone down the stairs before he can say another word. It’s probably for the best. He stumbles back into his workshop in the compound.

He mulls it over in his mind. He can’t see why’d she ever talk to him again. Honestly, he can’t see why’d he’d talk to himself. He looks for another bottle of anything. Only to realize there’s a full glass in his hand. A younger Tony Stark would have already been off to some party to rub drunken elbows with the burnt out celebrities and rub even more with Malibu’s finest adult entertainers, but he knows that’s going to get him nowhere fast. So he sits in his workshop numbed by the taste of rum and coke. No one bothers him for the rest of the night.

In hindsight, Tony should have taken Peter seriously. In a lot of ways. The one Tony was focused on him at the moment was one particularly angry May Parker. He needs to stop her screeching—at any cost. Tony grits his teeth. His head is pounding.

“I don’t know if you know this, but taking someone else’s kid to another country without the guardian’s consent is considered kidnapping.” She won’t let him speak. He waits for a pause. It doesn’t come. Bidding his time Tony turns the volume down on the call and pops a couple aspirin. He puts his head in his hands and waits for the pain to subside.

“And I don’t even know how, to begin with weaponizing a teenager. Really?” She yells.

“Let me stop you right there. It’s not a weapon, it’s protection.” It just happens to look a lot like a weapon, he finishes in his head. Tony stands it’s time to sell it. A disgruntled parent is not foreign territory for him, although it’s been awhile. “It’s security. For him and you-

“Mr. Stark you don’t honestly—” May exclaims exasperated.

“It’s my turn to talk,’He cuts her off and doesn’t let her say a word till he’s done selling her this. Even if it’s just for the kid’s sake. He can’t be wearing cotton pajamas if he’s hellbent on going after people like the Vulture. “It’s security. He would be out on the street either way. In cotton underoos or high tech spider suit. I say that he should wear the suit that allows live GPS tracking, readings on vitals and more safety features designed to keep him from getting in too deep.” At least without help, well, in theory. “At least when they aren’t being tampered with.”

There is a pause and a sigh on the other line.

“I know Peter said something similar… I just,” May sighs again she’s biting her nail on the other side of the line. I just what? Her mind is blank with all the things she could say but, won’t. Silence threatens to take the conversation again. She settles on, “He’s just a kid. I worried before when he was just walking home from school. Now he’s running into fires and fights…” Tony shifts uncomfortably. He doesn’t need to know her concern for her boy, that’s too personal for him. Time for this conversation to end.

“I can give you access. You have a StarkPhone?” He interrupts once again.

“Huh? No, I have—” Tony rolls his eyes. May blinks rushing to figure out what that has to do with anything.

“I’ll send one over. Just give me an hour. The spider app will be the one you’re looking for. I’ll even add my personal.”
“There are going to be rules.” She suddenly affirms. He was wondering about that. He bets silently that the kid will break all these ‘rules’ within a month.

“Uh huh. Yes of course.” He agrees, but there have never been any rules that have ever stopped Tony before.

“You or Happy have to get my permission before you cart him off to other countries, or the out of the Tri-state area. He can’t miss school either.”

“I can work with that.” Tony mutes his mic. The aspirin is working. “F.R.I.D.A.Y. pull up the real estate map buy a building with these semantics in mind.

“Would you like to buy as Tony Stark?” F.R.I.D.A.Y. asks processing the rest of the request.

“No. Undisclosed buyer.” Tony starts a new prototype design.

“He’s grounded for this month.” She finishes hanging up unceremoniously. He barely notices. He begins to make a plan to deal with Ross. A Ross who by the looks of it wants to put all efforts into finding ‘This Spider-Kid’. It’s good Peter will be taking a break. It makes it easier to create fake trails for Ross’s dogs to chase. Least till Ross is nose deep in some other superhero crisis and needs his aides again.

He needs a new place. One with away from Ross’s prying eye. He didn’t like that Ross had control. He had imprisoned Steve’s team in highest security in the middle of the ocean. Who was to stop Ross from doing the same to Tony? Or for that matter any Avenger or vigilante Ross found.

No, no. That won’t do. Tony thought. Especially under his watch. He tossed the holographic prototype away he’d been designing absentmindedly. He was going to have to play the game of subtlety and secrets, a spy’s game. Not something he’s particularly good at. It would be a game of tricks and use cunning skill to keep Peter’s Identity a secret. He tossed the accords into the metaphorical trash can. They needed an upgrade. A different system of accountability and mission assignments. He knew that for a while. It was palladium core: a solution with the same outcome as the problem.

He swiveled to the display system and rolls back his shoulders. He pulls up the building F.R.I.D.A.Y. purchased. He doubts the remodeling will be done in a month, but it could happen. “F.R.I.D.A.Y. hire contractors under another name.” He blocks everything out and moves forward. This will be a nice distraction he thinks.

What was wrong with having just a micron of caution? It’s two weeks later when he sees the report of a baby faced cotton suited spider fighting an armed robber. He knew the kid would be out again, but he’d at least thought Peter would keep it on the down-low. Fighting men with guns in front of cameras is not down-low. In fact, it’s idiotically stupid. He sends Peter a text kicking himself for not getting in touch, rather Happy getting in touch, with the kid sooner. Least if they’d been working together behind May’s back Peter would have at least been in something that could minimize the damage of a wayward bullet. He texts May next. He sends the video.

Tony Stark: Give him the suit. He’s only going to get hurt dressed like that.

May sends him something about not telling her how to parent her nephew, but when he sees the suit online later that evening he couldn’t care less about her text. Least the kid was safer.
Another set of eyes watches the news. A hand holds a toothpick and with surgical precision picks away at the meat between his teeth. He watches with the sound off, taking notes with his other hand. Excitement leers inside him as he writes down the hero’s strengths and looks for weaknesses. This could be a challenge. He likes challenges.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, kudos, subscribing, commenting and bookmarking!
Peter ducks into Midtown high surprisingly early. Energy buzzes around him, it’s Friday. He meets Ned in the hallway grinning emphatically.

“Hey, are we still on for tonight?” Ned asks excitedly. Peter grins. He forgot he said they should have a game night Friday. He’ll have to text Aunt May. This day just keeps getting better he thought to himself.

“Yeah, it’ll be fun!” Peter’s senses niggle in the back of his head. They aren’t alone.

“What’ll be fun?” MJ inquires casually slipping out of an air duct. She swings the vent closed standing. Ned lets out a manly scream. Peter fights the urge to jump onto the ceiling.

A thin layer of dust coats her hair and jacket. Peter weighs out if he should tell her or not. “What’ll be fun?” She repeats her gaze pierces through them, scrutinizing some unknown detail that only her eyes can see. He decides on not telling her.

“Uh, game night,” Peter answers barely withholding a stutter. MJ stares down the hallway. Peter listens. There’s no one coming this way.

“Is that really what you do for fun?” She’s not looking at him, but he knows the question is for him. His heart hides in his stomach. For the second time that year, he’s certain she knows he’s Spider-Man. Is that why she’s acting strange? His heart speeds up incrementally. She’s scoping out escape routes. It’s why she came from the vent to catch him by surprise. He watches her. He can’t tell what her endgame is. What if she’s here to attack. Her father is a crime boss. And they know. They’re here to take him and smoosh him under a building and... his thoughts run wild as anxiety rolls and tremors in his hands.

“Can I come?” She looks back to them suddenly and earnestly. Peter blinks. He needs to clean out his ears. There’s no way that MJ just asked to hang out with them. At the same time he feels like he could collapse, she wasn’t hinting at his super hero persona at all.

Still, he stares at her mouth agape. She looks at him funny as an awkward second passes between them. Her nose crinkles slightly then she laughs, “I’m not that interested, jeez.” He feels like she’s telling him some joke he’s missing the punchline for. He also is pretty sure he’s offended her somehow and he’ll never know how to make it right.

“Are you ok man?” Ned sputters regaining his voice.

“Did I?” she questions rhetorically looking around the almost empty hallway unperturbed. “See you later losers.” She’s gone before either of them can think of something to say.

“Are you ok man?” Ned puts a hand on Peter’s shoulder eyebrows drawn in concern. Peter shakes off the hand and nods, “Yea...Yeah. Don’t worry about it.” He clears his throat as his heart returns to its normal pace.
“MJ is so weird dude.” Peter nods again agreeing full heartedly. Leave it to Ned to speak exactly what he is thinking. MJ doesn’t talk to them the rest of the day. Even at the all school assembly announcing the new vice principal. One claim is the old one mysteriously vanished. The other is: he had an affair and ran off. Peter has a feeling it really had to do with the buses destroyed on homecoming night. Whatever the reason he gets out of English.

Peter doesn’t like the new vice principal. He reminds Peter of Mr. Toomes. His hair is buzzed off and balding at the front. The podium meets his lower chest as he wraps his fingers around the edges. The man holds himself to look down upon them like a bird of prey. His deeply inset eyes glisten as he flicks a toothpick between his teeth. And while he smiles brightly at everyone, a shiver runs down Peter’s spine.

“Hello students and staff of Midtown, it is my pleasure to stand before you today as your new vice principal, you may call me Dr. Kost. I’m looking forward to working beside you to make our school a safer and better place to learn and become the future leaders in science and innovation.” He pauses looking up from the notecards on the podium. An apathetic silence greets him. “The world we live in today is much more dangerous than the one I grew up in. With that in mind we are upgrading the security around Midtown as well as improving in more areas--” Kost continues.

Peter breathes. Shaking his head. What the hell is wrong with him today? He even saw MJ as a threat today. Peter berates himself, not everyone is plotting against you, Peter. He grapples to find something else to think about. He's gripping the underside of the bleachers and focuses on the window. When the assembly is over he finds himself with a handful of dried gum. Gross. He shakes his hand out. The spider grip refuses to let them go till third period. He hopes Ned took notes.

“So dude, are you ready? I can’t wait. I’ve finally got the DLC for Arkham Knight! Dude this is gonna be so fun.” Ned exclaims excitedly in shop class.

“Focus, please, on your work.” Mr. Harvey warns from behind his newspaper.

It turns out swinging from rooftop to rooftop as Batman is underwhelming after swinging from building to building in real life. It makes him itch to go outside and patrol. It’s Ned’s grin that stops him. It’s worth it, he thinks, worth playing a silly game for some time only having to be Peter Parker: A high school freshman and best friend to Ned Leeds. He kinda misses being normal. Sharing Ned’s one controller. Eating cheese puffs and downing soda. Ned’s mom checking in on them before she goes to bed. It’s just like old times. Before Uncle Ben and Spider-Man. It’s the most normal he’s felt in a long time. It’s nice.

Ned falls asleep around eleven. The controller still in his hands as he snores lightly. Peter covers Ned with a blanket then creates a human like lump in the bed behind Ned. He can still patrol for an hour. He sneaks out of Ned’s window and swings out into the night.

He tapped his pen on the calendar. October leered back at him. Times were roughly scratched and rewritten in for each day. Some days were blank, but there was a pattern. Spider-Man was more active during the weekends and was only spotted in the afternoon and on during the weekdays. A map of Queens was splayed beside the calendar dotted with reported sightings. Each dot was color coded for each day of the week. Satisfaction seeped into his bones looking at each perfected circle. The data was coming together. There would be a hefty paycheck after he delivered Spider-Man. Although, the satisfaction of the paycheck was nothing like the high of the chase. He was going to do right by the world, whether the world agreed or not. He was making it a better place. A place where mutants did not run rampant and draw other big fucks into the mix. His toothpick snapped.
He looks to the screens, spitting the other half of the toothpick out. He has Carlos and Sandra out tonight. They’re good mercs, and even better bounty hunters. They’ve been the cause of six robberies this week. It’s for the cause. Carlos, Digg, and Sandra take the money. He leaves it untouched. He won’t take money from victims of a mutant world. It’s their sacrifice to a better world is the only reason he lets the others keep the money at all.

Tonight they are going to hit a store at the end of the night. Let people run out screaming. Set the trap. It’s an experiment. He needs to know the weaknesses of Spider-Man. His first bet: powerful insecticide hidden in OFF! cans.

BANG! A muffled shot comes from the monitor. Sandra shoots into the roof of the store. Carlos has the body camera. He’s is there to observe.

“GET OUT IF YOU WANNA LIVE,” Sandra yells.

The few people in the store run screaming. Perfect.

Glass shatters. The world is a blur. Carlos shoves Sandra out of the way. Feathers envelop them. Sandra shouts. The camera moves further

“Carlos.” He barks into the com link, “I need visual.” The camera shifts again.

“Yes Mr. K--”

“We don’t use my name,” He growls at Carlos watching Spider-Man dodge the mannequin Sandra threw his way.

“Aren’t you a little old for Halloween?” The hero quips advancing.

“You were going to rob a costume store?” He grouches into the com.

“The guy has to get his costume from somewhere!” Carlos shouts back. The image blurs. Carlos narrowly avoids a falling shelf.

“Visual Carlos!” Mr. K orders. The camera shakes violently. Carlos pants loudly into his ear. Static. The camera swings. A web covers it. He’s lost visual. He knew he should have stuck the camera onto Sandra. He switches to Sandra’s com.

“Spray. Use it.” The toothpick rolls between his teeth.

“Uhng,” Sandra grunts, “It’s not working!”

There’s coughing in the background, “...bug spray?” It’s Spider-Man. His voice sounds weak in awe. Mr. K’s breath hitches. Did it work? Was it that easy? His fingers tingle. He sits an inch above his seat. A smirk begins to form.

Then, laughter. The hero laughs at them. At him. He scowls. They needed more data than what they had. Sirens ring in the background.

“Call it. Martha will come get you.” He cuts the com. He walks to the back of the room. He must have some sort of healing factor that dealt with the fumes. Or... Or maybe it was the suit. He couldn’t rule it out. Nevertheless, he needed to know, how fast could Spider-Man heal?

Ned was going to love this! Bug spray! He sends a long voicemail to Happy about it. His legs dangle over the edge of the building as he talks.
“And then I webbed him, right in the chest, like,” He makes the sound effect of his web shooters and continues, “Then like the lady right? She sprays me with this stuff right? And at first, I couldn’t figure it out. I thought maybe it was mace but then I realized it was bug spray! She brought bug spray in case I came along to stop them!” He laughs “It was like in this OFF! Can.” Beep. The call ends.

“Aww, I didn’t even say goodbye.” Peter mourns. They had a deal Happy and Peter: Only one full voicemail a night, but unlimited texts.

“I’m sure he understands” Karen comforts. The messaging falls into his viewer screen. Three text bubbles pop up next to each other in rapid succession.

May: That’s not Ned’s house.

May: We’ll talk tomorrow about this. Go back to Ned’s, get some sleep.

May: today*

Peter groans. It never occurred to him that Mr. Stark would reinstall the GSP tracker. The parachute, yes. GSP that performs no life-saving actions, no. Or even give it to Aunt May. She had sent him a picture of his location. He could only imagine the accompanying look. The *look*. The one that made him feel like he was three feet tall. The one that made his cheeks inflame with shame. The one that would haunt him at nights if he wasn’t busy having nightmares.

Damnit. He clenched his fists denting the can of OFF! in his hand. Why did they always see him as this kid? He was Spider-Man, took down Vulture without the suit, and held his own against Captain America for Pete’s sake. And what about trust huh? What happened to that? His grades were fine. He had been getting home on time. He vents as much to Ned in the morning.

He stands on Ned’s bed staring down at Ned.

“Wait- go back to the part where they sprayed you with bug spray.” Ned spent the last half hour listening to Peter’s reiteration of last night. He just couldn’t get over the fact some guys took the time to buy OFF! and spray the Spider-Man. One of the can’s sits in his hand. Coolest souvenir ever! Especially since the last one was radioactive and almost killed most of the

“Ned!” Peter prompts crossing his arms.

“Ok, fine, but I want to hear that again,” Ned chuckles good naturedly putting the can on his desk, “You want to get rid of the GSP. I say we don’t get rid of the GPS… completely…”

“What do you mean?” Peter slides down to sit on the bed.

“We attach it to the spidey drone. If you’re running late then you can send it to your place or mine. May doesn’t know I know about Spider-Man. Besides, the less you’re grounded the more I get to be
the Guy in the Chair.”

Peter shakes and grins conspiratorially, “This could work.”

“See, this is why I’m the Guy in the Chair.”

“Hey, I’m home.” He greets calling into the apartment. He can fix this. Explain. Apologize. She’s gone into the office. There’s a note about it on the fridge. He goes out and patrols, figuring if he’s screwed then he better go back out while he still can. When he comes back around seven she’s still not there. He paces the living room nervously practicing what he will say to her.

“May, about last night… No,” He starts again, “You see when I started out last night it was only eleven. Plus Ned fell asleep so I was bored! I wasn’t expecting to be out that long. There were these guys with masks and guns…No. Uh… I lost track of time?” He tries to convince the wall. He was pretty sure the wall was just as convinced as Aunt May would be. He placed his forehead against the cool plaster and groaned. He was so grounded.

May opens the door with Thai food. “I got some Pad Thai” She announces smiling. Peter follows her to the kitchen. Peter taps the underside of the bar nervously. This can’t be good.

“Aunt May,” He begins, “I can explain, last night, I’m sorr--”

“Do you want the chicken or shrimp?” She cuts him off slightly louder than necessary.

“Shrimp, I wanted to apologize…” He tries. She cuts him off again.

“It’s from that place that just opened up down the street. I thought we’d try it.” She continues to do this until he stops trying.

They never talk about the night before or anything to do with Spider-Man. It doesn’t hit him, that Aunt May has never done that before. Or the morning after. It hits him in the middle of a chemistry test on Monday. He’s jittery for the rest of the day. What does that mean? He can’t figure it out.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your kudos, subscriptions, bookmarks, and comments! Don't be shy I'd love to hear more from you readers! Tell me what you think, questions, or maybe even suggestions. I do have one question for you all: Do you prefer chapter summaries or not? If so why.

:) Hopefully will have one or more chapters up by next week. Thanks again!
It’s weird, ever since he was bitten he feels 100% safer off the ground. When he can’t sleep he hangs close to the corner by the door. It’s almost calming to wait for the sun to rise next to his new friend, a small unknown spider.

He stares at the spider in the corner. It’s mottled brown and no larger than a thumb. He holds his breath reaching forward. Curiosity burning behind his eyes. Would it come closer? Could he attract spiders to himself?

It doesn’t move as he stretches closer to it. It staggers forward as he touches the web. One step. Two. It crawls onto his finger. Peter lets out a breathy laugh. Another side effect of the bite. He’ll need to write this down. Tell Ne- “Ow” Peter hisses dropping the spider. It bit him! It’s a shock. And the pain and bite are gone before he can count to three, but it leaves a bitter taste in his mouth. That would have been so cool. He mourns. Or useful! Like what if there was a robber or bike thief that was afraid of spiders! So much potential wasted.

“Peter! It’s time to get up!” Aunt May calls from the hallway. Peter grumbles, instantly feeling the hours of lost sleep.

MJ slams the paper down in between Ned and Peter. “Sign it, nerds,” she demands holding out a pen. Peter takes the pen and signs dutifully. His hand drags in exhaustion. She’s been doing this a lot recently.

“What’s this one for?” Ned asks signing next to Peter.

“Least one of you has half a brain to ask,” MJ mutters under her breath. The comment whizzed past Ned but Peter catches it. Thank you enhanced senses. He can also hear about Flash’s new ride, but he does his best to tune that out.

“Hey! I resent that, Ned has a full brain only half of it’s mine so, together we make a super brain!” Peter defends, wishing the words would stop coming from his mouth.

“Yeah, duh, MJ” Ned supports blindly. MJ squints at them appraising the value of continuing this conversation. Out of mercy, she drops it. The two boys in front of her look exhausted and worn and it’s the least she can do.

“Whatever, dorks, it was a petition against Mr. Kost putting up more security cameras all over campus. That’s in addition to the metal detectors you guys signed against last week.” Peter nods. It would be bad if they added the extra security. Especially for him. Extra security meant no web solution, or secret stash of stuff under the lockers, or wearing/ bring the suit to school. He’d have to make more solution in the coming weeks just in case the cameras came to pass. He taps his foot rapidly. He may need to borrow some things from the chem lab as well...
MJ sits with them, not down at the other side of the table but straight across from them. That’s another thing she’s been doing lately: sitting with them. It perplexes both Ned and Peter since really it’s been only the two of them since about the second grade. Still, it’s not like MJ joining them at lunch is a bad thing. So, they let it be.

Peter stares at the book she holds. Her hand covered the title of the well-worn paperback. He can smell the soft old book smell over the onslaught of the cafeteria’s meatloaf surprise. She carries that book everywhere. He’s seen it before, but he never manages to catch the title. He’d ask her what book, but it seems too personal for reasons he can’t describe. Besides, it’s just a book. He wonders if she actually reads in it or if it’s just another sketchbook where she keeps the drawings she won’t show to Peter and Ned.

MJ kicks him under the table, “Earth to Parker, your apple is getting stolen in 3, 2-” She steals the apple before she reaches one and bites into it.

“Hey!” he protests reaching after the fruit. That’s another thing he’s noticed, he’s never seen her bring in a packed lunch or get a food tray from the cafeteria. Instead, she steals their food. “So did you guys finish Ms. Byrd’s review guide for the midterm?”

“Yep,” Ned replies happily biting into his sandwich.

“Review guide?” Peter furrows his eyebrows. MJ and Ned’s eyes are on him. “There’s a midterm for history?” He was totally not informed about this.

“Dude it’s like that packet that’s like an inch thick? It’s due tomorrow? It’s like fifty points?” Ned prods. He was totally informed about this multiple times.

Crap! It was assigned over a week ago. He knows the packet. It was in the backpack he lost last week or maybe the week before. He can’t remember but he knows it was in there. “Crappppppp! I forgot about it!”

MJ rolls her eyes, “Obviously. Meet me at after school, I’ll help you get started.” He could hug her, but he won’t cause she’d probably hit him. He settles for pushing his tray over to her and grinning sheepishly.

“Thanks.” He wants to tell her, there’s only so many excuses that get you out of decathlon meetings when a bank is being robbed or when you know there’s a dealer who sells to kids around 4-5pm on Thursdays. And, what’s more, it would be so much easier if she knew. He’d have to ask Ned and probably Tony. But, he can’t help but want to trust MJ. She was cool, smart and funny. But, still, he can’t form the words. And before he knows it, the moment has passed.

“Not all heroes wear capes” Ned mutters. Peter gives him a confused glance, mouthing, ‘I don’t wear a cape. Dude, what real hero wears a cape?’

“Thor” Ned whispers.

‘Oh yeahhh…’
Their conversation continues quietly in the cacophony of the cafeteria. MJ watches from behind her book.

“Alright love birds, I’ll leave you be. See you here after school Peter.” MJ stands and slides a piece of paper to Peter as the two stumble over one another protesting.

The bite. It’s part of him, sure. But it’s not what’s different with Peter. She knows it. It’s not being Spider-Man that’s made her Peter different. Though, May can’t say for certain that it isn’t that. She suspects it has to do with Ben’s death. Peter was there. He was… spider-enhanced, but didn’t act. He was afraid, she excuses. Cause if he wasn’t then he let Ben die, but that’s not fair. He was scared. Adrenaline can be paralyzing. Who wouldn’t be scared? She doesn’t let her mind continue, but those thoughts sit there like two puzzle pieces that don’t quite fit together. Because she can’t blame him. It really should have been her there that night with Ben or Peter. Maybe if it had been, they would have all made it out of there that night. If she had gone to get the prescription alone, perhaps everything would have been fine.

Ben was brave. Ben was a fool. Ben did everything that May would have done. Cause Ben was brave because Ben was a fool he took a bullet. He took a bullet because he believed he could talk the robber out of it. Because, just like May, just like Peter, Ben believed in the good of people. But did little to remember the power of a gun, the power of money and the power one begets with violence.

So May understood. Somehow telling a superhero to not save people, because he’s grounded, is being just as bad as that man that shot down her husband. The news reports punish Peter. Telling him that he failed in some way when he didn’t. It also punishes the victims of these crimes. If he isn’t there to save people, then is it her fault? She doesn’t want to think about it. She’d rather him be out there. Hell, she’d join him. Cause she agrees. She agrees that things like Ben’s death shouldn’t happen if it were preventable. She wishes it was less dangerous. She wishes that life was a little less complicated. She wants Ben. But, tonight his voice and comforting words are nowhere to be found.

She takes a different route home that night. It’s a Friday, Peter is probably at Ned’s or patrolling. She could check, but she likes to pretend. Pretend he’s at Nick’s playing video games or doing stupidly normal teenage things.

“Aunt May?” Peter calls hopefully into the empty apartment. If he’d thought she was busy before finding out about Spider-Man it’s nothing compared to now. May is gone constantly. She picked up a second job. It’s part-time and “a favor” for some friend who just opened an antique shop or something. However, he can’t help but feel like it’s somehow his fault. Peter walks into his room and spills his books onto the floor. He needs another backpack again. He hasn’t mentioned it to May yet. He’s almost afraid to. There’s a boundary there. Something neither of them has crossed, not since that night they made pizza. It’s on the list of things they don’t talk about, along with Ben, and his
parents.

Besides, it doesn’t matter much really. They always eat dinner together despite it. Still the time ticks by. That night she doesn’t come home until early. And neither does he.

Chapter End Notes

Hello all! Sorry about the wait, College is time-consuming. :)
Hope you have a wonderful day, Thank You for reading!!
Chapter 7: Happy and Some Unhappy Circumstances

Happy grumbled slamming the car door and getting out of the smoking vehicle. The front was warped around a pole. He began to dial AAA. Fucking ice and slush and shit. They tell him to wait. Double dammit. Sighing he waits suit and all on the curb of the frigid winter air. Malibu was so much better. Especially when you weren’t on business official or otherwise.

If had been Avengers or Stark related business he would have called a company car. But it wasn’t and Happy didn’t need or want anyone Tony to know where he was going. So, that’s how he ended up in an Uber, late to awake. He turned off his phone.

“Turn right at the light ahead. Don’t follow that GPS it won’t get you Brooklyn as fast as you think.” The driver briefly turned his head to look at Happy then turned into a left lane. “Uhh… I mean it is a GPS it knows how to get to Brooklyn just fine um, sir. Just relax? I have some water in that glove box if you want uh, sir.”

And that was how Happy drove the uber driver’s car to the wake he was obnoxiously late for. Tony would have been appalled. Potts would have been worried. Happy is never late. Pale-faced and wide-eyed the driver switched to the driver seat and drove away as Happy climbed the stairs to the unfamiliar apartment building. Artie had mentioned they’d moved, Happy hadn’t realized this was where. Iron barred windows did little persuade Happy of its safety. Nancy buzzed him up.

Nancy craned her neck to look up at him. “Hey Happy. It’s been awhile. Wasn’t sure if you’d show up.” She took a step back and let him into the combined living room and kitchen area. The apartment was cramped. A few people milled around the kitchen and living room. They spoke hushed and were quick to silence. He sat next to Nancy on the couch. “Relatives” she jerked her head towards the group in the kitchen. “They won’t tell me, but I’m sure they want Ada and Casey to go home with them.” She grimaced. “Could you imagine? My kids in Boise, Idaho?”

Happy shook his head. He had read too many emails about the spry and active Silva daughters. “No.” Nancy looked over at him and smiled.

“Good. Me neither.” She shook her head crossing her arms. “If they weren’t his kids they wouldn’t care.” She breathed shakily and took another sip from the can. The strangers in the living room begin to say goodbye and she got up to see them through the door. The relatives leave next with promises and “If you need anything...”s.

She begins to clean the mess left behind. Happy helped. The silence joins them the loss finding its voice through the silence.

Artie would be rapidly talking right about now. He hated silences. Nancy opens the fridge and sighs, “Is there any chance you’d like a casserole?” Happy looks over her shoulder to see the fridge filled to the brim with odd Tupperware and platters. Neighbors, friends and even those family members from Boise. He’s glad they have them, cause after tonight he wouldn’t be returning here. Not a chance.
“No, I couldn’t.” He hesitated. He hadn’t brought anything. Guilt swarmed to his shoulders and held fast and heavy to them. Nancy took out a casserole. She looks around with unease. Happy follows her gaze. Tension seems to surround them leaking from the corners of her eyes and the worrying of their gaze. Happy frowns. Something wasn’t right. She doesn’t look well. There’s a weariness about her that wasn’t there before. And He has a feeling it has nothing to do with Artie’s passing. He has a feeling it has to do with why she had called him here. To the wake and not the funeral.

“Would you stay for dinner? The girls would enjoy it.” It wasn’t a question, it was verging on a demand. Happy nodded. She smiled at him and the tension dissipated. It sets him on edge. They hadn’t talked in over ten years, he’s sure. And why he came here without letting anyone know? Stupid.

The girls stare at him for all of two seconds before they’re otherwise preoccupied with the asparagus chicken casserole. He tries asking them questions he already knows the answers too. It’s a fruitless effort. They act as though he isn’t here. It’s strange he’s known them their entire lives, yet they know nothing about him. It’s the job. You miss the funerals and the weddings, the birthdays and family reunions, but he wouldn’t trade it for the world. He was never really a family man anyway. But Artie was. It’s strange he’s here. It seems so misplaced. He hasn’t done anything off Stark or Potts radar in years, at least a decade he muses. Though Tony probably knows something. Only the sound of cutlery and chewing permeates the air. Happy stares across the table to Nancy she doesn’t touch the food on her plate. She doesn’t look up at him. Happy opens his mouth. Something is wrong. He wants, no he needs, to know what.

With that thought, Happy’s phone begins to ring loud and insistent cutting through the air. He ignores it the first time. And he turns it off the second time it goes off. Tony can wait. Happy is going to get to the bottom of this strange situation. Besides he has a feeling it’s probably about some case-sensitive material (like the real Avengers equipment). Something to which he couldn’t talk about here. He smiles sheepishly at Nancy. She stares back with a strange determination. The kids continue to play listlessly with their food.

When it rings the third time he curses under his breath and wanders into the hallway to answer. He had turned the fucking thing off. He would bet his life that he had turned the button off.

“Hello?” Happy grits out under his breath.

“Hey. Yeah? This A bad time?” Tony bombards through the line. Happy sighs, Tony never knew when to quit, “No, just some personal business boss. Like we discussed I’m taking the night off?” He says hoping Tony will remember that conversation. There’s a pause. Tony is thinking.

“There is a car outside, F.R.I.D.A.Y. will brief you.” Happy groans into the Stark custom dial tone. Happy missed Jarvis, that sarcastic bastard would have mentioned it to Tony before he called Happy. “Sorry Nance looks like duty calls.” Happy says gathering his things and all but sprinting out the door.

“Happy, wait!” Nancy follows him out into the hallway. “Artie has the same look you do. Whenever he sees… saw danger,” she corrects, “he’d get that look in his eyes. Be careful Hap.” Nancy hands him the frozen casserole. He feels the crinkle of paper underneath it.

“Thanks, Nance. I- ‘m sorry.” His eyes widen. Act natural he coaches. “No worries. I understand Artie has–had a taxing job as well. There’s no off time for you types. Thank you, for coming, it means… it means alot. Goodbye Happy.” She turns back into her apartment coralling her girls away from the door and shutting it. He jogs outside.

The car is parked outside and unlocks to his fingerprint. It’s a prototype for a self-driving model.
Something Tony cooked up in his spare time. They’re around for emergencies only, and only for the select three of Pepper, Happy and Tony himself.

Peter lay on his back panting. Karen was saying something warbled and waning in and out of focus. He ached all over and his arm felt...wrong. Sputtering he tried to move. He needed to move. Only he was tired. It hurt. That didn’t help.

“Karen,” the teen groans shaking his head.
“Yes, Peter?”

His arm is bleeding. Barbed wire is tangled around it. Who the hell was that guy?

“Karen, what happened?”
“You received a concussion and several contusions on your right arm. Happy Hogan is on his way.”
“Ugh, no why’d you call him Karen? I’m fine.” With his good arm, he leans against the brick wall.
“Sorry Peter, but it seems to me that you are not fine. And it is protocol.” Karen states emotionlessly.
Peter grumbles imagining what possible name this protocol would be called. Ass-kicked protocol?
“And what about the guy with that barbed wire gun thing?” Peter pants moving his arm to look at it. It’s not good. Barbed wire encircles it in disjointed pieces. Some of his skin has healed over. Peter closes his eyes and breathes. He feels like he’s going to be sick.
“He ran east of here an hour ago.”
“OH. Crap! What time is it? Aunt May! She’s going to kill me, Karen!” Peter panics shooting up from his spot. He groans and slumps back down holding his arm. That was not a good idea. Blood trickles down onto the pavement.
“8:45 P.M. Why would she ever do that Peter? As a protective measure, should I execute instant kill mode if we happen across May Parker?” Karen suggests. Peter sags in relief.
“How’s it only 8:45? It looks… What. NO! Karen, we talked about this, no instant kill mode --ever. Understand?” Peter shouts.
“Yes of course Peter.” If Peter didn’t know better the AI sounded amused, if not slightly homicidal.

"Who died?" Peter asked climbing into the back seat hissing as he caught his arm on the seat belt. Happy turned around to look at him startled. Peter's arm was completely out of the suit, well what's left of the arm of the suit anyway. He stares at Peter's arm, he can’t see much in the dim light but it looks like it’s bleeding. The kid is pallid and shivering. Happy sighs and blasts the heat. Least the kid is up for talking, can’t be too serious.
Peter gestures to the casserole next to him. "There are only two reasons anyone cooks one of those. One: it’s Thanksgiving or some cold holiday when everyone is visiting and will eat it for you. Two: someone died and everyone comes to your house and leaves one of those. The idea being you're so sad all you can operate is a microwave." Peter explains. Happy clears his throats and starts to drive.
“What happened?” Happy dodges. There is a long pause and Happy caves into it. “Fine. I’ll tell you. But then you’re telling me what happened to your arm.”
Happy looks over in the rearview mirror to see Peter staring back, “Ok.”
Happy nods, "A friend of mine," Peter hmms.
"Who gave that to you? I have a feeling it wasn't Mr. Stark" Peter pants out. Happy snorts at the image of Tony Stark with a homemade casserole.
"My friend’s wife."
It's strange how quiet Peter's gotten. The kid doesn't pry anymore, it makes Happy anxious, the kid is always sticking his nose into things that aren’t his. Happy keeps looking over his shoulder. To change lanes, here and there, but mostly to check on Peter. Happy doesn’t like how the kid is still
shivering, despite the seat warmers. It wasn’t that cold outside despite being late November. He’s so used to the blabbering teenager who barely breathes between words and speaks over a million words per minute (especially if the topic of conversation has anything to do with the Avengers). The silence, it’s unsettling.

"He was a good man. Smart. Knew him from my boxing days. He was a doctor for a bit. He went back to school when he had his first kid." Happy isn’t sure why he's telling Peter this. The kid seems to be listening anyhow. “Alright, your turn.”

“You were a boxer?” Peter asks.

“Yeah, now what happened.”

Peter sighs, “Yeah, I uh...” Peter trails off staring at the back of the seat in front of him trying to piece together the past four hours. The adrenaline rush has been slowly crashing this whole ride. His arm is throbbing. Peter lets out a breath, “I started patrol... And these two people were robbing a store, I think, I... I don’t remember. It was weird cause they didn’t have any place for the money... no bags, nothing.” Peter’s head is a blur the memories overlap and converge in new ways only to break apart in mayhem. “They had this sort of gun. I think they shot it at me. I...” Peter shakes his head and involuntarily groans as Happy switches lanes roughly.

“Hey, hey hey! Kid, it’s alright, we’ll watch the tapes. Just breath alright? We are almost there.” The streetlights blur into lines of red and yellow. Peter closes his eyes and listens to the sounds of the breaks and wheels outside.

“Hey? Happy? where are we going?” Peter asks wearily pulling off his mask. He hopes it isn’t far. This isn’t anywhere near the compound.

Happy sighs somewhat relieved, he’s talking again at least, "Tony's new place." Peter slouches back into the seat letting out a shaky breath. Reserved for the wait. He knows Happy won’t tell him anything else. His arm burns.

“Did our car just drive away? Without us? That is so cool!” Ned is gonna freakkk. Peter thinks as Happy guides him into a very Un-Stark like building. It looks like Peter’s apartment building, nothing like the shiny sleek designs of the compound or the tower. It's all brick, worn and dirty from time. There is no one in the front lobby area, but it lights up to their arrival.

“Happy?”

“What kid?” Happy steers them into an elevator. Peter cradles his arm closer to his chest wincing as the barbs catch at the remainder of his suit.

“I mean y-you’re probably, sure I mean are you sure this is the right building?” Peter asks tentatively glancing up. Happy is looking down at him. There’s a strangely concerned furrow in his brow that Peter can only interpret that its existence is because of him. Guilt wavers nauseously in his stomach. Happy should be with his friend’s family. Not here helping his dumbass.

“Yes. I always know where I’m going.” Happy grumbles pressing the button. He’d been a driver since this kid was probably in diapers if even that! But he has to agree, this isn’t really Tony’s... style. No F.R.I.D.A.Y. to greet them? That in of itself is unnatural. Happy looks over the kid again in the dingy light of the elevator. The kid’s arm is a mess and even with the internalized heater in that suit, he looks cold. The kid’s hair faces every which way and he looks on edge. It’s strange Happy thinks, usually Tony would handle these things. Handle the dangerous shit Peter got himself into or even the mundane things. Whenever it had to do with Peter Tony needed to be the first to know. In fact, Happy hadn’t bothered giving Tony the low down on the infamous spidey voicemails since second week of the job. Not because, Happy would skip most of the nondescript details of the voicemails, rather Tony had them directly sent to F.R.I.D.A.Y. automatically anyways.
The elevator dings softly and opens to the top and penthouse floor. Now, this was more Tony’s style. Albeit it was incomplete and reeked of recent construction. Happy relaxed and guided Peter to the kitchen counter. It would be optimal for what they would need to do next, especially if there was no med bay option available. And from the looks of construction in the building, there wasn’t.

Peter leaned against the cool marble counter, “W-where’s Mr. Stark?” Peter's voice cracked, his throat was dry. Happy hmm’d noncommittally. That was a good question, Happy frowned grabbing a first aid kit from under the sink. He should be here. Telling the kid off, taking the suit, throwing a fit, calling in actual medical professionals, something. Happy sent him another text. That was five now. That was bordering on Peter levels of communication.

“All right Kid hop up, let's see what we’ve got.” Happy rolled up his sleeves patting the counter in front of him. He could at least survey the damage and try to keep the wound open until Tony or Banner could have at the wire wrapped around Peter’s arm. Happy sent a silent prayer that Tony would be here quickly. Happy was not equipped to deal with this part of the superhero shit.

Peter groaned and lifted himself onto the counter with his good arm. Happy cut away the remaining strips of the suit, careful of the sharp barbs. Happy grimaced. The skin was healing along the edges. He took a deep breath steeling himself up for what he’d need to do next. “All right kid, we are going to have to get that wire off you.” Peter blanched opening his mouth then closing it again. “I’m going to go look for some gloves.” Happy awkwardly hovered around Peter before starting for the elevator. “Stay put.” He added. Someone probably left their construction gloves in the lower levels. Happy hoped.

“Yeah...Sure.” Peter replied as the elevator doors shut. Peter groaned and pulled his mask back over his face. The lights were killer in here. He laid down on the cool counter letting his feet hang off the edge. It felt so nice, the cool smooth stone along his back. He was cold before but now everything felt hot and far away. His limbs felt heavy and his eyelid drooped only to slide open to the onslaught of pain from his arm. He kept slipping in and out of consciousness until his eyes closed into oblivion.

Chapter End Notes

*insert excuses here*

so glad to be writing again and hopefully much more this summer! Thank you to all of you who have kept with my sporadic posting.

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